International IDEA, 2002, Women in Parliament, Stockholm (http://www.idea.int). This is an English version of Mala N. Htun, "Mujeres y poder político en Latinoamérica", in International IDEA, *Mujeres en el Parlamento. Más allá de los números*, Stockholm, Sweden, 2002. (This translation may vary slightly from the original text. If there are discrepancies in the meaning, the original Spanish version is the definitive text).

CHAPTER 1

Women in Political Power in Latin America

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This chapter provides an overview of women's participation in parliament in Latin America. It analyses the reasons for and obstacles to women's gains in power, including socio-economic factors, public attitudes to women in leadership and the role of political parties and electoral systems. Taking these into account, it examines the affirmative action strategies adopted by Latin American countries to expand women's opportunities. The chapter also considers whether women's greater presence in power has made a difference for policy. In certain circumstances, women have organized into multipartisan political alliances to promote specific law and policy changes to advance women's rights. Ultimately, however, advancing women's rights in the region depends on the consolidation of democracy, sustainable development and the promotion of equitable economic growth.

As in the rest of the world, women have historically been severely under-represented in elected office in Latin America. Women's presence in political decision-making has never equalled men's. Recognizing that this under-representation poses a threat to democracy, political equality, and justice, more and more people – including male politicians and opinion leaders – have endorsed measures to increase women's presence in power. In the 1990s, eleven Latin American countries adopted quota laws establishing minimum levels for women's participation as candidates in national elections. Though their results vary depending on electoral rules and party compliance, the quota movement marks a watershed in public attitudes toward women in power and in official commitments to women's equality.

As a result of quotas, social and economic development, and cultural changes, women's presence in power in Latin America has grown, in some countries dramatically. From an average of 9 per cent in 1990, by 2002, women's representation in the lower houses of Congress had increased to 15 per cent. Women's share of the Senate grew from an average of five per cent in 1990 to 12 per cent in 2002. And, whereas women occupied 9 per cent of ministerial posts in 1990, by 2002 this had increased to an average of 13 per cent and as high as 25 per cent in some countries. Yet considerable obstacles remain to women's achievement of decision-making parity with men, and women's presence in power continues to vary across countries. Not all countries have adopted quota laws for women, and in some countries where the laws do exist, they are weakly implemented or not enforced. Moreover, quotas, when they succeed in bringing women into power, do not always grant women the resources they need to use that power effectively.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Latin American countries made significant moves in the direction of political democracy and free market capitalism. With the exception of Cuba, those countries suffering under military dictatorship and authoritarian one-party systems made the transition to free elections and competitive party politics. Many countries also embraced free market principles by liberalizing trade, privatizing state-owned enterprises, reducing regulations, balancing budgets, reforming exchange rate policies, and the like.

Freer politics and freer markets, however, have not everywhere led to an unequivocal advance in citizen rights and economic well-being. Many countries still suffer from alleged abuses of human rights by state agents, corruption, high crime rates, and an ineffective judicial system. In the 1990s, the region's average rate of economic growth was 2 per cent per year, and income distribution was the most unequal in the world. Averaging across the region, one-fourth of national income goes to the richest 5 per cent of the population (and 40 per cent goes to wealthiest 10 per cent).[1] Brazil has enjoyed the region's highest average growth rates since the 1950s (at 2.5 per cent), but is also the most unequal. Average

growth rates since the 1950s have been lower than 1 per cent in Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Clearly, this variation in the economic and social conditions of different countries is consequential for the status of women.

Table 1.1 Women in Power in Latin America – A Snapshot

Country	% Ministers	% Chamber of Deputies (or unicameral parliament)	% Senate
Argentina	8%	31%	36%
Bolivia	0%	12%	4%
Brazil	0%	7%	6%
Chile	25%	13%	4%
Colombia	19%	13%	10%
Costa Rica	18%	35%	
Cuba	10%	28%	
Dominican Republic	8%	16%	7%
Ecuador	7%	15%	
El Salvador	25%	10%	
Guatemala	8%	9%	
Honduras	26%	9%	
Mexico	16%	16%	16%
Nicaragua	8%	21%	
Panama	25%	10%	
Paraguay	8%	3%	18%
Peru	7%	18%	
Uruguay	0%	12%	10%
Venezuela	21%	10%	
TOTAL	**13%**	**15%**	**12%**

Sources: Inter-American Dialogue. 2001. Women and Power in the Americas. A Report Card. Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Dialogue; Inter-Parliamentary Union. February 2002. Women in National Parliaments. Available on the internet at http://www.ipu.org. (Percentages are rounded off.)

