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Making the invisible visible : the position of indigenous women in Mexico. A general overview of the challenges ahead

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V. FEMALE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: CONQUERING SPACES

"*El reconocimiento pasa por la palabra:*
quien no participa en el diálogo humano, socialmente no existe."
(Espinosa Damián, 2010: 104)

The level of political participation of women is one of the indicators most often used to measure female emancipation. Political participation has two components: the right to vote and the possibility to be eligible and carry out a political mandate. The right to participate in a democratic representative system is a determining factor in the construction of citizenship. Whether women have equal political rights compared to men, is considered an indicator of the position of women within that society. In what follows female political participation in Mexico will be analyzed.

The UNDRIP guarantees indigenous peoples the right to participate in decision-making processes, and to follow their own normative systems:

> "Article 18
>
> Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions (UN, 2007)."

Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution states that indigenous peoples have the right to elect representatives according to their own traditional systems, and to maintain these systems in their communities. These political rights have to be regulated in the different state constitutions:

> "Article 2. The Mexican Nation is one and indivisible.
>
> A. This Constitution recognizes and guarantees the right of indigenous peoples and communities to self-determination and, consequently, to autonomy to:
>
> [...]
>
> III. Elect, according to their traditional norms, procedures, and practices, authorities or representatives for the exercise of their own forms of internal government,

guaranteeing the participation of women in conditions of equality to men, in a way that respects the federal pact and the sovereignty of the states.

[...]

VII. Elect, in municipalities with indigenous populations, representatives to town councils.

The constitutions and laws of the federated entities will recognize and regulate these rights in the municipalities, with the aim of strengthening the political participation and representation in accordance with their traditions and internal norms (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)[65]."

Regarding indigenous women, Article 2 of the Constitution does state that the political rights of women to participate in traditional normative systems have to be guaranteed.

From a legal point of view, Mexican men and women have been having equal political rights for six decades. At a municipal level, Mexican women obtained the right to vote and to be voted in 1947. General suffrage at a national level was obtained in 1953. But, are Mexican women actually participating in political life at the same level as their male fellow citizens? They have the right to vote, but are they also carrying out political mandates? Are they participating equally in local, state, and national decision-making processes? In the context of this research special attention must be given to women in rural and indigenous communities. Are these women limited by patriarchal social structures or can they participate in political processes? Do they have a voice and a vote in their local communities, and do they have access to higher political levels? In which spaces and to what extent can they participate?

[65] Original:
"Artículo 2o. La Nación Mexicana es única e indivisible.
A. Esta Constitución reconoce y garantiza el derecho de los pueblos y las comunidades indígenas a la libre determinación y, en consecuencia, a la autonomía para:
[...]
III. Elegir de acuerdo con sus normas, procedimientos y prácticas tradicionales, a las autoridades o representantes para el ejercicio de sus formas propias de gobierno interno, garantizando la participación de las mujeres en condiciones de equidad frente a los varones, en un marco que respete el pacto federal y la soberanía de los estados.
[...]
VII. Elegir, en los municipios con población indígena, representantes ante los ayuntamientos.
Las constituciones y leyes de las entidades federativas reconocerán y regularán estos derechos en los municipios, con el propósito de fortalecer la participación y representación política de conformidad con sus tradiciones y normas internas (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)."

Analyzing the political participation of indigenous communities is important because it shows the political emancipation of these communities. Since the 1990s, in the context of the struggle for indigenous autonomy, this subject has received a lot of attention. In addition to specialized publications, ethnographies almost systematically discuss the political structure of indigenous communities. Unfortunately, researchers tend to show a very masculine perspective of political life, which aligns with the machismo that is generally also very much present in traditional communities. In many indigenous communities, the political functions are still covered by men. Researchers thus speak to men and seem to find it evident that women are not participating. However, to give a complete image of the studied community they should question this gender division. Are women really not participating? What can be their role? Why don't they have equal access to politics and how could this be changed?

A certain number of researchers do work on female political participation and citizenship in Mexico. Studies specifically focusing on rural and indigenous women have been carried out by researchers such as Dalia Barrera Bassols (UNAM), Paloma Bonfil Sánchez, Margarita Dalton Palomo (CIESAS), Gisela Espinosa Damián (UAM-Xochimilco), Alejandra Massolo (UNAM), Maria Luisa Tarrés Barraza (Colmex), Ana María Tepichin Valle (Colmex), and Laura Valladares de la Cruz (UAM-Iztapalapa).

In this chapter, first the political participation of Mexican women will be analyzed. The national policy regarding female political participation will be looked at, and especially the use of gender quota. Then the question will be raised whether Mexican women can exercise their right to vote just like Mexican men. Subsequently, the same question will be asked about the eligibility of women. In this context three different political levels will be considered: the national level, state level, and municipal level. At a national level special attention will be given to the presidential elections of 2012 and the candidacy of Josefina Vázquez Mota, the first female candidate to have real possibilities to be elected as Mexican president.

After having studied the general degree of political participation of Mexican women, the focus will be on political participation of indigenous women. First, the specific indigenous political context will be explained, in which women have to find their place between a traditional political system and equal gender rights. The situation in the state of Oaxaca will be used to illustrate the position of indigenous women in Mexican politics. Then, several of the structural and cultural obstacles to participation encountered by indigenous women will be analyzed. Finally, special attention will be given to the changes that are occurring in indigenous communities, to alternative forms of participation, and to actions taken by indigenous women to gain a voice at the political level.

The national policy on female political participation will be critically analyzed, and certain specific statistics will be looked at. Official statistics of the Mexican Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) have many limitations, and often lack a gender dimension. This is also the case for statistics on female political participation. Statistics regarding the number of female members in National Secretaries, National Congress, and the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, as well as the number of female State Governors are available. The data for local state governments and municipalities are harder to find. Other institutions, such as the Instituto de la Mujer, developed their own gendered statistical documents based on different sources. The gaps in official statistical data can be attributed to lack of importance given to the gender perspective at policy level. It can also be considered symptomatic for the lack of commitment to really improve female political participation.

To complement the statistical data, literature on the topic was consulted. For the electoral campaign of 2012, a large amount of material could also be found in online newspapers. In addition, the available information was compared with personal experiences of female indigenous activists interviewed during fieldwork in Mexico.

A. National Policy on Female Political Participation

Since 1947, Mexican women have the right to be elected and to vote at municipal level. In 1953, they acquired full citizenship and thus the right to vote and to be elected in federal elections. Article 34 and 35 of the Mexican Constitution guarantee equal political rights for men and women:

> "Article 34
>
> The citizens of the Republic are those men and women who, in addition to having the status of Mexicans, meet the following requirements:
> I. To have attained 18 years of age, and
> II. To have an honest way of living.

Article 35

Citizens have the following prerogatives:

I. To vote in popular elections;

II. To be voted for all publicly eligible offices, [...];

III. To associate individually and freely to participate peacefully in the political affairs of the country; [...] (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)[66]."

At a global level, Mexico participated in all international women conferences and ratified international agreements on gender equality. Yet, in the 1990s, after four decades of female suffrage, it was striking how few women actively participated in political life. In particular, there was a large gap between the numbers of women that voted, and the ones that were eligible during elections. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), called upon governments to enforce equal participation of women in politics and in national power structures. It was clear that there was a need for special policies to stimulate female participation. After this conference, the Mexican government started to develop a national gender policy. Mexico had already included a first adaptation to its legislation in 1993. Article 175 of the *Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales*[67] (COFIPE) was amended to include that parties should promote the political participation of women. While this was a very general mention, it was nevertheless the first time better distribution of women in politics was included in legislation, and small improvements were noticeable. In 1996, after the Beijing Conference, and later in 2002, the COFIPE was further elaborated, replacing the general mention by concrete gender quota, and sanctions in case of nonobservance. From then on, not more than 70% of the candidates were allowed to be of the same sex (Reynoso and D'Angelo, 2004: 5). In 2007, the COFIPE was again modified, changing the existing

[66] Original:
"Artículo 34
Son ciudadanos de la República los varones y mujeres que, teniendo la calidad de mexicanos, reúnan, además, los siguientes requisitos:
I. Haber cumplido 18 años, y
II. Tener un modo honesto de vivir.
Artículo 35
Son prerrogativas del ciudadano:
I. Votar en las elecciones populares;
II. Poder ser votado para todos los cargos de elección popular, [...]
III. Asociarse individual y libremente para tomar parte en forma pacífica en los asuntos políticos del país;
[...] (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)."

[67] Federal Code on Electoral Institutions and Procedures that regulates federal elections.

quota of 70% to a gender quota of 60%. This change implied that a minimum of 40% of all candidates had to be female (Aparicio, 2011: 46).

In 2014, an electoral reform took place in Mexico, replacing the COFIPE by the *Ley General de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales* (LEGIPE). This new law includes new provisions regarding gender quota. For the next elections, parties will have to reach gender parity on their candidate lists (Congreso de la Unión, 2014a).

1. Mexican Gender Quota: The Gap Between Candidacy and Election

The use of gender quota in politics is subject to discussion. Worldwide the use of gender quotas seems to have a limited effect on the number of democratically elected women. According to Dahlerup and Freidenvall, the success of such policies depends on different factors: "the specific type of electoral system, the mean party and district magnitude, rank-ordering rules, open or closed lists, and sanctions for non-compliance (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2008: 29)". Opponents criticize such measures as positive discrimination, and fear that affirmative actions will have a negative influence on the kinds of women that will participate, and thus on the policy-making process. They argue that limited participation of women is the result of free and individual choices, often made in the context of motherhood and family care. The obligation for a female presence would only result in parties attracting unqualified women (Baltrunaite, 2012: 3). In this reasoning certain factors are overlooked, for example, difficult access for women to politics, persisting gender discrimination and stereotyping, as well as the fact that choosing to stay at home is not always a free choice for women, etcetera.

In the case of Mexico several problems became apparent. Studies show that, between 1993 and 2004, the implementation of quota has had little effect on the number of women in Mexican politics (Reynoso and D'Angelo, 2004). When the gender quota were introduced at the end of the 1990s, political parties tried to reach the 30% threshold by listing women as substitute candidates. The nominal lists thus complied with the quota, but women did not get elected proportionally (Tarrés, 2008: 118). After the quota reforms of 2007, the 2009 federal deputy elections showed a slight increase in the number of female candidates. However, the number of elected women rose very little. This shows that women have still a lot of obstacles to take before being de facto elected (Aparicio, 2011: 47).

Another problem is visible in the National Congress. The Lower Chamber of the Mexican National Congress counts 500 deputies; 300 are elected by relative majority in single-member districts, while the remaining 200 are elected by proportional representation through the system of party lists in five multi-member districts of 40 seats each (IFE, 2012b). Following Article 219 of the COFIPE, the 300 districts with relative majority are exempted from the gender quota if their candidatures are the

result of a democratic election within the party (Cámara de Diputados, 2008). The quota apply thus mainly to the 200 candidates in the popular representation system. In the 2009 elections, this resulted in an almost equal amount of male and female candidates in this representation system (Aparicio, 2011: 46).

Article 219 of the COFIPE could be questioned. José Antonio Aguilar, for example, wondered why the legislator included an exception on the gender quota if parties had chosen their candidates in a democratic way. He questioned why in this case it was allowed to choose democracy over gender (Aguilar, 2011: 49). Furthermore, according to Francisco Javier Aparicio, the fact that not all districts with relative majority had to maintain the quota allows manipulation of the system in two ways: first by minimizing the number of districts subject to quota, and secondly by placing female candidates in weak electoral districts (Aparicio, 2011: 46). The latter can clearly be illustrated by the 2009 federal elections. In these elections, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), in coalition with the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), put forward less female candidates than the two other largest parties, the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), yet they obtained the highest number of female members elected. According to Aparicio, this discrepancy between the number of female candidates and the number of elected women was due to the fact that women were often put in weak single-member districts where their chances to be elected were very low. During the 2009 elections, parties who put more women on their lists, such as the PAN and the PRD, put the majority of these women in weak districts, while parties with less women, such as the PRI, tended to list women more evenly among stronger districts (Aparicio, 2011: 47).

2. The Use of *'Juanitas'*: Getting Around Gender Quota

Another concrete example of the problems regarding the enforcement of gender quota in Mexico, is the case of the '*Juanitas*'. To get around the gender quota in National Congress, certain Mexican politicians introduced the system of the so-called '*Juanitas*'. Although the practice might already have been used in the past, the term '*Juanitas*' and '*Juanitos*' first appeared during the elections of 2009. In Iztapalapa, a delegation[68] in the east of Mexico City, the local street vendor and actor Rafael Acosta Ángeles, known by his nickname Juanito, was put forward by the Partido del Trabajo (PT) as electoral candidate-head of delegation. The candidature was pushed by the allied Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who declared from the start that if Juanito would win the elections, he would be replaced by Clara Brugada of the PRD. Juanito's popular background and peculiar personality contributed to his election. After first accepting the terms of his

[68] A delegation is a territorial and administrative entity within the Federal District.

election, he reconsidered, and protested against his replacement, but ultimately Brugada obtained the position as planned (Torres, 2011).

The way Juanito was treated and used can be criticized; his low social profile, lack of education, and characteristic tricolor head band, made him an easy object of derision and target for television jokes. Yet, this case was not gender related; Juanito was, in fact, replaced by a woman. The gender perspective of the replacement practice came to light in September of the same year, when eight female federal deputies resigned from their function just a few days after being elected, to be replaced by male substitutes (García Velázquez, 2011; Torres, 2011). Having problems meeting the gender quota, parties put female candidates on their lists. Upon election, however, they were replaced by male party members. The gender quota on the lists were thus respected, but in practice there were fewer women in Parliament.

The Mexican Electoral Tribunal and the Chamber of Deputies condemned this practice, and adopted an amendment in December 2011, to prevent this from happening in the future. To preserve the gender equity in Congress, this amendment states that resigning candidates will have to be replaced by candidates of the same sex (Cámara de Diputados, 2011). This reform was not yet in force for the 2012 elections. But, the use of '*Juanitas'* would probably be limited for presidential elections as this election process gets a lot of media coverage and the image of the candidate is crucial. However, the reform is important, specifically for the deputy elections. As deputy elections concern 500 deputies, replacements could easily go unnoticed (García Velázquez, 2011; El Universal, 2011a; Garduño and Méndez, 2011). In December 2013, celebrating 60 years of female vote in Mexico, President Peña Nieto initiated a request to the Senate to amend the COFIPE in order to guarantee equal political rights for women and men (SEGOB, 2013). His request was accepted, and included in the general electoral reforms adopted by the government in 2014. The COFIPE was replaced by the *Ley General de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales* (LEGIPE), which includes reforms regarding gender quota. The new law confirms that candidates on the lists have to have a substitute of the same gender, and extends the gender quota to parity. Thus, electoral lists will have to have 50% female candidates (Congreso de la Unión, 2014a).

Another important change is that the LEGIPE will apply to all federal, state, and municipal elections (Congreso de la Unión, 2014a). The COFIPE was only valid for federal elections. Essentially, the reform to prevent the use of '*Juanitas*', proposed in 2012, only applied to senators and deputies of the National Congress, and not to other political levels (Cámara de Diputados, 2011). Other levels, for example state governor or municipal elections, were not subject to such stipulations. The normativities regarding elections in the 32 federal entities of the Mexican territory were defined by

every local state legislation. The existence of gender quota for local elections depended thus on the decisions made by the individual state congresses. Every state included gender quota in its electoral legislation, but the rates differed. In most states only a maximum of 70% of all registered candidates could be of the same gender; in the remaining states the maximum was 60%. An exception to these quota was made for processes in which the candidates were chosen in a democratic election.

For the 2012 local elections, there were reports of candidate substitutions in all parties. In the state of Mexico for example, 163 changes to the candidate lists were accepted after the ballots were already printed. The names on the ballots differed therefore from the actual candidates. Although most of these substitutions do not seem to have been directly related to the avoidance of the gender quota, this situation left room for malpractices (Montaño, 2012; El Universal, 2012a). In some places gender quotas were met by nominating female family members for the National Congress[69] (Excelsior, 2012: 12-13). After the elections, some of these women might have been replaced by the initially envisioned male candidate. To prevent further abuse, it was important to implement gender substitution rules at all political levels, especially the lower levels where there is less control. Using women just to fill the candidates lists, but denying them to participate in the political decision-making process is a severe form of gender discrimination which had to be addressed. Even so, we will have to wait until the following elections to evaluate the real impact of the new legislation. It also remains to be seen to what degree and how fast this legislation is adapted and applied at the state and municipal levels.

