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Gender gap in senior positions in central administration: the case of the Spanish government for the period 2015-2021

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Abstract: *This article focuses on the evolving presence of women in senior positions in central government and dependent organism (General Administration of the State). The main goal is to analyse a new database for the first time, containing relevant data about the female presence during the period 2015 to 2021 through a new methodology, which is more reliable in terms of determining the level of the access of women to high positions of representation of political power in Spain. The key contribution of this study is twofold: (1) it resides in the design and exploration of a large database that goes beyond the information usually presented by the governmental statistics and that overcomes certain restrictive compilation criteria for these female senior officials and (2) it explores the situation after the global pandemic scenario. The results show how these metrics evolve from government to government with a significant change in political orientation.*

Keywords: *senior positions, central administration, Spain, women, political power.*

JEL: *D73, D78, J16, Z18*

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Introduction

Gender equality is one of the basic principles of any democratic social organization. And equal access to positions of responsibility and public power is

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also a key question to measure the development of a society. For this reason, this article analyses the distribution of senior positions in the Government of Spain during the period 2015-2021, considering the differences according to presidential terms and different departments. To do this, a feminist perspective will be taken into account, focusing on key metrics like the *gender gap* and *glass ceiling*, as well as providing data at the national and international levels.

The key contribution of this study resides in the design and exploration of a large database that goes beyond the information usually presented by the governmental statistics and that overcomes certain restrictive compilation criteria for these female senior officials, including those positions that are not currently counted in official public statistics for the period 2015 to 2019.

1. Theoretical background

In order to become a complete political subject, women have to have access to “equal participation of women in political power and a demand for a renegotiation of the social contract” (Cobo, 2004, p.18). If this does not occur, it is not possible to achieve true equality between women and men, especially in the sphere of power. However, as stated by Cobo (2004), in countries such as France, social movements are emerging that question different actions of positive discrimination, these movements being led by women who have grown up within political parties or the public administration (Androniceanu & Georgescu, 2022; Androniceanu et al., 2022; Androniceanu & Georgescu, 2021). These political currents demand a meritocracy regardless of quotas by sex. Therefore, we are facing a concept, that of parity democracy, which tries to “rationalize the male monopoly of power (...) and is an extension of the struggle for the vote of the suffrage movement” (Cobo, 2004, p. 19). This movement tries to fight against the so-called glass ceiling, which usually prevents women from accessing political, economic, cultural or personal autonomy resources (Cobo, 2004).

A *glass ceiling* can be defined as “a concept regarding the obstacles faced by women who hold or aspire to hold senior positions (under equal conditions and pay) in corporations as well as in all types of organizations” (Barberá Ribera, Estellés Miguel & Dema Pérez, 2009, p. 134). There are a lot of studies on the glass ceiling in the realm of political power. Valcárcel emphasizes that this glass ceiling acts as an invisible barrier that makes the percentages of women practically ridiculous (Valcárcel, 1998). Although women dominate more and more spheres of power, it is no less true that political power is still far from true gender parity. This glass ceiling is very difficult to subvert to break, because, as some studies affirm (Sarrió, Ramos, Barberá Heredia & Candela, 2002), women's access to the organs of power is hampered by gender roles.

For almost a decade, there have been many actions that have been carried out to reduce this inequality of access to political power. These actions have to do with positive discrimination measures (Verge Mestre, 2011) that try to reduce the

gender gap in this area. However, following Osborne (2005), the different regulations that advocate equality and non-discrimination based on gender have not managed to break the glass ceiling of access to political power, since this barrier works as a kind of indirect discrimination (non-legal) that occur due to causes related to gender roles and the difficulties of political participation in organizations (Osborne, 2005).

There are a large number of studies on the presence of women in the international political arena. The UN has published reports on the presence of women in politics (UN, 2020). It states that 6.6% of the Headquarters of State and 6.2% of the Headquarters of Government were held by women, while 20.5% of the presidencies of parliaments in the world are held by women. Other studies on the European Parliament and the female presence, also show that only 36% of the parliamentary representation was occupied by women (Olarde, 2014, p.43).

