

**The Boss is a Black Woman:
An Intersectional Case Study of the Executive Branch in Minas Gerais, Brazil**

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Abstract

Minas Gerais is the second most populated state in Brazil, and it is located in the country's most economically prosperous region. In its gender mainstreaming policy, the executive branch of Minas Gerais established the goal to achieve gender parity within leadership positions by 2028. While the policy mentions intersectionality among its values, it does not apply it to this specific goal. Therefore, aiming to understand black women's experiences regarding these leadership positions, this thesis employs an intersectional lens to analyze the mechanisms influencing black women's political participation.

I framed this study within the scholarship on political representation, which explores the presence of minority groups in the political sphere, connecting their participation with more inclusive policy outcomes. I argue that these women's identity as black female leaders results in their unique political experiences and places them in specific roles in securing political representation for this group. I identified a series of social and political mechanisms influencing black women's leadership experiences: racial identity, misogynoir, family, personality traits, access to high-quality education, party ideology, and the presence of critical allies. Misogynoir is the only mechanism solely hindering this group's careers. The combination of misogyny and a racial struggle, derived from a denial of their racial identity, entails a sense of not belonging to the political sphere. Additionally, the constant reinforcement of gender stereotypes at the workplace or within the family hinders black women's political success. Other barriers such as those derived from class, the association between left-leaning parties and diversity policies, and access to network ties may constrain this group's political careers. Still, I identified how these mechanisms could also positively affect black women's careers. For instance, by embracing their racial identity, they act as role models for the group and address their lack of belonging to politics. Furthermore, personal allies, such as supportive partners and mentors, foster this group's political achievements. Lastly, I demonstrated the crucial role of policies in these women's lives to reduce inequalities. This intersectional research indicates that black women's political reality is unique, considering they suffer from combined oppressions and that misogynoir affects only this group.

My study is an intersectional case study, entirely focused on black women's experiences. I employed a qualitative analysis by conducting ten interviews with black women, who either formerly held or currently occupy leadership roles in the executive branch. Interviewees have diverse social backgrounds and work in different areas within the government.

Lastly, this research adds to the existing scholarship by addressing not only this group's barriers but also mechanisms enabling this group to tackle oppression and achieve leadership positions. Furthermore, this study contributes to the scholarship on political representation by addressing the experiences of Brazilian black female leaders in executive branches. By framing this study within the scholarship on political representation and intersectionality, my research demonstrates how black female leaders fulfill a crucial role of representation.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 21,188 words

Entire manuscript: 25,557 words

Signed: Julye Beserra

Acknowledgments

My dark skin tone and curly hair have deemed me less valued many times in my life. I was told I did not belong to academia and that my hair and skin color made me unsuited for places of political decisions. Yet, here I am, transforming hate speech into a study (*and a labor of love*). Still, it takes a village to accomplish such a tremendous task. Therefore, I would like to thank:

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Globally, women's access to politics is restricted either legally, when laws prohibit them from joining the political sphere, or structurally, when gender stereotypes and misogyny entail institutional barriers such as access to campaign funding or to educational degrees, hindering women's possibilities of joining politics (UN Women, n.d.). Women occupy only 25% of legislative seats globally (UN Women, 2021); nonetheless, existing restrictions should not be perceived as exclusive to legislative branches. Women's presence within civil service and as heads of national or local governments is also limited. The UN Women released the document "Women in Politics in 2020" on the global situation of women in the political realm. Among 190 countries, women occupy only 21% of ministerial positions; only in 14 do women hold over 50% of seats (UN Women, 2020, "Women in ministerial positions" table). While there has been progress in countries like Spain and Finland, in which women represent over 60% of ministerial positions, at the current pace, the UN estimates gender parity will not be achieved until 2077 (UN Women, 2021, para 4).

While women's political representation has gained attention lately, demonstrating the connection between the presence of female leaders and the government acting on behalf of women's interests (Celis & Childs, 2020), most studies on this topic restrict their analysis to legislative houses (Araujo et al., 2018; Celis & Childs, 2020). When studies focus on the mechanisms preventing women's political representation in executive branches, they usually research heads of states or leadership positions in national governments (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2016; Jalalzai, 2013; Jensen, 2008). Furthermore, studies on this topic often do not consider the ways in which multiple types of identity influence an individual's access to politics and their perceptions of representation; thus, most studies on political representation lack the use of intersectionality (Lemi & Brown, 2019; Montoya et al., 2021).

The concept of intersectionality, coined within black feminist scholarship, shows the ways in which “feminist theory and antiracist discourse” fail to explain black women’s lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) employs the analogy of an accident at an intersection to explain black women’s unique lived experiences. She explains how it is usually not possible to define what caused an accident at an intersection and applies this as an analogy to the experience of black women. Crenshaw argues that this group’s experiences cannot be entirely described within gender studies theories nor critical race theory; black women are subject to the combined effects of racism and misogyny.

1.1. Research puzzle

The Brazilian political sphere is amongst the most challenging for women. Brazil occupies the 150th position, among 155 countries, regarding women’s political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2021). Politics have long been a men’s helm in Brazil; universal suffrage was approved in 1934, yet nearly 90 years have passed without women being equally represented in the political sphere (dos Santos & Thomé, 2020). An analysis of the current Brazilian Lower House, elected in 2018 for a four-year term, shows that only 15% of elected officials are women; the Upper House is no different, women represent only 13% of politicians (dos Santos & Thomé, 2020). Executive leaders are similar: women account for only 3.7% of governors and 11.9% of mayors (dos Santos & Thomé, 2020).¹ The country varies from the region, considering that, in Latin America, women account for 28% of the lower chambers in national legislatures on average (dos Santos & Thomé, 2020).

Additionally, Brazilian society is racially diverse, which makes me question the presence of minority women in politics. While women’s presence in the Brazilian political sphere is considered challenging (dos Santos & Thomé, 2020), an intersectional lens uncovers black

¹ 2018 and 2016 elections, respectively.

women's precariousness to achieve political power. Even though black women represent 28% of the Brazilian population, according to IBGE (2019a), they occupy only 2.5% of seats in the lower house and 5% in the upper chamber in Brazil (Assis et al., 2018). These striking results demonstrate how the reality of groups at an intersection is neglected when studies fail to analyze multiple identities. Therefore, considering the lack of attention to black women's political reality, despite the increasing overall concern about women's political representation, this research focuses on the reasons behind black women's challenges to lead in the executive and mechanisms to tackle these issues.

This case study focuses on the executive branch of Minas Gerais, the second most populated Brazilian state, home to 21 million people (IBGE, 2019a), and located in the southeast of Brazil, the country's most economically prosperous region. My reasons for this case study are both personal and political. As a civil servant working there since 2015, I have witnessed black women's near-complete exclusion from leadership positions. Still, this topic cannot be reduced to my personal experiences. Minas Gerais' government implemented a ten-year Policy Plan for Women (PPW) in 2018, aiming to institutionalize gender mainstreaming (Borges et al., 2018). PPW's 3a pillar addresses the lack of women in leadership positions within the government. The policy establishes among its strategic goals the aim to achieve gender parity in leadership positions until 2028. However, after two years, in December 2020, women occupied only 30% of leadership positions.² Even though PPW mentions intersectionality, the racial component was neglected when establishing gender parity goals. Thus, there is a gap between policy-making, PPW's goals, and black women's reality.

Therefore, my thesis focuses specifically on black women's political representation in the executive branch of Minas Gerais. I explore the mechanisms that contribute to their near-

² Own calculations based on the database sent by the Human Resources department of the executive branch of Minas Gerais on January 29, 2021 (Executive Branch of Minas Gerais, 2021).

complete exclusion from leadership positions in the executive branch, as well as tools that positively influence this group's political success.

1.2. Research question

To achieve the stated aims, my research questions the factors influencing black women's political representation in the executive branch of Minas Gerais. To reach this broader question, this thesis first examines the discussion on political representation, framing it within this study's context. I then investigate the political sphere in Brazil and the ways in which black people, women, and black women are excluded from playing a role in the country's politics. Next, I analyze mechanisms preventing black women from being appointed to leadership positions in politics. Lastly, I consider the positive mechanisms acting to enhance their political participation.

1.3. Contribution

This study focuses on black women's lived experiences within the Brazilian political context, adding to the scarce scholarship on the topic. Furthermore, this research differs by not only restricting the analysis on negative barriers preventing this minority group from achieving political power but also on identifying positive mechanisms capable of fostering this group's political success.

My research also contributes to knowledge production by portraying black women's political representation in Minas Gerais, Brazil. Policy scholarship is often developed within and from the perspective and context of the Global North, reproducing mainly the reality of the dominant white group. While black women's reality may resonate worldwide, by focusing on Brazil, I am able to demonstrate how the racist structures in the country provide a unique context for black women's experiences.

As previously mentioned, few studies delve into black women's political representation in executive branches, especially state branches, as my research does. This focus is particularly

relevant in Latin American countries, in which the executive sets policy agenda and leads policymaking, while the legislative holds a responsive role (Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018). Additionally, an intersectional analysis of the executive branch highlights the mechanisms of exclusion based on the intermingled oppression of race and gender acting upon black women in this political sphere.

1.4. Methodology

This research takes a qualitative approach through interviews to ascertain existing mechanisms influencing black women's political success. Considering that the purpose of qualitative research is to describe a trend (Walliman, 2006), the use of interviews is fundamental to mapping the existing barriers and similarities regarding black women's experiences. Additionally, I employed the method of case study, focusing on the specific group of black women in order to uncover how racialized gendered oppression acts upon them, influencing their possibilities of achieving leadership positions within the executive branch of Minas Gerais. Applying intersectionality as a theoretical lens is fundamental to uncovering systematic and overlaying oppressions (McCall, 2005). Additionally, McCall (2005) highlights the importance of an intersectional lens of analysis when researching "social relations" (p. 1773). For her, studies focusing on specific "social groups at neglected points of intersection," deploy an "intracategorical approach," and it is fundamental to uncover multiple systems of oppression (McCall, 2005, p. 1774).

For this qualitative research, I conducted ten interviews. My sample involved three black women who formerly held leadership positions within the executive branch of Minas Gerais and seven black women currently occupying leadership roles. Regarding the former leaders, I considered for my sample only those who had held leadership positions between 2015 and March 2021. This period encompassed two terms of office, which enabled me to understand the current mechanisms acting upon this group's issues. The interviews took place in the first

half of April 2021 on Microsoft Teams, to maintain the safety of all during the COVID-19 pandemic, following the CEU Ethical Research Policy.

Interviews covered six topics: personal life, race, education, career path, race or gender discrimination, and mentorship and network (see Appendix A). Questions varied slightly between women who are currently in leadership positions and those who formerly occupied leadership positions. Additionally, semi-structuring interviews enabled me to cover other topics as the conversation flowed.

Furthermore, as a civil servant who has been working for Minas Gerais' executive branch since 2015, I employed the snowball sampling method to contact some possible interviewees and ask them to refer me to other potential sources. Aiming to ensure that diversity of experiences would be covered in my research, participants ranged from various areas within the government and diversified hierarchical positions (see Appendix B). I classified interviewees within Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson's (2016) two categorization of government areas: (1) "Economics/Social Welfare/Central" (p. 56), in which the first category is directly related to economic sectors, the second to social development, and the last refers to "cabinet, national and international affairs" (p. 69), and (2) "stereotypically **feminine policy domains**" and "stereotypically **masculine policy domains**" (p. 71). The authors consider the ministries related to care and the private sphere, such as education, health, and housing, to be stereotypically feminine; while the stereotypically masculine domains referred to the public sphere, such as defense, energy, and finance (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2016, p. 71). In the executive branch of Minas Gerais, hierarchical positions vary from the first level, Secretary of State, to the fourth level, usually director or coordinator. Interviewees' positions

ranged from the second level to the fourth level. My study does not encompass first-level leaders.³

Interviewees identified themselves as *parda* (brown) or black. My research uses the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) classification regarding race and color stratification, which means the category of black people encompasses those who identify as both black and brown (Loveman et al., 2012). Additionally, as I will detail in chapter 3, skin tone is a relevant characteristic to understanding lived experiences in Brazil; therefore, I identified interviewees' skin tones between light and dark. An equal number of interviewees were light- and dark-skinned. This attribution was not discussed through their interviews.

Interviews were conducted in Portuguese and recorded through Microsoft Teams, lasting from 29 to 77 minutes. I employed *Sonix* software to assist me with transcription.⁴ Following this, I analyzed the interviews to (a) identify common themes and opinions, (b) identify within common topics those referring to my research question, (c) generate knowledge from participants' views, and (d) analyze these findings using existing literature.

In order to grant participants anonymity, I address them by their initials in this thesis. Only one interviewee did not have any employment relationship with the executive branch at the time of the interview; therefore, anonymity protects participants from any type of governmental retaliation.

1.5. Limitations

The generalization of my findings is limited due to the sample size of this case study. Still, this qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding of social and political

³ I was only referred to one woman who had occupied a first-level position within the time scope of this research; nonetheless, she was unavailable during my interview period.

⁴ <https://sonix.ai/>

mechanisms influencing this group. The existence of such mechanisms can be tested in other contexts and by more comprehensive samples.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely hit Brazil, as more than 450,000 Brazilians have lost their lives (World Health Organization, 2021).⁵ Written by a Brazilian researcher and covering the Brazilian context, the catastrophic results of the pandemic have impacted the production process of this thesis due to the additional distress and pressure placed on my interview participants and on me as a researcher. Considering this research took place under unprecedented circumstances, it is impossible to disassociate such a context from this study.

1.6. Research Overview

This thesis is structured into six chapters, including this introduction. In Chapter 2, I situate my research within the theoretical framework of women's political representation and intersectionality, focusing on executive branches and women's avenues to power. Chapter 3 highlights the Brazilian context of race and gender oppression within the political sphere. Chapter 4 presents the main results of the qualitative research. Chapter 5 analyzes the findings and situates them within the existing literature. Lastly, Chapter 6 concludes the study and its importance.