In general, the use of gender quota is debatable. After six decades of political participation, the number of women in politics is still significantly lower compared to men. But, the use of gender quota is an important first step towards female participation, and governments should continue to support these affirmative actions. However, it cannot be denied that until now gender quota have shown limited results. Demanding an equal number of men and women in legislative bodies can be an incentive. But, up to now, parties seem to value the gender of the candidate higher than his or her capabilities. There is a risk that parties put forward certain women to fill the quota, even if they are not the best qualified candidates. However, it is not enough to just fill the seats equally. It would be more important to take measures that tackle the root of the problem. It is crucial to create an environment in which women and men experience the same social, educational, economic, and

[69] For example: In the state of Sinaloa, Esteban Valenzuela García (PRI) handed over his candidature for federal deputy to his wife María Victoria Vega. In the state of Querétaro, Raúl Orihuela González (PAN) handed over his candidature for national senator to María Marcela Torres Peimbert, wife of the former governor of Querétaro. Similar situations take place in other states of the Republic (Excelsior, 2012: 12-13). If elected, who will be the actual decision makers? Although it also must be said that Mrs. Torres Peimbert, at least until December 2014, has been an active and present senator (Senado, 2014a).

cultural conditions that allow them equal access to functions of political representation. The same is true for high functions in the economic, social, and judicial sectors. If equal opportunities are created, more women will start participating, and more suitable and well prepared candidates will be available to compete on an equal basis with their male colleagues (Aguilar, 2011: 48).

3. Other Government Initiatives Regarding Female Political Participation

In addition to the gender quotas, other measures have been taken to facilitate female political participation. The legislation on the expenses of political parties has, for example, also a gender perspective. Since 2008, the COFIPE stated that all Mexican political parties were obliged to annually spend two percent of their public funding for the "training, promotion, and development of women's political leadership" (Cámara de Diputados, 2008: Art. 78 §1a; IFE, 2012f). Concretely, parties were supposed to use these funds to organize workshops and seminars, finance research or analysis, and diffuse and distribute information on gender and political participation (IFE, 2012f). In se, two percent of all public funding is negligible, especially when taking into account the importance of the issue and the considerable arrears of women in Mexican politics. But additionally, past events have shown that it is important to control expenses made by political parties, and to impose sanctions in case of abuses. In 2011, the newspaper La Jornada reported that the political parties were misusing the funds for the promotion of female leadership:

> "The PAN spent on promotional material, events, end-of-year bonuses, vacation bonuses, gratuities, honoraria, savings funds, IMSS and Infonavit; the PRI used these resources for telephone payments, electricity, water, surveillance, general maintenance costs, cleaning, fumigation, supplies, general services and events. The PRD did not use the money, for which it was fined; it disposed of a certain quantity for other things not related with the promotion of female leadership. The PVEM channeled it to personal services, materials and supplies, general services, taxes and rights, call center, bags, aprons and embroidered bracelets (Martínez, 2011)[70]."

The lack of respect for this kind of legislation shows the position of political parties regarding female empowerment. They do not seem to consider it a matter worth investing in. The new law on political parties following the 2014 electoral reforms (*Ley General de Partidos Políticos*), includes the

[70] Original: "El PAN gastó en material promocional, actos, aguinaldo, primas vacacionales, gratificaciones, honorarios, fondos de ahorro, IMSS e Infonavit; el PRI usó esos recursos para pago de teléfono, electricidad, agua, vigilancia, mantenimiento general, limpieza, fumigación, suministros, servicios generales y actos. El PRD no aplicó el dinero, por lo cual fue multado; dispuso de cierta cantidad para otros asuntos no relacionados con la promoción de liderazgos femeninos. El PVEM lo canalizó a servicios personales, materiales y suministros, servicios generales, impuestos y derechos, call center, bolsas, mandiles de gabardina y pulseras bordadas (Martínez, 2011)."

obligation to increase the use of public funding of parties for the training, promotion, and development of women's political leadership, from two to three percent[71] (Congreso de la Unión, 2014b: Art. 51 §1a).

The changes made to the legislation are positive, but the next elections of 2018 will have to be awaited to measure the results of these initiatives. Furthermore, no sanctions seem to have been included in case of non-compliance. The law on electoral crimes (*Ley General en Materia de Delitos Electorales*) only comprises very general sanctions for the misuse of funding, but nothing specifically for the funds to promote women's political leadership (Cámara de Diputados, 2014c).

The Mexican government started other initiatives to address gender discrimination in politics. For example, the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) had a section on its web page on female political participation, encouraging women to participate in the 2012 elections (IFE, 2012c), as well as a separate web page on gender and democracy (IFE, 2012d). Radio and television spots promoted political equality between women and men (IFE, 2012e). On a regional level, not many, but some of the state governments and their respective Instituto de la Mujer have been working on the same subject. In Oaxaca for example, the governor launched the *Sistema Estatal para la Igualdad entre Hombres y Mujeres* on the 30th of May 2012. The purpose of the system was to enforce a true gender policy in the state, focusing among others on female political participation (IMO, 2012). However, it is very clear that the number of such initiatives is limited, and that it is still a big step from intention and legislation to practice.

[71] The new law states that these funds can be used for research, communication, workshops, events, etcetera, focused on female political leadership (Congreso de la Unión, 2014b: Art. 73).

B. Female Voters

The Mexican Constitution and national gender policy ensure equal political rights for men and women. The legislation supports equality, however, it must be analyzed whether equality is also achieved in practice. Political rights are twofold: the right to vote, and the right to be elected. A first question that should be asked is whether Mexican women can cast their individual vote in the same way Mexican men can. To answer this question the statistical data on the number and the gender proportion of voters must be studied.

According to Article 36 of the Mexican Constitution, the vote is compulsory for all Mexican citizens, both men and women (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a). However, in practice, not voting is not sanctioned. Mexicans have to register with the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE)[72]. Only registered citizens have the possibility to vote during the elections[73]. In Mexico, the registration card is also used as an official identification and has to be presented for any official procedure or payment. People are thus encouraged to register even if they do not wish to vote. Statistics show that in 2012, an estimated 70% of Mexicans were registered and had a valid registration card (IFE, 2012a). But, this does not mean that all these people actually voted during the 2012 elections. During the 2009 federal elections, only 44% of all registered Mexicans cast their vote (IFE, 2010). For the presidential elections of 2006, 58.55% of registered voters participated (IFE, 2006b). A general upward trend can be observed, as in 2012, 63.3% of all registered voters voted for the presidential elections (IFE, 2012g).

In 2012, of all registered Mexicans, 51.85% were women and 48.15% were men (IFE, 2012a). For the 2009 federal elections, statistical data on the proportion of men and women that actually voted show a slightly larger number of women casting their vote in comparison to men[74] (IFE, 2010). There are thus more women than men participating as voters[75]. This basically shows that women are equally participating as electorate during federal elections.

Although this seems to be an excellent outcome, a few important points have to be made. Being able to cast an individual vote does not necessarily mean the vote will be free. The level to which the voter might be influenced or even forced to vote in a certain way is hard to measure, and I have found no studies on Mexican female voters related to this topic. In patriarchal communities, be it in

[72] The electoral reforms of 2014, replaced the former Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) by the INE.
[73] Registration cards issued since 2008 are valid for ten years (IFE, 2012).
[74] Approximately 47.3% of registered women voted, compared to 40.5% of registered men.
[75] The total Mexican population consists of 51.17% women and 48.83% men (INEGI, 2010).

an urban or rural environment, women might be expected to vote in line with their father's or husband's suggestion. Children around the world are educated in a certain context, often resulting – at least temporarily – in the same political preferences as their parents. But, lack of political knowledge and education may limit free choice, making the right to vote another opportunity to blindly obey the patriarch of the family. In Mexico, other institutions may also influence the vote. Even though the government finances campaigns to promote free vote, it is known that voters are easily influenced by bribes of political candidates. Candidates visit communities and offer food or drinks to their loyal voters. Promotional material, such as pens, bags, hats, watches, blankets, etcetera, with the candidate and party logos, are presented as gifts. Especially in poor communities, such simple items can buy votes easily. During the 2012 elections, there were reports that the PRI gave prepaid cards at a value between 100 and 700 pesos[76] for shopping in the Soriana super market chain among others, to voters from poor neighborhoods of Mexico City, such as Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, upon showing a picture of their ballot in favor of the PRI (Quintero, 2012). After one and a half year of investigations, the IFE acquitted the PRI with the peculiar argument that there was insufficient evidence, that beneficiaries of the cards never experienced threats nor violence, and they were never forced to vote for any particular party (Cervantes, 2014).

Beneficiaries of aid programs such as *Oportunidades*, are also vulnerable. *Oportunidades* is a federal program of the Secretary of Social Development that does not depend on the support of political parties. However, some people fear they might lose the much needed help if they do not favor a certain candidate. On the Frequently Asked Questions page of the *Oportunidades* website one of the questions is: “The authorities in my municipality tell us to vote for candidate or political party "X". Failing to do so, they will take away the aid of *Oportunidades*. What can we do?”[77] (SEDESOL, 2012). The fact that this question is present on the Frequently Asked Questions page shows it is a recurring concern. Unfortunately, a majority of beneficiaries of these aid programs are women. In fear of losing the help they need to feed their family, they might be vulnerable to intimidation. People can be influenced by the local authorities, a local teacher, health workers, or even the church. During the 2012 election campaign, government radio and television spots warned people not to accept bribes, nor to believe threats of political candidates, but the question is how effective these campaigns really are.

[76] Approximately between 5 and 40 euros.

[77] The answer to the question reads: “Remember: *Oportunidades* is a federal program, intended for Mexicans, and beneficiary families must only meet their responsibilities to receive the support. Those responsibilities do not include the vote for a particular party or candidate (SEDESOL, 2012).”

Nevertheless, everything should be nuanced and placed in perspective. There are also many women, both in urban, rural, and indigenous communities, who are voting very consciously, follow politics, and are well informed. Overgeneralizations and victimization of women should be avoided at all cost.

In Mexico, a certain level of gender equality seems to have been achieved regarding the right to vote. This equality can be threatened in patriarchal communities if women are socially forced to follow the political preference of the male members of the family. More attention should be given by the government to the development of political consciousness, education, and emancipation of women in such situations. This would enable them to cast an individual and considered vote, and arm them against bad influences that prejudice women's political rights.

C. Eligible Women

A second element of citizens' political rights is the right to be elected and to carry out a political mandate. Mexican women seem to be able to vote in almost the same way as men do. But can this gender equality also be found when looking at the proportion of elected women and men? Different levels have to be analyzed. This analysis will first look at the national level, which includes the National Government, with the National Presidency and the State Secretaries, the National Congress of the Union, and the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation. A second level is the state level, with the State Governors and local State Congresses. Finally, the municipal level will be analyzed briefly.

1. National Level

a) Presidents of the Mexican Republic

Until now, Mexico has had no female President of the Republic. There have been five female presidential candidates. The first female presidential candidate in Mexican history was Rosario Ibarra de la Garza. She was presidential candidate in 1982 and again in 1988, for the defunct Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores. She was succeeded by Cecilia Soto González, candidate of the socialist Partido del Trabajo in 1994; Marcela Lombardo Otero, presidential candidate of the former Partido Popular Socialista in 1994; and Patricia Mercado Castro, candidate of the extinct Partido Alternativa Socialdemócrata in 2006 (IFE, 2007). The electoral success of these women was limited. Before 2012, Cecilia Soto González and Patricia Mercado Castro obtained the best results with 2.75%

(IFE, 1994) and 2.70% (IFE, 2006a) of the votes respectively[78]. For the 2012 presidential elections, Josefina Vázquez Mota was the candidate of the Partido Acción Nacional. It was the first time that one of Mexico's three largest political parties put forward a woman as presidential candidate. Therefore, she was the woman with the best prospects in the history of Mexican elections. In the end, Vázquez Mota obtained 25.4% of the votes, but she was overtaken by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (PRD), and Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI), with respectively 31.59% and 38.21% of the votes (IFE, 2012h).

As Josefina Vázquez Mota was the first Mexican woman with real chances to reach the national presidency, it is interesting to look at her campaign and at her messages from a gender perspective. Vázquez Mota had been the first female Secretary of Social Development (2000-2006) and of Public Education (2006-2009) in Mexico. In 2012, she put herself forward as the first female Mexican president (Vázquez Mota, 2012b). Her main campaign slogan was "Josefina Diferente!". By stating that she was different, she distinguished herself from the other presidential candidates. The main difference she pointed at was that she is a woman. With other slogans, such as "Today we get a female president[79]!" and "The century and the time of women has come[80]!", Vázquez Mota emphasized her female gender, and tried to appeal especially to women. As part of her electoral campaign she participated in different meetings of women's organizations, for example in Monterrey, Puebla, and Zapópan (Vázquez Mota, 2012d, e, f). Electing a woman does not necessarily guarantee attention to female issues, but Vázquez Mota seemed to take a clear position on this subject. She addressed several gender subjects in her campaign proposals, such as a law on Responsible Paternity, giving women the right to demand a DNA test if the father of their child denies responsibility (Vázquez Mota, 2012a).

The candidature of Josefina Vázquez Mota showed that women can reach the highest echelons of Mexican politics. It makes her an important role model for young women. Although her focus on female issues was positive, the emphasis on her gender was, in my opinion, and from a feminist point of view, more negative than positive. First, she asked women for their vote appealing to their role as mothers, and because she, as a mother herself, understood their needs:

> "I ask all mommies of Mexico, I ask them all for their vote and I ask them for their trust because like you, I understand what it means to be a mother. I will look after

[78] Rosario Ibarra de la Garza obtained 1.76% of the votes in the presidential elections of 1982 (SEGOB, 1982: 6) and 0.39% in 1988. Marcela Lombardo Otero obtained 0.47% of the votes in the presidential elections of 1994 (IFE, 1994).
[79] Original: "¡Hoy toca Presidenta!"
[80] Original: "¡Ha llegado el siglo y el tiempo de las mujeres!"

> and protect your families, I will not consort with organized crime… How can we not win when we are more than half of the electoral register and the mother of the other half of the electoral register, with that in mind, of course we will win (Vázquez Mota, 2012c)[81]."

Vázquez Mota tried to take a feminist stance, however, her discourse tended to revert to gender prejudices. In an effort to show that women are capable of ruling the country, she attributed certain characteristics to women. But in doing this, she often reduced women to their reproductive and domestic role. Although she wanted to highlight the qualities of women, Vázquez Mota's discourse presented a very stereotyped and conservative image of women, limiting these qualities to the household sphere. This can be illustrated by several of her quotes (Valdez & Sánchez, 2012):

> "The females are the first ones to wake up and the last ones to go to bed, they keep the house clean and in perfect condition, they know how to manage the household resources and where to find them. We women know where the things are in the house and in that sense I will bring order and discipline to the public servants if I am elected president[82]."

> "Women do politics in their home: they reconcile brothers, they make sure the family meets at a certain time. And the married ones, when (the husband) misbehaves, when they are asleep, we get some instincts… like, passionate. But the next day we go ahead, we are builders of homes[83]."

> "Widows do not remarry, while men start looking for a girlfriend during the vigil of their former wife[84]."

> "After permanently cleaning the house, women ought to wonder about what life has in store for them and look for dreams to come true, instead of tackling the next task in the house[85]."

[81] Original: "Les pido a todas las mamás de México, a todas les pido su voto y les pido su confianza porque como ustedes entiendo lo que significa ser madre. Yo cuidaré y protegeré a sus familias, yo no pactaré con el crimen organizado...Cómo no vamos a ganar si somos más de la mitad del padrón electoral y ahora que somos la mamá de la otra mitad del padrón electoral, solamente bajo esta premisa, claro que vamos a ganar."

[82] Original: "Las féminas son las primeras en levantarse y las últimas en irse a la cama, mantienen la casa limpia y en perfecto estado, saben administrar los recursos del hogar y dónde ubicarlos. Las mujeres sabemos en dónde están las cosas en la casa y en ese sentido yo voy a poner orden y disciplina en los funcionarios en caso de ser electa presidenta."

