

# Do Women Legislators Have Different Policy Priorities than Their Male Colleagues? A Critical Case Test

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper proposes that findings in existing literature concerning the policy priorities of women legislators in Nordic countries, the United States, and Argentina may also be generalized to less developed countries where support for women in politics is minimal. Past studies in countries where women have achieved comparatively high levels of representation report that women legislators show a higher legislative priority on issues concerning women's rights and children and families. Using data on bill initiation, this paper analyzes gender differences in the Honduran Congress from the 1990-93 and 1994-97 terms. Findings are similar to previous studies in that women appear to place a higher priority on women's rights issues; however, we find that women do not have a higher priority than men on children's and family issues. Examination of bill debate shows that women are more frequent participants in debates of bills involving women's rights and children's and family issues than of bills concerning issues that have traditionally concerned men. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

Research on women and politics has explored whether women in elective office have a different policy agenda than men. Part of the rea-

son for this work has been to test the validity of claims that if representation of women in legislatures increases, the content of legislation will change, becoming more representative of women's interests and of policy areas which are of greatest concern to women (Sinkkonen and Haavio-Mannila 1981; Skjeie 1991). Another question has been whether women who hold only a small minority status in a legislature are able to substantively represent women's interests, or if they are just able to serve as descriptive representatives of women (Thomas 1991).

Extensive research explores the policy agendas of female politicians in the U.S. and Scandinavian national legislatures. These are logical choices for study given the comparatively high percentage of women elected to these legislatures, and thus their potential to work as full members of the legislature, rather than just as "token" representatives of women (Dodson and Carroll 1991; Kanter 1977; Skjeie 1991; Thomas 1994). In these cases, female elected officials can be expected to have the seniority and group influence to pursue a "female" legislative agenda if they so choose, and research has shown that women in these legislatures do pursue a different legislative agenda than their male colleagues (Saint-Germain 1989; Sinkkonen and Haavio-Mannila 1981).

Jones has extended this research beyond advanced industrial democracies to the case of Argentina (1997). This was a logical next step because in 1991 Argentina passed the "Ley de Cupos," requiring that women receive at least 30% of the electable positions on party lists. This increased representation of women in the Chamber of Deputies from 5% to 21%, and also showed the importance of the women's movement in Argentine politics (Jones 1996). In addition, Argentina is a "wealthy" developing country (what the World Bank calls an "upper middle income economy"), with a literacy rate of 97%, GNP/capita of \$7,550 (in 1999), is 90% urban, and has a "high" Human Development Index score of 0.842, ranking Argentina 34th in the world in 1999. Thus, while Argentina is a different type of case than the U.S. or Scandinavian countries, it is not nearly as different as most developing countries. And, as in the U.S. and Scandinavian research, Jones found that women deputies place greater emphasis on women's rights and on issues related to home, children, and family, than do men (1997).

The extent of the generalizability of this finding is still unknown, however, since the legislative patterns of women have not been explored outside of auspicious circumstances. Aside from Jones's work on Argentina, all study has been of countries (or state governments)

with a long history of democracy, a high level of economic development, education, and urbanization, and high scores on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) (1997).<sup>1</sup> Also, as shown previously, in the context of the developing world, Argentina has high scores on development indicators, even though Argentina's experience with democracy is limited (the current regime was established in 1983 and prior to that time Argentine politics was characterized by regime instability and frequent military intervention in politics). In addition, the passage of the "Ley de Cupos" shows that women are a potent political force in Argentina, and that political parties and male politicians have recognized the value of courting the female vote.<sup>2</sup>

To explore whether women legislate differently than men even under *inauspicious* circumstances, we examine the legislative agendas of members of the Honduran Congress. Honduras is an inauspicious setting for women politicians to pursue a "women's agenda" for several reasons. Women have yet to win 10% of the seats in the Congress, and thus they may still be viewed as "token" representatives. In the 1990-93 Congress, 9.5% of the deputies were women, while the percentage of women went down to 7.0% in the 1994-97 Congress.<sup>3</sup> Honduras has one of the least developed economies in the Western Hemisphere, still emphasizing primary products exports and maquila-based industry.<sup>4</sup> Only 75% of the population is literate, only 53% is urban, and Honduras is the second poorest country in the western hemisphere (after Haiti). GNP/capita in 1999 was \$770 and Honduras has a Human Development Index of 0.634 (U.N. Human Development Report category of medium), ranking it 113th in the world. The culture is also traditional and "machista," making the job of women in politics very difficult.<sup>5</sup> As one female deputy explained, women have to work "five times as hard as men just to be seen at the window" (anonymous interview with deputy from the Liberal Party, July 28, 1997).<sup>6</sup> Neither the national electoral law nor party statutes require that women receive a specific percentage of seats on electoral lists.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Honduras is not known for a strong feminist movement and women are not strongly organized, especially compared to neighboring Central American countries. Finally, the current democratic regime was established in 1982, before which Honduras had a history of political instability, including military coups, short semi-democratic periods, and a personalist dictatorship from 1932-49. Thus, on many levels Honduras is a "least likely case" for female elected officials to be able to pursue a women's agenda in government.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Women are expected to pursue a different legislative agenda than men for several reasons. First, gender influences psychosocial development, meaning that women and men have different life experiences, which produces a gendered value system (Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982; Ruddick 1989; Skjeie 1991; Tamerius 1995). We would expect this developmental influence to extend to other countries, beyond the U.S. and Scandinavia, and particularly into the third world where traditional role models and expectations are still very strong.

Other reasons why women have been expected to legislate differently than men may not translate to a different context. For example, studies of women in U.S. state and national legislatures have found women to be more liberal than men (Clark 1998; Dodson and Carroll 1991; Welch 1985).<sup>8</sup> Studies of U.S. state legislatures have also found that female members are more likely than men to see themselves as representatives of women (Dodson et al. 1995; Reingold 1992; Thomas 1994).<sup>9</sup> The women's movement has also been a major force in U.S. politics for several decades, which is expected to impart "to women (even those who explicitly reject the feminist label) the sense that their interests are not identical to those of men in all instances" (Jones 1997, 614; see also Carroll and Dodson 1991; Tolleson-Rinehart 1992).

