

## WOMEN'S SCARCITY IN ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE – GENDERED IDENTITY OR GENDERED PROCESSES? A NŐK ALACSONY RÉSZVÉTELE AZ EGYETEMEK VEZETÉSÉBEN – NEMI IDENTITÁS VAGY NEMI FOLYAMATOK?

This article contributes to the empirical evidence for women's scarcity in academic governance. The study evaluates to what extent women lean towards non-management careers and dismiss opportunities to attain executive roles in Colombian public universities, as well as the support received when they break the paradigm. The purpose was to determine whether gendered practices are ingrained in the designation process or whether women's scarcity is the outcome of individual attributes/choices and collective perceptions of inadequacy. Data was collected from universities' proceedings, opinion polls of rectors' designations, and candidates' curricula. Findings show low female candidacy rate but high public support for female candidates to the rector's seat among all universities examined. Also, curricula's in-depth analyses display women's preference for male-dominated careers and analogous academic/administrative experience to that of male candidates. Hence, the results challenge explanations presented by human capital and congruity prejudice theories, while leaning towards gendered processes and identities.

**Keywords:** gendered practices, prejudice, career/occupational segregation

E cikk eredményei a nők egyetemi vezetésben való alacsony részvételével kapcsolatos tudományos eredményekhez járulnak hozzá. A cikk kolumbiai állami egyetemek példáján vizsgálja meg, hogy mennyire jellemző a nőkre az, hogy nem vezetői karriert választanak maguknak, vagy visszautasítják a felajánlott vezetői pozíciókat; illetve, hogy milyen támogatást kapnak akkor, ha mégis szembe mennek az erre vonatkozó általános trenddel. A kutatás annak feltárására irányult, hogy a nők alacsony részvételének oka a kiválasztási folyamatokba ivódott nemi megkülönböztetésben keresendő-e, vagy inkább az egyéni tulajdonságok és választások, illetve a nők alkalmatlanságára vonatkozó kollektív észlelések okolandók ezért. Az elemzés az egyetemek kiválasztási eljárásrendjeiből, a rektori kinevezésekhez kapcsolódó közvélemény-kutatásokból és a jelöltek életrajzaiból származó adatokon alapult. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy az összes vizsgált egyetemen alacsony a női jelöltek aránya, de a rektori székbe kerülő nők a közvélemény nagy támogatottságát élvezik. Az életrajzok elemzése feltárta, hogy a nők nem utasítják el a karriert a férfiak által uralt területeken, valamint nők is rendelkeznek a férfi jelöltekéhez hasonló tudományos/adminisztratív tapasztalattal. A kutatás eredményei megkérdőjelezzik az emberi tőke és a kongruitásra vonatkozó elméletek magyarázatait, miközben igazolják a nemek által befolyásolt folyamatok és identitások elméleteit.

**Kulcsszavak:** nemre jellemző gyakorlatok, előítéletek, karrier/foglalkozási szegregáció

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Scholarly research has provided ample evidence of women's growing presence in the labor market worldwide but a persistent underrepresentation in the executive level. In Latin-American nations, for example, women represent 25% of the labor force in directive positions, according to data collected from economic, business and service sectors, where Latin-American women frequently work (Maxfield, Cárdenas, & Heller, 2008; Cardenas, et al., 2013). However, little attention has been given to their trajectories inside the academic organizational setting. As a contribution to this gap, the United Nations International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean revealed that just 18% of all universities in the region, have women rectors (UNESCO-IESALC, 2020). In Colombia, only four out of eighty-seven accredited universities have women as rectors, two of them in public universities (SNIES, 2020). When asked about influential factors behind this underrepresentation, one of these female rectors claimed that due to the stigma surrounding women's leadership skills, it is harder for women to attain directive roles, thus, good academic preparation would be the only path to guarantee women's access to executive seats. Another female rector pointed out the passive resistance of some directive boards to promote women to executive roles as a stronger influential factor (Guía académica, 2019).

To address this information gap, the present research evaluates women's limited professional promotion to the highest echelons of academic governance from different theoretical frameworks that take into account individual and organizational notions of gendered beliefs, identities, choices, and practices. Consistently, empirical data is elicited to determine 1) whether institutional designation procedures and requirements foster the exclusion of female candidates, 2) whether recent female application rates for leadership roles reflects a voluntary exclusion from high responsibility roles, 3) whether the professional profile of female applicants is deficient in terms of academic background and administrative experience when compared to men's profiles, and 4) how these assumed differences influence the community's support.

The paper is structured as follows: First, a short description of the Latin-American culture is provided as an overview of its cultural and social values around the subjects of gender and work followed by key theoretical referents and research questions. In the third section the methodology implemented is explained while the analysis of findings is covered in the fourth section. Finally, section five includes conclusions and suggestions for further research.

## Latin-American culture

In their research about women and corporative life in Latin-American culture, Sylvia Maxfield and her colleagues (2008) explained how in this region hierarchy is widely accepted, social status is highly important and collectivistic values are strongly tied to family obligations. The culture is also surrounded by stereotypes of *male chauvinism* or

*machismo* and *female marianismo* where men are seen as physically strong protectors, while women are most appreciated by their beauty, purity, and self-sacrifice.