[83] Original: "Las mujeres hacen política en su casa: reconcilian a los hermanos, hacen que la familia coincida en algún momento. Y las casadas, cuando (el marido) no se porta muy bien, cuando están dormidos, nos entran unos instintos… así, pasionales. Pero al día siguiente seguimos adelante, somos constructoras de hogares."

[84] Original: "Las viudas no vuelven a casarse, mientras que los hombres empiezan a buscar novia durante el velorio de la que fue su esposa."

In this portrayal, women wake up early, keep the house clean, are organized, have a talent for mediation, are virtuous; their lives are centered around the household. It disregards all the efforts and accomplishments of women, and minimizes the participation of women in all sectors of Mexican society. Vázquez Mota displayed a very stereotyped and paternalistic approach towards women, which raises questions about her engagement on the subject of real gender equality. Probably her basic idea was to show her capabilities as a woman to become president. She chose to emphasize the differences between men and women, but in doing so, she fell into the trap of, on the one hand, presenting men as untrustworthy womanizers, and, on the other hand, putting up a conservative and idealized image of the virtuous housewife. This mistake shows gender equality is not yet given in Mexican politics. Instead of stereotypically opposing the sexes, a more balanced discourse should be developed, reflecting equality between men and women as a matter of fact.

On the other hand, the PAN party of Vázquez Mota has been known for its conservatism regarding family values, opposing free abortion, among others. In her campaign, Vázquez Mota stressed again that the PAN is "the party of life". They defend life starting from conception, consequently opposing the right to abort. Vázquez Mota does not support abortion, but she is against the criminalization of women who have had an abortion (Vázquez Mota, 2012e). Despite the conservative stand towards abortion, the non-criminalization of women at a national level would be a first step towards free sexual and reproductive rights for Mexican women.

Vázquez Mota made another remarkable statement, perhaps unconsciously, which hardly qualifies as gender friendly. In an attempt to stimulate general electoral participation, on a campaign meeting in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, Vázquez Mota asked all women to cast their vote during the elections. She also asked them not to come alone, but to convince their partners and other family members to vote too. As an incentive, she joked that women should deny their partner one month of 'cuchi cuchi' if he failed to vote. This statement generated a lot of reaction from the public opinion, but she later reiterated it, and added that men who did cast their vote deserved a double portion of 'cuchi cuchi', if their wife was up to it. Although in later interviews she defined 'cuchi cuchi' as being merely hugs and kisses, the Mexican public interpreted it in a more sexual context. The comment may have been made to get the audience's attention, to appeal to the public. However, such a statement can hardly be considered an appropriate discourse for a candidate who claims to support gender equality. The statement may have been innocent, a little joke to boost the electoral 'passion', but the underlying message is not adequate. By suggesting that a vote should be rewarded with 'cuchi cuchi', she implies in fact that democratic elections can be obtained in exchange for sexual relations. Women

[85] Original: "Después de limpiar permanentemente la casa, las mujeres deben preguntarse qué les toca por vivir y soñar, en lugar de qué tarea sigue por realizar en el hogar."

are put in a subordinate position in which they are 'expected' to reward their partner's political participation with sexual favors (and where is the women's reward?). Taking it one step up, Mexican women would be 'offering their bodies' for democracy. Probably Vázquez Mota only meant to draw the attention of the audience, however, in a country with so many problems of gender inequality, and claiming to be a president for women, the presidential candidate should have picked her words more carefully.

The intention of this analysis is not to evaluate whether Vázquez Mota was, generally speaking, a good or a bad candidate for Mexico, and only a few elements of Vázquez Mota's campaign are highlighted here. What is important to realize is that it takes more than a woman leading the country to improve the situation of Mexican women. Vázquez Mota claimed to be different compared to her opponents, however, regarding gender equality she seemed in many ways to perpetuate the patriarchal ideology of her male predecessors, and of Mexican society in general. And while her intentions may have been good, she had to function within the confines of the party structures that are still dominated by men. A general hierarchy and mentality change within the parties is therefore necessary.

Although she did not win the elections – the PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto did – it is clear that the candidature of Vázquez Mota must nevertheless be acknowledged as a significant step towards female emancipation. A female candidate for the most prestigious function of the country shows women can reach the highest echelons of Mexican public life. However, much remains to be done to consider this a normal situation. Mexicans should be able to vote for the most capable candidate. The sex of this candidate should not define his or her capabilities. To make a real difference for Mexican women and foster substantial changes, the help of the entire Mexican society is needed.

b) Secretaries of State Departments

At national level, the President chooses the Secretaries of the different State Departments, who together form the cabinet. In the Vicente Fox administration (2000-2006), only the Secretary for Social Development was led by a woman. Another woman was the head of the Secretary of Agrarian Reform, but after three years she left and was replaced by a man (Presidencia de la República, 2006). During the LXI Legislature under Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), three of the eighteen State Departments (*Secretarías*) were led by women (16.7%), while fifteen were led by men (83.3%). The Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare, and the Secretary for Tourism were all women. The cabinet of the President was completed with a Legal Advisor of the Federal Executive, and with a General Attorney of the Republic, respectively a man and a woman (Presidencia de la República, 2012). Four female Secretaries served at the beginning of the legislation, but after several

changes only three remained. In the LXII legislature under Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), again only three out of seventeen State Departments are headed by women (17.6%): the Secretary for Social Development, the Secretary of Health, and the Secretary for Tourism. The Legal Advisor of the Federal Executive and the General Attorney of the Republic are both men. It is notable that in this cabinet, all women are given the responsibility over so-called 'soft' topics (Presidencia de la República, 2014).

It is clear that little efforts have been made to attain a certain degree of gender parity within the presidential cabinet; the Secretaries are predominantly male. President Peña Nieto launched an initiative to reach parity in the National Congress (SEGOB, 2013), but he did not apply the same rules when choosing his cabinet, which serves to illustrate the inconsistency of Mexican gender policy. Awareness about gender inequality seems to be lacking, even at the highest levels of Mexican politics. Enough capable women should be available to take up the function of Secretary. When forming the government, more attention should be given to offer opportunities to these women. The President would really show his commitment to the issue by appointing a government with a better gender balance.

c) National Congress

Mexican citizens can elect a presidential candidate of their choice. The members of the cabinet are chosen by the president. Additionally, the most important body of representation is the National Congress. The Mexican National Congress consists of a Senate and a Chamber of Deputies. The Senate counts 128 senators, elected for six years. They cannot be reelected for the next legislature. Every one of the 31 states and the Federal District (Distrito Federal) elect three senators; two with a relative majority vote, the third senator is attributed to the first minority. The remaining 32 senators are chosen by proportional representation, through lists voted in one national multi-member constituency (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 56). The Chamber of Deputies has 500 national deputies. They are elected every three years, and cannot be reelected for the next term[86]. Of the 500 deputies, 300 are elected by relative majority in single-member electoral districts. The 200 remaining deputies are chosen by proportional representation, through regional lists voted in multi-member constituencies (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 51-52). The variation in voting systems means that a certain amount of candidates can directly be chosen by the voters, while to some extent the political parties can control a part of the elected members.

[86] As a result of the new electoral reforms, entering into force with the 2018 elections, senators will be eligible for reelection for two consecutive terms (6 years), and deputies for four consecutive terms (12 years), if they remain in the same political party (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 59).

The National Congress elections are subject to gender quota. According to the 2008 *Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales* (COFIPE), at least 40% of the registered candidates for senator or deputy had to be from the same gender. An exception was possible for democratic election processes within the parties (Cámara de Diputados, 2008: Art. 219 & 220). For the next elections, the 2014 LEGIPE demands parity between female and male candidates, and exceptions have been abolished (Congreso de la Unión, 2014a: Art. 233 & 234).

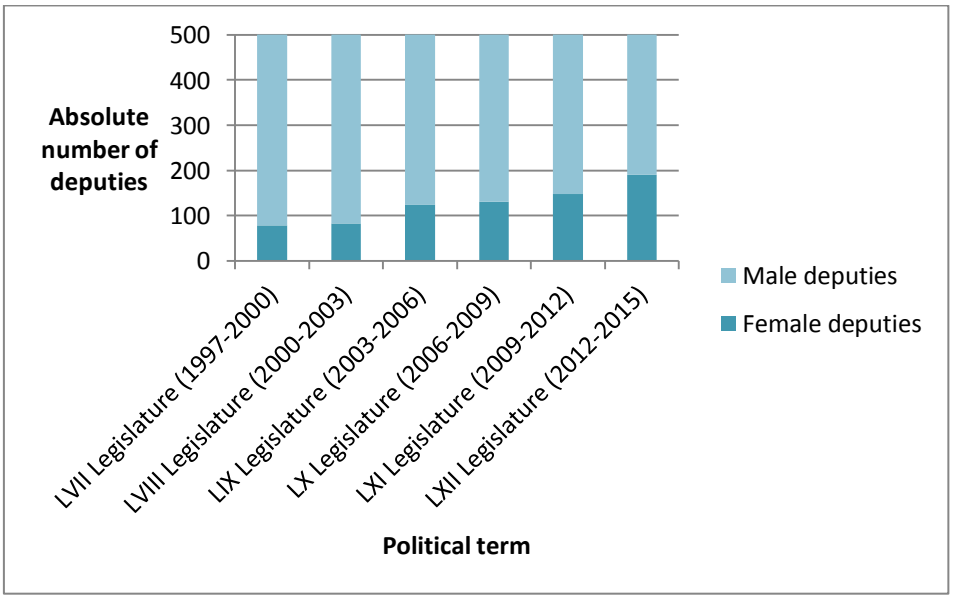
In 2012, the National Congress had 99 male senators (77.3%), and 29 female senators (22.7%) (Senado de la República, 2012a,b). Among the 500 deputies, there were 341 men (68.2%), and 159 women (31.8%) (Cámara de Diputados, 2012c). In 2014, there were 85 male (66.4%) and 43 female senators (33.6%) (Senado de la República, 2014a,b). The Chamber of Deputies consisted of 310 men (62%) and 190 women (38%) (Cámara de Diputados, 2014d).

Despite the introduction of gender quota, the number of women in Mexican Parliament has only been increasing slowly during the last fifteen years. The obligatory quota have never been reached (see figures 6a, 6b, 7a, and 7b). It remains to be seen what effect the new electoral reform will have.

Figure 6a: Members of the federal Chamber of Deputies, by sex, Mexico, 1997-2015.

Political term	Female deputies		Male deputies		Total number of deputies (male and female)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
LVII Legislature (1997-2000)[87]	79	15.8	421	84.2	500	100
LVIII Legislature (2000-2003)[88]	83	16.6	417	83.4	500	100
LIX Legislature (2003-2006)[89]	124	24.8	376	75.2	500	100
LX Legislature (2006-2009)[90]	131	26.2	369	73.8	500	100
LXI Legislature (2009-2012)[91]	159	31.8	341	68.2	500	100
LXII Legislature (2012-2015)[92]	190	38	310	62	500	100

Figure 6b: Members of the federal Chamber of Deputies, by sex, Mexico, 1997-2015[93].

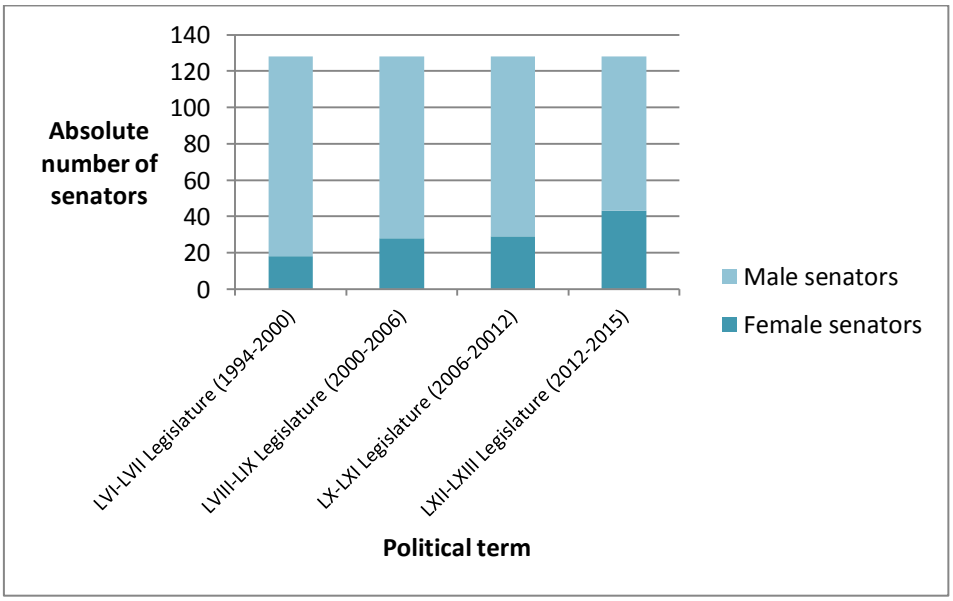


[87] Valladares, 2004: 142.
[88] Valladares, 2004: 142.
[89] Cámara de Diputados, 2012a.
[90] Cámara de Diputados, 2012b.
[91] Cámara de Diputados, 2012c.
[92] Cámara de Diputados, 2014d. Situation as it was in December 2014.
[93] Valladares, 2004: 142; Cámara de Diputados, 2012a, b, c.

Figure 7a: Senators, by sex, Mexico, 1994-2015.

Political term	Female senators		Male senators		Total number of senators (male and female)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
LVI-LVII Legislature (1994-2000)[94]	18	14.1	110	85.9	128	100
LVIII-LIX Legislature (2000-2006)[95]	28	21.9	100	78.1	128	100
LX-LXI Legislature (2006-2012)[96]	29	22.7	99	77.3	128	100
LXII-LXIII Legislature (2012-2015)[97]	43	33.6	85	66.4	128	100

Figure 7b: Senators, by sex, Mexico, 1994-2015[98].



[94] Senado de la República, 2007.
[95] Senado de la República, 2012c.
[96] Senado de la República, 2012a.
[97] Senado de la República, 2014a. Situation as it was in December 2014.
[98] Senado de la República, 2007; Senado de la República, 2012a, c.

To some authors, such as Laura Valladares de la Cruz, the actual number of women in Parliament shows that the gender quota of the COFIPE are not followed (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 141). Although it is true that the quota seem to have limited effects on female participation in Parliament, this statement must be nuanced. The quota suggested in the COFIPE consider the number of candidates for the election; the quota cannot guarantee the number of women that will de facto be elected. The government can stipulate the percentage of female candidates, but it cannot impose how many women must be chosen in a democratic election process. It is therefore normal that the proportion of women in Parliament will not match the required election quota. This is not a problem as such. Problems arise when registered female candidates are not chosen because they are women, or when they are replaced by male candidates, basically disregarding the quota. Furthermore, parties should commit and place more women in eligible positions. Not the number of women or men in Parliament are important, but equal opportunity to access these functions as well as the mentality of the electorate who would consider women equally up to the job, will make a difference and result in gender equality.

d) Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation

The Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation is the highest judicial power in Mexico. The Court consists of eleven Ministers, elected by the Senate among the candidates put forward by the President. They can be appointed for up to 15 years, thus changes in the composition of the Supreme Court are bound to be slow. In 2014, nine Ministers were male (82%) and two female (18%) (SCJN, 2014).

e) Party Structures

Currently, Mexico has three main political parties: the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN, founded in 1939), the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD, founded in 1989), and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI, founded in 1928). In 1994, the PRI was the first party to have a female party president. In 85 years of political history, three women have been president of the PRI[99]. The PRD had two female presidents during its 24 years of existence[100]. The PAN has always been ruled by men. None of the current smaller parties have had female presidents either[101].

[99] I.e. María de los Ángeles Moreno Uriego (1994-1995), Dulce María Sauri Riancho (1999-2002), and Beatriz Paredes Rangel (2007-2011). Cristina Díaz Salazar, the fourth female president, was not listed here because of her short term as interim president between 2 and 8 December 2011.
[100] I.e. Amalia García (1999-2002) and Rosario Robles (2002-2003).
[101] I.e. Partido del Trabajo (PT), Partindo Nueva Alianza (PANAL), Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), and Movimiento Ciudadano (MC).

