Feminizing Politics: The Impact of Gendered Institutions on Women’s Political Influence and Representation

*A case of Malawi and Colombia*

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Abstract
According to the 2030 agenda, gender equality is a fundamental condition for achieving sustainable development, and one of the central components is the effective participation of women at all levels of political decision-making. Based on the theory of gendered organizations and Lowndes' model, the study presents the legislative power in Colombia and Malawi aiming to understand the dramatic low number of women's political representation in both countries. The study was designed using a qualitative exploratory approach and conducted through semi-structured interviews with former and current women parliamentarians of Colombia and Malawi. The major findings revealed that the significant barriers for women's political representation and influence in both countries are the systematic violence, cultural values, and informal rules that put women in a disadvantaged position. On the other hand, the enablers for women's political participation are based on access to education, mentorship, and empowerment. Despite the social-cultural differences between the countries, the political arenas presented similar gendered systems that reproduce inequalities and hinder women's political representation and influence.

Keywords: Gendered Organizations Theory, Gender, Gendered Political Institutions, Women, Women’s Political Representation, Feminist Theories, Legislative Power, Political Violence, Barriers and Enablers, Colombia, Malawi, Gender Equality, Politics, Sustainable Development, Inclusive Development.
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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND
According to the 2030 agenda, gender equality is a fundamental condition for achieving sustainable development (United Nations, 2016). One of the central components stipulated, according to the sustainable development goal number five, is the effective participation of women at all levels of political decision-making (United Nations, 2016). Women's political representation is a worldwide concern hence this shows how despite public policies and courageous social movements' efforts, gender equality in politics is still far behind from equal representation and real influence (Dubrow & Hughes, 2017). Every country has its own particular story regarding the struggle of women to gain access to representation and the efforts to influence decision making at local, national, and international levels (Sears & Ng, 2017). However, according to several feminist theories, there are common structures that restrict women from accessing power, therefore making gender a very notable aspect to discuss regarding political participation.

In such a broad topic as women's political participation, it might be hard to find an angle that explains why women are underrepresented in the political arena worldwide and what the impacts of such a complex issue are. However, countless articles, reports, and books have discussed this topic, and their findings vary according to the context and the time studied, giving us a puzzle with thousands of pieces to create our criteria and map for further research and possible actions to address this problem. One angle to take into consideration based on feminist theories is to analyze how inequalities are created and reproduced from the institutions that shape the political arena.

According to Joan Acker (1990), most feminists assume that institutional structures are gender-neutral, whereas to the contrary, every contract or document produced within an institution is based on gender assumptions hence have a significant and distinctive impact on women and men. Gendered institutions create an image of "the universal worker" represented in the abstract jobs and organizational hierarchy within the institutions, assuming that anyone can fit the position but instead is a structure made to represent man's body, sexuality, relationship to procreation and paid work (Acker, 2012). Research has shown that despite the composition of the workforce, a gendered institution will reproduce norms and practices based on a stereotyped perception of males and females (Acker, 1990).

Institutional feminists have focused on understanding how the political sphere is systematically gendered hence hindering women's political representation. According to Vivien Lowndes (2019), gendered institutions help to constitute the role, relations, and identities of women and men in the political arena. In her research, Lowndes introduces an idea to analyze gendered institutions based on the micro-foundations of the political institutions rather than treating institutions as organizational systems or broad policy regimes. Lowndes points out that in order to understand how gendered institutions reinforce and maintain their structure, it is crucial to focus on how actors interact with rules given by these institutions in a specific political setting. Besides, the rules are not necessarily formal written laws set by political institutions. They might be informal as well as set and influenced by institutions outside the political arena.

One of the most important and complex political institutions in democracies is the legislative power that is in charge of creating, debating, and repealing national laws. Congress or Parliament depending on the country is a prominent institution that involves diverse actors
like politicians, voters, political parties, and other governmental agencies. It is essential to acknowledge that in recent years, women have more power and influence in the legislative power than ever before, however, the progress is uneven between countries and regions and suffers opposition and backlash very often (Conway, 2001). A recent study conducted by Panjak Kumar (2017) shows that women in parliament around the world represent just 23%, and that is not a clear relation between women's political engagement and economic growth and development. Kumar notes a mere 23 percent of women parliamentary seats worldwide, a figure that is very worrisome. Making it worse, the findings from Kumar’s paper show zero representation of women in certain parts of the world and mostly in Arabic countries. Considering the risk this poses on sustainable development, women's rights are to be enforced if we are to develop globally and in a sustainable manner.

Despite the distinct characteristics of countries, it is possible to analyze through the lens of gendered organization’s theory, political institution and main political arena’ actors with an aim of understanding common factors that hinder women's political participation in different countries. For the purpose of this thesis, we are taking into consideration the cases of Colombia and Malawi. Two countries that belong to the Global South and since regardless of all the efforts put in place, there is still a long way to go for equality in women's political participation and inclusive development. Additionally, according to Hofstede Insights (2020), Colombia and Malawi are considered to be culturally male dominated. Politically and economically, these countries share quite significant similarities. Just like many other countries in the global south, Colombia and Malawi are yet to achieve equal representation in leadership and decision-making especially in politics (World Bank, 2020).

Colombia, like other countries in the Latin-American region has what is known as the "law of quotas," which establishes a 30 percent minimum participation for women on the electoral lists in every party. According to a study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (2012), even though this law has led to an increase in women's participation in Colombian politics for the past decade, the parliamentarians that get elected are predominantly men (Segura, 2012). Similarly, research has shown a considerable increase in women's representation in politics in Malawi from 1994 to 2006 (Tiessen, 2008). Malawi was the second African country in history ever to have a female president, and this was in the year 2012 (Amundsen & Kayuni, 2016). Still, Malawian female politicians represent less than 25% in the current Parliament.

Women in Colombia acquired the right to vote in the mid-twenty centuries (Hincapie & Javier 2019), and since then, there has been an evolution of women's political participation in the country. However, there are many challenges regarding inequality, violence, and discrimination against women. First, Colombia has been in a civil war for more than 50 years and, in 2016, the country signed a peace agreement with the guerrilla Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC). However, the country continues in an armed conflict with other guerrillas and faces violent disputes with other groups formed by paramilitaries and drug traffickers. Moreover, the peace agreement is under pressure. Several actors like civil society, international organizations, and media are claiming the non-compliance in the fulfillment of the agreement between the government and the guerrilla group (Angelo, 2017). Most of the complaints are allegations against the government based on evidence of negligence in fulfilling critical points of the agreement like financial assistance for ex-combats, land restitution, and reparation of victims (Angelo, 2017). The impact of the conflict has led to placing women as a highly vulnerable group that encounters violence as a tactic of war and
silence and prevents their participation in politics and public decision-making (Svedberg & Cronsell, 2011).

Secondly, Colombia is one of the countries that are most gender unequal not only in Latin America but the world (OECD, 2016). The Gini index for Colombia is 0.53, placing it as the second-most unequal country in Latin America only after Honduras’ 0.537 (Serrano, 2018). This reality explains the difficult situation of many people paying for housing, education, transportation, and credit despite a healthy country economy (OECD, 2016). This situation impacts women, especially in rural areas and in poor neighborhoods in urban areas where they experience the most significant disadvantage regarding access to education, health, and lower their possibilities to access and participate in political processes (Serrano, 2018).

On the other hand, Malawi, a landlocked country in South-Eastern Africa despite no history of war, just like Colombia, has experienced gender inequality in expanse and continues to do so (UNDP, 2015). Malawi happens to be one of the world's poorest countries in the world, with a population of about 19 million people, of which 55.2 percent of the total population are women (World Bank, 2018). Most Malawian women are in poverty, unlike their male counterparts, with limited access to education and other resources, even in similar social groups. Consequently, this has affected their ability to participate in as far as competing for public office (Chingaipe, 2015). Malawi gained its independence from the British colony on July 6, 1964, and soon after gaining its independence, it became a totalitarian one-party state (McCracken, 1998). Following the independence, the first-ever vote to be cast was scheduled for July 28, 1974, but there was only one party with no opposition, making it impossible to carry out the vote and this was followed by over thirty years of a one-party dictatorship led by Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda (Jallow, 2014). In 1993, this dictatorship was challenged in a peaceful democratic transition, and a multiparty system was introduced, which led to a vote being cast in May 1994 (Chirwa, 2014).

