

# Modus Vivendi



Volume XXXI, Spring 2025  
RHODES COLLEGE Sigma Iota Rho



Photo by Edith Holzman '25  
Spain

---

# Modus Vivendi



RHODES COLLEGE Sigma Iota Rho

Volume XXXI, Spring 2025





# Editorial Staff

Editor in Chief:  
Maya Khalife-Hamdan '25

Associate Editors:  
Zeke Singerman '27, Muhammad Waraich '25,  
Gaarison Holran '25



A narrow alleyway in a city, likely in Chile. The left wall is covered in vibrant graffiti, including a large mural of a person's face. The right wall is made of rough stone and has some colorful paint splatters. A metal railing runs along the right side of the path. In the background, a red-roofed building is visible. A blue semi-transparent box with white text is overlaid in the center of the image.

## IMPORTANT NOTE:

Modus Vivendi is a non-profit publication produced by undergraduate students in the International Studies Department at Rhodes College. Any inquiries regarding the journal should be made to Professor Shadrack Nasong'o, 2000 North Parkway, Memphis, TN, 38112.



---

# Table of Contents

## 1.Nth Shortcoming: Cultural Influences on South Korea’s Digital Sex Industry

Regan Goodloe ‘25 .....7

## 2. The Paradox of Mano Dura: Security, Authoritarianism, and Democratic Backsliding in Bukele’s El Salvador

Nolan Colladay ‘25 ..... 41

## 3. Mexican Youth: Migrant Push Factors

Claire Bramlett ‘26 ..... 57

## 4. Barriers to Women-Friendly Policies: The Limits of Gender Quotas in Latin American Democracies

Lily Resha ‘25 ..... 71





Photo by Muhammad Waraich '25  
Japan



# Nth Shortcoming: Cultural Influences on South Korea's Digital Sex Industry

Regan Goodloe '25

## Introduction

The sex industry within South Korea is highly unique, interesting, and dependent on complex historical influences, such as colonialism and the abrupt introduction of Western values. Likewise, various modern cultural influences have affected both how the sex industry has interacted with the web and how society interacts with the industry itself, especially lingering notions – often influenced by both Confucianism and continued Western

influence – of misogyny, sexual hyper-conservatism, and an emphasis on maintaining one's image. In recent years, several shocking cases of digital sexual crimes have increased dialogue about the sex industry's new platform. The public and government tend to focus on hyper-violent cases of sexual exploitation online, especially through a lens of concern for protecting youth, but this focus yields little positive impact due to these factors. A slew of new legislation aimed at the digital sex industry has passed following these



cases, but sex workers are at odds with them, and many activists continue to view the issue through the narrow lens of sex work inherently being gender-based violence. South Korea's unique historical and cultural influences have created a distinct, cyclical relationship between the digital sex industry, law enforcement, and the public wherein discourse and action often lack nuance, fail to protect victims, neglect to properly punish assailants, forsake willing participants, occur with the condition of sensationalism, and do not often produce meaningful change or dialogue.

### **Historical Cultural Influences**

The sex market in South Korea is deeply entrenched into the nation's

history. Korea's medieval period saw female "kisaeng" performers, who were officially sanctioned by the ruling class to perform diverse types of services, garner status in society and a plethora of artistic abilities (Ghosh). Under Japanese colonial rule, which began in the late 1910s and only ended after World War II, many Korean women were taken to "comfort stations" and conscripted into sexual slavery for the Japanese military (Han & Chun 247). Sounds of societal outrage at the abuse of Korean women under colonialism quieted as the young, newly independent South Korean government "encouraged the sex trade to generate revenue" (Ghosh).

Furthermore, the government practically threw women at U.S. troops



and coordinated with Japanese corporate actors to facilitate prostitution for traveling Japanese businessmen throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Han & Chun 247). This economic move, executed under the authoritarian rule of Park Chung-hee, lives in infamy; many recount it with crass words such as, “[o]ur government was one big pimp for the U.S. military” (Ghosh).

Traditional Korean ideas of patriarchy, which are rooted in Confucian values that often serve as a “justification for the subjugation of women,” mingled with Japanese colonialism, American militarism, and inorganically introduced Western values – such as Christianity – to produce an emphasized division of gender roles

(Kong). Moreover, early Korean nationalism relied heavily on “gendered nationalism,” which included notions of “maidenhood” and “motherhood” as essential components of Korean life, further exacerbating gender roles (Han & Chun 247). The product is an especially narrow family model that developed between the 1960s and 1990s centering around the patriarchal authority that “rules over all matters inside the family” and compels the wife to “diligently fulfill the submissive role of housewife” (B. Kim 817). If a wife neglects her responsibilities, punishment in the form of the husband’s violence is often “considered legitimate,” so for centuries of Korean history “women have suffered from



physical and psychological abuse” from their husbands and other patriarchal figures (B. Kim 817). Such views on women harmed the status and humanity ascribed to prostitutes, which led to an ironic lack of concern for their hardships as the societal awe for the “passionate political activism” of surviving comfort women gave way to a cycle of complicity wherein society devalued and dehumanized sex workers, while simultaneously demanding that their services be readily available (Ghosh). As a result, overt red-light districts sprung up all over urban areas in Korea, receiving plentiful business and fame; two of the most famous red-light districts in Seoul, and therefore all of Korea, are Cheongyangni

588 and Miari Texas, which both peaked around the 1980’s, but maintain lasting relevance (Borowiec & Ghani). The sex industry remains so prominent that the government once admitted that it accounts for around 4 percent of Korea’s annual GDP (Ghosh).

### **Modern Cultural Influences**

Despite being a highly developed and advanced society in many regards, South Korea consistently lags in all statistical measures of gender equality. The wage gap is 31 percent and women do four times as much unpaid work as men, which earned Korea the title of “worst country” for working women in 2022 (Ahn, “HRW”). Women claim merely 21 percent of managerial positions, 5 percent of executive



positions, and 19 percent of National Assembly seats (Ahn). Korea is one of the only nations in the world where the homicide rate is equal by gender; globally, 81 percent of homicide victims are men (Bergsten). Since 89 percent of all violent crime victims in Korea are women, femicide is a major concern (“Vice”). In addition, a 2017 survey found that almost 80 percent of male respondents admitted to committing intimate partner violence against a female partner (IPV), eliciting further concerns about the hyper-prevalence of gender-based violence within society (“HRW”). Korean women often face sexual harassment, “microaggressions,” “active sexist policies,” and “general societal pressures urging them to exit

the workforce” (Jonas 10). Every statistical measure of gender equality is disappointing, and progress is slow.

The status of women in Korean society is already relatively low and tenuous, but female sex workers face these challenges a hundred-fold. While the red-light district Cheongyangni 588 thrived for decades and was known to have up to 500 sex workers and 200 different shops, today it has been carefully gentrified into extinction (Borowiec & Ghani). Infamous red-light districts are reduced to a scene with “padlocks on the doors,” “shattered windows,” and “eerie silence” (Borowiec & Ghani). A similar fate has met the once lively Miari Texas, following the 2004 Act on the



Punishment of Intermediating in the Sex Trade that pursued a Nordic style of enforcement, seeking to impose “large fines and long prison sentences” on brothelkeepers and clients – framing sex workers merely as “victims of trafficking,” though prostitution remains completely illegal for all parties involved (Choo 79, 85). Conflicting notions of victimhood and blame are consistent themes in public discourse about sex workers. The law came after a fire killed twenty-four prostitutes in brothels and a general uptick in the national attention given to the death of prostitutes (Choo 80). Public backlash took hold on a brutal brothel crackdown after the “unexpected tragedies” of several suicides by sex workers caught

by police in the raid (Choo 83).

Although the law boasts a reduction in the number of obvious brothels and an immediate decline in the number of sex workers by 18.4 percent, the decline has yielded little long-term decrease in supply or demand and paid sex remains “available all over” (Ghosh). Sex worker activists decry both the lack of dialogue with sex workers in the decision-making process as well as the neglect to protect them (Borowiec & Ghani). This law caused “crime displacement” in the sex industry, pushing it underground and into more covert spaces that range from barbershops, massage parlors, hotels, karaoke parlors, dry cleaners, private residences, and, most notably, cyberspace (Choo 80). Jang Se-hee, the

president of the national sex workers union, HanTeo, claims that the government “‘is failing the sex workers’” with this legislation (Borowiec & Ghani).

Despite this fierce legislation, the sex industry “continues to flourish underground” in a remarkable way (Kang). The Korean National Police Agency (KNPA) admitted in 2014 that enforcement has “become more difficult as prostitution has dispersed” from traditional hubs, stating a scarcity of resources (Kang). Demand for paid sex remains extremely high, with one out of five men in their 20s buying sex at least four times per month, according to the Korean Institute of Criminology (Ghosh). Likewise, prostitution is a

“central component of the local business culture,” especially in urban areas where men at work outings often engage in company-sponsored prostitution as a social ritual (Ghosh).

This issue became so problematic that the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) began offering cash incentives in 2013 to companies whose male employees refrained from purchasing sex at work gatherings (Ghosh). South Korea’s insatiable demand for paid sex does not merely affect their domestic sex industry, but also notably affects the domestic supply and advertising strategies of the Southeast Asian industries (Ghosh). More recently, between 500,000 and 1 million women are estimated to do sex



work, depending on what the true difference is between the prior report from the MOGEF and the latter report from the Korean Feminist Association (Ghosh). Given the high demand and illicit nature of the trade, the number of prostitutes is likely closer to the second estimation. Although most female sex workers are thought to be native Koreans, women from poorer Asian countries also migrate to urban areas in Korea to engage in sex work. Headlines detailing North Korean defectors who fall into prostitution, either by the coercion of smugglers or due to economic need to pay back smuggling fees, are allotted a great deal of public attention (Ghosh). Mass attention is given to similar sensationalized stories

that do not deeply challenge the role of Korean society in enabling harm, but in most cases conflates any form of voluntary sex work with coercion and gender-based violence – shackling heavy limitations onto what issues can be a part of the dialogue. This has been especially illustrated through more recent discussions about the online sex industry, which barely include online sex workers, instead exploring only appalling tales of violent exploitation that tends to involve women and minors.

Because Korea is known for being an innovative leader in high-speed internet and universal internet access, it arouses little surprise that the country's online sex industry has made its mark.

Korean news outlets began outlining how Koreans were “increasingly turning to the Internet and mobile phones” to seek out paid sex around 2004, especially for initial contact, payment, or arrangements (Hyung-jin Kim). As early as 2007, the Korea Internet Safety Commission was reporting on the number of websites and apps catering to prostitution, which was more than 11,000 – this number was quadruple the best 2005 estimates (Hyung-jin Kim). This is when some of the first whispers about paid sexual transactions taking place wholistically online occurred. Many female college students began to seek out “easy, convenient part-time jobs” through such platforms, which expanded to have a

strong impact on the industry today – young women are at the forefront of both consensually and non-consensually produced sexual content on the internet (Hyung-jin Kim). The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic wrought a surge in online advertisements for prostitution, amid some of the globe’s most thorough lockdown policies (Shin). A government monitoring initiative clocked over 68,000 instances of “illegal and harmful information” on the web revolving around sexual content (Shin). This initiative has expanded into a citizen-led watchdog group trained and funded by the government that monitors illegal online material – moreover, everyday citizens are encouraged to report websites and instances of such content.



Over 40,000 illegal sexual sites were deleted or blocked in 2020 as a result (Shin). Despite this sharp rise in relevance, the public eye afforded scarce attention to the online sex industry outside of feminist circles until two crucial 2019 cases of horrifying sexual abuse online that “sparked rage, fear, and renewed calls for change in a country that is no stranger to high-profile sexual violence” (Kasulis).

### **Illuminating Cases**

*Soranet* was the first known Korean site with paid sexual content, but it was shut down by the government in 2016 for its “mass dissemination of illegally filmed sexual content,” although it also featured a variety of consensually made content (Kasulis).

This caught public attention briefly, then was all but forgotten about. The *Welcome to Video* (W2V) case is the first case in the country’s history that everyone paid attention to – domestically and internationally. In 2019, Korea’s Department of Justice (DOJ) announced that it had shut down the “largest known child pornography website by volume” in the world, which utterly horrified the public (Bartlett). The site, which boasted hundreds of users and disallowed adult porn from being uploaded, provided and allowed users to upload child sex abuse material featuring “children as young as six months old” (Hollingsworth). 337 people from at least 18 countries were charged by the DOJ for their association

to the site – 223 of which are South Koreans – and 23 children in the United States, Spain, and the United Kingdom featured on the website were rescued from their abusers (Hollingsworth). During their operation to arrest Son Jung-woo, the 23-year-old administrator of the site, the KNPA confiscated “eight terabytes containing 250,000 sexual assault videos” of children – 45 percent of which were not “previously known to exist,” according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, suggesting that they were created for this particular page (Hollingsworth). Because W2V allowed users to create free accounts but required them to pay in Bitcoin or upload their own abuse material in order to download content

from the site, it is known for being the first Korean site to monetize child sexual exploitation with cryptocurrency (Hollingsworth). The bust of W2V remains the largest bust of any child porn site on the dark web in world history.

While the W2V case made global headlines and received a lot of attention, it was the Nth Room case that cemented discussions of the digital sex industry in Korea – although only through a lens of abuse, usually gender-based. Before news articles about the Nth Room broke, there were whispers in Korean society of online chatrooms through programs like Telegram or Discord being used to circulate sexual content (“ECPAT”). In contrast to the



indignation this case would spark, when the first story about the then ongoing case was published by the *Hankyoreh* newspaper, it was ignored by the public, which has a stigma against discussing women's issues, sexual topics, or other potentially uncomfortable topics. This initial newspaper article detailed how Telegram chatrooms were being used by tens of thousands of users to circulate the sexual abuse content of women and girls that were blackmailed or threatened into creating the content by the site's many administrators; descriptions of the sadistic acts victims were forced to commit, record, and upload were given, but little public outcry was heard ("Cyber Hell"). The reporters were doxed and even received

death threats by Nth Room users with little recourse ("Cyber Hell"). When the site's kingpin, who dubbed himself "박사"<sup>1</sup> but was actually 24-year-old Cho Ju-bin, got arrested in March of 2020, the case exploded in infamy and the true extent of the abuse became widely known (Oaten).