It is also important to highlight that cultural heterogeneity is a constant in the Latin-American region not only in terms of race and ethnicity, but also regarding political authority and economic development. Even inside countries, culture varies according to the geographical location of the communities. In Colombia, for example, coastal cities and those closer to the mountains are politically, culturally, and economically different. Yet, in general, the work culture is flexible, creative, and somehow chaotic due to a lack of clear guidelines or the widespread practice of "exceptions". Overall, when friendship is involved, rules can be broken and spontaneity is customary, thus moving the family-loyalty model to the workplace (Ogliastri, 1998).

Similarly, there is skepticism towards civil legislation, which is perceived as political machination and administrative judgement. Therefore, informal networks are crucial and informal strategies aiming at cultural change might succeed, but affirmative actions, like gender quotas, are bound to fail (Maxfield, Cárdenas, & Heller, 2008).

## Theoretical foundations

To explain female underrepresentation in executive roles different analogies and theoretical approaches have been proposed overtime. The most popular analogy is "the Glass Ceiling" metaphor, which refers to barriers at the end of the professional trajectory restricting women's access to the highest hierarchical levels. But the most recent analogy is "the Labyrinth" (Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b), which conveys the idea of a complex journey filled with both subtle and evident barriers in the multiple paths leading to the top.

Likewise, dominant theoretical approaches to gender and organization have expanded through different perspectives of inequality. Approaches with an individual lens give priority to personal beliefs and judgements, the notions of gender roles and their manifestations in the organizational distribution of positions (Calás, Smircich, & Holvino, 2014). On the other hand, approaches with an organizational lens investigate how recruitment, evaluation and promotion practices might generate gender stratifications. Yet, since organizations are immersed in societies with specific values and ideologies, a proper theoretical framework should examine the individual, the organizational context, and the larger social system in which they function (Fagenson, 1990). Thus, theoretical referents addressed in this study are divided into individual and organizational perspectives interplayed with a social perspective.

## Individual perspective

### Human capital theory and occupational segregation

*Human capital* comprises activities, such as schooling or on the job training, that influence future income and

benefits by increasing people's resources (Becker, 1993). Thus, as an economic theory, it attended to the analysis of wage gaps. However, Solomon Polachek believed it could also explain occupational sex segregation, where women would self-exclude from certain careers and from high responsibility positions in order to cope with domestic responsibilities. His statements were based on the premise that women planning discontinuous employment would prefer occupations with lower penalties for time spent outside the labor force (Polachek, 1975, 1976, 1979). Berry (1983) agreed that women might be willing to work in female-dominated occupations (e.g., nursing, social services) despite their lower status and lower pay rate because they provide more opportunities to combine work and family life.

The approach appears reasonable considering that low appreciation jobs, characterized as female-dominated jobs, usually offer higher starting wages, which would make them attractive to women planning to work for short periods of time. However, there is not enough evidence to support these statements, indeed, empirical evidence show that women have higher wages when employed in male-dominated occupations and that many women with continuous employment history also choose female-dominated occupations (England, 1982). Moreover, international data displays a new tendency, where female preferences for traditionally male-dominated occupations is growing (World Economic Forum, 2020).

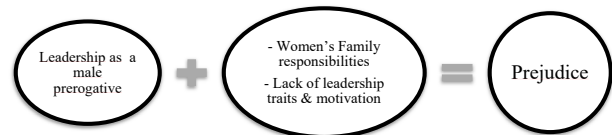
### Stereotypes, prejudice, and gendered identities

Gender stereotypes are considered mayor influential factors for women's underrepresentation in leadership roles, mainly because they can impact people's perceptions of suitable leaders as well as a person's willingness to lead (Chen & Houser, 2019). According to the *stereotype threat theory* (Steele & Aronson, 1995), the *stereotype boost theory* (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ho, 2011) and the *role congruity theory* (Eagly & Karau, 2002), when a woman is in an all-female group or is required to perform tasks that are congruent with female expectations, she will experience less gender stereotype effect (GSE) and will be more willing to assume leadership roles. On the other hand, when a woman is placed in a male-dominated group or is asked to perform tasks that are incongruent with female gender expectations, "her female identity will become more salient and she may hold back or be overlooked for promotion opportunities as a consequence of shying away from leadership" (Chen & Houser, 2019, p. 2).