⁵ Retrieved on May 28, 2021.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical Background

In the section that follows, I situate this research within the theoretical literature on political representation, addressing this concept as well as women's situation in executive branches, and their paths to political success. Additionally, I discuss the theoretical framework of intersectionality, focusing on black women's experiences. Regarding political representation, I demonstrate the importance of this concept, which is at the core of the debate among feminist scholars of political science. I argue that the presence of minority groups is fundamental to grant a more diverse policy outcome. Furthermore, I assert that the interaction between race and gender shapes black women's lived experiences; therefore, an intersectional approach is vital for unraveling the mechanisms preventing this group from achieving political power.

2.1. The Concept of Political Representation

Political representation theorists aim to understand the ways in which individuals, elected or not, act upon other citizens' interests and make decisions, thus representing a specific part of the population. In her well-known book, *The Concept of Representation*, Hanna Pitkin (1967) determines four types of possible representation: "authorization view" (p. 38), "descriptive representation" (p. 60), "symbolic representation" (p. 92), and "acting for" (p. 115), also known as substantive view. Discussion around the political representation of minorities usually engages with descriptive representation and substantive view. Descriptive representation refers to the representatives' identities, thus whose identity is present in politics. For Pitkin (1967), descriptive representation "depends on the representative's characteristics" (p. 61). Substantive representation refers to an in-depth analysis of the possible changes in politics once minorities are represented; in other words, a shift from who is represented to the extent the group is represented. Therefore, my research mainly engages with the concept of descriptive

representation, as black women's presence in cabinets is still too limited to engage with the idea of a substantive view.

Since Pitkin's approach, other political scientists have demonstrated the connection between the lived experiences of representatives and their political behavior, meaning their identities shape the ways in which they represent people's interests (Celis & Childs, 2020; Childs & Lovenduski, 2013; Mansbridge, 1999). For example, in "The Politics of Presence", Phillips (1998) argues that combining a candidate's shared experiences and political ideals is relevant for granting political representation in democracies. Similarly, in their pioneering analysis on the North American elections, Gershon et al. (2019) claim that: "[W]hile there is much debate about the role that identity *should* play in elections, there is much evidence that the identity of candidates *does* matter in ways significant for democracy" (p. 642). An individual's identity influences their paths and experiences; thus, the participation of minorities in politics enables the development of real democracy, in which historically marginalized people can represent themselves. Therefore, studies regarding minorities' involvement in politics show that such engagement improves democracy and acts as an essential tool for agency.

The presence of marginalized groups, such as black women, in crucial political power positions influences policy outcomes and counters stereotypes. For instance, an inclusive political sphere encourages younger women to increase their participation in politics and supports their political discussions (Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2007, as cited in Childs & Lovenduski, 2013, p. 491). Scanlon (2000) claims that stigmatization occurs when non-white and non-male individuals are deemed less valued within society and "will be judged to lack the relevant abilities and attainments" (p. 54). Therefore, it is crucial to challenge the misleading assumption that minorities, such as black women, are "unfit" for the political sphere.

Nonetheless, despite feminist scholars' attention to political representation theory, there are some critiques regarding the relevance of studying the mere presence of a particular minority in politics (see Mansbridge, 1999). These critiques can be illustrated briefly by Pitkin (1967) when she inquires "which characteristics are politically relevant for reproduction" in politics (p. 87). She denies the connection between identity and action, criticizing the focus on the representative's identity instead of their actions. Similarly, Griffiths (1960, p. 190, as cited in Phillips, 1998, p. 40) highlights that some divergences are necessary and exemplifies this claim by arguing that "maleficent" people are underrepresented in parliament, which is beneficial for everyone. However, these claims have been strongly contested. First, women's presence enables a shift from "gendered norms of behavior" in politics (Celis & Childs, 2020, p. 29), thus, enhancing women's power. Second, scholars advocating for minorities to be represented are also concerned about the representatives' qualifications and abilities (Childs & Lovenduski, 2013; Mansbridge, 1999). In sum, I argue that the presence of minorities enhances democracy, considering the interests of minority groups will be taken into account. Therefore, studies concerning the possibilities for strengthening the political representation of certain minority groups have a significant impact on the political sphere.

Furthermore, the concept of political representation is not limited to individuals who have been elected to a political role. Celis (2008) claims that representation occurs in "the making present of the absent, the represented has to be made present by the representative in at least one way, be it formally, descriptively, symbolically, or substantively" (p. 80). For her, representation exists even when individuals do not elect their representatives or when the representatives act against an individual's interests. This means that political representation encompasses a broader field than the role portrayed by elected officials. The crucial role of the legislature in political representation overshadows the other institutions playing an essential

part in politics. In a brilliant description of the places in which women's political representation occurs, Childs and Lovenduski (2013) claim:

[A]ppointed government and other public bodies, political parties, economic organizations such as trade unions, professional and employer organizations, firms, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, the print, broadcasting, and electronic media have been shown to play a part in political decision making and are arenas in which women have sought presence. Only a fraction of these positions are directly elected, many are appointed, and some are self-selected. (p. 501)

Therefore, governments aiming to pursue gender equality and transform policymaking should ensure women's participation in political decisions. Thus, the study of political representation in the executive branch enables an analysis of gender gaps in politics, even when it comes to non-elected individuals. Indeed, Childs and Lovenduski (2013) consider the study of political representation in executive governments to be innovative. The presence of women in policymaking is fundamental for promoting gender equality (Celis & Childs, 2020); therefore, studies on cabinet formation are crucial to understanding the ways in which political representation operates in the executive branch.

2.2. Women in the Executive Branch

Scholarship regarding the participation of women in executive branches is relatively new. Most research focuses on elected or appointed women as the head of the executive, such as presidents or prime ministers, governors, or mayors. A notable example is the book "Women Political Leaders", in which Jensen (2008) highlights the experiences of 64 women across the world who led their countries until 2007. Jensen (2008) uses a statement from Kim Campbell, Prime Minister of Canada in 1991, to justify the importance of having female leaders in the executives, "[it] is because women experience the world differently from men" (p. 12). Similarly, Jalalzai (2013) analyzes women's experiences as heads of democratic and undemocratic states in order to understand the mechanisms preventing women's political representation. According to Jalalzai (2013), the crucial factor for women's presence as a country's leader is "the opening of political space" (p. 15). Although she uses this argument to

explain women's paths to become heads of state, there is no reason for not applying it to other leadership positions within the government. Therefore, unless the political sphere, including political actors and voters, endorse women's presence, their participation in politics will not increase.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, feminist political scientists have been concerned with cabinet formation and the ways in which women are included in this political sphere, the central topic for my thesis. While the number of female ministers has doubled worldwide from 1999 to 2007, rising from nearly 9% to 15% (Jensen, 2008), the number is far from adequate, considering women represent half of the population. In Latin America, the figure has risen from 15% (1999-2003 tenure) to 25% (2010-2014 tenure) (Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018); still an insufficient number. In their well-known book, "Women in presidential cabinets: power players or abundant tokens?", Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2016) claim that executive leaders will only appoint women for cabinet positions when they "perceive a potential political cost to continuing to not include women" (p. 5). The authors argue executive leaders will appoint only the minimum acceptable number of women for cabinet formation; this number considers the political cost of not selecting any woman and appointing what would be considered overindulgent. Likewise, Annesley et al. (2019) claim that each society has a minimum acceptable number of women ministers and define this as a "concrete floor" (p. 3). Therefore, it is vital to understand who these women capable of stepping on the concrete floor are and which tools they use to enhance women's political representation, hence my concern to study successful women in this field.

Another significant aspect regarding cabinet formation is the institutional context in which the government is established. Annesley et al. (2019) affirm that formal and informal rules should be analyzed in order to understand the mechanisms behind cabinet formation. They argue that most constitutions do not establish legal rules for cabinet formations; nonetheless,

external and informal forces act upon this matter, enforcing particular political behavior. Therefore, even though most constitutions do not prevent women from being appointed to leadership positions, gendered political behavior hinders their ascension to these roles. Blondel (1985, as cited in Annesley et al., 2019) exemplifies this claim by arguing that informal rules create an expected ministerial profile, “which let some individuals come to the top while others are prevented from being selected” (p. 8); the typical characteristics are evidently associated with male behavior. Similarly, Taylor-Robinson and Gleitz (2018) claim that cabinet positions are highly prestigious, thus “valuable for ambitious politicians” (p. 40). This competitiveness refers to “a gendered club where men, male values, and masculine behaviors have long been dominant” (Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018, p. 40). Lastly, Chappell (2006b, as cited in Chappel 2013) argues that the male dominance of the political sphere leads to “a logic of appropriateness based on masculine norms, expectations and practices” (p. 612). Therefore, women’s presence in leadership positions within the government can challenge expected behavior and influence public opinion, hence feminist scholars’ advocacy for increasing women’s political representation.

Nonetheless, after these critical points, one could still inquire about the relevance of women’s political representation in leadership positions within the executive branch. Considering the Latin American context, the executive is usually responsible for setting policy agenda (Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018, p. 39). The executive has a “unity of command, hierarchical arrangements, and – with centralized control – a capacity to act quickly and decisively [...]” (Duerst-lahti, 1997, p. 18, as cited in Jalalzai, 2013, p. 26). Many societies perceive these characteristics as incompatible with women; therefore, positions of immense political power remain a men’s realm. Chappell (2013) excellently describes the consequences for this gendered aspect of society when she claims that, “masculine codes shape both the behavior of individuals within state institutions (regardless of their sex) and institutional

outcomes, such as laws, policies, ideas and discourses” (p. 612). Therefore, in order to challenge the gendered features of policymaking, the presence of women in the executive cannot be limited to the concrete floor. An increase in women’s political representation is vital for establishing gender perspectives in the policy agenda. Finally, understanding the mechanisms behind women’s success is crucial for its replication.

In conclusion, women’s political representation in the executive branch is crucial for building gender equality; therefore, an in-depth analysis of women’s presence not only as chiefs of state but also within the bureaucratic realm is fundamental.

2.3. Women’s Road to Political Power

Thus far, it is evident that women lack political representation, which in turn influences policymaking and agenda-setting. This section addresses the current debate regarding the known mechanisms enabling women to pursue a political career or restraining them from it.

Feminist political scientists have been interested in analyzing the history of women’s political power in order to identify and understand the milestones enabling their political achievements (For executive branch leaders, see Jalalzai, 2013; Jensen, 2008. For cabinet formation, see Annesley et al., 2019; Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2016). A significant finding refers to political systems, as Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2016) argue women will have more chances to be appointed for cabinets in presidential governments in which technical experience is more valued than experience in parliament. The authors highlight that in presidential systems, “the executive is chosen independently of the legislative branch” (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2016, p. 59), which gives immense political power to anyone appointed. As discussed previously, the executive’s political power is one of the main reasons for minimal female participation in this political sphere.

Additionally, there are institutional factors influencing women’s possibilities of leading the executive. Taylor-Robinson and Gleitz (2018) claim that the president’s ideology plays a

considerable role in forming the cabinet. They highlight that if the president is considered an outsider, there is more freedom to form a cabinet and appoint more women (Jacob et al., 2014 as cited in Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018). Furthermore, they claim that a leftist ideology has proven encouraging for presidents to appoint more women (Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018). The authors conclude that “women presidents are more likely to appoint women ministers than are men” (Reyes-Householder, 2013, in Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018, p. 45). Lastly, Taylor-Robinson and Gleitz (2018) emphasize the correlation between women in cabinets and women elected for the legislative branch. They note this finding can indicate two factors: women’s election suggests a shift in society, which does not limit the political sphere to men, or women’s network in politics has increased. I argue that a combination of both results in an increase in women’s political participation.

In addition to differences regarding political systems and institutions, feminist scholars have studied specific women in order to understand their political success. In an analysis of women executive leaders, Jensen (2008) concludes, “some acquired their positions as legacies of national political leaders” (p. 12). The relevance of a political mentor, sometimes part of the family as a spouse or father, sometimes a leader within the government or political party, is a crucial finding. Angela Merkel, chancellor of Germany since 2005, and Dilma Rousseff, former president of Brazil from 2011 to 2016, exemplify the importance of political mentorship. Jensen (2008) claims that Chancellor Helmut Kohl, former leader of Germany, acted as Merkel’s mentor, referring to her as “the girl”, she was his “protégé” (p. 44). When her mentor was involved in a financial scandal, Merkel “took over leadership” of the party and later won the election (p. 44). In Rousseff’s case, the former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010) acted as her mentor, first when he appointed Rousseff as a minister while still president and later when he expressed his support for her election as president (dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021). Identifying the critical role of mentors does not diminish women’s political careers. Both

Chancellor Angela Merkel and former President Dilma Rousseff had careers prior to their political pinnacle; nonetheless, their mentor's role is inseparable from their successful achievements.

Furthermore, some researchers have compared men and women who successfully achieve leadership positions within the executive in order to highlight possible similarities or differences. Jalalzai (2013) analyzes "the educational and political backgrounds of nearly all women national leaders who came to power from 1960 through 2010" in order to understand if their qualifications were different from their male counterparts (p. 79). Her findings indicate women "have slightly greater educational credentials" when they achieve power (p. 79). Another relevant fact is that chiefs of the executive, both men and women, usually hold what are considered "masculine" degrees, "such as science, finance, and economics" (Jalalzai, 2013, p. 81). Similar findings can be identified when it comes to cabinet formation. Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2016) compare women's and men's educational and political backgrounds in order to understand if they bring similar political capital resources to the government. In sum, they argue men and women have correspondent "policy expertise" (p. 80); nonetheless, the slightly better academic qualifications pointed out by Jalalzai (2013) were also perceived by Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2016). However, these previous studies did not consider factors such as race and class in order to uncover particular factors only certain women face.

Another mechanism acting upon women's appointments to cabinet positions is the political areas they are appointed to lead. Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2016) analyze women ministers in "five presidential democracies: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and the United States" (p. 21). In addition, the authors group these ministries into "Economics/Social Welfare/Central categories" (p. 69) and into "stereotypically **feminine policy domains**" and "stereotypically **masculine policy domains**" (p. 71), as mentioned in

chapter 1. The authors justify this division to understand if gendered stereotypes influence women's appointments. Unsurprisingly, presidents usually appoint women to posts within the feminine domain; nonetheless, the authors link the lack of women's presence in male political fields to their inexperience in the private sector, which, in their finding, is considered "the accepted credential" to be a minister (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2016, p. 170).

