



# Spain

Celia Valiente, Luis Ramiro and Laura Morales

## Introduction

In Western countries, the gender gap in political representation has been the object of increased attention by scholars, politicians and the public. In response to a growing expectation that women should be more fully represented in political life, some political parties have adopted internal mechanisms to increase the presence of women among the parliamentary elite. In other instances, countries reformed their electoral laws in order to feminize the political elite. Spain is no exception to this pattern. Some Spanish parties have gender quotas and some legislative attempts to modify the electoral laws have been discussed (and up to now defeated) at the national and regional level.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this chapter is three-fold: to test whether Spanish women are discriminated against while trying to enter the parliamentary elite, to examine demand-side explanations that maintain that women as a group do not have enough resources to obtain an egalitarian representation in elected institutions, and to study the differences (if any) between female and male members of the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament (the Chamber of Deputies, *Congreso de los Diputados*) with respect to their socio-economic characteristics and their parliamentary work. In assessing these three aspects of the elective process, we mainly analyse two types of empirical data: lists of candidates in the 2000 general elections; and information on female and male deputies in the 2000-2004 legislative term.

First, we offer a general overview of the Spanish political system and the situation and evolution of women's role in politics in Spain, and more specifically of female members of the Spanish parliament (MPs). Second, we review the (scant) literature on the under-representation of Spanish women in Parliament. Third, we use empirical data to test some demand-side and supply-side explanatory factors of women's unequal parliamentary representation in Spain. More concretely, we study whether it is possible to affirm that women are discriminated against while trying to become deputies; the potential impact of the size of the electoral district on women's chances to become MPs; and whether the lower education level of women (as a group) is an obstacle for them to be parliamentarians. Finally, we analyse the differences (if any) between female and male Spanish deputies concerning their socio-economic characteristics and their parliamentary work.

## Politics and Women in Spain

From 1939 to 1975 Spain was governed by a right-wing authoritarian regime headed by General Franco. The current political system was formed during the transition to democracy initiated in 1975. This transition was characterized by the negotiation between reformist political forces from the dictatorship and the democratic opposition. The transition was formally symbolised by the public adoption of a democratic constitution in 1978. The King is the head of state but with few formal powers. Parliament is composed of two chambers: the lower chamber, the Congress of Deputies, and the upper chamber, the Senate. Members of the Congress of Deputies are elected by proportional representation under the D'Hondt system with closed lists. The 52 constituencies, based on provincial boundaries, vary in size from one to 34 members and return a total of 350 parliamentarians to the lower house. There is a three per cent minimum threshold for representation at the electoral district level. These characteristics of the electoral system imply that electoral results tend to favour big parties and parties with geographically concentrated support.

The Spanish political party system is a limited multi-party system with a low level of ideological polarisation (Linz and Montero, 1999). In general, three nationwide political parties attract the majority of popular support, the centre-right Popular Party (*Partido Popular*, PP), the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE) and United Left (*Izquierda Unida*, IU). Three regional parties play a pivotal role in forming parliamentary majorities, the Catalan centre-right coalition Convergence and Union (*Convergència i Unió*, CiU), the center-right Nationalist Basque Party (*Partido Nacionalista Vasco*, PNV) and the smaller Canary centre-right coalition Canary Coalition (*Coalición Canaria*, CC). During the 1993-96 and 1996-2000 parliamentary terms the regional parties CiU, CC and PNV supported the respective PSOE and PP minority governments. The CiU, the CC and the PNV have governed their respective regions for a long time. In post-authoritarian Spain a process of devolution of powers to the regions has produced a quasi-federal state.

For a short period between 1931 and the mid-1930s Spain was for the first time in its history governed by a democratic regime, known as the Second Republic. The Spanish Republican Constitution of 1931 was the first to establish the equal right of men and women to vote and to be elected in national elections (Montero, 1996), after a vivid and historical parliamentary debate that took place between the Radical deputy Clara Campoamor – in favour of female suffrage – and the Radical-Socialist deputy Victoria Kent who opposed it for tactical reasons. Before that, the suffrage movement in Spain had been rather weak in organisational terms, but had gradually introduced the issue of female suffrage into public debate. The first public vindication of female suffrage took place in 1854 (Fagoaga, 1985, 44ff) and it was not until 1883 that the first signs of suffragist collective action emerged (Fagoaga, 1985, 74ff). Nevertheless, during the 1920s the Spanish suffrage movement organised more effectively around their claims for voting rights, with the creation of several organisations such as the Spanish Women National Association (ANME), the Women Union of Spain (UME), the Crusade of Spanish

Women, and the Feminine Association for Civic Education (AFEC), and with a burst of public suffragist demonstrations in the streets seeking the vote for women (Fagoaga, 1985, p.153).