The Nth Room case earned its name from the ordinal numbering of the chatrooms used – these rooms were plentiful, often deleted, and promptly recreated ("Nth Room"). It remains unclear exactly when the chatrooms were first created, but they are thought to have been active for around 3 years. Moon Hyung-wook – who dubbed himself "God God" – was responsible

---

<sup>1</sup> "Baksa" -- Korean word for doctor.

for their creation, not Cho, who merely took over and expanded the operation later on (Kasulis). In total, 74 women and 16 children, who were referred to as slaves, were blackmailed into producing sexual content for the rooms (Kasulis). Many of them were drawn in through Twitter or Telegram directly, where administrators employed a wide range of scams such as posing as law enforcement, modeling agents, and escort agents to obtain the personal information of the victims and threaten them (“ECPAT”). Because many of the victims were already producing independent sexual content online, especially on Twitter, the administrator’s ruse of law enforcement demanding personal information was

particularly effective – as was pretending to offer women modeling or escort jobs, then asking them to upload their information on Telegram as part of the interview process, because it is typical to provide potential employers with such information and the internet has become a recruitment hub for the modelling industry (“Cyber Hell”). The victims were gradually recruited, being asked at first to “complete seemingly harmless and miscellaneous jobs” that became more sexual over time (Kong). They were asked to do a wide range of sexual and violent acts on camera, from masturbation and nude posing to more heinous acts like harming their genitals and carving words, such as or the names of users, into their bodies with



knives (Kong). Furthermore, users and administrators coordinated to arrange for the victims to be raped on live video by high-paying users (“Nth Room”). Most of the women and girls were too afraid of facing social stigma to speak out, but those who tried were threatened with rape by users or blamed for their abuse by law enforcement (“Nth Room”). Once the public finally paid attention, they were horrified. This case remains “the largest and most infamous case of digital sex slavery” in Korea and brought the issues of grooming and sexual exploitation online permanently into the public eye and influenced policy change (Oaten, Jun).

Despite the persistent public attention lent to digital sexual abuse in

recent years, activists have continually warned that copycat chatrooms are rampant across several social media platforms and specific cases arising are proving these cries true. One such case revolved around 29-year-old Kim Young-jun, who exploited 79 male adults, teens, and children online by pretending to be a woman and requesting nude photos and videos, then selling the material (Bartlett). This case was given the name “Copycat Nth Room” (Bartlett). In another case, a man calling himself, “엘주인님<sup>2</sup>” was arrested in Sydney in 2020 for using hacking to blackmail victims into creating sexual videos of themselves, 9 of which were specified as underage,

---

<sup>2</sup> “L Juinnim: “Master L”

and subsequently uploading the videos online for money (Oaten). This case received the nickname “Second Nth Room,” but information on the perpetrator’s identity and age is difficult to obtain (Oaten). Moreover, a case referred to as the “Cat Nth Room,” wherein videos of “cruelly abused cats” were traded caused serious public horror (Yoon). A key factor in the name this case earned is that the man in his 20s who managed the site referred to himself as “주빈30이,” which implies that his site was a sort of homage to Cho (Yoon).

### **The Role of Big Tech**

---

<sup>3</sup> “Jubin-ie” -- A highly endearing reference to Cho Jubin, the Nth Room administrator. “Ie” is a friendly, cute ending close friends add to one another’s names.

This series of headlining crimes has firmly called into question the role of Big Tech, particularly encrypted messaging platforms and cryptocurrency, in perpetuating harm as well as arising further concern about the dangers of the dark web, which remains a nebulous entity that average people know little about. The role of the dark web in circulating sexual material has increased sharply since 2012, when criminals were first thought to begin using it more widely for illegal activities (“ECPAT”). While the dark web is inaccessible to most people, because it requires a special software, advanced knowledge of technology, and a



persistent nefarious intent to engage with, the general web is a larger issue – where huge, mostly unreliable tech conglomerates dominate the space (Hollingsworth). The early sexual material uploaded to the internet was unique from content circulated in other ways, because it was more widely accessible and often with perceived anonymity. However, today’s connotation of widely accessible is a thousand-fold what it was even in 2007, especially in a technologically advanced Korea, where almost all people have smartphones and Wi-Fi is readily available everywhere. For example, files from the W2V page were downloaded by users more than 1 million times from 2015 to 2018 – the three years that the

site was active (Hollingsworth).

Likewise, the content uploaded to the Nth Room chatrooms is known to still be circulating all over international pornography websites and other chatroom platforms (“Cyber Hell”).

Big Tech companies, most of which are headquartered in the West, are notorious for their ineptness at removing sexual abuse content generally, but they monitor non-English content far less rigorously than English content (Jang). Western cloud services – which involve person-to-person sharing – play key roles in the perpetuation of harm in Korean and other non-Western countries because they simultaneously allow easy content sharing with little oversight and are far “less liable” to

Korean authorities (Jang). Google Drive and Mega are the most prominent cloud services in harm reduction discourse that activists declare as guilty of utter inaction for their neglect to effectively monitor what occurs on their sites in foreign languages (Jang). For instance, Tumblr, which is responsible for more than two thirds of the Korean government's removal requests, only accepts reports in French, English, and Spanish (Jang). However, Google is known to have "the most severe secondary abuse problem," thereupon often rendering victims' attempts to file requests to have their abuse content taken down fruitless (Jang). Twitter is one of the few Western entities with a positive reputation for aiding police

investigations, especially in the Nth Room case (Jang). Korean watchdog groups report that, although there has been a 12 percent increase in the amount of sexual content that is censored online, only 34 percent of the total sexual content is being suspended (Yoon). Many platforms depend on AI algorithms for content monitoring that are flawed and ineffective (Jang). When abuse content is uploaded online, it is nearly impossible for a victim to get it off the web, which endangers them to re-traumatization and shaming for life.

Over the course of his administration of W2V, Son Jung-woo collected \$316,000 through Bitcoin, the world's largest form of cryptocurrency (D. Lee). It is a key resource of financial

gain for those involved in criminal schemes. Authorities used the trail of his transactions, which are permanently viewable to the public, and his carelessness at concealing his IP Address to uncover his identity to arrest him (Hollingsworth). In the Nth Room case, the more Bitcoin the thousands of users paid, the more sinister and abusive the content that they could view was (“ECPAT”). Some users paid as much as \$1,260 per month for access. Cho Jubin was believed to have collected at least \$13,000 in Bitcoin and Monero, another popular cryptocurrency, over the last few months before his arrest (“Nth Room”). While it is fortunately true that “[B]itcoin isn’t as private as some

cybercriminals” believe, it does afford users a great deal of refuge from law enforcement, who must connect Bitcoin pseudonyms to real identities (Hollingsworth).

Criminals are known for their innovative methods, especially with new technology, but “authorities are catching up” (Hollingsworth). Cho Jubin – whose case is a prominent example of an evolution in law enforcement’s capabilities, because his transactions were purposely difficult to track – Son, and many others responsible for similar acts were caught because of their cryptocurrency exchanges, but this was without the cooperation of Bitcoin, who commonly refuses to aid police investigations,



citing an emphasis on individual privacy (Jang). This is a trend among online platforms, such as Telegram, Discord, and, more recently, Facebook, which all hold “preserv[ing] user anonymity” to the highest regard, even above ensuring that their platforms are not enabling harm (Jang). Telegram’s refusal to cooperate delayed the police’s ability to arrest Cho, because they had to catch him outside of his home and away from technology so that he could not delete any evidence (“Cyber Hell”). Most platforms do not efficiently monitor their sites for harmful content or respond in a timely manner to reports, and they tend to be unresponsive to police warrants. One negligent platform alone can certainly

be and has certainly been harmful, but the imminent threat is the use of the applications together, which is a primary factor in the feasibility of wicked and effective online sexual abuse (Jang). Assailants are consistently utilizing multiple platforms simultaneously to maximize their profits and reach (Jang). If Western platforms continue to uphold hollow values and neglect their responsibilities to protect their users in foreign countries, harm will persist. After the Nth Room case, a significant amount of sexual abuse traffic has migrated from Telegram to Discord, which demonstrates how futile individual efforts to regulate individual platforms will be (Jang). In fact, much of

the content that circulates on Discord is from Nth room chatrooms (Jang).

### **Legislation and Implementation**

Following the Nth Room case, an abundance of legislation was passed regarding sexual content online – all of which has been popularly titled, “Nth Room legislation.” This collection of legislation aimed to make the prosecution of online sexual offenses easier (Kasulis). Previously, there lacked a “law that defines the exact concept” of what digital sex crimes are (Jun). There is a blanket ban on all pornography in the country, which intensifies the conflation of sexual abuse and sex work (Bartlett). Unfortunately, these laws have yielded little meaningful change due in part to international actors, but

primarily due to the insufficiency of these laws themselves to protect victims, remaining laws that are problematic, and the lack of proper implementation by law enforcement. One notable law revised in 2020 is the Business Telecommunications Act, which “forces internet providers to be more proactive” in self-regulating harmful content, though Western platforms remain virtually untouchable to the Korean government, so these laws have limited reach (“ECPAT”). Additionally, this act does not include one-on-one private chatrooms, even though 60 percent of picture files exchanged in these chatrooms are pornographic (Y. Lee 462). In April of 2020, Korea’s age of consent was raised from 13 to 16 a part

of the Nth Room laws (“ECPAT”).

Another notable law passed declares that those who possess, buy, store, or watch illegally filmed sexual material can receive up to 3 years in jail and be subject to a \$2,200 fine (Kasulis). This altered the status of personally possessing such content from legal to illegal (Kasulis). While the government proudly shares that reports of digital sexual exploitation have risen by 60 percent since the Nth Room and its subsequent legislation, the lingering issues in law enforcement and prosecution slow cries of victory (Oaten).

Frankly, Korean law enforcement practices regarding sex crimes have an awful reputation; police officers, 96

percent of which are men, are known to “refuse to accept [victims’] complaints and behave in abusive ways” (Yoon, “HRW”). This abuse includes pressuring – typically female – victims to drop sexual assault charges or forgive their abusers, and blaming them for their own abuse, especially if the content was initially made with their consent or if they created it themselves, but it was shared without their consent, or they were coerced into making it (Chung-ah Kim 1,338). Minors have just recently stopped being asked by police if they sent sexual content voluntarily when trying to report a digital sex crime (Oaten). Victims overwhelmingly hesitate to or refrain altogether from reporting sex crimes to the police,



because they report fearing this abuse (Oaten). Compared to “other modern democratic countries,” Korea’s prosecution, conviction, sentencing, and investigations of sex crimes are considered lackluster and exceptionally lenient, which is attributed to an “entrenched gender inequity” within the system (Bartlett, “HRW”). In 2019, prosecutors dropped 43.5 percent of digital sex crime cases and 79 percent of those convicted of such a crime in 2020 merely received a suspended sentence and or fine – half of those only received a suspended sentence (“HRW”). Almost all of the perpetrators of these crimes are men, which is often cited as the reason for their lenient sentences (Kasulis).

This is well-illustrated through the sentencing outcomes of several infamous high-profile abusers. Korea denied the United States’ extradition request for Son Jung-woo, sentencing him to a meager 18 months instead of the 10 to 30 years he would have served in the U.S. (Kong). 2 extra years were tacked onto his sentence for concealing the proceedings of a crime – a penalty more severe than the one for his sexual abuse (Oaten). Cho Ju-bin received a remarkable 42-year sentence not because of his sinister sexual coercion, but “because he was the ringleader of a criminal gang” that scammed people more widely, and laundered money (D. Lee). Similarly, Cho’s accomplice, Moon Hyung-wook, received 34-years for the

same reason. It is also worth note that merely 30 percent of judges in Korea are women, so most sex crime trials are headed by male judges who tend to sympathize with male assailants (Chung-ah Kim 1,338). In one well-known instance where a man raped an 8-year-old in a church bathroom, his 15-year sentence was reduced to 12 due to his invocation of a section of the Criminal Act that allows individuals to “equate intoxication via alcohol as succumbing to a mentally impaired state” and receive a lesser sentence (Bartlett). This loophole is one of many repeatedly put to use on behalf of male sex offenders in Korean courts. Another example is that raping one with an object other than male genitals

carries a lesser sentence (Chung-ah Kim 1,343). At trial, highly problematic and misogynistic rhetoric is commonly used by assailants’ attorneys to discredit, shame, and redirect blame to the female victim; likewise, defense lawyers wield Korea’s uniquely predatory defamation laws, wherein individuals can bring criminal charges on another for “tarnishing another person’s social reputation [. . .] even if it is based on well-supported facts” (Chung-ah Kim 1,343).

From a definition of rape that requires the victims to be subdued in a way they cannot physically escape from to endless gray areas that assailants and their lawyers exploit, the Korean judicial system is rampant with persistent

misogyny that is deeply ingrained into every aspect of the system (Bergsten). Within this current system, a self-inducing cycle has been created where cases of sexual abuse are not taken seriously, which leads individuals to be prescribed forgiving sentences; this causes prosecutors to drop sexual abuse cases before trial, which reaffirms the atmosphere of leniency and dismissive attitudes for sex crimes. This worsens views that police officers, judges, and the public have about the severity of sex crimes – as a result, their behavior toward victims becomes less sympathetic and victims grow greater hesitation to even report sex crimes to begin with. Fewer reports lessen the attention given to the prevalence of sex

crimes, which also serves to instill a sense of invincibility in assailants.

### **Intersections of Youth, Internet Culture, Misogyny, and Sex**

The significance of the kingpins behind online sexual abuse in Korea consistently being young men in their 20s should not be lost, because it forces important but uncomfortable questions about how men and women are socialized in society to understand sexuality and gender-relations. Around 2018, South Korea's typically disorganized and decentralized feminist movement unified into one of the most successful #MeToo movements in Asia, but the success ran dry when Korean men, especially those in their 20s, began to resent the movement (Ahn). While



some legal improvements have been made, social relations between men and women worsened as the resentment men have against feminism turned it into a dirty word (Kong). The passionately negative views that an alarming rate of Korean men have on women have been reinforced through public discourse and government institutions. For example, during the Nth Room case, one congressman expressed that Nth Room users should not be punished for viewing the abuse content “‘alone for self-satisfaction’” and the Attorney General even said that the teens involved in the case exhibited normal teen behavior, implicitly ascribing the blame to the women and invalidating the seriousness of the issue

(Kong). If men commit sexual crimes against women, they often receive sympathetic sentences, which further reaffirm their behavior. Hyper-conservative president, Yoon Suk-yeol, won his election by channeling the resentment of these young men, ensuring them it is valid, and promising to pursue anti-feminist policies. In doing so, Yoon has ensured that the cycle of gender discrimination will be carried out by the next generation of men.

