

**Organizing for Political Empowerment?  
Explaining the Effects of Women's Organizations on Women's Political  
Participation in Guatemala**

by

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B.A., College of William and Mary, 2005

M.A., University of Colorado, 2016

A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment  
Of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Political Science  
2016

This thesis entitled:  
Organizing for Political Empowerment?  
Explaining the Effects of Women's Organizations on Women's Political Participation in  
Guatemala  
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IRB protocol # 0610.8

Vance, Lindsey Richardson (Ph.D., Political Science, Department of Political Science)  
Organizing for Political Empowerment?

Explaining the Effects of Women's Organizations on Women's Political Participation in  
Guatemala

Thesis directed by Professor Lorraine Bayard de Volo

**ABSTRACT:** Prominent development agencies, including the World Bank and the United Nations, agree gender equality and women's political empowerment is central to achieving positive social and economic outcomes. To politically empower women in the developing world, international aid has increasingly turned to decentralized, bottom-up approaches. Consequently, the past twenty years have witnessed a "boom" in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in gender policy assessment, project execution, and social services delivery. Though proponents of bottom-up approaches *suggest* organizational involvement will empower women to act politically, neither research on women's political participation nor on the political effects of NGOs has empirically validated this assumption. Thus, it is still unclear whether, or how, women's collective organizing empowers women to act politically both within and outside of formal institutional channels. This project employs a mixed methods approach that combines case studies, participant observation and informal interview techniques with survey data to analyze and explain the relationship between women's organizations and women's political empowerment in the Guatemalan context. I conclude from these analyses that women's organizations in democratizing states generally, and in Guatemala specifically, do empower women to participate politically, but the effects across institutional and non-institutional acts differ. In democratizing states where institutions are weak and neoliberal reforms and international women's movements support women's organizing outside of institutional politics, women's organizations are most likely to empower members to exercise political agency via non-institutional political action. While women's organizational experiences tend to reinforce members' negative perceptions of institutional politics, organizations empower women to act politically by enhancing individual motivations, capacities, and opportunities for non-institutional political participation.

**Key Terms:** *Women, Political Participation, NGOs, Empowerment, Democratization, and Latin America*

**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this manuscript to my husband Joe. I owe the culmination of this project to your constant companionship, support, and unending patience.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

University of Colorado's Center to Advanced Research and Teaching in the Social Sciences

University of Colorado's Beverly Sears Grant

University of Colorado's Political Science Department Graduate Opportunity Grants

Lorraine Bayard de Volo

David Brown

Susan Clarke

Thank you to all of the incredible men, women, and organizations in Guatemala who were generous enough with their time to open up and share their lives and experiences with me. I would like to acknowledge specifically the Xep-Morales family who provided me a home in Guatemala that I came to call my own, Caitlin Scott and Francy Milner for being my mentors and advocates to this day, and my roommates at the Yoga house in Xela whose friendship helped me keep perspective during my year of fieldwork.

I would also like to thank my colleagues who provided ongoing encouragement and feedback on my work throughout the dissertation process. Specifically, I would like to thank my dear friends Leslie Ochreiter, Elise Pizzi, Matt Heller, Rachael Lovendahl, and Amy Liu. Throughout this process your friendship enabled me to work through and overcome the inevitable challenges that only those who dissertate can understand.

Finally, I would like to thank those who are members of my family, both by birth and by choice. You all give my life and work meaning. Without each of you—and you know who you are—there would be much less love, laughter, and joy in my life. All that I have accomplished in life I owe to your unconditional love and support.

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## **CHAPTER 1. WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN GUATEMALA**

"Success without democracy is improbable. Democracy without women is impossible."  
-Madeleine K. Albright

### **Introduction**

Prominent international and national foreign aid organizations agree that promoting women's empowerment is smart policy. Realizing the goal of politically empowering women is seen as a means to reduce poverty, achieve faster economic growth, improve health and education outcomes for children, and slow the spread of HIV/AIDS (INSTRAW 2007; UNRISD 2005; United Nations Development Fund 2010; World Bank 2006, 2012). Consequently, development policy has focused on creating equal chances for women and men to be politically and socially active. Realizing this goal, by increasing women's capacities, motivations, and opportunities to participate as political actors, is said to lead over time to more representative, and more inclusive, institutions and a better development path (Ingelhart and Norris 2003; World Bank 2006, 2012, 2013). At the same time, development policies increasingly have come to rely on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for policy implementation and evaluation in democratizing states. According to recent statistics, the majority of development aid is now being channeled through NGOs (Development Initiatives 2014). As a result of these concurrent trends, the past 20 years have witnessed significant increases in bottom-up approaches that rely on and support women's NGOs specializing in gender policy assessment, project execution, and social services delivery (Alvarez 2009; Swiss 2011). However, despite this 'boom' in women's NGOs in the developing world, across countries relative to men, women continue

to experience higher rates of poverty, participate less in formal politics, and be underrepresented in national parliaments and legislatures (Barnes and Bucchard 2012; Despasato and Norrander 2008; Ingelhart and Norris 2003; World Bank 2013; International IDEA 2010; IPU 2013).

These facts have lead to an increased skepticism about potential of women's organizations to effectively empower women, particularly in the context of newly established democratic institutions (Alvarez 2009; Bystydzienski 1992; Morduch 2000; Rankin 2002; Swiss 2011). Because of these critiques, the questions of whether and how women's organizations influence women's empowerment have received increased attention from policy makers, activists, and scholars. This study addresses these issues by providing a partial response to the broader question of: do women's organizations in developing democratic contexts politically empower women? The literature on women's NGOs and women's political empowerment in the democratizing world suggests dichotomous consequences of women's NGOs—either they politically empower women or they do not. However, as more recent scholars have suggested (Alvarez 2009; Kabeer 2011), and as the evidence presented in this study will show, the effects of women's organizations are not “either or.” Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from one developing democratic context—Guatemala—I demonstrate that participation in women's organizations does not necessarily increase women's institutional political participation, but membership in these organizations does politically empower to engage in non-institutional politics. Quantitative evidence shows members of women's organizations are more likely than non-members to participate in both institutional and non-institutional politics. However, qualitative observations reveal even though participation in women's

organizations is positively correlated with institutional and non-institutional political participation, in the case of women's development NGOs, organizational experiences lead members to prioritize participation in non-institutional politics. Qualitative analysis illustrates experiences within women's organizations increase members' capacities and opportunities for institutional and non-institutional political participation, but the effects of organizations on individuals' motivations to decide to act politically are conditioned by one's experiences with institutional and non-institutional politics. In a context where women tend to view political institutions negatively, when women's organizations enhance capacities and opportunities to exercise political agency, members are most likely to decide to do so by participating in non-institutional politics.

I argue, the combined effects of certain contextual factors— the international women's movement, democratization, domestic women's movements, and neoliberal<sup>1</sup> economic reforms— have enhanced the resources and political saliency of women's organizations in democratizing states. However, women continue to face limited opportunities and have little motivation to participate in institutional politics. Under conditions of limited institutional opportunities, women's organizations facilitate and encourage non-institutional action as a means to empower members. In these contexts women's organizations politically empower women by increasing women's capacities, motivations, and opportunities to act politically *outside of* formal institutions. In contexts where opportunities for women to participate in institutional politics are limited and state

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<sup>1</sup> Neoliberal economic reforms are characterized by a reduction of state involvement in the economy and the promotion of individual economic and political rights. Neoliberalism reduces the economic role of the state via structural adjustment policies (SAPs), which require, among other things, a reduction in government spending. In regards to individual rights, neoliberalism emphasizes self-help strategies to combat poverty and improve social welfare, as well as the right to participate in formal, institutional politics. (Craske 1998)

institutions have proven ineffective in regards to meeting women's needs and interests, women's organizational experiences tend to reinforce members' views that obstacles to institutional political participation are great and the rewards of this form of political action are uncertain at best.

Though proponents of bottom-up approaches *suggest* organizational involvement will empower women politically, research has not clearly validated this assumption. Additionally, empirical evidence confirming moderate gains and persistent challenges in regards to women's empowerment has produced bifurcated conclusions in regards to the potential for women's organizations to lead to women's political empowerment in democratizing states. On one side, scholars find despite moderate improvements in women's power and influence, these organizations do have positive effects on women's political empowerment (Alvarez 1999, 2000; Bayard de Volo 2006; Beck 2014; Berger 2006; Kabeer, 2005; Oxhorn 2006; Titeca and Vervisch 2008). These studies conclude women's organizations empower women by fostering links between women based on common values and identities and by creating connections between women and state institutions. Meanwhile, findings from other studies show NGOs diminish women's capacity to identify common experiences, to act to promote their interests, and to inspire social and political change (Blair 1996; Cornwall and Brock 2005; Craske 1998; Edwards and Hulme 1996; Edwards 2013; Jaquette 2009; Molyneux 2002; Morduch 2000; Rankin 2002; Silliman 1999; Walby 2010; Williams 2004). Among those studies that find NGOs do not politically empower members, it is said the growing emphasis of women's NGOs on activities of technical assistance and social-service delivery has depoliticized these organizations and diminished their potential to empower members to act politically

(Cornwall and Brock 2005; Craske 1998; Molyneux 2002; Rankin 2002; Silliman 1999; Walby 2010; Williams 2004).

Though both scholarly camps conclude contextual and individual-level factors influence the strategies of women's organizations and outcomes in regards to women's political empowerment, contradictory findings across studies suggest a need to improve theories of the political consequences of women's organizations in democratizing states. Contradictory findings result from two shortcomings in the literature on women's political empowerment and the effects of NGOs. The first is the lack of a comparative framework<sup>2</sup> identifying contextual factors that determine women's political empowerment and the effects of women's organizations across contexts. The second is a tendency to report results for women's empowerment in terms of impacts on political institutions or service delivery rather than impacts on women's political action more broadly. As a consequence of both of these limitations, debates about whether women's organizations politically empower women remain contentious.

By explaining the effects of women's organizations in Guatemala, this study provides the theoretical foundation to clarify how organizational activism affects women's political empowerment in democratizing states more generally. Examining the effects of these organizations on women's institutional and non-institutional political participation provides a means to assess the more general consequences of the boom in feminist NGOs on gender dynamics and women's empowerment in the developing world.

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<sup>2</sup> Here it is important to note the distinction between frameworks and theories. Frameworks serve to organize inquiry and provide the meta-theoretical language necessary to compare theories. Frameworks contribute to theory development by identifying variables and relationships that should be considered in explanations for a particular set of events and outcomes. Theories, on the other hand, apply values to variables and specify variable relationships in terms of variation, direction, and hypotheses. (Ostrom 2007, 25)

## **Explaining Women's Political Empowerment in Democratizing States**

Research on women's political empowerment and political participation is divided between macro-level and micro-level theories. Macro-level analyses emphasize the role of contextual level variables such as democratic transition (Jaquette 1994; Viterna and Fallon 2008; Weylan 1994), political institutions (Molyneux 2001; Schwindt-Bayer 2006, 2013) social networks (Leighley 1990; Safa 1990; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), social inequalities (Coffe and Bolzendahl 2010; Lijphart 1997; Verba and Nie 1972), and economic conditions (Barnes and Kasse 1979; Nie, Powell, and Prewitt 1969; Weylan 1998; Wolfinger 1965). Micro-level analyses emphasize the resources and attitudes of citizens as a means to explain when and why individuals are empowered to act politically (Almond and Verba 1963; Anderson 2014; Ingelhart and Norris 2003; Kabeer 2005; Schlozman et al. 1994). Scholars concur that factors at both the macro and micro-level of analysis influence processes that empower women to act politically, and both categories of explanation are valuable (Almond and Verba 1963; Despasato and Norrander 2008; Holzner 2010; Ibrahim and Alkire 2007; Jackson 2002; Kabeer 1999; Leighley 2008; Norris 2011). However, research has yet to specify how macro- and micro-level factors interact to influence individuals' decisions to act politically. This study contributes to current understandings of gender and political participation by outlining a comparative framework that explains how macro-level and micro-level factors influence women's political participation and the effects of women's organizations in democratizing states.

Democracy requires an inclusive society, whereby all groups receive equal opportunities to participate politically and voice their interests (Dahl 1989). Though political participation is understood to be an important condition for democracy, all

democracies are subject to systematic inequalities in political participation (Lijphart 1997). Gender disparities present one of the most enduring forms of participatory inequality. This empirical reality has motivated many scholarly efforts to explain gender gaps in political participation (Ingelhart and Norris 2003; Lowndes et al. 2002; Leighly 1996; Tripp 2006; Verba et al 1995), yet the majority of this research has focused on explaining gendered patterns of political participation in western, industrialized democracies (primarily in the United States and Western Europe). Within this literature, distinct pathways to participation have been identified to explain inequalities in men and women's rates of political involvement (Banaszak et al. 2003; Berger 2006; Schwindt-Bayer 2006; Schlozman et al. 1994). However, important contextual differences in many developing democracies, including weak political institutions, low rates of female literacy, and more rigid gender norms, cast doubt on whether theories based on observations of gender dynamics in established democracies can be generalized to explain women's participation in democratizing states.

Given the increased availability of data on political participation in regions outside of Western Europe and North America, studies of gender and political participation are increasing our understanding of gender differences in regions where most democracies have emerged only recently as part of the wave of democratization that swept the globe in the 1990s. Because the systematic collection of quantitative data from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe is relatively recent, cross-national studies of gender and political participation in developing democratic nations are small in number. What research has been conducted provides evidence to suggest gendered differences in political participation do not mirror the trends observed in established democratic contexts. In the



majority of established democracies, gender differences in regards to institutional, or conventional, political participation have consistently decreased, while gender gaps have even reversed for a number of non-institutional acts (Coffe and Bolzendahl 2010; Ingelhart and Norris 2003; Karp and Banducci 2007; Stolle and Micheletti 2006). In contrast, gender inequalities in both institutional and non-institutional political participation persist across newly established democracies. In Africa, a study using cross-sectional survey data from 20 nations found that women were less likely to talk about politics, contacted politicians less, and contacted political parties less than men (Barnes and Bucchard 2012). In Latin America, analyses of cross-sectional survey data show that on average women participate less than men in conventional and unconventional political acts (Despasato and Norrander 2008).

Thus, analyses of survey data from both Africa and Latin America indicate gendered trends in political participation vary across contexts. The task then for scholars is to identify contextual differences that account for cross-country variations in participatory inequalities. While quantitative analyses have begun to identify contextual variables that account for cross-country variations, these studies have not provided evidence to show how contextual variables influence processes at the individual level. Consequently, the task for scholars seeking to explain women's political empowerment in democratizing states is to specify how contextual variables shape processes at the individual level that influence women's decisions about whether and how to act politically.

### **The Effects of Women's Organizations on Women's Political Empowerment**

Across the world, influential international aid organizations are increasingly funding women's NGOs as a means to empower women politically. This policy decision rests on the

assumption that civil society organizations will enhance women's political voice and influence by increasing women's political action. However, research examining the relationship between civil society and participation has found NGOs do not necessarily increase political participation.

Civil society is defined as the "realm of organizational life that is open, voluntary, self-generating and at least partly self-supporting, autonomous from the state and bound by legal order" (Diamond 1999, 221). NGOs are characterized as organizations with specialized paid and volunteer staff that are funded by transnational agencies or private foundations and engage in the promotion of collective goals through activities such as reporting, advising, and service provision (Alvarez 1999, 186). Women's organizations constitute a subset within these broader categories of civil society and NGOs. What distinguishes women's organizations is that female identity is the primary criteria for membership. Though not all women's organizations explicitly aim to promote feminist goals, organizational objectives and strategies intend to reflect shared interests and experiences among a specific group of women<sup>3</sup>.

A vibrant civil society has been recognized as central to fostering citizen participation and the development of strong enduring democratic institutions (Chambers 2003; Linz and Stepan 1996; Oxhorn 2006; Putnam 1993). Civil society organizations enhance democracy by fostering social capital, meaning networks characterized by norms of trust and reciprocity among citizens (Gibson 2001; Ostrom 1990; Putnam 1993; Wood 2001), by mobilizing citizens to make political demands (Brown et al. 2008; Boulding and

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth recognizing that definitions of the term NGO are inconsistent across the literature. For a full discussion of this variation see: Martens, Kerstin. 2002. "Mission Impossible? Defining Nongovernmental Organizations". *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* Vol. 13, No. 3.

Gibson 2009), by auditing government actions (Blair 1996; Hulme and Edwards 1996; Diamond 1999; Waisman, Feinberg and Zamosc 2006), and by influencing government officials on the behalf of marginalized groups (Oxhorn 2006; Silliman 1999). Though civil society may increase social capital and mobilize citizens to make demands on government, these effects are not given, and they do not necessarily result in a broadening of the base of political participants.

Research on the relationship between civil society and democracy in Latin America has shown that civil society will expand participation only under certain conditions. Civil society organizations, including NGOs and women's organizations, when funded or closely monitored by the state face the possibility of being co-opted and limiting the range of expressed political demands (Mercer 2002; Molyneux 2002). International sources of funding may also affect political expression and participation. When NGOs receive international funding, they may abandon confrontational objectives or criticisms of the established political elites (Alvarez 1999; Brown et al. 2008; Hulme and Edwards 1996). Civil society may also have the effect of increasing social divisions and mistrust, leading to an increase in political conflict rather than an increase in collective political action (Anderson 2010; Gibson 2001; Titecha and Vervisch 2008; Varshney 2001).

The lack of scholarly consensus as to whether civil society will support or obstruct political participation is due in part to insufficient specification of the causal mechanisms within organizations that influence individuals' decisions to act politically. Rather than verifying the individual-level political effects of organizations, it is often assumed that NGOs politicize at the individual level, and the effects either support or challenge democracy. Research has devoted minimal attention to identifying internal processes

within organizations that explain variations in rates or forms of participation across groups in society (Johnson and Prakash 2006). This dissertation contributes to research on the political effects of civil society and NGOs by identifying causal mechanisms within women's organizations to explain women's political participation in democratizing contexts. By identifying what these mechanisms are and their influence on members' political participation across organizations in the Guatemalan context, this research offers the theoretical foundation needed to explain the effects of women's organizations on women's political empowerment in democratizing states more generally.

### **Theoretical Contribution and Implications of this Study**

Much of the prior work on the political effects of civil society organizations generally, and NGOs specifically, explains the political effects of organizations in terms of aggregated outcomes. Less attention has been devoted to theorizing and testing individual-level processes behind observed trends in political participation. By focusing on describing individuals' experiences within women's organizations, this study goes beyond establishing *if* civil society organizations affect political participation to specify *how* organizations influence micro-level mechanisms and processes steering members to participate politically. Additionally, contradictory findings across studies in regards to the relationship between civil society and political participation in democratizing states raise questions about whether and under what conditions organizational membership increases *women's* political participation. This project speaks to this by specifying conditions at the macro-level that influence both strategies of women's organizations as well as women's decisions about whether and how to participate politically.

The findings from this study also contribute to research on women's political participation. The majority of research on women's political participation has focused on explaining gendered patterns of political participation in western industrialized democracies (primarily in the United States and Western Europe). Though research on gender differences in political participation in these contexts has identified distinct processes directing men and women to participate politically, important contextual differences in developing democracies, such as weak political institutions, lower rates of female literacy, and more rigid gender norms, cast doubt on the generalizability of findings from western industrialized democracies. Thus, to explain women's political participation in democratizing states, theories must account for the effects of institutional, economic, and cultural factors that characterize the context of women's political action in democratizing states. By explaining how and when women participate politically, findings from this study will improve our understanding of observed differences in men's and women's rates and forms of political participation. By clarifying the causal processes that influence women's political participation, findings from this research provide the empirical foundations necessary to improve our understanding of the dynamics shaping gender inequalities in political participation in other developing country contexts.

Enhancing the political voice of women in weak democratic settings is imperative if democracy is to be inclusive. Women's organizations have been supported as a means to politically empower women, but my research on the political effects of civil society and NGOs shows organizations do not necessarily politically mobilize their members. Explaining the effects of NGOs on women's political participation is crucial for understanding the extent to which NGOs will or will not enhance the political voice of

members. Knowing more about the political effects of NGOs has significant implications for policies supporting civil society organizations as a means to broaden political participation and achieve women's political empowerment. My dissertation research contributes to questions that continuously perplex those who make policy decisions in regards to democracy and development, academics studying the topics, and the citizens in democratizing states who desire improved democratic governance and economic security. While my findings suggest women's organizations do not necessarily empower women to participate in institutional politics, qualitative evidence shows women's organizations do politically empower women to act outside of formal institutional channels.

The implications of these findings for democratic development and women's empowerment in democratizing states are significant. The evidence presented here implies that in the short-term women's organizations are unlikely to enhance women's institutional political participation. Without improvements in the performance and accountability of democratic institutions and politicians, it is likely that women's organizations will continue to empower members to engage in non-institutional, rather than institutional politics. However, by empowering women to participate in non-institutional politics, women's organizations are increasing women's voice and influence in society. In the long-term, an increase in women's non-institutional political power has the potential to transform gender norms and reduce gender inequalities in political institutions at the national level.

## **Methods and Research Design**

This dissertation research is motivated by persistent gender inequality in political voice and unsubstantiated claims that women's organizations will empower women to act

politically. In this study, women's political empowerment refers to processes that increase the capacity of individuals and groups to make choices and promote their interests through political action (Williams 2004). Given this motivation, the primary objective of this project is to assess whether and how women will be empowered to participate politically as a result of engaging in women's organizations. In this study I use the term political participation to refer to any act by which citizens pursue purposeful courses of action to influence political decisions and processes. Decisions and processes are political when the action is intended to reach beyond the economic self-interests of the individual, and the action has tangible implications for the decisions about who gets what, when and how (Albrecht 2008).

To understand the consequences for women's political empowerment generally, research must specify with what effect and under what conditions women's organizations influence members' political action. To this end, I focus my analysis on explaining consequences in terms of women's institutional and non-institutional political participation. To evaluate my argument that women are more likely to be empowered to participate in non-institutional politics as a result of their experiences within women's organizations, this project employs a mixed methods approach. My multi-method research design combines case studies, participant observation and informal interview techniques with survey data to analyze and explain the relationship between women's organizations and women's political empowerment in the Guatemalan context. Results from this analysis show women's organizations do politically empower women, but they do so by increasing women's opportunities, motivations and capacities to act in non-institutional rather than institutional politics.

The focus of my research emerges from longstanding questions I have had about the effects of development organizations on women's political agency. These questions arose from my own experiences working with a women's development organization in rural Guatemala from 2007 to 2008. The assumption behind organizational strategies was that through organizational experiences, e.g., trainings in women's rights and political activism, women would learn and decide to act politically to improve their lives, families, and communities. What I observed was that even with this mission and overt efforts to increase women's political engagement, most women in this organization were not engaged in formal politics. They were, however, taking actions to improve themselves, their families and communities. Instead of working through formal political channels, women were engaging in multiple women's organizations, taking advantage of opportunities to learn new skills that enabled them to care for and provide for their families as well as other women and members of their community. This experience raised questions that I brought with me as I entered graduate school: Do development organizations in fact enable women to improve their lives and the lives of others? If so, how? Which organizations have this effect? Which women are most likely to be affected in this way by development organizations? What factors prevent development organizations from having this effect? Having been asking these questions since my first year of graduate study, my own answers have evolved as a result of empirical investigations and fieldwork.



### ***Methodological Approach***

Before describing the methods employed in this study, it is important to identify the epistemic view<sup>4</sup> that shapes my methodological choices and subsequent theoretical conclusions concerning women's political participation in Guatemala specifically and in developing democratic contexts more generally. My epistemic approach challenges essentialist perspectives of human experience by recognizing that all knowledge is partial, socially situated, and contextually determined (Harding 2008). Thus, all theories of women's political participation that generalize women's individual experiences are partial. However, theories will be more comprehensive when they are based on pluralist methodological approaches that maximize the range and variety of perspectives included in a research project (Maguire 2008). Given that all knowledge is socially situated, valid theories of women's political participation rest on methods that enable scholars to situate individuals within society, explain how individuals relate to one another, and to uncover and expose dynamics of power and oppression that influence women's motivations to act politically. The key epistemological view guiding my methodological approach is that research is more objective and inclusive is by incorporating "subjugated ways of knowing" to expose gendered assumptions underlying existing concepts and theories used to explain the political world (Harding 2008). It is this view that underlies my decision to combine qualitative and quantitative methodologies, as well as my decision to employ inductive methods of theory development in the collection and analysis of qualitative data.

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<sup>4</sup> My epistemological position reflects my view of what information is ascertainable and the means by which it can be ascertained. It shapes methodological choices in regards to assumptions about whether and which phenomena can be objectively identified, as well as the degree to which and how objective relationships can be observed and verified (Marsh and Furlong 2002, 19).

Additionally, my theoretical and methodological approach rests on the assumption that meanings and experiences associated with gender are relational and vary by context. Thus, to achieve this study's goal of explaining how and why women's organizations influence women's political empowerment requires a deep understanding of the operation of gendered dynamics and gendered beliefs that shape individual behavior in a given context. To explain women's political participation in the Guatemalan context, this study employs methods of cross-case and within-case analysis to specify how conditions common across democratizing states shape Guatemalan women's experiences within women's organizations, as well as their perceptions and experiences of politics and political participation. To analyze and evaluate patterns within my quantitative and qualitative data, I employed an interpretivist approach. The interpretivist approach served to situate quantitative and qualitative findings within the "web of beliefs" that underlie women's actions and decisions (Bayard de Volo 2015, 242). Because interpretive findings are socially situated, they are necessarily understood as being "contingent and specific to the type of cases being studied" (ibid). By combining an interpretivist and mixed-methods approach to analyze the relationships between women's organizational involvement and women's political empowerment, I am able to uncover gendered processes that shape subjects' decisions to act politically in the Guatemalan context.

Despite the benefits of my methodological approach, it is important to recognize the limitations. While a mixed methods approach has the potential to strengthen causal arguments and increase theoretical and conceptual validity, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies does not completely eliminate the challenge of endogeneity. Because my qualitative observations are drawn from a non-random sample

that includes only members of one type of women's organization, these observations alone cannot confirm that membership has a distinct effect on women's decisions to participate politically. Additionally, without data to compare the effects across different types of women's organizations, my qualitative findings cannot be generalized to explain processes of political empowerment within women's organizations more generally. However, qualitative evidence and observations of women participating in economically-oriented development NGOs, shows within this *type* of women's organization, women are being politically empowered as a result of their organizational experiences.

I do not necessarily expect to observe these same processes of empowerment playing out with the same consequences in other types of Guatemalan women's organizations, but it is not the goal of this study to determine the degree to which these processes play out in all women's organizations. Rather, my objective is to develop a theory to explain the impact of organizations similar to those in my sample on women's political empowerment. Nonetheless, to establish the degree to which relationships observed in my qualitative sample are not endogenous and reflect the relationship between membership in women's organizations and women's political participation more generally, this study includes quantitative survey data to verify that membership has a significant, positive effect on women's decisions to act politically. While recognizing these challenges, a multi-method, interpretivist approach facilitates the development of theories that are externally valid, contextually specific, and rooted in the operation of gendered dynamics and beliefs that shape women's behavior in the context of study.

## ***Research Design***

This dissertation draws on numerous experiences and discussions with working with women participating in a variety of organizations in Guatemala. In addition to the year I spent conducting dissertation fieldwork, I traveled to Guatemala on two other occasions to conduct preliminary fieldwork, each time for a period of three months. During the summer of 2009 I gathered government elections data, census data, and municipal budget data. I also obtained a copy of the 2009 directory of NGOs compiled by the Guatemalan nonprofit organization, Coordination of NGOs and Cooperatives (CONGCOOP). I established contacts with leaders of prominent Guatemalan Women's Organizations, including Unión Nacional de Mujeres Guatemaltecas (UNAMG) and the Gender Equity Program at Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO). During the summer of 2010, I conducted focus groups, informal interviews, and participant observations to gather data on women's organizational participation. A year of fieldwork conducted between June 2012 and June 2013 provides the primary source of qualitative data for this project.

I situate my analysis of the effects of women's organizations on women's political participation within the political context of Guatemala. Narrowing the scope of research in this way enables me to not only develop a grounded theory of women's political participation in this case, but to also evaluate the consequences of contextual factors that affect women's organizations and women's political participation across newly established democracies. My methodological approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods to develop a theory of political empowerment and a conceptualization of political participation grounded in the experiences and perceptions of women in Guatemala. This approach, by documenting women's organizational experiences, as well as changes in

women's perceptions and motivations, serves to build and test theory so as to improve understandings of whether and why women in women's NGOs decide to act politically.

The first stage of research uses existing survey data to "document the operations of particular relationships between variables" (Jayarante and Stewart 2008, 54). In this first phase of analysis I examine the extent to which participation in women's organizations affects the probability that women will engage in a variety of political acts. The goal of this phase of investigation was to determine how women were participating politically and to identify relationships between involvement in women's organizations and various forms of political participation. By identifying correlations between variables, this method also provided the foundation for my theory of women's political empowerment and the effects of women's organizational involvement in democratizing states.

Quantitative analysis employed data collected by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP 2008). Data was interpreted using statistical methods of analysis to identify gendered patterns in rates and forms of political participation. This method intended to answer the following: which "political" acts women engage in, which "political" acts men engage in, and how men's and women's participation differs in both form and rate. To develop a conceptualization of political participation based on the patterns observed in the Guatemalan context, I identified gendered variations in forms and rates of institutional and non-institutional political participation. Interpretations will also use regression models to specify the nature of the relationship between women's involvement in women's organizations and various indicators of women's political participation. These models are used to determine if organizational involvement has a statistically significant

effect on women's political participation, whether this effect is positive or negative, and to identify which acts are significantly influenced by women's organizational involvement.

The analysis of quantitative data is useful for addressing existing assumptions and gender biases within current theories of women's political participation (Baneria 2008; Jayarante and Stewart 2008). I use this method to critically evaluate the assumed positive link between women's organizational involvement and political participation. Though some feminists have criticized the use of quantitative methods for obscuring important aspects of women's experience, quantitative methods are useful for identifying gendered patterns in conventional measures of political participation and for raising questions about observed relationships between variables (Jayarante and Stewart 2008).

Though quantitative methods are valuable for the reasons already discussed, these methods have important weaknesses. One such weakness lies in the inclusivity of the methods of survey data collection. Because survey questions are determined prior to the collection of survey responses, the information that is collected is limited to knowledge and information that is deemed relevant or valuable by those who write the survey. Survey data does not ask respondents what indicators they would use to measure acts of political participation (Waring 2008). Thus, there is no guarantee that subject perspectives, understandings, and experiences will be represented by the information that is collected (Strassman 2008).

Additionally, methods for collecting survey data do not ensure that survey measures correspond to meanings subjects associate with survey language theoretical concepts (Jayarante and Stewart 2008). For example, scholarship on women's participation in Latin America suggest that unlike women in the US or Europe, women in Latin America are

unlikely to view activities outside of formal, institutional arenas of politics as “political” (Weylan 1994; Alvarez 1999). Thus, research that assumes, rather than confirms, the validity of broad conceptualizations of women’s political participation may produce biased conclusions about the nature and causes of women’s political participation in contexts outside of the US and Europe. To ensure theoretical conclusions are valid and unbiased research must combine quantitative methods with qualitative approaches that include and give adequate authority to the situated and subjective knowledge of subjugated groups whose perspectives have been excluded from prior studies (Harding 2008; Stokes 1995).

The final weakness of this method is the inability to describe complex processes and causes behind gendered patterns in political participation. Though quantitative methods inform us of correlations between variables they do not adequately capture the “complex patterns of an individual life and preserve the integrity of individual experience” (Jayarante and Stewart 2008). As has been widely recognized within the field of political methodology, making a causal argument requires not only showing causal effect, but also identifying causal mechanisms<sup>5</sup>. In other words, a strong causal argument requires researchers go beyond large-N studies that provide evidence of a large and certain causal effect, to specify the pathways that connect X and Y. While quantitative data illustrates general relationships between membership in women’s organizations and political participation, qualitative data is needed to explain why these relationships occur. This study, by employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, provides a more complete depiction of the gendered nature of political participation in developing democratic contexts, one which incorporates contextual factors (Jayarante and Stewart 2008) and specifies complex

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<sup>5</sup> See Gerring (2007), footnote 19, page 44 for full summary of scholars acknowledging this.

processes leading to changes in the motivations and perceptions behind women's political action (Collier, Seawright, and Brady 2004).