During the Second Republic women entered parliament and held political office: thirteen women were elected as deputies in each of the three legislative terms, representing both left- and right-wing parties and another, the anarchist Federica Montseny, briefly served as a Minister of Public Health during the Civil War, thus becoming the first ever woman Minister. Unfortunately, women's political rights were to be short-lived. Women's right to participate in politics in Spain ended with the Civil War, fought between 1936 and 1939. Many women in the Republican zone joined the armed forces until the Republican government prohibited them from fighting at the front. After the end of the war, the dictatorship of General Franco attempted to send women back to the home and reinforced traditional gender roles in the family, society and politics. The only role women could exercise in the public sphere during the authoritarian regime was linked to the activities of the Women's Branch of the single official party, the *Sección Femenina*, which was responsible for the political indoctrination of women and the socialization of women in traditional roles (cooking, sewing, religious faith and practice) and charitable activities. However, some women continued to participate in politics within the underground organisations of the opposition political parties and illegal trade unions, and the modern feminist movement first appeared in the late 1960s, although it only really developed in organizational terms in the mid-1970s (Scanlon, 1990, Threlfall, 1996).

With the new 1978 constitution most but not all of the discriminatory laws introduced during the dictatorship were abolished and the constitution granted equal rights for men and women and full citizenship for the latter. With the restoration of democracy the presence of women began to increase in Parliament, public office-holding, and the political parties and trade unions (Instituto de la Mujer, 2003; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2002). With regard to the Congress of Deputies, the proportion of female MPs rose throughout the whole democratic period, from six per cent in 1977 to 36 per cent in 2004. After the 2004 elections, the PSOE had the highest representation of female parliamentarians (46 per cent), followed by the PNV (29 per cent), the IU-IC (40 per cent), the PP (28 per cent), PNV (14 per cent) and the CiU (10 per cent). The percentage of women in the parliamentary groups of PP, PSOE, IU, CiU, and PNV has generally increased in the last three decades, and especially since 1989. This increase has been continuous in the cases of the PP and PSOE, and it has experienced some periodic reversions in the cases of IU, CiU and PNV due to their smaller parliamentary seat share (Table 14.1). In the Senate, the proportion of women has always been slightly lower than in the Congress of Deputies, and women senators held 25 per cent of the seats in the 2004-2008 Senate. In the 17 regional parliaments women have gradually increased their presence from an average of six per cent in 1983 to an average of 32 per cent in 2003 (Threlfall, 1996; Montero, 1996; Instituto de la Mujer, 2003), and reached 53 per cent in the regional parliament of Castilla-La Mancha in the regional elections of May 2003.

**Table 14.1 Women MPs in Spanish Lower Chamber (%), 1977-2004**

Election	Total	PSOE	AP-PP	PCE-IU	CiU	PNV
1977	6	8	6	15	0	0
1979	5	4	11	9	11	0
1982	5	7	1	0	0	12
1986	7	7	6	0	6	0
1989	14	17	9	12	6	0
1993	16	18	15	22	6	0
1996	22	28	14	33	25	20
2000	28	37	25	25	13	29
2004	36	46	28	40	10	14

*Source:* Authors' calculation from data in [www.congreso.es](http://www.congreso.es). Percentages based on the number of women originally elected as MPs at the beginning of the term.