This information is developed to a greater extent by Lenine and Pereira Puga (2021) than following Aggestam and Towns (2019), they conclude that most of the political positions held by women are located in the so-called “political low”, that is, in questions such as the environment, human rights, food, culture, education (although sometimes there is also a glass ceiling here, as stated by Callejo Gallego, Gómez Esteban and Casado Aparicio, 2004) and childhood; while men hold more positions in presidencies, vice presidencies, defense and security (Lenine & Pereira Puga, 2021; Androniceanu A-M et al., 2022). Despite their low presence, various studies indicate that women tend to positively influence different peace processes at the international level (Aharoni, 2018; Paffenholz, 2018).

In Spain, equality policies, and their practical application, began in 2004, with the rise to power of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) with Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero at the head. But for this to be reached, Valiente Fernández (2007, p. 168-169) states that six factors were necessary: 1) feminist mobilization within the PSOE; 2) a certain convergence of the People's Party (PP) towards the positions of the PSOE on gender equality; 3) secularization and the (imperfect) separation of the Catholic Church and the State; 4) the vigour of the organized women's movement; 5) the influence of equality bodies 6) and the European Union. Without these factors, it is not possible to understand the beginning of the implementation of equal measures and gender quotas at the political and labour level.

In the case of Spain, the Equality Law establishes that at least 40% of the positions in organizations must be held by women (Terjesen, Aguilera & Lorenz, 2015) and in this line the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2021) provides data on this representation of women in senior positions in the General State Administration, which in 2020 reached 43.75%. However, it is necessary to comment that only the Presidency of the Government, the Vice Presidencies and Ministries, the State Secretaries, the General Undersecretaries and Secretaries and

the General Directorates and General Technical Secretariats are still considered high positions.

To accurately approach reality, a broader vision of the representation of women in senior positions in the General State Administration is required. For this reason, we have included in this paper, not only the gender perspective in the analysis, but also the inclusion of those positions that, despite being appointed and appointed by the Government of Spain, are currently not counted in the statistics that are published, demonstrating and scientifically quantifying the real representation of women in senior positions of the General Administration of the Spanish State from 2015 to 2021.

2. Material and methods

The methodology used in this study is based on the analysis of the database of senior officials of the Government of Spain from 2015 to June 2021 of the CIVIO entity, a non-profit foundation that monitors the public powers, informs all citizens and presses for real and effective transparency in the institutions (CIVIO, 2021a). The database is open to access and accessible upon request (CIVIO, 2021b).

The analysed database has 8,855 records that correspond to just over 1,600 different people who hold, or have held, senior positions between the period of June 2015 to June 2021. Said database has been created by extracting data from the reports published by the Office of Conflicts and Interests (OCI).

It should be noted that, for the elaboration of the database, the definition of senior position has been taken into account according to Law 3/2015, of March 30, regulating the exercise of the senior position of the General State Administration (BOE num. 77, 03/31/2015), which considers the following senior positions (Law 3/2015, art. 1.2):

- a) Members of the Government and the Secretaries of State.
- b) Sub-secretaries and assimilated; the General Secretaries; the Government Delegates in the Autonomous Communities (regional governments) and in Ceuta and Melilla (autonomous cities in North Africa); Government Delegates in Public Law entities (independent or autonomous organisms); and the heads of permanent diplomatic missions, as well as the heads of permanent representation at international organizations.
- c) Technical General Secretaries, General Directors of the General State Administration and similar.
- d) Presidents, Vice Presidents, General Directors, Executive Directors and similar in entities of the state, administrative, foundational or business public sector, linked or dependent on the General Administration of the State who have the status of top managers and whose appointment is made by decision of the Council of Ministers or by their own governing bodies and, in any case, the Presidents and Directors with the rank of Director General of the Managing Entities and Common Services of Social Security; the Presidents and Directors

of the State Agencies, the Presidents and Directors of the Port Authorities and the President and the Secretary General of the Economic and Social Council.