Qualitative observations were collected during a total of two years of fieldwork in Guatemala. In addition to my two years of fieldwork, my analyses and findings are informed by my experience of working with a small Guatemalan women's NGO from August 2007 through August 2008. In 2012-2013 I spent a year living in Guatemala's second largest city, Quetzaltenango. I became familiar with numerous organizations working with women across a range of issues. These case studies provided a method for specifying causal mechanisms and pathways. Field observations enabled me to actually see X affecting Y as it happened, and thus provided the foundation for a case-based theory to explain *how* women's organizational experiences influence members' political empowerment and decisions to participate politically.

In order to identify causal mechanisms and processes within organizations, the collection of qualitative data aimed to create "thick descriptions, i.e. interpretive work that focuses on the meaning of human behavior to the actors involved" (Collier, Seawright, and Brady 2004). Participant observation was the primary method of data collection during fieldwork. This method used immersion in the local context to identify patterns of behavior and to understand subjects' perceptions, beliefs, and expectations (Fetterman 2010). Participant observation, characterized by immersion, passive observation, as well as informal and formal interviews (Kubik 2009), produced the kind of detailed evidence needed to flesh out and call into question assumptions of the gendered political effects of women's organizations in democratizing states (Schatz 2009). Most importantly, this method allowed me to develop a grounded theory of women's political participation by



using insider meanings and inductive approaches to extract general concepts and hypotheses from observations of women participating in similar types of women's organizations (White 2008). By analyzing detailed, insider perspectives this study is able to provide contextually specific descriptions of causal relationships and externally valid measures of key concepts.

The collection of qualitative data focused on women participating in eleven different women's development NGOs. These organizations were similar in focus. All of the organizations I observed focused on economic and material goals in responding to women's needs and interests. For no organization in my sample was women's political empowerment an explicit goal. The decision to focus on this type of women's organization was both practically and theoretically motivated. Practically, focusing on economically oriented women's organizations enables me to draw conclusions about the type of women's organization that is increasingly coming to characterize the NGO sector in democratizing states, namely organizations that provide social services and material benefits. Theoretically, qualitative findings are not intended to explain the participatory consequences of women's NGOs generally. Instead, qualitative analysis contributes to theory development by 1) establishing if aggregate relationships between membership and political participation hold for women participating in women's development NGOs and 2) explaining how women's experiences in these types of organizations influence members' political empowerment and decisions to act politically. To realize these objectives I collected information on women's perceptions of politics, political action, and experiences in organizations. This information was analyzed to provide answers to the following questions: Why do members of these types of women's organizations decide to participate

politically? How is this similar or different from the more general relationship between membership in women's organizations and political participation in Guatemala? How do women's organizational experiences influence their decisions to participate in institutional and non-institutional politics?

To answer these questions, the analysis of qualitative data proceeded inductively. Using an inductive approach, I summarized and condensed raw text, as well as coded and categorized qualitative data to identify relevant theoretical patterns and causal processes within qualitative data (Thomas 2003). First, I transcribed all of my observations and organized my notes and interviews chronologically. The process of transcription itself involved a complete review and write-up of all of my observations from a year of fieldwork, plus three summers of talking with Guatemalans, mostly women, about politics, political participation, views of government and politicians, the role of women's organizations and NGOs, and individuals' experiences in organizations.

My analysis proceeded in two distinct phases. The first phase used open coding methods, while the second employed focused coding to categorize and analyze my qualitative field notes. The first round of analysis of my field observations involved reading through the full text and labeling lines, entries, and segments of information. This phase followed processes of "open coding" (Charmaz 2001; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995), whereby I remained open and labeled each line of data to identify all ideas and themes within my field notes. During the second round of coding, I focused on coding texts for processes of empowerment and indicators of women's political participation. To determine if women's organizations are causing members to act politically, I coded for evidence of processes within organizations that influence women's capacity, opportunities, and

motivations to act. To identify patterns and relationships between my central theoretical concepts—women’s organizations, political empowerment, and political agency— I sorted my coded data and wrote up my findings as patterns in the data emerged. My interpretation of subjects’ words identified logical and consistent relationships across sources in order to develop a theory of the relationship between experiences in women’s organizations and women’s political empowerment in Guatemala.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

The primary objective of this dissertation is to understand and explain gender inequalities in political participation in democratizing states generally and in Guatemala specifically. To do so, this study proceeds in the following manner. Chapter 2 discusses existing scholarship and outlines my theoretical approach. In this chapter I discuss existing research women’s empowerment, political participation, and the effects of organizational activism to justify my theoretical approach and illustrate my contribution to existing scholarship. In Chapter 3, I employ case study methods to outline a theoretical framework for explaining women’s political participation across democratizing states. I begin by conducting a cross-case analysis to identify macro-level variables that influence women’s political participation across developing democratic contexts. I then employ methods of within-case analysis to evaluate the theorized effects of macro-level factors in the Guatemalan context. The fourth chapter analyzes quantitative survey data to identify and explain gendered trends in political participation in Guatemala. In this chapter I specify gender differences in the form and frequency of men and women’s political participation. Next, I examine the role of different factors in explaining gendered trends in participation within Guatemala. Here I build off of past research on political participation to identify and

evaluate the effects of organizational activism on women's political participation within Guatemala. Finally, Chapter 5 identifies processes at the individual level to explain women's political participation in the Guatemalan context. By analyzing qualitative data, I explain how macro-level determinants influence the effects of women's organizations on individual capacities, opportunities, and motivations to participate politically in Guatemala. The study concludes with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications of my findings for future research and policies aimed at understanding and addressing gender inequalities in political participation in developing democratic contexts generally, and for the Latin American region and Guatemala more specifically.

## **CHAPTER 2. WOMEN'S ORGANIZING AND CONSEQUENCES FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIZING STATES**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I made the argument that women's organizations have been promoted as a means to politically empower women. Yet, research on women's political participation and the effects of women's organizations has not clearly established the relationship between organizational membership and women's political empowerment. In contexts of unrepresentative and unresponsive democratic institutions, women's organizations may empower women to participate in forums outside of formal institutional politics (Alvarez 2009; Banaszak 2005; Ray and Korteweg 1999; Razavi 2001; Tripp 2006; Waylen 1994). At the same time, women's organizations in developing democratic contexts have been found to enhance women's voice and influence in institutions (Beck 2014; Baldez 2002; Jaquette 1998; Lubertino 2003; Luciak 2001). Though research on women's political participation suggests women's organizations politically empower women, I find organizations will empower women to act politically in institutional and non-institutional politics, only when individuals have the opportunity, motive, and capacity to choose to act. Women's organizations will empower women politically by enhancing existing, or by generating new, opportunities, motives, or capacities for women to participate politically.

This chapter provides background for my theoretical and methodological approach by reviewing existing research on women's political empowerment, women's political participation, and the effects of women's organizations in democratizing states. Building off

of findings across these literatures, I articulate my theoretical and methodological approach to provide an answer to the following questions: Do women's organizations empower members to act politically? If so, how? What are the consequences of participation in women's organizations for gendered trends in institutional and non-institutional political participation? To analyze the relationship between women's organizations and women's political empowerment this study investigates consequences of organizational membership on women's institutional and non-institutional political participation in one developing democratic context, Guatemala.

The first section of the chapter defines the concept of political empowerment and explains the theoretical link between processes of empowerment and women's political participation. I argue focusing on women's political participation provides a valid means to assess the relationship between women's organizations and women's political empowerment. The second section of this chapter summarizes the research on women's political participation. Here I maintain research must begin by taking a broad approach to conceptualizing and measuring women's political participation in democratizing states. Additionally, explanations of women's political participation in these contexts must go beyond identifying contextual and individual-level factors that shape patterns in political participation and move towards specifying how contextual factors, such as political institutions and democratization, influence individual-level processes shaping aggregate patterns in women's political participation across developing democratic contexts. The third section turns to a discussion of the research on women's political participation and the effects of organizations to identify mechanisms within women's organizations that influence individual decisions to participate politically.

## **Conceptualizing Women's Political Empowerment**

Empowerment is a debated term that has been associated with a variety of definitions and meanings. Despite diverse definitions of empowerment, it is possible to identify common characteristics of the concept. These commonalities provide the foundation for the conceptualization employed in this study. Given the variation across definitions of empowerment, disagreement exists about whether a universal definition can be identified. Feminist scholars in particular, contend arriving at a universal definition of empowerment is neither possible nor beneficial because norms and values associated with gender are culturally and contextually specific, causing women's experiences of empowerment to vary accordingly (Baltiwala 1994; Cornwall and Brock 2005; Kabeer 2001). Narrow definitions and one-dimensional conceptualizations are unlikely to represent processes that expand the full range of women's potential choices and capacity to act across a wide range of environments (Kabeer 2001). Across definitions of empowerment two aspects in particular stand out as common. The first is that empowerment is conceptualized as a process of change. Second, the result of this change is identified as an increase in the agency of marginalized individuals and groups in society.

Consensus exists within the literature in regards to the process component of empowerment. Common across studies of empowerment is the understanding that empowerment involves a process of change. Change is understood as involving a movement from insight to action as a result of transformations that enhance individuals' power to make choices and influence decisions (Kabeer 1999; Mosedale 2005). In addition to understanding empowerment as a process that unfolds over time, changes are also understood as playing out across multiple domains of daily life. State, market, and society

are three domains in which actors are understood to experience a certain degree of empowerment (Aslop and Heinsohn 2005). However, the degree to which empowerment in one domain will have “spill-over” effects on the processes of empowerment and outcomes in other domains is an unsettled question within the empowerment literature (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007).

Processes of empowerment, as they occur within different domains of daily life, will affect individuals’ experiences at different levels of aggregation (Kabeer 1999; Aslop and Heisohn 2005). Generally, analyses of empowerment understand the outcomes of changes in power as manifesting at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Studies that seek to analyze causes and consequences of empowerment at the macro-level focus on measuring outcomes of empowerment with aggregate national level data. Macro-level analyses emphasize the role of contextual level variables such as democratic transition (Jaquette 1994; Viterna and Fallon 2008; Weylan 1994), political institutions (Molyneux 2001; Schwindt-Bayer 2006, 2013) social networks (Leighley 1990; Safa 1990; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), social inequalities (Coffe and Bolzendahl 2010; Lijphart 1997; Verba and Nie 1972), and economic conditions (Barnes and Kasse 1979; Nie, Powell, and Prewitt 1969; Weylan 1998; Wolfinger 1965). Micro-level analyses emphasize the resources and attitudes of citizens as a means to explain when and why individuals are empowered to act politically (Almond and Verba 1963; Anderson 2014; Ingelhart and Norris 2003; Kabeer 2005; Schlozman et al. 1994). Most studies identify individual-level and psychological changes when referring to processes and outcomes of empowerment at the micro-level. At the meso-level, research focuses on identifying and measuring processes of change within



close relationships. Here empowerment entails “developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and decisions made within it” (Rowlands 1997).

By understanding empowerment as a process, we assume that it involves a series of actions that move us toward a particular end or result. The result of processes of empowerment, as it has been conceptualized in the literature, is an increased capacity of individuals and groups to make choices and act in ways that promote their interests (Williams 2004). I use the term agency to refer to actions that result from empowerment processes. Agency is defined here as “an actor’s ability to envisage options and make meaningful choices” (Aslop and Heinsohn 2005). Put simply, agency refers to the freedom to make choices and act on them. As such, the concept of agency, as it is used in definitions of empowerment, refers to both observable actions and meanings and motivations that influence actors’ exercise of choice (Kabeer 1999). In order for individuals to be able to exercise choice, the following conditions must be met: there must be alternatives and alternatives must not only exist, but they must be seen to exist by those exercising choice (Aslop and Heinsohn 2005; Kabeer 2005).

The fact that agency is a central component across definitions of empowerment reflects the implicit assumption that enhancing individuals’ freedom to exercise choice is inherently valuable and as such is conducive to well-being (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). In terms of development interventions that seek to empower, increasing individual agency is seen as integral to the achievement of development objectives and outcomes associated with improving the lives of marginalized groups and individuals within society. Processes of empowerment that enhance the agency for marginalized groups are often seen as inherently positive, but as numerous authors have recognized, outcomes of processes of

empowerment that enhance agency will be largely dependent upon contextual factors that shape what choices are available to actors, their exercise of choice, and what actions result from exercising choice (Aslop and Heinsohn 2005; Ibrahim and Alkire 2007; Kabeer 2001; Kabeer 1999; Narayan 2005). Thus, there is consensus across definitions of empowerment in terms of the focus on agency, but there is not agreement on whether enhancing agency will necessarily be associated with positive outcomes for members of marginalized groups. Despite this discord, scholars agree that processes of empowerment and consequences with respect to agency are both determined by and will vary in accordance with contextual factors that shape individual opportunities for choice and the values and priorities that will be reflected in the choice that is made and actions taken.

How we define empowerment matters for how we evaluate the empowering effects of women's organizations. Considering where agreements and discord lie in regards to conceptualizations of empowerment, I offer the following recommendations for developing a definition of women's political empowerment. Firstly, political empowerment should be defined as a process of change. Second, the result of this process of change should be conceptualized as an increase in women's political agency. Finally, women's political empowerment and the exercise of agency will vary across contexts. Valid conceptualizations of empowerment must be amenable to contextual variations in both the processes that politically empower women and the consequences for women's choices about whether and how to act politically. In this study, the term ***empowerment*** is used to refer to the "process by which people become aware of their own interests and come to see themselves as having the capacity and right to act and have influence" (Rowlands 1997, 13). I use the concept of ***political empowerment*** to refer to processes that increase

individuals' and groups' *political agency*, meaning their capacity to choose and act to promote their interests through political action (Williams 2004).

### **Explaining Women's Political Empowerment**

As the concept of empowerment has come to occupy a central space in development discourses and policy, studies from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, economics, sociology, and demography, scholars have made efforts to measure empowerment as both an outcome and an intermediary factor to assess specific development strategies (Malhotra and Schuler 2005). Despite the number of studies on empowerment, taken together they do not provide conclusive evidence regarding the causes and consequences of political empowerment. Inconclusive results across these studies can be attributed to variations across studies in how the concept of empowerment is measured, tendencies to use indicators that do not effectively operationalize or validate processes leading to political empowerment, and the use of measures that do not encompass the full range of variation in women's political participation in democratizing states. Consequently, what research has been done to explain causes and consequences of women's political empowerment has not been able to specify or confirm processes that empower women to exercise agency via political action.

Most studies of empowerment involve empirical analyses at the individual and household level. Very few studies examine processes of empowerment as they operate at the macro-level. Consequently, measures of empowerment at the national level are less well developed than those at the individual and household level (Narayan 2005). Though literature on conceptualizing and defining empowerment stresses that processes of empowerment play out in multiple domains and levels of society, empirical research has

failed to specify how processes and outcomes of empowerment that occur within different domains, or at different levels of aggregation, influence the causes and consequences of political empowerment. As a result, most studies of empowerment do not come close to capturing all of the relevant processes that influence political empowerment. Consequently, there has been limited research connecting specific processes of empowerment to changes in political agency. However incomplete they may be, results across these studies are heavily weighted towards the positive, where results show empowerment, is associated with increases in choice, greater control over assets, and improvements in child well-being (Hashemi, Schuler, and Riley 1996; Kabeer 1998). Though studies suggest empowerment is associated with positive outcomes, failures to empirically evaluate the full range of interdependent factors that influence processes and outcomes of political empowerment prohibit us from drawing general conclusions across these studies about processes that enhance women's capacities, motivations, and opportunities for political action.

### **Conceptualizing Women's Political Participation**

Thus far, I have argued that to determine whether women's organizations politically empower women research must focus on explaining how and when women's organizations influence women's choices and decisions about whether and how to act politically. However, before we can begin to identify causes of women's political participation and the effects of women's organizations, it is necessary to establish a definition of political participation that is broad enough to be amenable to contextual variations in the causes of women's political action, as well as the form of political actions that women decide to take to promote their interests and realize their goals.

Valid theories of women's political participation must be based on a definition that captures the full range of actions that constitute political action in democratizing states. I argue that to explain the effects of women's organizations and processes that enhance political agency across these contexts, conceptualizations of political participation must consist of institutional and non-institutional acts. A valid conceptualization must also allow for the incorporation of political actions not included in current measures, but nonetheless represent instances of political participation. Such a broad conceptualization ensures theories of women's political participation, as well as research explaining the consequences of women's organizing for political empowerment, offer comprehensive and generalizable explanations capable of relating empowerment processes to changes in individual agency. In this section, I discuss research on women's political participation to justify the concept of political participation employed in this study.

To offer a theory that is able to explain women's political participation across developing democratic contexts, the concepts explicit in these theories must be (1) generalizable, meaning they are broad enough to encompass the full range of behavioral variation across contexts, and (2) differentiate instances and attributes of the concept of interest from other most-similar concepts (Gerring 2007). Insufficient attention has been given to evaluating the degree to which existing concepts and measures embody all forms of women's political participation in democratizing states. To determine the relationship between women's organizational membership and women's political empowerment research must begin with a broad conceptualization of political participation, one that encompasses institutional and non-institutional political acts and is amenable to explaining

the full range of variations in political actions taken by women across developing democratic contexts.

This study contributes to current research by broadening the conceptualization of women's political participation in democratizing states to enable the incorporation of emergent and previously unrecognized forms of political action into existing measures. To justify my concept of political participation, I begin with a discussion of questions that scholars grapple with when defining political participation. I summarize researchers' responses to these questions and highlight challenges to conceptual validity that arise when applying concepts developed in established democratic contexts to explain women's political participation in democratizing states. I then outline my definition of political participation. I conclude by making a case for adopting a broad conceptualization of political participation, one that includes a wide variety of institutional and non-institutional political acts, to explain gendered trends in political participation in developing democratic contexts generally, and in Guatemala specifically.

In deciding how to define and measure political participation, scholars must consider the following questions: (1) should political participation refer to conventional and unconventional acts of participation? (2) Should political participation include actions directed towards government as well as activities targeted at actors and/or institutions outside of government/the state? (3) Should behaviors with *unintended* consequences for government's decisions constitute acts of political participation? (4) Should political participation include "passive acts" such as political efficacy or political awareness? (Conge 1988, 241-242). The conceptualization of political participation I offer answers yes to all but the last of these questions. Theories of women's political participation in developing

democratic contexts require a broad conceptualization of political participation that includes all of the following “active”<sup>6</sup> acts of political participation: conventional<sup>7</sup> and unconventional<sup>8</sup> acts, actions to influence political decisions within and beyond government institutions, and actions that directly and indirectly intend to influence government. I do not go so far as to include “passive acts” such as political efficacy and political awareness in my definition of political participation, not for lack of importance in theorizing women’s participation, but because I conceive of these “passive acts” as mechanisms influencing individuals’ capacities, motivations and opportunities to engage in what I will call “active” political acts. Thus, to understand the effects of women’s organizations on individual decisions to exercise agency, this study focuses on explaining women’s decisions to engage in “active” forms of political participation.

Early studies of political participation tended towards a narrow definition of political participation and focused only on explaining intentional efforts to influence government personnel and decisions (Burns, Scholzman, and Verba 2001; Verba and Nie 1972). Most often these studies define political participation as, “acts that aim at influencing the government, either by affecting the choice of government personnel or by affecting the choices made by government personnel ” (1972, 2). Voting, participating in

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<sup>6</sup> I use the term “active” when referring to those actions included in my definition of political participation to distinguish my concept of political participation from even broader conceptualizations that include “passive acts”. See Conge (1988) for a full discussion of this distinction.

<sup>7</sup> Though debates exist about the precise definition of conventional political participation, as the term is used here, it is understood as referring to a range of political actions that are legally sanctioned by democratic governments. These forms of participation tend to include political acts that take place in formal political forums. Examples include participation in political campaigns, electoral participation, contacting public officials, etc. (Leighly 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Unconventional political participation refers to extra-parliamentary actions and manifestations. Most often this type of participation is narrowly associated with citizens’ protest activity. Protest activities include actions such as signing petitions, strikes, and demonstrations (Tarrow 1996).

political campaigns, contacting government officials, taking part in protests and demonstrations, and engagement in political organizations are all acts that would be included in this narrow conceptualization of political participation. What is common among all of these actions is that they aim at influencing government. Defining political participation in this way reflects the implicit assumption that acts of political participation target and aim to influence formal institutions of government. The justification for employing this narrow conceptualization of political participation is that it enables scholars to “separate political activity from other domains of activity” (Burns, Scholzman, and Verba 2001, 4).

For research seeking to explain dynamics of political participation in developed democratic contexts, this conceptualization may in fact be sufficient, but it rests on a narrow conception of the “political”. For scholars that use a narrow concept of political participation, political action is equated to the intent to influence government. This assumes that when citizens act politically they do so because they have the motivation, opportunity, and capacity to influence government. Yet in developing democratic contexts, where weak institutions challenge the accountability and effectiveness of government, there is little reason to expect that citizens’ political action will have the goal or intent of influencing formal political institutions. In contexts where citizens do not see government as being effective at representing and responding to their needs, individuals are more likely to engage in actions that intend to influence and hold accountable actors outside of government (Albrecht 2008; Cornwall 2011; Despasato and Norrander 2009; Holzner 2010; Norris 2011; Stokes 1995). In order to explain citizens’ political participation in contexts where political institutions make governments ineffective and unaccountable to



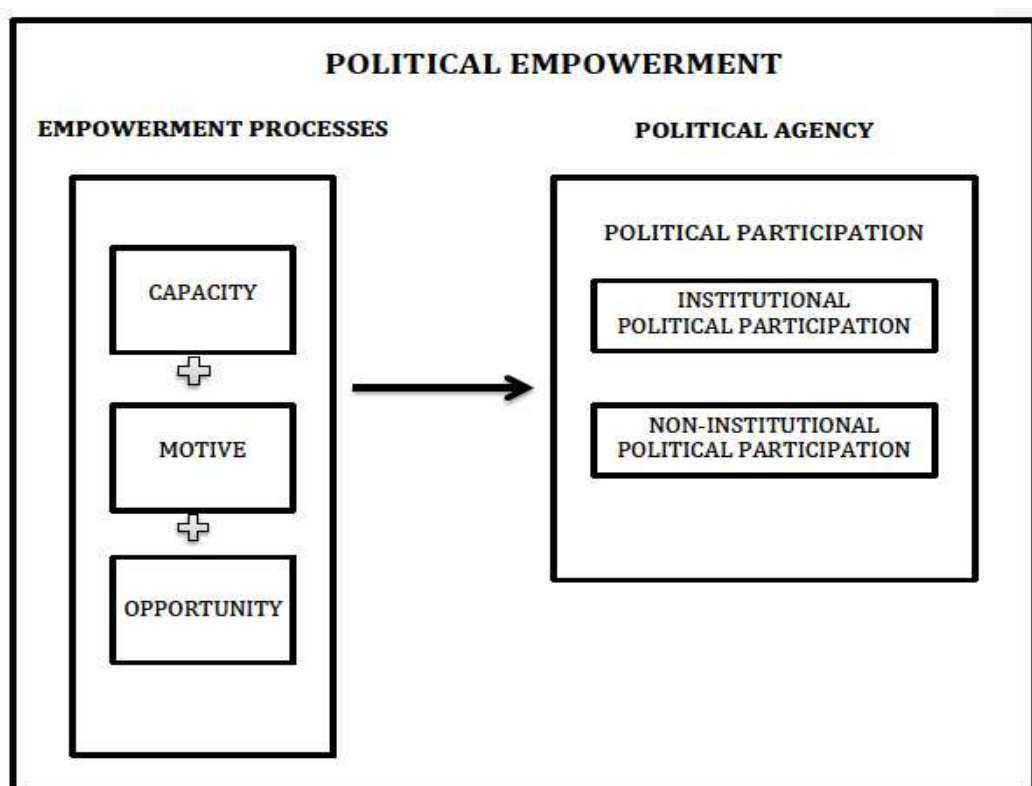
citizens, conceptualizations of political participation must begin with a broad understanding of the term “political”.

I base my conceptualization of political participation on a definition of politics as the processes by which society and individuals decide who gets what, when, and how (Laswell 1958). We would say an action is political when that action is intended to influence distributional processes, decisions, and outcomes. In developing democracies, because government is not the way that citizens believe they can shape political processes, decisions, and outcomes, individual action aims to influence politics outside of government as much as, perhaps even more than, politics within government (Albrecht 2008; Conge 1988; Cornwall 2011; Despasato and Norrander 2009; Holzner 2010; Norris 2011; Stokes 1995). Thus, to adequately understand and explain trends in political participation in developing democracies, generally, and in Guatemala specifically, I define political participation as any act by which citizens pursue purposeful courses of action to influence political decisions and processes. Recognizing that such a broad conceptualization poses problems for distinguishing political from non-political action, I consider an act “political” if it meets the following conditions: the action is intended to reach beyond the economic self-interests of the individual, and the action has tangible implications for the decisions about who gets what, when and how (Albrecht 2008, 19).

To examine how women’s organizations affect rates and forms of political participation, I examine both *institutional* and *non-institutional* acts of political participation. To distinguish institutional from non-institutional political acts I employ the following definitions. ***Institutional political participation*** refers to actions by which women participate in electoral politics and/or acts that involve direct communication with

members or agencies of government. *Non-institutional political participation* refers to political actions that occur outside of formal institutional channels. Recall that actions are considered political when they are intended to reach beyond the economic self-interests of the individual and they have implications for decisions about the distribution of resources among individuals in society. Figure 1 illustrates my concept of political participation and its relationship to political empowerment.

**Figure 1:** Components of the Concept of Political Empowerment



### Explaining Women's Political Participation

Research on political participation compares the way individuals participate politically and processes that lead to participation (Norris 2007, 628). Political

participation is understood to be an important condition for democracy, and strengthening democracy requires participation and inclusion by all citizens in the democratic process (Dahl 1989; Diamond 1999; Lijphart 1997). Gender disparities in political participation represent one of the most enduring challenges to democratization. Though gender inequalities in institutional political participation have decreased in many established democracies (Burns et al. 1997; Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Stolle and Hooghe 2011), inequalities persist in developing democratic contexts (Despasato and Norrander 2009; Ingelhart and Norris 2003; Schwindt-Bayer 2013). Yet, only a small number of studies have utilized quantitative data to explain aggregate gendered trends in political participation in democratizing states (Barnes and Bucchard 2012; Despasato and Norrander 2008; Ingelhart and Norris 2003; Morgan, Espinal, and Hartlyn 2008; Zetterberg 2009). Though quantitative analyses of gender and political participation in democratizing states are limited, this work has clearly established individual resources and attitudes, when considered alone, offer inadequate explanations of political participation across contexts (Barnes and Bucchard 2012; Holzner 2010; Ingelhart and Norris 2003; Tripp 2006). Because institutions and social structures also dictate who participates, how they participate, and why, research must specify how these contextual factors shape aggregate trends in participation as well as individual resources and attitudes that affect individual decisions in regards to political participation.

The recognition of distinct gendered patterns of participation across Western and non-Western contexts confirm early studies of political participation that identified contextual factors as important for shaping aggregate trends and individual decisions about political participation. The importance of contextual factors and distinct gendered

patterns in political participation across established and emerging democracies have motivated numerous efforts to explain women's political participation within democratizing states (Baldez 2013; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Ingelhart and Norris 2003; Karp and Banducci 2008; Lowndes et al. 2002; Tripp 2006). At the same time, studies examining the effects of organizations on political participation have specified individual-level processes that influence individuals' motivations, capacities, and opportunities to act politically. Though research on women's organizations in these contexts has identified mechanisms to explain how organizations cause women to act politically, it is not clear to what degree the mechanisms identified influence women's political participation across democratizing states. The challenge that remains is to link contextual factors and micro-level processes, so that individual-level processes leading to political participation are understood in terms of the broader social and institutional context where they occur. For scholarship seeking to understand women's political participation and the effects of women's organizations in developing democratic contexts, this entails explaining how the context in which women act shapes individuals' motives, opportunities, and capacities for political participation.

Literature examining variations in political participation within and across nations has established a series of findings to develop a "baseline model" of mass participation (Almond and Verba 1963; Verba and Nie 1972). This model identifies structural resources and cultural attitudes, as well as institutional and social contexts, as affecting political participation (Desposato and Norrander 2008; Holzner 2010; Schlozman et al. 1994; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al 1995). According to this approach to understanding political participation, gender differences in rates and forms of political participation result from

unevenly distributed resources (e.g. time, money, skills, and information). Inequalities in men and women's resources produce systematic variations in opportunities and constraints leading to gendered differences in both the form and frequency of men's and women's political participation (Lowndes et al. 2002; Leighly 1996; Stolle and Hooghe 2011; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Though research has confirmed resources and opportunities influence political participation in the above-mentioned ways, scholars have also found that important contextual factors condition the distribution of resources and structures of opportunities. Thus, factors such as institutions and gender norms, shape individual resources and opportunities with consequences for who participates and how they participate.

Research seeking to explain women's political participation has found organizations serve as important pathways leading to participation (Chambers 2003; Hennink et al. 2012; Rai 2009). Organizations have been found to enhance participation generally when they develop citizens' civic skills (Hulme and Edwards 1996, Oxhorn 2006, Verba et al 1994), influence individuals' political consciousness (Diamond 1999; Fox 1998; Stokes 1995), and foster social capital (Anderson 2010; Gibson 2001; Ostrom 1990; Putnam 1993; Wood 2001). For women, organizational activism provides experiences that enhance members' sense of self-worth and self-confidence, create a shared sense of identity and willingness to question women's status and gender inequality (Kabeer 2011; Rai 2000). Women's organizations have also been credited as solidifying collective goals, affirming group identities, and transforming emotional and cognitive conditions of members (Bayard de Volo 2006). Though research has found organizations serve as important pathways leading to women's political participation, characteristics and effects of organizational pathways

are not fixed across contexts. Rather, processes leading to participation are conditioned by contexts of “gender-related structures of constraint” in which they are found (Kabeer 2011). Thus, women will be politically mobilized as a result of organizational involvement only under certain conditions. Whether and how women are mobilized will depend on characteristics of the context in which mobilization occurs.

Research on women’s mobilizing in democratizing states has highlighted the importance of the role of the state in influencing the form and content of women’s political participation (Alvarez 2009; Alvarez 1999; Baldez 2003; Bayard de Volo 2001; Jaquette 2001; Jaquette 1994; Ray and Korteweg 1999; Razavi 2001). During periods of democratic transition, changes in the structure of the state may expand political opportunities and increase the possibilities for women to influence institutional change (Alvarez 1990). However, depending on the identity that is adopted by women’s movements prior to transition, it may work to either constrain or benefit feminist goals within newly democratic states (Viterna and Fallon 2008). When pre-transition identities assume a feminist “bent” that breaks with traditional understanding of the roles of women, the earlier movement is more likely to create a strong feminist movement in the post-transition period (Berger 2006; Molyneux 2001). For example, during the 1970s and 1980s, Latin American women’s mobilization in response to repressive political regimes led women to be active in processes of democratization (Alvarez 2009; Alvarez 1999; Baldez 2003; Bayard de Volo 2001; Jaquette 2001; Jaquette 1994), but since then women in many democratizing states have not been fully incorporated into formal institutional politics (Alvarez 2009; Alvarez 1999; Escobar and Alvarez 1992). This suggests women may be ignored or discredited during the process of democratization. This has been found

to be especially so when women's organizations make radical demands or threaten vested interests (Ray and Korteweg 1999; Waylen 1994).