In addition to their representation in elective office, women are gradually finding their way into governmental office. By May 2004, 25 women had been appointed ministers. The first woman minister was Soledad Becerril, appointed in December 1981 with the centrist government of UCD headed by Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo. She was in charge of the Ministry of Culture and remained in government for one year. The next women to be appointed ministers were the Socialists Matilde Fernández and Rosa Conde, Minister for Social Affairs and Government Spokesperson respectively, both of whom took office in 1988, six years after the first woman minister had left office. The twelve Socialist governments (PSOE) in office between 1982 and 1996 included a total of five female ministers and a maximum of three in a single cabinet, and they were responsible for the Ministries of Social Affairs, Government Spokesperson, Culture, and Health and Consumption. The governments of the Popular Party (Partido Popular) between 1996 and 2004 have appointed a total of eleven female ministers and a maximum of five in a single cabinet. These female ministers have headed the Ministries of Justice; Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; the Environment; Education and Culture; Health and Consumption; Science and Technology; Public Administration, and Foreign Affairs. The 2004 government of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was the first ever gender parity government in Spain, with 50 per cent female ministers (eight out of 16) and the first to have a female first Vice-Prime Minister (María Teresa Fernández de la Vega). As a consequence, since the first democratic government of 1977 to the 2004 government, women's presence in governmental ministries went from 0 to 50 per cent.

Issues of representation have preoccupied the Spanish feminist movement for many years. The first democratic elections in four decades, in June 1977, raised expectations among many advocates of women's rights. Therefore, on 13 July 1977, at the first meeting of the Congress of Deputies, women's rights activists presented their manifesto in support of the 25 women elected to parliament, denounced the fact that there were so few elected, and asked the three feminist MPs to push the feminist agenda in Congress (Escario, Alberdi and López-Acotto,

1996, pp.270-2). Through these years, however, the feminist movement pursued an ambitious agenda that went far beyond issues of women's presence in politics. In the 1970s and through the 1980s, among the goals pursued were equality before the law, reproductive rights such as decriminalisation of the selling and advertising of contraceptives (achieved in 1978), a divorce law (obtained in 1981), legalisation of abortion (partially achieved in 1985), criminalisation of sexual violence, and equal employment policies. Since then, as many of the most pressing legal changes (divorce, contraception, violence) have been achieved, the issue of representation has taken up more of the agenda. Moreover, because the Spanish feminist movement in general has involved women within left-wing parties, it is not surprising that they have come to focus on matters of access to elected office, both within their parties and more generally (Jenson and Valiente, 2003). The Spanish feminist movement continues its campaigns on the increase of the presence of women in institutions (the so-called objective of 'parity democracy'). However, the success of this mobilisation will in part depend on party and electoral dynamics, many of them beyond the control of the women's movement.

### **Obstacles to Women's Political Participation in Spain**

In comparison with research on female MPs undertaken in other advanced industrial countries, studies on Spanish women parliamentarians are still in an embryonic stage. Generally speaking, studies that explain how and why women reach political decision-making positions are less available in Spain than quantitative reports which map the modest presence of women in those positions. Due to the dearth of these studies, we can only offer some provisional conclusions. Since Spanish political parties are gatekeepers to legislative positions of power, research on legislative recruitment is intrinsically linked to the analysis of party candidate selection (Uriarte, 1997, p.58), with explanations emphasising the demand-side factors influencing female political participation (for example, García de León, 1994). In Spain, the number of women on electoral lists has been increasing over the last few decades in the majority of political parties. Nevertheless, women seldom occupy the leading positions on these lists (Ortiz, 1987, pp.129-39). Relegation to the bottom of electoral lists not only deprives women candidates of the possibility of gaining political office but it also excludes them from public view. Candidates who head the lists usually lead the electoral campaign in Spain. This is an excellent chance for candidates to gain experience as political leaders. Most female candidates cannot avail themselves of this opportunity (García de León, 1991, p.39).

An early study of women's political opportunities indicated that the proportion of women among the candidates with serious chances of winning a seat was higher in the leftist than in the conservative parties, and higher for parties with a small or no presence in the chamber (Barbadillo, Juste and Ramírez, 1990). Bearing in mind the time that has elapsed since these findings were first published, it would be interesting to test the conclusions of this study again. Echoing the experience of

other European countries, it seems that the number of female candidates of any modern Spanish political party increases when the probability of obtaining votes diminishes. All parties now draw attention to the presence of women on their lists in an attempt to win votes (IMOP-Encuestas, 1999, pp.99-100). However, male politicians promote male candidates when the party has a real possibility of winning a seat in Parliament (García de León, 1996, pp.171-2). It has also been argued (but has not been empirically tested) that other things being equal, women have a higher probability of being elected as legislators in the larger constituencies (García de León, 1996, p.173). Later, we will put this hypothesis to the test.