Table 1.1 shows that women's share of power, while quite high in some countries (such as Argentina and Costa Rica), and is low in others (such as Brazil and Guatemala). On average, women's opportunities to participate in parliament have improved, but gains have not been evenly distributed.

Levels of women's participation in power in Latin America are close to the world average. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women make up over 14 per cent of the lower houses of congress around the world, and 14 per cent of the senates. The averages across the 19 countries of Latin America are 15 and 12 per cent, respectively.

Table 1.2 Women in Parliament

World Region	Women as % of Lower House or Unicameral Parliament	Women as % of Senate
Nordic countries	38.8%	---
Europe (OSCE countries)	16.8 %	14.8 %
Americas	15.8%	16.6%
Asia	15.6 %	12.1%
Europe (excl. Nordic countries)	14.7%	14.8%
Latin America*	15.0%	12.0%
Sub-Saharan Africa	12.8	12.8 %
Pacific	11.3 %	25.9 %
Arab states	4.6 %	2.5 %

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union. February 2002. Women in National Parliaments. Available on the internet at http://www.ipu.org

****Author's calculations for the Latin American average.***

Latin American averages lag behind those of the Nordic countries, are comparable to Asia and the rest of Europe, slightly ahead of Sub-Saharan Africa, and well ahead of the Arab states. Latin America leads the Pacific region in terms of women's participation in the lower house of Congress but is far behind the Pacific's high average for the Senate.

Women's Position in the Economy and Society

Latin American women's capabilities and opportunities have grown, on average, in recent decades. Women's situation is worse than men's, however, and women's status varies dramatically across countries, regions, socio-economic classes, and racial and ethnic groups.

Data shows that on average, women's situation has improved and women are becoming more integrated into the public sphere of work and education:

- Women's life expectancy: 73 years in 1999, compared to 68 years in 1980.
- Fertility: 2.6 children per woman in 1999, compared to 4.1 in 1980.
- Prevalence of contraceptives: 60 per cent of women aged 15–45 in 1998, compared to 45 per cent in 1980.
- Labour force participation: women represented 35 per cent of the labour force in 1999, compared to 28 per cent in 1980.
- Literacy: 13 per cent of women aged 15 and over were illiterate in 1998, compared to 23 per cent in 1980.
- Secondary school enrolment: 67 per cent of secondary school-aged girls enrolled in 1998, compared to 54 per cent in 1980.[2]

Yet these improvements in women's status and integration into the public sphere vary significantly across countries and across social classes and regions within individual countries. Maternal mortality, for example, ranges from a high of 390 per 100,000 live births in Bolivia to a low of 21 in Uruguay.[3] Fertility varies from a high of 4.9 children per woman in Guatemala to a low of 2.3 in Brazil.[4]

Within individual countries, women from lower-income families are much less likely to work outside of the home than women from families with higher incomes. In the region as a whole, 61 per cent of women from families with incomes in the top 10 per cent work outside of the home compared to merely 37 per cent of women from the bottom 30 per cent. By contrast, 86 per cent of men from the top 10 per cent, and 83 from the bottom 30, work outside the home.[5] The main reason for this gap is education, which the Inter-American Development Bank concludes is "by far the most relevant and important factor in explaining labour force participation decisions". As they become more educated, women opt to have fewer children, become exposed to alternative life choices, and enjoy higher incomes. Education also affects the likelihood that a woman will work in the formal, as opposed to the informal, sector.[6]

The situations of rural, indigenous and Afro-Latin women may be significantly different from those of urban and paler-skinned women. Data from the north-east of Argentina, for example, show that 40 to 60 per cent of rural homes, many of which are headed by women, are in poverty.[7] In Peru, children of indigenous backgrounds are more likely to start school late and to repeat grades once in school, which contributes to overall lower levels of educational attainment.[8] Studies from Brazil have found that race matters for educational attainment, employment opportunities and earning power. White Brazilians aged 10 and over averaged over six years of schooling in 1996, whereas darker-skinned Brazilians had just over four years of schooling.[9] In terms of wage gaps, however, gender may matter more than race. One study found that in earnings gender inequality was less than racial inequality. Though women, on average, had more education than men, they earned lower wages regardless of race. [10]