These gender differences in socialization and life experiences are expected to shape the policy priorities that women elected officials bring with them to office. Women are expected to be more concerned than men with women's rights, needs that affect children and families, and also related areas of concern, such as education, health care, social welfare, and the environment (Saint-Germain 1989; Skjeie 1991; Thomas and Welch 1991). Conversely, women are expected to be less concerned with legislative areas that focus on topics related to traditional areas of interest to men, such as business and defense/foreign affairs. Surveys of members of U.S. state legislatures asking about their policy priorities and the legislation which they have sponsored and debated have found women members to be significantly more likely to offer responses concerning women, children, and families than their male colleagues (Considine and Deutchman 1994; Dodson and Carroll 1991; Saint-Germain 1989; Thomas 1991, 1994; Thomas and Welch 1991). Studies of bill initiation have also found that women initiate more bills targeting women's rights and children and family concerns (Saint-Germain 1989 [Arizona state legislature]; Jones 1997 [Argentine and U.S. Congresses]), and that women deputies initiate more bills related

to women's issues, social, cultural, and educational policies, while men are more concerned with such topics as economics and energy policy (Sinkkonen and Haavio-Mannila 1981 [Finland's Diet]). It is interesting to note that in a study of the Arizona state legislature, Saint-Germain found that when women were only present in small numbers in the legislature, they were no more likely than men to initiate bills targeting traditional women's issues (1989). However, once women won more than 15% of the seats in the legislature, a gap appeared, and women were more likely than men to initiate such bills.

The literature also suggests that a "critical mass" of women in the legislature is helpful to women elected officials who want to pursue a women's political agenda (Saint-Germain 1989; Thomas 1991, 1994; Vega and Firestone 1995). Based on findings in sociology, female membership below 15% of a legislative body is expected to leave women members relegated to "token" status. The problem for token women is that they may not feel that they have enough support to rock the boat and bring up topics of interest to women, because such topics may be criticized or ignored by the male super-majority. According to Kanter, there are two ways women respond to their minority situation (1977). The most common response is to limit their visibility and avoid attracting attention. The other possibility is over-achievement. Studies of women in legislatures have thus focused on cases where women had achieved representation that exceeded the token level.<sup>10</sup> However, a small piece of historical evidence makes it seem possible that women legislators, even when only a small minority faction of the Congress, can have an impact. Thomas mentions that in 1895 three women were elected to the Colorado state legislature and that they "made a priority of enacting legislation related to women, children, and families" (1998, 2). Still, in her study of whether women legislators see themselves as representing women, Reingold writes that women in a token position "may try to cover up or distance themselves from attributes and activities associated with femininity or feminism—anything that might further accentuate gender differences or create conflict and controversy" (1992, 511).

Based on this body of literature, two hypotheses underpin this study to explore whether women deputies legislate differently than men, even under inauspicious conditions. First, if the findings in the literature are broadly generalizable, then we expect:

- H1: Women deputies place a significantly higher priority on legislating for women's rights and the needs of children and families than do male deputies.

However, we do not have such strong expectations concerning other policy areas that are often considered to be of special interest to women (e.g., education, health, social welfare, environmental policy). In the context of a poor developing country, these issue areas have direct links to economic development and business policy, which are traditionally thought of as male policy domains. Thus:

- H2: Differences between women and men deputies in other policy areas of traditional interest to women, such as education, health care, and the environment, will be less pronounced.

### ***DATA AND METHODS***

Since Jones made the first extension of this literature into the developing world, we follow his methodology to maximize the ability to compare our findings with his for Argentina (1997). Thus, we conduct a study of legislator policy priorities by analyzing the bill initiation records of members of the Honduran Congress.

#### ***The Honduran Congress***

Honduras has a unicameral legislature with 128 members (*propietarios*) and 128 substitutes (*suplentes*). Deputies are all elected at the same time for a four-year term by proportional representation elections in which parties present closed-lists for each of the country's 18 departments.<sup>11</sup> Until 1997, the Congress was elected in "fused elections" with the president, as voters only cast one vote for both offices.<sup>12</sup> The Liberal (PLH) and National (PNH) parties have dominated Honduran politics since the beginning of the twentieth century, though since the 1980s there are a few small parties that participate in elections and win a few seats in the Congress. While neither major party is ideologically based, both can be characterized as center-right on the political spectrum, emphasizing personalities and patronage politics, rather than distinct policy agendas in their campaigns (McDonald and Ruhl 1989; Taylor 1996).

Individual deputies can initiate bills, and the executive branch, the Supreme Court, and the National Elections Tribunal also have bill initi-

ation power. The executive branch typically initiates 55-65% of the bills, and deputies 30-42% (Taylor-Robinson and Diaz 1999).<sup>13</sup> Bills initiated by the executive branch have a greater probability of passage (typically 66-81% are passed), while 20-53% of bills initiated by deputies become law. There is also a great difference between deputies from the governing party and opposition, as deputies from the governing party tend to initiate more bills, and their bills have a better chance of becoming law. *Suplentes* can initiate bills, and several do, but they cannot vote in the Congress or take part in debates unless they have been called to fill in for an absent deputy. Interestingly, there is a sizable minority of deputies who do not initiate any bills during their term (30.5% of deputies in the 1990-93 Congress, and 40.6% of deputies in the 1994-97 Congress). The average number of bills initiated by deputies was 3.3 in the 1990-93 Congress and 4.1 in the 1994-97 Congress, with a high of 37 during the 1990-93 term and 91 during the 1994-97 term.<sup>14</sup>