The different degree of trust given to female and male candidates by voters has also been identified as an obstacle to a higher presence of women among the political class. Uriarte (1997, p.69) supports this argument referring to the results of a survey undertaken in 1986 by the Women's Institute showing that 47 percent of men and 40 percent of women trust male candidates more than female candidates.<sup>2</sup> This general indication of preference for male candidates is known to party leaders who in turn reflect this preference when composing their electoral lists.

The organisational culture of the parties also militates against a high presence of women in the legislative elite. In their investigations of party cultures Gaitán and Cáceres (1995) studied the image of women in the documents of the main political parties produced between 1977 and 1994. Women are presented in these documents as individuals who participate, mainly in the economic and social spheres. This is a very positive image, given the fact that the Francoist regime (1939-75) actively opposed the advancement of women's rights and status. However, the willingness of political parties to present positive images of women does not extend to political images. To the extent that the cultures of political parties are reflected in their documents, these are organisations whose political world is male.

The impact of party quotas on the representation of women has been successful. The Spanish case shows that when a quota is introduced in a party, the number of female legislators from that party elected in the subsequent election increases significantly. Moreover, although only left-wing parties have introduced quotas, their effect tends to spread to other parties who are pressured by their achievements. Conservative parties (which have no quota) increased the number of their female representatives after the introduction of the quota in left-wing parties (Uriarte, 1997, pp.69-70).

Supply-side explanations of the weak presence of women among the legislative elite have also been made but are more recent and scarce than demand-side approaches. For example, even if the level of education is in general the same for young women and men, this is not the case for the population of all ages. The difference in education is an impediment for women to run for parliamentary office, since this political activity usually correlates with a high level of education. Additionally, the supply of women decision-makers is seriously hampered by the difficulties of combining women's professional and family responsibilities (Uriarte 1999; Uriarte and Ruiz 1998 and 1999).

Also from the supply-side perspective it has been hypothesised (but not

empirically proven) that women and men become members of political parties for different reasons. According to the literature, women tend to participate in politics in order to help others or change and improve society. Relatively few women engage in political party work in order to achieve prestige, professional upward mobility and economic privileges. These are precisely the reasons that induce some men to be politically active and to try to reach leadership positions in political parties (Vázquez, 1989, p.16). Again, it is imperative to test these propositions present in the literature.

In sum, most academic works on gender and the legislative elite show that on the whole women are discriminated against while trying to reach parliamentary office. According to these studies, the forms of discrimination are common to Spain and most advanced industrial countries. This evidence supports the demand-side explanation for the low presence of women in Parliament. However, recent studies also provide some evidence that corroborates the supply-side thesis. In contrast with the topic of gender and legislative recruitment, we know virtually nothing about the impact of Spanish female legislators. This is an area where research is badly needed.

## **Demand and Supply**

One of the main goals of this chapter is to explore some of the theoretical hypotheses proposed by other scholars, and reviewed previously, for the Spanish case. We will thus approach the analyses of women's under-representation in the Spanish lower chamber by distinguishing between demand-side and supply-side explanations. First, we test two demand-side hypotheses: a) that parties, as gatekeepers to elected office, discriminate against women; and b) that some institutional characteristics, such as the small size of electoral districts, make it difficult for women to access the parliamentary elite. Second, we examine the supply-centred thesis that women's lower levels of education obstruct women's presence in the legislative elite.

### *Demand*

One way to explore the adequacy of the proposition that parties act as gatekeepers to political office and discriminate against women for the Spanish case is to compare the levels of female membership in political parties and compare it with (i) the proportion of women in electoral lists, (ii) the proportion of women in electoral lists in 'safe' positions, and (iii) the proportion of women actually elected as MPs. The levels of female membership of political parties should be considered as the starting point of the analysis because it is mainly from party members that Spanish parties recruit their candidates. Any arguments about parties discriminating against women should, therefore, take into account the membership baseline within each party. We will do this by limiting the analysis to the general elections of 2000 and for the main five parties represented in the Congress of

Deputies. The results shown in Table 14.2 are revealing. When we take female party membership as the starting point, it would seem that none of the main Spanish parties substantially exclude or discriminate against women when it comes to the composition of electoral lists. On the contrary, we can see that PSOE and IU even favour them by granting women an over-representation in their lists when compared to the proportion of female members. However, the crucial aspect is not so much whether women are included in the lists but whether they make it to positions where they are likely to be elected. This provides the real test with regard to discrimination against women members.

