



THE FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN ELECTIVE POSITIONS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN THE DEMOCRATIC QUALITY OF THE STATE OF BAHIA

**A REPRESENTATIVIDADE FEMININA EM
CARGOS ELETIVOS E SEUS DESDOBRAMENTOS
NA QUALIDADE DEMOCRÁTICA DO ESTADO DA
BAHIA**

**LA REPRESENTACIÓN FEMENINA EN CARGOS
ELECTIVOS Y SUS CONSECUENCIAS EN LA
CALIDAD DEMOCRÁTICA DEL ESTADO DE
BAHIA**

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ABSTRACT

The present work started from the analysis of 102 samples collected through a virtual research questionnaire, which made it possible to analyze distinct variables that, in line with the literature review, make it possible to identify both the profile of the Bahian electorate and the state representatives, elected in the 2018 and 2022 ballots. Based on this, it was possible to investigate the female representation in elective positions, its consequences in democratic quality and the effects of the policy of care on female participation in politics. In the meantime, it was evidenced that this current hinders the realization of the expectations of

How to cite this article:
BRITO, Lavitta Almeida;
VASCONCELOS, Ana
Carolina Santana Gomes;
ROTONDANO, Ricardo
Oliveira.
The female representation
in elective positions and
its consequences in the
democratic quality of the
state of Bahia.
**Journal of Socio-
Environmental Law -
REDIS,**
Morrinhos, Brazil,
v. 03, n. 02, jul./dec.,
2025, p. 158-176.

Submission date:
15/07/2025

Approval date:
11/08/2025

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voters about their own representatives in their concrete performance, because they place parliamentarians in a symbolic political position. That said, it is relevant to debate publicly about the effectiveness of female representation in the Bahian scenario and its consequences for democratic quality, especially from the perspective of the electorate. The research used a hypothetical-deductive methodology, of a qualitative and quantitative nature, using historical, documentary, and bibliographical procedures, applying a closed questionnaire to the research participants.

Keywords: Democracy. Women. Representation. Politics.

RESUMO

O presente trabalho partiu da análise de 102 amostras coletadas por meio de um questionário virtual, o qual possibilitou analisar variáveis distintas que em consonância com a revisão bibliográfica, possibilitam identificar tanto o perfil do eleitorado baiano quanto as deputadas estaduais, eleitas no escrutínio de 2018 e 2022. Com base nisso, foi possível investigar a representatividade feminina em cargos eletivos, seus desdobramentos na qualidade democrática e os efeitos da política do desvelo na participação feminina na política. Neste ínterim, evidenciou-se que tal corrente obstaculiza a concretização das expectativas dos eleitores sobre as suas próprias representantes em sua concreta atuação, pois colocam as parlamentares em uma posição política simbólica. Posto isto, é relevante debater publicamente sobre a efetividade da representatividade feminina no cenário baiano e seus desdobramentos na qualidade democrática, em especial na ótica do eleitorado. A pesquisa utilizou metodologia hipotético-dedutiva, de caráter qualitativo e quantitativo, recorrendo aos métodos de procedimento histórico, documental e bibliográfico, aplicando-se um questionário fechado para os participantes da pesquisa.

Palavras-chave: Democracia. Mulheres. Representatividade. Política.

RESUMEN

Este estudio analizó 102 muestras recopiladas mediante una encuesta virtual. Esto permitió el análisis de distintas variables que, en consonancia con la revisión bibliográfica, permiten identificar tanto el perfil del electorado bahiano como el de los representantes estatales electos en las elecciones de 2018 y 2022. Con base en esto, fue posible investigar la representación femenina en cargos electivos, su impacto en la calidad democrática y los efectos de las políticas de cuidado en la participación femenina en política. Asimismo, se evidenció que esta tendencia dificulta el cumplimiento de las expectativas de los votantes respecto a sus propios representantes en sus acciones concretas, ya que coloca a los parlamentarios en una posición política simbólica. Por lo tanto, es importante debatir públicamente la efectividad de la representación femenina en Bahia y su impacto en la calidad democrática, especialmente desde la perspectiva del electorado. La investigación utilizó una metodología hipotético-deductiva, de carácter cualitativo y cuantitativo, utilizando procedimientos históricos, documentales y bibliográficos, aplicando un cuestionario cerrado a los participantes de la investigación.