Advances in the situation of some women put them in a better place to gain access to power. Many politicians, for example, have legal training and legal backgrounds, and in some countries, women make up half or more than half of law students. This suggests that women are moving into the "eligibility pools" out of which potential leaders emerge and are recruited. As data on income distribution and ethnic and regional disparities suggest, however, other women continue to lag behind.

Public attitudes about women's leadership

Studies show that the Latin American public supports women in power. A poll of around 2000 Latin Americans in five major cities, conducted by Gallup on behalf of the Inter-American Development Bank and the Inter-American Dialogue in 2000, suggests that public attitudes toward women's leadership may be helping to expand opportunities for women.[11]

The Latin Americans surveyed in the study were optimistic about women's performance in politics and women's future prospects. Fifty-seven per cent said that women's greater presence in political office would lead to better

government. Over 90 per cent claimed they would be willing to vote for a woman as president, and 69 per cent believed that their country would elect a woman president over the next 20 years. Sixty-five per cent agreed that women's quota laws were "mostly good" for the country.

Latin Americans felt that women were effective leaders and would outperform men in several areas. Sixty-six per cent agreed that women are more honest than men, and 85 per cent agreed that women are good decision-makers. Sixty-two per cent of people expressed the belief that women would do better than men at reducing poverty, 72 per cent at improving education, 57 per cent at combating corruption, 64 per cent at protecting the environment, 59 per cent at managing the economy, and 53 per cent at conducting diplomatic relations. On defending public security and running the army, however, only 44 and 20 per cent, respectively, said that women would outperform men.

Another interesting finding of the study was that Latin Americans care about a politician's position on women's rights issues. Fifty-seven per cent claimed that a candidate's opinion on women's rights would be "very important" to their decision about whom to vote for in the next presidential election. Forty-four per cent of those surveyed would be more likely to vote for a presidential candidate who promised to appoint equal numbers of men and women to the cabinet. Forty-two per cent said that such a promise would not affect their vote.

The results of the survey suggest that public attitudes may be a decreasingly salient obstacle to women gaining political office. Latin American publics say they are willing to vote for qualified women and believe that women do better than men at contending with a range of problems and issues. These survey results resemble the findings of similar studies in the United States, which have been interpreted to mean that the barriers to women gaining power lie not with the electorate but with party and institutional structures.[12] Indeed, in spite of public opinion, women continue to be elected to office at lower rates than men. To explain why, we should look at the potential constraints posed by political institutions –parties and electoral systems – on women's candidacies.

Women and Political Parties

Parties are the gatekeepers to women's advancement to political power. To gain positions of political leadership, women must work through political parties that have the unique ability to field candidates for political office. Parties, however, have historically been highly gendered institutions that incorporated women on a different basis from men and in ways that impeded their access to leadership positions. In many countries, women still make up half of party members but rarely enjoy equal status with men on party executive boards and among candidates for popular elections. Women joined "women's bureaus" of political parties that mobilized voters and supported male candidates by hosting meetings and fundraisers. Unlike male-dominated bureaus for peasants, labourers, students, and the like, these women's bureaus were not derived from a class position or occupation that women could organize around to press their collective demands. Rather, women were recruited "*as women*, whose primary association as a group was with private life".[13] Not surprisingly, women's representation in party leadership is low relative to their overall participation in parties.