2. State Level

a) State Governors

The Mexican Republic has 32 federal entities. Every six years each state elects a local governor[102]. In two hundred years of political history, there have only been six female state governors in Mexico: Griselda Álvarez in the state of Colima (1979-1985), Beatriz Paredes in Tlaxcala (1987-1992), Dulce María Sauri in Yucatán (1991-1993), Rosario Robles in the Federal District of Mexico (1999-2000), Amalia García in Zacatecas (2004-2010), and Ivonne Ortega in Yucatan (2007-2012) (El Universal, 2011b).

In 2012, out of 32 state governors there was only one woman (3%), Ivonne Ortega in Yucatán (CONAGO, 2014a). During that same year, governor elections took place in the Federal District and in six states: Chiapas, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Tabasco, and Yucatán. Jalisco and Yucatán had each one female candidate[103]; Chiapas had two[104]. With the exception of one PRD candidate in Chiapas, all of them belonged to small parties with little chance to be elected. In the six states, men won the elections. The Federal District had three female and one male candidate[105], but the women did not even get close to being elected, so the male candidate won (El Universal, 2012b). The most recent governor election was in 2013 in Baja California, but also there a man was elected. Currently, Mexico has no female state governor, only men. This situation will not change at least until the elections of seven new governors in 2015 (CONAGO, 2014b).

It is important to point out that in these cases the women did not lose because of their gender, but because of their political affiliation. In the D.F., for example, Beatriz Paredes proved to be a capable state governor in the past. However, her PRI party was not favored by the electorate during the 2012 elections, and the PRD won with a decisive 63.56% of the votes[106] (El Universal, 2012b). Nevertheless, it is remarkable how out of a total of 29 candidates, divided over the six states and the Federal District, only 7 were female (24%). Even more noteworthy is that with 32 federal entities, not even one woman was elected. Undoubtedly, Mexican women striving to become state governor have to face an unequal fight. It is clear that a lot of work still needs to be done at this level to give women access to the candidacy. An important responsibility lies within the political parties. At this moment they do not seem to be concerned about gender equality within their party structures, and there is a considerable lack of commitment. It is not about choosing the required woman, it is about giving

[102] In the case of the Federal District, a head of government is chosen.
[103] Respectively María Martínez (PANAL) and Olivia Guzmán (PANAL).
[104] María Elena Orantes (PRD/PT/MC) and Marcela Bonilla (Partido Orgullo Chiapas).
[105] María del Rosario Elena Guerra Díaz (PANAL), Miguel Ángel Mancera Espinosa (PRD/PT/MC), María Isabel Miranda Torres (PAN), and Beatriz Elena Paredes Rangel (PRI).
[106] Compared to only 19.75% for the PRI, 13.62% for the PAN, and 1.23% for the PANAL.

women and men equal opportunities to become valuable candidates. As a first step, a certain amount of affirmative actions could ease the path toward gender equality. More support is needed from within the parties to train women and give them the necessary experience to be able to compete at an equal level against their male counterparts.

b) State Congresses

Every Mexican state has a local state Congress. This Congress consists of a number of deputies, established by law and chosen for three years[107]. Part of them are elected by relative majority, the remaining ones are elected by proportional representation (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 116 § 2). Each state has its own constitution, and its own electoral code for local elections.

Before the 2014 electoral reforms, the gender quota differed from one state constitution to another. The second column of figure 8 shows the minimum percentage of local deputies that had to be of the same sex for each state. The 40% quota, adopted in the COFIPE, had to be incorporated in electoral legislation of each state. Yet after four years (2008-2012), the incorporation proved to be still incomplete. Of the total 32 states, 14 states, or almost half of them, had not yet implemented a gender quota of at least 40%. The majority of the states had a gender quota of 30% (37,5% of the states). Only one state out of five demanded parity. Furthermore, when the results of the 2012 elections are analyzed, it is clear that none of the states saw the quota demands on the lists reflected in the actual number of elected female deputies. In this respect, Oaxaca is the state that came closest to its gender quota (see figure 8). With the 2014 reforms, the new LEGIPE will have to be applied at state level, requiring the states to include a gender quota of 50% in their local electoral legislations. Future research will reveal whether the states adopted the new quota, and what effects this will have on electoral results.

[107] Following the adoption of the 2014 electoral reforms, they will have the possibility to be reelected four times, if they stay in the same party or coalition (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a; Art. 116 §2).

Figure 8: Gender quota in electoral state legislations, and proportion of female and male deputies in the state congresses, Mexico, 2012 and 2014.

	Federal entity	Gender quota for elections 2012 & 2014	Female deputies 2012		Female deputies 2014[108]		Total number of female and male deputies	
			No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*	*No.*	*%*
1	Aguascalientes[109]	40%	2	**7.4**	8	**29.6**	27	**100**
2	Baja California[110]	40%	8	**32.0**	9	**36.0**	25	**100**
3	Baja California Sur[111]	40%	6	**28.6**	7	**33.3**	21	**100**
4	Campeche[112]	50%	12	**34.3**	9	**25.7**	35	**100**
5	Chiapas[113]	50%	14	**34.1**	16	**39.0**	41	**100**
6	Chihuahua[114]	50%	7	**21.2**	14	**42.4**	33	**100**
7	Coahuila de Zaragoza[115]	50%	3	**12.0**	12	**48.0**	25	**100**
8	Colima[116]	30%	5	**19.2**	7	**26.9**	26	**100**
9	Federal District[117]	40%	18	**27.3**	21	**31.8**	66	**100**
10	Durango[118]	30%	5	**16.7**	6	**20.0**	30	**100**
11	Guanajuato[119]	Not specified	8	**22.2**	7	**19.4**	36	**100**
12	Guerrero[120]	30%	7	**15.2**	9	**19.6**	46	**100**
13	Hidalgo[121]	30%	8	**26.7**	9	**30.0**	30	**100**
14	Jalisco[122]	30%	8	**20.5**	9	**23.1**	39	**100**
15	México[123]	40%	12	**15.8**	15	**19.7**	76	**100**
16	Michoacán de Ocampo[124]	40%	11	**27.5**	9	**22.5**	40	**100**
17	Morelos[125]	30%	9	**30.0**	7	**23.3**	30	**100**
18	Nayarit[126]	/	9	**30.0**	14	**46.7**	30	**100**
19	Nuevo León[127]	30%	11	**26.2**	13	**31.0**	42	**100**
20	Oaxaca[128]	40%	16	**38.1**	17	**40.5**	42	**100**
21	Puebla[129]	30%	6	**14.6**	12	**29.3**	41	**100**

[108] Based on 31 states.
[109] Congreso del Estado de Aguascalientes, 2009 and 2014.
[110] Congreso del Estado de Baja California, 2013 and 2014.
[111] Congreso del Estado de Baja California Sur, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[112] Congreso del Estado de Campeche, 2014a and 2014b.
[113] Congreso del Estado de Chiapas, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[114] Congreso del Estado de Chihuahua, 2009 and 2014.
[115] Congreso del Estado de Coahuila de Zaragoza, 2012 and 2014.
[116] Congreso del Estado de Colima, 2014a and 2014b.
[117] Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, 2014a and 2014b.
[118] Congreso del Estado de Durango, 2014a and 2014b.
[119] Congreso del Estado de Guanajuato, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[120] Congreso del Estado de Guerrero, 2014a and 2014b.
[121] Congreso del Estado de Hidalgo, 2012a, 2012b and 2014.
[122] Congreso del Estado de Jalisco, 2008, 2012 and 2014.
[123] Congreso del Estado de México, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[124] Congreso del Estado de Michoacán de Ocampo, 2014a and 2014b.
[125] Congreso del Estado de Morelos, 2014a and 2014b.
[126] Congreso del Estado de Nayarit, 2012, 2013 and 2014.
[127] Congreso del Estado de Nuevo León, 2014a and 2014b.
[128] Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2012 and 2014.

22	Querétaro[130]	40%	5	**20.0**	2	**8.0**	25	**100**
23	Quintana Roo[131]	30%	5	**20.0**	9	**36.0**	25	**100**
24	San Luis Potosí[132]	50%	6	**22.2**	5	**18.5**	27	**100**
25	Sinaloa[133]	30%	7	**17.5**	13	**32.5**	40	**100**
26	Sonora[134]	50%	7	**21.2**	8	**24.2**	33	**100**
27	Tabasco[135]	40%	7	**20.0**	15	**42.9**	35	**100**
28	Tamaulipas[136]	40%	11	**31.4**	12	**34.3**	35	**100**
29	Tlaxcala[137]	50%	6	**18.8**	-[138]	-	32	**100**
30	Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave[139]	30%	19	**38.0**	12	**24.0**	50	**100**
31	Yucatán[140]	30%	5	**20.0**	6	**24.0**	25	**100**
32	Zacatecas[141]	40%	9	**30.0**	12	**40.0**	30	**100**
	TOTAL	40%	**272**	**23.9**	**324**	**29.3**	**1138**	**100**

3. Municipal Level

The Mexican Republic has a total of 2,440 municipalities in 31 states, and 16 delegations in the Federal District (INAFED, 2012c). Every municipality and delegation has a municipal council, the a*yuntamiento*, headed by a president and composed of one or two *síndicos* and several *regidores*, all chosen by popular election (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 115). In addition, the authorities can appoint a treasurer, auxiliaries, *comisariados*, and specific committee members. Municipalities constitute a very important political level, because at this level local decision-making is closest to the citizens. It is also the level impacting women most directly in their daily life in the community. In theory, it could be considered the most accessible political level for women. In practice however, it seems that participation of women is limited (Barrera Bassols, 2003: 1; Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 136-137). In 2002, only 3.4% of 2,427 Mexican municipal presidents were women (Barrera Bassols, 2003: 2). Ten years later, in 2012, only a slight increase could be seen, with a total of 6.38% female municipal presidents (Inmujeres, 2012). More women could be found in functions reporting to the municipal president. The higher the position, the less accessible it seems to be for them. The less important the function, the more women are present (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 136-137). In the lower positions their numbers have grown significantly in the last ten years. In 2002, 6.8% of Mexican

[129] Congreso del Estado de Puebla, 2014a and 2014b.
[130] Congreso del Estado de Querétaro, 2014a and 2014b.
[131] Congreso del Estado de Quintana Roo, 2012a, 2012b and 2014.
[132] Congreso del Estado de San Luis Potosí, 2014a and 2014b.
[133] Congreso del Estado de Sinaloa, 2012 and 2014.
[134] Congreso del Estado de Sonora, 2014a and 2014b.
[135] Congreso del Estado de Tabasco, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[136] Congreso del Estado de Tamaulipas, 2012, 2013 and 2014.
[137] Congreso del Estado de Tlaxcala, 2012 and 2014.
[138] There is no information on the deputies on the website of the Congress of Tlaxcala, only the number of deputies per party.
[139] Congreso del Estado de Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave, 2012a, 2012b and 2014.
[140] Congreso del Estado de Yucatán, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[141] Congreso del Estado de Zacatecas, 2012 and 2014.

síndicos and 15.9% of the *regidores* were women (Barrera Bassols, 2003: 2). In 2012, there were 26.81% female *síndicas* and 38.47% female *regidoras* (Inmujeres, 2012).

Dalia Barrera Bassols studied female municipal presidents in 21 municipalities across Mexico. According to her research, most female presidents can be found in rural and semirural municipalities, and in small or medium urban municipalities (with a population of less than 50,000 inhabitants) (Barrera Bassols, 2003: 6). She also noted that most women in her research had completed at least technical studies, followed normal school, or even obtained professional qualifications. This level of education seems to give them a certain legitimacy and authority to take up a responsible role in their community (Barrera Bassols, 2003: 12).

In general, efforts to improve female political participation have shown certain results. Between 2012 and 2014, a small increase could be seen in the number of women with a political function at a national level. Especially the number of female senators has increased by almost 10 percentage points; the number of female deputies by 6.2 percentage points. However, the number of women at the highest levels of the political structure remains limited; parity has nowhere been achieved. At a municipal level, the number of women in political functions is even less (see figure 9). The correlation between the level of the position and the presence of women is also noteworthy: the higher the position, the fewer women. The highest percentages of women can be seen at the deputy level, where the decision-making process is conducted with 500 deputies. When looking at the level of the Secretaries of State Departments or the State governors, women are underrepresented. The same is true at municipal level. The higher the position, the less accessible it seems for women; and conversely, as the function is lower ranking, more women will be found.

Figure 9: Presence of women and men in the political structures, Mexico (2011, 2012, 2014).

	Year	Women		Men		Total	
		Number	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*
Secretaries of State Departments[142]	2012	3	**16.7**	15	**83.3**	18	**100**
	2014	3	**17.6**	14	**82.4**	17	**100**
National Congress: Senators[143]	2012	29	**22.7**	99	**77.3**	128	**100**
	2014	43	**33.6**	85	**66.4**	128	**100**
National Congress: Deputies[144]	2012	159	**31.8**	341	**68.2**	500	**100**
	2014	190	**38.0**	310	**62.0**	500	**100**
Ministers of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation[145]	2012	2	**18.0**	9	**82.0**	11	**100**
	2014	2	**18.0**	9	**82.0**	11	**100**
State governors[146]	2012	1	**3.1**	31	**96.9**	32	**100**
	2014	0	**0.0**	32	**100**	32	**100**
State congresses[147]	2012	272	**23.9**	866	**76.1**	1138	**100**
	2014	324	**29.3**	782	**70.7**	1106[148]	**100**
Municipal presidents[149]	2011	-	**6.4**	-	**93.6**	-	**100**
	2014	-	**6.8**	-	**92.8**	-	**99.6**
Local deputies[150]	2011	-	**22.4**	-	**77.6**	-	**100**
	2014	-	**26.1**	-	**73.9**	-	**100**
Local *síndicos*[151]	2011	-	**26.8**	-	**73.2**	-	**100**
	2014	-	**29.2**	-	**70.8**	-	**100**
Local *regidores*[152]	2011	-	**38.5**	-	**61.5**	-	**100**
	2014	-	**38.3**	-	**61.7**	-	**100**

[142] Presidencia de la República, 2012 & 2014.
[143] Senado de la República, 2012 & 2014a.
[144] Cámara de Diputados, 2012c & 2014b.
[145] SCJN, 2014.
[146] CONAGO, 2014a & 2014b.
[147] Cf. figure 8.
[148] Based on 31 states with available data.
[149] Inmujeres, 2012. Data based on SEGOB, INAFED, Sistema Nacional de Información Municipal, October 2011; Inmujeres, 2014. Data based on SEGOB, INAFED, Sistema Nacional de Información Municipal, July 2014.
[150] Ibidem.
[151] Ibidem.
[152] Ibidem.

D. Indigenous Women and Politics: Between Tradition and Modernity

When analyzing political participation in Mexico, indigenous peoples, and particularly indigenous women, deserve special attention. Research on politics in indigenous communities usually focuses on men. Except for some specific studies mentioned earlier, women are invisible. They are generally considered not to be participating. The numbers seem to support this statement; there are very few indigenous women participating at a political level. However, most scholars do not seem to question women's absence, they consider it normal and attribute it to tradition. But by doing so they disregard women's social role. Irrespective of local traditions, women should have the same political rights as men. Anthropologists, advocates, and indigenous experts themselves could play an important role by exposing this situation. As they are familiar with the specific local context, they could also support women in the development of initiatives to include women in local politics.

Several questions have to be asked. To what degree are indigenous women participating in the decision-making processes? Why don't they have equal access to politics and how could this be changed?

The analysis of the presence of indigenous women in Mexican politics clearly shows: there are very few indigenous women with a political mandate. At the national level, some indigenous candidates succeeded in becoming a member of the Mexican National Congress. Official numbers are not available – Congress does not keep data on the ethnic origin of its members –, and even specialized researchers can only give rough estimates. What is clear, is that indigenous representatives are a very small minority of the national deputies and senators. Although 14% of the total Mexican population defines themselves as indigenous, and 10% of the electoral districts have more than 40% indigenous population, in 2012, not even 2% of the deputies in Congress were indigenous[153] (INEGI, 2010; Xantomila, 2012). The number of indigenous women reaching National Congress is consequently even lower. In certain states, such as in the state of Oaxaca, indigenous women have been able to participate in the local Congresses. Yet again, exact numbers are hard to find.