Palabras clave: Democracia. Mujeres. Representación. Política.

INTRODUCTION

Starting from the understanding that the consolidation of the Brazilian Democratic Rule of Law has deep roots in the Federal Constitution of 1988, it is imperative to delimit that citizenship and

the dignity of the human person have the fundamental objective of building a society in “becoming,” given that legal norms vary throughout history (Cunha Júnior, 2019).

To reduce inequalities, it is essential to discuss the expansion of the catalog of fundamental rights – to include therein broad and equal political participation, considering gender parity, considering that, despite the existence of normative incentives for the inclusion of women in politics, aimed at providing greater equality in this scenario, women’s participation is still below expectations.

The effectiveness of political agendas related to gender claims and the maturation of democracy are directly associated with greater female representation in the political sphere (Gomes et al., 2018). Patriarchy becomes a means of hindrance to ending this inequality. This social organization explains why women continue to be marginalized in politics, in a cause-and-effect relationship. In this way, they are perceived as less fully citizens (Biroli; Miguel, 2014).

Thus, the primary objective of this research revolves around the state political sphere, its discussions regarding female representation in elective offices, and its ramifications for democratic quality. To achieve this purpose, the study examines the exploration of democratic quality through the significance of representative and participatory democracy in the State of Bahia and the effect of symbolic and substantive representation of elected female state candidates, based on the results obtained.

At first, before delving into the implications of the topic, it is important to distinguish two concepts: representation versus representativeness, which, although related, hold relevant conceptual differences. This issue is debated in the sphere of participation in political parties and/or decision-making processes embedded within the institutional context.

Thus, representativeness is a broader concept and serves as an intersectional examination committed to critical analysis. From this perspective, it is not enough to merely affirm female representation and point out that women currently occupy only 18% of elective offices in Brazil, while more than half of the Brazilian population (51.7%) is female, and they represent 53% of the electorate (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2022).

Despite recognizing the importance of affirmative gender policies that correct this electoral/political inequality between men and women, only the discussion and encouragement of symbolic female representation can shift the figure from the collective to the individual, as the main tool of social transformation. In this way, the relevance of this research lies in tracing the profile of both the electorate and female representatives in elective offices in the State of Bahia, in order to investigate pre-established inequalities, the disproportionality in what the laws have established, and the reality to which these candidates are subordinated.

This study has a quantitative and qualitative nature, as the research analyzed data collected through a questionnaire, made available via the Google Forms platform, which theoretically analyzed the results in order to deepen the vision of representative democracy among Bahian voters regarding their elected parliamentarians in the years 2018 and 2019, and their ramifications for democratic quality.

In the case of this research, the pre-analysis consisted of selecting books, journals, and articles to support a better understanding of the object of study in focus. Thus, the descriptive qualitative exploration did not consist solely of the approach, but rather of the process and its meaning, that is, the main objective is the interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Silva; Menezes, 2005).

Similarly, data collection was carried out through questionnaires presenting distinct variables, whose analyses are presented within the scope of this study and through tables (Fachin, 2003). This method is regularly applied in descriptive studies, which seek to discover and classify the relationship between variables, proposing to uncover the characteristics of a phenomenon. In this type of research, specific variables that may be important are first identified, to later explain the complex characteristics of a problem (Richardson, 1999). Therefore, the samples of the results obtained in measurable data and statistical analysis techniques generally allowed extrapolation of the results to the entire population under study (Bryman et al., 2011).

1 ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OBTAINED THROUGH THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON FEMALE REPRESENTATION AMONG STATE DEPUTIES OF BAHIA (ELECTIONS 2018 AND 2022)

Female suffrage began in 1932, and despite this movement to promote the inclusion of women in politics, regarding the recognition of this formal equality between men and women under Article 5, item "I," of the 1988 Federal Constitution, and the historical struggles in pursuit of gender parity in the National Congress aimed at promoting policies favorable to both genders, such measures still only partially reflect the reality presented by the data.