In a similar analysis of Latin American ministers, evidence shows that from 1999 to 2003, in initial cabinets of presidents in Latin America, women represented 10% of masculine domains and 31% of feminine (Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018, p. 43). From 2010 to 2014, the numbers rose to 17% and 52%, respectively (Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018, p. 43). Therefore, the authors conclude that even though more women have successfully led male-dominated fields, the stereotypical appointments remain. In conclusion, it is evident women have managed to break the glass ceiling when it comes to the welfare domain; nonetheless, restricting women to care-related areas reinforces the biased perspective which considers women unprepared for a male-dominated field.

Another relevant factor in women's political representation is family, both as a mechanism of enforcement in which kinship ties encourage women to enter politics, and as a mechanism of constraint in which gender stereotypes restrict women's actions. Regarding the positive aspect, political scientists have studied the ways in which family ties contribute to women's participation in politics (see Jalalzai, 2013). For some women, the road to politics relies on their kinship ties to a known politician, with the aim to inherit their prestige (Jalalzai, 2013, p. 20). Similarly, Jensen (2008) claims that when women finally gained political rights, "widows and daughters of prominent politicians were the first" to run as candidates, entailing obvious political constraints (p. 15). Nonetheless, in terms of the negative aspect, Jalalzai (2013) brilliantly highlights the challenges of political kinship because "family ties reinforce 'feminine' characterizations of women as political proxies, diminishing their agency" (p. 20).

Therefore, even though family can act as a gateway for women's entrance into politics, it can also inhibit their freedom, as voters will expect these women to follow the political path of their relatives.

Another relevant positive effect refers to the family's ability to tackle gender stereotypes. Jensen (2008) claims that a woman born in a politically engaged family will be more likely to join the male realm of politics (p. 79). She focuses on the role of fatherhood when it comes to influencing a woman to enter a male domain, arguing that a father "is in a position to shield her from the effects of the perception of women as weak and ineffective" (p. 85). However, this claim relies on the biased assumption that women need male protection. Jensen also highlights the influence of mothers, claiming that the mothers of successful executive leaders under her study were "strong-willed women" who acted against gendered expectations (p. 89). When family acts to encourage women's participation in politics or even within the community, they challenge the stereotype of the political sphere being a males-only club. I argue motherhood and fatherhood can influence women to tackle gender stereotypes, including the belief that women are fragile.

Still, family can also act to constraint women's political success. Githens (2003) argues that society labels women as caregivers, docile and delicate, and at the same time, associates the opposite characteristics with men and politicians, meaning women in politics find themselves in a "double bind" (p. 44). In addition, as society expects women to be the main caregiver of the family, many women feel like they cannot combine their political aspirations with family roles (Jalalzai, 2013, p. 18). This is exemplified by the fact that many women in executive positions decide neither to get married nor to have children, or if they do, they delay their entrance into the political domain until their offspring has grown up; male politicians do not mention these facts (Jalalzai, 2013, p. 18). Similarly, Jensen (2008) brilliantly concludes that society's expectations towards women are incompatible with politics, therefore, "a

supportive family, especially a husband who shares his wife's goals, is important for a successful political career" (p. 126). The author does not associate political success with marriage; nonetheless, if a woman wants both a political career and a family, her partner needs to be supportive of her career and, therefore, needs to question gender stereotypes.

Lastly, another crucial topic refers to the male-dominated political sphere and the ways in which existing political behaviors reduce women's capabilities of networking, hindering their political growth. Political networks hold a crucial role in achieving a successful career in politics. This is evident in cabinet formation, in which the leader of the executive relies on trust to delegate political areas; "those who are part of personal networks linked to selectors and function as selectors' loyal allies and trusted friends constitute a substantial body of *ministrables*" (Annesley et al., 2019, p. 97). As mentioned before, women whose families are present in the political sphere may use these contacts to their advantage (Jensen, 2008, p. 79), granting their entrance into the male-dominated field. Similarly, Araújo et al. (2018) claim that women have been deprived of the "elite power networks out of which leaders emerged or were recruited" (p. 220), even if unofficially, considering that network alliances are nurtured in places attended mainly by men, such as "clubs or golf courses" (p. 221). Therefore, having access to the political network is crucial for political success.

Thus far, my thesis has argued in favor of women's political representation, showing the importance of women's presence in the executive branch and the ways in which these women have conquered such space. Nonetheless, most studies consider women a cohesive category, failing to acknowledge the ways in which identity shapes women's paths differently. Therefore, I argue that an intersectional analysis is crucial to assess the lived experiences of black women.

2.4. The Theoretical Framework of Intersectionality

Intersectionality emerged within black feminist studies to explain this group's lived experiences. Nowadays, feminist scholars have broadened the term's applicability to

understanding the effects of interactions between categories of identity such as class, nationality, and sexuality (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2015). Intersectionality has become crucial within gender studies, so much that Davis (2008) claims that restricting women's studies' focus to gender sounds unthinkable. Therefore, a substantial analysis should consider the impacts of intermingled relations upon an individual's identity.

Aiming to explain the experiences of women of color within the North American justice system, Crenshaw (1991) differentiates between “structural, political, and representational” intersectionality (p. 1244). This thesis mainly engages with the first and the last. “Structural intersectionality” refers to the unique experiences people at intersections, such as black women, are subject to if compared to their peers, for example, white women or black men (p. 1245). Therefore, Crenshaw (1991) argues that policies lacking an intersectional approach “will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles” (p. 1246). Similarly, research lacking an intersectional lens will be of little help to uncover the invisible mechanisms hindering black women's political participation. “Political intersectionality” refers to the ways in which government disregards certain individuals' characteristics when setting policy agenda, thus hindering these people's experiences (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1251). A classic example is the use of black men's experiences as the baseline for policies dealing with racism and white women's experiences for policies engaged with sexism. Lastly, “representational intersectionality” refers to black women's stereotyped representation within society, resulting in oppressive assumptions and policies (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1282). A notable example is the study of black women in senior-level positions in the North American federal government; the study concluded that black women's stereotypes hinder their possibilities of achieving higher government positions (White, 2020).

When it comes to black women's experiences, Bailey (2010) coined the term “misogynoir”, labeling the specific violence towards black women, which combines misogyny

and anti-blackness assumptions perpetuated in hip hop culture. Since then, the focus on the hip hop culture has diminished, and the term has been used to address the specific hatred black women are subject to when combining racist and misogynist oppressions. I argue that isolating experiences of racism and misogyny does not correctly translate black women's experiences of violence. It is the combination of systems of oppression, misogynoir, that affects their realities.

In sum, the use of intersectionality uncovers the ways in which power relations within society act upon black women's lives and result in several inequalities. I argue that an intersectional approach to feminist political research has the power to disrupt the domination of white feminism within knowledge production and uncover layers of oppression. In the next section, I address the current discussion regarding black women in politics.

2.5. Black Women in Politics

Existing scholarship referring to black women in politics is mainly based on the North American context, so even though this thesis will address a different country, I will use some of the main findings from the United States of America (USA) to understand the experiences of black women in Brazil. This is possible considering both countries share not only a similar past of colonization and slavery but also a similar present of capitalism, racism, and sexism. The unique experiences of blacks in Brazil are addressed in chapter 3.

In a recent intersectional study on the perceptions of descriptive representation in the USA, Montoya et al. (2021) claim that "the presence of historically underrepresented groups in political office" influences policy outcomes and encourages these groups in joining the political sphere (p. 2). The authors highlight the importance of conducting intersectional research to understand the ways in which "overlapping identities may vary across and within groups" (p. 3). For them, even though there is no perfect correlation between descriptive and substantive representation, it is evident that the participation of historical minorities, such as black women, in politics "has provided contingent evidence supporting the various substantive impacts" (p.

4). They highlight the “minority empowerment theory of politics,” which connects the presence of minorities in the political sphere and this group’s “democratic engagement and participation” (p. 4). Therefore, studies such as my thesis, which focuses on black women’s political representation, are crucial to understanding the political impacts of this group in politics.

Similarly, Lemi and Brown (2019) analyze black female candidates in the USA. For them, it is evident that voters observe women candidates’ phenotypes, like skin color or hair type, in order to decide their vote (p. 260). Nonetheless, voters will perceive candidates differently according to their own ethnicity. For instance, voters will negatively perceive black women candidates’ natural hair and dark skin unless the voter is also a black woman (Lemi & Brown, 2019, p. 261). The authors argue “colorism and hair texture preferences have consequences that impact Black women’s lives in meaningful ways” (Lemi & Brown, 2019, p. 263); not only for candidates but also for voters who, intentionally or not, will observe a candidate’s phenotype to make a decision. Furthermore, the authors claim that “black hair and black bodies have remained a site of political contestation [...], demonstrating that wearing natural hair today is a radical expression of self-acceptance, an evolution of Black political expression” (Lemi & Brown, 2019, p. 265). Thus, the color of skin, the type of hair, and other characteristics identifying the female candidate as black influence the level of discrimination these women are subject to.

The next chapter addresses the Brazilian political sphere, highlighting the historical path of women in politics and detailing the intermingled oppression of race and gender when it comes to black women. It also describes the specificities of the state government of Minas Gerais, demonstrating the importance of analyzing black women’s unique experiences in leadership positions.

Chapter 3 – Race and Gender Oppression in Brazilian Politics

Understanding the context of this study is fundamental to examine its results; therefore, in this chapter, I analyze the impacts of race and gender on Brazilian politics. Firstly, I address structural racism, a concept vital to understanding black people's struggles in the country. I argue that in Brazil, structural racism is behind black people's political underrepresentation. Additionally, I situate my study within the relevant scholarship regarding black people's political representation. Furthermore, I address women's exclusion from political power in the country. Lastly, drawing upon the concept of intersectionality presented in the last chapter, I examine existing scholarship regarding black women in Brazilian politics. I argue that political scientists concerned with political representation usually focus on black people or women; however, black women remain invisible at the intersection of race and gender oppression.

3.1. Racial Oppression

To understand black women's experiences in politics, it is fundamental to explain how racial oppression affects black people's lived experiences in Brazilian society. Brazil was the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery. While this violence against black and indigenous people was finally deemed illegal in 1888, race relations between white and non-white people have since been built on top of persisting white supremacy (Moura, 2014, as cited in Bersani, 2018).

Aiming to frame existing race relations in Brazil, legal scholar Almeida (2019) defines racism as “a **systematic** form of discrimination based on race. It manifests through conscious or unconscious practices that culminate in disadvantages or privileges for individuals, depending on the racial group to which they belong” (p. 22, emphasis added). The systemic characteristic of racism is fundamental to understanding Brazilian society, as it describes how race shapes one's lives, privileging white people.

Additionally, Almeida (2019) claims that there are three types of racism: individualist, institutional, and structural. This thesis focuses on institutional and structural racism because exploring racism in individual behaviors does not tackle black people's **systematic** oppression. The concept of institutional racism points to the ways in which racial discrimination acts upon institutions and organizations in attending to the interests of the dominant racial group while seeking to subdue minority groups (Werneck, 2012), even if unequal results are unintentional when existing rules produce racial inequalities despite not having this aim (McCrudden, 1982). Still, institutional racism influences the objectives, execution, and results of policies (Almeida, 2019; Werneck, 2012). To conclude, Almeida (2019) claims white men's domain in public and private institutions is based on rules and standards that prevent black people and women from achieving political and economic power; thus, there is a naturalization of gendered and racialized rules privileging white men.

Nonetheless, black people's **systemic** oppression cannot be reduced to institutional rules because institutions reproduce social practices and behavior (Almeida, 2019). Therefore, **structural racism** is intrinsic to the social order and explains how racist oppression occurs. Individualist and institutional racism develop because **structural racism** shapes Brazilian society. The roots of these racist outcomes go back to slavery, as Guimarães (2004) argues that Brazil established equality of rights between white and black people in 1888; still, the white elite who possessed power opposed black people's social and economic advancement, resulting in today's extreme inequality among these groups.

Nonetheless, only recently has the theoretical framework of structural racism been used to describe Brazilian reality. For many years, scholars described Brazil as a "racial democracy" (Gonzalez & Hasenbalg, 1982, p. 85) and downplayed existing racial inequalities. Deemed as the author of the racial democracy concept, Freyre (1933), argued that characteristics such as education, class, and occupation were more important than race in affecting people's lives (as

cited in Gonzalez & Hasenbalg 1982, p. 86). Racial democracy argues that Brazilian people are a product of interracial relations, favoring a peaceful coexistence of races in the country. This concept, however, fails in its core assumption of a peaceful coexistence of races in Brazil. The so-called ‘pacific coexistence of races’ was built on sexual abuse and exploitation of Indigenous and black people (Silva, 2017). The violent encounter resulted in a mix of races; thus, Brazilians represent a blend of colors, skin tones, and hair types. This mixture, however, should not be perceived as a racial paradise, firstly because of its violent roots, and secondly, because it does not stop forms of racial discrimination. Finally, scholars claim that the concept of racial democracy fails to acknowledge the ways in which race relates to existing inequalities in the country (Gonzalez & Hasenbalg, 1982). I argue that systemic racial oppression can no longer be denied in Brazil, where systems of power, intentionally or not, benefit white people.

Regarding the mix of races in the country, there are two concepts crucial to my study: colorism and racial identity. The first, colorism, is “a type of discrimination based on skin color, in which the darker a person’s skin tone, the greater their chances of suffering exclusion in society” (Silva, 2017, p. 3). Therefore, people are perceived differently according to their skin tone, regardless of their racial origin. Consequently, Silva (2017) highlights that aiming to be perceived differently, black people manipulate their hair or skin tone, blindly acknowledging white supremacy. The author argues that a lack of recognition as part of a black community results in blacks’ disunion (Silva, 2017). This disunion relates to the second concept, racial identity, “a person’s subjective self-identification”, which may be affected by several “conflicting dimensions” (Roth, 2016, p. 1310), such as ancestry, skin color, or hair type. Additionally, the fluidity of racial identity refers to how social behavior affects a person’s identity over time; thus, racial identity is a social construct.

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) established types of racial classification: white, indigenous, Asian-Brazilian, black, and brown.⁶ The Brazilian black movement criticizes the existence of the “brown” category, “the availability of a ‘mixed’ category encourages Brazilians to ‘deny their blackness’ and ‘lighten’ themselves” (Nascimento & Nascimento, 2001, as cited in Loveman et al., 2012, p.1469). Following the critics of the black movement, even though the categories of black and brown continue to exist in IBGE’s research, social scientists use “the sum of census blacks and browns” to analyze and understand the reality of black people in the country (Loveman et al., 2012, p. 1471). Therefore, my study encompasses women who identify themselves as **brown or black**, to understand their lived experiences and if skin tone affects them differently.