### ***The Participatory Consequences of Women's Organizing***

Civil society, defined as the "realm of organizational life that is open, voluntary, self-generating and at least partly self-supporting, autonomous from the state and bound by legal order (Diamond 1999, 221)", has been recognized as central to fostering citizen participation and the development of strong enduring democratic institutions (Linz and Stepan 1996; Putnam 1993). Scholars have also found in developing democracies that organizations of civil society will not always enhance political participation (Alvarez 1999; Banaszak 2005; Hulme and Edwards 1996; Jaquette 1998; Luciak 2001). Rather, important contextual factors condition the degree to which organizations enable citizens to act. This finding is supported by research examining the effects of nongovernmental organizations on women's political participation in democratizing states.

During the decade of the 1990s, Latin America saw a 'boom' in the number of NGOs working on issues of gender policy in response to democratization and the re-emergence of electoral politics in the region (Alvarez 1999). The research critically examining consequences of 'NGO-ization' reflects contradictory conclusions on the relationship between increases in formalized women's organizations and improvements in the relative power position of women (Alvarez 1999; Banaszak 2005). One view credits these trends for enhancing movement effectiveness. NGOs have been said to offer valuable organizational resources by professionalizing the movement and providing legitimacy to the cause (Alvarez 2000). Professionalization enabled feminist activists to form partnerships with the state and acquire support and donations from international

organizations; these partnerships have increased women's interactions with the states and transnational networks (Alvarez 2000; Jaquette 1998).

An alternative perspective on the relationship between NGOs and women's movements in the developing world is more skeptical. This research identifies a variety of negative effects from increases in women's NGOs on the ability of women's organizations to challenge conventional politics and structural inequalities. Though NGOization has formalized the organizational structures and allowed for the acquisition of financial resources from national governments and international donors, it has also increased the potential for movement co-optation (Silliman 1999). When organizations are funded or closely monitored by the state, co-optation limits the range of expressed political demands (Mercer 2002; Molyneux 2002). The general consensus among scholars is that organizational autonomy encourages the success of women's movements in the third world (Alvarez 1999; Jaquette 1998; Molyneux 2001). Autonomy allows women's organizations to focus on issues specific to women, such as female violence, reproductive rights, or equality of representation in formal political institutions. Additionally, in cases where women's organizations have been co-opted by political parties, gender specific goals have been relegated to the periphery of party platforms (Alvarez 1999; Luciak 2001).

International sources of funding have been shown to affect political expression and participation of organizational members. When NGOs receive international funding, they have been shown to abandon confrontational objectives and criticisms of established political elites (Alvarez 2009; Beck 2014; Brown et al. 2008; Hulme and Edwards 1996; Vargas 1999). As organizations become dependent on external financial support, and as national governments come to play a more significant role in the allocation of those



resources, the ability of women's organizations to target and criticize state institutions as sources of inequality is significantly impaired (Hulme and Edwards 1996).

Contradictory research findings on the political effects of women's organizations and NGOs suggest a need to clarify how organizations influence members to act politically. Thus far, research has given insufficient attention to mechanisms and processes within NGOs to understand how NGOs increase political participation (Johnson and Prakash 2006). Most studies of NGOs and civil society identify relationships at the societal level. Characteristics of the civil sector, such organizational density (Boulding and Gibson 2009; Brown, Brown, and Despasato 2008) and quantities of international funding (Hulme and Edwards 1996; Alvarez 2009) have been shown to influence aggregate patterns of political participation. Yet research on the political effects of NGOs has not empirically verified how these organizations affect processes at the individual-level. Thus, to date, investigations of the political consequences of civil society generally, and NGOs specifically, have yet to explain how organizational involvement affects individual decisions, as well as the opportunities, motivations, and capacities that influence individuals' decisions to participate politically.

### ***Organizational Mechanisms and Women's Decisions to Participate Politically***

Other studies on women's movements and associational involvement identify a variety of mechanisms affecting micro-level processes behind participation. One such body of work has found incentives for joining groups influence individual participation within and outside of the group (Bayard de Volo 2006; Leighly 1996; Olson 1965). Initial motivations for joining organizations affect political behavior by structuring activities and experiences of members within the group. For example, Jan Leighly (1996) finds that when

individuals join organizations without an expressed intent to mobilize, they are less likely to be mobilized as a consequence of involvement in the organization (Leighly 1996).

Organizational structures also affect interactions between individuals in the organization. To explain how organizations shape individual motivations for political participation distinctions have been made among incentive structures in terms of the benefits that individuals acquire through organizational involvement. One such distinction differentiates group incentives from individual incentives. Group incentives correspond to benefits whose enjoyment is conditional upon group behavior promoting collective goals (Nalbantian and Schotter 1997). Profit sharing groups, such as agricultural and business cooperatives, are examples of organizations characterized by group incentives. In these organizations, individual benefits depend on the function and success of the group. In contrast to benefits arising from group incentives, individual incentives to participate do not depend on the behavior of the group. In organizations characterized by individual incentive structures, benefits and rewards of participation are determined by individual behavior, rather than individual interactions within other members (Wageman and Baker 1999).

Incentive structures also influence the behavior of members in ways that affect individual political participation outside of the group. Organizational structures may either encourage or discourage communication and repeated interaction among members. When dense horizontal networks are prevalent within organizations, members are more likely to communicate with one another through repeated interaction (Ostrom and Ahn 2001). Dense networks and consistent communication build trust among individuals and enable

organizations to overcome obstacles to collective action by reducing incentives for self-interest (Putnam 1995).

Another body of research examines social capital as a means to explain the consequences of organizational involvement. The basic idea of social capital is that a person's friends, family, and associates constitute an important asset. When people engage in networks and forms of association, they develop a framework of common values and beliefs that can become a "moral resource" or that connects and creates bonds between individuals (Putnam 1993, 163). Shared values endow society with a "logic of collective action" (Olson 1965) by instilling in individuals a sense of stewardship for the common good and by ensuring social sanction against defection from the collective interest (Putnam 1993). Individuals endowed with a diverse stock of social networks are in a stronger position to confront vulnerability, resolve disputes, and take advantage of new opportunities to participate politically (Woolcock and Narayan 2000, 226).

At the same time, research has recognized the potential "downsides" of social capital (Portes and Landolt 1996), as well as the role of contextual factors in structuring the nature of associational engagement and outcomes in regards to political action (Foley and Edwards 1997; Skocpol 1996; Tarrow 1996). World Bank economist Michael Woolcock (1998) has addressed this issue, proposing a typology of social capital and their outcomes. Woolcock identifies three forms of social capital — bonding, bridging, and linking — in order to specify how differences in networks relate to participatory consequences of social capital. Bonding social capital refers to trusting and reciprocal relationships that emerge between group members that facilitates cooperation and coordination within an organization. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, refers to networks and solidarity

between groups and individuals from different backgrounds. Linking social capital refers to networks that connect people across vertical power differentials and is defined as “norms of respect, and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power, or authority gradients in society” (Szreter and Woolcock 2004, 6).

Each form of social capital implies different consequences. Whereas bridging social capital may narrow social gaps, enhance inclusion, and promote solidarity (Putnam and Goss 2002), bonding social capital may produce more exclusive forms of association on the basis of class, ethnicity, and gender (Portes and Landolt 1996). Bridging forms of social capital are more likely to produce positive outcomes for collective acts by creating networks that extend beyond individual groups to cross-cut ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic, or gendered divisions in society. Linking social capital is particularly important for understanding the consequences of organizational involvement for women’s political empowerment. Because empowerment is about powerlessness and social exclusion, any evaluation of the impact of social capital on women’s political empowerment must address ties between marginalized individuals and people in positions of power. While these concepts of social capital are valuable for identifying micro-level processes within organizations that influence individuals’ actions and interactions with others, it is not clear to what degree these mechanisms can be applied across contexts.

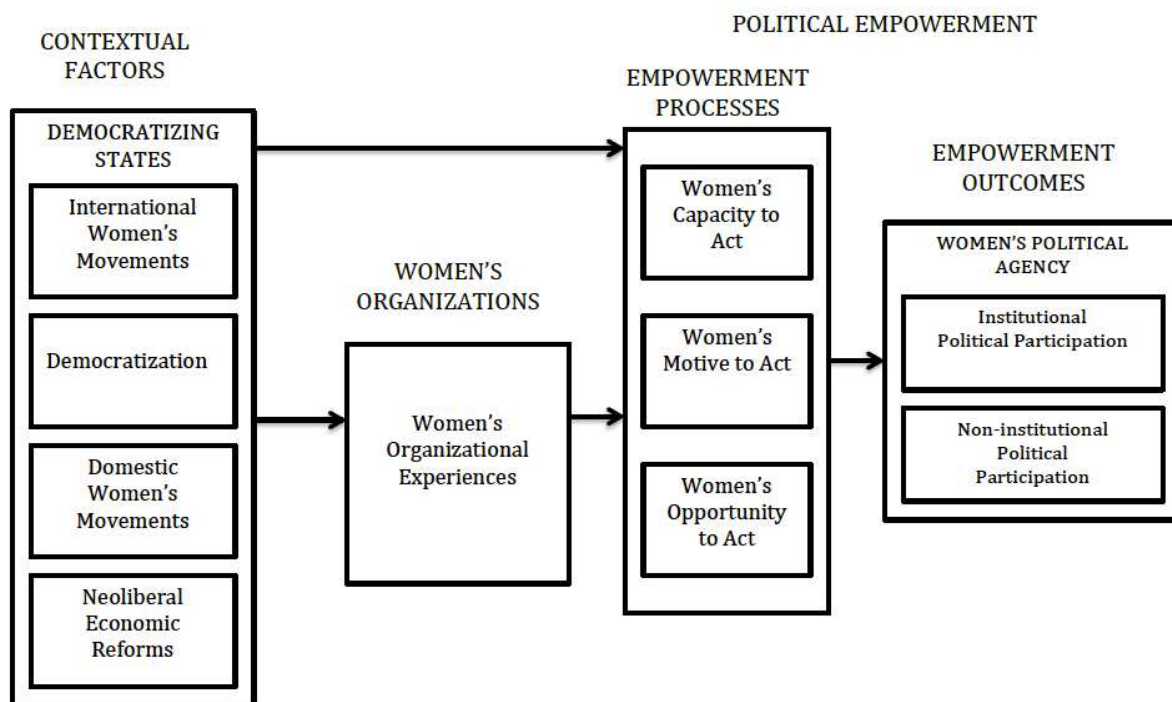
Research on the effects of civil society as well as studies of individual-level processes within organizations identify conditions and mechanisms to explain when and how organizations generally, and women’s organizations specifically, increase political participation. While numerous studies confirm organizations have a positive effect on

political participation, scholars recognize organizations will increase political participation only under certain conditions. Though micro-level analyses of organizations have identified mechanisms to explain how organizations cause women to act politically, it is not clear under what conditions, or to what extent, the organizational mechanisms identified lead to an increase in women's political participation generally. Thus, to explain how and when women's organizations politically empower members, research must not only identify individual level mechanisms within organizations, but also conditions under which these mechanisms increase women's political participation generally.

## **Conclusion**

Though the research on women's empowerment suggests women's experiences within organizations empower women, the study of how empowerment relates to women's political participation remains underdeveloped and undetermined. In other words, if women are being empowered by women's organizations, it is not clear what effect this has on women's decisions to participate politically. Women's organizations have been promoted as a means to achieve gender equality in institutional politics, but to evaluate claims about the potential of women's organizations to empower women and enhance women's voice in decision-making, better theory is needed to link women's organizational experiences to individual decisions to act politically. Figure 2 illustrates the central components of my theory of women's political empowerment in democratizing states.

**Figure 2:** Explaining Consequences of Women's Organizations for Women's Political Empowerment in Democratizing States



Across the research on empowerment and political participation, three points of consensus stand out. The first is that an increase in the political agency of marginalized individuals and groups in society is understood to be the result of individual-level processes that enable people to become aware of their own interests and see themselves as having the capacity and right to act politically. The second is that political participation is the result of processes that enhance individuals' motivations, capacities, and opportunities to exercise agency. Third, processes of political empowerment and outcomes in regards to political participation will vary across contexts. These ideas provide the foundation for my approach to explaining the effects of women's organizations on women's political empowerment in democratizing states.

In line with findings from research on women's empowerment and political participation, I argue that individuals will be empowered to act politically when they have the motivation, capacity, and opportunity to act. If women lack any one of these things, they will not be able to exercise agency. Without the exercise agency, empowerment cannot have occurred. Thus, women's organizations will politically empower members only if individuals have the motives, capacities, and opportunities to be able to choose to act politically.

To evaluate the effects of women's organizations on processes and outcomes of political empowerment, research must specify both observable actions that constitute outcomes of empowerment, i.e. instances of agency, as well the meanings and motivations actors associate with specific actions. To be considered an exercise of agency, action must be the outcome of actors' choices. Thus, explaining how processes of empowerment influence women's ability to participate politically requires specifying factors that influence both choices and actions. In order for individuals to be able to exercise choice, there must be opportunities to choose and opportunities must not only exist, but they must be seen to exist by those exercising choice. Thus, studies of empowerment must identify processes that shape individuals' perceptions of available *opportunities* to act. If empowerment is understood as producing a movement from insight to action as a result of transformations that enhance individuals' capacity to make choices and act, explanations of political participation must identify processes that influence individuals' *capacity* to choose and act. Thus, to exercise political agency, an individual must have the capacity, desire, and opportunity to act. If individuals have the capacity and the opportunity to act politically, but no desire to do so, then they will not act unless forced by someone else to do so.

### **CHAPTER 3. A COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLAINING WOMEN'S ORGANIZING AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN DEMOCRATIZING STATES**

#### **Introduction**

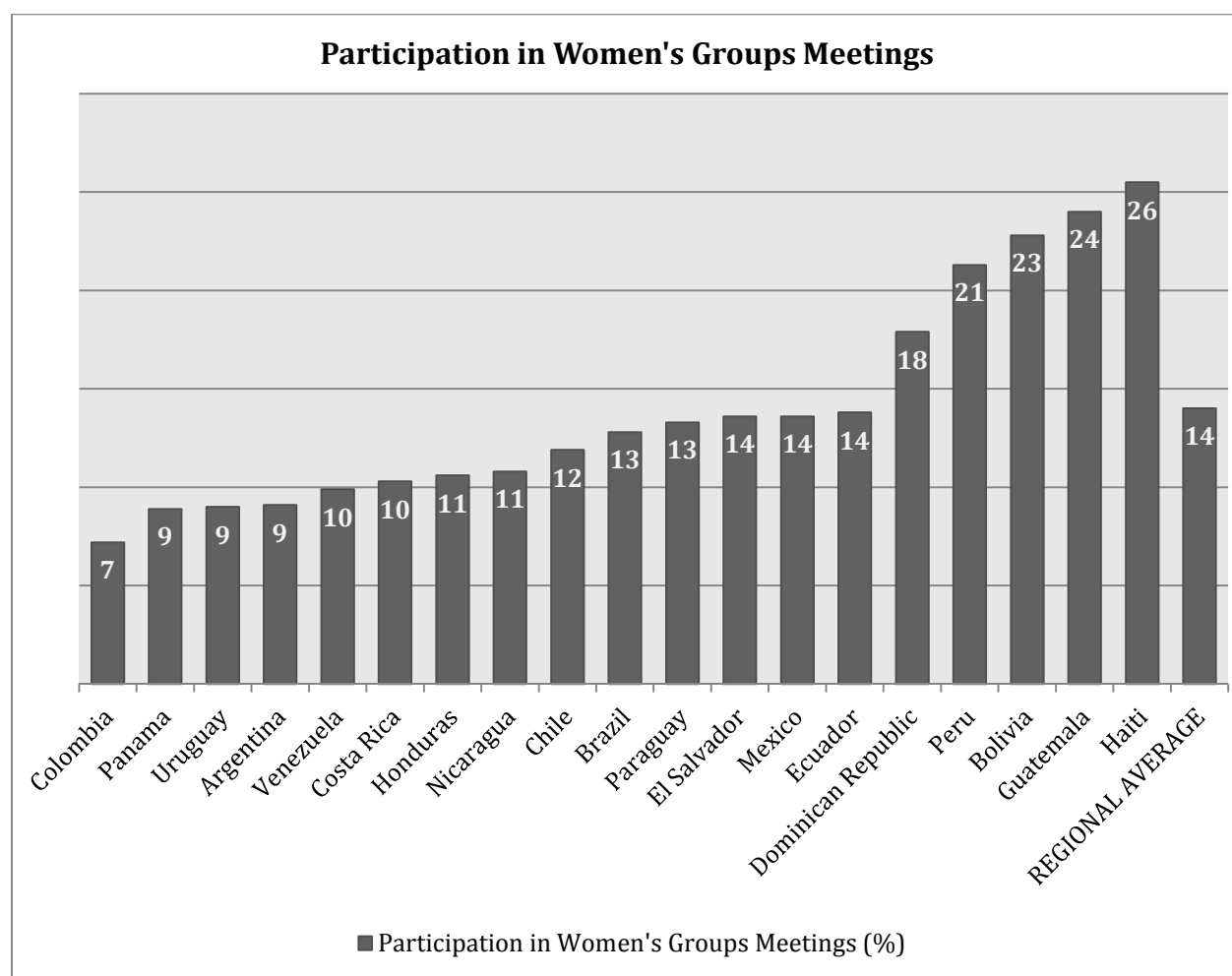
The previous chapter made the argument that important characteristics of the institutional and socio-economic context must be noted and accounted for to explain women's political participation in democratizing states. To understand how women's experiences within women's organizations influence individuals' decisions about whether and how to participate politically, it is necessary to identify political, social, and economic factors that shape individuals' relationship to the state and political strategies. The objective of this chapter is to identify and explain the effects of contextual factors on women's organizations and women's political participation in democratizing states generally, and in Guatemala specifically. To do this I identify and discuss the effects of the international women's movement, democratization, domestic women's movements, and neoliberal economic reforms. By describing how each of these factors influences women's organizations and women's political participation in democratizing states generally, this chapter identifies and explains the effects of key aspects of the political, social, and economic contexts to offer a framework for understanding women's political empowerment and the effects of women's organizations across democratizing states.

I argue, the combined effect of the international women's movement, democratization, domestic women's movements, and neoliberal economic reforms has enhanced the resources and political saliency of women's organizations in democratizing states. However, women continue to face limited opportunities and have little motivation to participate in institutional politics. Under conditions of limited institutional



opportunities, women's organizations facilitate and encourage non-institutional action as a means to empower members. The implication of these effects, I argue, is that without efforts to increase opportunities for women to participate in institutional politics and improve the effectiveness of state institutions in regards to meeting women's needs and interests, processes of political empowerment within women's organizations will be unlikely to increase women's institutional political participation.

In order to analyze how these contextual factors affect women's organizing and women's political participation in democratizing states, this study focuses on explaining the consequences of women's organizing in the Guatemalan case. Guatemala is an ideal case for examining the relationship between women's organizations and women's political participation. Figure 3 displays statistics on rates of women's institutional political representation for Latin American democracies.

**Figure 3:** Rates of Participation in Meetings of Women's Organizations<sup>9</sup>

According to 2008 data on rates of Latin American women's membership in women's groups, Guatemalan women have the second highest rate of involvement in women's organizations in the region. Twenty-four percent of women participate in women's organizations, a number eleven points higher than the regional average of thirteen percent (LAPOP 2008). At the same time, institutional reforms resulting from women's organizational efforts have been incomplete and ineffective, and women remain

<sup>9</sup> Data source: Latin American Public Opinion Project (Azpuru 2008)

underrepresented in political institutions. Table 1 presents statistics on women's political representation for Latin America's democratizing states.

**Table 1:** Gender Quotas and Women's Institutional Representation in Latin America

<b>Gender Quotas and Women's Institutional Representation in Latin America</b>			
	<b>Adoption of Gender Quota Laws <sup>10</sup></b>	<b>Public Support for Gender Quotas<sup>11</sup> (%)</b>	<b>Women in the National Legislature<sup>12</sup> (% Total Seats)</b>
Argentina	Yes	69.8	37.1
Bolivia	Yes	66	51.8
Brazil	Yes	53	10.4
Chile	No	70.4	16.5
Colombia	Yes	73.1	21.1
Costa Rica	Yes	67.4	33.3
Dominican Republic	Yes	78.5	19.1
Ecuador	Yes	68.4	38.7
El Salvador	Yes	81.3	27.4
Guatemala	<b>No</b>	<b>59.9</b>	<b>13.3</b>
Guyana	Yes	69.2	31.3
Haiti	Yes	57.6	4.0
Honduras	Yes	61.7	25.8
Mexico	Yes	65.7	40.3
Nicaragua	Yes	73.6	40.2
Panama	Yes	62.3	15.5
Paraguay	Yes	77.6	18.4
Peru	Yes	60.8	21.5
Trinidad and Tobago	No	46.4	27.4
Uruguay	Yes	76.1	19.2
Venezuela	No	60	17.0
<i>Regional Average</i>	--	66.6	25.2

<sup>10</sup> Data source: Interparliamentary Union (2015)

<sup>11</sup> Data source: Data source: Latin American Public Opinion Project (Azpuru 2012)

<sup>12</sup> Data source: Interparliamentary Union (2015)

Compared to other countries in Latin America, Guatemala has some of the lowest average rates of women's representation in the national legislature. Women occupy only thirteen percent of the seats in the Guatemalan National Congress; this is much lower than the regional average for Latin America, twenty-five percent (IPU 2013). Additionally, while thirteen countries have adopted candidate quotas in elections for their national legislature, as of 2015, Guatemala has yet to pass laws reserving spaces for women in the Guatemalan congress (Sacchet 2008). Thus, though membership in Guatemalan women's organizations is high relative to other countries in Latin America, this has not translated into the incorporation of women into formal institutional politics or the realization of women's interests within the domain of the state. However, studies of women's mobilization in other Latin American countries find political coordination among women has been central to the advancement of policies aimed at protecting the rights and interests of women (Luciak 2001; Baldez 2002; Lubertino 2003). In the case of Guatemala, failure to pass gender quota laws and effectively implement existing gender policies, speaks to the limitations of women's organizations in regards to increasing opportunities for women's participation in institutional politics (Htun 2002).

These facts motivate a critical examination of the relationship between organizational involvement and women's political empowerment in the Guatemalan case. They also support my argument that explaining the relationship between women's organizations and women's empowerment in democratizing states must begin with a broad conceptualization of women's political participation, one that considers both institutional and non-institutional political action. While the facts above suggest women's organizations

are not empowering women politically, my analysis of women's political participation in institutional *and* non-institutional politics shows women's organizations in Guatemala encourage and facilitate women's political action *outside of* formal political institutions. To explain why women's organizations are politically empowering women in this way, the following chapter identifies international and domestic factors shaping women's organizing and women's political participation in democratizing states generally, and in Guatemala specifically.

To illustrate the effects of contextual factors on women's organizations and political participation, this chapter begins by discussing how the globalization [and liberalization] of women's movements, processes of democratization, and neoliberal economic policies have come to shape the goals and strategies of women's organizations with consequences for women's political participation in developing democratic contexts. I then turn my discussion to examining how these factors, in combination with characteristics specific to Guatemala's domestic context, have shaped the goals and strategies of women's organizations in the Guatemalan case. I conclude, that while across democratizing states all four of these contextual factors have caused the resources, numbers, and political saliency of women's organizations to grow, they have also led women's organizations to increasingly encourage and facilitate women's political action outside of formal political institutions. The implication for the effects of women's organizations on women's political participation in democratizing states has been that women's organizations politically empower members by fostering a form of radical<sup>13</sup> politics that occurs outside of, and as an alternative to, institutional politics. While this chapter identifies characteristics of the political, social, and

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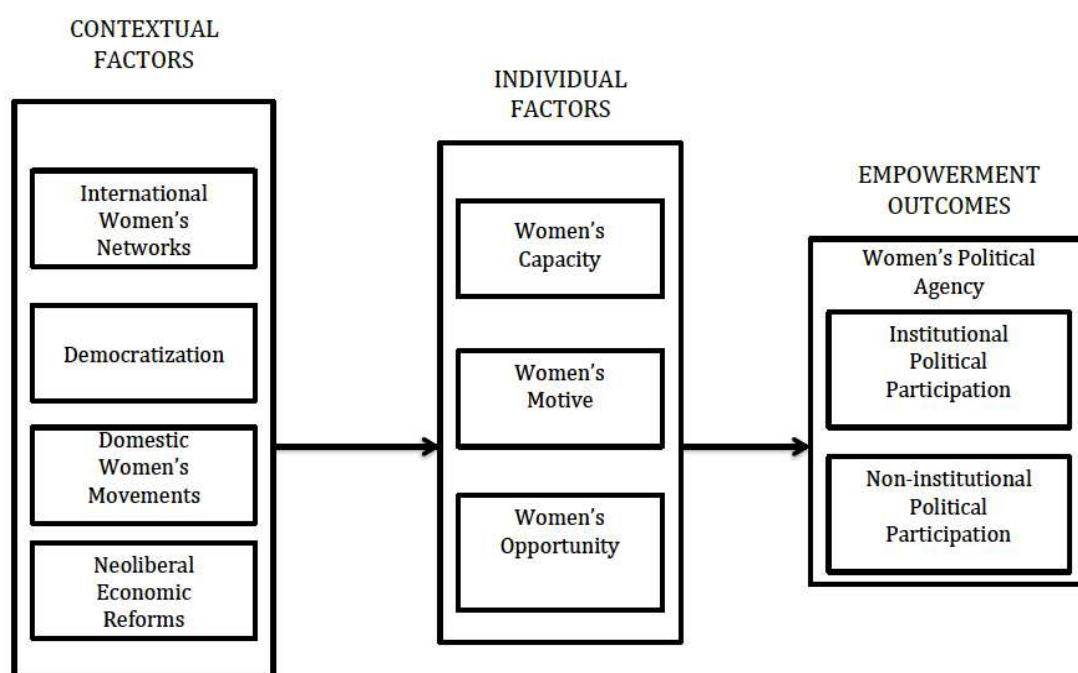
<sup>13</sup> Radical politics is understood here as "tactics and goals, beyond electoral politics," that seek to "transform, rather than merely reform" society (Gonzalez and Kampwirth 2001, 1).

economic context that influence the participatory consequences of women's organizing, chapters four and five provide empirical evidence from Guatemala to support my argument that women's organizations in democratizing states are more likely to empower women to participate in non-institutional, rather than institutional, politics.

### The Context of Women's Organizing in Democratizing States

In this section I identify factors across democratizing states that shape women's organizations and women's political participation today. Figure 4 depicts my theoretical framework.

**Figure 4:** Contextual Determinants of Women's Political Empowerment in Democratizing States



I argue that over the past twenty-five years, the rise of the international women's movement and transitions to democracy have increased the resources and political

saliency of women's organizations in democratizing states. At the same time, neoliberal economic policies, democratic institutional reforms, and domestic women's movements have produced limited opportunities and few motivations for women to engage in institutional politics. The lack of opportunities and incentives for institutional participation have both encouraged and reinforced the value of participating in non-institutional politics for women in democratizing states. As a result, members of women's organizations in these contexts are increasingly likely to be empowered to act through non-institutional channels as a means to promote their interests and meet their needs.

### ***International Women's Movements***

In order to understand women's organizations in democratizing states today, one must consider the effects of the international women's movement that emerged as a result of gendered critiques of development in the 1970s (Boserup 1970). Findings from these studies about the adverse outcomes of development policies for women came to influence and be reflected in international women's rights agendas. The 1970s witnessed the beginning of a series of international women's forums that culminated in the United Nations declaring 1985 the beginning of the International Decade of Women. Together these efforts led to the growth of women's organizations globally and the establishment of international institutions focused on promoting women's rights (Fraser 1999).

Though early participants were mostly from developed democracies, the movement influenced the allocation of funds for foreign aid and development. Income generating projects became the priority for most donors, and approaches aimed at integrating women into processes of political and economic development characterized the majority of foreign aid and democracy assistance at this time (Fraser 1999). Additionally, the world women's

conferences that happened during the 1980s and 1990s created transnational networks among women's organizations, engaged NGOs, and provided resources to NGOs in developing democracies. At these forums women also articulated strategies and goals that placed women and women's organizations at the center of strategies for political and economic development.

One such agenda was outlined at the Fourth World Conference on Women. The resultant document, the Beijing Declaration (1995), included a number of ideas that have come to shape the goals, design, and implementation of policies intended to promote women's rights, achieve gender equality, and empower women. Three statements in particular are relevant for understanding the effect of international agendas on women's organizations and women's political participation in democratizing states. First, gender equality is seen to require empowering women to participate in processes of decision-making. The declaration states, "Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace" (Beijing Declaration 1995, 8). Second, the lack of advancement in women's status across the world is attributed to "poverty that is affecting the lives of the majority of the world's people, in particular women and children" (Beijing Declaration 1995, 7). Third, engaging women's organizations is central to advancing the status of women and addressing persistent gender inequalities: "The participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particularly women's groups and networks" were seen as "important to the effective implementation and follow-up of the Platform for Action." (Beijing Declaration 1995, 8).



The discourse on women's rights and gender equality that characterized international meetings and forums on women's rights in the late twentieth century continues to shape efforts to address the problem of persistent gender inequality. Organizational involvement, social movements, and grassroots efforts have been widely accepted as the preferred means to address women's underrepresentation in politics (Alvarez 1999; Bystydzienski 1992; Rai 2000; Swiss 2011; World Bank 2012; Verba et al 1995). By being involved in these organizations, women are assumed to "gain control over their lives by taking part with others in activities and structures that allow for increased involvement in matters which affect them directly" (Bystydzienski 1992, 3). It is this thinking that has driven increases in international funding targeted towards women's "empowerment" to enhance their political voice in the politics of developing countries

Today prominent international organizations agree that promoting women's political empowerment will lead to both more representative institutions and a better developmental path (IPU 2015; UNDP 2010; United States Department of State 2015; World Bank 2006, 2012, 2013). Due to the influence of the international women's movement and the women's rights agenda that resulted, there is increasing consensus across national governments, international organizations, and members of civil society in democratizing states that achieving gender equality entails engaging women's organizations in order to both reduce rates of poverty among women and as a means to empower women to participate in decision-making processes across all aspects of society.

### ***Democratization***

The emergence of a transnational women's rights movement coincided with and became integrated into democratization movements across the developing world. The end

of the cold war ushered in the “third wave” of democratization, characterized by a global shift from authoritarian to democratic rule (Huntington 1990). Today virtually every government in Latin America has competitive elections, and globally democracy is more extensive and enduring than at any other point in history (Mainwaring and Hagopian 2005, 1). With this global shift to democratic rule, scholarly interest has focused on explaining variations in the quality and development of democracy across newly democratic states. While it would be expected that the emergence of democratic freedoms would increase women’s access to and engagement in institutional politics, research examining women’s institutional representation and their role in formal politics has produced compelling evidence to conclude democracy may actually “hinder women’s access to formal political power” in developing democratic contexts (Fallon et al. 2012, 381). In this section I build on these findings and provide evidence to show that though the transition to democracy increased the political saliency and resources of women’s organizations, newly established democratic institutions provide limited opportunities and give women little motivation to engage in formal politics.

Democratization has increased the political saliency of women and women’s organizations across the developing world. Women came to play a central role in politics leading up to and during periods of democratic transition. During this time women were drawn into politics and united to oppose the policies of militaristic and authoritarian states. This mobilization under pre-democratic, dictatorial regimes identified women as political actors whose interests and demands would be recognized once democratic institutions were established. Women’s involvement in transition politics positioned women to place issues of gender equity on the political agendas across Latin America’s newly established

democracies (Waylen 1998). Across the region, women's political influence resulted in reforms of discriminatory family law, policies criminalizing gender-based violence, as well as the adoption of gender quotas in national legislative elections (Jaquette 2009). Thus, the transition to democracy corresponded to an increase in the saliency of women as democratic citizens and political constituents with legitimate rights and interests that were reflected in the establishment of democratic institutions.