The Brazilian political landscape in terms of representation is predominantly marked by a political elite, resulting from a historical legacy formed almost exclusively by men. The same logic does not apply to women, as according to the TSE – Superior Electoral Court (2022), despite currently representing 53% of the Brazilian electorate, that is, the majority, these women hold a small number of positions as parliamentarians, occupying less than 18% of elective offices.

In Bahia, the situation is even more disproportionate. In 2018, out of 63 seats for State Deputies in the Legislative Assembly, only 9 positions were occupied by female parliamentarians, approximately 14%, according to data obtained from the TSE Portal. In 2022, this percentage dropped to 13%, considering that the number of female state deputies decreased to 8 parliamentarians (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2022). Presenting these results is of utmost importance for the development of this study, given that the analysis of the low female political representation in elective offices explains the pre-established inequalities, the disproportionality in what the laws have established, and the reality to which these candidates are subordinated. Evident in this context is the issue of female underrepresentation in politics:

The various theoretical interpretations for the under-representation of women in politics point to several causes - one of which is cultural patterns supported by the prevalence of patriarchy, associated with economic elements rooted in the sexual division of labor; another cause relates to the foundations that gave rise to liberal democracy and influence the ways political institutions are organized. The combination of these elements has contributed to the construction of convictions - which guide practices - that politics is an inherently male sphere. The fact remains that the convergence of so many obstacles makes dismantling gender inequalities a complex task (Ferreira, 2021, p. 83).

In order to enable a better understanding of democratic quality and how the electorate behaves in relation to the existing political scenario in Bahia, a sample was conducted through the collection of opinions and responses from 102 participants from different regions of the State of Bahia, namely: Southwest, Center-South, North, West, Central-South of Bahia, and the metropolitan region of Salvador. The results obtained show that the vast majority, approximately 77% of the sample population, reported being from the Southwest Region of Bahia (Table 1, item 3).

Considering that the objective of this study was to explore democratic quality through the significance of the symbolic and substantive representation of elected state candidates, the interpretation of the results obtained through this research helped evaluate the profile of both the electorate and the female parliamentarians of Bahia.

Table 1. Results of the questionnaire on the symbolic and substantive female representation of state deputies of Bahia (Elections 2018 and 2022)

QUESTION	PERCENTAGE RESULT OF THE MAJORITY OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE RESULT OF OTHER RESPONSES
01 – Gender:	Feminine – 53 (52,5%)	Masculine – 48 (47,5%)
02 – Age range:	25 a 34 years – 48 (48,5%)	16 a 24 years – 23 (22,8%) 35 a 45 years – 21 (20,8%) 46 a 54 years – 5 (5%)