**Table 14.2 Women's access to the Spanish parliament, 2000**

Party	% women Party members	% women on lists	% women in safe positions	% women MPs
PP	32.7	34.0	20.5	25.2
PSOE	28.0	46.9	37.6	36.8
IU	29.0	44.6	31.6	25.0
CiU	29.4	28.3	18.8	13.3
PNV	34.5	33.3	20.0	28.6

*Source:* Instituto de la Mujer, 2001; authors' calculations from B.O.E 15/02/2000 and from data held at [www.congreso.es](http://www.congreso.es); party membership data from 2001. 'Safe' seats are defined as those seats won or held by parties in the 1996 general election.

In this case, the Socialists still appear to grant more favourable treatment to women than they might expect from their proportional party membership. The left-wing IU allocates more women in safe list positions in proportion to their party membership, while the centre-right parties PP, CiU and PNV clearly under-represent them. These latter parties seem to discriminate against their female party members when it comes to deciding rank-order in the electoral lists. Centre-right women party members have a harder time getting through to the positions which will make them likely to be elected. The main outcome of this candidate selection process is that only the PSOE has been able to get a higher percentage of elected female MPs than their female party membership would push them to do, reaching one-third of women MPs in their parliamentary group. The electoral setback of IU has prevented it from guaranteeing a fair representation of its women party members among its MPs. And, finally, the three main centre-right parties, especially CiU, are clearly not giving their female party members equal treatment with men.

Constituency size in Spanish general elections range from the single-member districts of the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla to the large multimember districts of Madrid (34 MPs) and Barcelona (31 MPs). We examined the effect of district magnitude on women's representation in Spain by assessing if smaller electoral districts disadvantaged women in their efforts to gain a seat in parliament. The results shown in Table 14.3 would suggest that constituency size does not

matter much for women's access to the lower house. Around 30 per cent of elected MPs are women regardless of the size of the electoral district. True, women are slightly under-represented in smaller districts, but this difference is clearly not substantial.

**Table 14.3 Male and female MPs by constituency size, 2000**

Constituency Size	Total Seats	Men		Women	
		N	%	N	%
1-5 seats	116	84	72	32	28
6-8 seats	74	50	68	24	32
9-34 seats	160	108	68	52	32
Total	350	242	69	108	31

*Source:* Authors' calculations from [www.congreso.es](http://www.congreso.es)

On closer scrutiny we find that women MPs are elected in slightly larger districts of around 12.5 seats than men, who are elected in constituencies of around 11.6 seats, but the difference in the average constituency size where male and female MPs are elected is not statistically significant. Hence, our data do not support the conclusion that smaller electoral districts are a fundamental barrier for gender equality in political representation.

### *Supply*

As we have seen in previous sections, an increasingly common argument is that women are still under-represented in political offices partly because they lack the resources needed to fully participate in political activities. In this sense, explanations which highlight the importance of resources argue that women are less able to supply what is needed to compete for and gain elective office. Resources can be of very different types: time, money, and skills. One aspect of skill is measured by educational attainment. It was traditionally argued that women's lower levels of education acted a barrier to their access to elective positions, since elective offices require skills that are usually enhanced by education. For this proposition to be valid two conditions must be present: a) that women are less educated than men, and b) that education acts as a relevant factor in the selection process of candidates.

Table 14.4 shows educational levels of men and women extracted from a national sample in 2002. These results give a somewhat nuanced picture of educational differences between men and women. On the one hand, women are more likely than men to have only basic educational qualifications, but on the other hand men and women are nowadays equal when it comes to university degrees and education. Given that more than 70 per cent of MPs have some kind of university education, we are able to argue that women are not really disadvantaged in terms

of the educational skills required for parliamentary office (i.e. university qualifications). Thus, today, Spanish women have the educational skills necessary to gain elective positions, at least as much as Spanish men do.