All children in South Korea have internet access today, so they have developed a strong relationship with it (“ECPAT”). The 20-year-olds in Korea are the first generation to have grown up with internet access. A crucial factor

in the unhealthy expression of sexuality online and vulnerability to sexual exploitation is a lack of sexual education – Korean schools do not have sex-ed curriculums and sexual topics are not frequently discussed within families (Kong). The importance of developing “the right perception of sex from an early age and to provide an education on gender sensitivity” cannot be overemphasized due to teen and adolescent access to the web (Jun). A lack of sex-ed results in the internet serving as a “gateway” to sexual awareness for adolescents, especially since only around 8.5 percent of Korean high school students are sexually active (Hyun-le Kim 1). Sexting and other risky behavior is common in youth who

are improperly educated on sex and the internet (Hyun-le Kim 2). A positive conception of sexuality is known to increase “sound attitudes toward sexual health,” “encourage gender-equality awareness,” and increase ethical decision-making in sexual situations (Hwang 899). In addition to poor sex-ed resulting in increased sexually abusive ideologies in men, it also results in women being more likely to accept these flawed notions (Hwang 905). Cultural factors that demand silence about sexual topics prevent change. This social stigma puts victims at increased risk of mental illness, drug abuse, suicide, and PTSD, because recent studies have shown that these factors are heavily shaped by “social support

systems” and “cultural norms” (Chung-ah Kim 1,337). Gender is a notable division because expectations of “sexual humility” in girls and “sexual profligacy” in boys have very negative effects on sexual and mental health (Hyun-le Kim 7). Furthermore, Korea is a “sexually repressive” country that prevents open ideas about sex, which have enabled harm and abuse for centuries. Today, the cycle is continuing into the next generation as the online sex industry becomes another avenue for young men to exploit women. In order for more wholistic conversations about the online sex industry that do not revolve around narrow abuse narratives to be possible, the wheel of complicity in Korea must be stopped and careful

deliberations over cultural factors that must be left behind must happen.

## References

Ahn, Ashley. "Feminists are protesting against the wave of anti-feminism that's swept

South Korea." *NPR*, 3 Dec 2022,

<https://www.npr.org/2022/12/03/1135162927/women-feminism-south-korea-sexism-protest-haeil-yoon>

Bartlett, Jason. "South Korea's Constant Struggle With Digital Sex Crimes." *The*

*Diplomat*, 26 Jan 2022,

<https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/south-koreas-constant-struggle-with-digital-sex-crimes/>

Bergsten, Susanne. "South Korea Cancels Plans to Update Definition of Rape." *Human*

*Rights Watch*, 1 Feb 2023,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/01/south-korea-cancels-plans-update-definition-rape>

Borowiec, Steven and Faras Ghani. "South Korea: Sex workers hit hard by government's

crackdown." *Al Jazeera*, 19 Mar 2018,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/3/19/south-korea-sex-workers-hit-hard-by-governments-crackdown>



Choo, Kyungseok et. Al, "THE POLICE CRACKDOWN IN THE RED-LIGHT DISTRICTS IN SOUTH KOREA AND THE CRIME DISPLACEMENT EFFECT AFTER THE 2004 ACT ON THE PUNISHMENT OF INTERMEDIATING IN THE SEX TRADE." *British Journal of Community Justice*, Vol. 8, no. 3, 2011, pp. 79-96. <https://www.proquest.com/central/docview/905841022/FA82E91749264CC4PQ/36?accountid=13503>

"Cyber Hell." *Cyber Hell: Exposing an Internet Horror*, Netflix 2022, <https://rb.gy/lcdmbc>

"ECPAT." ECPAT International. "Social Media Messaging Apps Host Underground Child Sexual Abuse Networks." *End Child Prostitution and Trafficking*, 15 Dec 2020, <https://ecpat.org/story/social-media-messaging-apps-host-underground-child-sexual-abuse-networks/>

Ghosh, Palash R. "South Korea: A Thriving Sex Industry In A Powerful, Wealthy Super-State." *International Business Times*, 29 April 2013, <https://www.ibtimes.com/south-korea-thriving-sex-industry-powerful-wealthy-super-state-1222647>

Han, Ju Hui Judy and Jennifer Jihye Chun. "Introduction: Gender and Politics in Contemporary Korea." *The Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 19, no. 2, 2014, pp. 245-255, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43923271>

Hollingsworth, Julia. "How Bitcoin transactions were used to track down the 23-year-old South Korea operating a global child exploitation site from his bedroom." *CNN*, 20 Oct 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/19/asia/south-korea-child-exploitation-international-police-intl-hnk/index.html>

"HRW." "South Korea: Internet Sexual Images Ruin Women's Lives." *Human Rights Watch*, 15 Jun 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/15/south-korea-internet-sexual-images-ruin-womens-lives>

Hwang, Kyung-Hye et. Al. "SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION, ATTITUDES TOWARD SEXUAL HEALTH, AND CONSCIOUSNESS OF BIOMEDICAL ETHICS IN KOREA." *Social Behavior and Personality*, Vol. 44, no. 6, 2016, pp. 899-909, <https://www.proquest.com/central/docview/1813114872/A68D433084524FCBPQ/9?accountid=13503>

- Jang, Heesoo. "Tech Companies Sit on Sidelines While Korean Children Are Drawn Into Digital Sex Trafficking." *Tech Policy Press*, 13 Sep 2022,  
<https://techpolicy.press/tech-companies-sit-on-sidelines-while-korean-children-are-drawn-into-digital-sex-trafficking/>
- Jonas, Liz. "Crafted for the Male Gaze: Gender Discrimination in the K-Pop Industry." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 23, no. 1, Feb 2022, pp. 1-16,  
<https://www.proquest.com/central/docview/2627991293/FC20EA3E3F9E45A5PQ/10?accountid=13503>
- Jun, Chun-Woo et. Al. "A Study on the Analysis of and Educational Solution for Digital Sex Crimes in Korea." *National Library of Medicine*, Feb 2023,  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9915142/>
- Kang, Yewon. "South Korea's Sex Industry Thrives Underground a Decade After Crackdown." *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 Nov 2014,  
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/BI-KRTB-7048>
- Kasulis, Kelly. "New arrest amid nationwide anger over S Korea's 'sextortion' case." *Al Jazeera*, 11 May 2020.  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/11/new-arrest-amid-nationwide-anger-over-s-korea-sextortion-case>

Kim, Bitna et. Al. "Domestic Violence and South Korean Women: The Cultural Context and Alternative Experiences." *Violence and Victims*, Vol. 25, no. 6, 2010, pp. 814-830,  
<https://www.proquest.com/central/docview/817784590/E0061034A242433DPQ/4?accountid=13503bitn>

Kim, Chungah et. Al. "Social Movement and Mental Health of South Korean Women Sexual Violence Survivors, 2012-2019." *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 112, no. 9, Sep 2022, pp. 1,337-1,345,  
[https://www.proquest.com/central/docview/2709982601/AE38428FDD9B4168PQ/23?accountid=13503\](https://www.proquest.com/central/docview/2709982601/AE38428FDD9B4168PQ/23?accountid=13503)

Kim, Hyung-Jin. "Koreans resort to Internet to buy sex." *NBC News*, 10 Oct 2007,  
<https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna21228531>

Kim, Hyunle et. Al. "Gender Differences in Sexual Behaviors and Their Relevance to Mental Health among High School Students with Sexual Experiences in South Korea." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 18, no. 21, 2021,  
<https://www.proquest.com/central/docview/2596024031/A68D433084524FCBPQ/18?accountid=13503>



Kong, Rachel. "Reflecting on the 'Nth Room' Case: Why South Korea needs a new feminist wave." *The Michigan Daily*, 1 Feb 2021,

<https://www.michigandaily.com/michigan-in-color/reflecting-nth-room-case-why-south-korea-needs-new-feminist-wave/>

Lee, David D. "South Korea's women fear an 'Nth Room' repeat now Yoon Suk-yeol's in charge." *South China Morning Post*, 21 May 2022,

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3178566/south-koreas-women-fear-nth-room-repeat-now-yoon-suk-yeols-charge>

Lee, Yoona et. Al, "A Study on Youth Prostitution using Mobile Application: Focusing on Korean Youth." *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, Vol. 13, no. 2, Dec 2019, pp. 460-477,

<https://www.proquest.com/central/docview/2384583228/Record/FA82F91749264CC4PQ/37?accountid=13503>

"Nth Room." "The Nth Room case: The Making of a Monster [Documentary on online sex crime in Korea]" *YouTube*, uploaded by KST by *The Korea Times*, 4 Jun 2021, [The Nth Room case: The Making of a Monster \[Documentary on online sex crime in Korea\]](#)

Oaten, James. "This student reporter infiltrated a 'cyber hell' where women and girls were sexually exploited, and helped catch the ringleaders." *ABC News*, 30 Dec 2022,  
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-31/cyber-hell-south-korea-investigates-sexual-exploitation-telegram/101772704>

Shin, Ji-hye. "Online ads for private prostitution surge amid social distancing." *The Korea Herald*, 4 Feb 2021,  
<https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210204000808>

"Vice." "Feminism Is Dividing This Country." *YouTube*, uploaded by *Vice News* 24 Apr 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77zvIYDESok>

Yoon, Min-sik. "'Anti-Nth Room' legislation, an unfulfilled promise?" *The Korea Herald*, 11 Jul 2022, <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20220710000209>



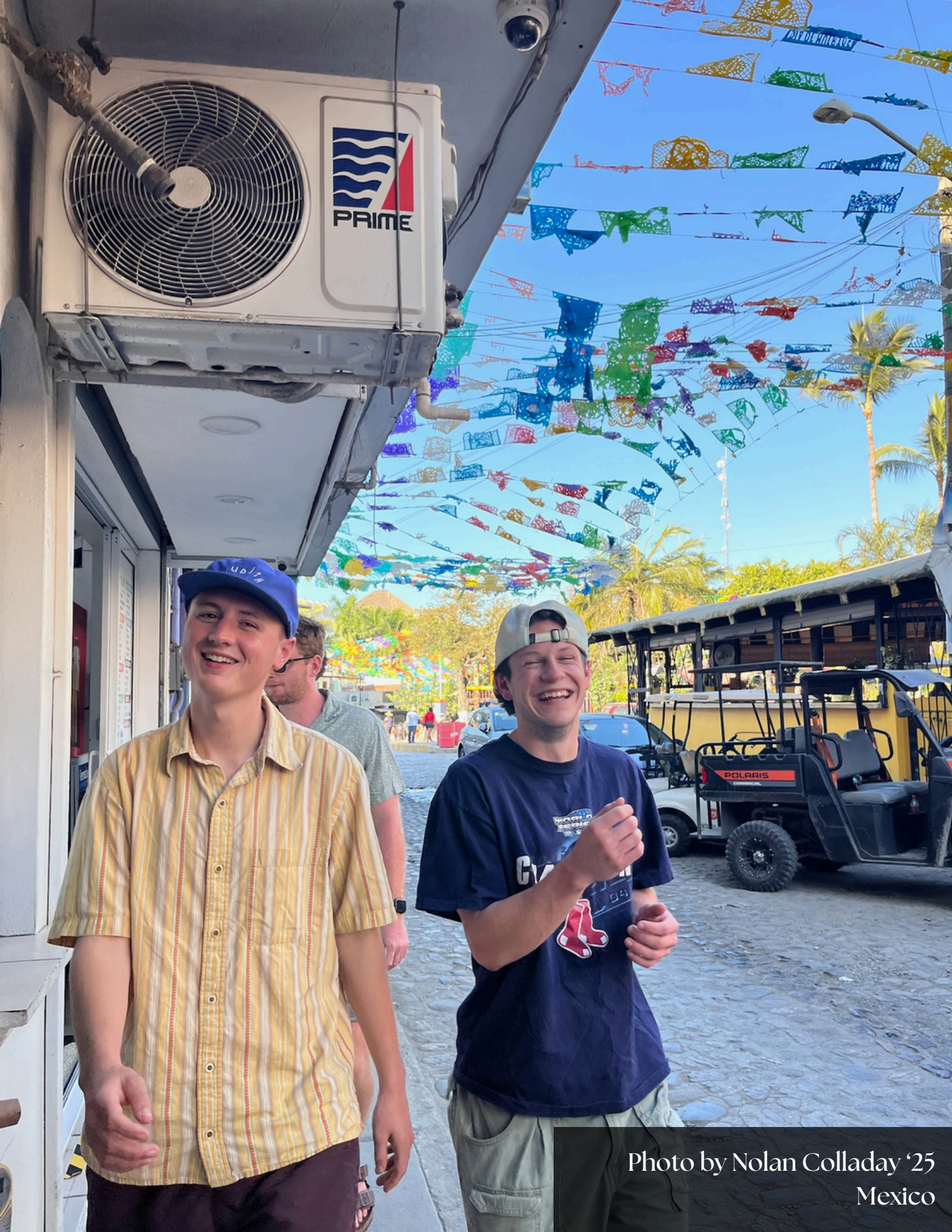


Photo by Nolan Colladay '25  
Mexico



# **The Paradox of Mano Dura: Security, Authoritarianism, and Democratic Backsliding in Bukele's El Salvador**

Nolan Colladay '25

El Salvador's mano dura, or "iron fist" policies, have captured global attention for their aggressive stance against gang violence. These policies are rooted in a complex historical path, beginning with the aftermath of the Salvadoran civil war and the social and economic devastation that followed. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, gang violence, fueled by mass deportations from the United States and entrenched poverty, became one of the nation's most pressing challenges (International Crisis

Group 2017). The gangs, including the infamous MS-13 and Barrio 18, thrived in an environment marked by a lack of opportunity, institutional weakness, and social fragmentation (International Crisis Group 2020). Successive governments, both left- and right-wing, have employed increasingly repressive measures to address the problem, with limited success.

The mano dura approach, characterized by mass arrests, militarized policing, and the framing of

gang members as existential threats to society, has been a centerpiece of El Salvador's crime policy for decades (Hume 2007). While such strategies often enjoy public support due to their promise of immediate security, they raise questions about their compatibility with democratic governance. This paper explores this central research question: How effective have President Nayib Bukele's *mano dura* policies been in reducing gang violence and crime, and what impact have these policies had on democratic institutions in El Salvador, particularly in terms of human rights and judicial independence? While Bukele's *mano dura* policies have delivered short-term security gains and earned widespread public support, they have simultaneously eroded democratic

institutions, threatening El Salvador's long-term democratic stability through human rights violations, judicial overreach, and authoritarian consolidation.