		Over 55 years – 3 (3%) Center-South Bahia – 7 (7%) North of Bahia – 2 (2%) Metropolitan Salvador – 12 (12%) Extreme South – 2 (2%)
03 – Which region of Bahia do you live in?	Southwest – 77 (77%)	
05 – Did you vote in the last elections?	Yes – 89 (88,1%)	No – 12 (11,9%)
06 – What criteria do you use to choose a state deputy?	I choose the candidate whose party profile, ideas, and proposed programs I identify with – 87 (86,1%)	I choose the one who can bring me some benefit – 5 (5%) I don't know how to choose, I follow family or friends' suggestions – 4 (4%) I choose the candidate I like and feel grateful to – 3 (3%) I don't usually research the projects, I vote for the first candidate I find – 2 (2%)
07 – Have you ever voted for a female candidate? If yes, how many times?	Yes, 2 or more times – 55 (54,5%)	I haven't voted – 23 (22,8%) Yes, only once – 22 (21,8%) I only vote for female candidates – 1 (1%)
08 – How do you evaluate the performance of female State Deputies in Bahia elected in 2018?	I am indifferent – 46%	I feel represented by the elected candidates – 23% I do not feel represented by them – 17%
		I do not follow / do not know any / do not research – 7%
09 – Regarding female State Deputies elected in 2022 in Bahia:	I am indifferent – 52,5%	I feel represented by the elected candidates – 29,7% I do not feel represented by them – 17,8%
10 – When choosing a female candidate, which of these factors do you consider most important in your decision-making? (Select up to two options)	Projects relevant to society – 87.8%	Party platform – 21,4% Political alliance – 18,4% Long political trajectory – 14,3% Charismatic – 5.1%
12 – Regarding policies and bills developed by State Deputies within the Legislative Assembly of Bahia (ALBA), mark those you were already aware of:		Creation of the Maria da Penha Social Grant – 43.4% I didn't know any, but I agree with them – 28.3% Development of statistics on violence against the LGBTQIA+ population and the Black population in the State of Bahia, among other measures – 19.2% Guarantee for pregnant women to reschedule the physical fitness test in public competitions held by the State of Bahia – 18.2% I know some, but I disagree with some – 14.1% Guarantees the constitutional freedom of those who do not want to participate in COVID-19 vaccination campaigns or any of its variants – 9.1% I don't know, but I disagree with some – 9.1% Declaration of Public Utility of MovimentoAiyê Ibcedh – Brazilian Institute of Education, Culture, and Human Development – 2%

Source: Collection of the Researchers, 2025.

Thus, based on the analysis of item 5 (Table 1), it was possible to verify how democratic quality is reproduced in the state of Bahia. In this regard, the responses obtained through the questionnaire show that 88% of respondents declared that they voted in the last elections, while only 12% of individuals stated that they did not exercise their political right to vote.

Through this research, it was observed that when respondents were asked: "Have you ever voted for a female candidate? If so, how many times?", 54.5% reported having voted two or more times; 21.8% stated they had voted only once, while 22.8% stated that they had never voted for a female candidate (Table 1, item 7).

Next, when asked about how they evaluate the performance of elected female deputies in Bahia in the last two legislative terms, approximately 46% of respondents stated that they were indifferent regarding the performance of the deputies in 2018 (Table 1, item 8). Later, about 52% of respondents also indicated indifference regarding the sense of representation in relation to the female State Deputies elected in 2022 (Table 1, item 9).

Reflecting on the responses to items 8 and 9, we were able to understand the perspective of this electorate regarding the phenomenon of individual consciousness when exercising their political right to vote. It was noted that symptoms such as apathy and indifference were externalized in a collective consciousness. Thus, it became necessary to analyze the impact of this signal concerning the existence of a quality democracy or the lack thereof in the State of Bahia.

At the state level, voters in Bahia number 11,291,528, of whom 5,927,765 are women – equivalent to 52% of the Bahian electorate (Regional Electoral Court, 2022). Furthermore, this research analyzed that among the 102 collected responses, the majority were female, i.e., 53% (Table 1, item 1). When correlating these data, the following question emerged: how can the results of items 8 and 9, regarding the electorate's indifference to the performance of their own representatives, be justified? What are its roots?

Consequently, it was found in items 6, 10, and 12 of the questionnaires that the electorate holds expectations regarding the political performance of female parliamentarians in the state government. Examples include: projects relevant to society, criteria of identification with party ideas and proposed programs (Table 1, item 6).

It is worth clarifying that, broadly speaking, democracy can be considered of quality when it possesses the legitimacy and satisfaction of citizens concerning their expectations regarding government performance – quality in terms of results (Silva, 2012). Therefore, the relevance of this debate is evident, since the absence of discussion on democratic quality stems from the effect of the "politics of indifference" – a current which leads one to believe that changes in political behavior patterns will naturally result from gender parity in decision-making forums (Miguel, 2001).

This current hinders the fulfillment of voters' expectations regarding their own representatives in their effective performance, as it places parliamentarians in a symbolic political position. Therefore, it is relevant to publicly debate the effectiveness of female representation in the

Bahian context and its implications for democratic quality, particularly from the perspective of the electorate.