In addition to enhancing the political influence of women, democratization had the effect of increasing the institutional and financial resources dedicated to promoting women's interests. As a result of women's influence in politics leading up to and during the transition to democracy, there have been significant constitutional and institutional changes. Women's issues, which had been absent in politics and institutions before, were formally included via the institutionalization of democracy. State "women's machineries" emerged with the establishment of government agencies focused exclusively on promoting the rights and interests of women (Stetson and Mazur 1995). Thus, the institutionalization of women's movements meant that state institutional and financial resources were directed towards promoting women's issues.

As democracy has become the most prevalent system of government in the world, foreign policy and foreign assistance for democracy promotion have increased accordingly. As the concept of citizen empowerment has entered prominently into policy interventions aiming to improve the quality and functioning of democracy in newly democratic states, assistance has been targeted towards civil society organizations as a means to enhance citizens' political awareness and capacities to act politically (Diamond 2008, 130). In the neoliberal, post-Beijing era this has resulted in greater emphasis on the role of women's

organizations for strengthening democratic governance in the developing world. Grass-roots policy efforts to encourage women's empowerment coincided with an increase in financial assistance for civil society organizations in the interest of democracy promotion (Diamond 2008, 122). Consequently, aid to democratizing states, whether premised upon goals of women's empowerment or democratization, emphasized engaging women and organizations to achieve policy goals (Alvarez 1999; Fallon et al. 2012; Waylen 1998).

As time went on, a paradox emerged; politicians and political institutions proved to be ineffective at protecting women's rights and addressing women's basic physical and material needs. States' responses to women's movements were often inconsistent and underfunded. For example, in Argentina and Peru, the institutional changes resulting from women's mobilizations during the early years of democracy were later reversed with budgetary reductions and shifting political priorities (Waylen 1998). In many cases, the shift from transition politics to institutionalized democracy brought a decline in the visibility and influence of women's organizations. Democratic politics altered the terms and consequences of women's political action. Strategies that worked well in the context of democratic transition, proved less effective in an environment of electoral politics and party competition. This is evidenced by highly variable rates of women's legislative representation across newly established democracies. Even in countries where women succeeded in passing legislative quotas, improvements in rates of women's representation have been limited. This suggests in democratizing states institutional reforms, such as the adoption of quota laws, are not sufficient for improved legislative representation (Fallon et al. 2012). What has become clear is that across Latin America's developing democracies the

culture of patriarchy within political institutions is still strong, and has not been dismantled by democratic reforms.

States' responses to women's movements under democracy came to influence women's views of working with the state. The limited success of women's organized efforts caused many women to reject strategies that aimed at working with institutions of the state as a means to promote women's interests. Female activists came to view both politicians and women who entered politics with suspicion (Vargas 1999). At the same time citizens within "Third Wave" democracies, especially those in Latin America, recognized that democratic governments had failed to reduce poverty, overcome persistent inequality, and respond to rising rates of crime (Diamond 2008; Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005; Holzner 2010). Even though many countries have made the formal, institutional transition to democracy, the quality and practice of democracy has corresponded to a decline in citizens' satisfaction with the performance of democratic institutions. Thus, many citizens in democratizing states, and women especially, question the effectiveness of formal institutional politics. For women's decisions to participate politically, the consequence has been increased skepticism of political strategies emphasizing work with and within the state to achieve reforms and promote their interests.

Two decades of observing political institutions and government performance in democracies of the "Third Wave", has shown democracy will survive despite poor social and economic performance. Because the institutional and political context shapes women's political participation, understanding women's political participation in democratizing states requires a gendered analysis of the processes of democratization. In this section I have shown that democratization has not only increased the political saliency and

resources of women's organizations, but it has also produced limited opportunities and decreased women's motivations to engage in institutional politics. However, to fully understand the effects of women's organizations on women's political participation, we must also consider how domestic women's movements themselves influence women's capacities, opportunities, and motivations for institutional and non-institutional political participation.

### ***Domestic Women's Movements***

Democratic transitions and increasing support for civil society organizations provided institutional openings for women's movements and organizations to participate in politics and push for women's rights protections within the state. In Latin America, most nations did not pass women's suffrage laws until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Given the timing of the passage of these laws and the shift to authoritarian rule that followed shortly thereafter, women had little involvement in institutional politics up until the end of the century. Consequently, the wave of political liberalization and democratization that began in the 1970s coincided with increased attention from feminist scholars, foundations, and international donors on the unprecedented mobilization of women during democratic transitions, civil wars and peace processes (Jaquette 2001, 111). Analyses of women's role in these processes made it clear that the political participation of women both affected and was affected by the nature of their collective mobilization. Across the majority of Latin American countries, women were drawn into politics during transitions, and the nature of this involvement had lasting consequences for the goals and strategies of women's organizations as well as the effects of these organizations on women's capacities, opportunities, and motivations for political participation today. While the process of

democratic transition positioned women and women's organizations as political actors able to push for women's issues, it also fractured a movement that had, during the final years of authoritarian rule, unified behind oppositional political strategies and motivations to overthrow dictators and usher in democracy.

Transition politics provided new opportunities for women's organizations and other social movement groups to mobilize. Because formal political competition was significantly limited and heavily monitored by the government, social movements provided an acceptable means for organizing under authoritarian and military rule (Jaquette and Wolchick 1998). The suppression of conventional political participation placed social movement organizations at the center of political life leading up to and during democratic transition (Razavi 2001). As a result, the 1980s and 1990s saw the political influence of women's organizations rise across democratizing states. With the general increase in the political influence of women's organizations, regional differences in the character of women's mobilization became apparent (Jaquette 2001).

In Latin America, women mobilized by expressing their dissatisfaction with existing authoritarian regimes, marching in demonstrations, speaking out, and demanding improvements in women's economic and political status. Economic and political turmoil during the 1980s upset traditional gender relations and led women to mobilize collectively. While some women's mobilization was initially motivated by economic and material goals rather than common concerns about gender, civil conflict and authoritarian politics encouraged other women's organizations to contest states' violations of human rights (Jaquette 2001). Thus, during the period of transition, women's mobilization was characterized by engagement in a variety of organizations with a range of objectives,

including religious organizations, human rights organizations, student groups, community groups, and income generating organizations. However, once in these organizations “women grew more politically sure of themselves; they began to analyze for themselves ‘the causes of their problems’ and demand new responsibilities and rights” (Berger 2006, 25). What emerged from women’s mobilization under authoritarian rule was a women’s movement connected by a common focus on addressing the needs and interests of women.

While opposition politics united women’s organizations around gender issues during the transition to democracy, what brought women together was the goal of bringing about the removal of oppressive governments and a return to democratic politics. Though these organizations rarely referred to themselves as “feminist”, cooperating with other women around economic and human rights issues outside the home raised women’s awareness of their common concerns and relative powerlessness as women (Berger 2006; Waylen 1998). The involvement of women in the politics of transition effectively united women’s movements and positioned women and women’s organizations as legitimate political actors (Jaquette and Wolchick 1998). Across the region, this gave rise to specific demands to improve the status of women in post-transition democracies (Cornwall and Goetz 2005). Issues that women’s movements raised included the political representation of women, women’s changing economic roles, concerns about the family, and reproductive rights. As democratic institutions and government structures were being established, women’s organizations shifted political strategies. The context of politics during democratization provided opportunities for women to influence politics by “transforming the state from within” (Razavi 2001, 210). In democratic contexts, as a result of institutional openings, women’s organizations moved away from protest politics towards



“policy politics”, whereby they worked with and within the state rather than in opposition to it, to realize political change (Berger 2006). As noted in my previous discussion of the effects of democratization, this resulted in a number of institutional reforms intended to promote and protect the rights and interests of women.

Concurrently, financial assistance increased for civil society organizations. As a result, many women’s organizations legally established themselves as nongovernmental organizations in order to receive external financial resources and institutional support (Alvarez 1999). What has been called the NGO-ization of women’s movements has in some regards strengthened and in others weakened national women’s movements and the cross-class alliances that were formed leading up to and during the early years of democracy (Razavi 2001). Increases in external support for women’s organizations enabled women’s movements to expand the scope of their demands as well as diversify their strategies for political engagement (Cornwall and Goetz 2005). Latin America’s women’s organizations, which had been active during the period of democratic transition in efforts to encourage women’s empowerment, respond to women’s social and economic needs, and promote democracy, were well positioned to capitalize on emergent institutional opportunities and external resources. However, the formalization and professionalization of women’s organizations, was accompanied by an emphasis on self-help and self-reliance, where many working class, rural, and poor women found themselves working in NGOs that relied on women’s un-paid efforts to support non-state approaches to social-service provision (Razavi 2001).

Subsequently, as time went on, the democratization and NGO-ization of Latin America’s women’s movements revealed divisions among women in regards to movement

goals and strategies. The success in advocating for women's issues, and even the institutionalization of women's interests under democracy, has paralleled state failures to guarantee the rights of all women across social strata as well as the deterioration of ties between middle class feminists and poor, working class women (Razavi 2001). While some organizations chose to work with new democratic governments and within the state to advance women's issues, other women's groups chose to remain independent from state institutions. For women that saw working with the state as the most effective strategy, the focus was on strengthening institutional reforms, holding political leaders accountable, and increasing women's role in formal, institutional politics. On the other hand, those that prioritized non-institutional action to promote gender issues focused on welfare provision and organized to provide projects and services specific to the needs of women (Alvarez 1999). For organizations that emphasized acting outside of the state, "autonomy" was seen as imperative and cooperation with the state as equivalent to cooptation (Vargas and Wieringa 1998). Compared to the period of transition, when women's organizations presented a unified front in their political goals and strategies, women's movements in the post-transition period are highly dispersed (Razavi 2001, 216). Thus, democratization and increasing external support for domestic women's movements, beget divisions within the women's movement on the basis of strategy. These divisions are reflected in the array of strategies and objectives that characterize women's organizations in Latin American democracies today.

In contemporary Latin America, women's organizations remain divided in regards to perceived opportunities and motivations for interacting with the state and engaging in formal institutional politics. Some women's organizations understand domestic women's

movements as successfully enhancing opportunities for women to participate in formal politics. These organizations tend to value and promote working with the state as an effective strategy for promoting women's interests. For members of other women's organizations, opportunities for women's institutional political participation are recognized as scarce, and acting outside of state institutions is the preferred strategy for meeting women's needs. Thus, it is not clear what effect the mobilization of women and domestic women's movements have had on women's participation in institutional and non-institutional politics in democratizing states. By examining the consequences of women's movements in the Guatemalan case, and by evaluating the relationship between women's organizational membership and political participation, both institutional and non-institutional, this dissertation clarifies the consequences of domestic women's movements for women's organizations and their effects on women's political participation in contemporary Latin America.

### ***Neoliberal Economic Policies***

Global economic systems were also undergoing significant change at this time, with consequences for the role of organizations and the role of the state in the daily lives of citizens in democratizing nations. As a result of the 1980s debt crises, many developing nations implemented broad and significant neoliberal economic reforms. These structural reforms, which were promoted by major lending institutions and donor agencies, typically combined macroeconomic policies of fiscal austerity with microeconomic policies to deregulate labor markets, domestic product prices, and international trade (Sadasivam 1997). Broadly, neoliberal economic policies sought to minimize the role of the state in the economy in order to maximize economic efficiency and aggregate rates of growth. The

consequence of this policy prescription in democratizing states included scaling back of public expenditures, reducing the wages and numbers of public sector employees, and significant cut-backs in food and health subsidies (Silliman 1999).

In the short-term, neoliberal economic reforms had the effect of increasing economic inequality, rates of unemployment, and levels of poverty across democratizing states (Berger 2006). Additionally, the burdens of economic reform were unequally distributed among groups in society. Both the poor and women disproportionately bore the costs of structural adjustment policies (Sadasivam 1997). To respond to the negative effects of neoliberalism and mitigate discontent, most Latin American governments have introduced poverty alleviation programs that use “demand-based projects, mediated through local agencies, frequently non-governmental organizations” (Craske 1998, 6). Neoliberal economic policies, including structural adjustment programs and market liberalization, had the effect of reducing public assistance, increasing citizens’ economic insecurity, while simultaneously encouraging and supporting private and non-profit sector efforts to fill the public service role of the state. Consequently, citizens, and women in particular, have learned it is effective to look outside government and institutions of the state, and they have come to rely on non-state actors to meet their social and economic needs.

As the negative effects of structural adjustment policies led states to adopt poverty alleviation programs, NGOs came to be the primary providers of social services. In a context in which public sector effectiveness was significantly constrained by cutbacks in human and financial resources, NGOs and social movement organizations filled the welfare function of the state (Craske 1998). Neoliberal ideas of efficiency, which rested on

minimizing the states' economic role, also supported NGOs and other non-state actors as providing a more efficient method for public service provision (Silliman 1999). As such, non-state actors, particularly NGOs, came to offer a conduit for citizens to access public services the state was no longer providing, and in many cases they served as a "deliberate substitute" for the state in regards to meeting citizens social and economic needs (Hulme and Edwards 1996).

The reliance on non-state actors to provide social services was justified in terms of both efficiency and empowerment. These 'bottom-up' approaches were seen to empower individuals by promoting self-reliance, rather than government services, as a means to address individuals' economic and social needs. However, the degree to which these organizations have indeed empowered women in developing democratic nations is unclear. Although poverty alleviation programs were designed to respond to the burdens of structural reforms, by reducing the public service role of the state they have also had the effect of depoliticizing women's social and economic concerns (Craske 1998). On the other hand, increases in foreign assistance for NGOs engaged in service delivery and income generation projects has caused the number of women's organizations in developing democracies grow significantly in recent years (Alvarez 1999). Poverty alleviation programs increased the amount of funding being directed towards NGOs and social movement organizations. To gain access to these funds and to meet donor demands, many organizations became legalized and more professionalized, and as they professionalized women's organizations saw a growth in size, institutional capacity and financial resources (Silliman 1999). Thus, neoliberalism had the combined effect of decreasing women's organizations' involvement with state institutions while increasing the resources available

to women's organizations, particularly those involved in meeting women's social and material demands. However, what is not clear is whether neoliberal economic reforms, by encouraging the NGO-ization of women's organizations, have enhanced women's capacity to challenge patriarchal structures, particularly within institutions of the state.

Neoliberal economic reforms have increased motives and opportunities for women to act outside of the state to make demands and meet their needs. Because the state's public administrative capacity has been weakened in the aftermath of neoliberal reform, international funding and policy agendas tend to prioritize women's material needs over needs that correspond to addressing women's lack of power and influence relative to men (Razavi 2001). As a result of the tendency of women's organizations to increasingly focus on service provision, many women's NGOs have become less focused on issues of social and cultural change, and today the majority of women's NGOs in democratizing states focus on providing public services or supporting women's economic activities (Alvarez 2009; Silliman 1999). Consequently, economic reforms have had the effect of decreasing women's interactions with the state on issues of social and economic development. At the same time these policies have created opportunities and resources for non-governmental actors to meet the needs of citizens, especially women, in democratizing states. Though it is not clear if neoliberal economic policies directly decreased women's motives and opportunities to participate in institutional politics, these policies did have the effect of greatly increasing opportunities and incentives for women to engage with non-state actors and participate in non-governmental organizations.

Across democratizing states, the international women's movement, democratization, domestic women's movements, and neoliberal economic reforms have

made gender equality and women's empowerment priorities for policies aimed at democracy and economic development. Because women's organizations have been supported as a means to achieve political and economic policy objectives, women's organizations in democratizing states have seen their political influence and access to resources increase. At the same time, contemporary women's organizations employ diverse strategies and take distinct political actions in their efforts to promote women's interests. The transition to democracy established women as influential political actors and created spaces for women to influence institutions of the state.

However, in the post transition era, the influence of women in formal politics has waned, and state institutions have failed to uphold commitments to promote women's interests. Neoliberal economic reforms have redefined the role of women in society and the relationship between women's organizations and the state. Today women's organizations remain divided over strategies for promoting women's interests, but increasingly women's organizations are less likely to focus on promoting women's interests by working within state institutions. In the following section I examine my arguments of the effects of these contextual factors on women's political participation and women's organizations in democratizing states by evaluating how each plays out in the Guatemalan case.

### **The Context of Women's Organizing in Guatemala**

The previous section made the argument that the international women's movement, democratization, domestic women's movements, and neoliberal economic reforms have increased the political saliency and resources of women's organizations while simultaneously encouraging women's participation in non-institutional politics. In this section, I shift my focus to examining how the effects of these factors in the Guatemalan

case. I argue that the Guatemalan case, because it is similar to other democratizing states in regards to the influence of the international women's movement, democratization, domestic women's movements, and neoliberal economic reforms, offers a most-likely case<sup>14</sup> to evaluate my argument about the effects of key contextual factors on women's organizing and political participation in developing democracies more generally. At the same time, Guatemala presents an unlikely case for theories of women's political empowerment that suggest factors such as political opportunities, development, and norms of gender equality will lead to women's political empowerment. Limited access to political institutions, low levels of human development, and persistent inequality that crosscuts lines of gender, ethnicity, and class, mean a variety of factors in this context challenge women's political empowerment. However, as my analysis in the following chapters will show, despite the presence of obstacles to women's political empowerment, women's organizations in Guatemala do politically empower women to participate in non-institutional politics.

Before evaluating the relationship between women's organizations and women's political participation, it is important to describe the context of politics in Guatemala. Table 2 presents statistics on political, economic, and social data for countries in Latin America.

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<sup>14</sup> I have selected Guatemala as a most likely case to fulfill my theoretical predictions. Guatemala provides a "crucial case" (Gerring 2007, 115) and a most-likely test of my theory because on all dimensions, except the dimension of theoretical interest—women's organizational participation—it is predicted women would not be politically empowered. In other words, numerous characteristics of the Guatemalan case, other than rates of participation in women's organizations, suggest women would not be empowered to participate politically. In this way, Guatemala offers a most-difficult test of my theory that women's organizations will politically empower women. Thus, the Guatemalan case provides the strongest evidence possible for my theoretical predictions about the effects of women's organizations in democratizing states.



**Table 2:** Political, Economic, and Social Statistics for Latin American Countries

Political, Economic, and Social Statistics for Latin American Countries						
	Citizen Support for Democracy in 2008 <sup>15</sup>	Polity Score <sup>16</sup>	Poverty Rate <sup>17</sup>	Human Development Index <sup>18</sup>	Gini Coefficient <sup>19</sup>	Indigenous Population <sup>20</sup>
Argentina	86.9	8.7	1.6	0.8	42.5	2.4
Bolivia	71.8	7.6	9.1	0.7	46.7	62.2
Brazil	70.5	8.7	4.6	0.7	52.7	0.5
Chile	69.5	10.0	0.9	0.8	50.5	11.0
Colombia	73.0	7.2	7.1	0.7	53.5	3.4
Costa Rica	78.2	10.0	1.7	0.8	48.6	2.4
Cuba	--	1.2	--	0.8	--	--
Dominican Republic	74.9	8.7	2.6	0.7	45.7	--
Ecuador	66.6	7.1	5.9	0.7	46.6	7.0
El Salvador	68.4	8.3	4.2	0.7	41.8	0.2
Guatemala	<b>60.5</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>52.3</b>	<b>41.0</b>
Haiti	66.6	4.6	53.9	0.5	60.8	--
Honduras	59.9	6.8	21.4	0.6	57.4	7.0
Mexico	68.5	7.8	2.7	0.8	48.1	15.1
Nicaragua	72.9	6.8	10.8	0.6	45.7	8.9
Panama	71.6	9.3	4.4	0.8	51.9	12.3
Paraguay	62.9	7.8	3.7	0.7	48.2	1.8
Peru	65.5	8.5	4.1	0.7	45.1	24.0
Uruguay	85.3	10.0	0.4	0.8	41.3	2.4
Venezuela	83.8	3.4	--	0.8	--	2.7
<i>Regional Average</i>	<i>71.4</i>	<i>7.5</i>	<i>8.4</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>48.9</i>	<i>12.0</i>

<sup>15</sup> Data Source: Latin American Public Opinion Project (Azpuru 2012)

<sup>16</sup> The Polity Score is a composite measure of political freedoms in a country where, 10 is a country that is completely free, and 1 is un-free. Data Source: Quality of Governance Database (Teorell et al. 2016)

<sup>17</sup> Measured as the percentage of the total population living on less than \$2 per day. Data Source: Quality of Governance Database (Teorell et al. 2016)

<sup>18</sup> The Human Development Index measures achievements on key aspects of human development: human health, education, and standards of living. Data Source: Quality of Governance Database (Teorell et al. 2016)

<sup>19</sup> The Gini coefficient measures the extent to which income distributions in a nation deviate from a perfectly equal distribution, where 0 is perfectly equal and 1 (100%) is perfectly unequal.

<sup>20</sup> Data source: United Nations Development Fund (2010)

In many ways democracy in post-war Guatemala resembles regional trends in regards to political institutions, government performance, and citizen views of democracy. Like many democratizing states, Guatemala has enacted neoliberal economic reforms with negative effects on inequality and poverty. Not unlike trends observed in other Latin American countries, rates of poverty tend to be the highest among Guatemala's indigenous population (Yashar 2004). At the same time, like other democratizing states, Guatemalan institutions have proven ineffective at responding to the needs of citizens. Similar to other countries in Latin America, measures of political freedom in Guatemala show levels of freedom are lower today than they were in 2000 (Teorell et al. 2016). Akin to other developing democracies, Guatemala has experienced a "backsliding" in regards to democratic reforms and the effectiveness of democratic institutions. Despite international support for democratization and the emergence of institutionalized democracy, the country has seen a continuation of systematic rights violations, high rates of crime, and increasing economic insecurity (Azpuru 2012; Caldeira 1996; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2014).

In other respects, Guatemala is an outlier, and distinct from other countries in Latin America. Guatemala is more underdeveloped, more ethnically diverse, and has a stronger authoritarian influence in comparison to the majority of Latin American countries. Though citizen preferences for democracy have generally decreased in recent years, compared to other Latin American countries, Guatemalan citizens consistently have some of the lowest rates of support for democracy (LAPOP 2012). Data on levels of economic development and inequality also distinguish Guatemala as one of the most economically unequal and least

developed countries in Latin America. “Guatemala has a high level of poverty and has the second-worst income distribution of any country in Latin America” (Miller and Hinman 2006, 7). Though the quality of human development in Guatemala, as measured by the Human Development Index, has improved in recent decades, Guatemala has consistently received some of the worst results in Latin America, surpassed only by Haiti (Azpuru 2012).

Inequalities in social and economic development within Guatemala are heavily influenced by Guatemala’s ethnic makeup. As one of three countries in Latin America with more than 30% of the population identifying as indigenous (Azpuru 2013), a significant proportion of the Guatemalan population has historically faced the double challenge of economic and political exclusion. “Incomes of indigenous Guatemalans are particularly low relative to those of non-indigenous Guatemalans” (Miller and Hinman 2006). Not only is there a large indigenous population in Guatemala, but there is also a high level of diversity among indigenous groups. This diversity is reflected by the fact that indigenous Guatemalans speak more than twenty-four distinct dialects (UNDP 2010). Historically, the Guatemalan state has capitalized on ethnicity to identify targets of oppression as well as maintain divisions and fragmentation both within and between indigenous communities. During the years of civil conflict, violent tactics were frequently employed by state supported groups to oppress indigenous mobilizations. Today the legacy of Guatemala’s authoritarian state continues to challenge the emergence of a unified national, indigenous movement.

This troubled history and legacy of authoritarianism have motivated international efforts to strengthen Guatemalan democracy. Consequently, significant amounts of

international aid have been directed towards institutional and democratic development. What distinguishes Guatemala from other Latin American nations is that, since 2000, it has received some of the largest amounts of foreign assistance for democracy promotion (Scott and Carter 2016). In 2014, Guatemala was the third highest aid recipient of UNDP funds directed towards the promotion of democratic governance, immediately preceded by Afghanistan (United Nations Development Program 2014). Thus, significant amounts of resources have been allocated towards democratic development in Guatemala. However, despite international support for democracy, today Guatemala's institutions fail to guarantee basic rights in practice. A strong army influence in formal politics, high levels of corruption in the executive branch, and a broken judicial system has led to a situation where impunity is the norm. As a result, rates of violence have increased dramatically. Homicide statistics illustrate the degree to which deficient state institutions have created opportunities for uncontrolled criminal and social violence. In recent years, homicide rates have surpassed those during the final years of the civil conflict, and for the past ten years Guatemala has had some of the highest rates of homicide not only in Latin America, but also the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2014).

As the above discussion has made clear, Guatemala is at once representative of and distinct from other democratizing states in Latin America. Guatemala is similar in that neoliberalism has had negative economic effects, democratic consolidation seems to have stalled, and citizen support for democracy is waning. However, Guatemala is distinguished by two seemingly contradictory trends: the quantity of resources directed towards democratic development has increased, while, at the same time, challenges to democratic and economic development have grown in magnitude. In order to understand how these

domestic factors shape women's political participation and the effects of women's organizations in the Guatemalan context, the following section focuses on the legacy of civil conflict, the role of gender and ethnicity in shaping state-society relations, and strategies and outcomes of women's mobilization.

The political climate prior to the signing of the Peace Accords was characterized by civil conflict and political oppression. Despite a political context of extreme social and economic inequality, weak democratic institutions, and a strong authoritarian legacy, the post war period created new opportunities for women to engage with and influence the state. The end of Guatemala's civil war and the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 marked an explicit government effort to combat gender discrimination and assure equal possibilities for men and women to participate politically and be represented in government institutions. Since the Peace Accords, the government has implemented specific policies and created institutions to promote and protect women's rights and political voice. However, it is not clear that democratization has advanced civil rights or broadened citizenship in Guatemala. In fact, as the subsequent discussion will show, the continuation of state sponsored violence, increasing rates of femicide, and persistent racial and economic inequalities mean that Guatemalan women face numerous and persistent challenges to realizing their political empowerment.

### ***The Conflict Period***

Guatemala experienced an extended period of oppressive, military, authoritarian rule that began in the 1960s. The state was the central actor during armed, internal conflicts. The UN sponsored Truth Commission found that over ninety percent of the acts of violence that occurred during the conflict were carried out by state actors (Godoy-Paiz

2008). Though guerrilla groups struggled against these governments throughout, it was not until 1982 that the guerrilla movement assumed a formal organizational structure with the creation of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) (Luciak 2001). Women were central to revolutionary efforts, providing support to husbands, sons, and other family members fighting in the conflict, and also through their engagement in the conflict as combatants themselves. Estimates suggest that women in Guatemala comprised as much as fifteen percent of the revolutionary fighters during the civil war (Luciak 2001).

Not only was the state the primary perpetrator of violent acts, but the destruction of social networks and community cohesion was also a key strategy of the military during the conflict (Yoldi, Aguilar, Estrada 2010). Strategies targeted ethnic indigenous populations in a manner that the U.N. characterized as “a massive extermination of unarmed Mayan communities they considered connected to guerrilla groups, including women and children” (United Nations 1999). In attempts to identify and punish guerrilla fighters, soldiers would target women, demanding that they admit their husband or son was a revolutionary. Women were pressured during these inquisitions often through torture and murder of children in front of them (Yoldi, Aguilar, Estrada 2010). The result of military actions was the erosion of trust among individuals at the community level.

During the years of civil conflict in Guatemala, social inequalities were used to reinforce vertical systems of military power and state sponsored violence. Gender and ethnicity often provided the basis for defining targets of military violence and identifying potential victims. Both women and indigenous Guatemalans had long been excluded from effective participation in the political system, and the conflict exploited this exclusion to employ repressive and violent tactics. Military strategies and the prevalence of sexual

violence during the conflict illustrate how long standing inequalities influenced the nature of the conflict and corresponding rights violations. Raping women was employed as means of demonstrating power, expressing victory, and debasing those who were considered the weakest members of society according to patriarchal standards (Yoldi, Aguilar, Estrada 2010). The gendered nature of violence during the conflict can be understood as a means of ensuring women's exclusion and inability to challenge existing patriarchal hegemonic politics.

The targets of violence were also defined along ethnic lines. The largest proportion of sexual violence was suffered by indigenous women, as yet another strategy to destroy the "social fabric of indigenous communities" (Godoy-Paiz 2008). Mayan indigenous citizens were viewed by the state as guerilla supporters and were primary targets of violence. As evidence of the ethnic nature of the conflict, Mayan peoples accounted for more than eighty percent of the victims during the conflict (CEH 1999). Because the violence that occurred during this time reflected lines of previous social divisions and inequality, the victims of the conflict were most often members of groups that had long been marginalized because of their ethnicity and/or gender.

Armed conflict in Guatemala resulted in the insulation of categorical inequalities from formal political arenas. The conflict served as a means for the state to maintain ethnic and geographic fragmentation within the country. Because the majority of the conflict was located in the rural highlands with high percentages of indigenous inhabitants, the urban dwelling middle class was largely insulated from the severity of the violence. The nature of the conflict in Guatemala was also influenced by a legacy of economic inequality. Guatemala's indigenous population comprised the majority of households living below the

poverty line during the conflict (Torres 2008). Additionally, Spanish was not spoken by most of the indigenous victims of the conflict. Thus, poverty along with barriers to communication prevented the formation of broad coalitions across classes and ethnic groups.

### ***The Guatemalan Women's Movement and Democratic Transition***

Similar to other countries in Latin America, women in Guatemala began mobilizing in the 1970s and 1980s in opposition to state repression and to contest poor economic conditions. Economic and political turmoil during the 1980s upset traditional gender relations and led women to seek additional economic resources in novel ways (Berger2006). Civil conflict, economic crises, and shifting gender dynamics encouraged women's engagement in revolutionary organizations, student groups, Catholic community groups, and human rights organizations. Women's initial participation in these organizations was primarily motivated by economic and material goals rather than common concerns about gender. Because of the economic and political conditions of the time, men often encouraged women to engage in organizations and take on new roles in the public sphere. Once in these organizations women's confidence increased, they identified common interests as women, and began to demand increased influence in decisions within public and private-spheres. Thus, Guatemalan women's mobilization at this time indicated women's identification of common concerns based on their shared experiences as women.

Membership within women's organizations that did form at this time was largely defined in terms of class and ethnicity. In the rural highlands, women organized around shared experiences of violence, struggle against the militarization in the countryside, and experiences as refugees (Walsh 2008). In urban areas, female targets and victims of



violence were academics, students, and trade unionists. Women in these areas, as victims of political violence, organized around explicitly political concerns such as rights and impunity (UNAMG 2009). The consequence of these factors for the women's movement during the period of conflict was a failure to form coalitions among women's organizations that coordinated action across ethnic or class lines. Thus, the movement remained fragmented and unable to mount a unified front against an oppressive and violent state.

Though military tactics divided communities by forcing individuals to identify revolutionaries, and intimidating women into confirming the involvement of husbands and sons (who were often innocent), these tactics had the unintended effect of encouraging the formation of networks and organizations of women. In 1986 the military returned the state over to civilian rule, officially beginning the process democratic reform; this created new opportunities for civil society organizations to engage directly with government institutions. Consequently, 1986 saw a proliferation of women's groups focused specifically on women's issues. The first people to organize themselves to look for their relatives, publicize acts of violence, and put pressure on the authorities were Guatemalan women (Walsh 2008). They were the force behind organizations such as the Mutual Support Group, the National Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Widows, and Relatives of the Guatemalan Disappeared. From individuals searching for their relatives, they grew into organized groups. The mobilization of women and the growth of women's organizations in response to the armed conflict were not initially accompanied by state cooptation of these segments of society. Some of the earliest women's organizations were founded on the basis of strict autonomy from the state. For example, female members of the formal organization of guerrilla fighters founded the Union Nacional de Mujeres in 1985, in order to advocate

for rights of friends and family members who had been targets of intimidation and state sponsored violence (UNAMG 2009). It was not until the beginning of peace negotiations, that women's organizations arising from the conflict began to cooperate with institutions of the state (Beever 2010).

At the same time other women's organizations formed partnerships with international NGOs and worked independently of state institutions to provide service projects for women. These partnerships reflected broader regional trends towards the NGO-ization of social movements in Latin America. A trend towards increased formalization of the movement facilitated the incorporation of women's movements into public politics (Walsh 2008). At the same time the influence of NGOs increased, Guatemalan women's organizations shifted strategies from protest politics towards more professionalized, and self-authorized tactics that targeted the state by pushing for "legal-breakthroughs" (Berger 2006).