El Salvador's history of violence and repression is heavily linked to its civil war (1980– 1992). The conflict left the country polarized and economically devastated, creating fertile ground for the rise of organized crime. The post-war Chapultepec Peace Accords mandated significant reforms, including the demilitarization of internal security forces and the establishment of a civilian-led National Civil Police (PNC) (Perez 2003). These reforms aimed to prevent the military from perpetuating human rights abuses and to build public trust in democratic



institutions. However, these efforts faced significant obstacles, including corruption, resource limitations, and insufficient political will to fully realize the accords' objectives.

After the civil war ended in 1992, El Salvador's left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) transitioned from being a guerrilla group to a political party focused on democratic reform and citizen security (Holland 2013). For years, the FMLN had opposed the repressive *mano dura* tactics used by the right-wing National Republican Alliance (ARENA), arguing that public security should address the social and economic causes of crime (Holland 2013). However, after the FMLN won the 2009 presidential election, they began using some of the

same tough-on-crime policies they had once criticized, such as making more discretionary arrests and increasing the use of force by the police. Gang violence became a major focus of the FMLN's security strategy, which increasingly portrayed gang members as dangerous "folk devils" and emphasized police crackdowns on them (Holland 2013). This marked a significant departure from the FMLN's earlier principles and showed how much their policies began to resemble ARENA's. Instead of providing a true alternative to ARENA's *mano dura*, the FMLN relied on military involvement in public security, even though this went against the spirit of the 1992 peace accords that aimed to keep the military out of civilian security (Holland 2013).

Against this backdrop of shifting party positions and violence, the election of Nayib Bukele in 2019 marked a dramatic turning point in El Salvador's approach to public security. Bukele's Territorial Control Plan (PCT), introduced shortly after his inauguration, expanded *mano dura* strategies with an emphasis on mass arrests, militarized policing, and communication controls in prisons (Hernandez-Roy and Bledsoe 2023). By 2023, Bukele's government had detained over 63,000 individuals, many of whom were arrested under emergency provisions that suspended constitutional rights, such as habeas corpus and freedom of assembly (Hernandez-Roy and Bledsoe 2023). Bukele frequently promoted the PCT's successes on social media, emphasizing

its role in reducing homicide and extortion rates. This use of social media, combined with his populist rhetoric, helped bolster his approval ratings to unprecedented levels, with polls consistently showing approval rates above 80% (Hernandez-Roy and Bledsoe 2023).

This strong public support for Bukele's policies aligns with broader trends in Salvadorian attitudes toward governance in the face of crime. A national survey revealed that 55% of respondents would support a military coup if crime levels became unmanageable, illustrating the connection between fear of insecurity and endorsement of authoritarian measures (Perez 2003). While direct crime victimization did not

significantly influence support for a coup, feelings of insecurity and vulnerability drove substantial backing for “strong hand” governance, with 31% of respondents favoring authoritarian measures to address societal issues (Perez 2003). These findings highlight the deep societal need for security, even at the expense of democratic norms. However, while Bukele’s aggressive policies deliver immediate security gains, they simultaneously create concerns about the long-term health of El Salvador’s democratic institutions, underscoring the balance between public safety and democratic stability.

Notably, Bukele’s approach differs from previous *mano dura* strategies in its scale and its

centralization of power. The erosion of judicial independence under Bukele’s administration is one of the most concerning consequences of his *mano dura* policies. In May 2021, the Bukele controlled legislature removed five Supreme Court justices and the attorney general, replacing them with individuals loyal to his government. This decision allowed Bukele to dismantle one of the country’s key checks on executive power, enabling his government to renew the state of emergency 10 times and pave the way for his re-election bid, despite constitutional limitations on consecutive terms (Hernandez-Roy and Bledsoe 2023; International Crisis Group 2020). By taking control of the judiciary, Bukele consolidated significant power in the executive

branch, leaving no institutional safeguards to hold him accountable. This move sparked criticism from international human rights organizations and democratic watchdogs, who warned that undermining judicial independence could have long-term consequences for El Salvador's democracy. Furthermore, this dangerous precedent may encourage other leaders in the region to follow a similar path, eroding democratic norms if they can maintain high public support for their security agendas.

The politicization of the judiciary also undermines the rule of law, creating significant obstacles for citizens seeking to challenge government abuses. Under President

Bukele's state of emergency, reports of arbitrary arrests have surfaced, highlighting widespread violations of due process. Many individuals have been detained based on vague or discriminatory criteria, such as their physical appearance, tattoos, or dwelling in gang-controlled areas, rather than credible evidence linking them to criminal activity (Hernandez-Roy and Bledsoe 2023). In some cases, mass arrests have been conducted throughout entire neighborhoods, with individuals accused of being gang affiliates simply because they were present during police operations.

Further complicating the situation, those detained are often held for extended periods without formal

charges or access to legal representation. The state of emergency has allowed security forces to bypass court orders and detain individuals for up to 15 days without justification, a stark increase from the constitutional limit of 3 days (Hernandez-Roy and Bledsoe 2023). Such measures have effectively suspended basic legal protections, leaving those wrongfully accused with limited recourse to defend themselves. Families of detainees have reported being extorted for bribes to secure the release of their loved ones, illustrating the systemic corruption exacerbated by the lack of judicial oversight (Hernandez-Roy and Bledsoe 2023).

The implications of these practices are far-reaching. Arbitrary

detentions and the absence of accountability mechanisms not only violate individual rights but also undermine public trust in state institutions. When citizens perceive the judiciary as an arm of the executive branch rather than an independent body tasked with upholding justice, confidence in the rule of law erodes. Without an impartial and autonomous judiciary to check executive power and address abuses, there is very little to prevent the country's backslide towards authoritarianism. Moreover, the climate of fear created by these policies has a repressive effect on dissenters, as these individuals may hesitate to speak out against the government for fear of retaliation. This growing culture of political immunity in El Salvador underscores the urgent

need to restore judicial independence and strengthen democratic practices.

These institutional shifts are not occurring in isolation– they are reinforced by on-the ground abuses that reflect the broader authoritarian turn. Bukele’s *mano dura* policies have been accompanied by widespread human rights violations. Under the state of emergency, thousands of individuals have been detained without charge, often in overcrowded and inhumane conditions.

Between 2010 and 2019, law enforcement conducted approximately half a million arrests in a country of 6.4 million people, with most arrests made at officers’ discretion for alleged in-the moment offenses (Bergmann and Gude 2021). However, 75% of these arrests

resulted in the release of individuals within 72 hours due to a lack of evidence, highlighting widespread unnecessary or unlawful detentions (Bergmann and Gude 2021). As of 2023, over 90 detainees had died in custody, many due to inadequate medical care or violence within the prisons (Hernandez-Roy and Bledsoe 2023). Families of detainees have reported paying exorbitant fees to provide food and basic necessities for their incarcerated relatives, highlighting the economic burdens these policies impose on marginalized communities (Hernandez-Roy and Bledsoe 2023).

The dehumanizing treatment of prisoners, frequently showcased in Bukele’s social media posts, serves as a calculated strategy to project and



reinforce state dominance through public humiliation. One widely circulated image from Bukele's administration (Figure 1) portrays gang members labeled as "terrorists" (Hernandez-Roy and Bledsoe 2023), shown shirtless and shackled in overcrowded, highly choreographed scenes of subjugation. This photo offers a striking example of how the state uses visual spectacles to enforce its dominance. By disseminating these images, Bukele seeks to present himself as a strong and uncompromising leader capable of restoring law and order in a country plagued by gang violence. This approach taps into public anger and fear, leveraging these emotions to solidify popular support for his administration's harsh tactics.



*Figure 1.* Inmates are lined up during a security operation under the watch of police at Izalco prison in San Salvador, El Salvador, on April 25, 2020. © 2020 El Salvador presidential press office via AP (Human Rights Watch)

However, this framing carries significant risks. By reducing individuals to symbols of criminality and dismissing their humanity, Bukele's rhetoric not only normalizes state violence but also dissolves essential civil liberties, setting dangerous precedents for governance. Such authoritarian tendencies undermine democratic norms, allowing for the expansion of unchecked state power under the guise of public security (Lessing 2017; Bergmann and

Gude 2020). The visual spectacle of mass detentions and the demeaning treatment of prisoners also risks desensitizing the public to human rights abuses, making these measures appear acceptable or even necessary when fighting against crime.

Even in the face of increasing international criticism, Bukele's administration enjoys widespread public support -- a reflection of the desperation many Salvadorans feel after decades of unchecked gang violence. For many, the sharp drop in homicides and extortion offers a tangible sense of safety that past democratic administrations failed to deliver. Some argue that this success justifies the suspension of certain democratic norms, suggesting that

Bukele's popular mandate legitimizes his heavy-handed approach. However, public support for punitive crime policies often stems not from a true endorsement of authoritarianism, but from a deep disillusionment with democratic institutions' historical inability to ensure justice and security (Lessing 2017). This context is crucial because, while strong approval ratings and visible reductions in crime may appear to validate Bukele's methods, they obscure the long-term dangers of dismantling democratic safeguards. Effectiveness in the short term does not equate to sustainability or legitimacy. Authoritarian crackdowns may suppress violence temporarily, but they often weaken institutions needed for lasting peace and accountability. Moreover, when public trust is built on

fear rather than democratic participation, it risks entrenching power in ways that are difficult to reverse. Thus, the very factors that make Bukele's policies appealing to many Salvadorans -- urgency, fear, and frustration -- are also what make them so dangerous to the country's democratic future.

Bukele has capitalized on this disillusionment by presenting himself as a decisive, results-driven leader -- a "savior" figure in the eyes of many. However, this style of governance sets a dangerous precedent, both within El Salvador and across the region. His trajectory increasingly resembles that of leaders in Nicaragua and Venezuela, where democratic institutions have eroded under the weight of populist

authoritarianism (International Crisis Group 2020). The growing interest from neighboring countries such as Honduras and Guatemala in replicating aspects of Bukele's PCT raises concerns about the regional spread of these governance models. If left unchecked, this trend threatens to reverse decades of democratic progress within the region and normalize authoritarianism as a response to insecurity.

Beyond the regional implications, the domestic costs of Bukele's approach are mounting. His reliance on mass incarceration without meaningful rehabilitation or reintegration programs risks perpetuating the very conditions that foster gang violence. Decades of research suggest that punitive

strategies alone are insufficient to address root causes like poverty, marginalization, and lack of opportunity (Lessing 2017; Reyes 2024). Without robust investment in education and community-based prevention, El Salvador's current security gains are unlikely to hold. Repressive policies may offer temporary relief, but sustainable peace demands deeper, systemic change.

Despite the dominance of punitive measures in Bukele's security agenda, the government has also made limited efforts to address the structural conditions that fuel gang recruitment. Chief among these is the Unit for the Reconstruction of the Social Fabric, which aims to tackle root causes of social exclusion, such as economic

marginalization and the lack of recreational opportunities (International Crisis Group 2020). Though modest in scale compared to the sweeping *mano dura* campaign, the initiative represents a vital yet often overlooked pillar of long-term violence prevention. Operating in over 60 municipalities, the Unit supports community-based interventions, including football camps, vocational training, scholarships, and the construction of "cubes," or glass-walled community centers designed to serve as safe spaces for education, entertainment, and skill development (International Crisis Group 2020). If given more institutional support and visibility, such programs could offer a meaningful alternative to repressive policing and help create the social

resilience necessary for lasting peace and democratic renewal.

President Nayib Bukele's *mano dura* policies have reshaped El Salvador's approach to public security, delivering significant reductions in gang violence while raising serious concerns about democratic governance. By undermining judicial independence, violating human rights, and consolidating executive power, Bukele has set a dangerous precedent for authoritarianism in the region. While

these measures have enjoyed widespread public support, their long-term consequences for democracy and human rights are profoundly concerning. Addressing these challenges requires a shift away from punitive policies toward strategies that prioritize accountability, social investment, and respect for human rights. If El Salvador fails to reverse its current trajectory, the cost to its democracy may prove far greater than the gains in public safety.

## References

- Bergmann, Adrian & Gude, Rafael. (2021). Set up to fail: The politics, mechanisms, and effects of mass incarceration. *Latin American Law Review*. 43-59.  
10.29263/lar07.2021.03
- Hernandez-Roy, C., & Bledsoe, R. (2024). Democracy dies under Mano Dura: Anti-crime strategies in the Northern Triangle. *CSIS*.  
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/democracy-dies-under-mano-dura-anti-crime-strategies-northern-triangle>
- Holland, A. C. (2013). RIGHT ON CRIME? Conservative Party Politics and Mano Dura Policies in El Salvador. *Latin American Research Review*, 48(1), 44-67,236,240.  
<http://relay.rhodes.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/right-on-crime-conservative-party-politics-mano/docview/1370358610/se-2>
- Hume, M. (2007). Mano Dura: El Salvador Responds to Gangs. *Development in Practice*, 17(6), 739–751. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25548280>
- International Crisis Group. (2020). Back to the Iron Fist?: Bukele’s Security Policies. In *Miracle or Mirage?: Gangs and Plunging Violence in El Salvador* (p. Page 6-Page 13). International Crisis Group. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep31423.6>
- International Crisis Group. (2017). State and Crime in El Salvador. In *El Salvador’s Politics of Perpetual Violence* (p. Page 3-Page 12). International Crisis Group.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep31473.6>
- Lessing, B. (2017). Counterproductive punishment: How prison gangs undermine state authority. *Rationality and Society*, 29(3), 257-297.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1043463117701132>



- Perez, O. J. (2003). Democratic legitimacy and public insecurity: crime and democracy in El Salvador and Guatemala. *Political Science Quarterly*, 118(4), 627+.  
[https://link-gale.com.rhodes.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A115634154/AONE?u=tel\\_a\\_rhodes&sid=bookmark AONE&xid=b1a7268f](https://link-gale.com.rhodes.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A115634154/AONE?u=tel_a_rhodes&sid=bookmark AONE&xid=b1a7268f)
- Reyes, N. (2024). From Gang Rule to Iron Fist: Questioning Progress in Bukele's El Salvador. *Chicago Policy Review (Online)*,  
<https://rhodes.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/gang-rule-iron-fist-questioning-progress-bukele-s/docview/3049788746/se-2>





Photo by Cali VanCleve '26  
Kyrgyzstan



# Mexican Youth: Migrant Push Factors

Claire Bramlett '26

The inherent rights of Mexican children are defined in the Act of the Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents under Article 15, Title II, Chapter II (United Nations). The Act states that “Children and adolescents have the right to live in conditions propitious to their healthy and harmonious growth, whether physical, mental, material, spiritual, moral, or social” (United Nations). Despite this proclamation, the conditions of Mexico between 2000 and 2008 were not fit to foster and cultivate growth among Mexican youth. The specific push

factors that have contributed to Mexican migration in the early 2000s raise implications related to the region’s cultural factors, standard of education, and community violence. Framing my research by questioning the specific push factors that contributed to Mexican youth migration between 2000 and 2008, I have sought to take into consideration the various reasons children emigrate from their homeland. The findings from this research seek to define a causal relationship between migration factors prior to the Great Recession and

Mexico's rate of migration in the early 2000s.