According to Jamali (2014), regardless of the low representation of women in Politics, Malawi stands out as one of the countries that perform well compared to other African countries. However, women's representation in politics remains below 30 percent of the Southern Africa Development Community threshold standard for women's political participation. Even though Malawi has laws and policies to support women's participation, there are no deliberate actions to make sure of women's access and participation in politics, making it difficult for women to progress politically rapidly (Chingaipe, 2015). For example, in 2009 elections, only 22 percent of the candidates that were voted into power during the parliamentary elections were women (Jamali, 2014), and 11 years down the line, there has been a mere 1 percent increase. Moreover, throughout the election history of Malawi, no women have participated and won as presidential candidate ever. Regardless of how long women have been active members of all the existing political parties, no woman has ever been selected to represent these parties as their candidate (Kayuni & Chikadza, 2016).

The impact of the underrepresentation of women in politics is not insignificant, especially in global development. The United Nations has highlighted that women's participation in politics is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality, genuine democracy, and, consequently, sustainable development (United Nations, 2019). Furthermore, to achieve governance for sustainability, countries must enhance equal participation, where women have access to all levels of decision-making and influence in public policies (United Nations, 2019).
RESEARCH PROBLEM
Women's political representation and influence is an extensively studied subject worldwide. However, the issue is far from being solved, and the number of women in political positions around the world is worrisome seeing as it is unrepresentative of the actual population. Besides, several researchers also questioned how much power these women really have in political offices compared to their male colleagues. When finally elected, women are not necessarily given the same power; it is merely “Illusive Inclusion” whereby they are represented in numbers but not in influence (Scholten & Witmer 2018). Every country has a particular cultural context that enables or limits women's political participation that correlates with society's structure, history, or current socio-political circumstances (Kazuki, 2008).

One challenge of studying women's political representation is to be able to acknowledge and understand the complexity of the political arena that is profoundly affected by the social structure itself in every country (Celis, 2013). There are many aspects of this multifaceted problem that have been studied by researchers from diverse disciplines that exposes different ideas and tensions regarding women's political participation and influence. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the main problems researched that are critical to understanding the current women's situation.

First, the fact that males dominate the political scene making it more straightforward to reproduce symbols of power that associate men to leading positions (Koester, 2015). That creates images that placed man as the one intended to rule (Lorber, 1994). Many feminists’ theories and researchers point out how power structures and gender social constructions lead to place women in a disadvantageous position that limits their political work (Kim, 2009). For example, it is common in the legislative power in Latin America that female representatives seldom hold leadership positions, and they do not serve as chairs of powerful committees or those traditionally considered to be in men's areas like economy and security (Schwindt-Bayer, 2012).

Second, laws that enable women's participation have shown tremendous advances in opening spaces for women to participate in politics. Still, gendered laws or rules such as "law of quotas" are not a miraculous solution to solve inequality, and their success highly depends on the type of quota applied and the political context (Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). Other noticeable problems like the lack of education, economic dependence, and gender assumptions that consider women as primary caretakers, are the most significant barriers for women to pursue a political career successfully (Lorber, 1994). These issues are not per se part of the political arena but play a crucial role in understanding the barriers that women face in the political world.

However, an angle that can give new lights into such an intricate concern is to explore the political arena under the lens of gendered organization's theory. Gendered organization's theory is an understudied subject among public institutions in the context of the Global South countries like Colombia and Malawi. Taking into consideration the institutions that shaped the political arena in those two countries could give a new insight into how institutions that seemingly appear to be "gender-neutral" are reproducing and maintaining structures that hinder women's political representation and access to real power (Lowndes, 2019; Acker, 2000). Moreover, recent studies in gendered institutions have shown that gendered political institutions create gendered rules and outcomes that shape the behavior of the political system’s actors, continuing an endless cycle of segregation and inequality (Lowndes, 2019).
Exploring different angles to find new approaches is critical for understanding and developing new policies and strategies that correlate better to local contexts in Colombia and Malawi. Furthermore, women's political representation and real influence are still far behind in both countries, creating a direct negative impact on sustainable development (Bayeh, 2016). Hence, there is a necessity to explore a novel approach to a widespread problem that might reinforce or dismiss feminist theories according to the characteristics of the context.

AIM OF STUDY
The purpose of this research is to explore how legislative power as a gendered institution impacts women's political influence and representation in the political arena in Colombia and Malawi through the lens of a gendered organizational theory. The study therefore seeks to show how female politicians in these countries faced the political arena and the challenges they encountered to be part of the legislative power. Theoretically the study aims to demonstrate how feminist theories correspond to the current realities in Colombia and Malawi. Looking at Lowndes’ framework and Acker’s Gendered organizational theory will give us a chance to contribute to theory through highlighting the struggles women face on the political arena, providing a light for future research in regards to women’s political representation and influence in the global south. Contribution to practice will be providing a clear picture showing diverse voices from female politicians that have faced the strains of gendered institutions hindering their political representation and influence. The study further intends to provide useful information to guide future policymaking and implementation for activists seeking gender equality and inclusion within complex institutions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
This study attempts to:

1. Explore how legislative power in Colombia and Malawi operates through the lens of gendered organizations theory and Lowndes's model of gendered political institutions.
2. To identify barriers and enablers to the participation of women in politics in Colombia and Malawi.

LAYOUT
Based on the Gendered Organization's theory, this thesis explores the legislative power in Colombia and Malawi and presents the critical factors that hinder women's representation and influence in the political arena in both countries. In the first chapter, we will explain the main theories supporting our study. These theories are based on the works of Joan Acker, Raewyn Connell and Vivien Lowndes. This chapter aims to give the reader the necessary framework to understand fundamental concepts of the object of the study. The second chapter describes the methods used to gather our data. Furthermore, it addresses the reliability, validity, and limitations of the research.

Chapters three and fourth presents the object of the study and the analysis of finds, based on the interviews conducted with female members of the Parliament in Colombia and Malawi and institutional observation on the legislative power in both countries. This chapter aims to give the reader a detailed picture of the current situation in Colombia and Malawi regarding the legislative power and a perspective on the barriers from former and current female politicians using the lens of gendered organization's theory. Finally, chapter five presents the discussion and conclusion that aims to highlight for the reader the critical aspects that hinder women's political representation and influence and the effects of gendered institutions, which in this case focused on the legislative power in both countries.
CHAPTER ONE

PREVIOUS RESEARCH
This section seeks to report on the key themes and influential studies regarding gendered institutions and women's political representation and influence. The section is divided into three parts; the first one discusses general approaches to gendered institutions and organizations. Secondly, the current status of the representation of women in politics both globally and locally includes researches from a feminist perspective regarding power and decision-making. The last part discusses the most common barriers, according to several studies for women's political representation and influence.

Gendered Institutions and Organizations
Feminist institutionalism has studied for decades the structures, norms, and routines within institutions that are permeated with gender, impacting disproportionally women to get access to power and decision-making (Ljungholm, 2017). According to the research reviewed, gender bias varies depending on the context, and it tends to be more likely a social construct that assumes femininity and masculinity as established behavior that must be followed (Ljungholm, 2017). Institutions that have gendered cultures usually converge with other crucial aspects such as class, race, and sexuality, creating a mechanism to reinforce and reproduce gendered frameworks and inequalities (Ljungholm, 2017). Among scholars, there is a broad consensus that most institutions and organizations are gendered, creating a male or female domination according to the cultural expectation of gender (Mastracci & Bowman, 2013). Besides, gendered organizations also create gendered norms, practices, and processes within organizations that impact the society (Mastracci & Bowman, 2013).

The concept of "gendered institutions" indicates that gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the different areas of social life (Acker, 1992). Moreover, Joan Acker in her article *From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions* affirms that social institutions that shape the life of any human, like politics, religion, the academy, the state, the economy, among others, are historically formed by men, currently controlled by men, and symbolically represented from the viewpoint of men (Acker, 1992).

Understanding gendered institutions could be intricate because most of the institutions are assumed gender-neutral. For example, if we take a look at any organizational chart, those figures that stand for every job seem to be gender-neutral. They are positions that anyone can fill. However, beyond those bodiless figures is a precise gender construction that assumes a particular type of masculinity and male dominance as neutral (Acker, 1992). In capitalist societies, production is elevated above reproduction where businesses and companies are seen as vital for wellbeing and care work related to family and education is perceived devalued and, most of the time, wealth consuming (Acker, 1992).

One way to observe the dynamics of a gendered institution is by using Raewyn Connell’s ideas about what she called *gender regime*. In her study, *Glass Ceilings or Gendered Institutions? Mapping the Gender Regimes of Public Sector Worksites*, Connell describes four dimensions in the relation between gender and institutions. Those dimensions relate to the division of work, power relations, human relations, culture, and symbolism (Connell, 2006; Acker, 1990). Other critical aspects of observing a gendered institution are hierarchy and bureaucracy. Those characteristics identified in gendered organizations create a structure that sustains and reproduces gender inequality based on segregation and differentiation among masculinity and femininity (Mastracci & Bowman, 2013).
In the case of public institutions Lowndes, in her research, how are Political Institutions Gendered? Proposes feminist institutionalism as a way to unveil the gendering processes within complex institutions and understand how these institutions help to establish the roles, relations, and identities of men and women that interact with the institution (Lowndes, 2019). Moreover, Connell (2006), in her research also presents a new approach to understand gender within public institutions claiming that the famous "glass ceiling approach" is insufficient to create new answers for gender inequality. Her approach highly correlated with Acker's ideas for exposing the gendering processes within organizations.