To elaborate on these gender-based expectations and their impact on gendered identities, it is necessary to further explain the *congruity theory of prejudice* (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This theory describes normative beliefs about attributes and behavioral patterns expected from each sex and analyzes how prejudice labels women as less qualified for leadership roles because of family responsibilities or lack of traits and motivations to attain positions of power (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999) as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

### Fundamental notions of the congruity theory of prejudice



Source: author's own schema based on Eagly & Karau (2002)

Recent research also argues that these "gender stereotypes that can produce prejudice against women as leaders can also serve as self-fulfilling prophecies that undermine women's confidence in their own leadership ability and ambitions" (Cardenas et al., 2013, p. 6). In Latin-America, women executives acknowledged the challenges posed by male chauvinism or machismo and domestic responsibilities not only in the practical sense of daily routines but also in their potential to foster employers' prejudice and workplace discrimination particularly at higher levels. Still, most successful Latin-American women executives deny having experienced discrimination themselves (Maxfield, 2008), and managed to fulfil cultural expectations through creative personal solutions to domestic responsibilities for example by hiring domestic help or relying on extended family support.

Overall, successful Latin-American women executives attribute their accomplishments to individual effort, hard work and personal performance. So, they do not make excuses for the difficulties/barriers faced but at the same time, they fail to realize that their struggles were not unique, and that gender stereotypes and organizational discriminatory practices are indeed a serious issue affecting all women pursuing professional advance (Cardenas et al., 2013).

### Organizational perspective: Gendered organizations

The historical division of power in social institutions can be ascribed to the distinction between production and reproduction, where business and industry (production) are perceived as the source of well-being and wealth, while child/elder care and education (reproduction) are devalued as wealth consuming. Therefore, non-work life is categorized as peripheral to the organization's interests, yet it strongly influences organizational practice, ideologies, and distributions of power (Acker, 1992).

The most evident manifestation of the gender-divided social influence is the higher representation of women in specific occupational positions, which was initially addressed as the result of individual self-segregation patterns. But evidence from different Latin-American nations highlights horizontal (within different occupations) and vertical (within positions of power) segregation at the organizational level, which are incongruent with the profiles of their labor force. Hence, it assumes structural patterns of discrimination that would categorize the organizational

performance as essentially gendered.

For instance, in Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, women are highly represented in human resources, services, sales, and social work which are perceived as female jobs for being congruent with communicative skills and caring functions traditionally attributed to women (Arango, Viveros, & Bernal, 1995; Valenzuela & Reinecke, 2000). But their presence in the directive level does not reach 30% despite their high education levels in pipeline fields such as engineering, management, accountancy, law and systems analysis (Avelar & Zabludovsky, 1996). Therefore, “there is a relation between social roles traditionally attributed to women and their assigned positions inside the organizational setting” (Maxfield, Cárdenas, & Heller, 2008, p. 84).

In the specific case of Colombia, female participation in the labor force also includes the industrial and financial sectors, and when compared to other Latin-American countries, the number of women in the executive level is also higher (PNUD, 2000), but their proportion is still small with respect to the male share. Thus, hidden patterns of discrimination in the recruitment and promotion processes are assumed. It is important to reiterate that, overall, Latin-American female executives do not perceive organizational recruitment and promotion practices as contributors to inequality patterns, except in a few male-dominated sectors.

This study explores the issue at hand from multiple angles, to further assess women’s occupational choices, their proportion in executive roles and their counterparts’ collective perceptions in the Latin-American region and particularly in Colombia. Moreover, since most scholarly research have focused on private organizations from business, political, and industrial sectors, this study is centered in an organizational setting generally neglected in the literature: higher education institutions.

First, the analysis involves an evaluation of whether *women’s application rate to the executive role of university rector and their preferences for certain professional disciplines reflect individual perceptions of gender appropriate social roles and lack of ambition*. The executive role of university rector was selected as focus of analysis because it is the only position, whose designation process requires the participation of all the organization’s members and involves elective and appointment stages.

Then, considering stereotype and congruency theories; it is assumed that women do not compete for executive roles and when they do, they are dismissed during the election process or receive minimal support. So, collective opinions are also examined to determine *to what extent do the designation process and the academic community’s support rates reflect a dismissal for female candidates*. Finally, incongruent images of appropriate gender roles and leadership also assume that male candidates would be more involved in political roles and that female candidates would accumulate lower administrative experience (human capital) overtime. Therefore, women’s opportunities are assumed to be limited in professional practices and in political roles as well. To address this concern, the third

question inquiries about *the impact of academic level and administrative experience in the amount of support that candidates receive*.

## Research methods

Due to the lack of research insights into gender equality in academia, this study is specifically oriented towards the analysis of women’s executive representation in universities. The organizational setting was selected because, even though all Colombian universities are legally granted institutional autonomy (Ley 30, 1992) to designate their academic and administrative authorities, only public universities as opposed to private universities, have similar directive boards’ composition, functions, and requirements. Hence, offering a valuable opportunity for comparative analyses.

Overall, there are eighty-seven accredited universities in Colombia, thirty-two of them are categorized as public universities (SNIES, 2020). Yet to evaluate the data under a gender-based lens, the study focused on cases that included female and male candidates in their last rector’s designation process. It is important to state that all public universities went through that process between 2017 and 2020 as more rectors are designated for periods of three or four years. The designation process of public universities is explained on Table 1.