### **Data**

We compare the legislative agendas of female and male deputies in the 1990-93 and 1994-97 Congresses. While Jones examined one year in the lower house of the Argentine Congress and in the U.S. House of Representatives, we decided that, given the small percentage of women in the Honduran Congress and the small number of bills initiated on average by Honduran deputies, it would be better to examine a longer time period to maximize the chance that female deputies had initiated legislation (1997). We include in our analysis all *propietarios* and also the *suplentes* who initiated bills. Since most *suplentes* rarely take part in Congressional sessions and do not initiate legislation, it seemed inappropriate to include all *suplentes* in our analysis, as it would unduly dilute the findings. However, some *suplentes*, both male and female, are as active in legislating as *propietarios*. It seemed equally inappropriate to exclude those *suplentes* from the analysis, as they have taken the initiative to take part in the legislative process, even when such activity is not expected of them. Thus, our dataset includes all *propietarios*, whether or not they initiated any legislation, and all *suplentes* who initiated at least one bill, with the result that there are 146 deputies from the 1990-93 Congress and 150 deputies from the 1994-97 Congress in the analysis.<sup>15</sup> These data were obtained from the archive of the Honduran Congress, which maintains records of all bills proposed, their committee assignments, and the bill's fate (i.e., passage into law, never reported out of

committee), thus we are confident that our analysis includes all bills initiated by deputies during these two Congressional terms.

### *Variables*

Our method of coding bills replicates that used by Jones (1997). First, all bills initiated by deputies were coded for whether they were “policy” or “non-policy bills.” Jones’s intent with this division was to remove “certain types of microlevel bills (e.g., commemorative acts, private relief)” from the analysis, as such bills do not have a general policy impact, but rather benefit an individual, are intended to deliver pork to a community or group, or are symbolic (further information about coding is provided in the Appendix) (1997, 617). Non-policy bills were coded 0, and all other bills were coded 1.

Next, all bills were coded based on policy theme. Jones employed seven thematic areas taken from the literature on women in politics and from areas of women’s interest as developed in the literature studying the U.S. and Scandinavian cases (1997).<sup>16</sup> These thematic areas are women’s rights, children and family, health care/public health, education, welfare/social security, and environment. The seventh category included all other bills. To this coding scheme we added human rights, which we thought might also be of special interest to Latin American women, given the area’s history of human rights violations. While all people are undeniably concerned about human rights and physical safety, women’s groups have been very vocal in Latin America in defense of human rights and putting pressure on governments to discover the fates of disappeared people (rules used for thematic coding are presented in the Appendix).

Given the token level of women’s membership in the Honduran Congress, we might expect that women deputies focus their attention on non-controversial “honorary” bills rather than building a substantive legislative agenda. In a study of legislation over an 18-year period in the Arizona state legislature, Saint-Germain found that as the percentage of women in the legislature increased over time, women “decreased their concentration on honorary proposals” (1989, 965). Saint-Germain coded bills as “honorary” if their purpose was “completely honorary in nature, for example, marking the death of a former legislator,” or creating a commemorative coin or stamp, or a day to commemorate a group or individual (1989, 959). Honorary bills were coded 1, and all others 0 (rules used for coding bills as honorary are presented in the Appendix).



Likewise, due to their token level of representation in the Congress, which might generate a desire not to draw attention to themselves, women might initiate local pork barrel projects or particularistic service bills targeted at individuals (Kanter 1977). Local pork bills were coded 1, and all others 0, and particularistic service bills were coded 1, and all others 0 (rules used in coding bills as local pork or particularistic service-oriented are presented in the Appendix).

Both authors independently coded all the bills as policy/non-policy, for thematic area, and whether they were honorary, local pork barrel, or particularistic service-oriented. We then discussed the cases where our coding differed to refine coding rules to guarantee that they were systematic. Each policy area serves as a separate dependent variable in the analysis. In addition, again to replicate the analysis conducted by Jones, a combined policy area category of women's rights and children and families is analyzed, as Jones found that often bills appeared to fit into both of these categories (1997).

The independent variables in our model also follow Jones (1997). The primary explanatory variable of interest is gender, coded 1 for women deputies, and 0 for men. Two control variables are also included. Deputy tenure is a measure of experience in the Congress, and is a count of the number of years a deputy served in the Congress before the start of the term analyzed in the model.<sup>17</sup> Deputy party is included as a binary variable indicating whether the deputy is from the governing party or in the opposition. Jones included two party variables in his study of Argentina, one for each of the major parties. This was feasible statistically in Argentina because a significant minority of deputies are elected from small parties. Controlling for membership in the two major parties was also theoretically interesting because of the historic role of the Peronists (*Partido Justicialista*) in securing rights for women. However, in Honduras there are methodological problems with including variables for each of the major parties, as the PLH and PNH together held 126 of the 128 seats in both of the Congresses under study. In addition, both major Honduran parties are quite conservative, and neither has women's rights issues as part of its platform. Thus, we instead control for whether a deputy is from the governing party, coded 1, or the opposition, coded 0. Party could influence a deputy's legislative agenda because opposition deputies tend to have much less success getting their legislation passed, and thus tend to initiate fewer bills than deputies from the governing party (Taylor-Robinson 2001). Jones also controlled for deputy age in his model. We were unable to include this variable, as there is no central source of biographical information for

members of the Honduran Congress.<sup>18</sup> Table 1 presents the partisan, gender, and seniority composition of both Congresses.