Based on previous research, we can conclude that first, even though institutions are perceived as neutral, they are, in fact, gendered. Second, there are fundamental characteristics that all gendered institutions share. Lastly, all gendered organizations create gendered rules and processes that shape people's behaviors within organizations. However, it is important to acknowledge that studies which applied gendered organization' theory in local contexts in the Global South are an underdeveloped field and there is not a wide range of literature available.

**Women's Political Representation: Power Structures and Substantive Representation**

Historically and across political jurisdictions, women have struggled (and continue to struggle) to gain access to political opportunities – not on a one-off basis, or dependent on special pleadings or special circumstances – but as institutional entitlements, which are not merely formal but substantive in themselves (Lowndes, 2019). Even though acknowledging an increase in the representation of women in politics for the past 100 years, Paxton and Hues (2013) narrates how underrepresentation is still something evident even as the first thing one may notice just by turning on the television to watch "a summit of world leaders, a debate in the British Parliament, or a UN Security Council meeting," few women are seen in these platforms. According to UN Women, women are underrepresented in political participation not only as leaders but even as voters, and this has materialized despite their proven capacity as leaders and change agents even so as having the same right to equal participation in democratic governance (UN Women, 2012).

From the year 1890 to recent years, there has been a significant though slow change in the involvement of women in politics. According to Paxton and Hues (2013) in 1890 women worldwide were not entitled to vote and as of the year 2020, there is no single country in the world restricting voting solely to men. Making the growth of women’s political power one of the most significant trends for the past 100 years. Despite the recommendation of women’s political participation and other forms of leadership as a foundational precondition for gender equality and genuine democracy, the global community is very far from equal representation (UN Women, 2012). A recent article from Johnson and Patel (2020) reports that regardless of being given the right to vote, women still lack a fair representation in leadership and decision making positions in politics, thus compromising the needs of up to more than 50 percent of the global population. A higher representation of women means an increase in the quality of life overall (Johnson & Patel, 2020) which also means a promise of achieving the agenda 2030, and consequently the Sustainable Development Goals.

According to Hanna Pitkin (1967), substantive representation refers to the representative’s ability to act in the interests of those whom they represent. In particular, women in decision-making positions are expected to be more incline of supporting gender issues and an overall female-oriented agenda. However, in reality, women are not a homogenous group (Olivari, 2013). Olivari argues that after women are elected, their support for some causes is affected
by partisan, or even religious factors. It is essential to point out that in the case of Latin American society is deeply influenced by the Catholic Church, aside from political and partisan fractures. Moreover, Olivari, in her article Why is it So Hard to Increase Women's Representation in Political Institutions? The case of Latin America explains that the persistence of deeply embedded social structures is the main reason for the lack of women's substantive representation. For example, societal beliefs that associate women with being better suited as caretakers and men better as political leaders hinder women's credibility in the political arena.

Women in political positions do not mean that they are automatically decision-makers. O'Neil, and Domingo (2015) expresses that political leadership does not always square to authority. They define decision making as "the ability to influence decisions that affect one's life, both private and public," and emphasize the significance of having women in politics as the starting point but not the means to the end, which is then decision-making position. A recent study on women’s political participation in Malawi shows that except for positions whose portfolio has to do with women’s issues, for instance, the position of Minister of Gender, women rarely get to hold other positions of influence in the political parties at all levels (Chingaipe, 2014). This means that party committees that are responsible for candidate selection in preparation for elections are inevitably dominated by male politicians, for many of whom the propensity to consider gender dimensions in their decision-making is simply remote (Chingaipe & Kachika, 2012).

Having a high representation of women in politics has to involve representation in decision making positions so as to ensure inclusiveness in the decisions made on behalf of the general public but also to give people a new perspective on who a leader should be (Musau, 2019). In Africa, from 2000 to 2018, the proportion of women parliamentarians almost doubled, and women’s representation in cabinet increased fivefold to 22% between 1980 and 2015. Unfortunately, the numbers do not necessarily imply influence. Women’s political representation in Africa is more descriptive than substantive (Wangnerud, 2009). Women represent almost half of the population in Africa, yet they are the least likely to hold political positions and exercise power across the continent (Konte & Kwado, 2019). Women politicians in Africa generally overcome many obstacles and restrictions to obtain political positions (Konte & Kwado, 2019). But once there, most of them have only little decision-making power or are completely excluded from important government decisions on legislation, policy, and budget allocation (Konte & Kwado, 2019). Widespread gender bias against women's leadership, rooted in socio-cultural and religious values, continues to thrive in Africa (United Nations, 2019).

Another critical study regarding women's political representation is within the legislative power. Once a woman is elected, evidence suggests that if she does not hold positions of leadership in legislatures, she is not fully integrated as a legislator and has fewer possibilities to influence policy (Osborn, 2014). Osborn explains that a common situation in the Latin American legislatures is that women tend to be assigned to "women's issues" commissions where they have a limited opportunity of accomplishing high-impact leadership (Osborn, 2014). Moreover, in her article, Women State Legislators and Representation: The Role of Political Parties and Institutions, Osborn explains that party leaders control the committee assignments and regularly designated women to marginal places in the legislative process.

In conclusion, according to previous studies, women's political representation is far from gender equality. Moreover, if there is no women's political engagement it is impossible to
achieve real sustainable development. Besides, it is essential to differentiate between descriptive and substantive representation. The first one relates to the numbers of women participating in politics, but it does not necessarily mean that they are influencing the decisions in the political arena. Substantive power correlates with the real power for women to make decisions and lead crucial scenarios where the main political decisions are made.

**Barriers for Women’s Political Participation**

Women’s political underrepresentation is a complex problem that has many faces. Based on the articles and studies researched, we found three primary trends that summarized common barriers for women in the political arena.

**Politics is a Man's World**

According to several feminist approaches in societies that are patriarchal, socially constructed gender roles tend to see biological gender roles determine what becomes of a woman, and they end up settling for staying at home to take care of their families and not join the workforce, let alone politics (Shames, 2015). Culture is essential and defines any society (Dyczewski & Ślawik 2016). Unfortunately, in most societies, patriarchy appears to be infused in culture, and the patriarchy in the political systems is simply an extension of household patriarchy (Bahlieda, 2015). Thus political systems and institutions might not necessarily be where the discriminations begin, but where it is reproduced. Bahlieda expresses that as patriarchy manifests itself in politics, men tend to be in control of women's political aspirations as well as their choices.

Lamentably, there are still some barriers found based on ideas that see in males, better leaders for the political arena (Hunt, 2007). Besides, women faced a double standard that placed them on one side too soft and feminine to handle politics, and on the other hand, when they stood up and showed character, they were accused of being non-feminine (Hunt, 2007). Consequently, according to the research, *It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office* shows that women doubt more about their leadership skills and find it hard to see themselves as an election’ winner (Lawless & Fox, 2008).

Another concern, according to Swanee Hunt in her article *Let Women Rule* one of the main impediments for women to participate in politics is the belief that politics is a dirty and corrupted game that favors men (Hunt, 2007). This argument is shared by Kamlongera, that found in her studies about gender and politics that, in the political arena in Malawi, male politicians play a disrespectful game with their female colleagues undermining their authority with comments physical appearance and expecting sexual favor in exchange for their support (Kamlongera, 2008).

**Traditional Role of Women in Society**

A common concern around scholars is the continuity of the idea that women are the primary caretakers of a family. That assumption hinders women's engagement in politics, where they are always trying to reconcile their political ambition with their domestic obligation and family commitments (Kamlongera, 2008). It seems that regardless of the contexts, the family is a current concern among women politicians. In the study, *A Job in Politics Is Not for Women: Analyzing Barriers to Women's Political Representation in Central Eastern Europe*, all the women interviewed described with a sense of guiltiness an endless personal battle between their political career and family' responsibilities. The study explained that women always feel that they are stealing time from their family and continuously complain about the
implicit sacrifices that women must do in order to pursue a political career (Clavero & Galligan, 2005).