In the 1980s and 1990s, many women's bureaus reoriented themselves to serve, not as support staff, but as advocates of women leaders in the party. In Mexico's Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), for example, the women's bureau was transformed from a matronly organization into an effective base to promote women's entry into mainstream leadership positions. In the period surrounding Mexican national elections of 1997 and 2000, the PAN's National Secretariat for the Political Promotion of Women lobbied local and national party leaders to include women as candidates. In the 2000 elections, the Women's Department succeeded in enforcing some affirmative action measures for women's candidacies. These measures were applied to the composition of the proportional representation (PR) lists (in Mexico's mixed system, 200 of the 500 deputies in Congress are elected through PR lists in each of five electoral circumscriptions). One measure specified that a woman occupy one of the first two slots on each of the five lists. A second measure required that throughout the list, if the official candidate were a man, his alternate would have to be a woman, and vice versa. The final rule was that the party committee of each state postulate men and women in equal numbers for the internal elections in which party members elected candidates to the party list.[14] After the elections, 12 per cent of the PAN's deputies were women, and 13 per cent of the senators.

Women also succeeded in convincing many parties to adopt quota rules for popular and internal elections. Latin American parties with quotas are shown in Box 1.

Box 1. Political Party Quotas in Latin America[15]

Country	Political Party	Quota
Brazil	Partido dos Trabalhadores	30%
Chile	Partido Socialista	30%
	Partido por la Democracia	40%
	Partido Demócrata Cristiano	20%
Costa Rica	Partido Unidad Social Cristiana	40%
El Salvador	Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional	35%
Mexico	Partido Revolucionario Democrático	30%
	Partido Revolucionario Institucional	30%
Nicaragua	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional	30%
Paraguay	Asociación Nacional Republicana	20%
Venezuela	Partido Acción Democrática	20%

Nonetheless, the track record of parties in promoting women's candidacies varies significantly. Scholars have hypothesized that women's success depends on the nature of the party organization and party ideology. It is argued that women will enjoy greater opportunities in rule-oriented, bureaucratic parties than in unstructured or clientelistic parties.[16] When a party is rule-bound, potential candidates can better understand the nomination process and hold party leaders accountable to these rules. Studies have also found that women tend to fare better in parties of the left, since left ideology favours the representation of marginalized social groups and women's movements have closer ties to the left.[17] One multi-country study found that the electoral strength of left-wing parties was a powerful predictor of women's representation in power.[18]

In Latin America, the key distinction is between party systems (i.e. the whole collection of parties in a country and their relationships to one another and the electorate) that are institutionalized and party systems that are poorly institutionalized or "inchoate". Institutionalized party systems enjoy stability in the rules and nature of partisan competition, parties with stable roots in society as well as consistent rules and structures and popular legitimacy.[19]

While there is evidence that parties with clear and stable rules and procedures would be advantageous to women, it may also be the case that systems with less formal procedures create opportunities for women. In Latin America, women's representation in congress in countries with institutionalized party politics and bureaucratic, rule-oriented parties, such as Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay, is high to average (at 13, 35 and 12 per cent, respectively). However, women's presence in congress in countries with more personalistic, informal parties and a more weakly institutionalized party system, such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru (at 12, 15 and 18 per cent, respectively), also ranges from high to average. In countries with weak political systems, voters may be turning to women, historic political outsiders, for a fresh start. It may also be the case that rule-bound party institutions have gender biases that are difficult to change, and that more disorganized parties provide greater opportunities to women.

In general, citizen identification with political parties in Latin America is low and parties have relatively weak roots in society. For example, Latinobarómetro surveys show that on average, only about 15 per cent of Latin Americans feel close to a political party. In over half of Latin American countries, moreover, fewer than 40 per cent of citizens see parties as essential to national progress.[20] Nonetheless, as the central institutions for aggregating citizen preferences and translating these into policy, as well as the only groups able to field candidates for elected office, parties are an indispensable component of democracy. Many Latin American parties have made attempts at reform by introducing more transparent rules and open primaries for candidate selection. These reform efforts may open up greater

opportunities to women to rise to leadership.

As in other countries around the world, Latin American parties of the left tend to elect more women than parties of the right.[21] Leftist parties are also more likely to adopt internal quota rules and quotas for popular elections. Yet women are not doing so badly as one might expect in parties of the Right, relative to the total numbers of women legislators in each country. Women comprise 13 per cent of the deputies elected by Chile's rightist Renovación Nacional (RN) party and 12 per cent of Mexico's right-wing PAN deputies. Eighteen per cent of the deputies belonging to Peru's Frente Independiente Moralizador (FIM) party are women. And women's share of seats among deputies in Brazil's right-wing Partido da Frente Liberal (PFL), five per cent, is very low, but only one percentage point lower than women's share of Congress generally. Even if they are unwilling to adopt quotas guaranteeing women a certain level of representation, parties of the right in Latin America have taken measures to promote women into decision-making and to adopt policy positions advancing women's interests. [22]

Parties, although historically presenting obstacles to women's advancement, have begun to change, even parties of the right. But the pace of change is slow and women's opportunities vary across parties. However, in Latin America, a party-by-party analysis of women's opportunities remains to be done.