### *Analysis*

Table 2 lists the aggregate presentation of “policy” bills in the thematic areas of women’s rights and in the other thematic areas. These data support the premise that female deputies place a higher degree of priority on the thematic area of women’s rights, but not children and

TABLE 1. Partisan, Gender, and Seniority Composition of the 1990-93 and 1994-97 Terms of the Honduran Congress

| <b>1990-93 Term:</b> | <b>Political Party</b>         | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
|                      | Liberal                        | 7            | 57         | 64           |
|                      | average tenure†                | 0            | 1.19       | 1.06         |
|                      | suplentes                      | 3            | 10         | 13           |
|                      | National*                      | 9            | 71         | 80           |
|                      | average tenure                 | 1.33         | 1.07       | 1.10         |
|                      | suplentes                      | 2            | 12         | 14           |
|                      | Innovation &<br>National Unity | 0            | 2          | 2            |
|                      | average tenure                 | 0            | 0          | 0            |
|                      | suplentes                      | 0            | 0          | 0            |
| <b>1994-97 Term:</b> | <b>Political Party</b>         | <b>Women</b> | <b>Men</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|                      | Liberal*                       | 5            | 77         | 82           |
|                      | average tenure                 | 0            | 1.3        | 1.22         |
|                      | suplentes                      | 1            | 10         | 11           |
|                      | National                       | 7            | 58         | 65           |
|                      | average tenure                 | 2.29         | 1.66       | 1.72         |
|                      | suplentes                      | 2            | 8          | 10           |
|                      | Innovation &<br>National Unity | 0            | 3          | 3            |
|                      | average tenure                 | 0            | 5.33       | 5.33         |
|                      | suplentes                      | 0            | 1          | 1            |

Note: Numbers total to more than 128 deputies in each Congress because *suplentes* who initiated bills are included in the analysis.

\* Indicates the governing party.

† Tenure is the number of years a deputy served as a *propietario* before this Congress.

TABLE 2. Aggregate Presentation of "Policy" Bills by Thematic Area in the Honduran Congress

|                         | Number of<br>Women's<br>Rights<br>Bills | Number of<br>Children &<br>Fam. Bills | Number of<br>Health Care/<br>Pub. Health Bills | Number of<br>Educ. Bills | Number of<br>Welfare/<br>Social<br>Sec. Bills | Number of<br>Environ. Bills | Number of<br>Human<br>Rights Bills | Number of<br>Bills in<br>Other Areas |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>BILL SPONSOR:</b>    |   |                                       |  |                          |   |                             |                                    |                                      |
| <i>1990-93 Congress</i> |   |                                       |  |                          |   |                             |                                    |                                      |
| Woman Deputy (n = 16)   | 3                                       | 1                                     | 1  | 4                        | 0   | 0                           | 0                                  | 12                                   |
| Male Deputy (n = 130)   | 3                                       | 14                                    | 16   | 15                       | 33  | 10                          | 3                                  | 213                                  |
| Total by Deputies       | 6                                       | 15                                    | 17   | 19                       | 33  | 10                          | 3                                  | 225                                  |
| Executive Branch        | 0                                       | 6                                     | 12   | 15                       | 10  | 12                          | 3                                  | 159                                  |
| <i>1994-97 Congress</i> |   |                                       |  |                          |   |                             |                                    |                                      |
| Woman Deputy (n = 12)   | 4                                       | 1                                     | 2  | 0                        | 0   | 0                           | 0                                  | 7                                    |
| Male Deputy (n = 138)   | 0                                       | 18                                    | 8  | 28                       | 32  | 17                          | 3                                  | 262                                  |
| Total by Deputies       | 4                                       | 19                                    | 10   | 28                       | 32  | 17                          | 3                                  | 269                                  |
| Executive Branch        | 2                                       | 7                                     | 14   | 13                       | 4   | 9                           | 2                                  | 141                                  |

Note: The total number of bills initiated by deputies coded one on the Policy versus Nonpolicy variable in the 1990-93 term is 328, and in the 1994-97 term is 382. The total number of "policy" bills initiated by the Executive branch during the 1990-93 term is 217 and the 1994-97 term is 192.

families. Despite comprising less than 10% of the members of the Honduran Congress in either term under study here, women sponsored 50% and 100% respectively of the women's rights bills initiated by deputies in these two legislatures. The numbers also show that women deputies are active in some other policy areas as well, so it appears that despite their small numbers they are not being "ghettoized" into women's areas of legislation.

Table 3 presents the results of a maximum likelihood logit and ordered logit analysis of the effect of gender on legislative agendas. The most important finding is that even in the inauspicious circumstances of the Honduran Congress, women deputies are significantly more likely than men to place a priority on women's rights in their legislative agendas. In addition, gender was the most salient determinant of legislator

TABLE 3. Determinants of Legislator Policy Priorities in the Honduran Congress

| Explanatory Variables | Women's Rights      | Children & Families | Women's Rights + Children & Families | Health Care/ Public Health | Education         |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Gender                | 3.365***<br>[0.732] | -0.281<br>[0.766]   | 1.238**<br>[0.465]                   | 0.053<br>[0.784]           | 0.112<br>[0.652]  |
| Tenure                | 0.034<br>[0.161]    | 0.057<br>[0.079]    | 0.063<br>[0.073]                     | 0.030<br>[0.110]           | -0.017<br>[0.091] |
| Governing Party       | -0.595<br>[0.715]   | -0.305<br>[0.406]   | -0.376<br>[0.366]                    | 0.393<br>[0.494]           | 0.897*<br>[0.432] |
| Year                  | -0.088<br>[0.182]   | 0.083<br>[0.103]    | 0.044<br>[0.093]                     | -0.279<br>[0.135]          | -0.079<br>[0.098] |
| pseudo R <sup>2</sup> | 0.274               | 0.009               | 0.032                                | 0.032                      | 0.024             |

Note: For Women's Rights legislation, logit analysis was conducted using Stata. For the other legislation categories, ordered logit analysis was conducted using Stata. The estimated coefficient is on the first line and the standard error is below the estimated coefficient in brackets.

\*\*\* Significant at the .001 level for a two-tailed test.

\*\*Significant at the .01 level for a two-tailed test.

\*Significant at the .05 level for a two-tailed test.