\textit{Lack of Resources}

Women find it hard to source funds for financing their campaigns, which has an impact on how far they can go in as far as getting elected for office during elections. The availability of finances then determines whether a woman aspires to participate in politics will pursue their aspirations or not (Schlozman et al, 1994). Shames (2015) points out that political participation is not usually publicly funded, and issues of unequal access to paid employment and gender pay gaps make it even worse for the women who are not economically empowered to participate even when they are willing to do it. However, money not just creates problems for campaigning. In most African countries, women are poorer than men, which creates a more significant gap in access to education, training, and employment (Kamlongera, 2008). Furthermore, the socio-economic class also relates to political influence. Underprivileged women groups are less likely to have the resources and skills required for political participation that are described in a wide range from connection to money to pay for childcare (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016).

\textbf{THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK}

This section presents the theoretical framework used in the research. Firstly, to add a more comprehensive understanding for the reader, the section highlights the concept of gender. As it is stated before, the study examines the legislation power of Colombia and Malawi through the lens of the Gendered Organizations theory based on the work of Joan Acker and Raewyn Connell. Moreover, due to the subject's complexity, the study also includes a novel perspective based on the ideas of Vivian Lowndes that gives a broader comprehension of gendered political institutions considering crucial interactions between institutions, actors, and rules within and outside the political arena. The relevant theoretical perspectives will be briefly described as the theoretical underpinning of the data analysis.

\textbf{The Concept of Gender}

Although the term is extensively used, there is no general understanding of its meaning, still between feminist scholars (Butler 1990). A common understanding sees gender as another word for sex or women; the study of gender is the research of women, sex roles, or both (Acker, 2000). However, this approach has questionable limitations and oversimplifies the studies of gender. From a modern perspective, gender is a principle of social structure and cultural interpretation (Scott 1986; Acker 1988). According to Acker, in this perspective, gender is a process, not a characteristic, although assigned a gender category to a person is a fundamental aspect of the process (Acker, 1990). Another aspect to consider is that gender is not a separate line of demarcation and domination (Acker, 1992). Gender, class, and race, among others, are part of the same process that shapes power relations (Lowndes, 2019). Gender is a system of social relations in which women's and men's roles are established, the cultural definitions of becoming a man and a woman are determined, and their trajectories are set out over time (Connell, 2006).

\textbf{Gendered Organizations Theory}

\textit{Definition}

In Joan Acker's words, a gendered institution is \textit{that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine} (Acker, 1990). The term
"gendered institutions" is present in the processes, practices, images, ideologies, and distributions of power in the various social life sectors (Acker, 1992). Institutional structures in most societies are organized through gender (Risman, 2004). Gendered institutions have historically developed by men, currently controlled by men, and symbolically represented from the viewpoint of men in directing positions, both in the present and historically (Hawkeswork, 2003; Acker, 1990; Connell, 2006). The absence of women has defined those institutions (Acker, 1992). Moreover, a crucial understructure of gendered institutions is the differentiation between production and reproduction (Acker, 1992). For example, in the organization chart of any institution, every position is assumed as "gender-neutral." However, it also brings the implication that these bodiless figures described in the chart do not represent a worker that gets pregnant, gives birth, and lactate creating the idea that reproduction occurs outside the production areas pushing for a clear division and sidelining of reproduction (Acker, 1992).

**Gendered Institutions' Process**

Acker argues that organizations tend to maintain the gendered processes of work divisions despite the increase in the number of women joining the workforce (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). The theory projects that the stereotypical norms and practices that go on in organization between male and female workers will persist no matter the composition of the workforce (Acker, 2012), thus whether there are more women and less men, the men will still dominate the highly ranked positions and that the human resource management practices will make it hard for women to achieve the work and life balance by reproducing the same old stereotypical gender norms, thus making them less likely to be considered for significant positions in the organization (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). Sorenson (1984) expressed that even though women are somehow present in work places, the most powerful positions are nearly wholly occupied by men disregarding the rare times that the only female who happens to occupy similar positions is one who “acts as a social man”. Connell (2006) and Acker (1990) studied the creation and recreation of the gender understructure, looking at organizational practices, and concrete institutional settings. Acker argues that although most of the gendered processes within institutions are inseparably connected with societal elements, it is possible to analyze and distinguish them. Some are clear and open; others are profoundly rooted and invisible (Acker, 1992). Based on Connell and Acker's work, there are four observable dimensions in a gendered institution:

**Division of labor:** The gender division of labor is the way production and consumption are arranged according to gender, including the gender of employment and the division between paid work and domestic work (Connell, 2006).

**Gender relations of power:** How control, authority, and force are employed along gender lines, including organizational hierarchy, legal power, and collective and individual violence (Connell, 2006). Among gender, Acker (2009) also includes class and race processes that create decisions and procedures to control, segregate, exclude, and construct hierarchies. Sometimes these are deliberate practices that dismiss women or minorities to incorporate them into segregated functions.

**Emotions and human relations:** The interaction between individuals and groups is the mechanism of institutional functioning, decision-making, and image production (Acker, 2009). People "do gender" according to the institution's specific expectations as they do every day work (West & Zimmerman 1987). Connell (2006) also suggests that human relations in institutions tell us how fondness and hostility among people and groups are also organized.
along gender lines, including feelings of solidarity, hatred, and sexual attraction and repulsion.

*Gender culture and symbolism:* This dimension relates to how gender identities are defined in society, the language and symbols of gender difference, and shared beliefs and attitudes about gender (Connell, 2006). Acker complements and quotes Connell's work saying that hegemonic masculinity permeates most institutions, including the political arena (Acker, 2009).

**Gendered Political Institutions: Lowndes’ Model**
In the article, *how are Political Institutions Gendered?* Lowndes (2019) introduces a model that defines the mechanisms of how political institutions are gendered. By focusing on the micro-foundations, Lowndes (2019) states that the political arena is shaped not only by explicit rules about gender but also by apparently neutral rules that have 'gendered effects' due to their relations with other institutions outside the formal political domain. In the model, Lowndes (2019) focused on the "action arena" (Ostrom, 2005), in which actors face institutional rules inside a particular political context. The rules shape the behavior of the actors, and under appropriate conditions are also subject to objection and change (Lowndes, 2019). The decision to choose this particular model is because it is a novel approach that interprets gendered institutions as the encounter among actors and rules in particular political contexts, that are linked to other institutions inside and outside the political realm (Lowndes, 2019). Understanding how the action of gendered institutions' system helps explain why the reforms of equality very often stumble, and why the efforts of advocates of women's rights are so often disappointed (Lowndes, 2019). Furthermore, a more extensive comprehension of the role of institutions in continuing gender inequality can potentially guide transformative approaches to change the political game's underlying rules (Lowndes, 2019). Hence, to explore the legislative power in Colombia and Malawi, it is fundamental to understand not just the Congress and the Parliament itself but also the political arena looking for those critical encounters that are hindering or enabling women’s political participation inside and outside politics (Lowndes, 2019).

First, to identify the rules (formal and informal) set in gendered institutions there are two possible distinctions: Rules about gender, and rules that have gendered effects.

*Rules about gender:* It refers to rules that deal explicitly with gender. Such rules help to designate roles, activities, or benefits for women and men differently. For example, some historical rules that excluded women from the right to vote, ownership of property, or employment. In addition, the laws aimed at rectifying exclusion such as gender quotas or maternity arrangements also apply. Lowndes also argues that laws can also be about gender in the sense that they require fair treatment of women and men, or they may aim to achieve goals of equality in public policy development and implementation. Rules about gender are not always written down and may take the appearance of common exclusions.