2 APATHY AND INDIFFERENCE: TWO SYMPTOMS REVEALED IN FEMALE REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IN BAHIA

One of the most evident and significant effects collected in the research, conducted through the questionnaire, was the translation of individual consciousness into a collective consciousness among the surveyed population. First and foremost, it is crucial to emphasize that the State, the Federal Constitution, and democracy are constructions of the human spirit that depend on being recognized by a community of subjects, products of their individual consciousnesses.

The very organization of the State presupposes the collective adoption of a model for structuring society based on a body of legal norms derived from a minimum consensus among its members. The aim is not to create a legal regime originating from uniform and homogeneous ideas; the undeniable plurality of thought, therefore, resorts to the instrument of the majority rule (Tocqueville, 2000; Bobbio, 2005) to reach decisions regarding the institutional regulation of the State.

With the numerical growth of the population in the States, it became empirically necessary to adopt a representative democracy model, given that collective decisions on each specific issue would require enormous institutional effort to collect and discuss every individual opinion. Direct deliberation spheres, such as those in the famous Greek “polis” (Menezes, 2010), do not constitute viable formats for collective decision-making in the modern context.

However, the contemporary situation established in political representation systems shows evident deficiencies that significantly hinder the achievement of the democratic ideals of the population. In this sense, the research traced the path of this phenomenon of individual and collective consciousness to the point where the development of social conjecture suggests the possible existence of democratic quality in voters’ participation in choosing popular representatives, specifically female representatives in the Legislative Assembly of Bahia.

Thus, according to the results extracted from items 8 and 9 of the questionnaire, although 54.5% of respondents reported having voted two or more times for female candidates, approximately 46% of them were indifferent regarding the performance of the state deputies elected in 2018, and 52.5% also showed indifference toward the sense of representation regarding the state deputies elected in Bahia in 2022, respectively (Table 1, items 8 and 9).

The highlighted scenario reveals a generalized disinterest among a significant portion of the Bahian population regarding the political actions and practices led by those who should be their representatives before the State. Although there is voting and the consequent election of popular representatives to participate in political deliberation, a large portion of the population neither follows nor demands from their representatives the necessary performance to advance their individual and collective agendas.

To understand the dynamics of this issue, it is necessary to analyze the representative democracy model established on the foundations of a liberal-individualist economy. The neoliberal political management format relies exclusively on voting as the citizen's sole praxis of political rights, in a State marked by the delegation of responsibility so that elected representatives exercise their respective positions autonomously (Marques, 2008). There are, certainly, explicit vicissitudes in this context.

The economic scenario of labor exploitation of the majority of the population – considering the concentration of wealth and means of production in the hands of a financial elite – places such subjects in a context of daily survival struggle. They have very limited possibilities to dedicate their scarce time to monitoring the political performance of their representatives. Furthermore, the mass-consumerist and individualist culture propagated by capital-driven media is internalized by oppressed groups, preventing them from perceiving the socioeconomic chains in which they are embedded – in an intense process of alienation and exclusion (Freire, 1979).

Thus, a cycle of collective conformity forms, in which exploited layers find no alternatives to overcome their oppression, being affected by the structural mechanisms that maintain the status quo of hegemonic groups. Generalized apathy, manifested through political passivity (Santos, 2007) – given that efforts of participatory democracy are not identified among the majority of the population – provides fertile ground for consolidating spurious ideals of State appropriation by power groups at both the national and Bahian levels.

From this perspective, the indifference and disinterest observed regarding female participation in the Legislative Assembly of Bahia are symptoms of the lack of collective preparation for practicing models of participatory democracy in the state by a large portion of the Bahian population. This highlights the need for the implementation of pedagogical proposals aimed at developing individual and collective consciousness, fostering participation in the democratic and political process to promote the collective emancipation of oppressed subjects.