3.2. Black People in Brazilian Politics

Considering the existence of racialized **systemic** oppression in the country, an analysis of black people’s political representation is fundamental to tackling inequalities. While research shows promising results, this group’s participation in politics remains low. In 2018, black representatives accounted for 24% of the Brazilian Lower House, while black people comprehend 55.8% of the population (IBGE, 2019b). Accounting for candidates’ race since 2014, the Superior Electoral Court affirmed that 2020 municipal election was the first in which there were more black candidates than whites (TSE, 2020).⁷ Even though there has been an increase in black candidates, elected representatives remain primarily white, as blacks accounted for 44% of council people elected in 2020 (Rodrigues, 2019).

In a crucial study about city councilor candidates in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in the 2012 election, Campos and Machado (2015) conclude that education levels are entirely different for white and black candidates. White candidates have a higher level of education and

⁶ In Portuguese: branco, indígena, amarelo, preto e pardo (IBGE, 2019a)

⁷ The Superior Electoral Court accounts for the candidate’s race since 2014.

access to more funding, resulting in better election outcomes for them. The authors claim that having a degree represents more than a level of education; it also means building networks, engaging with political life, and gaining essential skills such as good oratory.

Unequal access to education is a crucial debate in Brazil and directly related to the racist systemic oppression black people are subject to. Medeiros et al. (2019) highlight the importance of educational access for the country's social development. Still, in 2019, for the first time, blacks represented most students in public universities in Brazil.⁸ These results are relevant because increasing educational opportunities is essential to tackling inequality (Menezes-Filho, 2001, as cited in IBGE, 2019b). In 2012, the federal government established reserved quotas in federally-funded public universities (Scovino, 2018).⁹ These quotas were fundamental in increasing racial and class diversity in public universities in the country (Lee, 2021); nonetheless, while 78.8% of white young adults between 18 and 24 years were enrolled in a university course in 2018, only 55.6% of blacks were (IBGE, 2019b). While much has been accomplished, these results demonstrate persistent racial inequality.

Therefore, black people's political underrepresentation comes unsurprisingly. Souza et al. (2021) analyze the 2016 local elections and 2018 national elections: although black candidates represented 46%, only 22% of elected representatives were black in the 2018 election. Souza et al. (2021) demonstrate that not only the proportion of black candidates is lower, but their success rate is also much lower than white candidates. Campos & Machado (2015) come to a similar conclusion: black people do not have the same access as white people to the legislative sphere. Additionally, right-wing parties are usually overrepresented with white candidates, while candidates of left-wing parties are more racially diverse (Schreiber, 2018).

⁸ Brown and blacks: 50.3%, White and others: 49.7% (IBGE, 2019b). Brazilian public universities are free and recognized for their high quality. Within the 20 best ranked universities in the country, only the 18th and 19th positions refer to private universities (RUF, 2019).

⁹ 50% of university places in federally-funded public universities are reserved for students from state schools; within this number, 25% should be reserved for low-income students and 25% for black and indigenous students.

In recent research about black people in civil service, Libório and Santana (2020) conclude that the lack of data regarding employees' racial classification in most Brazilian governmental spheres hinders the analysis of racial diversity in politics. They argue that only the federal government and the city of São Paulo gather racial statistics about their employees. The underrepresentation is similar in both spheres, as the higher-paid employees are mainly white, and only a few black people occupy leadership positions (Libório & Santana, 2020).

Therefore, focusing on the federal government, Silva & Lopez (n.d.) investigate the racial composition of its employees between 1999 and 2020. In this period, the number of black employees increased from 30.8% to 35.1%, while for whites, their representation increased from 48.2% to 56.6%.¹⁰ This racial gap only grows once the authors analyze leadership positions, senior management, and advisory positions (DAS).¹¹ These positions range from 1 to 6, with 6 being the most prestigious and better paid. Silva & Lopez (n.d.) conclude that the higher the hierarchical level, the smaller the political representation of black people, representing only 14% of DAS-6 occupants and 18.5% of DAS-5, whites represent 80% and 75.8%, respectively.¹² In comparison, blacks represent 35.6% of DAS-1, while whites represent 56% (Silva & Lopez, n.d.).¹³ Additionally, the authors analyze the average remuneration among employees with the same educational level. In 2020, black civil servants received lower salaries in comparison with their white peers. The difference is prominent among employees with tertiary education, in which black employees received 78% of white employees' pay (Silva & Lopez, n.d.). They conclude that blacks are mainly underrepresented in positions requiring a higher level of education, such as leadership positions. There is an evident barrier preventing

¹⁰ 1999: Asian-Brazilian: 3.3%; Indigenous: 0.3%; Not informed: 17.3% - 2020: Asian-Brazilian: 2.4%; Indigenous: 0.3%; Not informed: 5.7% (Silva & Lopez, n.d.)

¹¹ In Portuguese: Cargos de Direção e Assessoramento Superior – DAS (Silva & Lopez, n.d.)

¹² DAS-6: Not informed: 2.9%, Others: 2.1%; DAS-5: Not informed: 4.3%, Others: 1.5% (Silva & Lopez, n.d.)

¹³ Not informed: 4.3%, Others: 4.1% (Silva & Lopez, n.d.)

black people from achieving higher positions; nonetheless, unlike my thesis, the authors do not attempt to uncover the reasons behind blacks' underrepresentation.

In contrast to the federal government, the executive branch of Minas Gerais does not racially stratify its employees, over 290,000 people,¹⁴ even though this branch coordinates policies for promoting racial equality in the state. The invisibility of the racial gap hinders the implementation of policies to tackle racial inequality. The lack of data transforms the racial gap into an invisible problem, and studies like mine are crucial to uncovering the mechanism behind these results.

3.3. Women in Brazilian Politics

Before focusing on black women, in this section, I take a general approach to women's political participation in Brazil. The history of women's political rights in Brazil explains the country's peculiarities in feminine political representation. The suffragist movement granted women political rights in 1932, but not long after, in 1937, President Getúlio Vargas established "a centralized authoritarian regime" (dos Santos & Thomé, 2020, p. 7). The dictatorship lasted eight years and praised the gendered roles for men and women, having men as the breadwinners and relegating women's role to motherhood (dos Santos & Thomé, 2020). From 1964 to 1985, the country was under a military dictatorship; therefore, social movements centralized their claims around the fight for democracy, relegating women's political rights to the margins (dos Santos & Thomé, 2020). Even though women obtained political rights, power dynamics favoring men's political dominance remained in place (dos Santos & Thomé, 2020, p. 8).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, women's participation in legislative houses is meager. Therefore, it is unsurprising to acknowledge this group's similar results in cabinet representation in the federal government. Although women represent 43.4% of university-

¹⁴ Own calculations based on data from April 2020 available at Portal da Transparência (n.d.)

educated employees in the federal government, they occupy only 16.7% and 24.7% of DAS-6 and DAS-5 positions, respectively (Silva & Lopez, n.d.).¹⁵ In comparison, they represent 45.3% of DAS-1, the lowest hierarchical level (Silva & Lopez, n.d.).¹⁶ Although women are still underrepresented in the lowest level, the gender gap is not as significant as in the most prestigious positions, leading to the conclusion that the challenges women face to be appointed to leadership positions are directly related to the hierarchical level they aim to occupy.

The male dominance of cabinet formation is historical; men represented 95% of cabinet members between re-democratization in 1985 and 2003 (dos Santos & Thomé, 2020). It was only with President Dilma Rousseff's election in 2011, the first female president in Brazilian history, that women broke the 15% barrier of cabinet formation. Dos Santos and Jalalzai (2021) claim that during President Lula's (2003-2010) and Rousseff's (2011-2016) tenures, it was evident that women's appointments were considered relevant, but they were limited by "coalitional demands" (p. 68), confirming similar findings discussed in chapter 2.

In a highly debatable process, Rousseff's government was impeached in 2016 (see dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021). Evidence shows how gender oppression influenced this episode and created the entailing political crisis and a significant gender backlash in Brazil (dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021). Dos Santos and Jalalzai (2021) argue this episode was an attempt at "reinforcing gendered political institutions and curbing efforts to increase women's equality in a male-dominated political system" (p. 37).

Thus, it is unsurprising to acknowledge that cabinet formations since Rousseff's fall have disregarded women's participation. President Michel Temer's initial cabinet was entirely male-dominated (dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021).¹⁷ After criticism, Temer appointed two women, one

¹⁵ University educated employees: Men 49%; Not informed: 7.6% / DAS-6: Men: 78.3%; Not informed: 2.1%; Others: 2.9% / DAS-5: Men: 69.6%; Not informed: 4.2%; Others: 1.5% (Silva & Lopez, n.d.)

¹⁶ DAS-1: Men: 50.3%; Not informed: 4.3%; Others: 4.1% (Silva & Lopez, n.d.)

¹⁷ President Temer ruled from 2016 to 2019.

of them for “the reestablished Human Rights Ministry” (dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021, p. 81), proving the findings discussed in chapter 2 regarding the existence of a “concrete floor” (Annesley et al., 2019, p. 3) and women’s relegation to care-related careers and welfare.

Lastly, gender backlash has not ceased in Brazil. The current President, Jair Bolsonaro, was elected under the standard of traditionalist gender roles (dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021).¹⁸ Bolsonaro had been a “low-level representative” at the Brazilian Lower House for 27 years prior to his presidential election (dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021, p. 131); thus, his “controversial positions on the rights of women, LGBT, *quilombola*, and indigenous communities” have long been known in the country (Vazquez, 2019, p. 601).¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, Bolsonaro has only appointed two women for his initial cabinet.²⁰ When asked about it, he downplayed the importance of female political representation by saying, “these [two] women here are equivalent to ten men” (dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021, p. 58). While one could mistake this statement as an appreciation of women’s work, it is a notable example of his opposition to gender equality, considering the disdain he demonstrates towards women’s low political representation in his government.

Nonetheless, while women’s situation is undoubtedly concerning, an intersectional lens is needed to explain the ways in which gender and racial oppression intermingle and affect black women’s political careers.

3.4. Black Women in Brazilian Politics

This chapter has thus far demonstrated how racial and gender identity shape one’s access to politics; still, occupying a place within the intersections of systematic oppression, black women’s situation remains hidden. Legally, there is no barrier preventing black women from achieving political positions in Brazil; still, sexist and racist oppressions hinder this group’s

¹⁸ Jair Bolsonaro was elected in 2018 for a four-year mandate.

¹⁹ *Quilombolas* are the inhabitants of African-descent rural communities in Brazil (see Bowen, 2021).

²⁰ Out of 22 positions (Dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021)

success (Silva et al., 2020). Additionally, studies aiming to understand black women and power relations are nearly non-existent within the country (Carneiro, 2009).

While there is no legal barrier for this group's political representation, they occupy around 2.5% seats in each the Lower House and the Upper Chamber in Brazil (Assis et al., 2018). Still, they represent 28% of the Brazilian population (IBGE, 2019a). The first black female governor, Benedita da Silva, was elected in 2002, not even 20 years ago (Silva et al., 2020). Additionally, the analysis of cabinet formation in the federal government supports the claim about this group's unique reality. In the lowest hierarchical leadership positions, black women occupy 14% of seats (Silva & Lopez, n.d.).²¹ In the highest levels, DAS-5 and DAS-6, they represent only 4% and 1.2%, respectively (Silva & Lopez, n.d.).²² Thus, white women are 5.2 and 12.8 times more likely than black women to occupy DAS-5 and DAS-6 positions, respectively. I argue that this data confirms the importance of intersectionality, thus, analyzing how power systems intermingle and create an even more powerful barrier for black women.

As previously addressed, while black women are subject to misogyny and racism, they suffer from the combination of these two systems, misogynoir. Aiming to explain this implication, anthropologist Gonzalez (2019) claims that in Brazil, society associates a black woman with being a servant. While not wishing to diminish the importance of this profession, Gonzalez aims to demonstrate the stereotype actively hindering black women's experiences. This group is perceived as low-skilled and, thus, naturally unsuitable for the political sphere. Therefore, black women's absence in places of political power is perceived as a consequence of their unsuitability instead of addressing the systematic barriers preventing their success.

²¹ DAS-1: White Men: 29.4%; Black Men: 20.9; White Women: 26.6; Not informed: 4.3%; Others: 4.1% (Silva & Lopez, n.d.).

²² DAS-5: White Men: 55.2%; Black Men: 14.4; White Women: 20.6; Not informed: 4.2%; Others: 1.5% DAS-6: White Men: 65%; Black Men: 13.3; White Women: 15.5; Not informed: 2.1%; Others: 2.9% (Silva & Lopez, n.d.).

Those women who manage to break the barriers of gender and race oppression face countless struggles to gain and maintain political power. Gomes (2018) describes the ways in which “the racist, sexist and capitalist system work on the black, resulting in their underrepresentation in power spaces” (p. 50). Her article argues that black women are belittled in the political arena and exemplifies this claim with an episode in which a Brazilian journalist said he was surprised to see Regina Souza, a black senator because he thought she looked like a “mam-of-coffee”²³ (Gomes, 2018, p. 50). Gomes claims that the journalist did not feel embarrassed to express his surprise with a black woman in the political space. The journalist’s assumption is an evident example of the expected place of black women in Brazilian society: servitude. When black women challenge their expected place within society and join the political sphere, they face the violent racist and misogynist behavior exemplified in this case.

In order to challenge the violence black women face, it is fundamental to tackle the underrepresentation of this group in institutional spaces; thus, going beyond the legislative branch. In 2018, opposing the national context of gender backlash, the left-wing government of Minas Gerais established a gender mainstreaming policy, Policy Plan for Women (PPW). As mentioned in chapter 1, PPW sets among its goals the establishment of gender parity in leadership positions by 2028 (Borges et al., 2018). In 2019, when a right-wing government took office, there seemed to be no concern with this goal, as only three women were appointed within the 11 secretaries of state (G1 Minas, 2019). While PPW sets intersectionality among its values, Minas Gerais’ government does not racially stratify its employees, preventing quantitative studies on this topic. As mentioned previously, lack of data challenges policy-making, as it is impossible to act on invisible problems. This is an evident example to address within the “structural intersectionality” framework (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245), which is used to

²³ It has been common in meetings to have somebody serving coffees. A low-paid and low-skilled job.

demonstrate how the lack of an intersectional approach in policy design, unwillingly or not, maintains black women under racial oppression and thus, favors white women.