*Rules which have gendered effects:* Although not all the institutional rules are gendered, they can have gendered effects because of how they interact with institutions outside the political domain. These rules may be formal or informal leading to indirect discrimination because, while they apply to everyone in the same way, they have a different and adverse effect upon women.
Second, Lowndes (2019) describes how the rules (rules about gender and with gendered effects) can be placed in three types of categories: *Regulatory, obligatory, and persuasive.* Those rules are the ones that actors used to reproduce gendered institutions through enacting them (Lowndes, 2019). Institutional rules that enhance certain actors usually restrict other actors' possibilities, meaning that any rule that defines who has authority also defines who has no power (Dennis, 2005). *Regulatory rules* are formally registered, determined by written and formal interpretation, and sanctioned through coercive action based on rewards and punishments. *Obligatory rules* are demonstrated by behavior, learned by observation and replication, and sanctioned by displaying disapproval or social isolation, and *persuasive rules* are represented by symbols and performance, and they are sanctioned through incomprehension and ridicule. Lastly, Lowndes (2019) focuses on the gendered actors and how they interact with the rules. The actors that interact with the rules are inevitably gendered. In the words of Lowndes, those who negotiate the rules of politics, occupy male, female or non-binary bodies and different positions on a masculine or feminine spectrum of values, attitudes, and behaviors. Actors have more or less crucial orientations towards power inequalities connected with any set of gendered rules. Actors enact rules *adapting* them but also can create change through *resistance* or *reforming.*
CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Research Design and Methodology
As mentioned before, the study used the theory of Gendered Organizations and Lowndes's model of gendered political institutions to explore the legislative power in Colombia and Malawi. The theory selection was inspired by their prominent contributions to gender studies and new institutionalism, and by the lack of research to adapt these methods to particular contexts. The study was conducted through qualitative exploratory research. This approach allowed us to dig deep into the data looking for discoveries that can validate the theory and model selected and contributes to the theory (Jupp, 2006). Moreover, exploratory research does not approach their object of study based on any determined formula, giving us a flexible methodology that establishes the development of theory as a continuous process of discovery (Jupp, 2006). According to Vaismoradi and colleagues, qualitative research helps researchers who try to arrive at an understanding of a certain phenomenon from the point of view of those experiencing it (Vaismoradi, et al, 2013). In the case of our study, a qualitative exploratory approach helped us clarify the current problems regarding women's political representation and influence in Colombia and Malawi and established further research priorities. Besides, it is crucial to point out that applying the Gendered Organization's theory or Lowndes' model into legislative power is a novel approach. Therefore, qualitative exploratory research was a proper methodology to explore the theoretical framework aiming to produce early hypotheses and tentative generalizations in a concrete setting like the political arena in Colombia and Malawi (Stebbins, 2001).

Method and Analysis
In order to answer the research questions, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with women that have been or are current members of the Parliament in Colombia or Malawi. The participants were systematically selected from different political parties to ensure broader representation in the study regardless of the political party's vision. Only those willing to take part in the research were interviewed for the purpose of consent. For the interviews, even though a set of topics was previously designed, each interview had a different flow where the participant could bring new topics and add personal experiences and perceptions (Given, 2018). Fifteen interviews were conducted and analyzed using a thematic approach. The development of the set of thematic categories were guided by the dimension stated in the theory of Gendered Institutions and the rules stated in Lowndes's model of gendered political institutions. Using a deductive approach, the themes were drawn from the main issues that characterize a gendered organization as stipulated by Acker and Connell. A deductive approach was used through a line by line coding exercise in order to identify the different themes. We chose Lowndes Model in particular as it is the first of its kind to discuss the gendered institutions approach in a specific political context, while many others relate it to corporate organizations. Moreover, Lowndes (2019) gives a guideline of how a gendered political institution looks, as to who are the actors, the rules as well as the outcomes. We hence run the Parliament and the Congress as political institutions in this model as a way of testing its functioning in the Malawian and Colombian contexts, at the same time as a way of giving a clear description of the kind of institutions we investigated.

Study Limitations
Sample Size:
We are aware that the sample for the study is small. Even though the interviewees come from different political visions, the sample is not the whole picture of the women that lead the legislative power. Hence, there might be topics and issues that are not represented in this thesis or other points of view that might contradict our findings. In addition, it is difficult to get appointments with parliamentarians because they are very high-profile figures.

*Method limitations:*
Conducting semi-structured interviews with politicians regarding social barriers, leadership in complex scenarios, and gender discrimination can be a sensitive subject. Even though the interviewees know that their answers are anonymous, they are very high profile and public leaders that are extremely careful with their words, mainly if they are recorded. Therefore, the responses might not be as honest or open as we wish for them to be.

*Reliability and Validity*
One of the critical aspects of the reliability of study relies on the selection of the sample (Morse et al, 2002). The selection of current or former members of Parliament and Congress was a way of ensuring that information gathered is coming from people who can report on the actual issues and have navigated the political arena; hence the results will be more reliable. Another strategy that we used to enhance the validity of our data was building rapport with the interviewees (McDougall, 2000). To achieve rapport, we created a careful design of the interview and explanation of the study and sent it previously to the interviewees. Therefore, even though it was a semi-structured interview, the interviewees had some sense of familiarity with the topic ahead and asked questions if they needed clarification so they could feel more comfortable.
CHAPTER THREE

PRESENTATION OF THE OBJECT OF THE STUDY

The legislative power in Colombia and Malawi is based on the same idea of the traditional division of power in democracies where the Congress or Parliament is the central body responsible for establishing, changing or revoking laws. However, it does have slight differences since Malawi follows a parliamentary democracy common in independent countries where Britain used to rule, and Colombia follows a congressional democracy common in American countries that got their independence in the XIX century. In this chapter, we present an overview of the legislative power in both countries to give the reader an understanding of the institutional context, main actors, and rules.

Colombia: Legislative Power

Institutional Context

History:
After three centuries of colonization by Spain, Colombia started its independence movement at the beginning of the XIX century. In 1810, the first attempt of independence was declared, followed by multiple battles and political struggles that led to the Republic of Colombia's foundation in 1819 (Congreso de la República de Colombia, n.d.). While the independence war was still going on, the first Congress was established in 1811 and formed by five male representatives of different provinces. Since that time, Congress was organized following a bicameral system and, in 1812, established nineteen members. However, Simón Bolivar, a crucial political and military figure for the independence movements in Latin America, pushed for a more democratic congress and, in 1818, established the first elections. The definition of "more democratic" in the XIX century was to guarantee that more men were allowed to vote and be represented in Congress.

However, the men allowed to vote were to comply with the following characteristics: older than 21 or married, literates, landowners and professors of any science. That profile was suitable only for 5% of the current male population (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, n.d.). After the slavery’ abolition in 1853, it was established that any men born in Colombia that were married and legal aged could vote. Nevertheless, in 1886 with a new constitution, it was declared a step back in the conditions for a voter, and besides being legal aged and literate, the voter should have a substantial annual income, properties, and legal profession. It was not until 1936 that the universal suffrage law that allowed all men older than 21 years to vote was established (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, n.d.).

Women's rights developed very slowly in the twentieth century. In the year 1932, Ofelia Uribe de Acosta, a recognized women rights' activist presented successfully in the Congress a bill that enabled women to access their goods without a consent required from their parents, brothers, or husbands (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, n.d.). In 1936, women were allowed to hold public offices and, in 1945, were finally recognized as citizens (Banco de la República, n.d.). Still, it was not until 1957 that women voted for the first time and in 1958 the first woman in Congress was elected, Esmeralda Arboleda Cadavid in the House of Representatives and Berta Fernández de Ospina in 1962 in the Senate (Banco de la República, n.d.). The last reform that Congress had was in 1991 with "The National Constituent Assembly" that defined the present Congress' structure. The current Senate is elected based on a single national constituency. In the case of the House of Representatives, the election is based on regional and special constituencies. For every 250,000 inhabitants, a region is
allowed to have two representatives and one more for every 150,000 (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, n.d.).

Organizational Structure 2018 - 2022
The Congress is a hierarchical institution. It has a clear division of authority that states a leader at the top referred to as “president”. Besides, it has seven central commissions called constitutional commissions and special and legal commissions (Congreso Visible, n.d.). The Senate has 108 Parliamentarians in total of which only 23 are women and 86 are men. Showing similar gaps, the House of Representatives comprises a total of 171 Parliamentarians with only 32 women against 143 men (Congreso Visible, n.d.).

Main Actors
Politicians
Even though there have been improvements in the women's political representation, in the last elections for the legislative period (2018-2022), from 4476 participants, 945 women that were running for Congress, just 55 women accomplished a seat (UN WOMEN, 2018). Besides, It is important to note that no woman was part of the list of the ten parliamentarians most voted. Moreover, the overall sum of all women's votes does not even equal the sum of the two most voted men. The women most voted got 105,700 votes in contrast with 872,310 votes that got the most voted men.

Political Parties
From the political parties’ side in 2018, 23 political parties aspired to get a seat in the Congress where just three had a woman as a head of political party’ list. Furthermore, most of the political parties filled the conditions regarding the law of quotas that requires at least 30% of women's participation in each political party's list. Still, just one political party achieved parity with 57% of women's representation. Another point to consider is that the internal structures of each political party also has its organizational chart and hierarchical division. Taking into consideration the fourteen political parties that got representatives elected in Congress, just one has a female director.

Voters
Colombia has a population where 50.6% are women, and 49.4% are men (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, n.d.). The Colombian' citizens elect Congress every four years and according to the National Registry of Civil Status, in the last election for Congress, over 36 million people were entitled to vote, and 51.6% were women (UN WOMEN, 2018). Still, the total votes were 18,605,754, meaning that 50.8% of the population qualified to vote did not participate, and from the ones that did 51.7% were women. In a recent report from the UN Women (2018) based on a study of last elections, the agency pointed out that results are paradoxical, placing women as a minority in Congress, despite that women are a majority in terms of the population as well as voters. The same study showed that over seven million women did not vote, and the ones that participated the most were women over 60 years old.