[153] According to the president of the Congress Commission for Indigenous Affairs, Jorge Venustiano González Ilescas, there were eight (out of 500) "really indigenous-indigenous" deputies in Mexican Congress in 2012 (Xantomila, 2012). Mr. González' definition of what is 'really indigenous-indigenous' is not know. Sonnleitner counts 17 indigenous deputies between 2009 and 2012 (3.4%) (Sonnleitner, 2013).

A study for the electoral tribunal estimates a total of five indigenous senators in Mexican National Congress (1.3%) between 1994 and 2012. Of these five senators there was only one woman[154] (Sonnleitner, 2013: 38, 100-101). When looking at the number of deputies between 1989 and 2012, the study counts around 60 indigenous deputies in the National Congress (around 3% of all deputies for that period), of which 10 were female. Thus, over a period of 23 years, the Mexican National Congress only numbered 11 indigenous women as representatives[155]. It is however very difficult to define whether a person is indigenous or not. In the past, this information was considered of no importance. With the reforms of 2006, redefining electoral districts and resulting in a reconfiguration of 28 districts with more than 40% of indigenous population, indigenous Congress members are slightly more visible (Sonnleitner, 2013: 13, 32-38). But even with nothing but estimates, it is clear that the proportion of indigenous Congress members is not representative of Mexico's indigenous population, and in the case of indigenous women the situation is even more alarming.

1. The Trap of Tradition? '*Usos y Costumbres*' in Indigenous Municipalities

To be able to reach the higher levels of state or national politics, it is important for candidates to gain political experience, and the local municipal level is a good place to start. Within the *ayuntamiento*, indigenous women could become municipal president, *síndica*, or one of the different *regidoras*. As said before, the municipality is the most accessible level for political participation and the one where decision-making is most directly related to daily life issues. It is therefore important to evaluate access of indigenous women to this level.

First, the particularities of the indigenous political system must be explained. In part of the indigenous municipalities, decision-making processes differ from the rest of Mexican municipalities. During the last two decades, there has been an emergence of indigenous civil action. Indigenous peoples in Mexico have fought for respect of cultural diversity. They have been demanding control over their territories and natural resources as well as the right to use their own traditional normative systems. In 2001, the Mexican Constitution was changed to recognize the multiethnic and multicultural composition of Mexican society. This change of the Constitution has given indigenous communities the right to have social, economic, cultural, and political institutions adapted to their needs and traditions (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 11-13). At a political level indigenous communities can now choose to vote according to their traditional systems, called '*usos y costumbres*' or '*sistemas normativos internos*'.

[154] Cirila Sánchez Mendoza, a Chatina woman from Oaxaca, was senator for the PRI from 1994 to 2000. She had previously also been a local deputy in the State Congress of Oaxaca (1983-1986), and deputy in the National Congress (1989-1991) (Sonnleitner, 2013: 101).
[155] There are in fact nine women, but two of them were elected twice (Sonnleitner, 2013).

Protecting their traditions has been an important step in the process towards respecting the autonomy of indigenous peoples. While this evolution has been applauded, there have also been critical voices. The traditional normative system is often criticized because it would discriminate women by denying them the right to participate in local politics. The traditional organization of indigenous communities is based on a hierarchic civic religious system of '*cargos*'. Different positions and tasks are divided among the citizens of the community, and throughout their life they can climb the hierarchical pyramid. The system can vary from one community to another, but it serves to make all decisions and resolve conflicts (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 59).

In indigenous communities ruled by '*usos y costumbres*' the assembly is the body of representation. The members of the assembly are elected for one, one and a half, two, or three years, depending on the community. To have a right to speak and a right to vote, citizens generally have to be married, own land, and be the head of the family (Bonfil Sánchez, 2003). In practice, these citizens are men. They are generally the head of the family, and as land is usually passed on to male family members, women cannot become *comuneras*, and consequently not assume a *cargo* either. Finally, to become municipal president, it is necessary to have fulfilled other *cargos* in the hierarchical system (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 63). The traditional power structures tend thus to favor men as decision makers. Women's access to political functions is made very difficult. They get the chance to participate primarily as wife of the *carguero*, supporting their husband in his tasks and, for example, cooking the food for the celebrations (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 61).

Alma Isunza Bizuet describes how in traditionalist municipalities in the Highlands of Chiapas[156], women are not allowed to participate in the cargo system. The only tasks they can do are the ones related to the household and the family, for example, attend the parent or health committee, or prepare school breakfasts, and always subject to the husband's approval. In the case of San Juan Chamula, women have no right to speak in the assembly; they can only ask for permission to listen. Usually, women are represented by their father or husband. If they have neither father nor husband, or if they are absent, the women have to ask another man to represent them and speak on their behalf (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 22, 40).

The people in the assembly are supposed to represent the interests of the community as a whole. As the demands and needs of women are not necessarily the same as those of their male companions, one could question whether the voices in the assembly really represent the entire community (Bonfil Sánchez, 2003). Paloma Bonfil Sánchez states that, in principle, as the people in the assembly are

[156] She mentions among others: San Juan Chamula, Chenalhó, San Andrés Larráinzar, Tenejapa, Zinacantán, Amatenango del Valle, etcetera.

mostly married landowning males, the needs of other groups, such as women, youth, singles, or people without land, are disregarded in the assembly (Bonfil Sánchez, 2003). Although access to the assembly is indeed difficult for these people, I believe it is too radical to state their needs would not be addressed. Each man in the assembly is the father and husband of people not represented. As head of the household, he would be representing all members of his family, and one would expect him to support measures favoring his family. Undoubtedly, within their households, issues will be suggested to the members of the assembly. Bonfil's statement gives very little credit to a body which has been primarily working for the wellbeing of the community for centuries. However, it is true that not all problems might be addressed. The specific needs of women are different from those of men, and men might overlook some of these needs or maybe consider some of them irrelevant. The problem here is not that the needs of women would be disregarded in the assembly. The main issue is that certain groups, such as women, have no *direct* voice in the assembly, and that they are in fact excluded on a gender basis. Women should have the right to speak and vote on the same level as men.

It has to be pointed out that not all indigenous communities follow the '*usos y costumbres*' political system. Often a mixed system is preferred in which the '*usos y costumbres*' are respected, but combined with political party structures. These communities are officially registered as following party politics. Consequently, little official data are available to analyze at which level the '*usos y costumbres*' are enforced or influence the decision-making processes. Furthermore, every community following the traditional system defines and interprets its own rules. The possibilities and opportunities for women depend thus largely on the local context.

2. Working with the Available Data: The Case of Oaxaca

As mentioned before, the availability of statistical data on the exact number of men and women with a local political mandate is very limited, and even worse for indigenous political participation. Hardly any official information on this topic can be found, neither at local nor at national level. Therefore, the combination of several sources is needed to analyze how many indigenous women are participating in the local authorities. Unfortunately the results are often only estimations.

The state where most information is available is Oaxaca. Oaxaca has one of the highest percentages of indigenous population in Mexico (INEGI, 2010). Compared to other states, Oaxaca has also the highest number of female municipal presidents (INEGI, 2013b). As a consequence, it is the state where participation of indigenous women has been studied more extensively, and where more information is available (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 137). The main research on female political participation in Oaxaca was carried out by scholars such as Dalia Barrera Bassols (e. g. 2003), Paloma

Bonfil Sánchez (e. g. 2008), Margarita Dalton Palomo (e. g. 2003), and Laura Valladares de la Cruz (e. g. 2004). At an official level, the Instituto Estatal Electoral y de Participación Ciudadana of Oaxaca also compiled certain statistics on female political participation. Although these data should be analyzed critically, the existence and availability of such information is exceptional within the Mexican institutional context.

Oaxaca was the first Mexican state to recognize in its constitution the right of indigenous communities to elect their authorities based on the traditional system (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 63). The number of communities voting through the traditional system varies from election to election. In 2011, 418 out of 570 Oaxacan municipalities organized elections by '*usos y costumbres*' (73,3%) (Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca, 2011: 25).

Isunza Bizuet has analyzed the right to vote of women in communities ruled by '*usos y costumbres*'. In 2007, she studied the 361 Oaxacan municipalities registered under the '*usos y costumbres*' system at that time. She found that not all women could vote within these municipalities, and that their right to vote depended on their marital status. But, the conditions they had to fulfill to be able to vote differed. In more than half of the municipalities, all adult women voted. Yet, in almost 16% of the municipalities women were not allowed to vote at all. In certain municipalities only married women had the right to vote; in others only single women or only widows could vote; in other places both single women and widows were allowed to vote, excluding all married women (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 33). These results show a large diversity in the levels of participation of the female electorate in communities ruled by '*usos y costumbres*'.

Based on the *Encuesta Nacional de Gobierno, Seguridad Pública y Justicia Municipal* of 2009, the INEGI put together data on the possibilities of indigenous women to vote in municipalities ruled by '*usos y costumbres*'. The data are very poor as they are only available for the state of Oaxaca and partially for the state of Puebla. The INEGI found that in 2009, women were allowed to vote in 361 of the 418 Oaxacan municipalities that followed the '*usos y costumbres*' (86.36%). In 48 municipalities women were not allowed to vote (11.48%). For the remaining 9 municipalities the situation was unknown (2.15%) (INEGI, 2009a). It should be noted that the INEGI only questioned whether women could vote or not. The study of Isunza clearly shows that the situation is more complex and that there are other factors to take into consideration, starting with the marital status. By ignoring this, the INEGI offers incomplete and distorted information.

When turning to the possibilities of being elected as a woman, we see that there are also variations. In 2009, women in the state of Oaxaca were allowed to take up an administrative *cargo* in 350 out of

570 municipalities; in 60 municipalities they were not allowed to do so. The situation in the remaining 8 municipalities was unknown (INEGI, 2009a). Again, no more details are available.

Indigenous women do get elected for municipal *cargos*. Although the Oaxacan average exceeds all other states, the total number of women governing municipalities remains low. This is true for the political party structures as well as the '*usos y costumbres*' system. In the electoral period 1999-2001, only 8 out of 570 municipalities in Oaxaca (1.4%) were ruled by a woman (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 138). Between 2002 and 2004, there were 5 female municipal presidents in the state of Oaxaca (0.88%). For the year 2010, the INEGI reports that there were at least 540 male and 10 female municipal presidents (1.7%) in Oaxaca[157] (INEGI, 2011). In 2012, Oaxaca had 18 female municipal presidents (3.1%) [158] (INEGI, 2013b).

Overall, during the 2010-2016 legislature, there were 19 municipalities with a female president before 2014. Although it is an increase, this still means only 3.3% of the total amount of municipal presidents of Oaxaca are women. Twelve of these presidents were elected in the system of '*usos y costumbres*'[159]; the remaining seven female presidents were chosen in the political party structures[160]. Although in the 2010-2016 legislature there are more women chosen in the political party structures than by '*usos y costumbres*', the percentages of women in both political systems is very limited[161].

The situation is similar for the other municipal *cargos*. In 2010, in all Oaxacan municipalities there were 19 female *síndicas* (3.1%) and 166 female *regidoras* (5.9%)[162] (INEGI, 2011). In 2012, Oaxaca had 15 *síndicas* (2.4%) and 271 *regidoras* (9.6%) (INEGI, 2013b). Exceptionally, data on the number of women elected for *cargos* or as substitutes in the municipalities ruled by '*usos y costumbres*' are available for Oaxaca for the period 2011-2013 (see figure 10). Unfortunately, a comparison with the political party system is not feasible due to lack of records specifically on indigenous women elected in communities, indigenous or non-indigenous, following this electoral system.

[157] The INEGI had no information on the sex of the 20 remaining municipal presidents. Based on other chronologic data, they are most probably mainly men.
[158] In the 2012 statistics, the sex of 225 municipal presidents is marked as unknown.
[159] This means 2.87% of municipal presidents chosen in the '*usos y costumbres*' system were female.
[160] This means 4.60% of municipal presidents chosen in the political party system were female.
[161] It has to be pointed out that the numbers of female municipal presidents can slightly differ from one source to another.
[162] It has to be noted that this is much lower than the national average of respectively 18% female *síndicas* and 29% female *regidoras* (INEGI, 2011).

Figure 10: Women elected as counselor in the municipalities following the '*usos y costumbres*' for the period 2011-2013, Oaxaca, Mexico (IEEPCO, 2012)[163].

Cargo	Elected women	Elected female substitutes
Municipal presidents	7	9
Municipal *síndicas*	1	1
Regidora for Finance	13	8
Regidora for Education	24	16
Regidora for Health	15	18
Regidora for Construction Works	2	4
Regidora for Ecology	0	2
Regidora for Hygiene	1	1
Regidora for Public Health	0	1
Regidora for the Market	3	0
Regidora for Tourism	2	0
Regidora for Gender Equity	1	1
Regidora for Culture and Recreation	1	0
Second *Regidora*	1	0
Third *Regidora*	1	0
Fourth *Regidora*	1	0
Sixth *Regidora*	2	3
Eighth *Regidora*	1	0
TOTAL	**76**	**64**

[163] Every municipality chooses the composition of its *ayuntamiento*, depending on the kind of functions they need. Therefore, there can be overlaps in this list, for example in the case of the *regidora* for Health, the *regidora* for Hygiene, and the *regidora* for Public Health. The number of *regidores* also varies depending on the community.

For Mexican standards, the availability of these data is exceptional. However, it is only a first step in the right direction. Gendered statistics should include data on both women and men, and that is not the case here. The presented numbers need to be contextualized to enable any analysis. What can be said about the number of female counselors when the number of indigenous male counselors is not known? The only observation is that only 76 women have been chosen in the *ayuntamientos* based on a total of 418 municipalities. According to 2010 data (INEGI, 2011), there have to be around 600 *síndicos* and around 2,800 *regidores* (male and female) in the entire state of Oaxaca, which would mean that merely 1 out of 600 *síndicos* (0.16%) and 68 out of 2,800 *regidores* (2.4%) are indigenous women. When compared to the total number of female *síndicas* and *regidoras* in both political systems in Oaxaca in 2010 (INEGI, 2011), we see that an estimated 5% of the female *síndicas* and around 40% of the *regidoras* are indigenous[164].

When looking at the type of *cargo* assigned to women, it can be noted that women are most often elected as *regidora* for education, and secondly as *regidora* for health. Less stereotyped is the election of women as *regidora* for finance. These numbers do not allow further deductions due to the lack of data about indigenous men.

3. Structural Obstacles for Indigenous Women in Politics

Despite being the most accessible level, very few indigenous women participate in municipal politics. Several reasons can be found for their absence. As mentioned before, indigenous municipalities provide a particular context for female participation. A part of the indigenous communities adopted a traditional political system that allows hardly any change, and thus limits the possibilities for female participation. This context is crucial to understand the political situation of indigenous women. In addition, structural, economic, or organizational problems can difficult the participation of indigenous women. Finally, indigenous women have to face numerous social and cultural obstacles.

Generally speaking, indigenous persons have difficulties attaining any public function in non-indigenous communities. This is true at local level, and even more so at state and national level. Although it is rarely acknowledged, Mexican society has a very high level of racism against indigenous peoples. This racism is deep-rooted in Mexico's colonial past, and it is a key aspect contributing to the invisibility of and lack of interest in the indigenous populations of Mexico.

But, both in indigenous and non-indigenous communities, indigenous women are facing other gender-specific obstacles in the process towards political emancipation. As mentioned before, the

[164] It has to be noted that comparing the years 2010 and 2011 without having exact numbers can only lead to estimations. But, if we consider that the presence of women in local governments is quite stable and only rises slowly, the comparison can be made to obtain at least a general panorama. These figures are not absolute numbers.

traditional structures of the '*usos y costumbres*' system can be a hindrance. Bonfil Sánchez identifies other general factors obstructing participation. For instance, the remoteness of many indigenous communities results in limited access to basic services, to opportunities in the labor market, and to information in general, which can hinder acceptance of an official function in the chief municipality. Not only the travel time, but certainly the transport costs, for example, from a local *ranchería* to the chief municipality, can be very high (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 27). This is even more of an issue for many indigenous women without income of their own[165]. In daily life, indigenous women would rather walk the distance, but this would be too time consuming when taking up an official function. Although the distance may remain an obstacle, the cost problem can be solved if the function foresees remuneration.