In conclusion, while addressing political representation, scholars usually disregard the ways in which different identities shape one's lived experiences. Thus, studies like mine, which focus on black women, are fundamental to show the ways in which this group's political underrepresentation occurs. Additionally, granting gender and racial diversity in the political sphere is essential to establish this group's voice within agenda setting (Silva et al., 2020).

Chapter 4 - Mechanisms Influencing Black Women's Political Participation

In order to explore the mechanisms influencing black women's political participation, this chapter presents the results of the ten interviews I conducted with black female leaders in the executive branch of Minas Gerais. Through the ten interviews, I identified seven mechanisms intervening in this group's political participation. These mechanisms are connected to racial identity, misogynoir, family, personality traits, access to high-quality education, party ideology, and the presence of critical allies.

The following sections address the ways in which interviewees described the impact of each mechanism in their careers. Some mechanisms might have a double effect, meaning they may have a positive or negative impact depending on certain conditions. In the next chapter, I analyze the ways in which my findings connect with existing literature on political representation and racial and gender politics in Brazil.

4.1. Racial Identity

Through the interviews, I identified two outcomes connected to racial identity influencing this group's political success. First, it became evident that white supremacist discourses negatively affect black women's racial identity, resulting in their sense of not belonging to the political sphere unless they attempt to be perceived as white, for instance, by straightening their hair. Second, when these women embrace their black identity and resist white supremacy, it positively affects this group's political success by tackling the biased assumption that black women do not belong to places of political power.

As mentioned in chapter 3, race is a social construct. This concept was evident in most of the interviews, as some women described how social interactions shaped their racial identity. G.S. narrated the moment in which she realized how her race differentiated her from others. "When I got a chance to study at a private school, I realized how different I was. [...] The only black student in my class" (G.S.). Therefore, up to that point in her life, her race had not been

something she was concerned about. Race only gained meaning when she realized her features deemed her as black, as someone different from others in a private school.

In addition, the interviewees demonstrated how they struggled with their racial identity over time. C.O., a light-skinned woman, claimed about her youth: “I would rather not identify as black; I would rather think I was white if I had to write it down on a questionnaire. You don’t have a reference to tell you: darling, you’re not white, you are black”. Her example demonstrates the ways in which an individual’s perceptions of race are not immutable; even though her features did not change over time, her perceptions of them changed, influencing her racial identity. Additionally, it demonstrates the crucial role of identity in representation. If every influential person looks the same, namely white, it is more likely that black women will deny their black heritage to fit in.

This naturalization of white supremacy discourse is evident through their testimonies. “Ten years ago, I didn’t go for a job interview unless I had straightened my hair. [...] Today, I don’t face issues with my curly hair” (G.S). “My hair was curly just like yours. [...] My hair is really important for my self-esteem, but I’m from a different generation than yours. Curly hair was not pretty back then” (J.V.). These examples show the naturalization of white features as mainstreaming beauty, such as straight hair, and the ways in which this naturalization affects how black women perceive their identities. Understanding that race is a fluid concept explains how their perceptions of race have changed over time, denaturalizing the white supremacy discourses they once had.

Still, there is a correlation between light-skinned black women and a reluctance to identify themselves as black. Even though racist stereotypes were a common theme in the interviews, light-skinned black women were more likely to deny a personal implication of racial oppression. “There is no impact of race in my life. I have never experienced racism,” K.R. argued when asked about the importance of race for her. “I don’t see any relevance in

identifying myself as a brown woman,” stated J.O., while addressing this issue. Both women used the word “*parda*”, which can be translated as brown. The use of brown instead of black indicates they would rather not identify as black, thus, unintentionally following racist discourse.

Some of the interviewees addressed the impact of black identity denial. For instance, M.V. argued that when people downplay the role of racism in their careers, refusing to acknowledge the impact of being a black person in a place of political power, this behavior hinders black people’s chances to achieve leadership positions unless they follow the same whitening path. C.O. shared the same opinion and claimed that without acknowledging the importance of being a black woman in a place of political power, “there is no sense of belonging”. The sense of belonging comes when black women understand the importance of representing this group in the political sphere, acknowledging they also hold political power. Similarly, G.G. expressed her concerns with black women’s representation in the executive branch, as she stated, “How many black women in leadership positions do you know? I ask this because I don’t know anyone”. The lack of this group’s presence in leadership positions results in the feeling of not belonging to that place of political power; therefore, having representatives concerned and aware of their identity helps to enhance this group’s representation. Their standpoint as black women in leadership positions allows them to recognize the importance of their identity. For instance, C.O. acknowledged the significance of this descriptive representation, claiming, “once in a while, there will be curly hair here and a darker skin tone there, and you will find the courage to be yourself. You have to resist”. Labeling the acceptance of one’s skin tone and type of hair as resistance demonstrates the struggle these women are subject to just by being themselves. Therefore, resisting white supremacy discourses by, for instance, not straightening curly hair, empower other women to embrace their natural hair without feeling that they do not belong.

These examples demonstrate the particular experiences of black women, as they are not perceived as belonging to the political field. While this racist discourse negatively affects this group by resulting in their racial denial, when they embrace their racial identity, it helps to tackle racist assumptions about black women not belonging in the political sphere.

4.2. Misogynoir

Interviewees acknowledged that Brazilian society is racist and misogynistic, which results in misogynoir, black women's unique experiences of racial and gender discrimination, and impacts this group's experiences in the political sphere. Nonetheless, discriminatory racial events were not always labeled in such a way. Still, even those who denied having experienced racial discrimination were aware of black women's lack of political representation in the executive branch.

Overall, interview participants acknowledged the existence of gender discrimination in the workplace. While some interviewees did not experience gender discrimination themselves, they still acknowledged the influence of gender stereotypes benefiting male leaders and hindering women's possibilities of achieving higher leadership positions. J.V. felt embarrassed when she had to tell her boss that she was pregnant, and J.O. expressed similar feelings when she told her boss about her maternity leave and vacation. Her male boss considered her absence a privilege instead of a right.

Similarly, most interviewees acknowledged the existence of double standards when it comes to being a man or a woman in a leadership position. C.O. claimed that when women's work goes wrong, the pejorative tone is dominant; the same does not happen if the leader is a man. Women are subject to misogynistic episodes because most leaders are "white, middle-aged and male" (C.O.). Her statement highlights the importance of black women's political representation in tackling gender stereotypes in the political sphere. Nonetheless, even when women achieve leadership positions, gender stereotypes may continue to affect their careers.

K.R. also illustrated the impact of gender discrimination when she claimed, “I decided to resign because the misogynistic political leaders at the Secretariat did not give me the authority to perform as I should”. At the time of her resignation, K.R. occupied a third level position within the hierarchy in a secretariat considered a masculine domain.

Gender stereotypes dictate who is to be regarded as a model leader, namely, white, middle-aged man, but gendered rules differ in so-called feminine and masculine domains (see Chapter 2). K.R. highlighted the leadership of a black woman as Secretary for Education in the past years; still she asked “Why don’t we see similar leadership in the Secretariat of State for Public Works, for example?”. Her inquiry demonstrates the ways in which black women’s political achievements are affected by racial and gender discrimination, but this also depends on the context. In this case, education is perceived as a feminine domain contrary to public works. Similarly, M.J. argued that even though she is aware of gender discrimination at the workplace, she has never experienced it because the leadership position she is in currently has long been led by women. Therefore, it is evident that gender stereotypes in political domains impact black women’s careers. My interview data shows that these women find it easier to be successful in feminine domains and struggle to lead masculine domains.

Nonetheless, even if attenuated in certain circumstances, such as leading a team in a feminine domain, my interviews provide many examples of how gender stereotypes entail gender discrimination. J.V. explained the presence of discriminatory behavior towards the LGBT community. She said that this is visible when someone at the workplace is labeled as “the lesbian”. This discriminatory behavior demonstrates how gender nonconformity is negatively perceived in the political sphere. In order to avoid this experience, C.O. asserted: “I don’t hide my sexuality, [...] but, in some spaces and moments, I will only come out [as a lesbian] if someone asks me directly”. There is a clear situation of violence in which sexuality, race, and gender oppression intersect. The interviewees feel they have to behave stereotypically

in order to achieve or maintain their leadership positions. Additionally, their perceptions on gender discrimination changed over time, as they became more aware of the concept. “I didn’t realize some things in the past were actually gender discrimination; once I realized it existed, I perceived many discriminatory comments” (J.O.). Most claimed that discussions about gender stereotypes have been more common lately, influencing their perceptions of gender discrimination in the labor force.

In opposition to gender discrimination, part of the group was reluctant to label episodes of racism as such, and only two out of ten claimed to have had such experiences. Both are dark-skinned women with curly hair. Nonetheless, through most interviewees’ statements, it is possible to claim that their experiences of discrimination resulted from combined oppression of not only gender but also racial discrimination.

K.F., one of the two who affirmatively responded when asked about racism, shared the discriminatory episode she suffered, which perfectly exemplifies this group’s unique oppression:

Once a mayor made an appointment to talk to another black woman from my team and me. When he got there, he looked shocked, so I asked him: Mr. Mayor, were you expecting two men? He replied: “No, I was expecting a tall, blond, and white woman. [...] where I come from, blacks are either working at farms or serving me coffee at the city hall.” [...] I wasn’t mad; it looked like he let it slip.

This shows the ways in which layers of oppression intersect and result in black women’s unique oppression. The mayor would not be surprised if she were a white woman; his surprise came because a black woman was not occupying a servitude position, which is the usual case in Brazil (Gonzalez, 2019). Another relevant factor is that he did not feel embarrassed to admit discriminatory behaviors towards someone occupying a position of political power.

Similarly, black women’s experiences are also evident in a second example:

Once, while I was a hospital administrator, I was showing the hospital around to a new white doctor when my husband arrived to pick me up after work. My husband is white. The doctor asked: “Is he a new doctor too?” I replied by saying: “No, he is my husband.” The doctor said: “Great business card you have.” I didn’t understand. He said: “You’re

black, and he is white, so it is a great business card to come and go where you wish.”
(K.F.)

Representing another clear example of misogynoir, the doctor felt entitled to assume she needed a white man to escort her in order to come and go as she wished. This assumption was only prevalent because her identity as a black woman often denies her access to powerful positions. It also demonstrates again that there was no embarrassment to express such discriminatory behavior. These clear examples of racial and gender discrimination illustrate the **unique** barriers that exist for black women.

While only K.F., the author of the statements above, and M.V. recognized experiences of race discrimination while performing their work, most interviewees agreed that they sometimes felt like they needed to behave in a certain way because of their skin color, type of hair, or gender. Thus, although they did not recognize this necessity to adapt as a result of discrimination, it is evident this is directly linked to their identity as black women.

I have never experienced racism directly; for example, something that was too striking not to notice. I have experienced something more subtle, like non-acceptance. I think we [black women] have to do much more to be accepted, much more than usual to be accepted. I always felt a little rejected. Nowadays, I am capable of identifying that it is because of the skin tone, that it is because of the hair, not because of my personality. In the past, I thought this was normal or that the problem was myself. (D.R.)

This quote shows a reluctance to identify discriminatory episodes as racism. It is clear that she ascribes specific barriers in her life to her identity as a black woman, but for her, this occurs only in a subtle way. Her reluctance to label subtle discrimination as racism relates to the ways in which racial oppression happens in Brazil. Additionally, it demonstrates racial fluidity as it indicates how her perceptions of race changed over time.

Furthermore, none of the interviewees believed that their race or gender negatively influenced their advancement in the executive branch in their particular case. Nonetheless, they acknowledged black people face exclusive barriers. G.G. exemplified this conclusion by claiming that, “I haven’t faced any type of discrimination; neither have I seen this happen to

anyone. But how am I going to see this happening to someone if I'm one out of the two blacks working there?" M.V. provided a similar statement: "Where are our people? They are cleaners or in administrative positions". Their comments highlight once more the importance of having black women in positions of political power in order to tackle the discriminatory assumptions they face. Therefore, even when interviewees did not acknowledge an evident impact of their race on their careers, there is evidence that the lack of this group's descriptive representation is a form of misogynoir.

In summary, I have identified ways in which black women suffer a unique type of discrimination, misogynoir, combining gender and racial discriminatory features. Most interviewees pointed to gender stereotypes influencing their careers in politics, while some denied racial discrimination experiences. Interviewees did, however, acknowledge the stereotyped experiences of black women in the workforce.

4.3. Family

Through the interviews, it became evident that family directly impacts women's careers, either hindering or benefiting them. There are two main factors to consider regarding family. First, the role of partners, who can act to support these women in achieving and maintaining leadership roles or can prevent them from doing so by being less supportive of their careers. The second factor is related to childcare and the gender stereotype of women as primary caregivers. Most of the interviewees claimed that children have a negative impact on women's careers in general. Thus, not having children has a positive effect on these women's careers.

The intermingled role of family was a common topic among interviewees. They were adamant that having a supportive partner who tackles gender stereotypes and is equally responsible for their children is fundamental for their political success. M.V. brilliantly exemplified this when she declared:

When I decided to accept the invitation to be the undersecretary, my husband was very supportive. When I asked him what his opinion was [to accept or not the invitation], he told me I should follow my heart and that he would handle our son's care. (M.V.)

It is evident that having a supportive partner who would reject gender stereotypes by being the primary caregiver of their child was fundamental for her political success. Similarly, C.O. believes her wife's support was essential for her professional success: "I always count on her support. [...] Before I accept a new leadership position, we talk and deliberate because there is a clear impact on our family interactions. She knows the costs [of a leadership position]". Again it is clear that a supportive partner, regardless of their gender, positively influences the development of these women's careers.