Key Gendered Rules and Gendered Outcomes:
Law of quotas:
A relevant gendered law regarding high-level decision-making is the law of quotas stating that ministries and government agencies must have at least 30% of women in their top positions (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, n.d.). Besides, the law enforces taking action regarding women's participation rights in the private sector and civil society organizations.
Moreover, the law included actions on education regarding gender inequality, gender studies, and women’s leadership training. In 2011, this law was complemented with 30% legislative candidate quotas giving monetary incentives to the political parties to incentivize women's political participation.

**Bench of women:**
In 2006, for the first time in history a bench of women was established in congress. The bench was created as a political compromise to work for women's rights. Besides, it was a bench that pursued laws to benefit women and also makes sure that any law has a principle of equity. Still, it did not have any formal base or constitutional support until 2011 when the legal commission for women' equity was established.

**Women legislation:**
Even though in the current elected Congress 2018 - 2022, there has not been any particular law approved regarding women’s issues, reviewing 129 current projects that Congresswomen are working on, we found that 10.9% directly correlates with gender inequality issues. The current projects are about economic empowerment of women, shared parental leave, and rights of pregnant women, among others.

**Malawi: Legislative Power**

**Institutional Context**

**History:**
The National Assembly of Malawi is the nation's highest legislative body; it is the only institution that has constitutional authority hence absolute control over all other political bodies in Malawi. The Parliament of Malawi was founded on 26 May 1964 following the country’s independence from the British Colony. At its head is the Speaker of the House who is chosen by his or her peers (Parliament of Malawi, 2020). It is worth noting that following Dr Kamuzu Banda’s presidency in 1964 which was a one party rule, Malawi was under a dictatorship which meant that parliamentary structures were technically doing what the president required them to do. Increasing domestic instability and resistance from the Malawi churches and the international community led to a referendum in which Malawians were asked to vote either for a multi-party democracy or for the reassertion of a one-party state, and Malawians voted largely in favor of multi-party democracy in 1993 (Chirwa, 2014).

Following this referendum, all citizens, both men and women cast their first democratic vote on 17th May 1994 in accordance with the provisional constitution, which entered into full force the following year. Bakili Muluzi won the elections, representing 88 parliamentary seats out of a total of 177 members of parliament. In 1994, the Constitution provided for a Senate but it was revoked by Parliament. Thus, Malawi has a unicameral legislature in practice (Parliament of Malawi, 2020). From 1994 going forward, men took the leading roles in the elections up until 2001 where more women contested for parliamentary seats, following which out of 193 members of parliamentary 17 were women one of which held the position of deputy speaker. This reflects a male dominance in the parliament as a whole as well as the leadership within. The assembly has been headed by men throughout history despite the fact that both men and women were allowed to vote as well as run for office. Malawi has had its first ever female speaker of parliament following the tripartite elections that were held in May 2019 showing a major shift in the parliamentary leadership. As of the year 2020, the parliamentary leadership which is also known as “office bearers” seems to be quite balanced, with 5 men and 6 women of which the top level leader is a woman.
The Malawi parliament, which is also referred to as the National assembly, is hierarchical in nature with a clear distribution of roles throughout the structure. The National Assembly has 193 Members of Parliament (MPs) who are democratically elected in single-member electoral districts using a simple majority (or first-past-the-post) system and serve a five-year term (Parliament of Malawi, 2020). From these members of parliament, the leadership team is selected, headed by the Speaker and then followed by this leadership are the parliamentary committees that are designated to different tasks. These committees are normally composed of a committee Chairperson, followed by Deputy Chair and then Committee members. Out of the 193 MPs, about 23 percent are women, which means that already, the committees are dominated by men. Of all the committees, only the women’s caucus is fully represented by women of which it is of no surprise considering it is a committee responsible for gender equality in the national assembly.

Main Actors

Politicians

Regardless of the rise in the political representation of women in the recent May 2019 elections, looking at the figures of the men and women who run for office still shows that the participation of women is way behind and so is the actual representation in the end. Out of the 1329 candidates that ran for office, only 295 were women, representing 22% of all the nominees. Following these elections, only 16.7% of the total winning candidates represented female elected members. It goes without saying that out of all the women that took part in the 2019 tripartite elections, there was a 0% representation of female presidential candidates out of 7 confirmed presidential nominees.

Political Parties

During the parliamentary election in May 2019, for starters, no political party had a female candidate for position of neither the president nor vice president. The political parties represented during these elections totaled 7, without ignoring the fact that a good number of candidates also competed as independent candidates and women candidates were spread through these divisions. Unlike many other countries, the political parties in Malawi do not have a provision for gender quotas hence no party has achieved a 50% gender parity in women representation. Additionally, hierarchies are noted in the political parties. These structures barely show any representation of women in the decision-making positions with an exception of UTM, a new political party that has grown following the past elections. It is worth noting that none of the parties has a female regional governor, a leading role on regional level throughout the country. Despite having Malawi Congress party as the only party that committed a 30% quota for women in decision-making positions in their governing manifesto, this has not been evidence of gains following elections. Most Malawi political parties do not have gender quotas and affirmative policies, nor do they have "left" egalitarian ideologies that promote equality. As a result, gender is commonly viewed rhetorically as an election campaign issue, but never seriously incorporated into party structures (Khembo, 2005).

Voters

Malawi has a population total of about 19 million out of which more than 50% of the population are women (World Bank, 2018). In the May, 2019 elections, only about 6.8 million voters were registered for voting. However, it is also worth noting that the number of voters is way below what was expected because following citizenship registration and issuing
of national identification card exercise, more people had not taken part in the exercise, as they were not aware that these same cards were to be used during voter registration. This made it very hard for most of the otherwise potential voters to register for the 2019 tripartite elections. Out of these people, almost 4 million were women and 3 million were men. Showing a higher number of women voters regardless of the number of women voted into power at parliamentary level. The trend for Malawian registered voters shows a representation of more women registered voters even though as each election period comes and goes they continue to be the minority represented in the National Assembly.

**Key Gendered Rules and Gendered Outcomes:**

*The Gender Equality Act*

In 2013, the gender equality act was proposed and approved in the parliament of Malawi, stating equality and the empowerment of women as the centre of the development agenda. However, regardless of this provision, not that much progress has been achieved. Unlike many other Countries in the Southern African Development Committee (SADC) region, Malawi has no provision of the quota law in the political institution, which is a guiding rule for SADC member countries hence, the drag in the advancement of women in political leadership. The absence of this law has left Malawi behind in as far women representation in politics is concerned as compared to other African Countries, the likes of Uganda, which according to Malawian female politicians, is doing pretty well in the same regard.

*Labour Law for Public Officers*

According to the labour law in Malawi, any woman who has served for at least 12 months, either in the public sector or private sector is entitled to a 90-day maternity leave whereas there is no law that is currently for paternity leave. This has resulted into a determining factor as to whether one participates in politics or not and consequently affecting the levels of women’s political representation at parliamentary level. At the same time, this has affected the guiding rules for political parties in choosing and considering women for leading roles at party level, such as party directors and presidential nominees. It is stemming from such laws that the general public are also guided on opting for male candidates during elections seeing as men are expected to be more available than women who might have to go on maternity leave at some point. This law has consequently made it easier for leadership opportunities to be more available for men unlike women throughout the political sphere and beyond, hence there is a constant reproduction and maintenance of the gendering processes in politics of which the result has always been and continues to be hegemonic masculinity, just as the theory of gendered organizations stipulates.

*Women’s Caucus*

The women’s caucus is a pro-women legislation movement with almost all the women legislators as its members. However, ever since its inception in 1994, the improvement on representation of women has not been as significant as one would expect. According to Chiweza and colleagues the caucus was most productive when the leaders were able to behave in unity and collaborate closely with outside actors. Yet the caucus' role in ensuring substantive outcomes is not indispensable and can be overridden by the combined actions of women's organizations, donors and key individual parliamentary actors (Chiweza et al, 2016).