There are projects that invest in this perspective. We cite here popular legal education projects, developed by national and Bahian entities, which aim to disseminate critical knowledge to

stimulate the sociopolitical struggle of historically excluded subjects from decision-making arenas. Through a proposal of “de-castelation” of legal knowledge (Nunesmaia Jr.; Rocha, 1998), via critical and libertarian education, popular legal education projects seek to engage oppressed populations in building collectively useful knowledge for their autonomous and feasible collective emancipation.

Within this movement, it is possible to identify entities whose activities are specifically directed toward women’s rights. This is the case of the *Promotoras Legais Populares* (Duque et al., 2011), which offer training courses on women’s rights to support feminist struggles and combat gender-based violence. These collectives operate in a dialogical and horizontalized manner to foster the construction of knowledge designed to be effective for all women, without distinction, and to assist in forming collective protection networks (Fonseca, 2012). In this sense:

For a long time, civic participation has been synonymous with merely fulfilling one’s electoral obligations: the role of citizens is consumed in the act of voting every two years, electing their representatives to decide the course of the State without any popular interference. [...] Countering this scenario of popular political disengagement, the training projects of Promotoras Legais Populares aim to engage the female population targeted by the program in participation within the governance of the country, across its various spheres. Women are encouraged to intervene both in governmental spaces themselves - through the election of their own representatives or by participating in councils and other institutions created for this purpose - and in non-governmental spaces - through petitions, marches, demonstrations, and so on (Rotondano, 2016, p. 267).

From this perspective, the indifference of voters regarding the performance of the state deputies elected in 2018 and 2022 to the Legislative Assembly of the State of Bahia, as reflected in the percentages evaluated in the questionnaire, contributes to the reinforcement of the liberal-elitist political system, which strengthens infrastructures that exclude groups discriminated against within the Brazilian democratic State, especially women. Proposals to combat this scenario, such as the *Promotoras Legais Populares*, constitute viable solutions to political passivity and indifference, fostering greater female protagonism in public representation spaces.

Therefore, overcoming the political apathy of the majority, through the preparation of individual consciousness for subjects to assume political and historical responsibilities within the perspective of a participatory democracy model and counter-hegemonic theoretical experience, is also a central point of this discussion. In addition to promoting democratic quality through the spirit of collective consciousness, such a measure would directly challenge the predominance of male composition in spaces of political power at both the national and Bahian levels.

3 POLITICS OF CARE: FEMALE REPRESENTATION AMONG STATE DEPUTIES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF BAHIA

In the present research, the data obtained through item 6 of the applied questionnaire indicate that 86.1% of the respondents use identification with the party profile, ideas, and proposed programs as a criterion for choosing a state deputy. In turn, in item 10 of the questionnaire, approximately 87.8% of the population considers projects relevant to society as an important factor in deciding which female candidates to vote for.

In this context, it becomes evident that the electorate seeks to determine which of their characteristics they wish to express in the political arena, that is, the self-identification of their interests that results in the formation of collective consciousness. Predominantly, the selection of women to exercise political representation is based on proposals and actions they can carry out during their terms, according to the responses provided. However, it is necessary to discuss the social, ideological, and political barriers that women face in their parliamentary activities.

Here, a theoretical current is highlighted, which characterizes the patriarchal effort to, illusorily, configure a subordination of women in the political sphere through a supposed male moral superiority. This thesis can be termed the “politics of care” or “maternal thinking” (Biroli; Miguel, 2014). This theoretical perspective argues that women can bring a differentiated contribution to public life because they are accustomed to caring for others and safeguarding the most defenseless. Thus, with a more expressive female presence in power spheres, the aggressive nature of political activity would be softened (Biroli; Miguel, 2014).

Women would bring to politics a valuing of solidarity and compassion, as well as a genuine pursuit of peace; areas currently neglected in political debates such as social support, health, education, or the environment. Female presence would enable the overcoming of “interest-based politics,” selfish and masculine (Biroli; Miguel, 2014). Consequently, this mechanism transforms into a form of segregation of women into subordinate political positions. Indeed, in the parliamentary sector, female candidates often end up focusing more on issues considered “social” rather than on hard politics, such as public administration, economic policy, and international relations (Miguel, 2001).