- e) Presidents, the Vice Presidents and the rest of the members of the Council of the National Commission of Markets and Competition, the President of the Council of Transparency and Good Governance, the President of the Independent Authority for Fiscal Responsibility, the President, Vice President and the Members of the Board of the National Securities Market Commission, the President, the Directors and the Secretary General of the Nuclear Safety Council, as well as the President and the members of the governing bodies of any other regulatory or supervisory body.
- f) Directors, Executive Directors, General Secretaries or equivalent of the regulatory and supervisory bodies.
- g) Holders of any other job in the state public sector, whatever their name, whose appointment is made by the Council of Ministers, with the exception of those who are considered Deputy Directors General and similar.

For this, a much broader notion has been used than that defined by the National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2020), which only considers senior positions those of the Government, the State Secretaries, the General Undersecretaries and Secretariats and the General Directorates and General Technical Secretaries (INE, 2020). In short, the data treated and analysed in this article are broader than those used officially, since it considers a greater range of high-ranking public officials of the General State Administration, very pertinent when analysing this from a gender perspective ambit.

Regarding the data analysis, the Microsoft Excel software package was used.

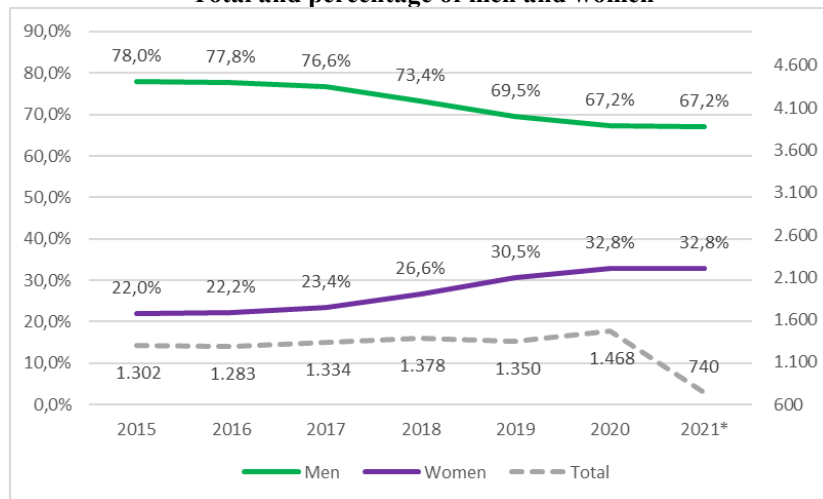
3. Results

Figure 1 shows the number of senior positions in the analysed period (2015-2021) and the percentage of men and women. As can be seen, the number of senior positions increases slightly in each of the years analysed. In this way, the progressive growth is independent of the left-oriented governments of Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) and the right-oriented ones of Mariano Rajoy (PP), in all of them, there is a clear upward trend (except for the year 2021, which measures the positions appointed until June).

Regarding the distribution of men and women, slowly, the gender gap narrows over the years, a trend that is also observed in terms of statistical inference (Chi-square = 81.180, $gl = 6$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$). Thus, in 2015 there are 22% women, reaching 32% in 2021. It should be noted that in none of these years the provisions of the Law regarding parity are fulfilled, that is, there must be a distribution of 40 - 60% between men and women (First additional provision of Law 3/2007, of March 22, for the effective equality of women and men). It should also be noted that there has been growth, especially as a result of the change of government in June 2018 when President Pedro Sánchez began to govern.