Nonetheless, even though most of the interviewees replied affirmatively when asked if their partners were supportive of their careers, their statements were sometimes conflicting. This conflict could be perceived when an interviewee claimed: "My husband is really supportive of my career, but **he says I work too much**" (G.S.). Similarly, J.O. stated that her husband understands that she has a demanding job, but he sometimes complains about her working hours and questions if her overtime would affect caring for their children. Although they affirm having supportive partners, their statements highlight the challenges behind balancing their personal lives and careers. The struggle of balancing career, partner, and childcare was also something D.R. highlighted:

I never let my ex-husband tell me what to do, [...] but when we had our daughter, he didn't want me to go back to work. [...] I was also studying at that time, and he would ask me why I needed to keep studying. (D.R.)

Her example demonstrates that a non-supportive partner may feel entitled to deprive women of their academic or professional advancements in order to fulfill gender stereotypes as family caregivers.

Additionally, the impact of children on these women's careers was a shared experience. Gender stereotypes within society are evident as women are expected to be the primary

caregivers within their families, even when they have promising careers (see chapter 2). Most interviewees acknowledged that their experience as mothers differs from the father's experience, for instance:

I keep thinking: do men also feel like they have to give up their leadership positions once they became parents, or is this a feeling only women have? [...] Society expects women to be the best moms in the world as if we didn't have to work and, at the same time, wants us to work as if we weren't moms. (J.O.)

Through her example, it is evident that, for her, women experience a much more complex challenge in balancing a demanding job and childcare than men do. This struggle is again an impact of gender stereotypes.

Therefore, family is a powerful tool reinforcing gender stereotypes and thus hindering women's careers. D.R. exemplified the impact of gender roles when she declared, "people think once you've become a mom, you have given up on your professional career". Women are labeled as possibly reckless professionals once they become mothers, and this label hinders their possibilities of being appointed for a leadership position. K.R. exemplified this, "I feel that I might have to resign from a future leadership position and find a job in which I can fit maternity better". In opposition, it seems unlikely that men face similar struggles about combining fatherhood and leadership roles because the gendered expectations of society allow them to balance their careers with political life (see chapter 2).

Although only five interviewees have children, non-mothers shared a similar view regarding the impact of children on women's careers. K.F. stated, "when I worked as a local secretary of public health, I remember looking at the working moms and thinking, 'this is insane' [...] You have to dream of becoming a mother; otherwise it won't work". Similarly, C.O. claimed, "I see that many colleagues who are mothers are overburdened, especially since we have been working from home" (C.O.).²⁴ Two interviews were interrupted so the women

²⁴ During the COVID-19 pandemic, the executive branch of Minas Gerais declared a state of emergency, and since March 2020, until the time of this research (May 2021), most of its employees have worked from home.

could talk to their children. Therefore, there is an even more prominent struggle in the extenuating circumstances of working from home in a pandemic year.

Unsurprisingly, for a leadership position, not having children is seen as an asset for women. C.O. shares this opinion, as she claims that “not having kids is certainly an advantage for me because I see how judged working mothers are”. Women without children are perceived as more available in a demanding job, as they do not have to balance their careers and childcare. Therefore, they do not face the same biases as mothers who are perceived as less dedicated professionals.

Overall, it is evident that family impacts women’s careers differently because gender stereotypes affect the ways in which women are perceived as the primary caregivers. Therefore, the cost of maternity is much higher than the cost of paternity, which hinders women’s careers in the executive branch. Supportive partners, however, can tackle gender stereotypes and affect these women’s careers positively.

4.4. Personality Traits

Through the interviews, it is possible to identify two outcomes connected to personality traits. First, there are common characteristics among interviewees, such as dedication and perseverance, supporting their political achievements. Second, there is a clear misogynistic component in these personality traits, as the interviewees argued that men and women, even when reacting similarly to events, are perceived differently, especially black women.

Overall, personality traits were the first mechanism interviewees pointed to as having a positive influence on their political career in the executive branch. For them, these personal characteristics distinguished them from others. K.F. pointed out that her courage and perseverance were fundamental to her achievements because “in many situations, it would have been easier to step back. In many situations, I thought ‘what am I doing here?’ [...] But then I encouraged myself to keep going”. For J.V., her personal characteristics were fundamental to

being appointed to a leadership position. Similarly, K.R. pointed to her dedication as something necessary for her success, “I like to dedicate myself to these challenges”.

Nonetheless, most of them argued that personality traits may facilitate upward movement, but they are not enough to grant a position of power. For instance, J.O. suggested that enduring extra shifts is also a requirement in addition to her personality. “I think it’s part of my personality. [...] It’s part of me to work overtime and dedicate myself”. Most interviewees had a similar view; in other words, working longer hours is expected to obtain and maintain a leadership position. As addressed earlier in this chapter, women may struggle to balance their role as caregivers within the family and the dedication required for a leadership role. Additionally, J.V. and J.O. argued the positive impacts of experience in the field, as they have held leadership positions for many years now; therefore, their technical expertise became fundamental for their continuity as leaders.

Still, interviewees highlighted the ways in which gender stereotypes affect how female leaders’ characteristics will be seen. For instance, J.O. exemplified this difference by highlighting existing double standards because “an assertive man has a good characteristic as a leader. When I am the one arguing about something, I’m someone challenging to handle, too angry”. In a second example, she claimed “recently, at a meeting, I told my boss I would handle a situation. He replied: ‘Will you go on a good or bad day?’ [...] Men are great, but women are hormonal?” (J.O.). Even though interviewees highlighted their personality traits as beneficial for their careers, gender stereotypes might make the same traits seem problematic.

Proving that these gender stereotypes derive from systematic oppression, even interviewees reproduced biased ideas. “I don’t mind working mainly with men, even though it is sometimes complicated. You have to prove yourself countless times”. D.R. works in a male-dominated team, which favors the reproduction of stereotyped assumptions. She claimed that

her “male” characteristics helped her thrive in a male field, “I’m very practical, and I think men are more practical than women, so I handle it well”.

Additionally, an intersectional lens is fundamental to understanding the combined impact of race and gender discrimination in this case. M.V. claimed that she is perceived as an “angry woman”; nonetheless, she connects this personality trait with her identity as a black woman. “I feel that to endure being a black woman in this position, I have to behave brutally. [...] My friend jokes saying that I only roar, I never meow. Unfortunately, the world does not allow women like me to meow” (M.V.). Her statement highlights that her identity as a black woman makes others question her decisions, and she uses a brutalized façade to endure this behavior. Additionally, she differentiates between white and black women’s experiences, where white women are allowed to portray softer behavior while black women cannot.

In conclusion, there is a clear correlation between personality traits and achieving leadership positions. While dedication and perseverance support these women’s success, gender stereotypes influence how these characteristics are perceived within the political sphere.

4.5. Access to High-Quality Education

Most interviewees connected access to high-quality education with political success. Nonetheless, to understand the intricacies of educational access in Brazil (see chapter 3), the intersectional framework needs to encompass a class analysis in addition to gender and race, as there is a correlation between privileged backgrounds and access to high-quality education. Interviewees from underprivileged backgrounds followed mainly two paths to overcome class barriers: either they were able to attend renowned public schools, or they received scholarships to attend private schools.

Firstly, the interviewees connected political success with educational access. When I asked if minorities needed support in order to achieve leadership positions, most interviewees pointed to former barriers, such as educational access, affecting this group’s political success.

“There is a need to balance minorities’ access to high-quality education; otherwise, they will never achieve leadership positions” (J.O.). For her, not having access to proper education negatively affects this group’s careers.

Interviewees from privileged households addressed the impact of easily accessing high-quality education on their careers. For instance, J.O. exemplified “I think that my financial conditions were much more beneficial to my professional success than my gender and race were detrimental”. At the same time, those from working-class backgrounds pointed to the fact that their successful academic education differed from their social class peers, indicating this difference as a milestone for their success.

Nonetheless, even though the interviewees accessed these privileged, mostly white, spheres, their experiences remained different from white people. M.V. brilliantly illustrated this difference:

I have always studied in private schools, in which blacks were minorities, not even ten percent. Later in university, the same happened, blacks weren’t even ten percent. [...] I think that [...] **being in a place where you do not recognize yourself in others is extremely disturbing.** (M.V.)

Her statement demonstrates the importance of representation. Even when coming from privileged backgrounds, black people’s experiences differ from white people’s because their racial identity automatically labels them as not belonging to privileged places.

Most interviewees claimed to have had high-quality educational opportunities. Some of them attended private schools for their primary education, mainly those coming from privileged backgrounds. G.S. differed from the group, as she was granted a scholarship to study at a private school. She highlighted the importance of this scholarship, presenting an opportunity not only to her but also to her family, as she is now able to encourage her siblings to study. “I see my brothers thinking about something none of us ever thought [to have a degree], and now we change society bit by bit” (G.S.). Once more, it is evident that role models are crucial for

minorities, seeing someone who resembles themselves breaking the existing barriers encourages members of minority groups.

While access to high-quality education is not always linked to private schools, the public schools these women attended were above average. For instance, some studied in federal or military schools,²⁵ known for their high-quality education. Still, there is evidence of discriminatory barriers, as K.F. highlighted: “it was only in high school that other blacks attended my [military] school”. Once more, interviewees demonstrated the ways in which black people are excluded from privileged spheres. The few who manage to break barriers face a racial struggle, as previously mentioned.

Interviewees who did not have access to high-quality primary education faced challenges in attending university, as C.O. pointed out. Both C.O. and K.R. gained a scholarship to attend preparatory courses for university and acknowledged that, even with the scholarship, it was a privilege to be able to focus on studies instead of joining the workforce. Severely underprivileged women might not have this opportunity to dedicate themselves only to study.

Furthermore, interviewees recognized the importance of social programs in tackling the existing barriers for minorities. G.G. claimed that only through social programs was she able to attend a technical school and later on join university. “I’m an exception among my community. [...] I started to see that I had potential to be better when I attended a technical school. Only then I realized I could go to a university”. Her statement brings some relevant facts to analyze. First, she claims to be an exception, which relates to the fact that most black people are poor and attend lower-quality schools. Second, she highlights the ways in which educational opportunities can tackle the poverty cycle, allowing for professional and political success.

²⁵ These schools are better rated on PISA (See Graeml, 2019).

In summary, access to high-quality education favors possible appointment to a leadership position. Nonetheless, in order to understand the ways in which this mechanism acts upon black women's lives, a combined analysis of race, gender, and class is necessary. An intersectional lens shows how underprivileged black women struggle to access high-quality education; thus, hindering this group's political success.

4.6. Party Ideology

Party ideology is another mechanism influencing black women's careers. Interviewees claimed a left-wing government is more concerned with appointing a diverse cabinet, while a right-wing one is more likely to disregard diversity inclusion as a political value. Firstly, it is evident that when the political party neglects diversity, it leads to the political underrepresentation of minority groups, considering that intermingled systems of oppression will act to maintain the status quo, namely, white, middle-aged men in leadership positions. Second, when diversity is seen as part of political ideology, right-wing parties might act to obstruct such tools in their governments.

Overall, interviewees highlighted the importance of party ideology to cabinet formation. "I see that Pimentel's government was more aware of diversity inclusion."²⁶ In the current government, I don't see any structured measure,"²⁷ stated M.J. when asked about the inclusion of minorities in leadership positions. The former governor was from the worker's party, the most prominent leftist party considering political affiliations, while the current one is right wing.

Addressing not only diversity, but also the specific case of black women in the political sphere, interviewees also associated black women's political success with party ideology. "I have the impression that [...] in Pimentel's government, there were more blacks and black

²⁶ Fernando Pimentel (Workers' Party – PT) governed the State of Minas Gerais from 2015 to 2019.

²⁷ Romeu Zema (Novo Party) has been the governor since 2020.

women in leadership positions” (K.R.). She considers this fact unsurprising because of “the party’s ideology and its supporters”. There are two relevant facts in her statements. Firstly, I highlight once more the importance of political representation and the individual being able to see oneself in powerful positions. Second, when a leftist party appoints black women to leadership positions, this brings no surprise, as if it was obliged to do this. At the same time, a right-wing politician may dismiss the importance of diversity by the same means.

As an evident example of the negative impact in associating party ideology and diversity, M.V. decided to resign from her position because the right-wing party hindered diversity policies. “The party voted against the ratification to the Inter-American Convention against Racism. This was really hard for me. [...] I held a political-technical position, but I couldn’t use my standpoint”.²⁸ In this statement, she demonstrates that an impact of black women’s identity on policies is only possible if party ideology does not hinder it. For her, the conflicting relation between her professional loyalty and her personal racial identity resulted in her resignation.

Therefore, it is evident that party ideology influences not only black women’s possibilities of achieving higher positions but also maintaining these positions. Thus, party ideology may affect the ways in which substantive representation occurs when the representative does not have self-governance to support diversity policies.

4.7. Critical Allies

Most interviewees endorsed the importance of having critical allies within the political sphere, such as an inspiring boss or mentor, or having the support of other women, in order to achieve and maintain political positions in the executive branch. Some interviewees claimed

²⁸ Brazil ratified the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance (A-68) in 2021. Novo Party, whose governor is ahead of Minas Gerais State, was the only party holding position against the ratification (see Martins, 2020)

that a personal relationship with their mentors was essential to their political achievements. Others pointed to the inspirational factor of having someone to look up to in the political sphere. Still, most have never had a black woman as a leader, which they pointed out as an issue of representation. Furthermore, they highlighted the importance of supporting other women in the workplace and having their support as well. The interviewees demonstrated that a women's network is fundamental for black women's political achievements. Lastly, they also highlight the ways in which they are personally attentive to political representation and, thus, appoint other women for leadership positions as well.

Personal relationships between the interviewees and their mentors was a consistent theme in the interviews. "My mentor guided me not only professionally, but also personally, he taught me what to observe, how to behave and make assertive decisions" (G.G.). Similarly, M.V. claimed that, "my mentor taught me that I had the power to change people's lives. That was really rewarding for me". In addition, K.R. declared: "my mentor was really inspiring; she had a crucial role in shaping my professional behavior". Their statements highlight the positive impact of mentorship on their careers, demonstrating the crucial role of mentors for their political success.

Most interviewees connected these experiences of an inspiring boss or mentor to achieving leadership positions in the executive branch. J.O. asserted that it was only because of her inspiring boss that she had the opportunity to demonstrate her qualifications for holding a leadership position. This connection between mentor and leadership position was also something that K.F. exemplified: "when I realized the importance of my position, I thought I couldn't handle, [...] she told me to trust myself because she knew I had potential". These examples demonstrate the ways in which a mentor's support is crucial to black women.