Women and Electoral Systems

Various studies have shown that electoral rules are consequential for women's chances to get elected. Countries with proportional representation (PR) tend to elect more women than countries with majoritarian, or winner-take-all, systems.23 Why? As Richard Matland argues in Chapter 4, in PR systems (where seats are allocated to parties based on the percentage of the total vote they receive) parties have an incentive to "balance" the ticket by including candidates with ties to a variety of social groups (such as women) and candidates representing different party factions and constituencies. In majoritarian systems, by contrast, the incentives are different. Parties tend to field those candidates that have a realistic chance of winning more votes than any other candidate. In most cases, party leaders feel that their top candidates are men.

> *Indeed, 1999 data from 53 countries show that women made up an average of 20 per cent of members of Congress in PR systems, 15 per cent in mixed systems (in which part of the legislature is elected using PR and part using single-member districts), and 11 per cent in majoritarian systems.[24]*

Many variations exist within the family of PR systems, however, and some of these may be better for women than others. Closed-list systems (where the elector votes for a party list, and party leaders control the order in which candidates appear on the list) tend to be more successful at electing women than open-list systems (where the voter votes for an individual candidate). Yet some scholars argue that open lists, which allow voters to elect women regardless of where party leaders place them on the list, increase women's chances.[25] Even when the electorate wants to elect women, however, gender differences in campaign budgets and media coverage may harm the fortunes of women candidates.

PR systems with higher electoral thresholds (that establish a national minimum vote percentage required for a party to gain a seat) are held to be more women-friendly than lower thresholds that permit small parties to gain a limited number of seats (as these seats are usually held by men). And, the larger the district magnitude, the more seats a party is likely to win in a district, and the greater the chances are that women will be included on the ballot and elected.

Besides providing incentives (or not) for party leaders to include women as candidates as a means of "balancing" the ticket, electoral rules wield significant influence over party structure. Although scholars are only beginning to focus on this process, a small number of works have hypothesized about how electoral rules affect the power of party leaders to control the nomination process, including the nomination of women. Without nomination control, party leaders have a harder time applying women's quotas or responding to activists' calls for the greater inclusion of women. Features like open and closed lists determine whether party leaders can control the selection of candidates and the order in which candidates appear on the list. Other factors affecting party leader control are rules that grant incumbents the automatic right to run for re-election (such laws, called "birthright candidate" laws, are currently in force only in Brazil). Therefore, electoral rules are important not just for their effects on how candidates get elected, but also for the ways they shape internal party rules and party structures.[26]

Table 1.3: Electoral Systems in Latin America (for the Lower House of Congress or Unicameral Parliament)

Electoral System	Country
List PR: Closed List	Argentina Costa Rica Dominican Republic* El Salvador Guatemala Honduras Nicaragua Paraguay
List PR: Factional Closed List	Uruguay
List PR: Personal List	Colombia
List PR: Open List	Brazil Chile Ecuador** Panama Peru
Mixed System(Closed List PR plus Single Member Districts)	Bolivia Mexico Venezuela

Source: Mainwaring and Shugart (1997); Htun and Jones (2002).

* Beginning in May 2002, elections in the Dominican Republic will be conducted with open lists.
** In addition, 15 per cent of Ecuador's Congress is elected from a single, national closed list.