For the 1990-93 term the PNH was the governing party, and for the 1994-97 term the PLH was the governing party.

n = 296

differences. Tenure in the Congress and party did not have even a moderate impact on policy priorities (except for education bills).<sup>19</sup>

Before running the multivariate analysis, we conducted binomial tests of proportions to determine in which legislative categories women deputies had initiated more bills than would be expected based on their representation in the Congress. If we assume that all deputies would place the same emphasis on each category, then women deputies would be predicted to initiate 9.5% of the bills in each category since women deputies made up 9.5% of the 296 deputies in our data set (recall that we included in our study all *propietarios* plus the *suplentes* who initiated bills). The binomial test for proportions shows that women deputies initiated significantly more than the predicted number of bills in the “women’s rights” category. Women deputies initiated seven of the ten women’s rights bills, or 70% (significant at the 0.001 level for a two-sided test). For the children and families, health care, education, environment, and human rights categories, women deputies did not initiate a significantly greater (or lesser) percentage of bills than expected. In the welfare/social security category, women deputies initiated significantly fewer bills than would be predicted (0 of 65 bills when 6.18 bills were expected, significant at the 0.01 level for a two-sided test). These results partially support hypothesis 1, in that women deputies initiated a significantly greater percentage of women’s rights bills than would be expected based on their level of representation in the Congress. However, in hypothesis 1 we expected this to also be the case for children and families bills, which was found not to be the case. In general, the findings for the other thematic categories, with the exception of welfare/social security, support hypothesis 2, which expected that differences based on gender would be less pronounced for the other thematic categories.

Next we conducted logistic regression analysis which allows us to control for other factors that are thought to have a significant impact on legislative behavior: a deputy’s years of experience in the Congress, and whether the deputy is from the governing party.<sup>20</sup> As the results in Table 3 show, when controlling for these other factors, gender is again a significant determinant of the propensity to initiate women’s rights bills.<sup>21</sup> Because logit coefficients cannot be interpreted directly, we used CLARIFY with Stata to compute the marginal effect of a deputy being female on the propensity to initiate a women’s rights bill (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001). The CLARIFY simulations show that women deputies are 24% more likely to initiate women’s rights bills when all other variables are held at their mean

value. For all other legislative categories we conducted ordered logit analysis because, while most deputies did not initiate any bills in the category, some deputies initiated more than one bill.<sup>22</sup> Gender was only found to be significant for a combined category of women's rights plus children and families bills. Again, we used CLARIFY to interpret the impact of gender on the propensity to initiate women's rights and children/family bills when values for the other independent variables are held at the mean. In this case being a woman makes a deputy 29% more likely to initiate a bill that falls into this combined category.

These two analyses demonstrate the generalizability of legislative behavior concerning women's rights legislation, which has been the strongest finding in the literature, to a very different type of case. However, another noteworthy finding is that women in the Honduran Congress are no more likely than men to emphasize children and family bills in their legislation. This is surprising given the frequency of that finding in other research. A possible explanation could be that women pursue different legislative strategies for these types of issues. Women may view it as more effective to have male deputies sponsor these bills or have them initiated through the executive branch because bills sponsored by party leaders (who are men) or by the executive branch have a greater likelihood of passage.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, we examine the substantive quality of bills to determine whether women deputies devote a greater percentage of their legislative work to initiating non-substantive bills than their male colleagues. Recall that Saint-Germain found in the Arizona state legislature that when women had only "token" representation they initiated a large percentage of "honorary" bills (1989, 964). We expand on this idea of honorary versus policy legislation and use three different conceptualizations of legislation that is not policy oriented: bills that can be categorized as honorary, particularistic service bills, and bills that deliver pork barrel projects to a community. The dependent variable is the percentage of the deputy's total number of bills introduced that are categorized as (1) honorary; (2) particularistic; and (3) pork, again including tenure in the Congress and governing versus opposition party membership as control variables. We find that gender is not a useful predictor of whether a deputy will initiate honorary, particularistic, or pork barrel bills, rather than "policy" bills (see Table 4). In all three models for both Congresses, holding other factors constant, gender is not significant, or even close to significant, for explaining the percentage of a deputy's bills that are non-policy bills. Not too surprisingly, given the intensely partisan nature of Honduran politics, being a member of the governing

TABLE 4. Determinants of Emphasis on Policy versus Non-Substantive Bills in the Legislative Agenda of Members of the Honduran Congress

| Explanatory Variables | 1990 - 1993 Congress Term: |                               |                     | 1994 - 1997 Congress Term: |                               |                     |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
|                       | Percent Honorary Bills     | Percent Particularistic Bills | Percent Pork Bills  | Percent Honorary Bills     | Percent Particularistic Bills | Percent Pork Bills  |
| Gender                | -0.012<br>[0.032]          | -0.120<br>[0.070]             | -0.154<br>[0.089]   | -0.005<br>[0.030]          | -0.027<br>[0.054]             | -0.132<br>[0.100]   |
| Tenure                | 0.000<br>[0.006]           | -0.009<br>[0.012]             | -0.004<br>[0.016]   | -0.001<br>[0.003]          | 0.001<br>[0.006]              | 0.001<br>[0.010]    |
| Governing Party       | 0.004<br>[0.020]           | -0.014<br>[0.044]             | -0.153**<br>[0.056] | 0.019<br>[0.017]           | 0.069*<br>[0.030]             | 0.232***<br>[0.055] |
| Constant              | 0.025<br>[0.032]           | 0.156*<br>[0.069]             | 0.419***<br>[0.088] | 0.013<br>[0.014]           | 0.029<br>[0.025]              | 0.117<br>[0.045]    |
| R <sup>2</sup>        | 0.001                      | 0.024                         | 0.068               | 0.010                      | 0.038                         | 0.124               |

Note: The estimated coefficient from the OLS regression is on the first line and the standard error is below the estimated coefficient in brackets.

\*\*\* Significant at the .001 level for a two-tailed test.

\*\* Significant at the .01 level for a two-tailed test.

\*Significant at the .05 level for a two-tailed test.

For the 1990-93 term the PNH was the governing party, and during the 1994-97 term the PLH was the governing party.