The ability of women's organizations to capitalize on political opportunities during the democratic transition resulted in institutional and constitutional changes. Because of a significant number of "successes" for women in the peace process and the establishment of democratic institutions, some women came to believe very strongly in the potential and effectiveness of working with and within state institutions. Both civil conflict and democratization had the effect of increasing both the numbers and political saliency of women's organizations in Guatemala. However, institutional reforms have resulted in limited progress towards gender equality in Guatemala (Berger 2006). This is reflected by public opinions towards violence against women in Guatemala. According to 2014 survey results, the majority of Guatemalan citizens (58%) approve of the use of violence against an

unfaithful wife, making Guatemala the leader in Latin America in regards to tolerance for this form of gender violence (Azpuru 2015). Additionally, insufficient and ineffective reforms led many women to question the degree to which participation in institutional politics was valuable. Thus, the shifting political attitudes of women and women's organizations, suggested women's opportunities and motivations to engage in institutional politics had changed as result of their perceived effectiveness of mobilization during the conflict and the transition to democracy.

### ***The Post Conflict Period***

On December 29, 1996 the government of Guatemala and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) signed the peace accords, which established a 'Firm and Lasting Peace'. The agreement ended the last armed conflict in Central America and 36 years of civil war in the country. The process of peace negotiation opened the state to pressure from women's organizations and other civil society actors. Unlike other countries in Central America, civil society enjoyed an institutionalized role in the peace process through the accord that established the Asembleas de la Sociedad Civil (Assembly of Civil Society, ASC). A vocal women's movement within the ASC ensured that gender equality was incorporated into the peace negotiations. Both the organization of the guerrillas (URNG) and the Women's Sector pushed for women's rights to be included in the content of the Peace Accords, and as a result multiple passages made explicit protections for women's rights (Luciak 2001).

The Peace Agreements generated greater visibility of the subject of inequality of gender in Guatemala. In 1995 ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ensured that these protections

were included in the Peace Accords. This provided added leverage to women's organizations that sought to use the Peace Accords to push for the implementation of women's rights protections (Godoy-Paiz 2008). The government's commitment to uphold international women's rights agendas was reflected in subsequent institutional reforms. For many women at the time, this signaled the Guatemalan state's endorsement of gender equality.

The establishment of the National Coordinator for the Prevention of Interfamilial Violence and Violence against Women (CONAPREVI) is one example of institutional reforms that have incorporated the demands of women's movements into formal politics. CONAPREVI was initiated by women's NGOs to address problems specific to women's experiences with domestic violence (Walsh 2008). In 2000 the organization was endorsed as an institution of the state. State sponsorship arose out of the efforts of a nation-wide network of women's organizations working to address instances of violence against women (Walsh 2008). Immediately after the endorsement of CONAPREVI in 2000, the national government opened the Government Office of the Woman (SEPREM), and in 2002 a law was passed that reserved seats for women on community government counsels.

Despite the Peace Accords, the establishment of the government offices for women, and the passage of a law reserving seats for women in community politics, there have been few substantive improvements in terms of women's underrepresentation in institutional politics. In regards to political participation, women occupy only nineteen percent of the decision-making positions in the national government. Only twelve percent of the positions in the executive branch, which includes ministry and vice-ministry appointments as well as presidential staff, are held by women. In the legislature, women hold only fifteen out of 158

congressional seats. Historically, women's participation in political parties has been highly limited. On party candidate lists women are often placed in lower positions if they are represented at all (Azpuru 2013). Legislation has been passed reserving seats for women in community government, but in practice this law is not enforced and there are neither precise nor official records of rates of women's participation in these counsels (JICA 2006). Additionally, despite the Peace Accords' explicit goal of ending gender discrimination, Guatemala has not passed any specific legislation outlawing discrimination on the basis of gender or sex (World Bank 2013).

Though the signing of the peace accords ended state sponsored genocide and the military's use of systematic violence against Mayans and women in Guatemala, women continue to face economic and institutional obstacles to realizing their rights. A number of laws have been enacted to provide legal protection for female victims of violence, but poverty continues to prevent many women from being able to access the judicial system (CONAPREVI 2004). For indigenous women, language barriers also present a significant challenge to realizing justice since the majority of institutions in Guatemala, conduct their business in Spanish and not indigenous languages (Godoy-Paiz 2008). These challenges are exacerbated by an inefficient and often ineffective judicial system. At the national level less than two percent of female homicide cases brought before the courts end in conviction (Orantes 2008).

The Peace Accords, the establishment of the national women's agencies, and laws reserving seats for women in community development councils provide formal institutional mechanisms for achieving gender equality. However, Guatemalan women continue to perceive a lack of opportunity and freedom to participate in politics (Azpuru

2013). As the evidence above shows, the creation of institutions to promote equality has not meant equality in practice for many women. As a result of the legacy of conflict, as well as limited and ineffective institutional reforms, historically excluded groups, namely women and indigenous populations, continue to face limited opportunities to access state institutions and participate in institutional politics.

### ***Women's Organizing in Post-conflict Guatemala***

The Peace Accords made significant headway by integrating women's organizations that were previously operating outside formal institutional channels of government. The signing of the peace accords opened the door for networks representing women's interests to be integrated into the state structure. However, fourteen years after the signing of the peace agreement, indicators of progress towards democracy for all citizens, particularly women, reflect troubling trends. In the post-conflict setting there has been a distressing increase in the rates of violence against women (Amnesty International 2005; United States Department of State 2015). Though the peace process included measures to address the systematic economic and social disadvantage felt by women in Guatemala, these formal legal measures have yet to translate into the daily experiences of most Guatemalan women. Thus, women continue to be marginalized within the political and legal systems (Walsh 2008).

In spite of women's prominent role in the peace process, today women's organizations within Guatemala are divided over strategies and goals. On one side institutionalists see achievements from working within the state to create state institutions that represent and protect women's interests. Other groups see strategies of working within the state as failing. The language of the Peace Accords defining women's rights and

the role of the state in upholding these rights has been criticized as overly general and unenforceable (Berger 2006; Luciak 2001). Though women's organizations succeeded at incorporating women's interests into newly established democratic institutions, reforms stopped short of specifying how these provisions would be implemented in practice.

Thus, Guatemala's democratic transition, like many other Latin American countries, brought both institutional success and new challenges for women's organizations working to enhance women's status. Democratization led women's groups to reconsider their relationship with the state and to question whether work within or outside of the state was most effective for pushing for gendered reforms (Berger 2006). Though democratization led women to be significant and influential political actors able to advocate for women's issues, it also fractured a movement that had unified to oppose an oppressive, militarized, authoritarian regime. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century began, women's organizations in Guatemala remained divided over political strategies, but they were also equipped with political experiences and recognition as legitimate and influential political actors. What remained unknown, and what this dissertation aims to uncover, was how women's organizations would interact with newly established democratic institutions in the neoliberal, post-Beijing era to influence the strategies and goals of women as well as women's political participation in the new millennium.

## **Conclusion**

Across contemporary democratizing states, women are more likely than ever to be engaged in women's organizations. At the same time, it is more unlikely than ever that these organizations will encourage women's institutional political participation. As my discussion of the Guatemalan case illustrates, women active in women's organizations are

not necessarily inclined to participate in institutional politics. Given the political context and gendered nature of politics in democratizing states, women have an immediate disincentive to expend their time and resources on efforts to voice their demands through institutional political channels. I have argued, activism in women's organizations will not likely lead women to participate in institutional politics. Because organizational experiences reinforce women's commonly held view that political institutions will not respond to women's needs, activism in women's organizations will be unlikely to cause women to participate in institutional politics. This is not to say that women are not empowered through their experiences as members of women's organizations. On the contrary, women's organizations do empower members, but they do so primarily by creating pathways for women to participate in non-institutional politics.

This chapter has identified international and domestic factors that characterize the context of women's organizing in democratizing states and in the Guatemalan case specifically. Though my analysis focuses on explaining the effects of women's organizations and women's political participation in Guatemala, the contextual factors I have identified can be applied to explain the relationship between women's organizations and women's political empowerment in Latin America's democratizing states more broadly. I have identified the international women's movement, democratization, domestic women's movements', and neoliberal economic reforms as important variables influencing women's political action and the effects of women's organizations in democratizing states. These factors provide the basis for developing a more generalizable theory to explain women's political participation across these contexts. Thus, I expect these factors to be equally significant and to have similar effects on women's organizations and political participation



in other democratizing states. The following chapters build on the conclusions drawn here in regards to the nature of women's organizing and political participation to evaluate and explain the relationship between women's organizational membership and women's political empowerment in Guatemala.

## **CHAPTER 4. ANALYZING THE EFFECTS OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN GUATEMALA**

### **Introduction**

The objective of this dissertation is to provide an answer to the question of whether women's organizations in democratizing states empower women politically. The previous chapter presented qualitative evidence to show that democratization, international and domestic women's movements, and neoliberal economic reforms have had the combined effect of increasing the political saliency and resources of women's organizations in democratizing states. However, these factors have provided limited opportunities and little motivation for women to interact with state institutions. While these findings are important, they raise a number of questions about the effects of women's organizations in developing democratic contexts today. For instance, are women's organizations in contemporary democratizing states serving as pathways to participation? If so, how do organizational pathways affect rates and forms of women's political participation? Are these pathways leading women to interact with state institutions, or are organizations encouraging women's autonomy and action outside of institutions of the state? In this chapter, I address these questions by using statistical data to evaluate the relationship between membership in women's organizations and women's participation in institutional and non-institutional political acts.

As I argued in chapters two and three, to fully understand the relationship between women's organizations and women's political empowerment in democratizing states, it is necessary to understand the context in which women act. My analysis confirms significant gender differences in rates and forms of political participation characterize the context of

women's participation in Guatemala; women participate at lower rates than men in both institutional and non-institutional politics. Though women continue to be politically disempowered relative to men, Guatemalan women's organizations have the potential to reduce gender disparities by empowering women to participate politically. In this chapter, I argue that Guatemalan women's organizations do politically empower women by enhancing members' opportunities, motivations, and capacities for non-institutional political action. Analyzing the consequences of membership in terms of women's decisions to participate in both institutional and non-institutional politics provides evidence to show that while membership in women's organizations does not necessarily increase women's participation in institutional politics, members are significantly more likely than non-members to participate in various ways outside of formal political institutions. Thus, the evidence presented in this chapter supports my argument that women's organizations politically empower women. Even though there are significant gender differences in rates and forms of political participation, I argue the positive relationship between membership and women's participation in non-institutional politics indicates women's organizations can politically empower women.

Employing Guatemalan data from the 2008 Latin American Public Opinion (LAPOP) survey, I analyze variations in rates of Guatemalan's participation in a variety of institutional and non-institutional political acts. *Institutional political participation* refers to participation in electoral politics and direct communication with politicians, local institutions, and government agencies. *Non-institutional political participation* refers to political acts that occur outside of formal institutional channels. In this chapter, measures of non-institutional political acts include participation in political discussions, acting

collectively to address a community problem, engaging in protests, and participating in civil society organizations. To analyze the relationship between women's organizational activism and political participation, I evaluate differences in rates and forms of participation between women that have been involved in women's organizations in the past year and those that have not. In this chapter, participants in women's organizations are referred to as *members* of women's organizations, and women who have never participated in meeting of a women's organization are referred to as *non-members*.

To better understand the relationship between women's organizational membership and political participation, this chapter proceeds as follows: First, I summarize the central theoretical arguments being evaluated in this chapter. Next, I present and discuss results from analyses of survey data. These analyses serve to assess both gendered trends in political participation and the relationship between membership in women's organizations and women's political participation in Guatemala. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the both the limitations and implications of these findings for existing theories of women's political empowerment and our understanding of the effects of women's organizations on political participation in democratizing states.

## **Theory**

My argument about the effect of women's organizations on women's political empowerment begins with the assumption that in democratizing states women continue to be underrepresented in political institutions and have less of a voice in processes of decision-making relative to men. It is this assumption that has motivated broad support for women's organizations in the developing world (Alvarez 2009; Bystydzienski 1992; Morduch 2000; Rankin 2002; Swiss 2011). This argument is supported by a number of

studies, employing a range of indicators at different levels of analyses, that conclude despite the transition to democracy, women continue to be less involved than men in politics in democratizing states (Barns and Burchard 2012; Despasato and Norrander 2008). At the same time, it has been confirmed that the nature and magnitude of gender disparities varies across countries (Ingelhart and Norris 2003; Kittilson 2005; Morgan et al 2008; Sacchet 2008). Thus, before we can identify factors that influence Guatemalan women's political empowerment, we need to begin by explaining how women are participating politically and how or if women's participation differs from men's.

In chapter three I made the case that in contemporary democratizing states, women engage in non-institutional and institutional politics in a variety of ways. In this chapter I build on that argument by specifying both how women participate politically and how women's political participation compares to men's in the Guatemalan context. Similar to other studies of gender and political participation in democratizing states, I expect gendered trends in political participation to differ from those observed in developed democratic contexts. Unlike trends in advanced democratic contexts, where gender gaps in participation have significantly decreased and even reversed in some cases in recent years (Coffe and Bolzendahl 2010; Ingelhart and Norris 2003; Karp and Banducci 2007; Stolle and Micheletti 2006), I expect that in Guatemala gender inequalities exist across a wide range of institutional and non-institutional political acts. I test this argument via the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: In comparing individuals, men will be more likely to participate in both institutional and non-institutional politics than will women.*

In this dissertation I argue that women's organizations are empowering women to act politically. However, in order to determine if women's organizations are empowering

women, the relationship between membership in these organizations and women's political participation must be established. If women's organizations are empowering women to act politically, we should observe significant differences between members and non-members in regards to rates of political participation. In order for organizations to empower women, they must increase women's voice and influence in forums where women's participation has been limited (Cornwall and Brock 2005; Kabeer 2005; Malhotra and Schuler 2005; Mosedale 2005; Petesch et al 2005; Samman and Santos 2009). Thus, if women's organizations are politically empowering members, then the effects of membership should be most significant for those acts in which women participate less than men.

In the previous chapter I argued that in contemporary democratic, neoliberal contexts, women's organizations encourage members to act through both institutional and non-institutional channels to promote women's interests. Qualitative evidence across a number of studies of women's movements in these contexts confirms during the period of transition, women's engaged in a variety of organizations with a range of objectives, including religious organizations, human rights organizations, student groups, community groups, and income generating organizations (Berger 2006; Jaquette 2001; Razavi 2001). More recently, due to increases in external support for women's organizations, women have expanded the scope of their demands and diversified their strategies for political engagement (Cornwall and Goetz 2005). Building off of findings from previous studies, I argue that women's organizations in democratizing states will politically empower women by increasing women's participation in both institutional and non-institutional political acts. In terms of trends in the Guatemalan case, I expect to observe the following:

*Hypothesis 2: In comparing Guatemalan women, members of women's organizations will be more likely to participate in institutional and non-institutional politics than will non-members.*

I expect women's organizations to have a positive effect on women's participation in institutional and non-institutional politics. However, as the qualitative analyses in chapter three made clear, there are significant variations across women that influence both individuals' political participation and the effects of women's organizations on individual decisions to participate politically. Historically these variations have fallen along lines of class, ethnicity, and geography (Razavi 2001). Given how influential and important these individual characteristics have been in defining the structure of women's opportunities, particularly who can participate in institutional politics and incentives for participation, I expect individual characteristics, such as ethnicity, income, and education to be significant predictors of women's political participation in Guatemala. Thus, in order to establish the degree to which women's organizations explain variations in rates of women's political participation, we must account for other factors that influence participation.

Because for certain types of political participation, women's participation is determined primarily by factors other than membership in women's organizations, when we account for these I expect membership to have distinct effects on women's participation in institutional and non-institutional politics. For those types of political action that are not significantly influenced by women's organizations, I expect women's organizations to have no effect and for individual-level factors to have a significant effect on women's political participation.

Given the nature of politics in contemporary democratizing states, women's organizations are unlikely to empower women to participate in institutional politics. I

argue this is because women's organizations in contexts characterized by neoliberal economic policies, weak democratic institutions, and persistent gender inequalities, are unlikely to encourage women to interact with state institutions to promote their interests and meet their needs (Cornwall and Brock 2005; Craske 1998; Molyneux 2002; Rankin 2002; Silliman 1999; Walby 2010; Williams 2004). At the same time, democratization provided female and indigenous citizens, the majority of whom had been legally excluded from institutional politics prior to the transition to democracy, increased opportunities to participate in institutional politics (Berger 2008; Walsh 2008). In many cases citizens capitalized on these new opportunities to participate. In the Guatemalan case, this led women and indigenous groups to participate in the establishment of democratic institutions, to influence the negotiation of peace treaties, and to engage in electoral politics (Berger 2008; Luciak 2001; Menjivar 2011). Thus, women's organizations are unlikely to influence women's participation in institutional politics, however, individual characteristics, such as ethnicity, are very likely to influence women's participation in institutional politics. Given this argument, I expect to observe the following:

*Hypothesis 3: In comparing Guatemalan women, when controlling for other factors influencing participation, members of women's organizations will not necessarily be more likely than will non-members to participate in institutional politics.*

Since the transition to democracy, across democratizing states, there has been an increase in citizen dissatisfaction with the performance of institutionalized democracy (Diamond 2008; Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005; Holzner 2010). At the same time, due to the failures of initial democratic reforms, many social movement organizations and members of historically marginalized groups have come to question the effectiveness of institutional politics (Baldez 2003; Waisman et al 2006; Yashar 2004). Additionally, many



women in democratizing states view political institutions as offering women limited opportunities to participate in politics and politicians and government institutions as unresponsive to their needs (Fallon et al 2012). Given the historical context and gendered nature of politics in Guatemala, women have an immediate disincentive to expend their time and resources on efforts to voice their demands through institutional political channels. However, the NGO-ization of domestic women's movements has reinforced and encouraged women's participation in alternative, non-institutional channels (Alvarez 2009; Silliman 1999). I argue this has led members of women's organizations to see participation outside of formal institutions as an effective solution to meet their needs. For these reasons, Guatemalan women active in women's organizations are not inclined to participate in institutional politics. However, activism in women's organizations does tend to encourage women's participation in non-institutional politics. Given these arguments, I expect the following:

*Hypothesis 4: In comparing Guatemalan women, when controlling for other factors influencing participation, members of women's organizations will be more likely than will non-members to participate in non-institutional politics.*

In the following section I evaluate this theory using public opinion data on women's organizational activism and political participation in Guatemala. Results support the theory articulated here. Evidence confirms that significant gender differences in rates of institutional and non-institutional participation exist in Guatemala. The data also shows activism in women's organizations positively affects women's participation in non-institutional politics, but not necessarily institutional politics. These results support my argument that in contexts where men dominate institutional politics, women's organizations tend to foster non-institutional political participation and have little effect on

women's participation in institutional politics. Before discussing my results, I present the data and introduce my method of analysis.

### **Model Specification**

To evaluate the relationship between women's organizational activism and political participation, my analysis uses individual-level data from the 2008 Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)<sup>21</sup>. The Guatemalan survey includes a variety of indicators measuring respondents' participation in institutional and non-institutional political acts. Given that the focus of this chapter is on identifying and explaining gendered trends in institutional and non-institutional participation, this analysis uses a combination of indicators to measure both categories of participation.

The LAPOP survey asks respondents whether they have engaged in institutional politics in any of the following ways — contacting a member of the legislature, contacting a local official, contacting a government agency, attending municipal meetings, voted in the last presidential election, and are registered to vote. The variable measuring whether individuals were registered to vote was coded categorically, where one indicates they were not registered, two indicates their registration is in process, and three means that the respondent has registered to vote. The remaining measures of institutional participation were coded dichotomously. If a respondent answered they had participated in this activity, the act was coded as “1”, and if they had not ever taken part in this act, the action was scored as “0”.

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<sup>21</sup> The 2008 round of this bi-annual survey included 24 Latin American countries and over 40,000 respondents. Each survey was implemented based on a national probability design sampling by sub-national regions. All survey participants were voting-age adults. The Guatemalan sample of respondents includes 772 men and 766 women, for a total of 1,538 individuals.

To explain how activist women participate politically, this analysis also looks at six measures of non-institutional participation: discussing politics with others, solving a community problem, attending meetings of a parents association at school (PTA), participating in community groups, attending meetings of a professional association, and participation in protests. All of these measures of non-institutional political participation were coded categorically from low to high to indicate how frequently individuals engage in these political acts. Low values indicate low levels of participation and high values equate to higher levels of participation. The number of categories ranges from three for participation in protests, to five for political discussion. For all categorical measures, respondents were assigned a code of one if they never participated. Values between two and five on these measures indicate how often respondents participated, with two being the lowest frequency of reported participation for all categorical measures.

This study is primarily interested in assessing the effect of women's involvement in women's organizations on forms and rates of institutionalized and non-institutionalized political participation. To explain the relationship between women's organizations and women's political participation I use a dichotomous measure indicating whether or not a woman is a member of a women's organization. Respondents were asked how often in the past year they attended meetings of a women's organization. Of those women in the survey sample, 745 answered the question asking whether they participated in organizations of women: 76% (566) were not active (never participated), 10% (72) of respondents participated at a low level (once or twice a year), and 14% (107) were highly active, meaning they participated at least once or twice a month and as often as once or twice a week in these organizations. If respondents answered as never attending they were

classified as a *non-member* and given a score of “0”; if they attended a meeting once or twice in the past year or more they were considered a member and coded as “1”. In addition to membership in women’s organizations, regression models predicting women’s political participation include measures to estimate the effects of age, ethnicity, level of education, marital status, income and geography. Summary statistics for all variables are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Summary Statistics for All Quantitative Variables

<b>Summary Statistics for All Quantitative Variables</b>						
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Obs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>StdDev</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	
<i>Institutional Political Participation</i>						
Contact member of congress	1531	0.05	0.22	0	1	
Contact local official	1530	0.15	0.36	0	1	
Contact government agency	1521	0.05	0.22	0	1	
Attend municipal meeting in past year	1507	0.14	0.35	0	1	
Voted in last presidential election	1519	0.73	0.44	0	1	
Registered to vote	1534	2.71	0.70	1	3	
<i>Non-institutional Political Participation</i>						
Discuss politics with others	1498	1.92	0.97	1	5	
Help solve a community problem in past year	1484	1.59	0.87	1	4	
Attend meetings of a parents' association at school	1514	1.89	0.99	1	4	
Attend meetings of a community association	1512	1.68	0.99	1	4	
Attend meetings of a trade or professional association	1498	1.23	0.62	1	4	
Ever participated in public demonstration or protest	1499	1.24	0.62	1	3	
<i>Independent Variables</i>						
Women's Org Member (1=member)	745	0.24	0.43	0	1	
Age	1538	39.45	15.62	18	99	
Ethnicity (1=Indigenous, 0= other)	1499	0.43	0.49	0	1	
Level of education (1=none, 2=primary, 3=secondary, 4=university or above)	1534	2.26	0.81	1	4	
Marital Status (1=married/partnered)	1517	0.69	0.46	0	1	
Monthly income	1268	2.71	2.25	0	10	
Location of residence (1=rural inhabitant)	1538	0.53	0.50	0	1	

In this chapter, I present results from both bivariate and multivariate analyses to explain women's political participation and the effects of women's organizations on women's participation in the Guatemalan contexts. First, using data on rates of political participation and measures of association, I analyze the effect of both gender and membership in women's organizations on trends in institutional and non-institutional political participation. I begin by presenting statistics on rates of participation for men and women in Guatemala. In addition to comparing men and women in terms of rates of participation, I compare rates of political participation for female members and non-members of women's organizations. These results show that both gender and membership in women's organizations are significantly women's rates of participation in non-institutional and institutional politics.

Next I use multivariate analyses to estimate the effect of membership in women's organizations on women's political participation. I present the results from two sets of multivariate models predicting causes of women's political participation, including models of six acts of institutional political participation and models of six acts of non-institutional political participation. To estimate the effect of theorized causes of political participation, this analysis employs a combination of logistic and ordered logistic regression methods. Because all but one act of institutional participation is coded dichotomously, logistic regressions were used to estimate the majority of the models of institutional political participation. For all measures of non-institutional participation and for the measure of whether an individual registered to vote, variables codes are ordered and categorical. Following the recommendations of Long and Freese (2014), ordered logistic regression was deemed the most appropriate estimation method for modeling women's decisions to

register to vote and engage the six non-institutional acts considered below. In the following section I present results from each analysis and discuss what these findings indicate about women's political participation and the effects of women's organizations in the Guatemalan context.

### **Gender Inequalities in Political Participation in Guatemala**

My first analysis examines gendered trends in political participation in Guatemala. The analysis focuses on comparing rates of men and women's political participation in terms of gendered differences for institutional and non-institutional political participation. In addition to comparing men and women in terms of rates of participation, I analyze the strength of the relationship between gender and political participation for twelve different political acts, six acts of institutional participation and six acts of non-institutional participation. Bivariate statistics on men and women's participation in institutional and non-institutional political acts confirm my hypothesis, that gender inequalities in participation exist in Guatemala, and that generally women participate less than men in both institutional and non-institutional politics. These results illustrate that men participate at higher rates than women in ten of the twelve acts of political participation considered here. Table 4 displays the percentages of individuals responding affirmatively to participating in each of type of institutional and non-institutional political action.

**Table 4:** Gender Differences in Rates of Institutional and Non-institutional Political Participation

<b>Gender Differences in Rates of Institutional and Non-institutional Political Participation</b>		
<b>Institutional Political Participation</b>		
	Men	Women
Contact member of congress	4.68%	5.64%
Chi2 (1, N=1,531)	= 0.732	
Contact local official	15.47%	14.19%
Chi2 (1, N=1,530)	= 0.498	
Contact government agency	6.03%	4.62%
Chi2 (1, N=1,521)	= 1.502	
Attend municipal meeting in past year	16.75%	11.21%
Chi2 (1, N=1,507)	= 9.601**	
Voted in last presidential election	78.20%	68.39%
Chi2 (1, N=1,519)	= 18.671***	
Registered to vote	89.48%	80.63%
Chi2 (2, N=1,534)	= 23.967***	
<b>Non-institutional Political Participation</b>		
	Men	Women
Discuss politics with others	66.40%	51.83%
Chi2 (4, N=1,498)	= 40.300***	
Help solve a community problem in past year	44.98%	29.85%
Chi2 (3, N=1,484)	= 42.68***	
Attend meetings of a parents' association at school	44.47%	51.87%
Chi2 (3, N=1,514)	= 17.86***	
Attend meetings of a community association	46.01%	33.07%
Chi2 (3, N=1,512)	= 28.43***	
Attend meetings of a trade or professional association	17.89%	9.61%
Chi2 (3, N=1,498)	= 26.38***	
Ever participated in public demonstration or protest	15.46%	11.86%
Chi2 (2, N=1,499)	= 4.296	
Notes: Results reported as percentage of respondents that answered affirmatively when asked if they participated in each political act. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001		



Measures of the strength of the relationship between gender and rates of political participation are significant for all but four of the models. Thus, for the majority of twelve political acts examined here, gender is significantly correlated with individual differences in rates and forms of political participation.

Two important findings emerge from the data presented in Table 4. The first is that there are significant gendered differences in rates of political participation for both institutional and non-institutional political acts. For eight of the twelve political acts, the chi-squared statistic is significant at  $p < 0.01$  or higher. For all but one of these acts, attending a meeting of a parents' association at school, men participate at higher rates than women. On average, across institutional and non-institutional participation, men participate at rates about ten percent higher than women. The second important finding to note is that gender differences in rates of participation are most pronounced for non-institutional forms of political participation. While gender differences are significant for only three of the six institutional acts, men's and women's rates of participation are significantly different for all but one non-institutional act. Women do participate at higher rates than men in parents' associations, but this is not surprising given gendered divisions of labor in the household and the value placed upon women's roles as mothers (Alvarez 2000; Craske 1998; Schwindt-Bayer 2006; Rankin 2002; Viterna and Fallon 2008).

In addition to gender differences being significant across a larger proportion of non-institutional political acts, differences in rates of non-institutional participation are larger than differences for institutional participation. Inequalities in participation are greatest for the following non-institutional acts—acting to solve a community problem, discussing politics with others, and attending meetings of a community association. Though research

findings from Western contexts would lead us to expect gender differences to be largest in regards to participation in institutional politics (Lowndes et al. 2002; Stolle and Hooghe 2011), we actually see the biggest differences in rates of men's and women's participation outside of formal institutions. This is significant given that such a large proportion of citizens participate in non-institutional politics; on average the rate of participation for Guatemalan men and women in non-institutional politics is approximately 35%. On the other hand, average rates for contacting officials or interacting with government institutions are much lower. On average, Guatemalans participate in these forms of institutional politics at a rate of approximately ten percent. It is worth noting that though rates for most institutional political acts are low relative to rates of non-institutional political participation, the highest rates of participation are seen in regards to electoral politics, specifically being registered to vote and voting. Of the women in the sample, 80% were registered to vote. This is impressive considering Guatemalan women, and indigenous women especially, have faced numerous challenges in being able to access and engage in institutional politics. Thus in Guatemala's contemporary democratic context, women take advantage of opportunities to participate and vote in elections; as this survey data indicates, the vast majority of women in this sample, 68%, reported voting in the last presidential election.

Data from Guatemala confirms findings from other studies of gender diffs in participation in democratizing states—namely, that gender inequalities in these contexts are more pronounced and distinct from those in developed democratic settings.

In Guatemala women participate less than men in both non-institutional and institutional politics. Additionally, observed gender inequalities across institutional and non-

institutional categories of participation support my argument that employing a broad conceptualization of political participation offers a fuller picture of the degree of gender inequality in the context of democratizing states. If non-institutional political acts had not been incorporated into this analysis, the amount of inequality and the significance of gender in shaping participatory dynamics would have been underestimated.

In this section I confirmed that there are significant gender differences in both institutional and non-institutional participation, that generally men and women participate at higher rates in non-institutional politics, and that gender differences are most pronounced for non-institutional forms of political participation. The question that remains to be answered is what effect, if any, does women's membership in women's organizations have on gender dynamics in political participation in the Guatemalan case. To answer this question, the remainder of the chapter examines the relationship between women's organizations and women's political participation. In the following section I report and discuss results from bivariate analyses to explain the relationship between women's organizational activism and rates of participation in institutional and non-institutional politics.