Table 1.  
Mainstream stages for rector’s designation in Colombian public universities

Stage	Description
1	– Call for application including specific requirements (e.g., educational level, administrative experience, etc.) – Registration of candidates, – Assessment of candidate’s curriculums with supporting documentation to define compliance with the requirements.
2	– Presentation of candidates’ profiles and their government proposals to the academic community (through online news reports or live discussion forums), – Opinion polls where students, teachers, administrative staff, and alumni members vote to short-list (3 to 5) applicants, – Presentation of short-listed candidates to the Board of Directors.
3	– Board of Directors designates as rector the candidate that obtains more than half of the votes of the board members (absolute majority).

Source: author’s own schema based on empirical data from application calls and general statuses

To evaluate the data, document analysis was selected as research method because organizational files are valuable sources of information regarding recruitment and promotion practices, workforce’ professional profiles, and events’ outcomes. Moreover, documents deriving from organizations and public inquiries are likely to be authentic and meaningful (in the sense of being clear and compre-

hensible), hence, they do not incorporate issues of credibility and representativeness (Bryman, 2012).

Then, descriptive statistics are conducted to facilitate the revision of the findings, since most of the data include numerical information and the cluster of essential categories for multiple research subjects. The evaluation encompasses organizational practices, application rates by gender, professional profiles of candidates and collective support rate of selected organizations.

### Data

The selection of analytic categories was based on the application requirements of all public universities in Colombia, which contain different combinations of the following elements: Colombian citizenship, university degree, disciplinary and criminal clean records, administrative and academic experience, and a governmental plan.

From these options, only half of the universities clearly specified that candidates must not have convictions, disciplinary sanctions, legal impediments nor conflicts of interest to apply for the rector's position. Twenty-five percent (25%) of them explicitly required a governmental plan, and few cases included additional requirements such as age limitations (10%) or proficiency in a second language (3%). However, all Colombian public universities required a university degree to apply for the role of rector, sixty percent (60%) of them further specify a graduate degree requirement. Similarly, more than ninety percent (90%) of these academic organizations required minimum teaching/research and administrative experience alternating between 3, 5, and 10 years. Thus, aiming at data uniformity to foster comparative accuracy, only the categories of academic background represented by university degrees, and the professional experience represented by administrative and academic experience are carefully assessed in this study.

For the selection of participants, a criterion-based sampling (Goertz & LeCompte, 1984) was established, to address the female underrepresentation issue. Hence, aiming at comparative cases, only, universities that had both female and male candidates in their most recent rector's designation were included in the research. The process started by examining organizational public records (statuses and internal regulations) of designation proceedings for directive positions. The information was then compared to establish similarity patterns, which are further explained in the discussion section. Then, detailed data was gathered from all public universities' most recent calls for application and from official reports of registered candidates, published by every university's General Secretary Office.

Selected cases include 11 universities whose final candidates' list contained female and male applicants. The total sample comprises 65 candidates whose curricula were compiled for further examination in terms of academic background and professional experience with a particular focus on administrative experience. Data was obtained from different sources starting with the researchers' database of the Colombian Ministry of Science, Technolo-

gy, and Innovation (CVLAC), but also from universities' websites, the government's curriculum database of civil servants (Función Pública), LinkedIn, and candidates' professional webpages and academic blogs.

For the evaluation of collective opinions within different sectors of the academic community, official reports were collected from selected organizations and their voting results were categorized in relation to all participating sectors, for instance, students, academic and administrative staff, and alumni members. The purpose was to evaluate the assumption that differences in the candidates' professional profiles might affect the support rates received from their academic communities. Thereupon, different categories of educational attainment, administrative experience, and actual voting results are compared.

### Data Analysis: Cross-Tabulations

Descriptive statistics based on cross-tabulations or contingency tables were implemented, because they facilitate the process of summarizing relationships and can show the proportion of application rates by subgroups in a manageable format. Next, an analysis of candidates' occupational preferences is assessed to determine relationships within the data. First by determining gender differences for the most selected disciplines (career segregation), the most selected administrative sector within the broad categories of academic, public, and private (occupational segregation), and the accumulated years of experience. Then, overall preferences for male or female candidates are evaluated based on the number of votes received, which indicate the level of support of the academic community. Results are categorized between shortlisted and most voted candidates.

Finally, more specific data were included to examine the influence of higher levels of academic background and administrative experience in the amount of support received by the candidates. The goal was to determine whether higher academic preparation or sector specific professional experience leads to higher candidacy support independent of the applicant's gender or whether gender has a stronger impact regardless of the professional profile.

## Results

### Designation of University Rectors

The organizational proceedings for the designation of rectors does not include any explicit requirements that might openly segregate or exclude women from the candidacy pool. The educational level, for example, does not specify any required professional field of expertise and the expected minimum experience is feasible.

On the other hand, the subjective selection that takes place during the implementation of opinion polls might represent a barrier to the selection of female candidates, as socially internalized perceptions of leadership characteristics and gender-appropriate jobs could influence the results (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011; Korabik, 1999; Powell, 1993).