*Nomination Fee and Candidate fee reduction*
The Malawi Electoral Commission requires a certain amount of money as a nomination fee to be paid by each nominee in order to be allowed to run for office, which in most cases is an amount that is slightly too high especially for most of the women. The usual fee requirement was however recently revised with a provision stating that women aspirants will now pay half of what their male counterparts are expected to pay. Regardless of this revision, however, concerns were still raised that this amount was still too high for most female candidates. Following complaints from many aspiring women politicians towards the May 2019 tripartite elections in regards to lack of resources, external actors held many dialogues with political parties and other involved organizations with the aim of addressing the cost of being a female candidate. Despite the efforts, political parties did not adopt this. However, other parties like the UN women 50/50 campaign came to their rescue and supported most of the nominees and this made it easier for more women to participate in the elections.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

Politicians are one of the main actors of legislative power. They are the ones who have to navigate the political arena to get a seat in Congress or Parliament and build political capital to ensure influence over legislative decisions. In Colombia and Malawi, the characteristics of the political arena that politicians interact with are very similar. In both scenarios, politicians encounter legislative campaigns, political parties, and power struggles to influence decision-making. Besides, the duties as members of Parliament or Congress are very similar. In both cases, politicians in the legislative power are in charge of representing their constituencies, enact or deny laws, and enforce political control. However, the differences between countries lie in the socio-cultural particular contexts that shaped the political arena and created different challenges and dynamics of power. In this chapter, we present the results and analysis of the 15 interviews conducted with current and former female parliamentarians in Colombia and Malawi under the lens of Gendered Organization theory and Lowndes's model.

Gendered Actors Working with Rules

Rules about Gender

According to Lowndes (2019), to acknowledge and understand the critical relations within the political arena, we have to look for rules about gender that impact a specific setting, in our case, the legislative power. Surprisingly, according to our findings, all women politicians recognized that the rules that impact women's political representation and influence the most are not formal written rules. Instead, those rules are informal and created in institutions outside the political arena. That is the case of cultural rules, represented in a set of beliefs in which society based decisions regarding major institutions like family, education, health, among others (Dyczewski & Sławik, 2016). According to our findings, one of the most challenging cultural underlying rules that hinder women's political representation is that girls are supposed to become mothers and wives instead of aspiring to a leading public role. Therefore, they are raised as secondary actors rather than leaders. This rule seems to be persuasive (Lowndes, 2019). It is represented through symbolism, meaning that men are placed as a symbol of a leader in the society and women that tried to emulate or defy such a symbol are ridiculed or misinterpreted (Lowndes, 2019).

Resisting and Reforming Informal Rules

According to Lowndes (2019), gendered actors interact with the rules in three ways: adapting, resisting, or reforming. In both countries, women politicians explained how, through empowerment, they could resist the informal rules that hinder their aspirations. For instance, most of the interviewees pointed out that empowering women, building their self-esteem, and teaching young girls to believe in themselves is one of the best ways to change those underlying society's rules that put women in a disadvantaged position. As one of the women interviewed suggests:

“We should focus on the more informal driving forces that affect women and guide their choices to joining politics. We need to revolutionize feminism; women should empower girls and women. We should be in the forefront to empower fellow women to take leadership positions in both formal and the informal platforms.”

Furthermore, some of the women interviewed also suggested the implementation of local leadership programs for women in rural areas to encourage more women to participate in politics. They describe these leadership training as something that boosts self-confidence in
women and breaks harmful informal rules like cultural beliefs that put women in a position to accept the setup that they are not meant for leadership, let alone political leadership. Regarding education, most women parliamentarians interviewed identified equal access to education as one fundamental way to have more women in politics. In the case of Malawi, they suggested a review of education policies to create a deliberate effort in intellectually preparing more girls for political leadership and making the education policy accommodative for the girls. Moreover, most of them advocated for education laws to reform current cultural values that impede women from getting educated. Nurturing the potential in young girls and women would show them that political careers are for everyone. As much as education policies do not necessarily stipulate favor for the boys, they might be negatively affecting girls, and perhaps there is a need to remodel them for a more gendered outcome. One interviewee from Malawi also pointed out that the fact that;

"Women are the majority of the country and that the fact that they are the least educated population means that their issues will not be highlighted in national issues."

Rules with Gendered Effects
According to Lowndes (2019), some rules might seem neutral, but in practice, they can have gendered effects. Our findings did not find relevant signs for such rules in the Colombian legislative power that were directly affecting women's political representation and influence. However, in Malawi, all the interviewees pointed out that several informal rules that seem neutral regarding the electoral campaign hinder women's possibilities to achieve a seat in the Parliament. Those rules create gendered effects that put women in a disadvantaged position compared to their male colleagues. One of them is that, for members of Parliament, whether male or female, communities expect them to solve their problems like paying school fees for their children, giving them food and any other financial assistance. Unfortunately, most of the time, female politicians cannot reach these expectations, and therefore it has been tough to remain in power because their male counterparts usually have the resources to live up to these expectations. As one of the interviewees explained, women end up on the disadvantaged side where they are perceived as nonfunctional when, in actuality, legislatures are not supposed to play the role of a social worker. A former member of parliament from Malawi declares;

"My challenge was that our politics in Malawi, you need to please people. If you don't play to please people your political career cannot survive so you need to suck up to people, you need to do all the stupid things people do, you need to buy your votes. You need to play the role of a social worker to get votes."

Adapting to the “Rules” of the Game
According to the interviewees, in Malawi, it is hopeless to try to change this reality. In most cases, female politicians have adapted to the circumstances and tried to do their best to find their way to win the elections. However, some women that tried to resist these informal rules experienced frustration and disappointment, stating that being in power does not matter how good a politician is. If they do not play such a corrupted game, they will not remain in power. One of the interviewees said that;

‘People want you to cough money. I did everything right that I was supposed to do as a politician but I didn’t cough up money to buy anyone. So that was a challenge, and I didn’t make it again but in a way I left a legacy, that I did work, and that I did it right. As a legislature I asked the right questions, I followed what I was supposed to follow, I
went to parliament. I followed deliberations and went to Parliament. I made sure that people knew that somebody was representing them. I made sure that the public had someone to follow issues up for them as a legislature.”

Lowndes (2109) describes this situation as explaining how obligatory rules, in a particular setting, are learned by observation and replication. They are severely sanctioned with disapprobation or social isolation. Despite these rules are not written down and, in this particular case, they go against the law. However, they are powerful precepts that hinder someone's possibilities to achieve or preserve a seat in the Parliament.

**Enablers and Barriers**

**Division of Labor**

Most of the interviewees expressed that one of the challenges that have impacted the representation of women in politics is that politics is termed as a man's career, that the political arena is, therefore a man's world. Connell (2006) explains that in gendered organizations, production and consumption are arranged in a gendered manner. The division of work in the Parliament of Malawi and the Colombian Congress is evident in the way the commissions’ composition is represented. In these commissions, men tend to hold most of the leading positions like chairperson, whereas women are just mere members. The study also found that, unfortunately, common assumptions that placed women in social issues and men in economic and security issues are still present in both countries' legislative power. For instance, there is less representation of women in commissions dealing with the national budget, judiciary, national security, and international relations. According to Budig (2002), women are disadvantaged regardless of their willingness to work, their working experience, and even professionalism simply because they are not men. Another point regarding the division of labor that our findings showed is that other institutions outside the political arena also impact women's political representation. For instance, the case of family. Some of the interviewees pointed out that as women, they had to choose whether they should get married and start a family or join politics. Gender division of labor in a society depends on its cultural beliefs about the nature and social value of gender differences in skills and abilities (Ridgeway, 2001). Deducing from that, then, we can see that women are mostly associated with domestic work in Colombia and Malawi. Thus, the only skills they are associated with are taking care of the home, raising children, and not necessarily running a campaign, let alone going to Parliament.

**Gender Relations of Power**

According to Connell (2006), power relations are how control, authority, and forces are employed along gender lines and can be seen in the use of collective and individual violence against women. Our findings show that one of the principal barriers that women face is violence in all political participation stages and levels. Female politicians have experienced several kinds of violence, from insults and intimidations to beatings and death threats. Moreover, female politicians that are current members of the Parliament stated that it is usual that their colleagues use a pejorative language to approach them. Terms like "girl," "love," or comments about appearance are common in the workplace. Besides, some interviewees also feel ignored by their colleagues when they raise issues, declaring that people pay more attention to ideas when a man talks. Another issue that most of the women politicians continue to face is that people regularly verbally attack them more especially during campaigns. It is also common that when women achieve a well-known public position, they are accused of prostitution or being someone’s lover to get to that position.
In the case of Colombia, violence is a current and historical phenomenon that has hindered women's political participation (AWID, 2015). Despite a peace agreement signed in 2016, Colombia is in a critical situation that is compromising the lives of hundreds of political leaders (Casey, 2019). One of the interviewees’ states that the first barrier women face for participating in politics, especially in rural areas, relates to security concerns. She said;

"The systematic homicide of social leaders is what generates, in addition to the humanitarian effect, a silencing effect. It is a fear of enacting leadership because this puts women in a situation of vulnerability."