**Table 14.4 Education and gender in Spain (%)**

Education	Total	Men	Women
Primary or less	51.7	46.7	56.6
Second level	29.7	33.6	26.0
Third level	18.0	18.9	17.0
DK/NA	0.6	0.8	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey no. 2450 (CIS, 2002)

Let us turn now to the second condition: does education act as a relevant factor in the selection process of candidates? Answering this question is much more difficult than it was for the first condition. It is logical to expect that the acquisition of educational skills will have some kind of impact on these processes, however it is not possible to quantify with a degree of certainty to what extent it does. Hence, we will use an indirect method to check if this is the case. Also from survey data it is possible to get some kind of estimate of the educational differences between male and female party members. The 2002 survey revealed that women party members actually possess higher qualifications than their male counterparts. True, as we already know, women are less likely to become party members than men. However, those women who eventually become party members are more likely than male party members to have obtained university degrees. Therefore, if educational attainment was a determining factor in being selected as a candidate for parliament, women should be on electoral lists in a higher proportion to their membership. As we have seen in previous sections, this is not the case in Spain. Our data, thus suggest that a restricted access to resources, at least educational, is not what is preventing women from gaining access to elective offices in Spain. Nor are demand-side explanations particularly illuminating. Therefore we must conclude that other extraneous factors, such as political culture and traditional attitudes militate against women's selection as candidates.

### Do Male MPs Differ from Female MPs?

We now analyse the socio-economic characteristics and parliamentary work of female and male deputies in order to assess the similarities and differences between political women and men in Spain. All data in this section refer to MPs in the Congress of Deputies for the 2000-2004 legislative term. There are few differences between this cohort of male and female MPs in age, education levels and

occupational activity. The average age of female deputies, at 45.9 years, is five years younger than that of male deputies. Male and female MPs show similar levels of educational attainment, although women MPs are slightly more likely to have completed primary education only, and less likely to hold a doctoral degree. It is interesting to note, however, that 72 per cent of female and male deputies hold university degrees. There is also a similarity in the occupational profiles of female and male MPs. About one in three male and female MPs are drawn from middle-management, teaching and lecturing occupations. Another one-fifth (21.5 per cent) have backgrounds in the traditional professions (for example, lawyers, architects, medical practitioners), where men dominate, and administrative and service work which is more prevalent among female MPs. A very similar proportion of female (16 per cent) and male (17 per cent) MPs had been politicians or trade union representatives before entering parliament.

In contrast, differences in the marital status of female and male MPs are marked. Marital status is, as already noted in the literature, a differential trait of male and female MPs. Women are much more likely than men to be single (26 per cent), whereas Spanish male MPs are almost invariably married (80 per cent). Therefore, it seems that indeed the attention given by women to political and elective office-holding is not compatible with family obligations in Spain.

So far we have seen that female MPs do not greatly differ from their male counterparts in their socio-economic characteristics. They differed more in terms of marital status and age. However, the most recent international literature argues that while women MPs are becoming more similar to men in their socio-economic characteristics, they are still different with regard to their policy orientation and preferences (Berkman and O'Connor, 1993; Tamerius, 1995; Childs, 2001; Dodson, 2001; Swers, 2001). A related but different proposition states that not only their policy activities might be different but that when we get a more nuanced picture of women's parliamentary role we can still find important gender inequalities. We will see how far these observations can be applied to the Spanish case on the basis of data collected from all 350 Spanish MPs serving in the 2000-04 parliamentary term.

To analyse the potential existence of different policy priorities or preferences of women and men MPs, we examined the membership of female and male MPs to parliamentary commissions related to social policies.<sup>3</sup> A sharp difference was found between the proportion of women (78 per cent) and men (46 per cent) MPs who belong to parliamentary commissions related to social policies. The difference is so pronounced that it may indicate the existence of different preferences of female and male MPs regarding membership to specific types of commissions. It could also be hypothesised that women are welcome in these commissions but not in others. However, more research is needed to clarify the causes of this difference.