Furthermore, even if this situation is changing, education also plays an important role in the participation process. In this regard, women are disadvantaged as they often have less access to education than men. One of the conditions to be a member of the *ayuntamiento* is to be able to read and write (Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2011a: Art. 133). Although the alphabetization level has risen, this might still discourage certain women. Their low level of education can thus be an obstacle, and especially their language knowledge. In the community, the local language can be used, but Spanish is the official language at the other decision-making levels. The majority of official documents and procedures is also in Spanish. Knowledge of the Spanish language is therefore a requirement for participation, at least beyond the municipal level.

Another factor is that for indigenous women, the right to participate often depends on their marital status. As mentioned previously, this can have an influence on the opportunities a woman has to express herself. Indigenous women tend to marry at a young age. If their community excludes married women from participation in the decision-making processes, they lose any possibility of participation at a young age. Usually, the recognition of the services offered to the community can grant a person the right to speak. However, the traditional tasks of women are seen as part of their 'natural' tasks, and are not valued the same as a man's job. Women have less access to economic and productive resources and thus cannot offer the same services as men. Furthermore, women have little time to dedicate to public functions because of the long hours they spend taking care of the household and the children (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 27-30). As said by a woman of

[165] Local transport in rural communities generally costs around 10 pesos (0.60 euro) for a single journey (as experienced personally between 2009 and 2012). This is expensive if considered that a large part of the indigenous population is self-sufficient with limited cash income. In 2000, 27% of indigenous persons had no income, 29% earned less than one minimum wage (in 2012 the minimum wage was around 60 pesos or 3.7 euros a day (SAT, 2012)). In the case of indigenous women, 23.5% had no income, and 34.8% earned one minimum wage or less (INEGI, 2004: 108-109), which means that 20 pesos to go back and forth is a lot of money.

Oventik Grande in the municipality of San Andrés Larráinzar, Chiapas, interviewed by Alma Isunza Bizuet: "We, women, have a lot of work at home, therefore it are all men, that is how it has been since before (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 44)[166]."

A factor worth analyzing in the future is the influence of migration. Large groups of indigenous persons have migrated to larger cities in Mexico or to the U.S.A.. As many men left their communities, migration resulted in shifts within the traditional gender structures, and an increasing number of women are taking up the role of head of the household. However, as women are often still denied the right to inherit or be landowners, the position of head of the family does not always guarantee them the right to participate (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 31).

4. Cultural Obstacles: "Tú cállate, tú eres mujer, no sabes nada."

The previous obstacles can be considered of structural, economic, or organizational nature. But when becoming a political candidate, indigenous women are also confronted with hurdles with a cultural or social component. Traditional indigenous communities have, until now, always been ruled by men. This was institutionalized by the Spanish colonial authorities, as women were given no individual rights and could thus not assume public functions. Considering that this has been the tradition for so many centuries, there is a certain reluctance, even rejection, of the idea that women could have a political function. Machismo is very strong, and women cannot rule, *because they are women*. This situation can be seen in both indigenous and non-indigenous Mexican communities. However, in indigenous contexts it is more obvious because it is institutionalized by the '*usos y costumbres*' system. Communities that do not want women to rule, have attributed this exclusion to the '*usos y costumbres*', stating that changes in the system would be in contradiction with the preservation of the indigenous traditions. Men have always ruled, and this tradition should not be altered.

[166] Original: "Es que las mujeres tenemos mucho trabajo en la casa, por eso son puros hombres, así ha sido desde antes."

Isunza Bizuet has recorded, primarily in Chiapas, statements of indigenous women on their political participation. A woman of Bayalemó, in the municipality of San Andrés Larráinzar, Chiapas, says:

> "In the past women were not taken into account, it was said that they could only stay at home their entire life, they could not speak, only men felt very strong. […] When a woman spoke, the man said: "Shut up, you are a woman, you do not know anything, I do because I am a man"; — That is what the man said — [...] when the [Municipal] Agents are changed, we do not go, only men go (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 43)[167]."

Although she speaks about the past, this perception still persists in several communities.

Not only the local authority, but also her own family and her husband can advise against female political aspirations. According to Bonfil, overcoming this hurdle is often a difficult first step for indigenous women. To attain leadership, indigenous women constantly have to surpass traditional norms and expectations (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 54). Women engaging in a public role, have thus to convince their family of the importance of their presence; they have to find financial resources and support, without neglecting their household responsibilities (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 131-132). Gossip can be the family's part, the husband may be called weak because he cannot control his wife, and the woman can be accused of abandoning her maternal and marital obligations. Women can get a bad reputation, and men can get jealous:

> "I think we women could not have another *cargo* in the politics of the community because it would be seen as wrong, we cannot start working with men, they are going to talk badly about us, men get mad and jealous […] We have already experienced it with other women and young girls, they do not last long, the husbands get angry, sometimes meetings take place until late at night and they do not allow it. That is why a woman cannot take up a *cargo* because men put obstacles (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 42-43)[168]."

[167] Original: "Antes las mujeres no se tomaban en cuenta, decían que no servían más que para quedarse toda la vida en la casa, no podían hablar, sólo los hombres se sentían muy fuertes. [...] Cuando una mujer hablaba, el hombre le decía 'Tú cállate, tú eres mujer, no sabes nada, yo sí sé porque soy hombre'; —Así decía el hombre— [...] cuando cambian a los Agentes [Municipales], nosotras no vamos, van puros hombres."

[168] Original: "Creo que las mujeres no podríamos tener otro cargo en la política de la comunidad porque se vería mal, no podemos entrar trabajando junto con los hombres, van a hablar mal de nosotras, los hombres se enojan y sienten celos [...] Ya lo hemos experimentado con las demás mujeres y con las muchachas, no aguantan mucho tiempo, los esposos se enojan, a veces les agarra la noche en alguna reunión y ellos no lo permiten. Es por eso que una mujer no puede ocupar un cargo porque los hombres ponen obstáculos."

The pressure on the family can thus be very high. But, the opposition can also deliberately come from other women in the community:

> "It is difficult because when women participate, the same women started the gossip between themselves… (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 47)[169]."

Another woman of Bayalemó says:

> "It would be good if women participated, however the *Regidores*, the auxiliaries, the President and the Judge are all men. A woman among men would not be considered good, their wives would think bad things (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 44)[170]".

These accounts clearly show, that not only men oppose a woman's political ambition. Other women of the community can also disapprove of it, denying women's capabilities. It is an example of how machismo is not only a male attitude. Women themselves perpetuate patriarchal social structures and even reinforce them. Thus, changes of mentality are needed for both sexes.

When women do participate in political issues, there is often opposition to their decisions, and even pressure to make them resign. In particular when decisions have to be taken that seem to be opposed to certain groups in the community or in favor of the female population, women can be pressured to step down (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 65). In 2001, 101 women in 64 Oaxacan municipalities were elected by '*usos y costumbres*' for a *cargo* in their local government. However, 22.6% of these women left the *cargo* before the end of the term. I have no data on the number of men leaving their *cargo*. It is clear, though, that women in indigenous communities experience a lot of pressure. Their presence is seen as breaching tradition, and any step towards change is considered a betrayal of the community. Their ambition and public role often meets with disapproval. The social, personal, economic, and political burdens make it an extremely difficult task for women to take up a *cargo* and follow a political vocation (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 139). Studies of Margarita Dalton Palomo (2003) and María Cristina Velásquez Cepeda (2003) have shown that the numbers of indigenous women resigning from a political function are significantly high. The pressure from the community and other local political players, the accumulation of domestic tasks and responsibilities with political obligations, the lack of financial resources, and the lack of political emancipation of indigenous women, all have a negative impact on the political participation of indigenous women.

[169] Original: "Es difícil porque cuando hay mujeres que participan, las mismas mujeres comenzaron los chismes, entre las mismas mujeres... ."

[170] Original: "Estaría bien que participaran las mujeres, sin embargo los Regidores, los auxiliares, el Presidente y el Juez, son puros hombres, no se vería bien que una mujer estuviera entre todos ellos, sus esposas pensarían mal."

The case of Eufrosina Cruz Mendoza exemplifies how indigenous women experience a lot of resistance to their political participation. Eufrosina Cruz, an indigenous Zapotec woman of the community of Santa María Quiegolani in the southeast of the state of Oaxaca, always fought to improve her life conditions. She learned Spanish and left her native village to sell *elotes* (corncobs), cucumbers, and *tortas* in the Oaxacan city of Salina Cruz in order to pay for her education. She managed to obtain a university degree in accountancy. Later, she became a Community Instructor for the National Commission for Educational Development (Comisión Nacional de Fomento Educativo), and traveled to other villages to assist people. There she became aware of the social problems in Oaxaca, the lack of health services and good education, and especially the subordination of women (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 11-13). In 2007, Eufrosina Cruz was candidate for the municipal presidency of Santa María Quiegolani. In this village, elections are held according to the '*usos y costumbres*'. Supporters of the sitting president strongly opposed her candidacy, and intimidated and threatened people who inclined to vote for Cruz. Women were not allowed to vote in Santa María Quiegolani (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 55-58). But Cruz had proven to be socially engaged, and she received a high number of votes from the male voters. However, during the count of the votes, the ballots with her name were systematically declared invalid. When Cruz complained about this, she was told that, according to the '*usos y costumbres*', women and persons with a profession – Cruz is an accountant – are not allowed to take up the *cargo* of municipal president (Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2007: 260).

> "It is sad to say this, but in my community it looks as if it is a punishment to be a woman, because we have no rights at all. Immediately the municipal president came out and confronted me, telling me that it was the people's decision that the ballots in my favor were declared invalid. Next, the sister of the municipal president intervened arguing that people with a profession do not have the right to take up that *cargo*, causing a disturbance in the assembly and a few drunk citizens attacked me verbally for the simple fact of being a woman, at this the municipal president only mocked my presence and he ignored what was happening (Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2007: 260) [171]."

[171] Original: "Es triste decir esto pero en mi comunidad tal parece que es un castigo ser mujer, pues no tenemos derecho a nada, en seguida salió el C. Presidente Municipal y me enfrentó diciéndome que el pueblo es quien decidió la acción de que las personas que confiaran en mi sus boletas fueran nulas, a continuación la hermana del Presidente Municipal intervino argumentando que los profesionistas no tienen derecho a ocupar este cargo, provocando que la asamblea se alterara y algunos ciudadanos en estado de ebriedad me agredieron verbalmente por el simple hecho de ser mujer, a esto el Presidente Municipal solo se burló de mi presencia y no hizo caso a lo que sucedía."

The Municipal Electoral Council for '*Usos y Costumbres*' of the Congress of Oaxaca declared that the elections in Santa María Quiegolani were valid because they were held following the '*usos y costumbres*' system. After having knocked on many doors that mostly remained closed, Eufrosina Cruz appealed to the National Human Rights Commission. On the 5th of March 2008, this commission decided in her favor, and recognized that the gender discrimination she had suffered violated her rights as a Mexican citizen to be voted, and that of her voters to choose freely. The commission recommended a reform of the Constitution of Oaxaca. Following this case, Article 25 of this Constitution was amended, making it impossible to deny women the right to participate in municipal governments following the '*usos y costumbres*' (Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2007: 261-275; Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 11-13):

> "The law will protect and promote democratic practices in all communities of the state of Oaxaca, for the election of its municipalities, according to the terms established by Article 2, Paragraph A, Section III and VII of the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico and 16 of the Political Constitution of the Free and Sovereign State of Oaxaca; it will establish the mechanisms to guarantee the full and total participation of women in said electoral processes and the exercise of their right to vote and be elected on equal terms with men, and will penalize violations (Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2011b: Art. 25 §A)[172]."

Cruz' case received a lot of media coverage, simultaneously launching her political carrier within the PAN party. She continued to be politically active and was an advocate for the political rights of indigenous women. And with success: in the year 2010, she became the first indigenous woman to become president of the Congress of Oaxaca. In 2012, she was elected as Federal Deputy in the Mexican National Congress (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 13).

Eufrosina Cruz has not been the only indigenous woman struggling to participate in local politics. Sometimes local newspapers report stories, and so several examples can be found. Ezequiel Zárate describes how an active militant of the PRD was appointed as treasurer of her community San Mateo del Mar, Oaxaca in 2001. She was replaced after strong opposition. The municipal president argued that men consider women cannot take up a function in the authority because they do not do community work in the *tequios* as men do (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 38). In 1995, Bernardina

[172] Original: "La ley protegerá y propiciará las prácticas democráticas en todas las comunidades del Estado de Oaxaca, para la elección de sus Ayuntamientos, en los términos establecidos por el artículo 2º apartado A fracciones III y VII de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos y 16 de la Constitución Política del Estado Libre y Soberano de Oaxaca; establecerá los mecanismos para garantizar la plena y total participación de la mujer en dichos procesos electorales y el ejercicio de su derecho a votar y ser votada en condiciones de igualdad con el de los varones y sancionará su contravención."

Tequiliquihua Ajactle tried to become the municipal president of Los Reyes, a Nahuatl speaking municipality in the Zongolica mountains of the state of Veracruz. Although she was elected, and in 2007 was able to become the first indigenous deputy in the state Congress of Veracruz, she recalls how she experienced a lot of difficulties and opposition during her political campaign:

> ""When I considered becoming municipal president I was discriminated a lot by men and by everybody, my campaign was very difficult but with the conviction of the community I won." [...]
>
> She remembers the multiple occasions men of the communities shouted when she passed by: "You cannot govern, you are a *chamaca*[173], you know nothing."
>
> And the Nahua men of the communities asked: "Who rules at home, the men or the wives?" And when the people present answered, shouting, they demanded that she returned home to cook and clean (Castro Medina, 2007) [174]."

Although these women struggled, the different stories tell that not everybody in the communities opposed their candidacy. In the community of Eufrosina Cruz, women are not allowed to vote. This means she was clearly supported by a considerable group of male voters. The treasurer of San Mateo del Mar was appointed, and Bernardina Tequiliquihua was elected municipal president. Every time there were difficulties, but eventually at least part of the community believed in their capacities, which illustrates a certain evolution in the minds of people, both of women and men.

Now that she is a member and even the president of the Congress of Oaxaca, Eufrosina Cruz is sometimes seen as the representative of indigenous women. Yet, her case illustrates that it is not enough to have one indigenous woman participating. Certain indigenous groups, for example the women of the Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas de Oaxaca, have not accepted her as their representative in Congress. They disapprove of her because she is believed to have discredited the '*usos y costumbres*' system in order to launch her own political career (López, 2011). Critics could argue that this proves indigenous women are not ready for politics, or that they are not able to agree on a common approach. In my opinion, this is not the case. When comparing this situation with non-indigenous politicians, not a single member of congress is supported by the entire population. Every

[173] A *chamaca* is a young girl, but the term has a negative connotation.

[174] Original: ""Cuando comencé a buscar la presidencia municipal fui muy discriminada por los hombres y por todos, fue muy difícil mi campaña pero con el convencimiento de la comunidad la gané." Recuerda las múltiples ocasiones en que los hombres de las comunidades gritaban a su paso: "tú no puedes gobernar, eres una chamaca, no sabes nada." [...] Y preguntaban los señores nahuas de las comunidades: "¿Quién manda en las casas, los hombres o las esposas?" Y tras la respuesta de los presentes, a gritos, le exigían que regresara a su casa a cocinar y a lavar."

politician only represents a specific group of citizens. It is rather an illustration of the fact that more female indigenous candidates are necessary. More candidates would offer more options for the indigenous population to find candidates addressing their specific needs. This is part of democracy. The presence of Eufrosina Cruz is a very important step, as she can be a role model for other indigenous women, but it is only a first step on a long road.

5. Changing Times: Defying Traditions and Social Structures

Indigenous women have to overcome many obstacles in order to reach political participation. Nevertheless, the traditional structures are slowly changing, and more women are able to take up *cargos*. Increasing migration has been a significant factor. Large numbers of indigenous persons, primarily men, migrated to bigger cities of the Republic, or even to the United States of America. They leave their home town to find better employment, and hope to be back soon. But, often they stay for several years, or never return home. The women that stay behind in the communities increasingly participate in *cargos* as representative of their emigrated male relatives. This situation has also led to certain women inheriting land, allowing them to gain a voice and a vote in the municipal assemblies. In some cases migration limited the number of male villagers, and thus women are bound to take up *cargos* (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 61).