Most of them pointed to other women when asked about inspiring bosses or mentors. Nonetheless, the topic of representation is once more evident, as most of the group

acknowledged they have never had a black woman as a leader. Therefore, most inspiring bosses or mentors are white and thus do not share interviewees' racial identity or understand the challenges of this minority group. For G.G., not having a black woman as a boss feels challenging because "I have no reference of racial experience, and this would have been important for me". M.V. similarly highlighted the importance of having black women in leadership positions: "a white man, even when they are attentive to diversity, will never know what it is like to be a black woman". For her, the standpoint of black women needs to be present in the executive branch. Similarly, K.R. claimed, "it would be interesting to work with a woman who identified herself as black, so I could better understand the challenges, but I haven't had this opportunity yet". Once more, the issue of representation comes back, as there are so few black women in leadership positions that none of the interviewees had the opportunity to be led by one.

Additionally, some women pointed to the importance of having women's support in their workplace. "I have always found it difficult to work with men, I'd rather work with women instead. This net of support was really important for me" (M.V.). Similarly, C.O. pointed to women's networks as fundamental for her accomplishments, "from technical support to referring me to leadership positions". Having the support of other women in the workforce is essential to tackling gender stereotypes. In this case, interviewees did not highlight the importance of representation, mainly because they were not addressing leadership positions. Thus, women's networks are a tool to enhance women's experience in the political sphere in general, not aimed at leadership positions only.

When it comes to leadership positions, most of them claimed to be supportive of other women at the workplace, acknowledging their importance in fostering women's presence in the political sphere. "I see that my presence encourages other women [...], today in my position, I have the opportunity to appoint other women to leadership positions" (C.O.). Similarly, G.S.

explained, “I appointed three women to be directors at my superintendence, one of them is black. I think this is really important and it is helpful because we understand each other”. M.V. also emphasized female leaders’ role in supporting other women at the workplace, as she claimed, “I have always appointed other women to leadership positions, to foster our network and empower these women. I am very proud to see their transformation”. These examples show the power of political representation, considering that these women are attentive to increasing the presence of women in the political sphere, using their political power to do so.

In sum, interviewees demonstrated the positive role of inspiring bosses or mentors for their political success. Most interviewees, however, have never been led by black women, showing a clear issue of representation. Additionally, they described the ways in which women’s networks act as a mechanism of support to overcome the barriers they face in the political sphere. Critical allies positively influence women’s political success, and these women also act to promote other women to leadership positions.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the main findings of the ten interviews I conducted with black women in leadership positions in the executive branch of Minas Gerais. Through this method, I identified seven mechanisms positively and negatively affecting this group’s political participation. It became evident that black women’s experiences sometimes are similar to white women and sometimes are similar to black men, which means that overall, this group lives a **unique** experience in the political sphere. The intersectional lens combining gender and race, and sometimes class oppression, enabled me to demonstrate the ways in which these mechanisms affect this group in a singular way.

Furthermore, misogynoir is the only mechanism that solely hinders this group’s political careers. The other tools can positively or negatively influence black women’s achievements in the political sphere, depending on specific contexts. In the following chapter, I analyze the ways

in which these seven mechanisms create a unique lived experience for this group and relate my findings to the existing literature on political representation and racial and gender politics in Brazil.

Chapter 5 - Being Black, a Woman, and a Boss: A Unique Lived Experience

This chapter connects results from my research with existing literature on the topic, particularly political representation theory and literature on black women in politics. Firstly, this chapter highlights how black women's identity and personal characteristics differentiate their experiences within the political sphere. I address the challenges they face to succeed, demonstrating how different systems of oppression and their interactions hinder this group's political success. Secondly, I identify this group's tools to tackle the existing discrimination. Through this chapter, I argue that black women face unique challenges in achieving and maintaining leadership positions in the executive. While some mechanisms occur because of their racial identity and some because of their gender, most mechanisms influence these women in an exclusive way due to intersecting oppressions.

5.1. The Multiple Mechanisms of Oppression

My research demonstrates how black women's identity shapes their political paths. Firstly, there is an evident sense of not belonging to the political sphere due to their identity as black women. Secondly, my results show how gendered expectations influence this group's careers. While race and gender oppression are not exclusive to this group, their interaction is. Misogynoir exclusively hinders black women's political success. Furthermore, my results show how additional challenges, such as underprivileged backgrounds, hinder these women's achievements in the political sphere.

5.1.1. *The Sense of Not Belonging*

Through my research, it became clear that black women are perceived as not belonging to the political sphere. In Brazilian society, black women are usually associated with servitude occupations (Gonzalez, 2019). This stereotype is constantly reinforced even towards black female politicians (see Gomes, 2018), as also demonstrated in my research results. Although my interviewees were dedicated professionals, they highlighted the exclusive discrimination

black women are subject to when they hold leadership positions. Additionally, they showed perpetrators did not feel embarrassed when reinforcing biased assumptions. I argue that misogynoir submits these women to a discriminatory experience in the political field, which means the cost of enduring such discrimination is very high and unique for this group.

Interviewees highlighted the ways in which their identity affected their behavior in the executive, describing how a hostile environment could result in aggressive attitudes. There is an apparent correlation between anger and an attempt to resist a threatening environment (Bilodeau, 1992, as cited in Ashley, 2013). While every woman suffers from gender stereotypes, rage issues are attributed only to black women, who are not perceived as docile in opposition to their white peers (Ashley, 2013). The “dominant culture” negatively evaluates black women’s behavior as “aggressive”; however, the black community relates this behavior with “strength and survival” (Ashley, 2013, p. 29). Thus, when others label black women as aggressive, it is an evident example of the unique experiences this group is subject to, which contributes to the feeling of being unfit for politics.

Still, interviewees demonstrated that the feeling of not belonging is not exclusive to the political sphere, as those who experienced attending high-quality schools and universities expressed similar perceptions. As illustrated in chapter 3, top-quality education remains a white domain (IBGE, 2019b; Nascimento, 2019), reinforcing social and economic inequalities by preventing underprivileged, mainly black, people from accessing such programs. Therefore, even though some black women had access to these spheres, their experience did not compare to white women’s, as their racial identity marked them as different. These continuous experiences as outcasts entail a sense of not belonging to these privileged spheres.

The sense of belonging is also explained by how race relations happen in Brazil. As mentioned in chapter 3, although the structural racism framework has been more widely disseminated lately, emphasizing how racialized practices perpetuate inequalities in Brazil

(Almeida, 2019), for many years, the fallacy of racial democracy was widespread in the country (Gonzalez & Hasenbalg, 1982). This concept disseminated the fallacious beliefs that races peacefully coexisted in the country, denying any hierarchy among races and defending the idea that inequalities derived from other oppression systems such as class. Unsurprisingly, even among highly educated women, episodes of racial discrimination were not recognized as such; instead, interviewees would use euphemisms to address racist oppressions. Interviewees' denial in naming these episodes as racism relates to the ways in which Brazilian society naturalizes racist rules and assumptions. Therefore, I argue that these erroneous beliefs influence black women's perceptions of racial discrimination, constraining this group from labeling episodes of racism as such. Additionally, denying the label of racism to these episodes can also be perceived as an individual coping mechanism to racial oppression; still, it contributes to the general distress this group is subject to in the political field by preventing the problem, namely racism, from being seen and addressed.

Therefore, it is unsurprising to notice how this oppression affects black women's racial identity, resulting in their attempt to be perceived as white, for instance, by straightening their hair. In the context of North American politics, black women candidates' hair type and skin color are negatively perceived by all voters except black women (Lemi & Brown, 2019, p. 261). The same white supremacist concepts dominate Brazilian society, explaining why black women manipulate their hair or skin tone to be perceived as white (Silva, 2017). Interviewees mentioned their hair type and skin color as characteristics influencing their own perceptions of racial identity. These perceptions are affected by self-identification, but also how others react to these individuals (Jenkins, 2008, as cited in Roth, 2006, p. 1311). When interviewees address the necessity to straighten their hair for a job interview or to go to work, these statements relate to the negative implications of being perceived as black and their attempts to avoid these ramifications. In addition, the racist context explains the apparent discrepancy between light-

skinned and dark-skinned women concerning racial identity. Some interviewees use the term “*parda*”,²⁹ when referring to their race. Scholars indicate a correlation between the use of this term and an attempt to deny their black heritage (Loveman et al., 2012). The fact that these women try not to be perceived as black is unsurprising, considering there is systematic racial oppression that praises a white aesthetic (Silva, 2017). In addition, light-skinned women’s experiences relate to colorism, a theory in which people’s dark skin tones increase their chances of social exclusion (Silva, 2017; Lemi & Brown, 2019). Nevertheless, I argue that their attempt to differ from the discriminated group could also be perceived as an individual coping mechanism, which would prevent them from enduring discrimination; still, this negatively affects other black women in politics as it indicates the necessity to conform to white aesthetics to succeed, contributing to the group’s distress in politics. Findings are similar to Porto et al. (2016), as they claim existing stereotypes discourage black people from embracing their black identity.

5.1.2. *Gender Stereotypes*

While black women certainly endure particular conditions because of overlapping systems of oppression, my research confirmed male-centered behavior and expectations within the political field hinder this group’s political achievements. As mentioned in chapter 2, the political sphere has long been male-dominated and -centered (Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018), resulting in gendered rules of behavior in the political sphere (Celis & Childs, 2020). Episodes of gender discrimination, such as setting double standards for women’s and men’s work, are internalized and reproduced in politics.

Gendered assumptions separate feminine and masculine domains, as addressed in chapter 2. Scholars have demonstrated the ways in which politicians reproduce gender stereotypes by

²⁹ In English: Brown

appointing women to female-dominated fields and avoiding their presence in what are considered male-dominated spheres (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2016; dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021). My research showed similar results, as interviewees pointed to a clear difference between leading so-called feminine and masculine domains. While feminine domains might create a safe space for black women's leadership, these gender barriers also prevent women from managing non-stereotypical fields, or if they do, they might reproduce behavior deemed "masculine" in order to fit in.

Gendered stereotypes also result in double standards. Women are subject to a double bind in the political sphere because politicians are generally associated with male figures and characteristics, while women are expected to behave the opposite way (Githens, 2003). These results were similar to my research, demonstrating how similar attitudes are praised when attributed to men, while women faced backlash when they revealed attitudes deemed masculine.

Furthermore, there is a clear struggle in maintaining their political position alongside their role within the family. Society compels women to act as primary caregivers at home, impacting their ability to combine political careers and family care (Jalalzai, 2013). Previous research on female political representation highlights the negative impact of childcare on women's careers (Jensen, 2008), in opposition to their male peers (Jalalzai, 2013). My research provided similar findings. Most women carry the burden of childcare, struggling to conquer and maintain leadership positions once they become mothers; in opposition, their male partners do not experience the same impacts. Aware of that, interviewees without children highlighted how motherhood is perceived as a liability for women in the executive branch.

Further research could address the impact of class when it comes to childcare responsibilities. Through my research, it was unclear how social class influences childcare. During the interview period, most Brazilian children had been unable to attend school in person for over one year because of COVID-19. Most interviewees shared their struggles to maintain

their work routine and educate their children simultaneously in these circumstances. Their current reality did not allow me to conclude if their social class background represented any difference for this mechanism or if their present social stratum had any impact.

5.1.3. Additional Challenges

My research identified three additional challenges affecting these women's political careers: the association between party ideology with diversity policies, unequal access to high-quality education, and disparate networking possibilities.

Studies have identified a correlation between right-leaning parties and lower percentages of women appointments for presidential cabinet positions (Taylor-Robinson & Gleitz, 2018). This correlation has also proven to be true in Brazil (dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021). Similarly, my study indicates right-leaning parties are less preoccupied with diversity and associate such policies with a left-wing ideology. Furthermore, my research suggests a direct association between a leftist ideology and diversity inclusion, hindering the application of such policies by right-wing parties; thus, impacting substantive representation. Since Brazil is among the most unequal countries in the world (Bourguignon, 2015), parties should be concerned with tackling inequality regardless of their ideology and should prioritize diversity policies. Yet, my research also demonstrates how this association may inhibit substantive representation, considering one interviewee had to resign when the right-wing party demanded that her professional loyalty stood against her racial identity. Thus, having black women in leadership positions is crucial; still, party ideology may present additional challenges to this group's substantive representation. When governments lack an intersectional approach in their policies, regardless of the motives, structural systems of oppression remain in place and prevent groups at the margins, such as black women, from advancing.

Furthermore, interviewees highlighted the correlation between high-quality education and political success. Social class has proven to be a relevant factor influencing black women's

access to high-quality education. Successful women in the executive branch usually have slightly better educational credentials than their male peers (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, 2016; Jalalzai, 2013); nonetheless, these studies failed to uncover the ways in which race and class influence educational access. In chapter 3, I highlighted how educational access influences Brazilian candidates' chances of election (Campos & Machado, 2015) and the ways in which class and race are connected to social inequalities in the country. Along the same lines, my research demonstrates how underprivileged women struggled to attend high-quality education and get a degree, the absence of which later, hinders their political success in their later careers.

Lastly, unequal access to education results in unequal networking possibilities, a crucial mechanism to gaining and maintaining political power. As explained in chapter 3, university degrees represent more than diplomas, they provide networks and help to engage in political life (Campos & Machado, 2015). Therefore, being deprived of educational access also impacts these women's networks, much needed for political success.

Throughout my research, it became evident that black women experience, in a unique way, barriers to achieving and maintaining leadership positions in the executive branch. Still, understanding how this group overcame such hurdles is fundamental in tackling issues of black women's underrepresentation, which is addressed in the following section.

5.2. Mechanisms to Tackle Black Women's Oppression

My research indicates that the strategies to tackle black women's oppression are related to three main topics: the importance of role models who resemble this group, personal allies who help them tackle gendered behavior, and policies aimed at reducing existing inequalities.