### **Women's Organizations and Political Participation in Guatemala**

Having provided an overview of gender inequalities in political participation, the presentation of results now turns to bivariate statistics on women's organizational activism. I use this data to compare rates of participation for members and non-members and to determine whether membership in women's organizations is significantly associated with differences in women's rate of participation in the twelve acts of institutional and non-institutional political participation discussed above. Bivariate

statistics indicate that membership in a women's organization is positively and significantly correlated with eight of the twelve political acts. Additionally, differences in rates of participation between members and non-members are more significant for non-institutional political acts than for institutional acts. Considering that gender inequalities do exist in Guatemala and are most pronounced for non-institutional political acts, the finding that members of women's organizations are significantly more likely than non-members to participate politically, and even more so in non-institutional politics, suggest membership in women's organizations may indeed politically empower women. This positive and significant difference in regards to membership and political participation provides evidence to support my argument that women's organizations politically empower women. In what follows I discuss findings from my bivariate analyses to provide evidence in support of my argument and conclusions about the potential of women's organizations to politically empower women in democratizing states generally and in Guatemala specifically. Results are displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Membership in Women's Organizations and Women's Rates of Political Participation

<b>Membership in Women's Organizations and Women's Rates of Political Participation</b>		
<b>Institutional Political Participation</b>		
	Member	Non-member
Contact member of congress	9.04%	4.43%
Chi2 (1, N=741)	= 5.4703*	
Contact local official	21.91%	11.57%
Chi2 (1, N=740)	= 11.9756**	
Contact government agency	5.68%	3.39%
Chi2 (1, N=737)	= 1.8667	
Attend municipal meeting in past year	17.71%	9.04%
Chi2 (1, N=728)	= 10.1114**	
Voted in last presidential election	70.11%	67.74%
Chi2 (1, N=732)	= 0.345	
Registered to vote	80.79%	80.92%
Chi2 (2, N=743)	= 0.6132	
<b>Non-institutional Political Participation</b>		
	Member	Non-member
Discuss politics with others	57.65%	50.00%
Chi2 (4, N=718)	= 3.32	
Help solve a community problem in past year	45.93	24.50
Chi2 (3, N=716)	= 29.036***	
Attend meetings of a parents' association at school	68.24	46.07
Chi2 (3, N=730)	= 28.689***	
Attend meetings of a community association	55.29	25.67
Chi2 (3, N=727)	= 55.026***	
Attend meetings of a trade or professional association	19.30	6.45
Chi2 (3, N=729)	= 30.8973***	
Ever participated in public demonstration or protest	18.29	9.32
Chi2 (2, N=722)	= 15.3656***	
Notes: Results reported as percentage of respondents that answered affirmatively when asked if they participated in each political act. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001		

The first important finding to note is that for all but one of the twelve political acts presented in Table 5, members' rates of participation are higher than non-members. Additionally, for eight acts of political participation, these differences are statistically significant. The positive and significant relationship between membership and political

participation is not only statistically significant, but also substantively significant. If we consider these findings about membership and women's political participation in terms of gendered trends in participation in Guatemala, membership in women's organizations is positively related to women's participation in five of the seven political acts where men participate at significantly higher rates than women. Members of women's organizations participate at significantly higher rates than non-members in municipal meetings, solving community problems, parents' associations, community organizations, and professional groups. Given that the previous analysis found women to participate less than men in all of these acts, the positive effect of membership suggests women's organizations are positively associated with higher rates of women's participation in political acts where gender inequality is significant. The positive relationship between membership and women's rate of participation in a variety of institutional and non-institutional political acts suggests women's organizations may decrease gender inequalities in participation.

Though membership is positively associated with women's political participation, disaggregating between institutional and non-institutional politics suggests the effects of membership on women's participation differs across institutional and non-institutional acts. Results from my analyses of gender inequalities in participation show that men participate at significantly higher rates than women in municipal meetings, and that men are significantly more likely than women to vote and to be registered to vote. Though significant gender differences exist for these three institutional acts, members of women's organizations participate at significantly higher rates than non-members in only one of these, attending a municipal meeting. On the other hand, of the five non-institutional political acts for which gender differences are significant, membership is significantly and

positively associated to women's rates of participation in four of these. Not only does membership in women's organizations have a positive correlation with participation in political acts where men dominate, but also the most significant relationships are on rates of women's participation in non-institutional politics. This suggests that membership in women's organizations has a more significant, positive effect on non-institutional rather than institutional participation. These results support my argument that experiences in women's organizations encourage women to participate politically, but the effects of organizations vary between institutional and non-institutional forms of actions.

These results show that there are significant differences in rates of women's participation between those who are members of women's organizations and those who are not. The analysis above also provides evidence to support my argument that membership in women's organizations is positively related to women's political participation. What this analysis has not done is evaluate the effects of women's organizational membership relative to other factors known to influence variations in participation among Guatemalan women. I address this issue in the following section.

### **Modeling Women's Political Participation in Guatemala**

The previous section illustrated that significant differences in rates of participation exist between members and non-members of women's organizations. In this section I evaluate whether these differences can be attributed to membership in women's organizations or whether other factors, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or rural-urban differences determine women's participation in institutional politics. Because multivariate models enable the estimation of independent effects of various factors known to influence women's political participation in the Guatemalan context, I am able to

evaluate the effects of membership while simultaneously testing and controlling for alternative explanations of participation. Once I control for other factors influencing political participation, membership in women's organizations has a significant effect on institutional political participation in only one of the six models. The fact that membership in women's organizations is not a significant predictor of women's participation in five of the six measures of institutional political participation, shows that other factors—namely ethnicity, marital status, location, and education— are more significantly related to women's decisions to participation in institutional politics. Table 6 displays the results from six multivariate models predicting women's institutional political participation.



**Table 6:** Determinants of Women's Institutional Political Participation

<b>Determinants of Women's Institutional Political Participation</b>						
	Contact Member of Congress (logit)	Contact Local Official (logit)	Contact Government Agency (logit)	Attend Municipal Meeting in the Past Year (logit)	Voted in the Last Presidential Election (logit)	Registered Voter (ordered logit)
Women's Org Member	0.71 (0.39)	0.52* (0.45)	0.49 (0.45)	0.47 (0.28)	0.05 (0.22)	-0.23 (0.26)
Age	0.02 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)
Indigenous	1.18** (0.41)	0.32 (0.27)	1.15* (0.51)	0.90** (0.30)	0.47* (0.22)	0.14 (0.25)
Level of education	0.49 (0.29)	0.32 (0.19)	0.5 (0.37)	0.22 (0.24)	1.07*** (0.18)	1.13*** (0.21)
Married	-0.42 (0.36)	-0.04 (0.25)	0.19 (0.47)	-0.04 (0.30)	0.44* (0.22)	0.76** (0.24)
Monthly income	0.10 (0.10)	-0.05 (0.08)	-0.19 (0.11)	-0.05 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.08)
Rural	0.49 (0.44)	1.13*** (0.30)	-0.28 (0.45)	0.15 (0.30)	0.23 (0.22)	-0.04 (0.26)
Constant	-5.59*** (1.23)	-2.98*** (0.78)	-5.11** (1.60)	-3.20*** (0.90)	-2.90*** (0.65)	-- --
N	566	565	555	556	559	569
Notes: Results report regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. For all dependent variables, affirmative responses were coded as high. All models were run using robust standard errors. Predictor and model significance reported as *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.						

The first important point to note relates to my hypothesis that members of women's organizations will not necessarily be more likely than will non-members to participate in institutional politics. I argued this is because differences such as ethnicity and education are expected to be more significant determinants of institutional political participation. The regression results for five of the six models of institutional political participation confirm this hypothesis. Once I control for other determinants of participation, membership in women's organizations does not have a significant effect on whether women contact a

member of congress, contact a government agency, attend municipal meetings, vote in presidential elections, or register to vote. The lack of significance is particularly noteworthy given that bivariate analyses showed members contacted congress and attended municipal meetings at significantly higher rates than women who were not members of women's organizations. Thus, the fact that membership in a women's organization does not have a significant effect once we control for other variables shows that membership is not the most significant predictor of women's participation in these two acts.

It is important to note that organizational activism does have a positive effect on one act of institutional participation, contacting a local official. This shows that members of women's organizations are significantly more likely than are non-members to contact a local official, and that this is true even when controlling for other causes of political participation. To determine the magnitude of effect of membership on women's decisions to contact local officials, it is necessary to calculate the predicted probability of participation. Table 7 displays the predicted probabilities of institutional participation for members and non-members.

**Table 7:** Membership Effects on Probabilities of Women's Institutional Political Participation

<b>Membership Effects on Probabilities of Women's Institutional Political Participation</b>													
Membership Status	<b>Measures of Institutional Political Participation</b>												
	<i>Contact member of congress</i>		<i>Contact local official*</i>		<i>Contact government agency</i>		<i>Attend municipal meeting</i>		<i>Voted</i>		<i>Registered Voter</i>		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	In Process	Yes
Members	91.80% (2.28)	8.19% (2.29)	78.97% (3.38)	21.03% (3.38)	94.80% (1.93)	5.20% (1.93)	84.42% (2.96)	15.58% (2.96)	28.63% (3.91)	71.37% (3.91)	16.59% (3.22)	1.33% (0.54)	82.09% (3.39)
Non-Members	95.81% (1.01)	4.19% (1.01)	86.63% (1.68)	13.37% (1.68)	96.83% (0.97)	3.16% (0.97)	89.86% (1.56)	10.14% (1.56)	23.36% (2.40)	70.64% (2.40)	13.51% (1.86)	1.13% (0.44)	85.37% (1.97)

Notes: Results report predicted probabilities with standard errors in parentheses. Significance of membership effects in full regression models reported as \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

These results indicate that the largest difference in the likelihood of participation is for women's decision to contact a local official. For this political act, members are about seven percent more likely than non-members to participate. These results also indicate important differences in regards to electoral participation. Though the coefficients for voting and registering to vote were not significant in the full model, predicted probabilities illustrate the effects of membership are smallest for these two acts. What is more, non-members are more likely than members to register to vote. This evidence further confirms that women's organizations have a limited impact on women's participation in institutional politics.

Though membership in women's organizations has no significant effect on five of the institutional acts examined here, other factors including a woman's age, ethnicity, education level, marital status and location notably affect the probability that women participate in institutional politics. The results presented in Table 4 show age, level of education, and marital status to be positively and significantly related to women's decisions to register to vote and participate in elections. These findings, though not surprising, confirm what other scholars studying gender and political participation in democratizing states have found—that older, more educated, married women are most likely to vote and be registered to vote (Despasato and Norrander 2008).

Given the importance of ethnicity in shaping both gender and political dynamics in Guatemala, the remainder of my discussion of the results in Table 4 focuses on findings in regards to the relationship between ethnicity and women's institutional political participation. As I argued in chapter three, ethnicity has been an important determinant of women's experiences with the state as well as their opportunities, motives, and capacities

to act politically. Here, I argue that these ethnic differences are important determinants for how and if women participate politically, and that they are more significant than membership in women's organizations for predicting women's institutional political participation. The results of four models of institutional political participation confirm this. Ethnicity has a significant effect on whether women contact a member of congress, contact a government agency, attend a municipal meeting, and vote.

Though regression coefficients tell us that ethnicity has a significant effect, in order to understand more clearly the relationship between ethnicity and political participation we must calculate predicted probabilities to determine the magnitude of effect of this variable. Table 8 predicts the degree to which being indigenous influences the likelihood that a woman will participate in each of six institutional acts.

**Table 8:** Effects of Ethnicity on Probabilities of Women's Institutional Political Participation

<b>Effects of Ethnicity on Probabilities of Women's Institutional Political Participation</b>													
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Measures of Institutional Political Participation</b>												
	<i>Contact member of congress**</i>		<i>Contact local official</i>		<i>Contact government agency*</i>		<i>Attend municipal meeting **</i>		<i>Voted *</i>		<i>Registered to vote</i>		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	In Process	Yes
Indigenous	90.51% (2.27)	9.49% (2.27)	82.11% (2.60)	17.89% (2.60)	93.24% (1.94)	6.76% (1.94)	82.15% (2.82)	17.85% (2.82)	24.09% (3.06)	75.91% (3.06)	13.41% (2.42)	1.09% (0.42)	85.50% (2.56)
Non-indigenous	96.88% (9.68)	3.12% (9.68)	86.53% (2.00)	13.47% (2.00)	97.66% (0.91)	2.34% (0.91)	91.89% (1.63)	8.11% (1.63)	33.37% (2.96)	66.63% (2.96)	15.02% (2.09)	1.20% (0.44)	83.79% (2.17)

Notes: Results report predicted probabilities with standard errors in parentheses. Significance of membership effects in full regression models reported as \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

These findings confirm that ethnicity is a significant determinant of women's participation in institutional politics. Additionally, for all regression models in which ethnicity had a significant effect, indigenous women were between four and ten percent more likely than non-indigenous women to participate. Ethnic differences in the probability of acting politically are largest for contacting a member of congress, attending municipal meetings, and voting. It is important to note that for these same acts, differences between members and non-members were much smaller; this is particularly true in regards to women's decision to vote. Given these findings, I conclude that not only are indigenous women more likely than non-indigenous women to participate in institutional politics, but indigenous women are also more likely than members of women's organizations to engage in institutionalized forms of participation.

Given these findings, that the significance of the relationship between membership and institutional political participation decreases when models account for the effects of other predictors of women's political participation, and that members are significantly more likely than non-members to contact local officials, I conclude that being a member of a women's organization is positively and significantly related to women's decisions to contact a local official. However, members are not significantly more likely than non-members to participate in any of the other five acts of institutional political participation. Instead the most significant factor determining women's institutional political participation is ethnicity. This is not surprising given the role that ethnic identity has played in Guatemalan politics. What is surprising is the magnitude of effect of ethnicity on institutional participation, particularly in comparison to the magnitude of the effect of women's organizational membership on contacting local officials. Indigenous women are

on average seven percent more likely than non-indigenous women to participate in institutional politics. On the other hand, members are only three percent more likely than non-members to engage in this type of political action. Additionally, as the results for models of non-institutional participation will show, when we compare the magnitude of the effect of membership, the effect of membership is smaller for institutional participation than it is for non-institutional participation. Thus, women's organizations increase the likelihood that women will contact a local official, but membership does not have a significant effect on women's participation in the majority of institutional political acts. Instead, individual characteristics, including age, ethnicity, education, and marital status, prove to be more significant predictors of women's participation in institutional politics. Table 9 displays the results of models predicting women's participation in six non-institutional political acts.



**Table 9:** Determinants of Women's Non-institutional Political Participation

<b>Determinants of Women's Non-institutional Political Participation</b>						
	Discuss Politics with Others (ordered logit)	Help Solve a Community Problem (ordered logit)	Attend Meetings of Parents Association (ordered logit)	Attend Meetings of Community Association (ordered logit)	Attend Meetings of a Professional Association (ordered logit)	Have Ever Protested (ordered logit)
Women's Org Member	<b>0.17</b> (-0.19)	<b>0.86***</b> (0.19)	<b>0.84***</b> (0.18)	<b>1.13***</b> (0.19)	<b>1.33***</b> (0.29)	<b>0.65*</b> (0.28)
Age	<b>-0.01</b> (0.01)	<b>0.01</b> (0.01)	<b>-0.00</b> (0.01)	<b>0.01</b> (0.01)	<b>0.01</b> (0.01)	<b>0.01</b> (0.01)
Indigenous	<b>-0.28</b> (0.18)	<b>0.09</b> (0.20)	<b>0.16</b> (0.19)	<b>0.33</b> (0.20)	<b>0.25</b> (0.33)	<b>0.41</b> (0.30)
Level of education	<b>0.59***</b> (0.15)	<b>0.31*</b> (0.15)	<b>-0.04</b> (0.15)	<b>0.34*</b> (0.15)	<b>-0.10</b> (0.27)	<b>0.69***</b> (0.20)
Married	<b>0.20</b> (0.18)	<b>0.08</b> (0.20)	<b>1.19***</b> (0.21)	<b>0.32</b> (0.20)	<b>0.49</b> (0.37)	<b>0.12</b> (0.30)
Monthly income	<b>0.06</b> (0.05)	<b>-0.06</b> (0.05)	<b>0.01</b> (0.05)	<b>-0.11*</b> (0.06)	<b>0.20**</b> (0.08)	<b>0.05</b> (0.07)
Rural	<b>0.03</b> (0.20)	<b>0.02</b> (0.21)	<b>0.43**</b> (0.20)	<b>0.39*</b> (0.20)	<b>0.39</b> (0.34)	<b>-0.13</b> (0.31)
N	548	549	556	555	555	549
Notes: Results report regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. For all dependent variables, affirmative responses were coded as high. All models were run using robust standard errors. Predictor and model significance reported as *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.						

What immediately stands out is that for all but one of the models, membership in women's organizations has a positive and significant effect on the likelihood that women will engage in non-institutional politics. Thus, even when controlling for other factors known to influence women's political participation, organizational activism does have a significant and positive effect on women's decision to participate in politics outside of formal institutions. Thus, considering together the results from models of women's

institutional and non-institutional political participation, the evidence shows that women's organizations have distinct effects on women's participation in non-institutional and institutional politics.

Coefficients show that members of women's organizations are more likely than non-members to have acted to solve a community problem, attended PTA meetings, participated in a community group or professional organization, and participated in protests. Positive and significant coefficients for the effects of membership in five of the six models of non-institutional political participation show that membership in women's organizations, even when controlling for other factors, has a significant and positive effect on women's participation in a range of non-institutional political acts.

Predicted probabilities are used to explain how much being a member of a women's organization increases a woman's probability of participating in non-institutional politics. Table 10 presents the results of predicted probabilities when holding all other variables at their mean.

**Table 10:** Membership Effects on Probabilities of Women's Non-institutional Political Participation**Membership Effects on Probabilities of Women's Non-institutional Political Participation**

<b>Membership Status</b>	<b>Measures of Non-institutional Political Participation</b>				
	<i><b>Discuss politics with others</b></i>				
	Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
Members of Women's Organizations	43.12% (3.96)	38.78% (2.60)	13.62% (2.00)	2.91% (0.79)	1.56% (0.56)
Female Non-Members of Women's Organizations	47.43% (2.43)	36.98% (2.12)	11.83% (1.44)	2.45% (0.61)	1.30% (0.43)
	<i><b>Help solve a community problem in past year***</b></i>				
	Never	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly	
Members of Women's Organizations	51.59% (3.93)	27.03% (2.45)	15.72% (2.33)	5.66% (1.45)	
Female Non-Members of Women's Organizations	71.49% (2.20)	18.17% (1.69)	7.86% (1.13)	2.47% (0.62)	
	<i><b>Attend meetings of a parents' association at school***</b></i>				
	Never	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly	
Members of Women's Organizations	33.57% (3.78)	12.77% (1.53)	47.14% (3.57)	6.53% (1.55)	
Female Non-Members of Women's Organizations	53.62% (2.53)	12.82% (1.48)	30.63% (2.26)	2.94% (0.65)	
	<i><b>Attend meetings of a community association***</b></i>				
	Never	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly	
Members of Women's Organizations	44.34% (3.81)	20.89% (2.04)	26.25% (3.07)	8.51% (1.80)	
Female Non-Members of Women's Organizations	71.14% (2.30)	14.90% (1.52)	11.75% (1.40)	2.92% (0.64)	
	<i><b>Attend meetings of a trade or professional association***</b></i>				
	Never	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly	
Members of Women's Organizations	80.59% (3.46)	10.56% (2.21)	7.32% (1.89)	1.53% (0.86)	
Female Non-Members of Women's Organizations	93.97% (1.18)	3.51% (0.78)	2.11% (0.59)	0.41% (0.23)	
	<i><b>Ever participated in public demonstration or protest*</b></i>				
	Never	Hardly Ever	A Few Times		
Members of Women's Organizations	83.50% (3.17)	5.26% (1.29)	11.24% (2.51)		
Female Non-Members of Women's Organizations	90.62% (1.43)	3.17% (0.75)	6.21% (1.10)		

Notes: Results report predicted probabilities with standard errors in parentheses. Significance of membership effects in full regression models reported as \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

These results show that on average, for all models where membership has a significant effect, being a member of a women's organization increases the likelihood of participation in non-institutional politics by six percent. Additionally, for three of the six acts of non-institutional political participation, members are more than six percent more likely than non-members to act politically. Thus, not only is the effect of membership on non-institutional political participation significant, but increases in the probability of participating are greatest for non-institutional political acts.

Results in Table 10 also indicate that in addition to women's organizations, education level, marital status, income, and rural-urban differences significantly affect women's participation in non-institutional politics. Aside from membership in women's organizations, a woman's level of education is the second most consistent predictor of women's non-institutional political participation. Levels of education are significantly associated with women's participation in four of the six non-institutional acts.

Marital status significantly predicts only one act of non-institutional political participation, attending meeting of a parents association at school. This is not surprising considering that married women are both more likely than single women to have children, and more likely than single women to have the time to attend these meetings. Results also show income is positively associated with women's participation in professional organizations. This too is unsurprising, given that income is also strongly correlated with employment and consequently women's participation in labor or professional organizations. What is interesting is that income is significantly and negatively correlated with women's participation in community associations. Thus, lower income women are

more likely than higher income women to attend meetings of a community association. This confirms findings from other studies of participation in Latin America that show the poor tend to participate at high rates in community organizations than do higher income individuals (Holzner 2010; Stokes 1995). It also provides evidence of the effects of the historical legacy of domestic women's organizing. As chapter three pointed out, poor women in Guatemala have often chosen to participate in community organizations for economic reasons (Berger 2008). Finally, rural-urban differences also predict whether women will participate in PTA-like organizations as well as community associations. The results here indicate that women in rural areas are more likely than urban inhabitants to participate in these two forms of non-institutional politics.

Taken together, results from models of women's institutional and non-institutional political participation show that while women's organizations have no effect on the majority of institutional acts considered here, there is a positive and significant relationship between membership and the probability that women will participate in a variety of non-institutional political acts. Additionally, these models show that ethnicity is a significant factor influencing women's participation in institutional politics, but it is not a significant determinant of women's non-institutional political participation. Thus, factors that influence women's institutional participation are distinct from those that influence non-institutional participation.

## **Conclusion**

Results presented in this chapter support my argument that valid understandings of women's political participation require differentiating causes of institutional and non-institutional action. This is particularly true in regards to evaluating the effects of

membership in women's organizations on women's decisions to participate politically. While analyses of the relationship between membership and institutional participation raises questions about the degree to which women's organizations politically empower members, results from analyses of women's non-institutional political participation provide support for my argument that women's organizations politically empower women. The evidence in this chapter shows women's organizational activism positively influences women's engagement in the majority of non-institutional acts considered here. At the same time, membership in women's organizations significantly increases the likelihood that women will participate in only one act of institutional participation. What these results suggest is that women's organizations do politically empower women, but they are most likely to do so by fostering women's engagement in non-institutional politics. These findings support my argument about the effects of women's organizations in democratizing states by confirming that membership in women's organizations is positively associated with women's political participation, and that this relationship varies across institutional and non-institutional categories of political participation.

Despite these findings, it is not clear whether differences between members and non-members, as well as the distinct institutional and non-institutional effects of organizational membership can be attributed to women's experiences in women's organizations. Perhaps it is not that membership has a significant effect on political participation, but instead that factors shaping women's decision to join a women's organization also determine how women participate politically. In other words, it is possible that some factor common to members of women's organizations, other than their organizational experience, causes these women to participate more than non-members in

non-institutional politics. Thus, to establish whether and how women's experiences within women's organizations influence members' decisions to participate politically, we need additional evidence to confirm women's organizations influence members' decisions to act politically and that these experiences tend to encourage women's participation in non-institutional politics. The following chapter presents exactly this kind of evidence. In what follows I present findings from my analyses of interview data and observations of women participating in women's organizations in Guatemala to show how women's organizations influence members' decisions to participate politically.

## CHAPTER 5. CONSEQUENCES OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZING FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN GUATEMALA

*Y Usted todavía esta participando en la política?*

Ahorita ya no.

*Porque no?*

Porque ahorita ya es muy diferente. Ahorita estamos luchando para sacar nuestra comunidad adelante. Estamos formando negocios<sup>22</sup>.

### Introduction

Though proponents of bottom-up approaches suggest collectively organizing women empowers them to participate more fully in processes of decision-making across all aspects of society, this effect has not been empirically validated. In the previous chapter I presented quantitative evidence to show that there is a positive relationship between membership in women's organizations and women's participation in institutional and non-institutional politics. I also provided evidence to show that membership had the most significant impact on women's participation in non-institutional politics. These aggregate relationships provide important empirical evidence to support my argument that women's organizations empower women by encouraging members' participation in non-institutional politics, but these correlations alone do not allow us to conclude that women's organizations are politically empowering women. In order to show that organizations are empowering members, additional evidence is needed to verify that processes within

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<sup>22</sup> Excerpt from author's conversation with one leader of a Guatemalan women's organization. The quote is a response to the question of whether members of the organization were engaged in institutional politics. Translation: "*Are you still participating in politics?*"

"Now, no."

"Why not?"

"Because now it is very different. Now we are fighting to move our community forward. We are forming businesses."



women's organizations are transforming women and increasing individuals' capacity to make choices and act to influence decisions about who gets what, when, and how.

In this chapter I argue that women's organizations do politically empower women, but they do so primarily by enhancing women's non-institutional political participation. Quantitative evidence illustrated membership in women's organizations is positively associated with women's participation in both institutional and non-institutional politics. However, qualitative data reveals that even though women's organizations increase members' skills and opportunities for institutional and non-institutional participation, experiences within these organizations cause members to choose to act in non-institutional rather than institutional politics. The evidence presented in this chapter shows organizations politically empower women by increasing members' capacities, motivations, and opportunities to act politically *outside of* formal institutions. In contexts where opportunities for women to participate in institutional politics are limited and state institutions have proven ineffective in regards to meeting women's needs and interests, women's organizational experiences tend to reinforce members' views that obstacles to institutional political participation are great and the rewards of this form of political action are uncertain at best.

In this study, the term empowerment is used to refer to the "process by which people become aware of their own interests and come to see themselves as having the capacity and right to act and have influence" (Rowlands 1997, 13). Processes of empowerment are often assumed to be inherently positive, but as numerous authors have recognized, the effects of empowerment in regards to women's capacity for choice and action are largely context dependent (Aslop and Heinsohn 2005; Ibrahim and Alkire 2007;

Kabeer 2001; Kabeer 1999; Narayan 2005). I argue that in the context of weak democratic institutions such as those found in Guatemala, processes of political empowerment within women's organizations are likely to result in an increase in women's non-institutional political participation. By increasing members' capacity, motivation, and opportunity to advocate for their rights and interests in forums outside of institutions of the state, women's organizations empower and encourage women to act through non-institutional channels to further their goals. This is not to say that women's organizations have no effect on women's decisions to participate in institutional politics, but rarely do they enhance women's motivations for institutional political participation.

This chapter evaluates these arguments, and in doing so contributes to current understandings of the political effects of women's organizing in democratizing states. By employing theories and concepts of political empowerment, I specify processes within women's organizations that influence women's capacities, motivations, and opportunities to exercise choice and act to promote their interests. By focusing on processes of empowerment and consequences in terms of women's political agency, this chapter contributes to current assessments of the gendered political effects of civil society organizations and NGOs by responding to the following questions: (1) Do women's organizations empower women? (2) If so, what effect do processes of empowerment have on women's decisions to participate politically? (3) How do women's organizations influence women's decisions to participate in institutional and non-institutional political acts?

To answer these questions, I turn to qualitative data collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with thirty members of ten economically oriented Guatemalan

women's NGOs and focused interviews with over one-hundred women participating in one microfinance institution. Inductive methods were used during multiple rounds of coding to identify patterns and draw comparisons across organizations and individuals in regards to processes of empowerment and women's political participation. While all of the organizations I observed do not explicitly intend to influence women's institutional political participation, most do aim to enhance women's participation in NGOs and income generating activities. Additionally all of these organizations work primarily with women from poor communities in the Western, rural regions of Guatemala. The ethnic makeup of all organizations in my sample is diverse; members include both indigenous and non-indigenous women. Twenty-three percent of the women in my sample spoke only their indigenous language, and the remainder spoke Spanish or Spanish and their indigenous dialect. The majority of the women interviewed were mothers, single and married. Their ages ranged between eighteen and seventy-three, with the average age being thirty-six. Most of the members of all organizations in this sample received only a primary level of education, and as much as fifteen-percent of all interviewees were unable to read and write.

It is important to note that how the sample of organizations from which qualitative data was drawn constrains the scope and implications of qualitative findings. The generalizability of the conclusions of this chapter extends only to those types of organizations included in this sample. While the processes and consequences of empowerment I discuss in this chapter have been identified as operating within this specific type of women's organization, economically oriented women's NGOs, they do support quantitative findings that membership is positively correlated with women's

decision to participate in both institutional and non-institutional politics. Qualitative data and the analysis presented in this chapter contribute to previous findings by describing members' meanings and experiences to uncover how individuals' experiences within organizations shape women's decisions and motivations to act politically.

In order to detail how women's organizations influence members' political participation, this chapter proceeds as follows. I first summarize my theory to explain how empowerment processes within women's organizations influence women's political agency. I focus specifically on evaluating women's choices in regards to institutional and non-institutional political action. My analysis begins by identifying the political actions taken by women within women's organizations and the choices and interests women associate with those actions. The second part of my analysis presents evidence of processes of empowerment within women's organizations. Here, I turn to the question of how these organizations influence women's decisions to act politically. By identifying processes within organizations that influence women's motivations, capacities, and opportunities for political action, I offer evidence to support my explanation for how organizations affect women's decisions to participate in institutional and non-institutional politics.

### **Women's Organizations and Consequences for Women's Political Empowerment**

This study contributes to existing research on the political effects of women's organizing in democratizing states. Though similar political effects of women's organizing have been observed across Latin American countries, there is a need to develop more general theory to explain how women's organizing (past and present) shapes women's decisions to participate politically in newly democratic states. Additionally, though research on the effects organizational membership suggests women's organizations and

NGOs empower women, there are inconsistent findings across studies in regards to the effects of organizations on women's political participation. In the discussion that follows, I employ concepts from research on women's empowerment to identify micro-level processes within women's organizations that influence members' capacity to make choices and act politically.

In order to show that women's organizations are empowering women, we need evidence of processes of empowerment within women's organizations, and we need to be able to connect these processes of empowerment to changes in women's political agency. In other words, we need to be able to show, not only that processes of empowerment exist within women's organizations, but also that these processes increase women's capacities to choose to act politically. In this dissertation, I have thus far provided evidence to show that across democratizing states the political saliency, numbers, and resources of women's organizations have increased over the past twenty years. I have also shown that in these same contexts, women face limited opportunities and have little incentive to interact with state institutions to promote their interests. The evidence in the previous chapter showed that in Guatemala women participate less than men in both institutional and non-institutional politics, but I also confirmed members of women's organizations are more likely than non-members to engage in non-institutional political acts. In this chapter I evaluate the argument that women's organizations in Guatemala empower women politically. To do so, I assess qualitative evidence to show women's organizations encourage members to participate primarily through non-institutional channels by enhancing women's capacities, motivations, and opportunities for non-institutional political action.

Before outlining my theory, it is important to reiterate the definitions of key theoretical concepts. To explain political empowerment, we must be clear on what empowerment is. Empowerment is commonly understood as involving a process of change, and it is assumed to involve a series of actions that move us toward a particular end or result. Generally empowerment is understood as producing a movement from insight to action as a result of transformations that enhance individuals' capacity to make choices and influence decisions (Kabeer 1999; Mosedale 2005). The result of these processes, as it has been conceptualized in the literature, is referred to as agency. Empowerment is said to have occurred when individuals experience an increase in agency, where agency refers to "an actor's ability to envisage options and make meaningful choices" (Aslop and Heinsohn 2005). Put simply, agency refers to actions individuals decide to take to promote their interests. Recall that actions are considered political when they are intended to reach beyond the economic self-interests of the individual and they have implications for decisions about the distribution of resources among individuals in society. Thus, we can say that organizations politically empower women when processes within organizations increase individuals' capacity to exercise political agency.

In order to politically empower women, organizations must increase women's capacity to choose to act and promote their interests. In order for individuals to be able to exercise choice, the following conditions must be met: there must be alternatives and alternatives must not only exist, but they must be seen to exist by those exercising choice (Aslop and Heinsohn 2005; Kabeer 2005). I argue that women's organizations increase women's political agency by affecting members' opportunities, motivations, or capacities to act politically.

Women's organizations can influence opportunities that determine how women choose to act. Opportunities refer to, "consistent, though not necessarily formal or permanent, dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for action by affecting people's expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow 1998, 77). Women's organizations can increase opportunities for political action by either expanding the range of available alternatives or by increasing women's incentives to act politically. Women's organizations have been shown to expand the range of choices available to women when they choose not to adopt confrontational objectives or challenge established elites (Fallon et al 2012; Gonzalez and Kampwirth 2001; Luciak 2001; Molyneux 2001; Silliman 1999; Vargas 1999) Experiences within women's organizations also influence members' incentives and their perceptions of the choices available to them. Women's organizational experiences have been found to influence "relationships of dependence, interdependence and autonomy which characterize gender relations in different cultures, the structures of risks, incentives and opportunities which they generate and therefore the particular trajectories which processes of empowerment are likely to take" (Kabeer 2001, 66).