Participation of women depends a lot on local contexts. Certain factors can have more influence depending on the region. In the state of Oaxaca, for example, the strong migration process facilitated women's access to political functions in the Mixteca region; in the Southern Sierra and the Isthmus region, women gained experience as activists against megaprojects such as the construction of dams; in the Northern Sierra, more indigenous peoples had access to education, and adopted the opinion that it is politically incorrect to deny women the right to participate (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). In communities facing severe local conflicts, such as with the Triqui of Oaxaca, women will probably be taking up more political *cargos* in the future. Migration is one reason for this shift, but also the fact that women in this conflicted area have, more often than men, a clean criminal record, a condition to be elected (Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca, 2011: Art. 133). Most adult men in these communities have been involved in the troubles. In addition, women have been very active in the Triqui protest movements during the conflicts. They have learned how to participate and to raise their voices in favor of their community. This experience will hopefully stimulate future female political participation.

Thus, female participation often originates in the deconstruction of social structures. According to Bonfil Sánchez, the participation of women resulting from socio-economic difficulties, does not necessarily lead to an increase of status (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 62). While women bear more

responsibilities and pressure, they do not gain higher status. Furthermore, Valladares does not believe indigenous women are just filling in the spaces left open by men. As members of their community, they experience problems and injustices firsthand, and have the growing need to participate actively in the decision-making process to improve their situation (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 134).

In addition to migration, a growing level of education also opened doors for women. While the general education level of indigenous women is still significantly lower than the national average, some young indigenous women are now not only finishing high school, but also attending university, which was unachievable in the past. With a higher level of education as well as a profession, women can gain the recognition and trust of the community, paving the way for political participation. The downside is that educated women often do not return to their community because of the lack of employment opportunities in the village. Only certain professions may return, for example lawyers, primary school teachers, or accountants (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 23). Nevertheless, qualitative education also helps to develop civic and social skills. It helps increase the consciousness of women regarding their rights, and the role they can play in politics and in society in general.

At an economic level, women are involved in more non-domestic activities; they are participating in the labor market, and are contributing to the domestic budget. As a consequence, they are increasingly conscious of their right to participate at all levels of society, including the level of political decision-making.

These different elements allowed women to engage in the local political scene, proving that they are capable of making decisions. Consequently, the opinions regarding the capabilities of women are slowly improving (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 62). Both men and women are starting to accept female representatives. Eufrosina Cruz, for example, states:

> "The lie of politicians is saying it is the problem of the '*usos y costumbres*'. If you ask men whether they agree that women participate, many will say yes, that they prefer it (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 62)[175]."

Thus, indigenous women have to face many obstacles, and a long road ahead, but changes are slowly happening.

[175] Original: "La mentira de los politicos es decir que es problema de los Usos y Costumbres. Si preguntas a los hombres acerca de si están de acuerdo en que participen mujeres, muchos van a decir que sí, que lo prefieren (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 62)."

6. Are Indigenous Women Not Participating?

In general, studies on the '*usos y costumbres*' agree that women have been excluded from political participation in this traditional system. While the statistical data are often only estimates, they indicate a general trend showing very limited presence of women in local politics. Numbers are important, but taking the research one step further, it is also crucial to talk to the women involved, and ask them what their experiences are.

Certain testimonies regarding cultural obstacles have already been discussed. These women acknowledge that it is difficult for them to participate in political *cargos*, or simply not done. Their contributions focus on local situations, yet they are valuable. To broaden the scope, these testimonies were complemented with interviews conducted with young indigenous women who are very active in their communities, but also at a regional or even national level. I deliberately chose indigenous women with a university degree because they can comment on their personal experiences from different points of view, taking into account the traditions of their community, theoretical academic discourses, as well as political opinions. They offered additional insights rarely captured in the studies on '*usos y costumbres*', and also criticized some of the preconceptions of anthropologists. It is important to present these very active and engaged indigenous women, with experience in different types of organizations, with academic degrees, who are agents of change, and can speak up. Their knowledge and experience has to be acknowledged and valued.

Zaira Alhelí Hipólito López[176] is a young Zapotec woman who had the opportunity to study abroad, and is now very active in the female indigenous movement as one of the coordinators of the Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas de Oaxaca. The different experiences she lived have made her into a self-confident and emancipated woman, also proudly conscious of her indigenous background, which makes her analysis of female political participation very interesting. She describes, for example, the first time she wanted to speak to the local authorities of her community, a community adhering to the '*usos y costumbres*' system:

[176] Zaira Alhelí Hipólito López is from Tanetze de Zaragoza, a municipality of around 1,700 inhabitants in the state of Oaxaca (INAFED, 2012b). Her mother's family is Zapotec; there has been no contact with her father's family. Her mother and aunts are bilingual. Her grandmother is bilingual too, but she does not like to speak Spanish. The mother of Zaira is a Zapotec teacher and thus Zaira herself has a good level of written Zapotec. In her community, most people older than 18 years are bilingual. According to her, women speak more Zapotec than men, because they prefer it over Spanish. Zaira has a master's degree in psychology and she received a scholarship from the Fundación Ford to study abroad in Chile for a year. Currently, she is active in the female indigenous movement as one of the coordinators of the Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas.

"The first time I wanted to talk to the municipal authority, well, we always go there, but now it was to speak with the authority about a territorial conflict. I raised my hand, and when it was my turn, I said, "Well...", but I got stuck after the "Well…" because the president interrupted me. And I thought, "No way, I will have none of that!" But he said, "Excuse me, I want to tell you all that Zaira has been involved in the community for this and that matter, and I think she has the right to speak, what do you say?" And they all accepted. If I would have reacted from my Western perspective, never having gone to the municipality – because women do not go to the municipality, the occasions we go to the municipality are very rare – and I would have risen and said, "No! Let me, I must speak!"... Fortunately I restrained myself. That is a very important ritual. I understood it was like a ritual to ensure that your voice counts, whether you are a woman or a man. And when I got home my mom asked me how I had felt, because we went together. I said, "I thought he would not let me speak. You should have told me that was the ritual". And she said: "We all have to go through that, men too, and also young boys." It is like, "He or she has not done, he or she cannot. He or she did, he or she can". It is a different practice to "I become 18 years, and I can go to everything". If I had not passed this ritual first, it would have been no use for me to be there. They would have let me speak, but the others would not have considered my speech as important, my word as important. The word is valuable to the extent that it contributes (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012)[177]."

[177] Original: "La primera vez que quise hablar con la autoridad municipal, bueno uno siempre va, pero eso ya era para hablar con la autoridad sobre un conflicto territorial. Yo alzé la mano, y cuando ya me tocaba el turno, yo dije: "Es que...". Y entonces me quedé en el "es que", porque el presidente me interrumpio. Y yo pensé: "Ay no, en este momento le digo sus cosas!" Pero él dijo: "Permítanme, les voy a decir que Zaira ha participado con la comunidad en tal, en tal y en tal cosa, y creo que tiene el derecho de hablar, ustedes qué dicen?" Y todos aceptaron. Si yo hubiera reaccionado desde mi perspectiva occidental, de nunca haber ido al municipio – porque las mujeres no vamos al municipio, son muy raras las ocasiones en las que vamos al municipio – y me hubiera levantado y hubiera dicho: "No! Usted déjeme, tengo que hablar!"... Afortunadamente me contuve. Ese es un ritual sumamente imporante. Entendí que era como un ritual de garantía de que tu voz cuenta, seas mujer o seas hombre. Y cuando llegué a casa mi mamá me preguntó que tal había sentido, porque fuimos juntas. Le dije: "Pensé que no me iba a dejar hablar. Me hubieras dicho que ese era el ritual". Y dijo: "Es que todos pasamos por eso, a los hombres también les pasa, también a los chavitos." Es como "No ha hecho, no puede. Ya hizo, ya puede." Es una práctica diferent a "Cumplo 18 y ya voy a todo. Si no hubiera pasado este rito previamente, no hubiera valido nada que estuviera ahí. Me hubieran dejado hablar, pero el resto no hubiera considerado mi discurso como algo importante, mi palabra como algo importante. La palabra vale en la medida en que aporta."

The testimony of Hipólito reveals that women in her community rarely go to the municipality. However, this does not mean women cannot acquire the right to speak. In this case, women who demonstrate their engagement in the community, receive recognition and a valuable voice in the local decision-making process. Hipólito herself feared not to be allowed to speak because of her occidental academic education. But, as she had already proven herself on several occasions, there was no opposition from the assembly. This example illustrates that not all traditional communities are against female participation, and that there have also been changes from within. Hipólito argues that existing studies do not acknowledge a certain level of acceptance in the communities to allow female political participation (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012).

For Hipólito it is also important to point out that there are different ways of female participation. She feels academic research focused too much on the more obvious political participation, ignoring the importance of other forms of participation in committees and assemblies. There is a persistent perspective that women have to participate actively, their name has to be mentioned in order for this participation to be recognized as valid (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012).

> "There are quite debatable interpretations, especially on the subject of women. For example, the idea that within the normative system women do not participate, has made us women believe we do not participate. When you ask women who are participating in their communities, they say they are not, because they have been told they do not participate. But, for example, at celebrations, they cook for the celebration, they prepare, they clean up, they serve, they get up very early, and are on their feet all day. An academic colleague said that the women do not enjoy the celebration because they spend all the time cooking. But this is precisely their community work, and they are very proud to be able to contribute (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012)[178]."

Hipólito argues that all women's activities must be recognized. Interpreting their role as merely an extension of their 'natural' domestic tasks, denies the true value of their participation. Furthermore, considering these tasks as inferior is the result of interpretations constructed from a Western point of view in which the 'private' domestic work of women is seen as inferior to the 'public' work of men

[178] Original: "Hay interpretaciones bastante discutibles, sobre todo en el tema de mujeres. Por ejemplo, la idea que dentro del systema normativo las mujeres no participamos nos ha hecho creer a nosotras que no participamos. Cuando le preguntas a las mujeres en qué participan en su comunidad te dicen que no participan, porque les han dicho que no participan. Pero por ejemplo en las fiestas, ellas cocinan para la fiesta, preparan, recogen, sirven, se levantan muy temprano y estan paradas todo el día. Una compañera académica ha dicho que ellas no disfrutan de la fiesta porque se la pasan cocinando. Pero esto justamente es su trabajo comunitario, y ellas estan muy orgullosas de poder hacerlo."

(Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). Without Western bias, researchers could become aware of different levels of participation in which women are present and play an important role. For example, food and hospitality offered to guests are crucial for any kind of social event. Any festivity or ritual, be it a wedding or a patron saint celebration, needs to be accompanied by food and drinks offered to the guests, and this is mainly the responsibility of the women of the community[179]. Women are thus not merely heating food, they are enabling an important part of the ritual.

Hipólito makes an important point: it is not because women are not present in the local authority that they are not participating. Hipólito herself is very active in social organizations, but as she says herself, she is not interested in a political *cargo* (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). Female leadership can also be developed and obtained through other civil organizations and movements, but these do not have to be political. In indigenous communities, women can be found participating at three main levels: at the political, social, and religious level. At the political level, they can be present in different departments of the local authority. Women can be elected to become *síndica* or *regidora* in the *ayuntamiento*, or exceptionally municipal president. In some cases wives can be registered as substitutes for their husbands in the *ayuntamiento*. Women can also be part of the lower municipal administration, as treasurer, secretary, controller, phone operator, or librarian. A second level is the social municipal space. Women can have access to local committees, especially those related to health, nutrition, education, and social programs, such as *Oportunidades*. They can, for example, be part of the mill committee, parents committee, prepare school breakfasts, promote milk distribution programs, such as *Liconsa*, etcetera. Sometimes, there are specific women's committees or small municipal women's institutes. Thus, women can mostly be found in committees that are complementary to their domestic and family care tasks. But, they have also been active in farmers' associations or as social activists, promoting the well-being of the community. A third level of participation is in the traditional *cargo* system, which includes several religious functions. Mostly, women have to support their husband in his role as *carguero*, but in certain municipalities women can be the main participant, for example being *mayordoma*, taking care of the church, a specific saint, or giving catechism. Women can also be asked to participate in community services; this often implies cooking during festivities, or cleaning the public spaces. In some cases they can even become a local police officer. In several places, carrying out these community services is a prerequisite to reach higher functions in the *ayuntamiento* (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 34-37). In communities where women's participation at the social and religious level is limited, access to political participation can thus be more difficult.

[179] As a matter of fact, this is also still true for Western social events, although here too women's role is undervalued.

As mentioned before, participation at municipal level is very important in the empowerment of women. The proximity to home and focus on local agendas about daily life items familiar to all women of the community, makes it the ideal place for women to learn to participate and to become leaders. Indigenous women have learned to participate actively in these different bodies. Within their organizations they strived to include a gender perspective. Their work is not always easy, but their participation in these organizations helped them to obtain a certain degree of recognition, and a voice in their communities (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 54). Ezequiel Zárate describes the memories of a woman in the Oaxacan community of San Mateo del Mar, who wanted to participate:

> "When I participated, people shouted: "Throw this woman out, because she is worth nothing." And then I told them, directing myself to the one that was shouting, inviting him to take the microphone. And I was scared, but I participated. Later, we lost our fear, and we continued participating … (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 39)[180]".

The gained experience makes women stronger and more confident, and encourages them to keep participating.

Judith Bautista Pérez[181] also believes women are participating at more levels than visible at first sight. When she was young, women in her community did not participate in the assemblies, but not for lack of interest. Bautista tells how, as a young girl, her mother always sent her to the mill, or the well, of the community. While waiting for their turn, the adult women were always discussing local politics. They commented on the decisions made by their husbands in the assembly and had a very clear opinion on community matters. She also remembers how her own mother discussed political decisions with her father at home (Bautista, personal communication, 2012). The power of women to influence their husband's choices may vary a lot. In certain homes, the man might listen to his partner, but it is clear this will not be true everywhere. Women need to have more direct and formal ways of participation. However, this example is meant to illustrate that women are interested in the decisions concerning their community and will try to find ways to participate, even indirectly. When developing programs to enhance their empowerment, it is important to keep already existing dynamics in mind as they could serve as a starting point, rather than believing that these women are ignorant and not participating.

[180] Original: "Cuando participé, la gente me gritaba: "Saquen a esa mujer porque no vale nada". Y entonces les dije dirigiéndome al que estaba gritando invitándolo para que pasara a hablar en el micrófono y yo tenía miedo, pero participé. Ya después perdimos el miedo, seguimos participando… ."

[181] Judith Bautista is a young Zapotec woman from the town of San Juan Atepec, in the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca. Atepec has about 1,500 inhabitants, mostly bilingual. Bautista had to start working at the age of eleven, but got a scholarship of the Fundación Ford, and obtained an MA in sociology.

Sofía Robles, of the organization Ser Mixe, testifies how women can gain experience in local organizations. When Ser Mixe started with projects for indigenous women, it was difficult to convince women in the communities to participate. At the beginning, women brought their husbands along so they would speak for them. Yet, over time they learned to stand up for themselves, and now these same women are hard to stop once they start talking (Robles, personal communication, 2011).

As we have seen with Hipólito, participation in community matters can open the door to participation in the decision-making process. The different levels of participation are thus interconnected; the social and traditional levels can be a platform to attain the political level. To specifically analyze female political participation, it is therefore important to take all levels of participation into account, which is often forgotten in current research. Thus, specific research is necessary to analyze the participation of indigenous women at all levels of the community.

The different levels of participation are important, but the lack of indigenous women in politics cannot be denied and needs to be addressed. Women ought to get equal access to political decision-making processes. The role of the different participation levels could be part of the solution. Hipólito believes that the integration of women in local politics has to be a process coming from within the communities (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). The more experienced and confident women become at a more accessible social level, the more they might be stimulated to take up a political *cargo*. It is a process that is happening. Not everywhere, but in part of the indigenous communities change is occurring from within. Women are starting to receive recognition for their work. But, the process is very slow, partly because changing mentalities is difficult. Furthermore, progress has been hampered by a lack of institutional involvement, and recognition from the political and academic world. Consequently, specific policies are needed to support women's struggles.