Eighteen of the Latin American countries for which electoral information was available use some version of PR, although three countries are mixed systems combining closed-list PR and single member districts. Among the list PR countries, eight use closed lists and five use open lists. Uruguay has a factional list system, in which votes are pooled at the party level, distributed proportionally to the factions, and then distributed to each faction's lists of candidates. In Colombia's personal list system, the vast majority of lists contain only a single candidate. Votes are pooled across these sub-party lists, not at the party level (see Table 1.3).[27]

Different sets of PR rules are associated with different levels of women's representation. The mean level of women's representation for the lower house of Congress was 17 per cent in the closed-list systems, 13 per cent in the mixed systems, and 12 per cent in the open-list systems. This provides tentative confirmation that closed-list systems are better for women. The closed-list number is significantly affected by the cases of Argentina and Costa Rica, however, both of which use quotas to elect legislators, and both of which apply placement mandates to the position of women on party lists.

Quotas for Women

Between 1991 and 2000, 11 Latin American countries adopted quota laws establishing a minimum level of 20 to 40 per cent for women's participation as candidates in legislative elections. Venezuela has since, however, rescinded its quota law. A twelfth country, Colombia, enacted a law requiring that women occupy 30 per cent of appointed decision-making positions in the executive branch of government (see Table 1.4).

Table 1.4 Latin American Quota Laws

Country	Date of Law	Quota Percentage
Argentina	1991	30 (Chamber and Senate)
Bolivia	1997	30 (Chamber) 25 (Senate)
Brazil	1997	30 (Chamber)
Colombia	2000	30 (in appointed executive posts)
Costa Rica	1997	40 (Unicameral)
Dominican Republic	1997	25 (Chamber)
Ecuador	1997	20 (Unicameral)
Mexico	1996	30 (Chamber and Senate)
Panama	1997	30 (Unicameral)
Paraguay	1996	20 (Chamber and Senate)
Peru	1997	25 (Unicameral)

Argentina was the first country to adopt quotas in 1991. There, a multi-party group of women politicians and women activists united to convince their male colleagues to support the quota. Women were inspired by the use of quotas in Spain's Socialist Party and by international norms and agreements about sex equality. Quotas would not have been approved, however, without the support of (then) President Carlos Menem and members of his inner circle. These male politicians, embarrassed at low levels of women's representation, sought to gain women's votes and to "go down in history" as those who had made a difference for women in power.

Argentina's pioneering move triggered debates on quotas in countries around the region. Argentine women politicians

travelled to other countries to share their experiences with quotas and spoke of quotas at an important meeting at the Latin American Parliament in São Paulo in early 1995. These exchanges motivated many women to introduce their own quota proposals. The decisive push for quotas came, however, with the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. The Beijing Platform for Action endorsed women's right to participate in decision-making. Specifically, the Platform called on governments to ensure "women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making," and to consider adopting affirmative action policies to achieve gender parity in decision-making bodies.

The Beijing Platform and the shared experience of many women politicians at the 1995 Conference helped unite women around the idea of quotas and provided normative leverage against governments. By endorsing the Platform, governments had made a commitment to promoting women to decision-making.[28]

Have quotas actually helped more women get elected? On average, quotas boosted women's representation by eight percentage points, but the effects of quotas have varied significantly across countries (see Table 1.5).

Table 1.5 Results of Quotas in Latin America

Country	Legislative Body	% Women (before law)	% Women (after law)	Change (in % points)
Argentina	Chamber	6	30	+24
	Senate	3	36	+33
Bolivia	Chamber Senate	11 4	12 4	+1 0
Brazil	Chamber	7	6	-1
Costa Rica	Unicameral	14	35	+21
Dominican Republic	Chamber	12	16	+4
Ecuador	Unicameral	4	15	+11
Mexico	Chamber Senate	17 15	16 16	-1 +1
Panama	Unicameral	8	10	+2
Paraguay	Chamber Senate	3 11	3 18	0 +7
Peru	Unicameral	11	18	+7
Average		**9**	**17**	**+8**

Source: Mala Htun and Mark Jones, "Engendering the Right to Participate in Decision-making: Electoral Quotas and Women's Leadership in Latin America", in Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America, eds. Nikki Craske and Maxine Molyneux (London: Palgrave, 2002) and author's calculations based on recent election results.