On the other hand, most of the respondents from Malawi relate to power relations issues regarding barriers to access economical resources. Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries, and according to research women are more impacted by poverty (World Bank, 2018). Unlike their male counterparts, women barely have the resources to launch activities that will attract voters, let alone the bare minimum. The interviewees stressed that access to finances incapacitate more women who would otherwise participate in active politics if they were economically empowered. One of the interviewees stressed that there is an essential link between economic empowerment and political representation. She said that from her experience, a woman has to have enough money to compete with a man in the constituency. This statement correlates directly with the idea that those who have access to resources tend to be dominant, and those without resources are powerless (Witmer, 2018). This linkage automatically places women in politics below their male counterparts.

Looking at the issues arising from unequal access to finances between men and women, the study clearly shows that the representation of women is not entirely up to them being willing to participate, most times it is a choice they may never afford to pick. Acker (2012), discusses the process of identifying people in social classes as a way of putting others in control and others as subordinates, thus an exclusion between two different classes, thereby constructing hierarchies. Due to the fact that men have access to resources and most women do not, this automatically places women below in the hierarchies thus making men more powerful than their female counterparts. On the same note of gender relation of power, considering that most women in Malawi are not financially fit to partake in politics, some depend on their husband’s financial support whereby oftentimes such a woman may not go for campaign if the husband forbids her from doing so. This can be one of the intentional practices Acker (2012) highlights as practices that dismiss or incorporate women into segregated functions.

**Emotion and Human Relations**

Connell (2006) also argues that human relations in institutions informs us of how kindness and animosity between individuals and groups are often structured along gender lines, including feelings of friendship, resentment, and sexual desire and repulsion. In the case of Malawi, some of the interviews expressed that the men objectify them. One interviewee indicated that male colleagues are fond of saying playful words that are oftentimes rude and demeaning. She said that the men usually have the mentality that if the women go to them for instance to ask about issues to do with politics more than once, they assume that what these women are looking for is sexual relations. This has affected women’s work in politics and she says since people are aware of such conducts, they would rather not join politics at all. Another interviewee expressed that being a young female politician; she has experienced disrespect in a sense that her colleagues do not respect her as someone that can deliver results on the political scene. Just like Connell (2006) associates gendered institutions feelings of friendship and resentment as organized in gendered lines, we see the same from the results of
the study as the women express that they cannot even mingle at the institution’s bars for fear of being misunderstood and being associated with the wrong image. This lack of opportunity to build networks they say has had an impact on the progression in most of the women in political careers.

On the other hand, in the case of Colombia, all of the interviewees talked very fondly about their women colleagues in Congress. They recognized that despite the different political views, most of their colleagues are admirable women committed to their political work. Besides, in the women’s commission established within the Congress, there is a sense of comradery that has been highly effective in defending women politicians in Congress against verbal violence and machismo. One of the women interviews from Colombia stated that;

"In the women’s commission, women are representing all political parties, but when someone attacks one of us is like they are attacking all of us. Regarding our political views, we all come out to defend each other. And that is something that other women should learn because it doesn’t happen often that other women stand for you. And I think that's the way it should be."

Another important dimension of the Colombian case is that of female politicians who act as mentors to other women who strive to be in politics. One interviewee stated that a woman in power has a responsibility to get more women in power. These relations also have generated positive results, encouraging women to consider a political career. Well-known politicians are giving other women mentorship and an already built political capital that raises their possibilities to achieve a seat in the legislative power.

Gender Culture and Symbolism
There are several common aspects of the cultural values in Colombia and Malawi that define gender identities and shared beliefs about women's roles. Women politicians acknowledge that in their societies it is common to assume that men tend to be more natural leaders than women. Thus, women are perceived as less capable of assuming leadership positions impacting their political aspirations. Moreover, women are raised to be mothers rather than leaders, which is an arrangement that the family embraces. Another barrier based on gender culture is that most of the time, women choose between having a family or pursuing a political career. Even though most of the interviewees reject those values and advocate for change in society, there are still some female politicians in Colombia that believe that being better suited for taking care of a home is a natural condition. Therefore, cultural barriers are not perceived as barriers but as a factor that cannot be changed. For instance, one politician explicitly stated that most challenges in her career are based in the natural condition of being born as a woman by saying that:

"Men do not have to decide between family and work. And that's normal. I mean women, by nature, are the ones who should take care of a family. For men, everything is easier. They do not have to make sacrifices for their careers. But that is how nature is. Men are the stronger sex, and we are stronger to give birth and take care of a family."
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION
Consistent with the theory, our findings for Malawi show that most of the women politicians acknowledge that the legislative power is indeed gendered. They recognized that there are formal and informal rules, actors, and institutions in and outside the political arena that are systematically placing women in a disadvantaged position to pursue a political career. However, in the case of Colombia most politicians believe that the political arena is neutral. Therefore, they do not recognize barriers that are explicitly connected to gender. It is important to note that political institutions might seem to be neutral, but they still affect women and men differently (Johnson, 2017). That represents a considerable threat because, for inequalities to be reproduced, they have to be incorporated in daily interactions and accepted by a particular setting (Lorber, 1994). Women politicians that fail to recognize the gendered structures would help to reproduce those inequalities in the political arena. According to Acker (1990), change in seemingly neutral institutions is possible, but it has a considerable risk that the outcomes could be a new unequal system. If this continues to be the case for women in Colombia and Malawi, where explicit gendered institutions and rules are hindering political participation, equal representation in politics would be harder to achieve.

Surprisingly, our findings also show that most of the struggles and barriers that women politicians encounter are informal rules created by other institutions outside the political domains. It is, therefore, crucial for activists, policymakers, and advocates to recognize the root sources of the barriers for women's political representation. As Lowndes (2019) explains, most of the efforts regarding equality policies and strategies are frustrated due to the lack of accuracy in recognizing crucial micro-foundation between actors and rules. In the case of Colombia and Malawi, we realized that cultural values that place women as a secondary actor hinder their possibilities of becoming political leaders.

Another crucial aspect to take into consideration is the issue of intersectionalities of class and gender. How sexism and class are combined to create a distinct kind of discrimination for disadvantaged women in rural areas in both countries and this has had a negative impact on women’s political representation. Crenshaw and McCall (2013) explains that taking intersectionality into consideration will help in the identification of how interwoven categories of identity have an impact on individuals and institutions, and therefore it is crucial to take these relationships into account when working to promote social and political equity. Most of the women politicians interviewed acknowledge that there are other systems of domination, like class, which affect women, especially those in rural areas. Our major concern regarding intersectionalities is that women that benefit from class privileges might have a blind spot regarding other women's struggles. Few of our interviewees recognized that they had class privileges that enable their political careers and that their situation does not represent or deny other women's challenges in the country. In the case of Colombia, privileges are related to being born and raised in an urban area that was not affected by war, access to education, and a supportive family. Similarly, in Malawi, privilege is seen as family support and growing up in urban areas where girl child education is not uncommon as compared to rural areas.

Gender laws and policies are the outcome of the fight for gender inequality, one of which is gender quotas in politics. Studying two countries, one of which has a quota rule and the other that has not, has shown some pretty interesting results. Since implementing a quota provision with a 30 percent representation of women in congresses, Colombia is behind by up to 5 per
cent compared to Malawi, even though Malawi does not have a political gender quota at the legislative level. However, it is worth noting that women interviewed in both countries recognize the need for a gender quota so as to increase women's political representation. Some of the women interviewed from Colombia acknowledge that the increase in the representation of women in the Colombian congress is a result of the quota. However, some women from Malawi have concerns about the gender quota policy because they believe it would defeat the purpose of women's representation, which is influence, just as much as it may improve women's representation. Perhaps suggesting further research on substantial representation of women in the presence of the quota.

CONCLUSION
In conclusion, women's political representation and influence in the legislative power in Colombia and Malawi is far from gender parity. That represents a considerable challenge in achieving sustainable development in each country, especially the sustainable development goal number five stipulated in the United Nations' agenda 2030. Even though the legislative power in Colombia and Malawi have differences related to the socio-cultural context of each country, both countries presented similar gendered political arenas that reproduce inequalities and hinder women's political representation and influence. Consistent with theory, our findings highlighted systematic violence, cultural values, and informal rules as the main barriers that put women in a disadvantaged position in terms of political participation in the legislative power. In contrast, the enablers for women's political participation are based on access to education, mentorship, and empowerment.

We believe that the first step in moving towards gender equality is to acknowledge that the political arena is indeed not gender neutral, and it does affect women and men in different ways. Moreover, in order to create more effective and sustainable laws and policies, other systems of oppression that create intersectionalities to hinder women's development must be considered. For future research, from a feminist perspective, several lines of investigation focusing on the political arena should be considered, such as the impact of gender inequality on sustainable development, the actors' interaction with informal rules, and the effect of the intersectionalities in women's political representation.
REFERENCES