Women's organizations can also increase women's political agency by transforming individuals' capacity to make choices and to take action. In order for an individual to act politically, they must have the capacity to do so. One might have the desire and need to participate, but if they do not have knowledge of how they can participate, if they do not have the financial means to travel to a polling booth, or if they don't have the time to participate in a political campaign, they will not do so. I argue that self-determined, that is democratic, political action requires that individuals have the capacity to make the choice to act. The capacity to envision a different future is an important antecedent to action.

Often, marginalized groups will internalize limited opportunities (Nussbaum 2000). In these cases empowerment depends as much on the existence of external opportunities for action as it does on individuals' feelings of competence, motivation, and desire to act. (Narayan 2005). In conclusion, capacity determines how individuals make choices, which choices individuals identify as being able to make, as well as what actions individuals take to promote their interests.

Women's organizations can increase individuals' capacity to make choices by increasing individuals' assessments of their own capacities. If an individual is made to feel more capable as a result of their experience in women's organizations, their confidence to make political choices is likely to increase as well. Also, through their experiences in women's organizations, women learn to identify and express their interests, as well as how they can act to advocate for their interests as women individually and collectively. Studies of the effects of microfinance on women's empowerment find membership in such groups led to wider impacts, including knowledge of wider societal concerns and improved self-confidence in dealing with government personnel (Banerjee and Duflo 2011; Kabeer 2011). Experiences in organizations may also increase individual capacities to choose and act by increasing the information women need to make choices and take action. For example, during periods of democratic transition, many Latin America women's organizations served as sources of information about government's role in human rights abuses (Chinchilla 1990; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Viterna and Fallon 2008). Today women's organizations in Guatemala provide information to members about political events and issues that impact the needs and interests of women in the group (Beck 2014; IDEA 2010; Torres 2008). Women's organizations also enhance women's capacities for political



participation when they provide material resources for their members. Many women's organizations provide financial resources to members' in the form of employment, income generating projects, or small loans. Other organizations address the material needs of members' and their families by providing infrastructure projects or services such as health care and childcare. Thus, women's organizations empower members by providing informational, material, or collective resources to enhance women's political capacities.

Women's organizations also influence women's political agency by affecting women's motivations. Individual action of any kind is the result of individual motivation, meaning the desire to act a certain way. Political agency, by definition entails not just action but the choice to act. Thus, self-determined political action requires that individuals have the will and desire to act. If one does not see action as necessary or valuable, then we would not expect individuals to act. If they do, the action would not constitute an exercise of political agency. In order to determine if women's organizations are politically empowering women we must establish which actions taken by women represent an exercise of political agency. This requires attending to the value and meanings women attach to specific political acts. Identifying women's motivations for political action is necessary in order to specify how experiences within women's organizations influence individuals' decisions and choices about how to act politically.

Women's organizations can influence women's motivations and choices to participate politically when an organization explicitly advocates for or promotes a particular kind of political action. Women's organizations can also enhance women's motivations to take non-institutional action by reinforcing women's view that institutional approaches are ineffective strategies for promoting women's interests and meeting

women's needs. Because women's organizations tend not to actively encourage women's participation in institutional politics, women's experiences within these organizations do not counter commonly held views across women in democratizing states that institutional political participation is an ineffective way to express their needs and have them met. By reinforcing the motivations of those already inclined to engage in non-institutional politics, women's organizations tend to encourage women's non-institutional political participation.

I argue that in order for women to be empowered to participate politically they must have the capacity, opportunity, and motivations to choose to act politically. If individuals have the capacity to act and the opportunity to act, but no motive to do so, then they will not act unless forced by someone else to do so. What this study is interested in explaining is how women's organizations affect women's political agency. Consequently, the analysis in this chapter focuses on identifying and explaining the effects of organizations on women's choices to act politically. Women's organizations will have a positive effect on women's political agency and empower members politically, when experiences within organizations increase members' capacity, motivation, or opportunity to act. In contemporary democratizing states, women's organizations tend to increase women's capacities, motivations, and opportunities for non-institutional political participation. This is because women have limited opportunities and little motivation to participate in institutional politics (Fallon et al 2012; Jaquette 2009). Additionally, as the evidence in this chapter will show, women's organizational experiences rarely increase individuals' motivations or opportunities for institutional action. As a result, members of women's organizations are unlikely to be empowered to participate in institutional politics. On the other hand, because women's organizations increase women's motivations,

capacities, and opportunities for non-institutional action, members of women's organizations are likely to be empowered to act to promote their interests through non-institutional channels.

### **Women's Political Participation in the Guatemalan Context**

Before we can identify processes within women's organizations that empower women to participate politically, we must have a clear understanding of what women's political participation looks like in the Guatemalan context. To understand how organizational experiences influence women's motivations, capacities, and opportunities in ways that increase women's political agency, we must (1) identify how women in these organizations are choosing to act and (2) specify the meanings and motivations women associate with political action (Bayard de Volo 2015). Without knowing how women are acting or the specific meanings they attach to their actions, we cannot identify how organizations influence women's political agency, specifically women's choices about how to act to promote their interests. To achieve these objectives, this section presents evidence from my observations and interviews with members of women's organizations to show how women are acting politically and how women understand their political action as promoting their interests and the collective of interests of women.

In discussing women's political action I focus on identifying variations in forms, frequency, and meanings associated with two types of political action, non-institutional and institutional. By documenting variations in women's political participation as well as differences in women's experiences with institutional and non-institutional politics, I establish in which cases members' political action qualifies as an exercise of political agency. Thus, my analysis of women's political participation provides the empirical

foundation needed to determine how women's organizations influence individuals' decisions to participate politically and if women are politically empowered as a result of their organizational experiences.

I have argued that in democratizing states, particularly in contexts where institutions are weak and unresponsive, non-institutional political action is often perceived by citizens to be more effective than institutional actions for achieving individual and collective goals. Thus, to fully explain factors influencing Guatemalan women's decisions to act politically, my analysis of women's political agency examines both institutional and non-institutional political acts. In this section, I identify common characteristics across these two categories of political action to describe how women choose to act within and outside of formal political institutions. This analysis shows not only is there more variation in how organizational members participate in non-institutional politics, but also that members engage more frequently in non-institutional, rather than institutional, political acts. This analysis confirms evidence from previous chapters as well as other studies of women's political participation in Latin America that find women, and poor women especially, tend to participate at high rates in non-institutional politics (Berger 2008; Holzner 2010).

I discuss women's views of their choice to act politically in terms of their evaluations of 'effective' political action, meaning those actions understood by women as promoting women's needs and collective interests. I argue women's goals and what they perceive as effective actions for achieving those goals determine the value women associate with particular forms of political action. By identifying which actions women identify as 'effective', I am able to distinguish which political actions women choose to take to promote

their interests and how they understand the consequences of those actions. In the case of Guatemala, analyses of qualitative data reveal members of women's organizations participate in both institutional and non-institutional political acts, but that the meanings they attribute to each form of political action are distinct. To distinguish institutional from non-institutional political acts I employ the following definitions. *Institutional political participation* refers to actions by which women participate in electoral politics and/or acts that involve direct communication with members or agencies of government. *Non-institutional political participation* refers to political actions that occur outside of formal institutional channels. The following analyses of women's political participation show women hold distinct views in regards to the effectiveness of institutional and non-institutional political participation. While the majority of the women I spoke with tend to view participation in non-institutional politics as an effective way to promote their interests, their experiences participating in institutional politics have caused them to question the effectiveness of this form of political action.

### **Women's Institutional Political Participation**

In regards to women's institutional political participation, qualitative evidence illustrates that members of women's organizations are choosing to participate in institutional politics, and their choice to do so is driven by a desire to promote collective interests. However, the evidence presented here also reveals that women's experiences participating in institutional politics have taught members of women's organizations this is an ineffective strategy for realizing their goals. This indicates even though women are choosing to participate in institutional politics, engaging in this type of action tends to decrease women's motivations to continue to participate in institutional politics.

Across my respondents, there exist variations in women's form of institutional political participation. Of those members who participated in institutional politics, individuals expressed engaging in political campaigns, contacting the municipal government to request resources and support, participating in municipal-level representative bodies, making demands of national-level institutions, and voting in elections. The institutional actions women reported engaging in most frequently were voting and contacting members of the municipal government. I describe each of these actions in terms of how frequently women reported participating as well as how they view their choice to participate and the effectiveness of participation.

All respondents reported they voted. This initial finding would suggest that women in organizations value and prioritize voting when deciding how and whether to act politically; however, how women talk about voting suggests something different. The comments from multiple women suggest that the act of voting is not seen as a choice or an effective means of ensuring their interests are represented in political decisions. Even though organizational members report voting at high rates, they are not doing so because they expect to effectively influence decisions within formal political institutions. Many explained that they voted because it is their 'duty' or 'obligation' as citizens, and only occasionally do they report seeing positive results from voting. One woman responded:

You have to try, because otherwise we will never be able to achieve anything here in Guatemala. At the very least we need to vote for the mayor, because he may help us, but with the president it is much more difficult, they never do anything for our community.

This sentiment, that women should vote despite uncertainty about the effectiveness of voting, is one other women expressed as well. One member conceded that it was important to vote to ensure that the person she supports wins. At the same time, this

woman recognized that governing officials could not be trusted to make the “right choices” for the country, her community, and her personally. Another woman who reported voting, acknowledged she is not interested in institutional politics, because she is never familiar with the candidate that wins. This gets at another important point that was made by a municipal representative in regards to how women understand voting. She observed that for many Guatemalan women, particularly rural, indigenous women, a woman’s vote is often uninformed, and the choice of how, and whether, to vote is frequently made by the husband. Though voting is a frequent occurrence among members of women’s organizations, it is a political act women engage in not out of choice but out of a sense of duty or obligation. Additionally, Guatemalan women’s rates of voting at the national-level are relatively high<sup>23</sup>, but the responses of organizational members show that women do not see this action as an effective means to achieve their goals.

In addition to voting at high rates, contacting municipal government was another way that respondents commonly engaged in institutional politics. Women, when they did interact with local government, did so as members of women’s organizations not as individuals. This provides evidence to confirm through experiences participating in organizations, women come to identify their collective needs as women as well as collective needs of their community (Baldez 2002; Banaszak 2005; Bayard de Volo 2006; Berger 2006; Chinchilla 1990; Gonzalez and Kampwirth 2001; Jaquette 1994, 2009; Luciak 2001; Mansbridge and Morris 2001; Mohanty 1991; Rowlands 1997; Silliman 1999). When members of women’s organizations do contact local government, it is often on behalf of the

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<sup>23</sup> The Latin American Public Opinion Project found in 2012 that 75% of Guatemalan women participated in the most recent election, placing Guatemala in an intermediate position among Latin American countries in terms of rates of women’s electoral participation (Azpuru 2012).

organization. A municipal official observed, "When women come into our office, they are already organized, but they come to us [the municipal government] seeking additional resources to support their efforts". When women talk about their experiences, they recognize that being collectively organized does motivate them to contact municipal government. However, respondents also tend to understand that contacting local government rarely is an effective means to achieve their goals. One woman said the following:

Even if we do organize, we don't talk to the officials in the government because sometimes the opportunity doesn't exist in our municipality. If we do attempt to talk to the municipality, they don't respond to us. They ignore us.

Another woman was more critical of the potential for local government to represent her interests. Her views reflect the expressions of other women who have chosen to work outside of local government because the municipality is not seen as representing the interests of women. When asked if the organization would attempt to work with the mayor, she said:

We look to the mayor only so we can legalize the organization. We are not going to involve ourselves in [municipal institutions]. We are going to fight for ourselves. We don't have confidence in the mayor because he has not shown us anything.

Thus, according to the individuals I interviewed, women are contacting local government to make requests in support of organizational goals; however as organizational members' responses show, these efforts have often been ineffective and consequently have discouraged women from continuing to contact municipal government.

Few women I spoke with acted as representatives in municipal governing boards; however, it is telling to consider how they understand and describe these experiences when they do happen. Similar to trends observed for other institutional political acts, women recognize



the opportunity to participate institutionally, but their experience participating in municipal boards and contacting national institutions has shown them that it is not an effective means to exercise choice and have their interests represented. Of the three women who said they had participated as a representative in municipal government, two were required to do so by the organization. One women's organization even made the receipt of organizational benefits contingent upon members' attendance at municipal meetings. For the one respondent who entered municipal government of her own will, she was criticized by women and men in her community for her decision to participate. This ultimately discouraged her from continuing as a representative in her municipal government. In describing her experience this woman said:

It has been two years since I participated, but it was very trying for me. I was the only woman. I was criticized by women and men [who said], 'Why is this woman there? Why is she interested?' After that I lost interest. One of my friends said she would support me, and that I should keep trying. Now I don't, not without problems.

In conclusion, members of women's organizations do engage in institutional politics with the aim of furthering their goals and promoting their interests. However, these experiences have influenced women's understanding of institutional political action as an uncertain at best, and ineffective at worst, strategy for achieving their goals. This suggests even if women are choosing to participate in institutional politics, engaging in this type of political action may decrease women's motivation to choose to continue to participate in this way. Qualitative evidence shows by engaging with political institutions, women are exercising political agency. Women choose and decide to participate in institutional political acts such as voting and contacting municipal government in order to further their political goals. However, in the Guatemalan context, encouraging women to participate in institutional politics may actually decrease women's propensity to continue to choose to

act through institutional channels. Thus, even if organizations are increasing women's institutional political participation, they may not increase women's political agency. As the evidence presented here shows, more often women's experiences with institutional participation decrease women's incentives to act through political institutions to promote their interests.

### **Women's Non-Institutional Political Participation**

I argue arriving at a valid theoretical explanation of women's political participation in developing democratic contexts requires a grounded understanding of women's political action as it occurs both within and outside of formal political institutions. As the previous analysis has shown, though organizational members participate institutionally, women's experiences engaging with government often shape women's perceptions of institutional politics in a negative way. Women come to understand institutional channels as an ineffective means to have their interests represented and their needs addressed. Consequently, organizational members more often act outside of formal political institutions when exercising political agency. From my analysis of organizational members' non-institutional political participation, I conclude that women in women's organizations are more likely to participate in non-institutional rather than institutional politics. In what follows, I discuss three forms of non-institutional political participation identified most frequently by organizational members and the meanings women associate with each of the following: political discussion, acting collectively to address the needs of others, and mobilizing others to participate in non-institutional politics.

Interview data confirms that members of women's organizations frequently participated in political discussions<sup>24</sup> outside of formal institutions. Discussions that were categorized as 'political' intended to influence distributional processes, decisions, and outcomes (Albrecht 2008; Goodin and Dryzek 1980; Laswell 1958; Teorell 2006). In meetings and activities, such as workshops, women engage in political discussions to identify common goals, to share experiences, and to acquire and distribute knowledge and information. Through organizations, women are likely to encounter opportunities to participate in political discussions that influence both how they act and how they understand their actions (Anderson 2014; Berger 2006; Leighly 1996; Molyneux 2001; O'Neill and Gidengil 2006; Olson 1965; Putnam 1993; Rowlands 1997; Wageman and Baker 1996). This finding is confirmed by my discussions with members of Guatemalan women's organizations. Of the women I spoke with, 36% expressed participating in political discussions within and outside of their own organization.

Discussions tend to revolve around sharing information, identifying collective needs, and recognizing opportunities and constraints in regards to women's choices and actions. In addition to confirming participation in discussions outside of formal political institutions, members of women's organizations express optimism when describing opportunities for women to participate in political discussions.

We realize the reality is that there has been a change and there are more opportunities for women, because now if women want to learn and talk with others, there are spaces. All one needs is the motive and one can do this.

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth recognizing here that quantitative results found no significant relationship between membership and political discussion. However, qualitative evidence indicates this is not because women are not engaging in 'political' discussion. Given that many respondents understand 'politics' as referring to elections, government, and politicians, responses to this survey question are unlikely to reflect women's participation in discussions related to distributional issues more broadly.

Not only do women in these organizations acknowledge the existence of opportunities to participate in political discussions, but they also perceive participation in political discussion as valuable for identifying collective needs within the community. One indigenous woman from a rural community on Guatemala's western coast credits organizations as providing forums to discuss and identify collective needs at the community level. In describing her experience she said:

By organizing ourselves we began to see which were the most important needs of all of the [members of our community]. As an organization we conducted a study, and we realized that the most important need for all of us was mother earth, our land. No one had a place for living or for planting. From there began the idea of what we could do. What we could do to make the government see the land ... all of the land belongs us. Because the land belonged to us before the Spanish came.

Women's comments on their experiences talking with other members reflect that participating in political discussions is seen as an effective strategy to identify and address women's interests. These responses confirm findings from research on women's organizing, namely that discussions among women enable members of organizations to recognize their common needs and interests as women (Alvarez 1990; Bayard de Volo 2006; Beck 2014; Berger 2006; Kabeer 2001; Mansbridge and Morris 2001). In describing her experience of participating in political discussions with other women, an older single mother from the Guatemalan highlands spoke to this:

We women have many problems, a lot of work, and many responsibilities, so this [organization] is a space for women, it provides the support for women to manage their problems, their work. We try to do this. This is why we are here. If someone is hurt or has a problem we address it by listening and providing a solution.

Thus, political discussions are not only seen as important for identifying community needs, but they are also seen as a necessary and effective strategy for women to solve common problems and achieve collective goals. Women with whom I spoke also recognized

participation in discussions with members and individuals outside of the organization as valuable. Respondents emphasized that these experiences provided women opportunities to travel, learn, share ideas with others, and gain confidence. The following comment from one woman participating in a women's business cooperative reflects the idea of many of the members I spoke with. She describes her experience participating in capacity building workshops in the following way:

Our first outing was to Chimaltenango. They took us to a training to learn how to make Christmas baskets because no one knew how. Thanks to our organization, most importantly the other women, we have learned so much. We have been able to teach others. They invite us to come.

As this quote suggests, members of women's organizations value participating in organizational activities where they learn from other women. They recognize that interacting with and learning from others increases women's influence by enabling women to teach and share knowledge with other individuals in their community. For members of women's organizations, political discussions are seen as an effective strategy to identify collective needs and interests, to solve problems, and share information.

In addition to engaging in political discussions, members often participate in collective acts to address the needs of their community and women within and outside of their organization. Beyond women's organizations, my respondents participate in mixed gender NGOs, informal community groups, religious groups, and organizations at their children's school. Women recognize opportunities to act collectively to promote their interests and influence political decisions outside of formal political institutions. They recognize that this form of political participation is effective because it allows them to achieve collective goals. As the following comment illustrates, acting collectively with other

women outside of formal political institutions is seen as an effective strategy for addressing women's shared concerns:

We [women] all have the potential to solve whatever problem. First we have to identify the problem ourselves. With the group, a problem arises, and with the capacity of all the members we can solve the problem. And even when we can't solve the problem we can get through it together.

Finally, members of women's organizations frequently expressed having acted to mobilize other individuals, both men and women, to participate in non-institutional politics. Discussions with members of women's organizations confirm women perceive themselves as having opportunities to mobilize other individuals to engage in non-institutional political acts. Women saw their successes in non-institutional politics as influencing others' views on non-institutional political participation. One woman described how her experiences engaging in non-institutional politics changed her husband's perceptions and actions:

Because he was... his thinking was... different. We were doing political work, but I didn't show him my papers. My husband didn't know what it was I was involved in. He was far from home at that time, but when he was there in the house I tried to get him to allow it. Now he is a revolutionary. He has changed because of my experience.

Thus, members of women's organizations acknowledge that they have the opportunity, through their own participation in non-institutional politics, to influence the perspectives of others and encourage non-institutional participation.

Members of women's organizations also mention encouraging their children to participate in non-institutional politics. In describing her experiences one woman said, "It is not going to help our families if we remain closed up in our houses. If our children don't see us participating, they are not going to do it. So changes in our children come from us". As this quote illustrates, members see themselves as responsible for mobilizing others to

participate in non-institutional politics. Women, by providing examples for other individuals, see their own participation in non-institutional politics as an effective strategy to realize social change (Gonzalez and Kampwirth 2001; Kabeer 2011; Titeca and Vervisch 2008; Vargas 1999).

According to members of women's organizations, another reason to encourage non-institutional participation is to promote women's interests. Members mobilize other women to participate in non-institutional politics because this form of political participation is seen as the most effective means for realizing women's goals (Viterna and Fallon 2008). By speaking to women's needs and offering benefits that reflect women's practical and material interests, organizational members mobilize women who might not otherwise decide to participate in non-institutional politics. The following provides an example:

She [the member of the women's organization] encouraged me to participate by inviting me to a course on cooking. Participating in these activities was difficult for me because I was very shy, but I said to myself, I am going to participate because for me it is practical.

Organizational members frequently encourage other women to participate in non-institutional politics by speaking to women's needs and offering benefits that address women's practical and material interests.

This analysis of women's institutional and non-institutional political participation has shown members of women's organizations are indeed exercising political agency when they engage in both categories of political action. In both forums, they exercise their capacity to make decisions and act to further goals that extend beyond their economic self-interest. However, a comparison of women's experiences participating in institutional and non-institutional politics indicates the meanings women attach to each are distinct. These

distinctions are best described in terms of how women see each type of action relating to their capacity to make and exercise choice and the likelihood that their interests will be recognized and adequately addressed. Women's experiences with institutional politics have taught members their capacity to influence decisions within formal institutions is limited. These findings support my argument that despite the adoption of democratic reforms intended to provide opportunities for women to participate in formal institutions at the local and national level, few opportunities exist for women to effectively promote their interests through institutional politics. Members commonly acknowledge that even when they do manage to access formal political institutions, they cannot expect their interests to be upheld or their goals realized.

On the other hand, women's experiences participating in non-institutional politics have taught the opposite in regards to the choices and interests of women. Members of women's organizations recognize that they have a variety of means by which they can engage in non-institutional political acts. Members both seek out and take advantage of opportunities for non-institutional political participation. In addition to recognizing the high degree of opportunity they have to engage in non-institutional politics, women's experiences of non-institutional political participations have taught them that through these channels their interests are more likely to be heard and upheld. Thus, members of women's organizations are more likely to participate in non-institutional politics because there is more opportunity to do so and because they understand this form of political action to be most effective at representing their interests and enabling them to achieve their goals.



In this section I described how women decide to act politically and what motivates them to engage in both institutional and non-institutional politics. I also discussed the meanings and values women ascribe to different acts that constitute women's institutional and non-institutional political participation in the Guatemalan context. In the following section I examine women's experiences within women's organizations to show women's organizations influence women's decisions to participate politically by affecting members' capacities, motivations, and opportunities for institutional and non-institutional participation.

### **Analyzing Processes of Empowerment within Women's Organizations**

To explain the effects of women's organizations and MFIs on women's political participation I describe processes of empowerment that lead women to participate politically. Here I detail processes within organizations that shape capacities, motivations, and opportunities for women to exercise choice and act politically. From this analysis, I conclude that these organizations tend to decrease women's motivations to participate in institutional politics while simultaneously enhancing members' capabilities, motivations, and opportunities to advocate for their interests outside of formal political institutions.

### ***Empowerment Processes and Women's Capacity for Action***

I argue, in order for an individual to act politically, they must have the capacity to do so. Having the motivation or opportunity to participate is not enough. In order for an individual to exercise political agency, individuals must have the opportunity to choose to act, the desire to make the choice to act, and the capacity to act on that choice. In this section I focus on the role of individual capacities to identify processes within women's

organizations that enhance women's ability to choose to act in institutional and non-institutional politics. The evidence presented in this section shows that women's organizations increase the capacities of members to engage in institutional and non-institutional politics.

First, women's organizations enhance women's capacity for political action by transforming members' political consciousness. Women's organizations have in the past served as sources of information about government's role (Baldez 2003; Beever 2010; Caldeira 1996; Craske 1998; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Htun 2002; Jaquette 2009; Luciak 2001; Molyneux 2001; Schwindt-Bayer 2013). According to my respondents, organizations continue to provide information about political events and issues that impact the needs and interests of members. Through their experience within these organizations, women in Guatemala come to learn about how political events are playing out, how they are affected by these events, and how they can get involved to influence these events. One organizational member made the point that in addition to giving her the experience she needed to work with other groups, the organization provided the information she needed to become aware of collective needs and strategies to address them:

I worked a long time with the campesina organization. We [women] began to see the needs that were most important for all of us. We realized that the need for land was shared between everyone. We came to see what we needed to do to recover the land that was ours. All of the land was in the hands of a few people, the finceros. Meanwhile we [poor women], of whom there are many, don't have even the smallest piece of land.

Not only do organizations affect members' understandings of their needs and interests, but they also increase women's capacity for political action by enhancing individuals' skills and confidence in their own abilities. Many women identified concrete skills that they gained through capacity building activities, such as knowledge about how to

form and legalize an organization in Guatemala, or how to seek out and acquire financial resources to support their efforts. However, the vast majority of women I interviewed made reference to the psychological impact of these trainings, namely that workshops enabled them to realize their own capacity to make an impact on the lives of members of their family and community. The following comment from a new member of a women's agricultural cooperative is illustrative:

In my experience, perhaps it is not much... it has only been a year since I began working with the organization. Unfortunately only this year did I begin to come with these women and participate in trainings, but I came to a realization in the trainings that I could learn, that I could improve myself. Often we don't go out because we have our children, but the trainings opened my mind. In the beginning I didn't understand what I was capable of. I have begun to learn, and I will continue.

One client of the MFI I studied reflected a similar sentiment in regards to how her experience working with the organization shaped her self-perception:

I have changed as a result of my experience with this organization. I think this, like all of the experiences of life, has caused me to continue to evaluate and observe the reality that for women it is important to go out and participate because if we are closed up in our house all of our life, we will not grow and we will not help our family.

Taken together, responses from members of women's organizations provide evidence to show that women's organizations are increasing the capacity of members to act politically. Through their experiences in the organizations, members become aware of how their own interests relate to the interests of other women and other individuals in their community. Organizational experiences also increase women's skills and levels of self-confidence. However, because members tend to view institutional action as ineffective, increasing members' capacity for political action is likely to result in women choosing to participate in non-institutional forums.

***Empowerment Processes and Women's Motivation for Action***

I argue women's organizations enhance members' political agency by influencing women's motivations and incentives to participate politically. The evidence presented in this section illustrates women's organizations encourage members to participate in non-institutional politics. My respondents confirm organizational experiences enable women to identify collective interests. Additionally, they recognize experiences within women's organizations motivate them to act to promote these interests. The evidence shows women's organizations do increase members' motivations to act politically. However, experiences in women's organizations have also led members to value certain forms of political action over others. For many respondents, experiences within women's organizations increase incentives and motivations to participate in activities outside of formal institutional politics.

Organizations teach members they have not only a right, but also a responsibility, to act to promote and protect the interests of themselves and their families. The leader of a small environmental organization spoke to this:

We have participated in workshops on women's rights, domestic violence and gender equality. These trainings have caused us to awaken, to realize that women are among the most discriminated, but we have the opportunity to change that. Because if we act on our rights it is not only the women who benefit, but we will see the change in our children. By becoming aware, we are planting seeds for our children.

Through their experiences in these organizations, women learn how to identify and express their interests. Women become aware of their rights as women, and they learn strategies to realize their needs and advocate for their individual and collective interests as women. They learn how they can act and where to go to express their needs and interests to influence decisions that affect their lives. Women within these organizations frequently

expressed recognition that collective action, working with other women, was how they came to envision alternatives and act to create change. One businesswoman, a long time member of an MFI, and leader of her credit group, made the following comment:

We all have the capacity to resolve whatever problem, but it is through the group that we can succeed and address them. With the group, a problem arises and we are able to solve it because we believe in the capacity of each woman. If we do not [believe in each woman's capacity] then we fall behind.

Through experiences of learning from other women in these organizations, members come to see acting outside of political institutions as more welcoming to and more supportive of women's interests. Many made reference to feeling emotionally supported by other members, inspired by the women they worked with, and capable of overcoming challenges with the help of other members. This is especially true for women who lack the basic skills needed to participate effectively in institutional politics. Take for example, this comment from a middle aged, indigenous woman participating in one women's organization in the rural highlands:

It is important to participate, to give your time, even though [organizational involvement] doesn't provide us a salary. This is the meaning of organization. I don't know how to read or write, but yes I can recognize that the organization provides a source of support for all of us. Here [this group] is part of our family also. I feel very supported by other women who show their dedication and give their time to the organization.

In addition to learning how to act, women learn that they can act through women's organizations to promote the interest of themselves, their families, and their communities. Organizations allow women to meet their material needs by providing income generating opportunities and access to material goods. When organizations provide material benefits, women are able to provide for their family. Because women are responsible for managing the private sphere in Guatemala, the ability to contribute material resources changes

women's status in the household<sup>25</sup>. Because women gain materially from participating in women's organizations, their husbands and families will support, enable, and often encourage further participation in organizations. Women's participation outside of formal politics comes to be seen as necessary for the financial wellbeing of the household. One member spoke to this:

We are not just housewives. We are the ones who care for the children and help our husbands pay for the education of our children. We want to help provide the food for our family. For all of the members of our group, this is the benefit of the organization. This is our motivation for participating in this organization. We organize so that we can bring [financial resources] back to the household.

When women are able to effectively respond to individual, household, and community needs through organizational involvement, their confidence and self-esteem increases. One woman made mention of the pride she felt in being able to contribute to her family when she said, "Our project, the restaurant, still lacks important equipment, but we feel good that we are already bringing in business and earning an income for our families. This enables us to grow personally." The leader of another women's organization commented on the reinforcing positive effects of her experience participating in non-institutional politics saying, "When we succeed at bringing projects to our community, the community recognizes that we are doing good work. They support us, and we feel we can continue our efforts."

In summary, the comments from members of women's organizations indicate that organizations influence women's motivation to act politically. However, because of their organizational experiences, women come to value non-institutional forms of political

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<sup>25</sup> Numerous studies have recognized that increases in economic resources and financial independence enhance women's status in the household and ability to influence decisions in the private sphere (Beck 2014; Hashemi et al 1996; Kabeer 2005, 2011; Pitt et al 2006; Rankin 2002).

action. At the same time, the evidence presented here does not indicate that women's organizations are increasing women's motivations to participate in institutional politics. Consequently, members of women's organizations, when they choose to act politically, will be motivated to act primarily in non-institutional forums.

### ***Empowerment Processes and Women's Opportunities for Action***

Political opportunities determine individuals' chance to participate and individuals' incentives to choose to participate. Women's opportunities to participate politically are determined in part by factors outside of women's organizations, but organizations will enhance women's political participation when they offer members new or added opportunities to participate (Booth and Richard 2000; Burns et al 1997; Jackson 2002; Karp and Banducci 2007; Kittilson 2005; Lubertino 2003; Morgan et al 2008; Stolle and Micheletti 2006). In democratizing states, weak and unrepresentative democratic institutions, do not have the same effect on women's political participation as institutions in established, consolidated democratic contexts. In democratizing states institutions tend to limit the opportunities, motivations, and capacities for women to participate in institutional politics (Conway et al 1998; Fallon et al 2012; Vargas and Wieringa 1998). Many women I spoke with recognized this limitation. One organizational leader's comments illustrate the common perception that limited opportunities exist for women to participate political institutions:

Still spaces [in institutions] are not open. It is still a struggle. We have succeeded in establishing a women's office in the municipal government, but this office is not effective. The law requires that the mayor meet with the COMUDES [the group of women elected to represent women's interests in the municipal government], but our mayor never has.

Rather than providing opportunities for female members to participate in political institutions to satisfy their own needs, needs of their families, or needs of their communities, women's organizations more often provide opportunities for non-institutional political participation. They provide opportunities for non-institutional participation by partnering with and connecting members to other social movement organizations, by providing forums for women to discuss politics, and by providing opportunities for women to collaborate and coordinate for collective non-institutional political action. When I asked one woman if she participated in institutional politics, she offered the following response, "I am not participating in [institutional] politics now, because now it is very different. Now we are fighting to get our community ahead by forming businesses [on the part of the organization]".