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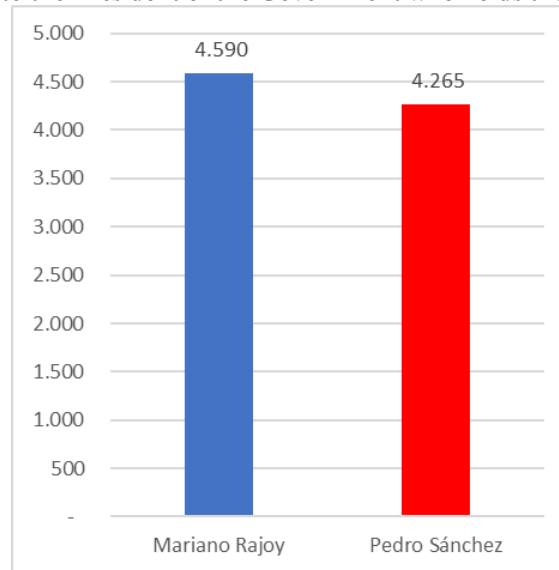
**Figure 1. Senior officials of the Government of Spain (2015-2021).
Total and percentage of men and women**



*: Until June 2021.

On the other hand, Figures 2 and 3 analyse the distribution of senior positions according to the President of the Government who was in office at the time. Thus, it is observed how the government of Mariano Rajoy has had a greater number of senior positions than that of Pedro Sánchez. It is true that this data must be taken with caution, since the charges are recorded until June 2021 (the appointments would be missing from then on until the end of the annuity).

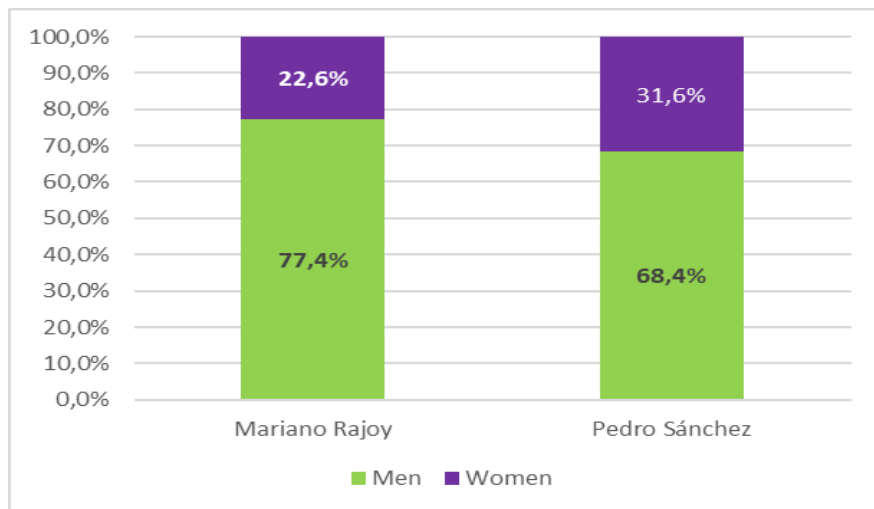
**Figure 2. Senior officials of the Government of Spain (2015-2021). Distribution
according to the President of the Government who holds the position. %**



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In figure 3, on the other hand, we observe what was already appreciated in figure 1. Thus, the Pedro Sánchez government has appointed a higher percentage of women than the Mariano Rajoy government, a question that is statistically proven (Chicadrado = 91.253, gl = 1, p-value = 0.000). Even so, analysing the Government of Pedro Sánchez, only one in three positions corresponds to a woman, far from the standards required by the first additional provision of Law 3/2007, of March 22, for the effective equality of women and men.