The concept of youth migration, specifically in the Global South, must be better addressed within the international community.

Implementations must be put in place to better prioritize the safety of migrant youth and adolescents. In recent years, the anti-migration rhetoric promoted by President Donald Trump and his supporters has contributed to a rise in xenophobic, racist attitudes pertaining to migration (Schaffner). Although such attitudes have permeated much of the American psyche prior to Donald Trump's presence in office, this issue

remains a component of a widely accepted American stereotype that must be repudiated. While a large number of research focuses on Mexican migration as a general topic, this paper seeks to refine the data by analyzing the migration of a vulnerable community – children.

The outward migration of Mexican children to the United States has remained a consistent factor over the years, but an uptick in children's migration was accounted for in the mid-2000s. A sample survey held by the Mexican Family Life Survey tracked “854 migrants, including 375 children to the United States” (Hamilton and

Bylander). There is an understanding that migrating children are often accompanied by an adult and thus base their decision to migrate on external considerations (Hamilton and Bylander). Despite this, there are residual factors that indicate children did migrate at relatively high levels between 2002 and 2005. Most prominently, out of a sample of respondents, 61.8% of participants ages 12 to 17 indicated they migrated without parents. In turn, this number raises significant questions about how and why children migrated at significant rates in the early 2000s. Theory and microeconomic models of migration purport the notion that “migrants weigh

their education, experience, and expectations of income differentials in both countries against the perceived costs of migration” (Tucker et al).

An abundance of factors – oversight of familial relations and structural norms, levels of educational attainment, and community violence have been conducive to the pattern of external migration for children in the 2000s. In an article published by Hamilton and Bylander, it was found that children frequently make decisions to migrate independently of parental oversight. Despite this phenomenon, an aspect of parental oversight remained consistent during a child’s migration

journey. At the outset of the 2000s, data trends pointed to an accepted belief that families traveled as a singular body, where children would often follow their migrating parents (Hamilton and Bylander 3). To best understand migration patterns, Donato and Perez obtained data from a Mexican Migration Project survey. Creating a sample survey, 71 communities and 10,723 households were accounted for. Placing restrictions on the sample survey, the analysis “[was] limited to respondents residing in households where they are categorized as a child of the head of the household and are 40 years of age or younger” (Donato and Sisk 41). In this survey, Latin American respondents

were simultaneously accounted for. Donato and Perez’s findings indicate that 55 percent of children made a trip to the United States before age seventeen between 1997 and 2017 (Donato and Perez 119). Between 1970 and 1986, and between 1987 and 1996, these figures were significantly higher; children’s migration before age 17 constituted 69 percent and 75 percent of border crossings, respectively. Despite this dwindling figure, Donato and Perez suggest “continued and strong linkages between migrant parents and their children” (Donato and Perez 119). While familial oversight remained a contending factor among child migration patterns, the simultaneous

lack of educational opportunities and community violence posed themselves as significant migratory push factors. To gain a general understanding of Mexico's educational expenditures, a 47 percent budget increase contributed to the financing of Mexico's primary school spending. Despite this figure, the average per-capita spending for a single Mexican student averaged approximately USD 1,694, one-third of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Hopkins et al. 11). Thus, there is an indication that the quality of a child's education was not prioritized by the Mexican government, serving as a causal factor for low graduation rates,

unemployment, and ultimately a source of provocation to migrate. Interestingly, academic achievement and community violence shared characteristics related to each other. At the height of Mexico's war on drugs under the jurisdiction of President Felipe Calderón, the country witnessed a 90 percent increase in homicides between 2006 and 2009 (Basu and Pearlman). Resultantly, this statistic shared a correlational relationship between grade failure (Donato and Perez 118). The analysis of youth migration factors and Mexico's state of education in the early 2000s, coupled with first-hand accounts and experiences, will work to provide additional perspectives and a nuanced



position on the factors of migration of Mexican youth.

There is a consensus amongst academics and researchers that parental involvement and oversight are an imperative factor in Mexican youth migration patterns. From ongoing data analysis presented by Donato and Perez, it appears that within the context of Mexico's cultural and familial values, external migration signifies an opportune moment to receive financial freedoms, educational access, or additional benefits that cannot be maintained within their home country. From this analysis, there lies a clear understanding that migration among

households holds significant familial values. Despite this, parental migration more often leads to the disruption of a child, constituting a "disruptive family transition with significant health and education costs for children who remain in origin homes" (Nobles). Whilst familial structures and parental oversight often trumped a child's decision to migrate, these findings take into consideration the influential role of men within the household. A 2014 study conducted by Jenna Nobles sought to analyze the role of fathers within the context of shifting household structure. From Nobles' findings, a father's independent migration produces disproportionate effects of familial

disruption, often leading to the later migration of women and children. Between the period of 2002 and 2005, “30% of men who migrated to the United States had children younger than age 15 living in their origin homes” (Nobles). The absence of a father figure amongst Mexican households was associated with significant health concerns: a decrease in education completed, vaccination coverage, and an increase in behavioral problems, among other factors (Nobles). Taking this into consideration, it is evident that there exists a causal relationship between the absence of a father and migration patterns among children. Factors that were already present within Mexico

during the early 2000s – low education spending in comparison to other countries, rising violence, and regional socioeconomic disparities- heightened the risks associated with parental absence within the household. While children maintained a degree of autonomy in their decision to migrate, there does exist, simultaneously, a degree of involuntary commitment due to the lack or absence of a father figure. Thus, while familial and cultural values played a pertinent role in youth migration, the absence of a father can be attributed to a child’s migration, for reunification, economic opportunities, or necessity. The data relative to household indicators often works in

tandem with educational factors. A secondary factor, educational attainment, revealed clear influencing factors regarding youth migration.

Globally, opportunities for education serve as a causal factor for migration, especially among youth populations. In a comparative study of Haitian emigration factors, it was concluded that “youth undertake migration to foster educational attainment... often necessitated by scarcity of secondary schools and their concentration in urban areas” (Heckert 769). Taking this into consideration, it is evident that while there exists a corresponding relationship between

rates of migration and educational attainment, the case of Mexico, however, is representative of a nuanced, secondary factor at play. The lack of fiscal spending put aside for public education manifested itself in various ways. For example, the minimal number of fiscal resources allocated towards fifteen-year-olds landed Mexico’s spending per 15-year-old student as the “second lowest of OECD countries” (Hopkins et al. 11). With underfunded public schools, non-existent national standardization of education, and educational inequality that is often a result of economic inequality, the guarantee that Mexican youth were to receive a proper, well-rounded

education in the early 2000s was a difficult task (Mendez). Moreover, the Mexican government's monopoly on state education had presented difficulties for parents and children alike; because much of Mexico's quality of education lies in socioeconomic status, it was often Mexico's marginalized communities that faced the harshest consequences of Mexico's educational system (Mendez). Due to these findings made by Mendez, a lack of educational funding for older Mexican youth could play an inherent role in their migration. In 2006, the average for the completion of upper-secondary schooling was 44 percent, disproportionately affecting

youth among poor and rural communities with an average of 19 and 26 percent, respectively (UNESCO). There is a clear divide among Mexico's socioeconomic classes; while education funding posed a significant problem in 2006, it affected Mexico's lower classes at alarming rates. Mexico's inability to meet proper educational standards manifested itself in the attitudes of Mexican youth immigrants. Analyzing firsthand accounts of Mexican youth and schoolchildren provided general insight into the country's educational conditions. Juan, a youth migrant from Jalpan de Serra, claimed that the Mexican school system "isn't the same as it is [in the United States]. [There

they] don't teach you. They don't care if you learn or not" (Nichols et al. 52). In a similar vein, Allie, a young Mexican migrant who was immersed in the United States' education system, held perceptions that differed from her parents' education experience in Mexico. Allie's father, Hernán, "perceived school as a chore" due to a lack of systematic efforts to encourage learning. In contrast, Allie "enjoyed school and was intrinsically motivated by reading" (Nichols et al. 67). While these findings lack nuance, they contribute to the narrative of Mexico's underfunding, which has served as a driver to migration. Nichols' paper makes it clear that "not all Mexican

students in Allie's generation loved reading or succeeding in school as she did... children who entered school... encountered resources that gave them more options [to learn]" (Nichols et al 67). Understanding the functionality of Mexico's education system in the early 2000s provides insight into youth migration patterns. Moreover, there resides an important relationship between education and community violence that often works as a primary push factor.

An increase in violent measures is also considered a push for Mexican youth migration. Between 1990 and 2007, 65 percent of civilians "felt unsafe

in their state” (Polanska 87). A plethora of factors can be attributed to this feeling of insecurity; however, data proves that this number, 67 percent of civilians, can be backed up by empirical statistics. Between 2003 and 2008, Mexico’s homicide rate increased exponentially, experiencing over a 67 percent increase over the recorded period. Although this number is indicative of all of Mexico’s homicidal activities, it does not account for additional factors, such as the reasons why criminal activity and violence increased in Mexico and their effect on children. Despite this discrepancy, there are comprehensible indicators that can be argued as a causal factor of youth

migration. Scholars have attributed the presence of gang violence and its recruitment tactics to the migration of Mexican youth. These two symptoms of migration have been presented as a “central cause of the migration of unaccompanied minors from Mexico, most of whom are adolescents... a study of high school students in Guanajuato, Mexico found that experiences of violence were associated with greater odds of planning to migrate” (Hamilton and Bylander). This finding represents a general understanding of one of the largest push factors for adolescents, youth, and teenagers alike. Moreover, evidence indicates a correlation between increased violence and educational

attainment or performance. To better understand the severity of Mexico's homicidal and violent tendencies during the early 2000s, one study attributes a decline in academic performance directly to psychological distress that was caused within a violent, homicidal atmosphere (Michaelson and Salardi). Further solidifying this proposition, a study conducted by Michaelson and Salardi confirmed this theory; they found that "schools that are exposed to at least three homicides within a 2 km radius in the week immediately prior to exams see scores fall by an average of about 4.4 points (out of 800), or about 0.1 standard deviations" (Michaelson and Salardi). Consequently, a lack of

community protection serves as an integral factor for Mexican youth to migrate. Migrating to an economically stable country with priorities to serve and safeguard children remains crucial. On the other hand, measures taken by members of Mexico's cartel targeted the vulnerable position of children in their recruitment tactics. This finding has significant restraints, however, as scholarship on the issue is scarce. Despite this, a lack of education, coupled with false promises, successfully led to the cartel recruiting over 30,000 individuals of Mexico's youth to their militia (Woodman). Evidently, this number can be traced back to a lack of classroom provisions. It



is evident that many of these findings work in tandem to reveal the interconnectedness of Mexico's sociopolitical state in the early 2000s. Furthermore, these findings indicate that not one factor – parental oversight, educational attainment, and violence – works exclusively. All these factors have contributed to youth migration from Mexico.

This analysis of Mexico seeks to put into question policy implications on a domestic and international level.

There exists a relationship between internal policy and external relations, particularly with the United States. By comparatively analyzing Mexico's rate

of youth migration in 2020, there is significant evidence indicating that a political shift related to strict border enforcement occurred. In 2005, the United States Border Patrol released data pertaining to border apprehensions or interactions. In total, 1,023,888 Mexicans were apprehended at the border, and 114,222 individuals were aged 17 and under (Sapp). In contrast, border encounters between January to July of 2023 totaled 1,253,991 individuals. A combined total of 456,496 individuals accounted for both children and adolescents, as well as family units. Of this number, 77,070 individuals were children and adolescents, a smaller number than the number accounted for

in 2005. This number does raise a conflict in the data provided, however, as it is unknown what the Department of Homeland Security and Border Patrol categorized as a youth or adolescent in terms of age (International Organization for Migration). Taking these numbers into account, it can be understood that there was a slight deviation of migration between 2005 and 2023. This stagnation can be attributed to a considerable increase in education spending. In 2023, Mexico spent approximately USD 3,239 “annually per full-time equivalent student,” (OECD) a number that has increased significantly since Mexico’s annual spending of USD 1,694 for primary students. This increase in

funding is important, as it is a step toward providing equity amongst Mexico’s children. This funding, therefore, can be allocated to 21st-century learning (OECD), systemic quality of education amongst Mexico’s regions, and pushing forth learning that expands beyond the classroom. Prioritizing public spending on education is a crucial step for ensuring youth prosperity. As this paper has considered, education plays a critical role in determining a child’s propensity to stay in the region. It can be understood, given the research presented by Donato and Perez, that much has remained the same regarding cultural normativity and community

engagement. Due to the increased surveillance of child migration, predominantly along the United States' southern border, additional policies have been implemented that have the potential to put Mexican youth at severe risk. In the first months of his second term, President Trump invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798. The Alien Enemies Act is to be invoked in times of conflict or war, and gives the President of the United States the ability to remove noncitizens by deportation (ACLU). Since President Trump announced the invocation of the Alien Enemies Act, migrant and non-migrant communities are living in a newfound era of fear. The ACLU claims that

“[they] are hearing reports of children afraid to go to school, parents to work, and families in need who are too afraid to go to a local food bank or community health clinic” (ACLU). Thus, there is a need for profound change that safeguards migrant children and their families. As of 2023, 5.5 million unauthorized immigrants were accounted for in the United States (Migration Policy Institute), a number that had grown from 5.3 million in 2021, and 7.8 million in 2007 (Migration Policy Institute). Consequently, the growing number of migrants to the United States poses implications that expand beyond policy change. It is clear that a systemic change must occur to preserve the rights

of migrants. Thus, through a thorough analysis of migrant longevity in the United States, measures can be taken to properly assimilate migrants into the United States' society.