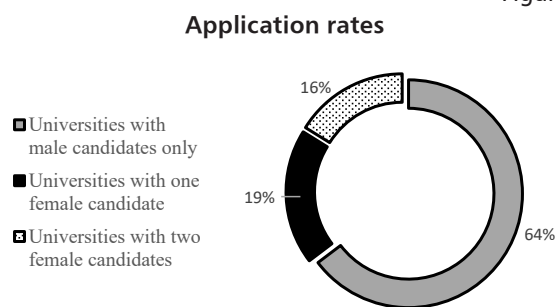
Also, in organizations with a score evaluation system, candidates' academic profile with a focus on non-manage-

ment related careers, as well as sector specific administrative experience might also put women at a disadvantaged position. This assumption is based on the theoretical claim that incongruent perceptions of women as suitable leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002) might restrain their opportunities to acquire experience in sector specific roles, such as political positions.

### Women’s application rate to the executive role of university rector

News reports from general secretary’s offices show that, in the most recent election of all universities (see Figure 2), eleven (11) out of thirty-two (32) universities had female candidates (34.3%) and those with more than one female candidate account for a total of five universities (16%). Reports also show that all three cases in which women were successfully designated as university rectors are associated to groups of candidates that included two women. In the other two cases with two female applicants the designation was achieved by re-elected rectors aiming at a second term, which is a standard organizational practice. So, the assumption about women’s apathy for competition is only partially true since there is evidence of a considerable proportion of female candidates. Therefore, women’s low applications are common, but not widespread.

Figure 2.



Source: author’s schema based on news reports from the general secretary’s offices (2017-2020)

It must also be noted that all cases in which women applicants won the designation process took place within universities that have had female rectors before. Thus, their presence in executive roles was not a novelty. Hence, taking into consideration the influential power of role models for social learning and behavioral change (Bandura, 1977; Morgenroth, Ryan, & Peters, 2015), a thorough evaluation of the professional trajectory of those women, who chose to break the paradigm and aim higher, is the best option to elicit valuable insights to processes, limitations, advantages that help explain the circumstances around the persistent scarcity phenomenon.

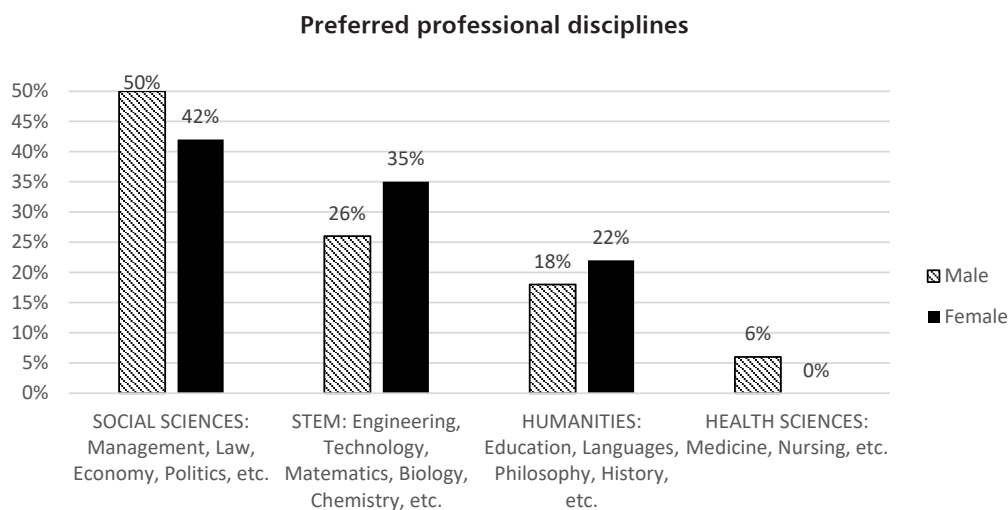
### Candidates’ professional profiles

To address the question of different preferences for professional disciplines among women and men as a reflection of individual perceptions of gender appropriate social roles, official data from the Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2020) were consulted and compared to empirically collected data. Results corroborate the Index’ findings that a growing number of Colombian women choose careers in business, law, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 displays social sciences, such as management, law, economy, and politics, as the most selected areas for both female and male candidates, followed by STEM related disciplines. In fact, there is a higher representation of women in STEM fields than of men. Similar patterns can be seen in education fields, which is not rare considering that the organizational setting analyzed in this study is academic-oriented. Finally, none of the female candidates had a professional profile linked to health sciences which differ from the socially expected role of care-related interests.

To examine the highest level of education reached, the total number of candidates were distributed according to the graduate categories of 1) specialization, which usually takes up to a one-year of graduate-level training in specific subjects; 2) masters, which can take between 1 and two years of graduate-level schooling and 3) PhD,

Figure 3.



Source: author’s own schema based on empirical data from candidates’ curriculum vitae

which can take between 3 and 5 years of academic and research work (see Table 2).