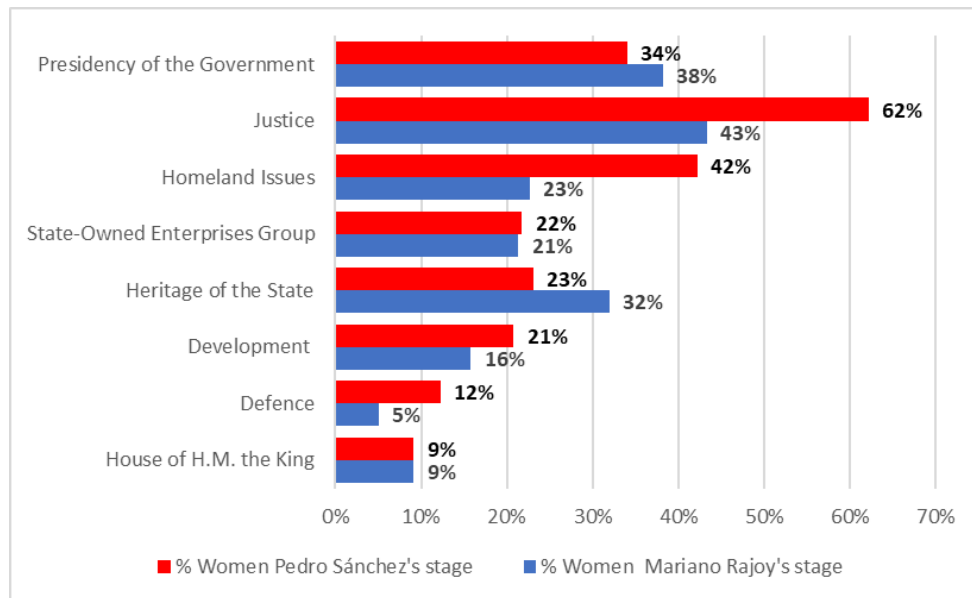
Figure 3. Senior officials of the Government of Spain (2015-2021). Distribution of men and women according to the President of the Government who holds the position. %



With respect to figures 4 and 5 where the distribution of men and women in senior positions in some departments is analysed, we can see that figure 4 shows the percentage of women in departments with the same name in both terms (from Pedro Sánchez to Mariano Rajoy). This is important because it allows you to see exactly how departments with the same names have varied, that is, with the same competencies. Thus, it is observed that the government of Mariano Rajoy only appointed more women than that of Pedro Sánchez in the Presidency of the Government and in the Heritage Group. However, both in the House of H.M. the King and in the State-Owned Enterprises Group the percentage of women is similar.

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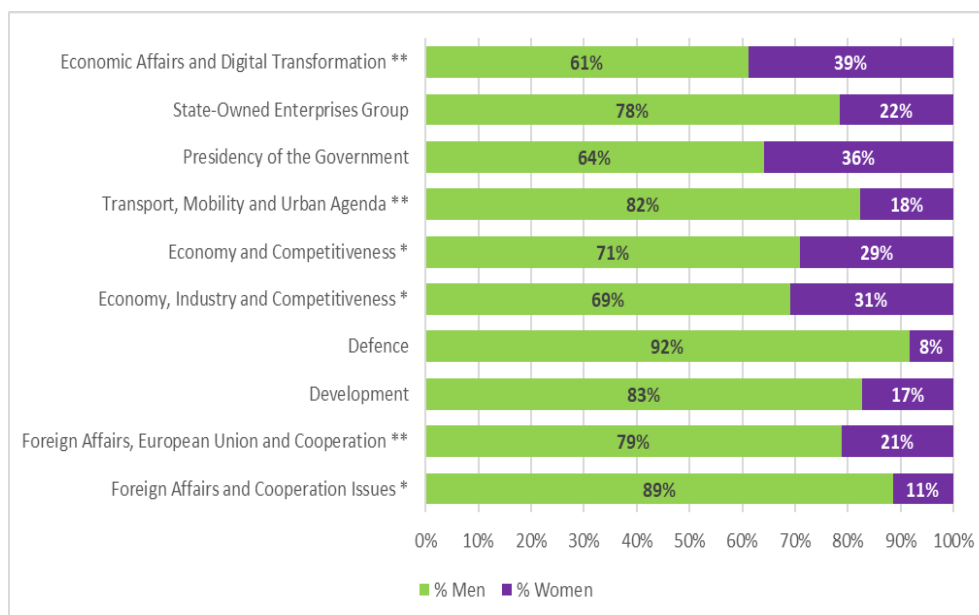
Figure 4. Senior officials of the Government of Spain (2015-2021). Percentage of women in departments that share both mandates. %