Thus, the challenge for women’s inclusion in politics was that, to become full citizens, they would need to adapt beforehand to the traditional stereotype created by the patriarchal society regarding their political functions. Consequently, this dangerous appeal fosters the naturalization of identities that emerge from historical processes of gender domination. In this sense, the research confirmed this maternalist social bias in item 12 of the questionnaire when relating some of the Law Projects proposed by the State Deputies of Bahia, such as the following examples:

Table 2. Law projects discussed by the State Deputies of Bahia

Creation of the Bolsa Social Maria da Penha, providing financial assistance to women in Bahia in situations of social vulnerability, who are threatened or have been victims of domestic, family, or gender-based violence, in order to guarantee the right to a dignified life, especially when protective measures require removal from the home and family nucleus.
Guarantees the constitutional rights to freedom for those who do not wish to participate in vaccination campaigns against COVID-19 or any of its variants.
Provides for the development of statistics on violence against the LGBTQIA+ population and against Black populations within the State of Bahia, and establishes other provisions.
Guarantees pregnant women the right to reschedule physical aptitude tests in public examinations conducted by the State of Bahia.
Declaration of Public Utility of MovimentAiyê Ibcedh – Brazilian Institute of Education, Culture, and Human Development.

Source: Data from the questionnaire applied by the researchers in 2022.

It can be observed that there exists a moral imperative underlying the central theoretical current discussed, which is similarly embedded in the Legislative Assembly of Bahia, shaping the actions of the state deputies. Issues such as culture, health, child and women protection, and social support for groups considered vulnerable within the social context are framed in the notion that women possess greater sensitivity to the needs of others, which supposedly contrasts with the pragmatic masculine approach. Consequently, this situation may reinforce merely symbolic representation of Bahia's female state deputies, perpetuating gender stereotypes, and hegemonic performances of masculinity.

In this light, the ascent of women to power in a state structured under patriarchal norms⁴ becomes, in the symbolic-political spectrum, an assertion that, although women may occupy positions of authority, their voices are constrained by a veil of subordination, as they are not considered "capable" of addressing and acting effectively in other public spheres. Supposed innate characteristics of women condition them toward functions and practices deemed sensitive and nurturing, where political debate and the confrontation of ideas are considered inappropriate.

The discourse of "maternal politics" or "politics of care" isolates women in their fictitious niche of dependence and assigns men the socially most valued tasks (Miguel, 2001). Consequently, the attribution of caregiving roles to women is naturalized, especially within the family, where men rarely assume responsibilities (Vasconcelos, 2009). In this scenario, it becomes necessary to construct

⁴ According to Carole Pateman (1992, p. 57), "patriarchy asserts that, from the natural characteristics of men and women, hierarchical relations of subordination necessarily follow." Furthermore, "it is based on the appeal to nature and on the argument that the woman's natural function to procreate prescribes her domestic and subordinate place in the order of things" (Pateman, 1992, p. 62). In addition, "The essential feminist argument is that the doctrine of 'separate but equal' and the ostensible individualism and egalitarianism of liberal theory obscure the patriarchal reality of a social structure of inequality and the domination of women by men" (Pateman, 1992, p. 57).

an ethics of care that recognizes care as a human necessity, with the State playing a vital role in promoting public policies to ensure its full fulfillment (Mello; Nuernberg, 2012).

Citizenship requires qualities of openness and inclusivity, whereas this “maternal” politics seeks intimacy and exclusivity, which is particularly unsuitable for public life (Miguel, 2001). Given this issue, the familism proposed by “maternal thinking,” by privileging private union ties, erases references to the common good and dissolves society into a proliferation of particularisms.

The manifestation of this consciousness reveals the vertiginous space into which the idea of maternalism and familism, promoted by the politics of care, can spill into the public sphere. Indeed, the conception remains crystallized that the construction of the Brazilian state’s national identity, at an institutional level, is incapable of distinguishing public from private.