Table 2.  
Candidates' highest graduate level

	Specialization	MA	PhD	Total
Male Candidates	2	26	20	48
Female Candidates	-	6	10	16
Total	2	32	30	64

Source: author's own schema based on empirical data from candidates' curriculum vitae

The classification presented in Table 2 indicates a higher number of male candidates in all graduate levels, but when comparing the categories within groups the results show that only at the master level do male candidates (54%) transcend the percentage of representation of female candidates (37.5%). At the doctoral level, over sixty-two percent of all applying women (62.5%) had a doctoral degree as opposed to forty-two percent (42%) of all male candidates. In fact, having less women with masters and no women with specializations as their highest academic degree denote their deliberate efforts to consolidate stronger professional profiles. From the sample, one male candidate was not included in the table because his highest graduate level was a bachelor's degree.

Therefore, career choice (or occupational segregation for that matter) and lack of human capital are not adequate explanations for women's executive scarcity in this particular setting. Moreover, choices displayed in the sample of female candidates dissent from theoretical statements claiming women's voluntary segregation from management-oriented or historically male dominated fields in order to avoid high-responsibility roles.

### Support rates

But the individual perspective is not the only influential factor under consideration, people's endorsement power also plays a crucial role in the professional promotion of women. Consequently, voting results from every academic community's opinion polls were also inspected to determine latent resistance towards female candidates.

Initial data analysis required the establishment of mean values for the total amount of votes reported in every organization. Mainly because the number of students usually is bigger than the number of other staff members, so average values can offer a clearer picture of the community's preferences. As a result, general calculations indicate an average of 15785 (24.9%) votes for male candidates and 5586 votes for female candidates (24.9%), which represent a parallel percentage of preferences regardless of the candidates' gender.

Subsequently, after confirming that women's candidacy is not dismissed by the community's opinion, it is necessary to verify if the support received is enough to promote women's advance to the next designation stage (see Table 3). Therefore, data on shortlisted candidates are also

compared. The guidelines to shortlist candidates may vary slightly from one university to another but generally the indications include one of the following: three (3) or five (5) most voted candidates, all candidates who obtained ten percent (10%) of teachers' and administrative members' votes plus fifteen percent (15%) of students' votes, fifty percent (50%) plus one of the most voted candidates, or all candidates who reach a total support of twenty percent (20%).

Table 3.  
Higher support rates

Total Candidates	Shortlisted	%	Most voted	%	Designated Rector
Female: 16	12	75	2	12.5	3
Male: 49	23	47	9	18.3	8

Source: author's own calculations based on organizational records of opinion polls

Table 3 shows that twelve out of sixteen female candidates were shortlisted in the elections, thus over seventy-five percent (75%) of the female candidates successfully passed to the next stage of the designation process. It is also noteworthy that only two female candidates were the most voted. However, since the electoral process functions only as an indicator of the academic community's preferences without conditioning the directive board's decision; being the most voted candidate is not equivalent to winning the designation process. In fact, one of the three women designated as rector was the most voted candidate, but her designation was annulled immediately after the official public announcement (Arenas, 2019) leading to a new designation process that has extended for several years due to multiple organizational factors that will not be addressed here on account of extension constrains. To date there is a total of two female university rectors in the entire set of Colombian public universities, which opens the floor to questions about potential barriers at the last stage of the process where directive boards vote and designate the winner.

### Impact of academic background and administrative experience in the support rates

The last question proposed in this study is framed within the arguments of the human capital theory, by examining the potential relation between candidates' level of academic preparation and professional experience in sector-specific administrative roles with the amount of support received. The assumption is that candidates with a higher degree of education and/or more experience in administrative roles will be perceived as more suitable for academic leadership roles and will receive more votes in the polls. The rationale for these assumptions is that doctoral degrees and more experience would be congruent with the perception of a committed professional in the academic field. In addition, it was expected that doctoral degrees might represent an advantage for male candidates whose reduced responsibilities in the private spheres might facilitate their pursue for higher academic levels. If that was

the case, female candidates might be perceived as less committed to academic life and consequently less suitable for a managing role inside that setting.

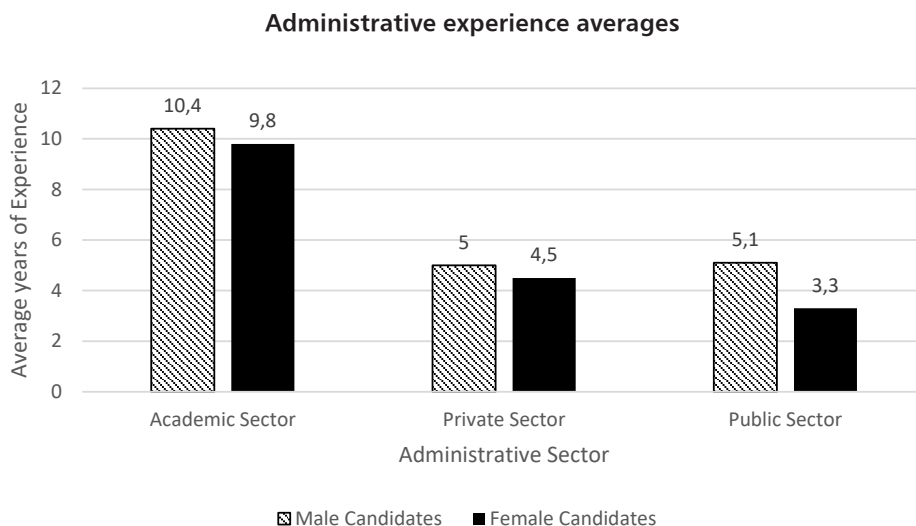
The preliminary analysis of candidates' highest academic level and overall years of experience illustrates women's deliberate efforts to consolidate stronger professional profiles and analogous average experience for both groups ranging between 12.4 years for female candidates' average total experience and 12.9 years for male candidates' average total experience. To identify these values the number of administrative years of experience accumulated by all female candidates and by all male candidates was divided by the total number of candidates in their respective subgroup, for instance 48 men and 16 women. One of the male candidates was excluded due to incomplete data for administrative experience. The number of years invested in administrative roles was determined according to the timeframe reported in the candidates' curricula for starting and ending dates of all administrative position held over their professional trajectories.