*n* = 146 for the 1990-93 term, *n* = 150 for the 1994-97 term

party is significantly associated with dedicating a greater percentage of a deputy's legislative agenda to particularistic and pork bills.

From this analysis it appears that, despite their token representation in the Congress, women deputies are not focusing their legislative activity on "non-policy" types of bills. However, this finding must be read with caution because most deputies in the Honduran Congress do not initiate a large number of bills and their legislative records are even smaller once "non-policy" bills are removed. Thus, this finding may be more cautiously interpreted to indicate that women deputies are no more inclined to focus their legislative activity on "non-substantive" bills than their male colleagues, despite their "token" numbers in the Congress.

Of course, bill initiation is not the only way deputies can pursue their legislative agenda. Some other possible avenues include working to help the passage of bills that they support and offering amendments to bills. For this reason we also examined debate participation by female and male deputies on selected major pieces of legislation during the 1994-97 Congress.<sup>24</sup> In the Honduran Congress, committees have few resources with which to investigate legislation. As a result, bill discussion and amendment largely take place in plenary session debates. To determine whether women deputies are more likely to participate in debates of bills concerning women's issues and children's and family issues than bills in issue areas that have traditionally been the domain of men, we looked at debate participation on seven bills that received extensive debate in 1996 and 1997.<sup>25</sup> We found that on the three bills that fit into the women's rights and children and families categories, women deputies were much more frequent participants in debates than they were in general on debates of the four bills that fit into the "other" category (see Table 5). Speech-making by women deputies on women's rights and children/family bills also represented a much larger percentage than the percentage of women's representation in the Congress (7% during 1994-97).<sup>26</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The findings of this study support the generalizability of previous Nordic, U.S., and Argentine studies on gender variances in policy priorities. Women in both highly advanced democratic states and developing countries appear to place a greater legislative emphasis on women's rights issues than do their male colleagues. However, unlike previous



| TABLE 5. Debate Participation by Women Deputies on Selected Bills<br>(1994-97 Honduran Congress)  |                                  |                  |                       |                                |                                       |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Bill (year of passage):   | Number of<br>Plenary<br>Sessions | % of<br>Speeches | Number of<br>Speeches | % of<br>Amendment<br>Proposals | Number of<br>Amendment<br>Proposals** |
| Code of Rights of Children<br>& Youth (1996)  | 19                               | 21.0             | 106 of<br>504*        | 30.0                           | 21 of 70*                             |
| Organic Law Code for<br>Nursing Professionals<br>(1997)   | 9                                | 36.3             | 69 of 190*            | 17.6                           | 6 of 34* <sup>2</sup>                 |
| Law of the College of<br>Professional Teachers<br>(1997)  | 2                                | 16.4             | 9 of 55* <sup>1</sup> | 27.3                           | 3 of 11* <sup>2</sup>                 |
| First Reform of the Penal<br>Code (1996)  | 20                               | 10.3             | 82 of 796*            | 11.0                           | 13 of 118                             |
| Law of the National<br>Registry of Persons<br>(1997)  | 7                                | 0                | 0 of 121**            | 0                              | 0 of 16                               |
| Reform of the Tax Code<br>(1997)  | 10                               | 1.0              | 5 of 500**            | 1.1                            | 1 of 81** <sup>2</sup>                |
| Second Reform of the<br>Penal Code (1997)   | 3                                | 5.5              | 13 of 238             | 2.9                            | 1 of 35                               |
| <p>Notes: (1) All bills analyzed in this table were passed into law. (2) Amendment proposals were also counted as speeches, so the figures in the speeches columns include the amendment proposals.</p> <p>* A binomial test of proportions indicates that the percentage of speeches or amendments made by women deputies is significantly greater than the predicted 7%, based on women comprising 7% of the Congress. (* significant at the .001 level; *<sup>1</sup> significant at the .01 level; *<sup>2</sup> significant at the .05 level)</p> <p>** A binomial test of proportions indicates that the percentage of speeches or amendments made by women deputies is significantly smaller than the predicted 7%, based on women comprising 7% of the Congress. (** significant at the .001 level; **<sup>1</sup> significant at the .01 level; **<sup>2</sup> significant at the .05 level)</p> |                                  |                  |                       |                                |                                       |

studies, women deputies in Honduras do not appear to place a higher priority on initiating legislation on children's and family issues than their male colleagues. Similar to Jones's study of Argentina, we found no gender differences on who initiates legislation on themes considered of traditional interest to women. This study also shows that women deputies in Honduras participate more extensively in legislative debates involving women's issues and children's and families issues when compared to participation in debates on thematic areas traditionally considered to be the domain of men, such as the electoral or tax codes. In addition, we find that Honduran women deputies are no more likely than their male colleagues to initiate bills that lack policy substance (i.e., honorary, particularistic service, or local pork barrel project bills). Such bills make up a large part of the legislative agenda of all deputies in Honduras, which is not surprising given the clientelistic nature of Honduran parties and politics. Still, despite the disadvantaged position of women in Honduran national politics, female deputies have not limited their legislative work to such non-controversial types of bills. Our findings thus call into question whether women deputies' "token" numerical status translates into a "token" perception of their role in the legislature and a desire not to draw attention to themselves.

The results of this study provide empirical evidence that women legislators in both advanced industrialized countries and less developed countries place higher legislative priority on women's rights than do men. Honduras provides a critical case for exploring the generalizability of findings about whether women legislate differently than men. It appears that even in an inauspicious setting, where women have only token representation in the legislature, and economic and social forces make the task of women in politics difficult, women still legislate differently than men. Particularly when it comes to women's rights issues, even token women representatives play an important role in bringing legislative attention to women's concerns.

Certainly we cannot yet definitively say that these findings are generalizable to women politicians in all parts of the developing world. Other cases should be studied, particularly where party and electoral institutions and candidate nomination procedures vary, to see if institutional rules affect the legislative agenda of women. In addition, more needs to be known about how women work in congressional committees, particularly whether women legislators debate women's rights and children's and family issues more than

other nontraditional thematic categories, and how women deputies work to get their legislation passed. For now, however, this research provides positive evidence that women deputies do have different policy priorities than men, even when they have only token representation in the legislature.