We have also analysed the access of women and men MPs to high parliamentary positions. In Table 14.5 we first show gender differences in membership of the main governing bodies of the Congress of Deputies: the Spokespeople Council (*Junta de Portavoces*), the Permanent Council (*Diputación Permanente*) and the Presidency (*Mesa del Congreso*).<sup>4</sup> The first two governing bodies are more important than the third one. As we can see, male MPs are over-represented in the

more powerful governing bodies of the lower house, while female MPs are over-represented in the Presidency, the least relevant of all three. Almost eight per cent of men MPs but only about three per cent of female MPs belong to the Spokespeople Council. This difference would indicate that political elites have noticed that it is important in terms of the public image of parliament that women are represented in the governing bodies of the chamber, but that power structures are still heavily skewed in favour of men. Women are very welcome in symbolic positions, but when it gets to sharing real power things are somewhat different.

**Table 14.5 Membership of the main governing bodies of the *Congreso* by gender**

Governing bodies	Male MPs	Female MPs
Spokespeople Council	7.4	2.8*
Permanent Council	31.4	21.3**
Presidency	1.2	5.6***

*Source:* Own calculation from data in [www.congreso.es](http://www.congreso.es). Percentages are column percentages and they do not add to 100 because not all MPs are members of these governing bodies. \*\*\* Difference statistically significant for  $p \leq 0.01$ . \*\* Difference statistically significant for  $p \leq 0.05$ . \* Difference statistically significant for  $p \leq 0.1$

A similar picture is portrayed by the analysis of the roles and positions gained by female MPs in some parliamentary commissions. In Table 14.6 we highlight gender differences for different positions within parliamentary committees according to a distinction between two types of committees and the degree of relevance of the position. First, we distinguish between two types of committees: type 1 includes the most 'relevant' committees; that is, those that deal with core issues or that assume legislative functions. These include the permanent legislative committees and the committees for the National Audit Office and the European Union. Type 2 committees are those without legislative functions and those related to non-core issues including the joint committees with the Senate for women's rights, the study of drug issues and for relations with the Ombudsman. On the other hand, we can distinguish between three broad types of positions within committees: directive positions, leadership positions, and plain membership. These three can also be graded within them as we do in Table 14.6.

If we take into account these two dimensions of power structures related to committee involvement we can distinguish a clearly gendered pattern. The most powerful positions in the more relevant committees (type 1 committees) are mostly filled in by men. Proof of this phenomenon is the presidency role in type 1 committees: men are almost three and one half times more likely to hold one of these positions than women are: almost seven per cent of the male MPs preside a type 1 committee while the percentage of female MPs in such a position is reduced to under two per cent. But there is also quite a substantive gap in the likelihood of

becoming a spokesperson between male and female MPs: 26.6 per cent of men MPs but only 12 per cent of women MPs are spokespersons in type 1 committees. However, once we go down the ladder of 'relevance' of the position within each category, gender differences disappear or reverse. An even more gendered pattern appears when we consider type 2 committees. In this case, the reduced saliency of the issues dealt with in these groups have as the main consequence the clear over-representation of women in some positions.

**Table 14.6 Roles in Spanish parliamentary committees by gender**

Position	Type 1 Committees		Type 2 Committees	
	Male MPs	Female MPs	Male MPs	Female MPs
Presidency	█	1.9**	1.2	1.9 n.s
Vicepresidency	10.3	11.1 n.s	2.1	█
Secretary	11.2	12.0 n.s	0.8	1.9 n.s
Spokesperson	█	12.0***	3.3	█
Adjoint spokesperson	13.6	█	1.7	█
Member	81.4	80.6 n.s	13.2	█
Attendant	20.7	█	2.5	█

*Source:* Authors' calculations from data in [www.congreso.es](http://www.congreso.es). Percentages do not add up to 100 because categories are not mutually exclusive. \*\*\* Difference statistically significant for  $p \leq 0.01$ . \*\* Difference statistically significant for  $p \leq 0.05$ . \* Difference statistically significant for  $p \leq 0.1$ . n.s statistically not significant for  $p \leq 0.1$ . A grey shading is given to the group (men or women) over-represented in each category if a statistically or substantively significant difference is present.