Nevertheless, figure 5 analyses the senior positions of the 10 departments with the highest number of senior positions, highlighting firstly that the departments where there is a lower percentage of women are Defence (in both mandates), Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (government of Mariano Rajoy) and in Development (in both mandates). However, in which there are more women than men is in Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation (government of Pedro Sánchez), Presidency of the Government (in both legislatures), Economy, Industry and Competitiveness (government of Mariano Rajoy). Even so, in no department with the highest positions, they reach 40% of women, although that of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation is close enough.

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Figure 5. Senior officials of the Government of Spain (2015-2021). Percentage of women and men in the 10 departments with the highest positions in the period analysed. %



Without Asterisk: Departments common to both governments.

*: Department belonging to the Government whose President is Mariano Rajoy.

**: Department belonging to the Government whose President is Mariano Rajoy.

4. Discussion and conclusions

According to our exploration of the dataset, there is a progressive increase in senior positions in the General Administration of the State of the Government of Spain in the period analysed (2015-2021). Therefore, what is extracted is that more and more from the Government of the moment it is about appointing a greater number of high positions. Similarly, there is a tendency to reduce the gender gap. This progressive decrease is due to the establishment of actions that have to do with positive discrimination measures (Verge Mestre, 2011) that try to reduce this gender gap in this area (quotas by sex, for example). However, it continues to exist in part due to issues related to social responsibilities and gender stereotypes (Sarrió et al, 2002).

Analysing the stages of the two governments of Spain with opposite political tendencies, (until 2018 Mariano Rajoy and as of 2018 Pedro Sánchez), it is observed that from the mandate of Pedro Sánchez there was a more pronounced increase in the percentage of women, although 40% of women were not reached in any period, as established by current Legislation (Law 3/2007). The Government of Pedro Sánchez has appointed higher female positions than that of Mariano Rajoy, although two out of every 3 are still men.

As can be seen, in the data exploited in this article we observe that the percentage of high-ranking women in the Government of Spain is 32%. These data do not coincide with those offered by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), which considers that the representation of women in senior positions in the General State Administration reaches 43.75% in 2020. This variation has to do with the fact that the database used in this article is more complete and exhaustive and includes a greater number of categories of senior positions in the Government of Spain, following Law 3/2007 (BOE, 2007). However, we can affirm that these data on the current presence of women in the Government of Spain are similar to those offered in national and European statistics (Olarte, 2014; UN, 2020). As for the departments that were the same in both mandates, it is remarkable that the Ministry of the Presidency of the Government has more women positions in the government of Mariano Rajoy than in that of Pedro Sánchez. Even so, in general, these departments present a higher percentage of women when Pedro Sánchez governs. We detect also a lower number of women in foreign affairs, such as defence and development. These data are coherent with previous results from Lenine and Pereira Puga (2021) highlighted political positions held by women. For these authors, women generally occupy the spaces of the so-called “low politics”, that is, the environment, human rights, food, culture, education and, on the contrary, men occupy more positions in presidencies, vice presidencies, defence and security (Lenine & Pereira Puga, 2021, p. 115).

In conclusion, the gender gap in politics is an indicator that measures the distance between men and women with respect to opportunities for access to public office and political power. In this sense, we have verified that regardless of the political sign of the Government of Spain and from a more exhaustive analysis, parity is still somewhat non-existent. With regard to senior government officials, this gender gap continues, since two out of every three senior officials are men, despite the fact that since 2007 there have been positive discrimination measures for women's access to these top positions. Therefore, there is still a long way to go to achieve legal and social standards in terms of equality between women and men in politics, since not only has parity not been reached.

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