7. Movement of Indigenous Women: Activism and Leadership

In addition to their participation in local committees, certain indigenous women have taken their participation one step further and integrated the indigenous movement. Some are activists in mixed indigenous associations, others have specifically chosen to engage in the improvement of the situation of indigenous women.

As previously discussed in the historical overview, in Mexico the movement of indigenous women gained visibility in the 1990s. Indigenous women managed to create a national network and develop a specific discourse. It is a movement overlapping the indigenous and the feminist movement, but questioning both.

As Espinosa states:

> "It forces to recognize the generic dimension of the social inequality in the project of the indigenous movement, and the plurality of subjects and political strategies within the feminist movement (Espinosa Damián, 2010: 86)[182]".

Research has shown that Mexican indigenous women have been participating actively in most revolts and conflicts throughout colonial and post-colonial history. But it was during the Zapatista uprising in the 1990s that the participation of indigenous women caught the attention of the general public. Hundreds of women were members of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), as part of the militia, as insurgents, or helping in the support bases. But most important was precisely that they were not only fighting for their rights as indigenous peoples, but that they also had gender specific demands (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 128).

Valladares recalls how the Zapatistas were called cowards whenever women were seen in the front line of demonstrations against the military. This standpoint does however not take into consideration women's role as protagonists in the fight for better life conditions for their community. Furthermore, it portrays women as inferior, ignorant, and in need of protection (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 136).

On the 8th of March 1993, nine months before the uprising, the EZLN had already accepted the *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres*. This document addressed the need to integrate specific rights for indigenous women in the traditional normative system of '*usos y costumbres*'. But the indigenous women's movement also took a critical stand towards the '*usos y costumbres*', questioning the elements that oppressed women (Espinosa Damián, 2010: 90-91; EZLN, 1993). They fight for ethnic recognition and want to protect their traditions, but they do not accept all traditions blindly. They are very conscious of the unequal rights they have as women, and want to change this situation. Gutiérrez and Palomo interviewed a Tzeltal woman in Chiapas who stated:

> "Not all *costumbres* are good! Some are bad. If they say that the government is going to respect the *costumbres* of indigenous peoples, we women have to say which *costumbres* are good and have to be respected and which *costumbres* are bad and have to be forgotten (Gutiérrez and Palomo, 1999)[183]."

[182] Original: "Obliga a reconocer la dimensión genérica de la desigualdad social en el proyecto del movimiento indígena, y la pluralidad de sujetos y estrategias políticas al interior del movimiento feminista."
[183] Original: "¡No todas las costumbres son buenas! Hay unas que son malas. Si dicen que el gobierno va a respetar las costumbres de los indígenas, las mujeres tenemos que decir cuáles costumbres son buenas y deben respetarse y cuáles costumbres son malas y deben de olvidarse."

Participating in the indigenous women's movement is not always easy. These women are faced with resistance from the mixed indigenous movement, which believes that the gender demands weaken the indigenous movement. The critical approach of the '*usos y costumbres'* and the exposure of problems regarding gender relations within the communities – considered to be private matters – is experienced as a betrayal of the mixed movement.

But at the same time, their critical approach shows the strength, maturity, and independence of the movement. Indigenous women are not helpless creatures in need of saving; they are not just following the mixed movement either. They have their own priorities, and are capable of developing a critical discourse questioning all mechanisms of oppression, both inside and outside their communities.

Many initiatives have been organized, bringing indigenous women together, for example the *Primera Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de América* (2002), and local groups have been created, such as the Coordinadora Guerrerense de Mujeres Indígenas (2004) and the Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas de Oaxaca (2011). Maybe the movement has lost some strength since the 1990s, but new generations of young indigenous women are already standing up.

Hipólito testifies that there are many differences within the female indigenous movement. Women have different demands and needs, especially among the different generations. This is not always easy to coordinate. The Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas of which Hipólito is a member, for example, consists of women of different communities and indigenous peoples of Oaxaca. These women have different experiences and different trajectories within and outside their communities. About a hundred indigenous women participated in the last assembly; many of them are teachers, but also women who are not part of any organization, or young women finishing their academic education in the capital. They have in common that they are addressing similar subjects, such as sexual and reproductive health, political participation, land owning rights, community communication, or collective rights. The organization started as a local project, but now different initiatives with similar agendas have emerged from other spaces and are coming together (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). Similar processes are happening all across the country. As mentioned, the difficulty is to coordinate, but also to recognize the specific demands and needs within the organizations, which has not been an easy task. The differences often divide the movement, and other views are not always accepted. In addition, the lack of resources hampers the indigenous women's movement. Most women in the organizations are participating on a voluntary base, on top of their normal activities. Hipólito explains how for government meetings they have to see who is free at that specific moment. This makes it difficult to guarantee a systematic follow-up.

Furthermore, the influence of the indigenous women's movement on the political authorities remains limited. They are invited to attend certain meetings, but are clearly not yet important stakeholders for politicians (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). In general, the initiatives of indigenous peoples are heterogeneous. They are very diverse in strength and scale, and in the spaces they use. This reflects the diversity existing within the Mexican indigenous population.

The women in the indigenous movement acquired a great deal of experience regarding leadership. They learned to participate in assemblies, workshops, and social protests, and have been in contact with both national and international academia, human rights activists, feminists, etcetera. Mexican indigenous women participated in international meetings, such as the *Encounter of Women of the First Nations of Abya Yala* in Quito, Ecuador (1995). Certain indigenous women have also been able to participate in work groups and subcommittees of the United Nations (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 142-143). These experiences helped to empower them even more. They learned to claim new spaces, and serve as a positive example for other indigenous women. Some female indigenous activists are Martha Sánchez (Amuzga of Guerrero), Sofía Robles (Mixe of Oaxaca)[184], Cándida Jiménez (Mixe of Oaxaca), and Margarita Gutiérrez (Hñahñu of Hidalgo), among others. These women have been playing an important role in the fight for the recognition of indigenous women's rights, both at local, state, national, and international level. Sofía Robles, for example, participated in the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, as the only indigenous woman in the Mexican delegation (Robles, personal communication, 2011).

Nevertheless, the number of female indigenous leaders remains limited. They have a lot of problems to conquer these spaces, and have to resist economic, social, and personal pressure. Although their main objective is to improve the situation of indigenous peoples, they are sometimes criticized by their own community because they are thought to have lost the bond with the community and no longer able to understand them. Female activists have to fight again on different levels, both within and outside their community, in the feminist movement, within the indigenous movement, and with the other female indigenous activists.

The female indigenous movement has however been able to give indigenous women a voice, and it has put specific social and gender issues on the national and international agenda (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 144). The agency of indigenous women needs to be acknowledged. The discourse of the female indigenous movement has become very mature, criticizing society's paternalistic, racist, and sexist elements that have been oppressing them. They also show that tradition and modernity are no

[184] Sofía Robles is originally from a Zapotec town in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca. However, since she married a Mixe man, she has primarily been active in the Mixe region.

contradiction, seeking a balance between the two. Because they believe: "You can remain the same while changing, and change while remaining the same[185] (Espinosa Damián, 2010: 105)".

Another very important point stressed by indigenous women whenever I spoke to them is that they do not want to be treated as poor, pitiful, and needy souls. They are not victims, they speak up demanding equal rights as indigenous peoples, and as women. Researchers – still generally outsiders – often approach them as if they were helpless children needing to be saved, but this is a paternalistic approach. It cannot be denied that indigenous women are confronted with situations of oppression and discrimination, but this does not mean that they do not have the capabilities to speak up, or are unable to participate. Researchers should connect with the people in question, give moral and concrete support, help to open up spaces, starting within the academia itself. But they should not impose their voice, as this would mean reduplicating the situation of oppression.

Overall, several changes are necessary to improve the political participation of indigenous women. Isunza Bizuet lists different points that can help to integrate more indigenous women in politics. First, mentalities have to change, starting in the families of the women, so that they receive the necessary support and understanding at home. Women should also support each other's ambition. The culture of imposition, submission, uncertainty, and offense has to be changed into a culture of motivation, perseverance, and engagement. Women have to be able to work with men, and their opinions have to be respected. All capacities and roles of women have to be valued, including the domestic tasks they perform. There is also a need for gender inclusive education encouraging broader development of girls. Girls and boys have to learn that both sexes are equally capable of taking up a significant role in the decision-making processes of the community and by extension, the country. Within the family, education is also crucial; women should avoid teaching machismo to their children. Daughters and sons should be brought up in a context of gender equality. Furthermore, to improve their self-awareness and self-confidence, but also their political skills, women should receive specific trainings (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 51-55). These points have to be addressed in the communities. But mentality changes are also necessary outside the communities. Non-indigenous society should accept the capabilities of indigenous women to participate at all levels, be it at local, state, or national level. Spaces have to be made more accessible for these women, and they should be empowered and encouraged to participate. Another important point is the creation of specific policies that take indigenous women into account, and stimulate and facilitate their participation. At this moment, the government has not made enough efforts to include indigenous women as full and valuable citizens.

[185] Original: "Se puede permanecer cambiando y cambiar permaneciendo."

At international level, it can be noted that indigenous women become more visible, and gain agency. For example, indigenous women very actively participate in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which is currently presided by Dalee Sambo Dorough, an Inuit woman and associate professor of the University of Alaska Anchorage. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, is also an indigenous woman (Kankanaey Igorot peoples of the Philippines). In 2015, the 59th UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) reviewed progress made regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women since the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action that is now 20 years old. For this occasion, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) specifically evaluated the achievements and obstacles of indigenous women and girls. In national politics, for example, the former secretary of culture of Guatemala (2000-2004), Otilia Lux, is a K'iché woman. In countries such as Canada and the U.S.A., indigenous women are also present in academia. Several of them are specifically engaging in historical, social, and anthropological research on their own peoples, for example Sonya Atalay (Anishinaabe) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Jennifer Nez Denetdale (Diné) at the University of New Mexico, and Waziyatawin (Dakota) at the University of Victoria, among others.

Despite the fact that Mexico has about 15% of indigenous citizens, opportunities for political and academic participation are rarely available for indigenous women in Mexico.

E. Conclusions

This chapter looked at the political participation of women in Mexico, giving special attention to political participation of indigenous women. Are Mexican women and men participating in politics at the same degree? Do they have equal opportunities to participate, and are women equally represented at all levels of political hierarchy? Political participation of women is an indicator of the level of female emancipation, but it is also an indicator of the place women have within Mexican society. The same is true for indigenous women; the level of political participation illustrates the place indigenous women have within Mexican society as a whole, but also within their own communities. In the indigenous context, specific questions had to be asked. Do indigenous women have a voice and a vote in their local communities? And do they have access to higher political levels? In which spaces and to what extent can they participate?

First, the national policy on female political participation was analyzed. Following international agreements, the Mexican government pledged to enforce equal participation of women in politics,

and in the power structures of the state. At a national level, measures have been taken, such as the adoption of gender quota for candidate lists for federal, state, and municipal elections. The electoral reforms of 2014 stipulate parity between female and male candidates on party lists. Furthermore, candidates on the lists have to have a substitute of the same gender.

In the past, more limited quota laws were already in place, but during previous elections, the gender quota had limited effects on the electoral results. Women were placed in strategically less important positions and districts, or even replaced by men after election. The new measures will have to prove their effectiveness during the following elections.

When looking at the right to vote, gender equality seems to have been reached in Mexico. Certain factors can negatively influence this equality. Within patriarchal structures, women can be influenced to vote according to the wishes of a male family member. They can also be influenced by other actors, such as government officials or the church, or by fear of losing government aid. To ensure freedom of vote and to empower women, government initiatives should focus on the development of more political consciousness, education, and the emancipation of women on this subject.

The analysis of the number of women elected within the political structures shows a grimmer picture. As illustrated by the female candidacy for the presidential elections of 2012, women can reach the highest ranks of Mexican politics. Between 2012 and 2014, there was also a small increase in the number of women with a political function at national level. However, at almost every political level, female representatives are still a minority; parity is nowhere reached. Women and men do not have equal access to political functions. Parties seem to be reluctant to give seats to women, believing men are more capable. The higher the position, the fewer women are present; the lower the position, the more women can be found. This essentially means that women are underrepresented and do not participate at all levels of the decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the few women among the highest political ranks are not necessarily the best ambassadors for women. Often they still operate within the existing patriarchal structures and conservative values; they tend to revert to stereotypical ideas on gender relations and on the role of women. This illustrates a deeply rooted and structural gender inequality.

To give women effective equal opportunities, mentalities have to change. In this process, the government should set an example. To address this problem, the first step is to have data showing the extent of the issue and the evolution of the number of men and women in politics. At this moment, there are no gendered statistics available for all political levels. The lack of these official data illustrates the lack of importance given to gender equality in Mexican politics, and the lack of

effective commitment of the government. Mexican institutions are still not aware of the need to collect gender specific data. Officially, the national gender policy has to be followed at all levels. In practice, however, it is not considered important.

When focusing on indigenous women, the situation is even worse. Until now, indigenous women have only exceptionally been able to reach the national political level, and in the state congresses they are rarely present either. In the municipalities, more indigenous women are active, but their numbers are still low. Access of women to public functions differs depending on the community and the local context, but it is difficult to have a clear overview of the situation. An important problem in measuring participation of indigenous women within the institutionalized political structures is the absolute lack of statistical data to make a complete analysis. Hardly any statistics are available about the number of indigenous persons participating in politics, and official data on indigenous women do not exist at all. To be able to address gender issues in rural and indigenous communities, it is indispensable to have an overview of the different contexts and situations indigenous women are living in. They do not all have the same opportunities and access to resources, and the local and national policies should be adapted to their specific needs. How can the government evaluate and improve the situation of indigenous women, if no data are collected to show the extent of the issue? Here again the absence of the most basic information illustrates the lack of commitment of the government.

At the local municipal level, the degree of participation of indigenous women differs, depending on the specific context of each community. In certain communities, women encounter little resistance when taking up a political *cargo*. In others, however, women have to face many obstacles to be able to participate, and sometimes they are even forbidden to do so. In general, to be able to participate, indigenous women have to face both structural and cultural obstacles. Furthermore, in certain communities, the traditional political system of '*usos y costumbres'* makes it impossible for women to participate in local politics. Indigenous communities fought to get this distinctive normative system recognized at a national level, but traditionally it is a patriarchal structure led by men only. Therefore, the '*usos y costumbres'* system is often considered to be harmful for gender equality and for the emancipation of indigenous women. The '*usos y costumbres'* system has indeed been used as an excuse to refuse access to women, however, positive examples have shown that this is not necessarily the case. Within indigenous communities, changes have been taking place and women are being included in the traditional normative system. To counter external criticism claiming that the '*usos y costumbres'* is an oppressive system, indigenous women have clearly stated their support for the system and they know which changes have to be made to the system to grant them equal political rights. Indigenous women are finding their place between a traditional political system and

equal gender rights. They do not feel they have to choose between tradition and modernity; they believe they can remain the same while changing, and change while remaining the same.

The agency of indigenous women should not be underestimated and should be acknowledged. They are themselves actors of change. At the political level, indigenous women are slowly taking actions to gain a voice. It is important to realize that there are both indigenous women and men supporting these changes. On the other hand, women are using alternative ways to participate, and are acquiring leadership experience in different spaces, within political structures and beyond, both at national and international level.

It is important to make the agency of indigenous women more visible. The previously mentioned story of Eufrosina Cruz, for example, has been published in the book *Alas de Maguey* (2012) by Marta Gómez-Rodulfo. Cruz also accepted to participate in the documentary *La revolución de los alcatraces* (2013) by Luciana Kaplan, which describes her struggle to participate in local and national politics against the background of the '*usos y costumbres*' system. The documentary won the Al Jazeera Documentary Award at the 2013 Vancouver Latin American Film Festival, among other prizes, and participated in numerous film festivals in Mexico and abroad, getting much visibility. This kind of media is important to show that indigenous women are not passive victims. They are taking action themselves to improve their situation, and they are speaking up for themselves.

However, more spaces should open up for indigenous peoples, such as civil organizations, academia, official institutions, cultural centers, etcetera. This would give them the opportunity to gain more experience and expand their agency. Both the Mexican government, and the other actors in society must take their responsibility to decolonize mentalities, and create the conditions for indigenous women to be able to participate and have a voice in all spheres of society.