It is noteworthy that Brazil has had only one female President in the entire history of its democracy (Devulsky, 2016). Spaces of political representation and representativity remain largely closed to women - especially those corresponding to high-ranking positions. This scenario becomes even more severe when considering that the only female President of the country was illegally and illegitimately removed from office by a predominantly male political elite (Souza, 2016; Braz, 2017; Costa; Lima, 2023).

The misogynistic nature of the 2016 parliamentary coup against then-President Dilma Rousseff must be discussed (Vieira, 2022), as she was removed under the pretext of committing “fiscal pedaladas”. While gender was not the sole factor motivating the spurious organization of the Brazilian hegemonic elite to depose the President, it undoubtedly played a significant role. Accordingly, “the 2016 impeachment was a parliamentary coup orchestrated with strong gender dimensions, as opposition efforts combined prejudices and sexist stereotypes to delegitimize Dilma’s image” (Carniel; Ruggi; Ruggi, 2018, p. 254). This conclusion is further reinforced by the fact that the Federal Regional Court of the 1st Region (TRF-1) upheld, on August 21, 2023, the dismissal of the Administrative Misconduct Action regarding practices attributed to Dilma Rousseff and others during the impeachment (Richter, 2023).

Regarding the state of Bahia, the respondents in item 6 primarily use identification with the party profile, ideas, and proposed programs as a criterion for choosing a state deputy, and in item 10, they consider projects relevant to society as important for deciding on female candidates. Nevertheless, the “politics of care” obstructs the realization of voters’ expectations regarding the deputies. Moreover, it reinforces a vague and weak symbolic representation, as not all female deputies will be able to act on public policy agendas that address the population’s socioeconomic needs to achieve social justice.

Thus, representation does not always align with representativity, as previously discussed. This highlights the necessity of shifting the individual dimension of the “politics of care” phenomenon toward a collective citizen perspective as a principal tool for social transformation through participatory democracy. It is essential to invest in transcending symbolic representation beyond the private sphere of “politics of care” to achieve a profile of concrete representativity in deputies’ political actions.

Therefore, it is imperative to construct alternatives that both challenge the “politics of care” regarding women and develop political instruments capable of legitimizing the expression of interests from both the electorate - solidifying their political satisfaction - and from female deputies in their concrete political actions, enabling women to exercise their representation fully and unhindered.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of the results obtained in the present study aimed to explore democratic quality and its ramifications in Bahia’s politics. This work demonstrates not only the transversality and multidimensionality encompassed in the study of women’s participation and consequent representation in Bahian politics but also the importance of discussing democratic quality as the effective attainment of gender equality.

Firstly, the study revealed a discussion of apathy and indifference as collective symptoms, identified through the quantitative analysis of data obtained via questionnaires applied to the population of the State of Bahia. In this sense, the research addressed the phenomenon of collective consciousness within the social context, reflecting how the intersubjectivities of these subjects are intertwined with the choice of their representatives.

Thus, it was found that the hegemonic liberal-individualist ideology exerts significant influence over the established model of representative democracy, constructed on foundations that limit active societal participation in the political sphere. Consequently, there is a clear need to overcome disbelief regarding popular participation in political representation, which would promote dialectical processes of consciousness and social transformation toward the construction of a society in “becoming.”

Although some historical efforts have been made to include women in politics, from the perspective of the so-called “politics of care,” this inclusion often requires women to occupy only the space of a dominant symbolic discourse. Consequently, from a theoretical viewpoint, this approach

reinforces the naturalization of gender-stereotyped identities in society, supporting the maintenance of hegemonic performances of masculinity and femininity.

In this regard, the ascent of women to political power, structured within patriarchy, remains constrained under the veil of subordination, as numerous barriers are erected that limit these parliamentarians' full autonomy to act within the democratic order. Accordingly, much remains to be done; viable alternatives must be pursued to increase the number of women in politics, as well as to create social and political openings for the exercise of female political representation in its full potential, without falling into discriminatory and limiting patriarchal rhetoric.

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This version was originally presented in Portuguese and translated into Spanish with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence.

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Editors:

Liliane Pereira Amorim;
Karla Karoline Rodrigues Silva;
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