regional governments or national public entities other than academic organizations (e.g., ministries) with average administrative experiences of 5.1 years for male candidates and 3.3 years for female candidates.

To evaluate the impact of the professional profile in the amount of support received, candidates were divided by clustered sectors in which they have participated (see Table 4). The rationale for this final distribution was to determine whether academic experience alone was perceived as strong enough to influence high levels of support or whether a combination with experience in the private and/or public sector would bring about more positive outcomes.

In general, except for one male applicant, all candidates have experience in academic administrative roles, and half of contestants of each group (56% and 50% respectively) have exclusively worked in this setting. It can also be noticed that a higher percentage of women labored in the private sector (31% as opposed to 14.5% of men) and that similar circumstances apply to the higher pres-

Figure 4.



Source: author's own schema based on empirically collected data from candidates' curriculum vitae

In short, it could be interpreted that the overall accumulated experience of both groups is similar. However, after a close observation of the participants' sector specific experience (see Figure 4), different levels of mean values were identified but the most evident variation was found for public positions such as administrative roles in local,

ence of men with administrative experience in the public sector. Since none of the participants reported exclusive experience in the public sector and since no female candidate reported exclusive experience in the private sector, those two categories will be omitted in the following analyses.

Table 4.

Administrative experience (Sector)

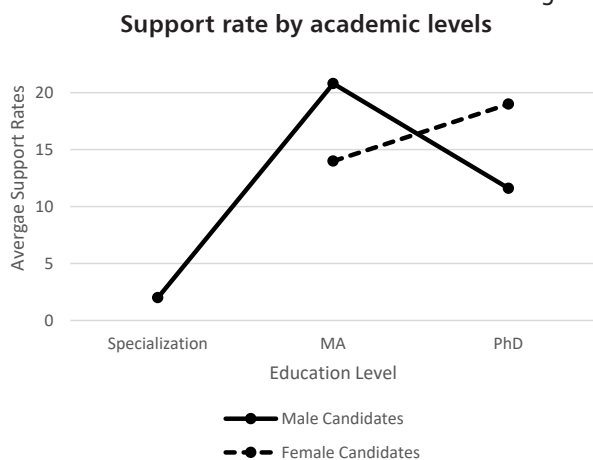
	Academic only	Private only	Public only	Academic +Private	Academic +Private +Public	Total
Male Candidates	27	1	0	7	13	48
Female Candidates	8	0	0	5	3	16
Total	35	1	0	12	16	64

Source: author's own calculations based on empirical data from candidates' curriculum vitae



Lastly, taking into consideration the highest academic degree and administrative experience by sectors of every candidate (see Tables 2 and 4), average support rates were calculated. The analysis of education levels (see figure 5) revealed how male candidates with a master's degree receive more support than those with specialization or doctoral studies. It seems that men's support rates are higher when advancing from specialization to master's but that the acquisition of a doctoral degree has a negative impact on the number of votes received. On the other hand, female candidates receive more support when they have doctoral degrees, thus, a higher level of education generally seems to have a positive impact in the amount of support received by this group.

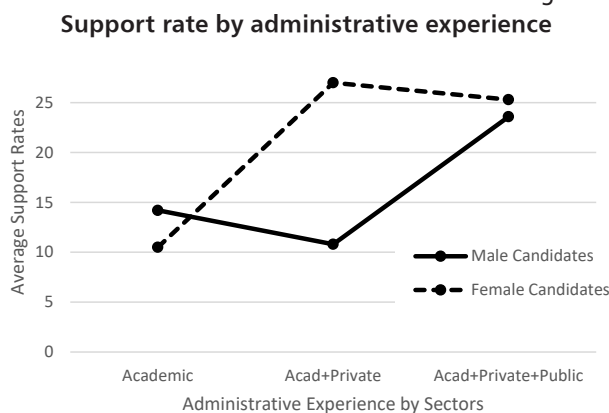
Figure 5.