## APPENDIX:

### CODING OF BILLS

#### ***Policy versus Non-policy***

To make our analysis as comparable as possible to Jones, we followed his example and coded the following types of bills 0 for “non-policy”: private relief for individuals or businesses, establishment of new judicial districts, commemorative acts (see Jones 1997). In addition, we viewed the following sorts of bills as similarly “non-policy”-oriented, so they were also coded 0: nominations for government offices, officializing schools, granting tax exemption to a group. When we replicated the analysis presented in Table 3 with all bills (policy and non-policy) it had no substantive impact on the study’s findings.

#### ***Honorary***

We based coding of bills as honorary on Saint-Germain’s (1989) work. The types of bills coded as honorary included erecting statues, establishing parliamentary prizes, declaring national monuments, and declaring specific days as holidays.

#### ***Local Pork Barrel and Particularistic Service***

Bills that were intended to provide a tangible service to a community were coded as local pork barrel bills. Examples include financing road repairs between two towns; repair of telephone, electricity, or potable water systems in a town; and building a school. Bills that provided a benefit to a particular individual, family, organization, or business were coded as particularistic service bills. Examples include allowing an individual to accept an award from a foreign country, allowing a Honduran citizen to serve as honorary consul for a foreign country in Honduras, forgiving the debts of a particular agricultural cooperative.

#### ***Thematic Category***

Again, we based this coding on Jones (1997), who in turn based his coding of the thematic category of bills on the work of Dodson and Carroll

(1991). These categories are the same, or very similar to, those used by Saint-Germain (1989), Thomas (1991), and Thomas and Welch (1991). Dodson and Carroll explain women's rights bills to be those "that dealt specifically with issues of direct concern to women generally (e.g., legislation concerning rape, teen pregnancy, or women's health) or in terms of their special concerns as wage earners (e.g., pay equity), mothers balancing home and work (e.g., maternity leave, day care) or marital partners (e.g., domestic violence, spousal retirement benefits, division of property in divorce)" (1991, 38). Examples of women's rights bills initiated in the Honduran Congress include loans for local women's development programs, amendments to the family code addressing violence in the home, and amendments to the penal code concerning crimes against sexual liberty and honesty.

As in Jones's study, if a deputy introduced no bills that received a code of 1 in any of the women's rights or women's interest thematic categories, that deputy received a score of 0 for all policy categories (1997). This would be the case for deputies who initiated no bills. When we ran our analysis excluding deputies who initiated no bills, the results were very similar to those presented in Table 3.

### SENSITIVITY TESTS

To be certain that the findings were not a consequence of a particular grouping of control variables, all the models in Table 3 were run with other possible combinations of control variables (gender + tenure; gender + party), and the findings remained the same. Since our study, unlike previous work, includes *suplentes* who initiated bills, we also ran all models with a binary variable controlling for whether a deputy was a *suplente* or a *propietario*. This did not change the findings.

### NOTES

The authors would like to thank Judith Baer, Lorraine Bayard de Volo, Warren Eller, Maria Escobar-Lemmon, and Mark Jones for helpful comments on this manuscript. Of course, any errors are the authors'.

This research was made possible by NSF Grant #Y460895 and a Faculty Mini-Grant from Texas A&M University.

1. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) for the United States in 1998 was 0.675, causing the U.S. to be ranked 4th in the world (with Canada, France, and Norway ranked first, second, and third respectively).

2. Though in 1998 a Gender Empowerment Measure was not computed for Argentina, the Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) for Argentina was 0.777, rank-

ing Argentina 36th in the world. For comparison, the United States' GDI was 0.932 in 1998 and it was ranked fourth in the world, with Canada, France, and Norway ranked first, second, and third.

3. The first Congress in the current democratic regime (1982-85) had only 2.4% women, while in the 1986-89 Congress women's representation increased to 7.5%. In the 1998-2001 Congress women held 9.4% of the seats, but in the 2002-2005 Congress women hold only 6.3% of the seats.

4. The U.N. World Development Report categorizes Honduras among "lower-middle income economies" and Honduras qualified in 2000 for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Program.

5. As with Argentina, in 1998 a Gender Empowerment Measure was not computed for Honduras, but the Gender-Related Development Index for Honduras in 1998 was 0.544, ranking Honduras 119th in the world.

6. Other women deputies also mentioned that women in politics have to work harder than men, that women who are capable professionals tend to be marginalized by men, and that party leaders have a preference for male candidates (anonymous interviews with several deputies from the Liberal and National parties between July 23 and August 21, 1997).

7. Honduras, along with Guatemala and Uruguay, are the only Latin American countries with neither party quota rules nor national quota legislation. No bills have been proposed to change the electoral law to include gender quotas, which the authors attribute to the comparatively low degree of women's organization in Honduran politics, and to the belief of the two traditional parties that they do not need to actively court the female vote.

8. Interestingly, in interviews and transcripts of plenary sessions, Honduran women deputies do not appear to be more liberal than the men. Instead, the women often appear quite conservative by U.S. standards, for example, arguing against abortion rights. This does not mean, however, that female deputies are introducing anti-abortion legislation, or indeed anti-feminist legislation in general. Rather, their women's rights agenda concerns basic subsistence and safety, for example the right of women to inherit farmland from their spouse, or legal protection in cases of domestic violence.

9. Interviews were conducted with 12 women and 59 male deputies from the 1994-97 Honduran Congress. The deputies were asked, "Please describe in some detail who you consider to be your constituents." It is interesting to note that only one of the women specifically mentioned women in her answer. All said that they represent their department, or specific municipalities in their department, which is understandable given that deputies are elected via party-presented closed-lists at the department level. The deputy who specifically mentioned women did so in the context of whom she will help to find jobs (which is an important duty or patronage perk for Honduran deputies). She explained that when working to get a project for a community, the party affiliation of the people does not matter. But when she is helping people find work she favors supporters of her party and also women (anonymous interview conducted July 22, 1997).