These results clearly support a less naïve vision of gender inequalities in parliamentary representation in Spain. Women are certainly gaining access to parliament, they are certainly similar to men in their social traits, they have improved their position within power structures, but nonetheless they are still far from sharing power with men on an equal basis. Not even those women that make it through to parliament are given the same opportunities and responsibilities given to men. Women MPs occupy less politically relevant positions.

## Conclusion

The proportion of women among members of the Spanish Congress of Deputies has increased steadily since the transition to democracy to reach the current level of 36 percent. Nevertheless, the presence of women in the legislative elite is lower than their proportion of the general population. In this chapter we have shown that the socio-economic characteristics of women and men deputies are similar, with the exception of their marital status and (to a lesser extent) level of education. Women deputies are also slightly younger than men deputies.

Differences between female and male deputies are very marked concerning their parliamentary work: the percentage of women as members of parliamentary committees on social issues is higher than that of men. This difference may reflect a dissimilarity in the political preferences of women and men MPs, but it may also be the result of discrimination against women, who are relegated to these types of committees. Women are under-represented among those deputies who occupy positions in governing bodies of the lower chamber and among those that hold leading positions in the most important parliamentary committees. Men MPs are over-represented in the most important governing bodies of the Congress of Deputies (the Spokespeople Council and the Permanent Council). Male MPs significantly outnumber women MPs who occupy the main leading positions (president and spokesperson) of the most important parliamentary committees – the permanent legislative committees and the committees for the National Audit Office and for the European Union.

What are the causes of women's under-representation in the legislative elite? In this chapter we have tested demand-side and supply-side explanations. The proportion of women in safe positions in electoral lists for the 2000 general election was lower than that of female members of the party in the PP, the CiU and the PNV, equal in the IU, and higher in the PSOE. Hence, the demand-side thesis that affirms that parties discriminate against women while composing their electoral lists is partly confirmed in the case of the three centre-right parties, but not so for the two left-wing parties. To study whether this discrimination is due to the ideology of parties is beyond the scope of this chapter but may be a matter for future research. In addition, this chapter has tested (and rejected) another demand-side thesis: that small electoral districts are detrimental to women's presence among the legislative elite. Around 36 per cent of members of the Congress of Deputies are women regardless of the size of the electoral district where they were elected.

The supply-side hypotheses that women as a group have lower human capital, expressed in lower educational levels, and that this difference in education negatively affects women's chances to become MPs have also been tested and rejected in the Spanish case. Studying the Spanish population as a whole, we see that a very similar percentage of women and men have university degrees, while the proportion of individuals with university degrees is higher among female members of political parties than among male members.

The results of this chapter indicate the need to continue the study of women's under-representation in parliament in particular and in politics in general. The chapter highlights the need for further investigations into party selection practices, parliamentary culture and the legislative input of men and women in order to add to our understanding of women's contribution to the building of Spain's democracy. Efforts to increase the presence of women in the Spanish political elite are one of the goals of Spanish feminist groups and it is explicitly mentioned in the electoral platforms of the left-wing parties. In this regard, this issue will be present to some extent in future political debates. However, the possibilities for the advancement of democratic parity will depend on multiple factors, some of them

beyond the control of the feminist movement. Therefore the future of women's political representation in Spain remains unpredictable.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Electoral laws governing regional elections in Castilla-La Mancha and the Balearic Islands were amended in June 2002 to introduce a compulsory 50 per cent gender parity in party electoral lists. However, in September 2002, the national government challenged the constitutionality of this provision. Both laws were temporarily suspended and the May 2003 regional elections were conducted under the former regulations.

<sup>2</sup> The Eurobarometer of the 1994 European elections (study 41.1) showed that about 38 per cent of Spanish voters thought that the number of female candidates in party lists was very important in influencing their voting decisions. Only citizens of former East Germany indicated a higher level of support, suggesting that Spanish voters are highly sensitive to gender equality in political representation.

<sup>3</sup> The following commissions were viewed as dealing with social policies: Education; Culture and Sports; Social Policy and Employment; Health and Consumption; International Cooperation to Development; Joint Committee with the Senate for Women's Rights; Joint Committee with the Senate for the Study of Drug Issues.

<sup>4</sup> We analysed full and substitute members of the Spokespeople Council. Regarding the Permanent Council we studied full members, deputy members and MPs with any directive role in the unit.