5.2.1. *Role Models*

The presence of other black women in positions of political power within the executive branch was deemed essential to tackling the sense of not belonging. There is a connection

between minority groups' political representation and encouraging others within that group to join the political sphere and help tackle stigmatization (Childs & Lovenduski, 2013; Montoya et al., 2021). Scholars have also shown the ways in which wearing natural afro hair affects black women's careers in the political field (Lemi & Brown, 2019). The cultural representation of black women influences this group's experiences within society (Crenshaw, 1991); thus, when black women tackle the stereotyped vision, it contributes to the group's political success. Interviewees described their struggles to fit in and, later on, how they found "the courage to be [themselves]" (C.O.). I argue that there is a powerful connection between a sense of belonging and seeing look-alikes in positions of political power. As more black women join a "radical expression of self-acceptance" by proudly wearing their natural hair (Lemi & Brown, 2019, p. 265), they are able to influence others to do the same; thus tackling stereotypes of success, namely, the assumptions that only by whitening their features would black women be able to succeed.

My results demonstrate the importance of black women's political representation, not only to ensure that this group's interests are considered but also because "you can't be what you can't see" (quoted in Murabit, 2019).³⁰ Having black women in leadership positions is a powerful mechanism for minority groups to believe the political sphere belongs to them as well. Having this group in leadership positions can amend gendered expectations within politics (Celis & Childs, 2020). Therefore, the presence of black female leaders encourages debates on existing stereotypes and helps to tackle biased assumptions.

5.2.2. *Personal Allies*

My research demonstrated how family members, mentors, and other personal allies encourage these women to join the political sphere. Partners have a fundamental role in tackling

³⁰ Although not cited in this source, this common phrase is attributed to Marian Wright Edelman, North American activist.

gender stereotypes and assumptions by supporting these women's dedication to their careers. While marriage is not associated with women's political success, in order to politically succeed after marriage, women need a partner who does not expect them to conform to gender stereotypes (Jensen, 2008). My research indicates this is sometimes a controversial topic, as partners deemed supportive also demonstrated a reinforcement of gender stereotypes. I argue that although these partners might slip back into gendered expectations, their overall behavior is supportive, which influences women's political success.

Some scholars argue that kinship ties to male politicians or being born in a politically engaged family may influence women to join the political sphere (Jalalzai, 2013; Jensen, 2008). My research found nearly no correlation between kinship ties and these women's success. There can be different explanations for my findings. First, as mentioned previously, research on women's political representation usually focuses on the legislative branch, which could indicate such a trend is more restricted to that political sphere. Second, research on women in politics mostly reflects white women's experiences because they predominate female political representation, marginalizing the experiences of black people. Third, research on this field is mostly concerned with the North American and European contexts, while mine focuses on the Brazilian. Thus, further analysis is needed to uncover how this trend is perceived in other studies.

Similar to the role of partners, having critical allies in the political sphere can contribute to these women's political success. Research on women's journey to achieve political success has uncovered the connection between political mentors and women's accomplishments (dos Santos & Jalalzai, 2021; Jensen, 2008). Although these studies focus on female heads of state, my research indicates that even among less valued posts within the executive, the presence of a mentor positively influences women's possibilities of political success. These are not "role models" because none of my interviewees has ever had a black woman as a mentor. Therefore,

further investigation could address the impact on black women's careers of having a black female boss or mentor.

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of having a women's network of solidarity in the workplace, which demonstrates the importance of nurturing female alliances to succeed in the political sphere and outlines how the political network usually forms in male-dominated places such as "clubs or golf courses" (Araújo et al., 2018, p. 221). Thus, my research reveals the ways in which women's networks assure black women are connected and able to reach leadership positions when there is an opening.

5.2.3. Tools to Reduce Educational Inequalities

Besides the importance of personal characteristics and social ties, my research also indicates the crucial role of tools aimed to reduce educational inequalities by assisting black women from underprivileged backgrounds to access high-quality institutions.

Campos and Machado (2015) have demonstrated the clear connection between higher educational levels and political success, while race and class overlapping oppression explain the challenges black people face to access education (IBGE, 2019b). Alongside this evidence, Medeiros et al. (2019) showed the connection between policies to foster educational access and social development. Interviewees highlighted the link between accessing high-quality education and achieving leadership positions. My interview data demonstrated two relevant tools to face this barrier: first, some interviewees were granted scholarships to attend private schools. While this definitely solves the individual problem, the systemic inequality between public and private institutions remains. The second tool is increasing public investments in schools. While interviewees did not directly address this policy, some attended military or federal schools, known for their high quality but also for their considerably higher public investments (Cafardo & Jansen, 2018). Thus, increasing public investment could diminish the existing inequality between public and private institutions, assisting these women in facing

existing barriers, mostly derived from the overlapping oppression of class and race, and receiving a proper education.

Alongside those tools, affirmative action can also reduce this group's existing inequalities. This policy was mainly implemented in Brazil from 2012 on (Scovino, 2018).³¹ Therefore, none of the interviewees benefited from it, as they had already graduated or were on their university journey once this tool was established. Future research could analyze if granting more access to black people in universities positively affects black women's political participation.

5.3. Conclusion

Through this chapter, I demonstrated my contributions to the existing literature on black women's political representation. I addressed the unique experiences of this group in the executive branch by highlighting the barriers they faced in achieving and maintaining leadership positions. I compared my findings with previous studies to expose the ways in which these women's identity shapes their political path. Furthermore, I presented this group's strategies for tackling existing challenges, revealing, among other factors, the importance of their political participation. Lastly, I exemplified the ways in which this group's multiple oppressions affect them in a unique way, portraying barriers only black women face.

³¹ See Lee (2021) for further analysis.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This thesis uncovered the mechanisms behind black women's near exclusion in leadership positions from the executive branch of Minas Gerais. Firstly, I framed this study within the existing scholarship on political representation. I highlighted the ways in which previous studies on political representation demonstrated the importance of minority groups' presence in politics in order to tackle biased assumptions and increase this group's participation in the political sphere. With my empirical research, I demonstrated the ways in which the Brazilian context influences this group's political achievements.

In analyzing the ten interviews, I found that black women's political achievements or lack thereof were associated with series of specific mechanisms of exclusion or inclusion. These were: **(1) racial identity**, in which their unique identity as black female leaders results in the sense of not belonging to the political sphere; at the same time, when these leaders confront the biased assumptions by embracing their racial identity, this mechanism has the power to foster this group's political achievements by demonstrating their crucial role in politics. **(2) Misogynoir**, in which I demonstrate how black women face gender and race discrimination, but also the overlapping consequences of these two systems of oppression. While women generally face discrimination in politics, black women's burdens are particular to this group's reality, as they are the ones facing the burden of being associated with servitude occupations. **(3) Family**, in which the gender stereotype of women as main caregivers hinders their possibilities of political success, while the support of partners can tackle this assumption, removing this barrier. **(4) Personality traits**, in which specific characteristics such as resilience and dedication were deemed fundamental for political success, still, the white male-dominated atmosphere negatively affects the overall perceptions of these characteristics by setting double standards for men and women. **(5) Access to high-quality education**, which favors political success, still, black women from underprivileged backgrounds face the overlapping

consequences of race and class oppression to accomplish this goal, presenting an extra hurdle to this group. **(6) Party ideology**, which demonstrates how the association between a leftist ideology and diversity policies could increase the possibilities of black women's success, but at the same time, in the case of a right-wing government, could hinder this group's political success, constraining black female leaders from implementing policies to tackle this group's inequality. **(7) The presence of critical allies**, which encompasses the positive impact of an inspiring boss or mentor as well as the presence of a female network of support for black women's political success.

While black women face an evident struggle to achieve and maintain leadership positions, mainly because of misogyny, racism, and their interactions, my study also presents how mechanisms can tackle black women's oppression. There are three main findings: (1) importance of role models to tackle the sense of not belonging, (2) personal allies to help this group endure the distress they face in the political sphere, and (3) tools to reduce educational inequalities increasing this group's possibilities of achieving leadership positions.

Furthermore, my "intracategorical" (McCall, 2005, p. 1773) intersectional approach enabled me to demonstrate three systems of oppression and their interactions acting upon black women's reality: race, gender, and class. The first two were constant throughout this work. The interactions of race and gender resulted in black women's stereotype as 'servant', entailing episodes of discrimination and a sense of not belonging in politics. These systems also impact how their personality traits were perceived, for instance, when they were deemed aggressive. This combined oppression has also prevented this group from having a black female leader as a mentor, restraining their experiences to white leaders and contributing to the sense of not belonging. "Representational intersectionality" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1282) enables me to demonstrate how these layers of oppression enforce black women's stereotype and creates their distress in the political sphere. The layer of class oppression was only uncovered when

addressing educational access, connecting issues of race and class. While class might prevent underprivileged people from accessing high-quality education, the combined discrimination of race and class results in (a) either structurally preventing black people from accessing these privileged spheres or (b) resulting in black people's experiences of distress in these places of privilege.

While black women's realities portrayed in this thesis may resonate with the experiences of this group worldwide, there are crucial points adding to the scholarship on this topic: (1) unlike the North American and European reality, black people are a numerical majority in Brazil;³² (2) the country's unique racial relations, based on claims of racial democracy (see chapter 3). The combination of such characteristics produces a unique environment in which racist structures discriminate against the majority of the country, while at the same time, these same rules attempt to deny the existence of a racial struggle. In addition to this racial struggle, the use of "structural intersectionality" reminds us that the experiences of black women are unique (Crenshaw, 1991). Therefore, this thesis contributes by addressing the specific context of racism in Brazil combined with the oppression that only black women are subject to. Furthermore, by analyzing leadership in the executive, I demonstrated how leadership positions in this domain are connected to political power and, thus, need to be inclusive of minority groups.

Further research could focus on the ways in which class, gender, and race influence the childcare responsibilities of black women in politics. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected Brazil; therefore, I was unable to assess how privileged backgrounds interacted with childcare, enabling or not women's political achievements. Furthermore, other studies could

³² In 2018: Whites: 43.1%; Blacks: 55.8% and others: 1.1% (IBGE, 2019b)

focus on the ways in which COVID-19 affected work relations and if it resulted in any changes for black women in the political sphere, especially regarding childcare responsibilities.

In conclusion, this study represents a unique analysis of the mechanisms behind black women's underrepresentation in the executive branch of Minas Gerais. While the Minas Gerais' government has proven to be attentive to gender oppression by implementing PPW and setting intersectionality among its values, it does not mention race criteria when it sets parity goals within leadership positions. As the executive branch does not gather data about the racial identity of its employees, this invisibility hides the racial gap and masks black women's situation under the gender gap, which mostly represents white women's reality. There is no denying that having black women in leadership positions is crucial to tackling biased assumptions and influence policymaking. Thus, policies should apply intersectionality instead of only listing it as a value.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

As a semi-structured interview, the researcher adapted these questions throughout the interview. Additionally, the researcher adapted verb tense in the case of participants who were not in leadership positions during the interview period.

Personal Life

1. Can you briefly describe your parents' professions and level of education?
2. Have they ever been involved in politics in any way as civil servants, politicians, community service, party-affiliated, civil society organizations, unions? (If yes: How did this influence your decisions?)
3. Can you describe the influence of your family in your decisions (education, career trajectory)?
4. Would you say your parents were supportive in tackling gender stereotypes, or did they try to enforce them upon you? Can you recall any examples?
5. Have you ever been married? (If yes: Can you describe how your partner deals with your career? Is he/she supportive of you? In which way?) (If no: Is it something you plan? Do you think it could interfere with your career?)
6. Do you have any kids? (If yes: How old are they? What has been the impact of kids on your career?) (If no: Is it something you plan? Do you think it could interfere with your job?)

Race

7. Do you identify as a black woman? Have you always identified yourself that way? (If no: Why? Did something change in your life once you saw yourself as a black woman?)
8. How is race perceived within your family? Is your ethnicity something you grew up aware of?
9. Can you describe if you ever felt like your type of hair or skin color was not accepted within society and what this meant to you?
10. Have you ever felt like you needed to behave in a certain way because of your skin color or hair type?
11. What does it mean to you to be a black woman in a position of political power?
12. Do you think black women in leadership positions are perceived the same as men or white women? Please explain.

Education

13. Do you consider you had a sound primary education? And why?
14. What level of education have you completed?
 - a. (If she holds at least a bachelor's: What is the area of your education?)
15. Would you change your area of education if you were to choose again? Why?

Career Path

16. How did you enter the public sector?
17. Was this career something you chose? Can you name actors who you consider to have influenced your decision?

18. Can you describe the most important positions you have occupied so far? (If there has been a downgrade: Would you be willing to talk about the reasons for this?)
19. What factors do you think contributed to your promotion for this position? (Former leaders: What factors contributed for you leaving your position?)
20. Do you think your ethnicity or gender has influenced your career path (entry-level, promotion, professional development)? Why?
21. Have you ever had a black woman as your boss? (If yes: What did it mean to you? If No: What do you think about that?)

Race or gender discrimination

22. Have you ever been discriminated against in terms of race or gender in the workplace? (If yes: Would you be willing to tell me briefly about it?)
23. Do you think gender and ethnicity should matter for cabinet formation? Do you think it does? Why?

Mentorship and Network

24. Have you had any mentors in your career? (If yes: can you describe their role?)
25. Can you point out other actors who have helped you in achieving your career goals such as classmates, university cohort, colleagues, or other? Please describe their role for you.
26. Are you supportive of other women at the workplace? (If yes: Can you give any example of this? If no: why not?)
27. Do you think minorities such women, blacks, LGBTQ+, or others need support in achieving leadership positions? Why?
28. What do you think positively or negatively influences minorities into achieving leadership positions?

Final:

29. Is there anything else important you think I should know about concerning the topics we covered?

Appendix B: Overview of Interviewees

Interviewees	Category	Domain	Hierarchy Level
C.O.	Social Welfare	Feminine	3rd level - Superintendent
G.S.	Social Welfare	Feminine	3rd level - Superintendent
D.R.	Social Welfare	Masculine	4th level - Director
J.V.	Central	Masculine	3rd level - Superintendent
K.R.	Economics	Masculine	3rd level - Superintendent
M.V.	Social Welfare	Feminine	2nd level - Undersecretary
G.G.	Central	Masculine	4th level - Director
K.F.	Social Welfare	Feminine	4th level - Director
J.O.	Central	Masculine	3rd level - Superintendent
M.J.	Central	Feminine	3rd level - Superintendent

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