10. Some of the research comparing U.S. states is an exception as states were chosen from both the high and low ends of women's representation (see Considine and Deutchman 1994; Thomas 1991).

11. District magnitude ranges from 1 to 23, with an average of 7.1.

12. See Taylor (1996) for a discussion of the impact of this electoral arrangement on executive-legislative relations, and Taylor-Robinson and Diaz (1999) for analysis of the role of the executive versus the Congress in policy-making.

13. The remainder are initiated by the Elections Tribunal or the Supreme Court, or their source was unknown due to occasional inconsistencies in record keeping in the Congress.

14. To facilitate comparison with Jones's (1997) study: In the 1993-95 term in Argentina the average number of bills initiated per deputy was 7.9, with a high of 91; and 30 of the 254 deputies (11.8%) initiated no bills. In the 1993-94 term of the U.S. House of Representatives the average number of bills initiated per representative was 12.2, with a high of 81; and four of the 435 members (1%) initiated no bills. In the 1995-96 term the average number of bills initiated per representative was 9.8, with a high of 62; and twelve members (2.8%) initiated no bills.

15. Most bills have only one sponsor, though a small percentage (3.4%, 33 bills) have two sponsors, and seven bills were sponsored by more than two deputies. In his study of the Argentine and U.S. lower chambers, Jones (1997) only included the "official sponsor" of a bill. However, the Honduran Congress does not keep records of official bill sponsors as distinguished from co-sponsors, and there is no way to determine who was the "primary" sponsor in cases where a bill is listed as having more than one author. Thus, for bills with more than one author, the bill was counted as part of the legislative agenda of each author, based on the logic that deputies can claim credit for a bill they co-sponsored, even if they were not the primary sponsor of a bill (Mayhew 1974).

16. See Chowdhury and Nelson (1994) for a useful discussion of the challenges of coming up with a list of the policy areas that concern women across different political and cultural contexts.

17. Only previous experience as a *propietario* is counted in the deputy tenure variable. Thus, a deputy who served a previous term as a *suplente* is scored 0 on the deputy tenure variable, and a deputy for whom the term analyzed is their first election to the Congress is scored 0.

18. Jones (1997) found no significant relationship between age and bill initiation in any thematic category. Thus, if we had been able to include age in our models, we doubt that it would have been significant. Due to the lack of a central source of information about deputy education and income levels, it was also not possible to check for any effect of those factors. Other factors that might be expected to influence variance in legislative interests are committee assignments and leadership positions. These variables were not included in the analysis due to lack of variance for female deputies. Women held no important positions in the Congress leadership (*Junta Directiva*), no committee presidencies during the 1990-93 Congress, and were presidents of only the Women's Issues, Family Issues, and Children's Issues committees (out of 54 committees) during the 1994-97 Congress. Women deputies also tended to be assigned primarily to "women's issues" committees, so all female *propietarios* served on at least one of these committees.

19. Tenure and party continued to lack significance as predictors of legislative agenda (except for education bills where being from the governing party has a moderately positive effect on initiation of education bills) even when gender was dropped from the models. Only for the broad "other" category of bills did years of experience in the Congress achieve significance, and this was the case whether or not gender was included in the model. In addition, in ordered logit models of initiation of welfare policy bills and human rights policy bills, years of experience had a positive effect on initiation of these types of bills; however, it was not possible to run these models controlling for gender (our factor of interest) because no women deputies initiated these types of bills (see note 22).

20. Year is included as a control for the two different Congress terms. Stata v.7 was used for all analysis (StataCorp 2000).

21. For our analysis of initiation of women's rights bills we used logit analysis because those data were naturally dichotomous in nature since all deputies who initiated a women's rights bill only initiated one bill of this type.

22. It was not possible to conduct logit or ordered logit analysis for the welfare/social security, environment, or human rights legislative categories, as women deputies did not initiate any of these types of bills. Because there is no variance on the gender variable relative to the dependent variable, gender perfectly predicts failure in these models.

23. For example, the Code of Rights of Children and Youth (1996) was initiated by the executive branch, but women deputies were intensely involved with the executive branch and the First Lady in the development of this legislation. The debate participation analysis (see Table 5) indicates that women deputies were also intensely involved in the debate of this bill. Women's reliance on support from influential male colleagues to facilitate passage of bills concerning women's issues has been noted by Dodson et al. (1995). Women in the Honduran Congress also mentioned needing the backing of male colleagues on their bills, and how they must work to explain to the men that policies of interest to women will benefit their wives and daughters so the men will see it as useful to support the bills (anonymous interview with PNH deputy, July 30, 1997).

24. Debate participation data were only available for the 1994-97 Congress because of the time required to obtain the data. These data were obtained in the archive of the Honduran Congress by reading transcripts of all congressional plenary session debates for the 1994-97 Congress and taking notes about which deputies participated in debates, including the topic of discussion and whether the purpose of the deputy's "speech" was to offer an amendment to a bill, contribute to a bill or amendment debate, make a point of order, or make a "denúncia" or "manifestación" to call attention to a problem in government or society. (See Taylor-Robinson and David [2002] for a full analysis of what types of deputies take part in debate in the Honduran Congress.)

25. Most bills are passed with little, if any, discussion, so we selected bills that received several days of debate. We only looked at bills debated in the last two years of the term because that was when several bills concerning women's rights and children's and family issues were debated. See Kathlene (1994) for an extensive analysis of how gender affects participation in debates in committee hearings in the Colorado state legislature.

26. Interestingly, women made significantly more speeches than predicted in the debates of the first reform of the penal code—a topic that falls into a category that would be expected to be the domain of men. However, this bill included punishment for sexual violence and crime by children, which accounts for the higher than predicted participation by women deputies.

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