Photo by Lily Resha  
Argentina



# Barriers to Women-Friendly Policies: The Limits of Gender Quotas in Latin American Democracies

Lily Resha '25

## I. Introduction

Latin America leads globally in female political leadership, with women holding 36.8% of national legislature seats (UN Women). Much of this progress is due to gender quota laws enacted since the 1990s to mandate women's representation in parliaments (Piscopo 2015). These quotas aimed to elevate women's interests at the national level. Yet, despite this increase in representation, significant challenges remain—high maternal mortality, unsafe abortions, domestic violence, and femicide persist at alarming rates.

Around 8,400 women die annually from pregnancy-related complications, and one in three Latina women experience intimate partner violence (FIGO 2023; Guttmacher 2018; UN Women).

Fourteen Latin American countries rank among the top 25 globally for femicide.

These statistics highlight a puzzling disconnect: more women in office has not consistently translated into more women-friendly policies (Dahlerup & Friendenvall 2005; Piscopo 2014, 2015; Zetterberg 2009). Why, even with gender quotas and increased representation, do women's interests

continue to be sidelined in policymaking? What political conditions enable—or block—female legislators from delivering substantive change?

Given the life-and-death nature of many women-focused issues, it is critical to understand under what conditions female politicians can effectively advocate for and enact women-friendly policies. This study investigates a key question: Why have some Latin American democracies with gender quota laws successfully implemented women-friendly policies, while others have not?

## **II. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Political scientists have long examined how women gain access to

power. Legislative gender quotas and the idea of a critical mass—typically 15–30%—have been central to arguments for increasing women’s presence in parliaments (Childs & Krook 2006; Kanter 1977). The theory holds that women must reach this threshold to move from symbolic to substantive representation. Scholars also argue that critical mass helps counter tokenism, where a small number of women are seen as representatives of their gender and struggle to influence policy (Studlar & McAllister 2002; Beckwith 2006). Yet, research increasingly shows that a critical mass alone is insufficient. There is no universal link between women’s numerical presence and pro-women



legislation (Childs & Krook 2006; Dahlerup 2006; Grey 2006; Piscopo 2015). In response, scholars have shifted focus to critical acts—the specific interventions and strategies individual women use to advance gender equality, regardless of their numbers.

Another approach centers on gender consciousness—a sense of shared identity and common interests among women (Lovenduski; Rinehart 1992; Conway 1994). While intuitively appealing, this concept has been critiqued for oversimplifying women’s diversity in race, ideology, and experience (Childs & Krook 2006; Carroll 2001). As representation has expanded, it’s become clear that women do not speak with a single voice.

A more fruitful explanation comes from historical institutionalism, which emphasizes how male-dominated institutions embed gender biases over time (Thelen & Steinmo 1992; Franceschet, 2010). These institutions often privilege male norms and behaviors, making it difficult for women to challenge the status quo—even under “gender-neutral” rules (Hawkesworth 1994). As Carroll (2001) and Grey (2006) note, institutional norms can pressure female legislators to conform, limiting their ability to bring women’s perspectives into policy. Political party identity further complicates women’s ability to act collectively. In systems with strong party discipline, women may prioritize

party loyalty over gender interests (Hawkesworth 2012; Grey 2006). Some scholars suggest critical mass should be assessed within parties, not legislatures, since having enough women in a single party may provide the “safe space” needed to advocate for gender policies (Childs 2004).

Taken together, the literature suggests that women’s presence alone is not enough. Institutional norms, political parties, and the broader political context play pivotal roles in shaping whether and how female legislators can advance women-friendly policy.

### **III. Argument and Theory**

Women-specific issues are those that disproportionately affect

women—like reproductive rights or protection from domestic violence (Carroll 1994; Schwindt-Bayer & Taylor-Robinson 2005). In Latin America, abortion laws serve as a revealing case study for understanding how political contexts shape women-friendly outcomes.

Karen Beckwith and Kimberly Cowell-Meyers (2007) argue that political context is essential for turning female representation into substantive results. They identify two enabling conditions: left-wing legislative majorities and active feminist social movements. Rational choice theory suggests that political actors—especially parties—act strategically to maintain

power, aligning policy with ideology and voter demand.

Thus, left-wing parties, which traditionally support social reform, may be more inclined to prioritize women's interests. Similarly, feminist movements raise awareness, frame public discourse, and pressure governments—shaping both the problem stream and political incentives.

To explain when women-friendly policies are likely to pass, I turn to Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF). Policy change happens when three streams—problems, policies, and politics—converge, creating a window of opportunity. In this study:

- Problem stream: Feminist social movements spotlight women's issues.
- Policy stream: Female legislators propose and support relevant policies.
- Political stream: Left-wing majorities provide the political will.

My theory is that when feminist mobilization increases public demand and left-leaning governments dominate the legislature, female legislators are better positioned to act as policy entrepreneurs. They can couple all three streams, increasing the likelihood of passing women-friendly legislation—even in historically male-dominated institutions.

## ***Hypothesis***

I hypothesize that female legislators are more likely to propose women-friendly policies when a left-wing political party is in the majority. I also hypothesize that women-friendly policies are more likely to occur when there are strong feminist social movements putting pressure on the national legislature and increasing public awareness of the issues.

**H1:** Women-friendly policy outcomes are more likely in national legislatures with left-wing majorities.

**H2:** Strong feminist social movements increase the likelihood of women-friendly policy outcomes.

## ***Research Design and Methods***

Latin America offers rich terrain for studying women-friendly policy, as the region ranks among the highest in the world for female legislative representation (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2024). This study uses a **comparative case study** approach, focusing on **Argentina** and **Chile**, which share key characteristics: predominantly Catholic populations, histories of military dictatorships, recent democratization, and the implementation of gender quota laws—Argentina in 1991 and Chile in 2015 (Schwindt-Bayer 2015). As of 2020, women made up 40.7% of Argentina’s legislature and 22.7% of Chile’s (Piscopo 2020; IFES 2020).

Because these countries are similar in several institutional and historical respects, I use a **Most Similar Systems (MSS)** design. This method isolates variables of interest—in this case, **party ideology** and **feminist social movements**—to explain variation in abortion policy outcomes.

***Dependent Variable: Abortion policy outcomes***

To assess women-friendly policy outcomes, I focus on **abortion laws**—a policy area directly tied to women’s health and autonomy. I evaluate whether abortion is legally and practically accessible, including the conditions under which it is permitted

and whether women face criminalization.

Data will be drawn from reports by the **AS/COA (Americas Society/Council of the Americas)** and **Human Rights Watch**, focusing on legal frameworks, access conditions, and enforcement. Based on this, abortion laws are categorized as:

- **Widely available:** Legal through the 14th week of pregnancy, under any circumstances.
- **Partially available:** Legal in the first 8 weeks and under specific conditions.
- **Unavailable:** Prohibited in all cases, including life-threatening pregnancies or rape, with legal consequences.

## ***Independent variables***

### ***Independent variable (1): Political ideology of the majority political party***

To measure the political orientation of the majority party, I analyze legislative election results preceding key abortion legislation: 2015, 2017, and 2019 (Argentina) and 2017 and 2021 (Chile). Election data comes from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). Each party is classified as Left-Wing, Center, or Right-Wing using frameworks by Ostrowski (2023) and Held (2007). These

frameworks define left-wing parties as favoring redistribution, progressive reform, and state regulation, while right-wing parties aim to preserve traditional structures. Party ideology is assessed based on public actions and policy initiatives of party leaders, applying assumptions from rational choice theory—which suggests party leaders act strategically to maximize influence and reelection prospects. This allows for an objective categorization of party ideology as it relates to policy outcomes.

**Party Ideology Scale:**

***Left: 3/3***

- Positive Market Regulation (1)
- Positive Social Justice (1)
- Positive Welfare State Expansion. (1)

***Center: 1/3 or 2/3***

- Positive or Negative Market Regulation (1/-1)
- Positive or Negative Social Justice (1/-1)
- Positive or Negative Welfare State Expansion (1/-1)

***Right: 0/3***

- Negative Market Regulation (-1)
- Negative Social Justice (-1)
- Negative Welfare state expansion (-1)

***Independent Variable (2): Strength of***

***feminist social movements***

To assess the strength of feminist movements, I analyze the **visibility, organization, and impact** of movements

advocating for abortion rights.

Indicators include:

- Number and scale of protests

- Organizational presence (e.g., Ni

Una Menos, Marea Verde)

- Media coverage

- Political endorsements or alliances

Sources include local and international news archives, academic studies, and reports from NGOs. Movements will be evaluated on a scale from **weak to strong** based on their public presence



and ability to shape political discourse and legislative outcomes.

## **I. Evidence**

To begin, I would like to bolster the critiques of critical mass theory by demonstrating by applying it in the context of abortion legislation in Latin America. As mentioned previously in 1991 Argentina was the first country globally to implement a gender quota law at the national level. The quota threshold mandated by the *Ley de Cupo* or Law of Quotas is set at 30 percent. The Argentine Chamber of Deputies and Senate both reached this threshold in the year 2001 (Carrio 2002). This indicates that the Argentine Congress had amassed a critical mass of women legislators. The campaign to

decriminalize abortion in Argentina began in 2005 with the start of the Green Wave or (Marea Verde) movement. Activists advocated for a bill to decriminalize abortion for years until it was finally added to the legislative agenda in 2018 and then passed in December 2020 (Anderson 2022). Therefore, the critical mass was reached 19 years before the abortion bill was passed. This summary shows that the critical mass of women within the legislature was still not enough to expedite the passage of a woman-friendly policy. In Chile, they did not enact a federal gender quota law until 2015. However, the law quickly helped the Chilean Congress achieve a critical mass within five years. By the

year 2020, 22.7 percent of Chilean legislators were women (IFES 2020). The movement to decriminalize abortion in Chile gained significant momentum in 2019 during the widespread social unrest demanding a rewrite of their dictatorship-era constitution (McGowan 2023). Despite the growing pressure to amend the abortion law and a critical mass of women serving in Congress abortion remains illegal in Chile. Both cases align with what many scholars already propose “Electing a “critical mass” of women to the national legislature may be necessary but insufficient cause of women’s substantive representation.” (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers 2007).

Before I dive into the evidence, I want to be clear that quota laws and increased female representation in national legislatures are important to the passage of women-friendly policies however, I am proposing the presence of women must be supported by other valuable political factors. It has been shown that women legislators are important actors in introducing and formulating legislation that represents women’s issues, “Female legislators are more active than male legislators on questions of violence against women, sexual harassment, affirmative action, and reproductive rights, though their high rates of bill introduction do not translate into high rates of policy success” (Franceschet and Piscopo

2008). In addition to increased proposals of women-friendly policies, the presence of women is important for encouraging a positive public opinion of female leaders. For example, “The acceptance of gender-based quotas in Latin America is revealed in opinion polls that show that two-thirds of the population considers that quotas are generally beneficial for the region.” (Peschard 2002). This shows that even though increased numbers of women may not guarantee policy outcomes, they do have an impact on the public perception and acceptance of women in politics. Public support of women in politics encouraged by the adoption of gender quotas illustrates how these laws are inherently important to the passage of

women-friendly policies. Now, we can delve into the other political factors that increase the likelihood of governments passing women-friendly policies.

### ***Strength of Feminist Social Movements***

Social movements are common in the Latin American region. Scholars have attributed this to, inchoate party systems and high levels of legislative fragmentation (Arce 2010). This is true of Argentina and Chile because they both have democratic systems less than 50 years old. Literature suggests that the weakness of parties and legislatures drives interest groups to influence policy by dealing directly with the executive. This means that social movements that are successful at interacting directly with the executive

branch are likely to influence policy.

Women and politics research indicates the importance of an active feminist movement in civil society articulating women's issues and insisting upon legislative action. Literature suggests that feminist movements are posited to have two possible impacts on policy outcomes, "First, a feminist movement militating around women's issues can create a legislative context favorable to the issues it advocates by publicizing women's issues...Second a feminist movement can bring direct pressure upon (or provide immediate support to) elected women." (Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers, 2007) These actors would be considered part of the *problem stream* since they are organizations that

actively work to bring attention to specific issues, frame them as problems, and push for them to be addressed by policymakers. Feminist social movements play a large role in bringing attention to abortion law reform in Latin America. Additionally, based on the definition of the *critical acts* framework posed by Drude Dahlerup, I propose that feminist social movements engage in critical actions that are necessary for the development of women-friendly policies (Dahlerup 2006).

Argentina has a strong feminist movement that has been advocating for abortion policy reform for many years. During the five years leading up to the passage of the 2020 abortion law, the campaign had significant influence over

abortion reform discourse by creating a movement that brought many sections of the population together for the same purpose. The cross-cutting nature of the movement demonstrates strength of the movement, “The Campaign was launched as an alliance of approximately 300 organizations, and by 2018, that number had grown to more than 500, including women’s groups, unions, cultural movements, peasants, educators, and human rights organizations. In 2015, a group of health professionals joined the Campaign, breaking with a long tradition of medical schools and associations opposing legal abortion.” (Anderson 2022). Additionally, the movement had a large *total number of participants*.

Reports from the three years leading up to 2020, noted that the movement grew from “500,000 to one million demonstrators in the capital during Women’s International Day on 8 March, without counting local events throughout the country.” (Anderson 2022). Regarding its *consistency*, the movement’s activity was regularly covered by the media for 21 years, “In the early years, left-wing newspaper Página 12 reported continuously on the Campaign... In 2018, mainstream newspapers such as Clarín began covering the movements’ activities for the first time going from an average of thirty-five articles a year between 1997 and 2017 to a high of 678 articles in 2018 alone.” (Anderson 2022). The amount of

new coverage over these 20 years is an indicator of the movement's consistency and adds to the overall understanding of its strength.

The impact on Argentine *public opinion* by their strong feminist social movement played a key role in increasing public awareness and making policymakers recognize the need for abortion reform. At the beginning of the movement, activists faced the daunting task of changing public opinion. Abortion was particularly taboo in Argentina because of the Catholic church and the influence of its doctrine on social norms and legal rules (Htun, 2003). The negative public opinion about abortion went beyond practicing Catholics and was common among most

social sectors (Anderson 2022). The Argentine pro-abortion movement employed human rights frames to influence public opinion on the issue.

They framed abortion rights as an issue of “public health and of social justice, defending at the same time internationally recognized reproductive rights.” (Sutton and Borland 2013).

Scholars agree that these frames employed by activists were successful in influencing public opinion over time (Anderson, 2022). A study published in 2020 reported that, according to the people interviewed in November 2020, 41 percent of respondents in Argentina strongly or somewhat agreed with abortion decriminalization (Statista 2024). In their study of the 2018 abortion

debate, Daby and Moseley confirm this trend and show how feminist mobilization was behind the increasing support of public opinion for the legalization of abortion (2021).