Though women's organizations provide members with opportunities to engage in other organizations, discuss politics, and mobilize collectively, they rarely partner with or connect women with formal political institutions. Women's organizations are unlikely to increase women's opportunities for institutional political participation for a number of reasons. First, though these organizations provide opportunities for women to discuss institutional politics, many respondents observe that the tone of political discussion is often negative. In my observations, these discussions tended to reinforce members' view that they lack opportunities to affect political institutions. Many of my respondents attributed limited opportunities for effective political actions to corrupt and unresponsive political institutions. Thus, rather than enabling women to identify opportunities for institutional participation, women's organizations reinforce perceptions of members that



opportunities are limited and outcomes uncertain. In speaking to her experience working with the local government, one woman expressed the following:

We have asked for support from the municipality, but we still have not received a response. So instead we decided to look to other sources of support, because we are unable to work with the local government. We seek out other organizations to achieve the things we need. Perhaps [organizations] don't meet all of our needs, but at least they provide something.

The history of women's organizations and social movement organizations generally in Latin America can also explain why organizations tend not to create opportunities for political participation. Women's organizations emerged to oppose, rather than cooperate with state institutions. As such, many movement leaders and organizational members came to see remaining autonomous and independent from the state as central to the survival and success of movements that sought to overturn historically powerful coalitions of political, economic, and military elites (Alvarez 2009; Fallon et al 2012; Razavi 2001; Vargas 1999). The consequence for women's organizations has been the maintenance of a culture of autonomy among organizational members and leaders (Vargas and Wieringa 1998). This is confirmed by my interviews. Women's responses indicate many members see collaboration with the state as opening the door for organizations to be co-opted by corrupt and self-interested political elites. One member's statement clearly reflects this sentiment:

Local government has failed us. Politicians are corrupt and irresponsible. They are the reason that our community has not progressed. To be effective in our struggle we must work with other organizations and come up with our own solutions.

In conclusion, the evidence presented above shows that women's organizations are creating opportunities for women to participate politically. However, more often than not, these are opportunities for non-institutional, rather than institutional, participation. Also, women's experiences in organizations reinforce the view that opportunities for effective

institutional political action are limited. Consequently, political strategies that promote non-institutional action are increasingly likely to be supported by members of women's organizations. Members recognize not only that opportunities to engage in non-institutional politics exist, but also that taking advantage of these opportunities is an effective way to promote their interests and organizational goals.

## **Conclusion**

Results from my qualitative analysis contribute to existing research that links processes of empowerment to women's agency by specifying the form of political actions that result from the processes of empowerment shown to operate in Guatemalan women's organizations. The analysis presented here supports my argument that theories of empowerment can be used to explain the effects of women's organizations on women's political participation in developing democratic contexts. By applying the concepts of empowerment and agency, this chapter identified processes within women's organizations that shape women's ability to make choices and act politically.

Given the results of my qualitative analysis and findings from previous research on the political consequences of women's organizing in democratizing states, I conclude the following in regards to the effects of women's organizations on women's political participation. Firstly, as a result of experiences within these organizations, Guatemalan women continue to remain independent from institutions of the state. Because women often gain materially from participating in women's organizations, their families support and encourage them to act through organizations rather than institutions of the state to achieve material objectives. Women's organizations also foster women's autonomy by reinforcing the value and effectiveness of non-institutional political action. Organizations,

by providing non-institutional forums for political action, influence women's motivations and opportunities to act politically. Because these forums are often seen by members to be supportive, representative and responsive, women tend to take advantage of new opportunities for non-institutional political participation. At the same time organizations rarely create new opportunities for women to effectively participate in institutional politics.

Secondly, women's organizations tend to encourage members to advocate for their rights and interests primarily through non-institutional channels. Women rarely choose to advocate for their rights in formal institutions of the state. This is because their experiences within women's organizations tend to reinforce the view that state institutions will not respond to their demands. Though women's organizations increase members' awareness of their collective interests, members also come to learn they can most effectively promote their rights and interests by acting outside of formal institutions.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

### Summary of Main Findings

Though women's organizations are promoted as leading to women's empowerment and political participation (Alvarez 1999; Bystydzienski 1992; Rai 2000; Swiss 2011; World Bank 2012), scant attention has been given to examining the relationship between women's organizational involvement and women's political participation in democratizing states. While research on organizational involvement and political participation in developed democracies has found organizations to provide important skills and resources, acting as pathways to women's political participation (Leighley 1990; Norris 2011; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al 1995), empirical evidence from democratizing states has produced contradictory findings about the effects of NGOs and women's organizations on women's political empowerment and participation (Alvarez 1999, 2000; Bayard de Volo 2006; Beck 2014; Berger 2006; Blair 1996; Cornwall and Brock 2005; Craske 1998; Edwards and Hulme 1996; Edwards 2013; Jaquette 2009; Kabeer, 2005; Molyneux 2002; Morduch 2000; Oxhorn 2006; Rankin 2002; Silliman 1999; Titeca and Vervisch 2008; Walby 2010; Williams 2004). Given the growth in number and influence of women's organizations in the developing world, the state of empirical analysis, and limits to our theoretical understanding of the effects of these organizations, the aim of this dissertation has been to explain how women's organizations influence individuals' decisions to participate politically. This dissertation contributes to our understanding of the relationship between women's organizations and women's political participation by answering the following questions: Do women's organizations empower members to act politically? If so, how? What are the consequences of participation in women's

organizations for gendered trends in institutional and non-institutional political participation?

To answer these questions this project employed a mixed methods approach that combined case studies, participant observation and informal interview techniques with survey data to analyze and explain the relationship between women's organizations and women's political empowerment in the Guatemalan context. Case study methods served to identify common contextual factors across democratizing states that influence both the nature of women's organizing and women's decisions to participate politically. Survey data and quantitative analyses were used to evaluate both gendered trends in political participation and the relationship between membership in women's organizations and women's participation in institutional and non-institutional politics in Guatemala. Finally, participant observation and informal interviews were used to collect data on women's experiences in women's organizations and the meanings and motivations women attach to various acts of political participation. This data was analyzed using inductive methods and multiple rounds of coding to identify common characteristics of women's experiences in women's organizations that influence members' decisions to participate politically. By focusing on describing women's experiences within women's organizations, this study goes beyond establishing *if* women's organizations affect women's political participation in democratizing states to specify *how* organizations influence micro-level mechanisms and processes that influence members' decisions to act politically.

The evidence I presented in chapter three, four, and five supports this conclusion. In chapter three, I showed the combined effect of the international women's movement, democratization, domestic women's movements, and neoliberal economic reforms has

enhanced the resources and political saliency of women's organizations in democratizing states. However, women continue to face limited opportunities and have little motivation to participate in institutional politics. Given the political context and gendered nature of politics in democratizing states, this chapter confirmed women have an immediate disincentive to expend their time and resources on efforts to voice their demands through institutional political channels.

Chapter four built on these arguments to describe the relationship between women's organizations and political participation in Guatemala. Analyses of quantitative survey data demonstrated membership is positively associated with higher rates of women's participation in politics generally. However, analyses that controlled for other factors influencing women's political participation and disaggregated institutional and non-institutional participation, illustrated the effects of membership on women's participation differs across institutional and non-institutional acts. The results illustrated women's organizational activism positively influences women's engagement in numerous non-institutional acts. At the same time, membership in women's organizations had a significant, positive effect on only one act of institutional participation. Taken together, findings in this chapter suggested women's organizations have a positive effect on women's political participation, but they are most likely to foster women's engagement in non-institutional politics.

Chapter five served to provide evidence that members' decisions to participate in institutional and non-institutional politics were influenced by their experiences in women's organizations. Results from my qualitative analysis demonstrated in the Guatemalan context women's organizations politically empower women by increasing women's

motivations, capacities, and opportunities to act politically. However, because organizations have a limited positive impact on women's motivations and opportunities for institutional participation, experiences within women's organizations tend to encourage non-institutional rather than institutional participation.

I conclude from these analyses that women's organizations in democratizing states generally, and in Guatemala specifically, do empower women to participate politically, but the effects across institutional and non-institutional acts differ. In democratizing states where institutions are weak and neoliberal reforms and international women's movements support women's organizing outside of institutional politics, it is increasingly likely that women's organizations will empower women by enhancing members' capacities, motivations, and opportunities for non-institutional political action.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has provided evidence to show that women's organizations are most likely to empower members to participate in non-institutional politics. However, the implications of these findings must be qualified in terms of this study's limitations. Some of the principle limitations of this study include a heavy reliance on observations from a single country and a lack of comparative data to confirm difference in the political participation for members' and non results from the effects of women's organizations.

Questions remain as to whether the trends and relationships observed in Guatemala are mirrored in similar, developing democratic settings. If these findings do extend beyond the Guatemalan case, then we could draw for firm conclusion in regards to the relationship between women's organizations and women's political participation in democratizing states more broadly. The evidence presented here, has suggested women's organizations

may actually discourage women's participation in institutional politics. If this is true across contexts and in other newly established democracies, continued support for women's organizations may ultimately encourage and reinforce gender inequalities in institutional politics. However, to better understand the effects of women's organizations on political participation in developing democracies, research must begin by determining if the results observed in Guatemala hold in other contexts.

It is also important to acknowledge that this study has made minimal efforts to explain the effects of other individual-level variables on women's political participation. As the analysis in chapter four made clear, incorporating other explanatory variables into our models of women's political participation may change, and perhaps significantly, the observed relationship between membership and women's political empowerment. While chapter three identified important aspects of the Guatemalan context that shape women's decisions to participate politically, the findings here could be strengthened by a more systematic and comprehensive inclusion of factors aside from women's organizations that shape women's political participation. One such set of variables includes women's political attitudes. Future research would do well to identify how women's political views influence the relationship between women's organizations and women's political participation.

Finally, this study has not been able to sufficiently counter the challenges of endogeneity. This limitation arises from my decision to talk predominantly with members of women's organizations when gathering data to confirm the effects of these organizations on political participation. It may be the case that a certain type of woman chooses to join a women's organization, and it is this type of woman that is most likely to be empowered to



participate in non-institutional politics. Also, because I spoke with women who were already members of an organization, this qualitative evidence does not allow me to say whether these members would have participated in this way without being in the organization. Again, it may be that women I spoke with participate in non-institutional politics because they are inclined to participate this way regardless of their experiences in women's organizations.

### **Theoretical Contribution and Avenues for Future Research**

This dissertation research is motivated by persistent gender inequality in political voice and unsubstantiated claims that women's organizations will politically empower women in ways that increase their political influence. While this study provided the theoretical foundation to clarify how organizational activism affects women's political participation in democratizing states more generally, establishing the validity and generalizability of this framework for explaining women's political empowerment requires testing my theoretical arguments in contexts outside of Guatemala. In the third chapter of this dissertation, I specified contextual factors theorized to influence women's organizing and political participation in democratizing states. One avenue for future research would involve examining how these factors play out in other Latin American countries. This would establish whether the contextual effects I observed in Guatemala explain the participatory consequences of women's organizing in other, most-similar cases.

The theory I have offered about women's political empowerment drew primarily on evidence from Latin America. It would be valuable in future investigations to establish whether my theory holds in other developing regions where the influence of women's organizations has grown significantly in recent years. Understanding how women's

organizations influence women's political empowerment in regions such as Africa and South East Asia would improve our theoretical understanding of the causes and consequences of women's empowerment. Also, examining the effects of these organizations on women's institutional and non-institutional political participation outside of the Guatemalan context provides a means to assess the more general consequences of the boom in feminist NGOs for women's political empowerment in the developing world.

### **Final Conclusions and Implications**

Given the results of my analyses and findings from previous research on the political consequences of women's organizing in democratizing states, I conclude the following in regards to the effects of women's organizations on women's political participation in Guatemala. Firstly, as a result of experiences within these organizations, Guatemalan women continue to remain independent from institutions of the state. Women's organizations foster women's autonomy from state institutions by reinforcing the effectiveness of non-institutional political and by failing to create opportunities or increase motivations for women to interact with political institutions. Through women's organizations, Guatemalan women come to learn that they can, and they are encouraged to, push for their rights as women in non-institutional forums.

The policy implications of these findings are significant. For international organizations and national governments promoting women's organizations as a means to enhance women's voice and presence in institutional politics, these strategies may be having the opposite effect. What is significant is that women's empowerment through women's organizations is not providing a pathway to institutional political participation.

This is not to say that these organizations are not empowering women in ways and that increase their ability to make choices and influence decisions that affect their lives. On the contrary, evidence from interviews with women suggests women's organizations in Guatemala are doing just that. Though it is not clear to what degree women's organizations are in fact increasing women's participation in institutional politics, women's organizations *are* empowering women to engage in non-institutional politics. By reinforcing the value and effectiveness of alternative channels of political participation, women's organizations may actually encourage non-institutional political participation.

The findings of this study are also important for improving understandings of the *gendered* consequences of NGOs in democratizing states. By focusing on explaining the effects of women's organizations on women's political participation, this study addresses the consequences of NGOs for gender dynamics in societies where gender inequalities are significant and persistent. Thus, these findings not only confirm the potential of NGOs to enhance political participation in democratizing states, but also their potential to reduce gender inequalities in political participation by increasing women's participation in non-institutional forums. The positive effect of women's organizations on members' non-institutional political participation is also significant because increasing women's role in non-institutional politics both reflects and encourages reflection and discussion of women's role and position in society. This kind of discourse produces the shifts in norms and collective ideas about women needed to realize institutional and structural changes that enhance women's political power in the long-term.

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## APPENDIX

### A. Description of Methods for Coding and Analyzing Qualitative Data

#### *Research Objectives and Methods of Qualitative Analysis*

The goal of qualitative analysis was to answer the questions of how women's experiences within women's development organizations influence members' decisions to participate in institutional and non-institutional politics, as well as why members are more likely than non-members to engage in non-institutional politics. Is it because women who join women's organizations are already more likely to engage in non-institutional politics? Or, is it because women's organizations enable and motivate members to participate in non-institutional politics? To answer these questions, qualitative analysis focused on observations of women's experiences within women's organizations as well as the effects of these experiences on members' decisions to act politically. To explain how women's organizations influence women's decisions in regards to political participation, I employed concepts and theories from the literature on women's empowerment. Qualitative data was analyzed to identify processes leading to political action, to describe how women's organizational experiences relate to processes of empowerment, and to describe the consequences of this relationship for members' political agency.

The final product of my qualitative coding and analysis was an Excel file that contained all of my coded qualitative data. By putting data into Excel I was able to sort my coded data (interviews, observations, organizational documents, publications, etc.) to identify patterns and relationships between my central theoretical concepts—women's organizations, political empowerment, and political agency. My interpretation of these

patterns served to develop a theory of the relationship between women's organizations and women's political empowerment in Guatemala.

In order to answer the question of whether women's NGOs empower members, we need to be clear on what empowerment is. One of the central goals of my qualitative analysis was to identify subject meanings of empowerment to offer a definition grounded in the experiences of the subjects whose empowerment I sought to understand. In my case these individuals were women participating in women's development organizations in Guatemala. Iterations of qualitative coding and analysis addressed the following themes and questions:

- 1) Grounded concept of empowerment
  - a. How do subjects define and understand empowerment?
  - b. How does this definition relate to definitions in the literature?
- 2) Description of processes of empowerment (as defined by subjects)
  - a. Is there evidence that this is happening in the women's organizations I observe?
  - b. How is it happening?
  - c. What is the consequence for women's political agency?
- 3) Contextual factors influencing empowerment
  - a. What contextual factors do subjects identify as influencing empowerment?
  - b. What contextual factors do I see influencing empowerment?
  - c. How do contextual factors influence women's empowerment?

- d. How does this relate to the literature examining the effects of context on empowerment? What is similar? What is different?

### ***Coding Methods for Round One***

The first round of coding involved a complete read through of my qualitative field notes. I first transcribed all of my field observations and interviews into a single word document totaling more than 250 pages. I organized my notes and interviews chronologically. The process of transcription itself involved a complete review and write-up of all of my observations from a year of fieldwork, plus three summers of talking with Guatemalans, mostly women, about politics, political participation, views of government and politicians, the role of women's organizations and NGOs in responding to the needs of individuals and communities, and individuals' experiences in organizations.

My first round of coding and analysis proceeded in two distinct phases. The first phase used open coding methods, while the second employs focused coding to categorize and analyze my qualitative field notes. The first round of analysis of my field observations involved reading through the full text and labeling lines, entries, and segments of information. This phase followed processes of "open coding" (Chamaz 2001; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011), whereby I remained open and labeled each section/line/passage of data to identify all ideas and themes within my field notes. The goal during this first phase is to explore emergent theoretical issues in my qualitative data and ethnographic observations. My objective in labeling and naming lines of text was to create a comprehensive catalogue of discrete ideas and actions without applying preexisting categories or theoretical concepts. These initial codes intended to spark my theoretical thinking, and as such, they were provisional yet grounded in the data (Charmaz 2001).

My first round of coding produced more than eighty labels for my data. The following are a list of “open codes” that stood out and sparked my theoretical thinking. These ideas provided the foundation of my coding decision during my first round of “focused coding”.

Round one codes that relate to “women’s decisions” about how to act politically:

- To benefit from an organization, one has to give something to that organization.
- The way for women to improve their lives, is to do so themselves, to be independent and self-sufficient.
- Connecting women in Guatemala with international markets
- Sharing information within organizations. Happens between staff, between members, from members to staff, and from staff to members.
- Bringing resources back to the home, women fighting for their families
- Social capital among members
- Participation in group, church, family, community decision-making
- Help for the family as a motivation for participating in the organization
- Credit/loan as a benefit
- Training/learning as a benefit
- Growing the business/increased income as a benefit
- Processes of identity formation: Women as leaders and women as capable
- Women acting to promote their interests
- Material benefits from organizations as “necessary” not a choice
- Participation in groups as a means to improve things
- Women take out loans/microcredit to help educate their siblings/children



- Life/personal challenges prevent women from being able to participate in their group
- Women lack interest in being involved in politics
- Business is seen by women as a way to get ahead/meet their goals/needs.
- Business (not government/politics) identified as the way women meet their needs
- Independence identified as an outcome of empowerment by women/clients.
- Women see themselves as having to meet their own needs because government and politicians will ignore them.
- Women say participating politically is not worth their time.
- Politics is seen as “unequal” only helping the rich.
- Government does not respond to the needs of the community.
- The family is identified as a place where women go to meet their needs.
- Women identify themselves and their business/work as how they act to meet their needs.

### ***Coding Methods for Round Two***

The second phase of coding began with one round of “focused coding”. The process of coding during this phase involves a line-by-line analysis of field notes according to topics that were identified in the first round as being theoretically interesting and/or relevant to answering my research question (Emerson et al 2011, 172). My research question, as well as an inductive approach to qualitative data analysis, shaped my identification of “theoretically relevant” topics. The questions I aimed to answer in this stage of my

research were: Why do women's organizations have a positive effect on non-institutional political participation, but no effect on institutional participation? How do women's organizations influence women's decisions to act politically? In essence, I sought to identify, within my qualitative data, mechanisms by which women's organizations influenced women's decisions to participate politically. Thus, in my review of round one codes I identified codes that correspond to micro-level mechanisms and processes by which women's experience within organizations influence their decisions to act politically.

The term I use to code women's decision to act politically was political agency. I coded instances where organizations enhanced women's political agency and how women choose to act (either institutionally or non-institutionally). I began by identifying processes that influenced women's agency. I then identify instances of political agency to describe how members of women's organizations are acting politically, how their actions have changed over time, and factors influencing their decisions to act.

Categories of codes for round two:

- (1) Women's needs/interests
- (2) How women define political participation
- (3) How women act to meet their needs
- (4) Women's (and others') recognition of structural inequality
- (5) Women's perceptions of formal politics/political institutions
- (6) Women's perceptions of organizations
- (7) Women's perception of effective action
- (8) Mechanisms of organizational influence on women
- (9) Organizational goals

## (10) Organizational strategies

### ***Coding Methods for Round Three***

I began by assigning “structural” codes (Saldana 2009) to the excerpts identified in round two of my coding qualitative field notes. Structural codes are codes that assign conceptual names to qualitative data. Concepts reflected the research questions, research objectives, and theoretical focus of this project. The structural codes of my project responded to the following objectives: (1) to determine processes by which women’s organizations are empowering members, and (2) to explain how processes of empowerment are influence members’ capacities, opportunities, and motivations for political action.

Given these objectives, methods of structural coding were used to code for processes of empowerment and indicators of women’s agency. I define the concept of empowerment as processes that enhance individuals’ capacity to make choices and take action on those choices. I used the code “EMP” to identify information about processes that influence women’s capacity to make choices and act. Text was assigned the code “EMP” if the text described or provided an example of (1) processes that influenced women’s capacity for action, (2) processes that influenced opportunities for women to act, (3) processes that influenced women’s motivation for action, (4) conditions that enable/obstruct empowerment, and (5) subject definitions, meanings, and understandings of empowerment.

My analysis involved sorting and describing my empowerment codes. I wrote up the results of this analysis as a description of processes of empowerment within organizations. Specifically, I identified instances where organizational experiences influenced

motivations, capacities, and/or opportunities for women to act and exercise political agency. To determine how organizational experiences influence political action, I focused on identifying instances of changes in women's political action to determine if/how organizational experiences are related to women's motivations, capacities, and opportunities to participate politically (either by subjects themselves or through my own observations). When I did this analysis, I did not focus on the outcome side of organizational experiences. In other words, I did not distinguish processes of empowerment or describe them in terms of the type of action they influenced. Instead, I used text and quotes to describe the ways that organizational experiences had been observed and/or identified by subjects as influencing women's motivations, capacities, and opportunities to act.

In regards to the outcome of processes of empowerment, women's agency, my objectives were to determine how women are acting, and what causes women to act the way they do. Because agency refers to both observable actions and the meanings and motivations that influence individuals' exercise of choice, i.e. their actions, I coded for both components of agency. Thus my coding of agency included sub-codes to identify individuals' motivations to act and actions that individuals are taking to promote their interests. To determine if women's organizations influence members to act politically, I sorted empowerment codes to specify the relationship between empowerment processes within organizations and individuals' capacity to act to promote their interests.

Below is a list of codes that I used to define units of qualitative data and analyze relationships between coded categories. These relationships, as they reflect connections between theoretical concepts, provided the primary evidence used to develop the

theoretical framework and draw conclusions in regards to the effects of women's organizations on members' political empowerment in Guatemala.

#### Categories of Codes for Round Three:

- (EMP) Empowerment = processes that increase individual capacity to make choices and transform those choices into action. Across definitions of empowerment two aspects in particular stand out as common. The first is that empowerment is conceptualized as a process of change. Second, the result of this change is identified as an increase in the agency of marginalized individuals and groups in society.
  - (EMPCHO) Processes that enhance capacity for choice
  - (EMPACT) Processes that enhance capacity for action
  - (WEMP) Women's Empowerment = "the process by which women redefine gender roles in ways which extend their possibilities for being and doing."  
(Mosedale 2005, 252)
- (AGNC) Agency = "an actor's ability to envisage options and make meaningful choices" (Aslop and Heinsohn 2005); an increased capacity of individuals and groups to make choices and act in ways that promote their interests (Williams 2004). Agency includes both observable actions and the meanings and motivations that influence actors' exercise of choice, i.e. how they act (Kabeer 1999). Thus, to explain agency we must identify/describe actions individuals are taking and the motivations that lead individuals to act that way.
  - [ACT] = actions individuals are taking to promote their interests
  - [ACTMOTV] = individual motivations for action

- [WINT] Women's needs/interests = the wants and needs of women, as reflected in expressions of women's values, beliefs and goals
- (POLPAR) Political participation = any act by which citizens pursue purposeful courses of action to influence political decisions and processes. I consider an act "political" if it meets the following conditions: the action is intended to reach beyond the economic self-interests of the individual, and the action has tangible implications for the operation of power and distribution of resources in society (Albrecht 2008,19).
  - [NIPP] Non-institutional Political Participation = political actions that occur outside of formal institutional channels.
  - [IPP] Institutional political participation= actions by which women participate in electoral politics and/or acts that involve direct communication with members or agencies of government.

## **B. Subject Recruitment Script**

### ***Presentation Script***

I am a doctoral student from the University of Colorado conducting a study investigating the effects of women's organizational participation on processes of women's political empowerment. This study will ask questions about your experience participating in organizations and political participation. Your responses will remain confidential. Would you like to learn more about this project and possibly participate?

### ***Exempt Consent Script for Research Participation***

1. Lindsey Richardson, a doctoral student studying political science, is inviting you to participate in this research study.
2. The title of this study is "*Women's Organizational Activism and Political Participation in Guatemala*". The purpose of this study is to identify the effects of women's organizational involvement on processes of individual empowerment and political participation. You are being asked to be in this study because of your involvement in women's organizations in Guatemala.
3. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to offer your own reflections on the experience and process of participating in organizations, processes of individual empowerment, and your experience and views on political participation.
4. You will not be paid for participating in this study.
5. There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

6. There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. However, this study offers you the opportunity to share your views and contribute to academic understandings of the political effects of women's organizational involvement.
7. This interview may be tape-recorded. Parts of your interview might be published, and various researchers might listen to the tapes. Being tape-recorded is not a requirement for participation. You may still participate in the study should you choose not be taped.
8. The results of this study may be published in scientific research journals or presented at professional conferences. However, your name and identity will not be revealed and your record will remain anonymous. I will make every effort to maintain the privacy of your responses. Pseudonyms will be used for all individuals, organizations, and locations referenced in this study. Also, I will not use your name during the recorded interview.
9. You can choose not to participate. If you decide not to participate, there will not be a penalty to you or loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw from this study at any time.
10. If you have any questions regarding your participation in this research, you should ask the investigator before signing this form. If you should have questions or concerns during or after your participation, please contact Lindsey Richardson by phone at (001)-540-292-1034 or email ([lindsey.richardson-1@colorado.edu](mailto:lindsey.richardson-1@colorado.edu)).



If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may report them – confidentially, if you wish – to the University of Colorado at Boulder’s Institutional Review Board: 3100 Marine Street, ARCE Room A15, 563 University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO 80309-0563, (303) 735-3702.

## **C. Background on the Study Provided to Research Participants**

### ***The Research Objectives***

For this project I am asking, “Do women’s organizations empower women? If so, how?” To answer this question I plan to use ethnographic methods, which involves participating in and observing organizational members and staff. My goal, through volunteering with a local women’s organization, is to understand how women’s experiences within organizations influence their interactions, their self-esteem, leadership capabilities, and understandings of politics. Most importantly I want to understand how it is that women begin to take the initiative to fight for their own rights and needs, and what role organizations play in women’s personal development. To date I have been doing interviews with organizational staff and leaders to understand generally what organizations exist in Xela and what kind of work they do. I hope through these interviews to introduce my project and identify organizations that are willing to allow me volunteer with them and observe their work for my research. My interviews and observations will focus on—1) identifying the goals and approach of each organization, 2) describing women’s experiences, 3) and understanding meanings, motivations, and values associated with politics and women’s empowerment.

### ***Informal Description of the Research Method***

My research uses the method of ethnography to study and gather information on women’s organizations here in Guatemala. Ethnography uses face-to-face contact to describe the meanings and value local women give to their daily lives and activities. The greatest value and most important source of information are the perspectives of the women being

studied. Though I have begun my research with a general question and topic, my goal is to discover new ideas and information from women in Guatemala to influence how academics and policy makers understand the needs of Guatemalan women.

### ***Formal Description of the Research Method***

Ethnography, according to Edward Schatz (2009), “is a sensibility that utilizes face-to-face contact...to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality. It pays attention to the perspectives of people being studied. The job of the scholar is to take what subjects present—self and fact—and make sense of the information contained in this presentation. Ethnography grants descriptive and explanatory priority to the ways in which ‘insiders’ understand their existence.” This approach is theoretically grounded, but is more inductive than deductive. Though I enter the context of study with a broad research question, it is only through discussions and observations of Guatemalan women, that I am able to identify meanings and definitions of politics, patterns of interactions, and changes in individual behavior, values and perceptions, to explain how NGOs empower women to participate politically.

## **D. Semi-structured Interview Questions with Members of Women's Organizations**

### ***Interview Objectives***

- To determine the approach of the organization.
- To identify organizations with goals of empowerment.
- Development of the concept of “political participation”.
- To collect membership data.

### ***Theme 1: Background on the Organization***

How did you come up with the idea for your organization?

*If the answer is not given in the previous response, ask:*

How did it start out?

*If the answer is not given in the previous response, ask:*

Where did you get the initial funding?

How did you get the community/individuals to participate?

What challenges did you encounter in the beginning? How did your organization address these challenges?

What challenges do you continue to confront? How successful have you been in overcoming these challenges?

How would you describe your organization to someone you think might like to join?

How has your organization changed over time?

What programs have you implemented to meet these goals?

How are you sustaining your organization right now? What is the business model for getting funds?

Are there any proposed methods of gaining sustainability?

### ***Theme 2: Organizational Approaches***

*Before meeting check out the organization's website and literature, and be sure to follow up on the statements and claims they make here.*

How are decisions made within the organization? Who makes decisions? Who has input on these decisions?

What are the processes for making decisions? Discuss in meetings? Vote? Can you give an example?

How often do members discuss organizational decisions? Are decisions ever made without engaging in these discussions/voting first? How often? Why?

### ***Theme 3: Women's Empowerment***

The goal of some organizations is to "empower their members". Are you familiar with this term? If so, how do understand/define empowerment?

Does your organization use this term to describe it's own approach, values or vision? Why or why not?

Do you feel experiences within the NGO have empowered members or fostered your personal development? If so, can you give an example?

What challenges do you face in meeting this goal?

### ***Theme 4: Political Participation***

How do you define/understand the word "politics"?

Can you give an example of acts that you would identify as political?

Would you say that most members in your organization are politically active? Why or why not?

Can you give specific examples of this political activity?

Are members of your organization active in the community? Why or why not?

Can you give specific examples of members' community involvement?

***Theme 5: Membership Characteristics***

How many members do you have?

Average level of education?

Average level of income?

Average age?

Average number of children?

Married or single?

Where do members live?

Do your members include women and men or just women?

Do you have any groups/programs that are made up of only women?

How would you describe the ethnic makeup of the organization?

Is Spanish the first language for the majority or minority of your members?

## **E. Interview Questions for Focused Interviews with Members of Women's Organizations**

### ***Interview Objectives***

- To determine how members of women's organizations understand the term empowerment.
- To determine how members see their organizational experiences as influencing their own empowerment.
- To determine how members understand the term politics.
- To determine how members act politically.
- To determine how members perceive politicians and the government as responding to their needs.
- To determine how members perceive the political participation of other members of their organization, community, and household.

### ***Theme 1: Empowerment***

1. Are you familiar with the meaning of the word empowerment?  
(If they say "no", provide the definition before asking question number two)
2. How would you describe your level of empowerment?
3. Do you consider yourself an empowered woman?
4. (if "yes" continue with number 4a)...
  - a. Are you able to give me an example of how you are empowered?  
(if "no" continue with number 4b)...
  - b. Why not?
5. Do you think this organization is helping you to be an empowered woman?

6. Why or why not?
7. (if “yes” to question 5) Could you give me an example of how you have become empowered because of this organization?
8. (if “yes” to question 5) What have been the consequences of your empowerment?
9. Have the training and your experiences with this organization caused you to be a more empowered person? If yes, could you give me an example?
10. What obstacles have you faced in your personal development?

***Theme 2: Politics***

11. Are you familiar with the meaning of the word politics?
12. What do you understand about politics?
13. What do you think about politics in Guatemala?
14. Do you participate in politics? Why or why not?
15. How do you act politically?
16. Do you know how many members of this organization participate politically?
17. Do the majority of people in your household participate politically?
18. Does the government respond to the needs of you community?
19. What are the needs of your community?
20. What are your needs? What are the needs of your family?
21. What is something that you need but don’t have?
22. Would you say that the majority of the members of this organization are politically empowered? Why or why not?
23. Do you think that the local or national government provides a good service relative to your needs? Why or why not?



24. Where do you go to have your needs met?