Source: author's schema based on candidates' cvs and organizational records of opinion polls

In relation to sector specific administrative experience, data analysis also illustrates a greater support for male candidates with additional experience in the public sector, but not much benefits from their presence in the private sector. For women, the support rate is more prominent with the accumulation of both private and public sector experience (see Figure 6).

Figure 6.



Source: author's schema based on candidates' cvs and organizational records of opinion polls

## Conclusions

After a careful analysis of organizational practices for the designation of university rectors, the professional profiles of the candidates and the support rates from the academic community, mixed results were determined. In some cases, theoretical statements for women's scarcity in decision-making roles were partially supported since there is indeed a pattern of low female applications for the executive role of university rector among all Colombian public universities. This finding aligns with stereotype theories where the prospect of competing in a male-dominated group might hold women back from assuming leadership roles (Chen & Houser, 2019) but further qualitative analyses should be conducted to explore people's perceptions and to verify this statement.

Another influential factor could be linked to the difficulties of balancing work-house tasks, which makes higher responsibility roles implausible for women. Likewise, a female disadvantage in terms of administrative experience within the public sector and a standard designation of male figures even in cases where female applicants had similar professional and academic profiles were also identified. These patterns agree with arguments of the congruency theory of prejudice against women regarding hidden prejudices influencing people's perception and consequent resistance towards women's suitability for leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). It was initially assumed that these arguments could explain women's limited promotion opportunities to executive roles within academic leadership.

However, disproving results are greater within the organizational context of public universities in Colombia. First, by providing evidence of women extended pursue for the highest degrees of academic preparation and their equal performance in terms of administrative experience than that of men applying for the executive role of university rector. Hence, all female candidates' profiles indicate a purposeful investment in their human capital, contrary to the ideas stated in the human capital theory (Becker, 1993). Their recurrent selection of science and STEM related disciplines also imply a level of confidence and ambition that challenges the explanations provided in the literature.

Besides, the evaluation of organizational practices did not identify explicit requirements that would openly exclude or discriminate candidates on a gender-basis. However, the evaluation of professional experience in the case of score evaluation systems and the implementation of opinion polls among all members of the organization were expected to influence biased outcomes because of divergent perceptions of leadership and gender. Indeed, major differences were found in the support levels according to candidates' academic preparation and experience in specific sectors.

Overall, doctoral levels of education seem to have a positive effect for women while men with doctoral degrees seem to receive less support than male candidates with master's degrees. It is important to point out that the

percentage of women candidates with doctoral degrees was quite higher than the percentage of men candidates. Likewise, administrative experience in the private sector benefits the levels of support received by female candidates but for male candidates, working in the public sector generate better outcomes. Still, in general, the organizations' personnel disclose parallel support rates for male and female candidates. Finally, data exhibited the importance of a higher number of women candidates, since all three cases in which women were successfully designated as university rectors were associated to groups of candidates that included more than one woman and belonged to universities that previously had designated female rectors, which ratified the influential power of role models for social learning and behavioral change (Bandura, 1977; Morgenroth, Ryan, & Peters, 2015).

In the end, women who broke the paradigm and ran for the executive role of university successfully overcame the selection stages evaluating their professional background and were generally endorsed by people's votes as shown in the high percentage of shortlisted female candidates, thus, no evidence of gendered promotion processes can be presented. Nonetheless, since very few women passed the last stage where the directive board conducts a final revision and designates the winner, additional studies should be conveyed to determine the potential role of unequal placement of power and opportunity (Acker 1990) within academic organizations. In other words, to explore whether the constitution of the boards, generally composed by a male majority, contribute to the continuance of gender inequality at the organizational level.

In sum, within this particular organizational setting, gender might not influence women's educational progress and occupation choices or people's collective perceptions of congruous leadership profiles (gendered identities). Yet, it does seem to have an indirect effect in women's promotion opportunities due to its impact in sector specific administrative experience and in the final stage of the designation process, in which female candidates are still denied access to executive roles, despite their professional profiles, public support, administrative experience and academic preparation. These results concur with the statements of the glass ceiling effect (Eagly & Carli, 2007a) since all examined cases of female candidates show professional trajectories that prevail over the challenges of the leadership labyrinth (Eagly & Carly, 2007a; Eagly & Carly, 2007b; Gaete-Quezada, 2018) and reinforce a conscious pursue for high-responsibility roles. Further research should be conducted to examine people's reasoning for specific career choices and for the low application rate of female candidates to identify the impact of individual perceptions about gender appropriate jobs and success prospects to aim higher.

Finally, a life-course assessment of candidates' profiles could help us determine whether there are any variations of life-long investment among representatives of both genders to overcome sociocultural barriers and earn a fair opportunity to reach a position at the top of the hierarchy. Overall, the study closely assessed the designation

process of academic directive positions and set the current state of organizational practices, collective perceptions, representation rates, and professional profiles of candidates aspiring to the executive role of university rector, all of which have great potential to inform the design and assessment of policies aiming at equal opportunity and anti-discriminatory organizational systems.

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