Therefore, it appears that the feminist social movement had a strong impact on the shift in public opinion in the five years leading up to the 2020 abortion law.

The history of feminist social movements in Chile is much less linear than that of its neighbor Argentina. Researchers point to a period of “silence” among Chile’s feminist movement in the 1990s, which was broken by the election of Michele Bachelet, Chile’s first female president, in 2006 (Alvarez and Navarrete, 2016).

This means for roughly 16 years the feminist movement in Chile was extremely inactive. This shows that the feminist movement in Chile is *less consistent* than the movement in Argentina, which has consistently demonstrated for over 20 years. In 2015, The Green Wave movement (Ni Una Más) in Argentina inspired a resurgence of feminist marches in Chile. This led President Michelle Bachelet, with the support of the legislature proposed a new abortion law that decriminalized abortion in three cases: rape, a risk to the mother's life, and disability in the year 2017. This overturned the dictatorship-era law that criminalized abortion in all cases but was not the full decriminalization protestors wanted.



Social movements continued their demonstrations in 2018, with over 40,000 women marching through the capital of Santiago. Protesters held up banners and chanted while wearing the green scarves as a nod to pro-abortion campaigners in neighboring Argentina (France-Presse 2018). After seven years of pro-abortion campaigning by the Green Wave in Chile, the movement suffered a serious blow when 62 percent of Chilean voters rejected a new draft of their constitution in 2022 that would have enshrined reproductive health and bodily autonomy as fundamental rights (McGowan 2023). Despite the setback, the pro-abortion movement continues in the following year in 2023, an estimated 400,000 women gathered on

International Women's Day in Santiago and other cities to demand safe, free, and legal abortion (McGowan 2023).

These statistics demonstrate evidence of a developing strong social movement.

The increase in the *number of participants*, despite the rejection of the law, points to the capacity for strength of the movement. Despite only being active for roughly seven years the pro-abortion movement in Chile has had a positive impact on *public opinion* of abortion rights. Chile faces the same permeation of religious values in society's perception of abortion as most other Latin American countries (Levy 2021).

The effects of social movements in combatting this can be seen in the improvement of public opinion on

abortion legality. According to Estudios Públicos (CEP), a Santiago-based think tank, support for abortion in specific cases increased from 35% in 1999 to 49% in 2023 (Bartlett 2023). These statistics indicate that the education and work done by feminist social movements in Chile have had a positive impact on public opinion. The jump in participants from 2018 to 2022 and the impact on public opinion demonstrates great promise for feminist social movements in Chile. However, given that their presence is relatively recent, and their largest demonstration just occurred within the last two years I am going to categorize this movement as a moderately strong social movement.

### ***Assessing the effect of political parties***

Now, we will analyze the effect of the majority political parties in the national legislature when abortion laws were being proposed. The role of political parties is arguably the most important political factor that can increase the likelihood that legislatures pass women-friendly policies. The literature suggests, “Which party is in government and how electorally secure that party is may affect the likelihood that parliament will produce women-friendly policies.” (Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007) In that study, the author used Scandinavian cases of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden and concluded that when women are in office and there is a secure, leftwing government, with strong support from

an active women's movement in each case, women's substantive representation was the result. Under these conditions, each nation introduced laws regarding contraception and abortion, parental leave policies, equal pay for equal work, and equal opportunities at work, among other women-friendly policies (Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007). Here I will assess the political environment of the national legislature in Argentina and Chile in the years 2020 and 2022 respectively.

### ***Argentina***

Argentina has a bicameral legislature composed of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. In the Senate, all 72 members are directly elected via closed-list proportional representation

vote from multi-seat constituencies. Within each of the 24 constituencies, two seats are given to the first-place party, and one seat is given to the second-place party. All members serve six-year terms, and one-third of the seats (24) are up for election every two years (IFES 2024). Therefore, to assess the political context of the Senate in 2020, I will look at what party won the most seats in 2015, 2017, and 2019 by using data published by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

### ***Argentine Senate***

In the 2015 election, the party Front for Victory (Frente para la Victoria) won 14 of the 24 seats. The Front for Victory Party was led by Christina Kirchner, former president

and notoriously progressive politician. Kirchner adhered to Peronist policies which included a penchant for economic protectionism (Bello 2022). Further, during the “Kirchner era” the government introduced a set of measures that “restricted foreign investors' access to the country and... re-nationalization of the oil and gas company YPF... and implemented industrial policies based on import-substitution.” (Bendini 2012). This demonstrates positive support for market regulations. Regarding social justice and state welfare initiatives, the Kirchner era brought legalized same-sex marriages, and child and pregnancy subsidies to help the poor through the crisis (Newbery 2015). Therefore, we can

infer that the Front for Victory party supported these policy interests. This means that the Front for Victory party scores three out of three points on the composite scale signifying a left-wing party.

In 2017, the Let's Change (Cambiemos) won 12 seats. The Let's Change party was led by Mauricio Macri. Macri was a member of the elite business class who defeated the Front for Victory party in 2015. During his presidency, Macri re-opened Argentina to the international market by lifting currency controls and transitioning towards a floating exchange-rate regime (Kovalski 2019). Additionally, his administration cut income, corporate, and export taxes. This illustrates a

negative opinion of market regulation.

On state welfare, the government led by

Let's Change went to great lengths to

stress its moderate stance on issues of

social policy and poverty. There

President Macri promised to maintain

popular programs undertaken by the

previous president, most notably the

Universal Child Allowance conditional

cash transfer. However, due to their

efforts in reducing inflation and

improving economic conditions, the

administration dismantled social policy

benefits “under the table” (Pribble 2019).

This leads me to characterize the

support of Let's Change for state

welfare as negative. Social justice

legislators for Marci's party did not

explicitly support the same-sex

marriage laws passed under Kirchner,

but there was no damage done to social

justice policies, and it does not appear to

have been a priority for the party

(Rogers 2015). This seems to be an

indifferent stance on social justice but

since it is not explicitly negative, I will

award one point. This makes the Let's

Change party led by Mauricio Macri

score one out of three points and makes

it a center-right party.

in 2019, Everyone's Front, which

is the same party as Front for Victory,

won 12 out of 24 seats (Bello 2022). The

party changed its name to realign itself

behind presidential candidate Alberto

Fernández in the 2019 presidential

election. In addition to Front for Victory

winning a majority of seats in the

election their presidential candidate Alberto Fernández also won the presidency with Christina Kirchner serving as vice president. The results of the presidential election and the Front for Everyone's 36% senate majority lead me to characterize the Senate as left-wing in 2020.

### ***Argentine Chamber of Deputies***

For the Chamber of Deputies, there are 257 members directly elected in multi-seat constituencies by proportional representation vote. Half of the membership is renewed every two years and members serve four-year terms. This makes the years 2017 and 2019 relevant to this study. In 2017, Let's Change (Cambiemos) won 61 of the 127 seats available. Based on the evidence

presented in the previous section Let's Change is a center-right party. In 2019, the left-wing party Everyone's Front (Frente de Todos) won 64 of the 130 seats available. Which I have demonstrated as a left-wing party in the previous section. Therefore, the Chamber of Deputies in 2020 also had a 36% left-wing majority.

### ***Chile***

Chile also has a bicameral legislature. Before 2021 the Senate only had 38 members and the Chamber of Deputies had 138 Members beginning in 2021, the Senate now consists of 50 seats and the Chamber of Deputies has 155 seats. Senators are directly elected in multi-seat constituencies by a simple majority vote to serve eight-year terms.

One-half of the membership is renewed every four years. To assess the political context of the Senate, we must look at the election results in 2017 and 2021.

### ***Chilean Chamber of Deputies***

For the Chamber of Deputies, every Deputy is directly elected to four-year terms in multi-seat constituencies by a simple majority vote. This means we only need to look at the results of the 2021 elections to assess the political context. In 2021, all 155 seats were at stake, and We Can Do More (Chile Podemos Más) won the majority with 53 seats. The We Can Do More party is led by José Antonio Kast a conservative catholic lawyer who founded Chile's republican party. The Republican Party, founded in 2019,

opposes equal marriage, adoption of minors by same-sex couples, abortion, sex education in schools, and an abstract set of ideas they call "gender ideology." (Montes 2023). Further in 2007, before becoming a party leader, he led an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the commercialization of the emergency contraceptive pill (Montes 2023). Kast is also a staunch defender of free-market principles, the Pinochet legacy, and a decreased welfare state. (Mohor 2021). This means the Let's Do More party is negative towards all left-wing policies and therefore scores zero out of three points on the scale. This indicates that the Chilean Congress has right-wing majority during the year 2022.

### ***Chilean Senate***

In 2017, the right-wing party Chile Let's Go (Chile Vamos) won 12 of the 19 seats at stake. In 2021, when the numbers changed, the right-wing party Chile We Can Do More (Chile Podemos Más) won 12 of the 27 seats available. Both parties are part of a three-party coalition including the Chilean republican party that supports the policies and leadership of José Antonio Kast. Therefore, the Senate also had a right-wing majority in the Chilean Senate in 2022.

### ***The Impact***

These statistics indicate the potential influence of political ideologies within the legislative bodies at the time of each country's abortion law decision. In the context of the multiple streams

framework, political context is an important aspect of the political stream.

The political stream highlights how political factors such as party politics, and the alignment of political actors can influence when and how policy reforms or changes occur. In these cases, we can see that the political and problem streams were aligning at the same time in Argentina but not in Chile. The feminist social movements in Chile were gaining momentum and beginning to gain enough influence to hopefully influence the problem stream in the coming years. While the politics stream is taking a drastic turn towards the far-right. This will make the alignment of problem and policy increasingly difficult for policy



entrepreneurs such as female legislators and feminist leaders. Going back to the study by Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers their study finds that left-wing parties, in general, are more likely than right-wing parties to support “women-friendly” policies such as liberalizing divorce, extending abortion rights, criminalizing violence against women, and providing women’s healthcare innovations (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers 2007). Further, Beckwith and Cowell characterize parliaments with “positive political contexts” for women as a congress comprised of fifteen percent or more left-wing representatives (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers 2007). At the time when Argentina passed its December 2020

law, the Senate had a 53% left-wing majority, and the Chamber of Deputies had a 49% left-wing majority. This is well above the necessary 15% proposed, therefore suggesting that conditions within the Argentine legislature were conducive to women-friendly policy outcomes. Unfortunately, for the 2022 abortion law in Chile, their Congress had a right-wing majority of 38%. While that is not most of the whole number of legislators due to party fragmentation, there are no other parties that outnumber the right-wing party in either body. Based on the outcome of the 2022 abortion law and the evidence proposed, there is strong evidence that conditions within the Chilean national

legislature were not conducive to women-friendly policy outcomes.

### **Results:**

Based on the evidence presented I have compiled the results into a Most Similar Systems Model. I begin by listing the similarities in cultural characteristics that are relevant to the issue. For example, both countries are predominantly Catholic which has been proven to affect abortion sentiment and policy. Catholicism and Hispanic heritage lead both countries to have similar cultural values. Each country's history of dictatorship and the recent transition to democracy is important to the understanding of the political context. One cannot argue that the differences in policy outcomes might be

attributed to cultural factors or democratic history because both cases are more or less the same. Next, I added the political factors that I have discussed here in this evidence section. Both countries have greater than or equal to 20 percent of women serving in their national legislature which is above the critical mass threshold of 15 percent. This indicates that each country has a significant representation of women in policymaking and therefore that cannot be attributed to the failed abortion policy in Chile. Based on the three factors proposed in methods, *the number of participants, consistency of activism, and influence over public policy* both countries have strong feminist social movements.

The variation in political conditions within the state legislature at the time of the abortion law decision between Argentina and Chile could have feasibly led to their different policy outcomes. Given the evidence presented, Argentina had a strong left-wing majority that presumably would have supported women-friendly policies and female legislators. In addition to that, there was a strong pro-abortion movement that had been pressuring the government for over 20 years and positively impacting public opinion. These factors represent a convergence of the problem and political streams, which allowed female legislators in Argentina to capitalize on the policy window created. Moreover,

one of the major policy goals of President Fernández was a legal abortion law and his fierce support of the bill makes a strong case for his involvement as a policy entrepreneur. The policy stream was likely impacted by the number of women in Congress. The Senate vote data from the 2018 and 2020 abortion bill votes highlights the significant role of women legislators in passing the 2020 abortion law. Additionally, we can see how female legislators changed their votes after experiencing increased pressure from social movements. In 2018, the abortion bill failed 38 to 31, with two abstentions. Fourteen women voted for it, 14 against, and two abstained. In 2020, the bill passed 38 to 29, with one abstention; 20

women voted in favor, 8 against. In 2018, women made up 41.6% of the Senate and cast 45% of the votes for the bill. By 2020, women comprised 38.8% of the Senate but accounted for 52.6% of the "yes" votes. The number of men supporting the bill remained steady (17 in 2018, 18 in 2020), while the number of women supporting it increased by six, including three who switched from "no" to "yes." Despite making up just over a third of the Senate, women cast more than half of the "yes" votes, and all senators who changed their vote to "yes" were women (Tallant 2021). The coupling of a left-wing majority, a strong social movement, increased female legislators, and the support of

the president led to the legalization of abortion in Argentina.

In Chile, female legislators have been advocating for legalized abortion alongside pro-abortion activists. However, in 2022 when the country was given the chance to enshrine abortion rights in the national constitution, 61.9 percent of voters rejected the new constitution (McGowan 2022). Now the future of abortion legislation is back in the hands of the national Congress, where political parties are guiding the process, and the result is expected to be more moderate, meaning abortion rights could be left off the table (McGowan 2023). This outcome shows how the differing political factors in Argentina and Chile played a crucial

role in shaping their respective abortion policies. Chile is still experiencing more challenging political conditions for abortion advocacy. Despite efforts by female legislators and pro-abortion movements, the rejection of the new constitution in 2022, and a right-wing majority in Congress indicates that the political landscape remains a challenge for progressive abortion policies.

### ***Accessibility of Abortion Services***

Argentina's abortion law is the result of political factors converging to combat institutional challenges to women-friendly policies. The law passed in December 2020 and enacted as of January 2021 allows for legal, safe, and free abortion up to the fourteenth week of pregnancy. After fourteen

weeks, abortion is allowed if there are serious health risks to the woman or fetus, or if the fetus has a condition that is incompatible with life outside the womb. I consider this law widely accessible because the procedure is provided at public health centers without charge.

The current abortion law in Chile enacted in 2017 allows abortion under limited circumstances such as the risk to the woman's life, an unviable fetus, or rape. However, abortion is still highly regulated and restricted in Chile, and the law does not provide for broader access to abortion on demand. The government does not compile any official numbers on abortion studies approximate range from 60,000 to

200,000 clandestine abortions per year, in a country with a population of 17 million (). The current law requires the approval of a doctor to confirm that the legal requirements are met for life-health risks and fetal anomaly, and in the case of rape, a psycho-social team confirms the pregnancy gestational age and coherence of the statement regarding the rape. As part of the regulations attached to the law, public health services must guarantee access to legal terminations of pregnancy through 69 specialized high-risk obstetric units. Additionally, a study on the implementation of the law reported, “According to projections by the Ministry of Health, there should be 2,500–3,000 legal abortions per year, the

majority (67%) of which are expected to be requested on the rape ground. The actual numbers reveal another story. For the period September 2017– December 2018, the Ministry of Health reported 769 cases in which an abortion was permitted: 343 on the life ground, 311 on the fatal fetal anomaly ground, and 115 on the rape ground (in other words, only 15% of the total).” (Maira, Casas, and Vivaldi 2019). Even though the law technically allows for abortion under some circumstances, the fact a country of 17 million people only 769 pregnancies were non-viable, or instances of rape illustrate to me that legal abortion procedures are not being done even to a degree that they would be considered partially available.

Therefore, based on this data, the Chilean abortion law still constitutes widely unavailable services.

**Most Similiar Systems Table: Argentina and Chile**

Category	Argentina	Chile
Religion	✓	✓
Cultural Values	✓	✓
History of Dictatorship	✓	✓
Recently Consolidated Democracy	✓	✓
≥20 percent of Women in National Legislature	✓	✓
Strong Feminist Social Movement	✓	✗
Left-Wing Majority	✓	✗
Widely Accessible Abortion Services	✓	✗

## II. Conclusion

The political factors contributing to women-friendly policies need to be given more attention. Since increasing female leadership there has been an unrealistic expectation put on these

women to dismantle deeply entrenched male dominance in politics. A large part of the “disappointing” nature of women-friendly policies is because of these impossible standards. Instead, we should acknowledge the

institutionalized challenges women face that make their jobs significantly harder than their male counterparts and we should focus on supporting women in politics rather than making conclusions about their effectiveness. Each of the “streams” I have mentioned is important in its own right but as this project has demonstrated they are most effective when working together. Every actor in society has the power to influence meaningful change as the theory presents. Those who influence the problem stream such as civilians and activists are just as important as those in the politics stream. The theory makes a strong case for the effectiveness of cooperation among all sectors of society. This is particularly important in our

world which becomes increasingly fragmented and that is all too quick to resort to conflict rather than compromise.

In the context of women’s issues, a focus on these political factors that help mitigate the effects of institutionalized obstacles would be exponentially beneficial. Instead of trying to answer, “What can female legislators do better?” or “What are they doing wrong?” We should recognize the inherent disadvantages women face in political spaces. Therefore, we should be trying to identify what factors allow them to represent women’s interests successfully. Then, those who are trying to pass women-friendly policies could take advantage of specific political



factors that have been proven to increase the likelihood of successful policy outcomes. To achieve this, more comparative studies should be done on these issues because some countries have begun to realize this in their policy-making processes. In the case of Argentina, for example, we see how social movements that put consistent pressure on politicians can make a significant impact on the policy process. More cases like Argentina should be studied in a comparative context to further develop these specific aspects that make a big impact. Additionally, more research on Latin America should be done on the topic of female representation and policy outcomes. Latin America is full of interesting and

diverse countries that could be used for this type of research and are seriously understudied in this area. In this vein, I want to propose that the theories addressing women's representation and their impact on policy be revisited. Scholars have spent much time picking apart critical mass, but no one has proposed a new theory that might better close some of the gaps. Of course, some theories can be applied to this research such as MSF, but I believe that the field of gender and politics needs a theory of its own. Possibly, part of the assumptions should be an emphasis on the political factors discussed in this project.

The study of women-friendly policies and the factors that drive their

implementation is crucial work.

Gendered issues affect more than half of the world's population, yet they are often overlooked or deprioritized in policymaking. For women to continue making strides in politics, it is essential to ensure our interests are prioritized on the political agenda. As the world gradually recognizes the untapped potential of women in political spaces, we must learn to maximize the influence we have. As I've discussed in this project, external political factors emphasize the importance of female civilians supporting their female legislators. In specific there was an

emphasis on the importance of the political ideology of lawmakers. This signals that one of the simplest ways that change can be made in a democracy is by electing leaders who support women's issues. This demonstrates that all women have a role to play in advancing women-friendly policies. To achieve the changes we wish to see in the world, we must commit to supporting and empowering women at all levels of politics.

## References

- Alvarez, S. L., & Navarrete, A. B. (2019, October 21). *Cronología del Movimiento Feminista en Chile 2006-2016*. *Revista Estudios Feministas*. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1806-9584-2019v27n354709>
- Gobierno de Chile. (2023). *Diario Oficial pública Plan Nacional de Búsqueda, tras toma de razón de la Contraloría General de la República*. Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos. <https://www.minjusticia.gob.cl/ministro-luis-cordero-visita-el-centro-de-documentacion-y-archivo-de-la-vicaria-de-la-solidaridad-en-el-marco-del-plan-nacional-de-busqueda/>
- Barnes, T. D., & Córdova, A. (2016). Making Space for Women: Explaining Citizen Support for Legislative Gender Quotas in Latin America. *The Journal of Politics*, 78(3), 670–686. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26550752>
- Beckwith, K., & Cowell-Meyers, K. (2007). Sheer Numbers: Critical Representation Thresholds and Women's Political Representation. *Perspectives on Politics*, 5(3), 553–565. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20446503>
- Bonder, G., & Nari, M. (1990, September 10). *The 30 percent - quota law*. un.org. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/feature/postconflict/argentina.pdf>
- Carnes, N., & Lupu, N. (2015). Rethinking the Comparative Perspective on Class and Representation: Evidence from Latin America. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(1), 1–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24363593>
- Childs, S and Krook, M 2006 "Should Feminists Give Up on Critical Mass? A Contingent Yes." *Politics and Gender* 2 (4): 522-530.
- Childs, S and Krook, M 2008 "Critical Mass Theory and Women's Political Representation." *Political Studies* 56 (3): 725-736.

CRS Reports. 2024 “*Chile: An overview*” - *CRS reports - congress.gov*.

Congressional Research Service.

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10880>

CRS Reports. 2024 “*Argentina: An overview*” - *CRS reports - congress.gov*.

Congressional Research Service.

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10932>

Daby, M., & Moseley, M. W. (2022). Feminist Mobilization and the Abortion Debate in Latin America: Lessons from Argentina. *Politics & Gender*, 18(2), 359–393.

doi:10.1017/S1743923X20000197

Dides, C. (2021, January 21). *One step beyond-how victory was won in Chile*. Catholics for Choice.

<https://www.catholicsforchoice.org/resource-library/one-step-beyond-how-victory-was-won-in-chile/>

Dodson, Debra L. 2006. *The Impact of Women in Congress*. Oxford: Oxford University

Press. Fernández Anderson, C. (2020b). *Fighting for abortion rights in Latin America: Social Movements, state allies and institutions*. Routledge.

Flores, R. (2024, April 3). *Legislative Power: Percentage of women in the National Legislative Body (SDG indicator 5.5.1a)*. Gender Equality Observatory.

<https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/legislative-power-percentage-women-national-legislative-body-sdg-indicator-551a>

Gobierno de Chile. (2023). *Diario Oficial pública Plan Nacional de Búsqueda, tras toma de razón de la Contraloría General de la República*. Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos.

<https://www.minjusticia.gob.cl/ministro-luis-cordero-visita-el-centro-de-documentacion-y-archivo-de-la-vicaria-de-la-solidaridad-en-el-marco-del-plan-nacional-de-busqueda/>

Franceschet, S. (2010). Explaining Domestic Violence Policy Outcomes in Chile and Argentina. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 52(3), 1–29.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40925584>

- France-Presse, A. (2018). *Thousands March in Chile demanding abortion law overhaul*. Voice of America.  
<https://www.voanews.com/a/thousands-march-in-chile-demanding-abortion-law-overhaul/4501079.html>
- Gabel, M. J., & Huber, J. D. (2000). Putting Parties in Their Place: Inferring Party Left-Right Ideological Positions from Party Manifestos Data. *American Journal of Political Science*, 44(1), 94–103. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2669295>
- Grey, Sandra. (2006). Numbers and Beyond: The Relevance of Critical Mass in Gender Research. *Politics & Gender*. 2. 492 - 502. 10.1017/S1743923X06221147.
- Hawkesworth, M. (1994). Policy Studies within a Feminist Frame. *Policy Sciences*, 27(2/3), 97–118. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4532310>
- Hawkesworth, M. (2012). *Political Worlds of Women: Activism, Advocacy, and Governance in the Twenty-First Century*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Htun, M., & Weldon, S. L. (2010). When Do Governments Promote Women's Rights? A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Sex Equality Policy. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(1), 207–216. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25698527>
- Held, D., Abdul Haris, & Puji Wahono. (2007). *Models of democracy*. Akbar Tandjung Institute.
- IFES Election Guide: Elections: Argentina Senate 2021*. IFES Election Guide | Elections: Argentina Senate 2021. (n.d.). <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3593/>
- IFES Election Guide: Elections: Chile Senate 2000*. IFES Election Guide | Elections: Chile Senate 2000. (n.d.). <https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/44/>
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss 1977 "Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women." *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (5): 965-990.

- Kelly, D. (2004). Carl Schmitt's Political Theory of Representation. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65(1), 113–134. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3654285>
- Krook, M. L. (2010). Studying Political Representation: A Comparative-Gendered Approach. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(1), 233–240. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25698530>
- Larsson, N. (2020, September 29). *Feminist history and Chile's Social Uprising*. Toward Freedom. <https://towardfreedom.org/story/feminist-history-and-chiles-social-uprising/>
- Levy, E. (2021). *A surprising trend: How do catholicism and abortion laws intersect in Latin America?* International Law and Policy Brief. <https://studentbriefs.law.gwu.edu/ilpb/2021/05/31/a-surprising-trend-how-do-catholicism-and-abortion-laws-intersect-in-latin-america/>
- Lovenduski, J. (2005). Introduction: state feminism and the political representation of women. In J. Lovenduski (Ed.), *State Feminism and Political Representation* (pp. 1–19). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maira, G., Casas, L., & Vivaldi, L. (2019). Abortion in Chile: The Long Road to Legalization and its Slow Implementation. *Health and human rights*, 21(2), 121–131.
- Mohor, D. (2021, November 20). *The far-right presidential candidate tempting voters from Chile's left and center*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/20/americas/chile-election-kast-boric-intl-latam/index.html>
- Montes, R. (2023, May 14). *José Antonio Kast, the far-right Catholic who is winning over Chile*. EL PAÍS English. <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-05-14/jose-antonio-kast-the-far-right-catholic-who-seduces-chile.html>
- Ostrowski, M. S. (2023). The ideological morphology of left–centre–right. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 28(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2022.2163770>

- Peschard, J. (2002). *The Quota System in Latin America: General overview*. International IDEA.  
<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/chapters/women-inparliament/mujeres-en-el-parlamento-mas-alla-de-los-numeros-2002-EN-case-study-latin-america.pdf>
- Piscopo, J. M. (2014). FEMALE LEADERSHIP AND SEXUAL HEALTH POLICY IN ARGENTINA. *Latin American Research Review*, 49(1), 104–127.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43670155>
- Piscopo, J. M. (2015). States as Gender Equality Activists: The Evolution of Quota Laws in Latin America. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 57(3), 27–49.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24765974>
- Piscopo, J. M. (2020) When do quotas in politics work? Latin America offers lessons. *Americas Quarterly*.  
<https://americasquarterly.org/article/when-do-quotas-in-politics-work-latin-america-offers-lessons/>
- Politi, D., & Londoño, E. (2020, December 30). *Argentina legalizes abortion, a milestone in a Conservative region*. The New York Times.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/30/world/americas/argentina-legalizes-abortion.html#:~:text=Argentina's%20president%2C%20Alberto%20Fernández%2C%20has,grass%2Droots%20women's%20rights%20advocates.>
- Pollmann, L. A. (2017). Women in Government: The Successes of Quota Laws. In *Women's Leadership in Latin America: THE KEY TO GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT* (pp. 6–7). Atlantic Council.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03714.7>
- Kelly, D. (2004). Carl Schmitt's Political Theory of Representation. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65(1), 113–134. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3654285>

- Richardson, E., & Birn, A.-E. (2011). Sexual and reproductive health and rights in Latin America: an analysis of trends, commitments and achievements. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 19(38), 183–196. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41409191>
- Sanchez, O. (2008). Transformation and Decay: The De-Institutionalisation of Party Systems in South America. *Third World Quarterly*, 29(2), 315–337. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20455042>
- Sanjurjo, D. (2020). Taking the multiple streams framework for a walk in Latin America. *Policy Sciences: Integrating Knowledge and Practice to Advance Human Dignity*, 53(1), 205–221. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-020-09376-1>
- SCHWINDT-BAYER, L. A. (2009). Making Quotas Work: The Effect of Gender Quota Laws On the Election of Women. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 34(1), 5–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20680225>
- Walsh, S. (2020). Quota or No Quota: The Effect of Gender Quotas on Women’s Ability to Provide Substantive Representation. *Political Science*. Skidmore College [https://creativematter.skidmore.edu/poli\\_sci\\_stu\\_schol/1](https://creativematter.skidmore.edu/poli_sci_stu_schol/1)
- Watson, S. (1990). 'The state of play: an introduction' in S Watson (ed) *Playing the State*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Xydias, C. V. (2007). Inviting More Women to the Party: Gender Quotas and Women’s Substantive Representation in Germany. *International Journal of Sociology*, 37(4), 52–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20628311>
- Zetterberg, P. (2009). Do Gender Quotas Foster Women’s Political Engagement? Lessons from Latin America. *Political Research Quarterly*, 62(4), 715–730. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25594442> \
- Zissis, C., Harrison, C., Orbach, J., & Vilcarino, J. (2023, November 21). *Explainer: Abortion rights in Latin America*. AS/COA.





CREMAILLIERE 19

Photo by Teresa Lowry '25  
France