The effectiveness of quotas depends largely on the nature of a country's electoral system. Quotas work best in closed-list PR systems where the law contains a placement mandate for women candidates. These placement mandates, which require parties to place women in high positions on the party list, preclude parties from placing women in decorative positions lower on the list where they stand no chance of being elected. Quotas also tend to work better in large, multi-member districts (this is explained in Matland's chapter). In districts with few members, only the party's top candidates – generally men – tend to get elected. When the district magnitude is larger, more of a party's candidates, including those in lower positions on the party list, will win seats.[29]

These factors explain the success of quotas in the Argentine Chamber and Senate, the Costa Rican Congress, and the Paraguayan Senate, the only cases where women's presence has come close to meeting the level of the quota. Argentina has a strict placement mandate in a closed-list system, and parties that failed to comply with the mandate have been taken to court. Costa Rica also has a placement mandate and a closed-list system. In elections for the Paraguayan Senate, the combination of the large single national electoral district (from which 45 senators are elected) and the electoral success of the two largest parties permitted even women low on the list to get elected.

Table 1.5 shows that women's presence also jumped sharply in Ecuador, although this was largely attributable to the fact that voters tended to vote for party lists instead of individual candidates (due to their lack of familiarity with changes in the electoral law), and parties strategically placed their most popular candidates at the top, middle and bottom of their respective lists.[30]

The details of the quota law are very important. Many parties have complied with quotas in the most minimal way possible permitted by law. In Mexico, the quota law does not specify the types of candidacies quotas apply to. As a result, parties have tended to include women on the ballot as *suplentes*, or alternate candidates. In the 2000 Mexican elections, around 60 per cent of the *suplentes* on the three largest lists were women. In Argentina, the quota law's placement mandate requires that women be placed in every third position on the party list. Parties have tended to comply with this mandate in a minimalist manner by including women candidates in third positions, not in first or second. In Costa Rica before 2000, there was no placement mandate, and parties tended to place women near the bottom of party lists. In 2000, however, the Supreme Court issued a ruling interpreting the law to require that women be placed in electable positions on party lists. As a result, women's presence in Congress jumped from 19 to 35 per cent after the 2002 elections, the first time the placement mandate was in effect.

The poor results of quotas in Brazil provide dramatic evidence for need to draft quota laws very carefully. Brazil's law states that parties must *reserve* 30 per cent of candidate slots for women, but does not require that parties actually *fill* these slots. Since Brazilian electoral law allows parties to postulate 50 per cent more candidates than seats being contested in a district, a party may, in practice, postulate a full slate without including any women. For example, if a district elects 10 members to congress, each party is permitted to postulate 15 candidates. The quota law requires that parties *reserve* four of these slots for women. If a party is unwilling to recruit women, it may postulate 11 male candidates to the electorate and still not violate the law.[31]

These examples suggest that for quotas to work, the law must be as specific as possible and contain no loopholes permitting parties to avoid postulating women or to comply with quotas merely by placing women in supplementary or decorative positions on the ballot. In addition, activists need to be willing and able to mobilize to monitor implementation of the quota. In Argentina, the present norm of party compliance with quotas developed only after women activists repeatedly challenged noncompliant lists in court.

Women in Power: Do They Make a Difference?

Even if quotas, social changes, and shifting cultural attitudes combine to expand women's opportunities to gain power, the question remains of whether women's greater presence makes a difference for policy outcomes. Are women's legislative and policy priorities better served by having more women in power, or can male politicians just as effectively represent women's needs in the political process?

It is important to keep in mind that not all arguments in favour of women's representation focus on consequences for policy outputs. Some people argue that women's presence in power is a simple question of fairness. The systematic discrepancy between women's participation at the middle and bottom of organizations and their presence in decision-making is clear evidence of an injustice, it is argued. Fairness demands that women get their proper share of power regardless of whether they use this power to promote women's interests.

In Latin America, the greater presence of women in national legislatures coincided with unprecedented attention to women's rights issues like domestic violence, reproduction and family law. Women from different political parties formed alliances to put women's issues on the policy agenda and then to pressure their male colleagues to support changes in the law. In the 1990s, at least 16 Latin American countries approved legislation to help victims of domestic violence. Several countries launched programmes to improve women's reproductive health, including cervical cancer screening programmes, family planning and AIDS prevention. A few countries reformed their constitutions to endorse principles of equal rights between men and women, and several more modified family law provisions that had granted husbands and fathers unequal authority in the household. It is unlikely that Latin American legislatures would have devoted as much attention to women's rights issues without the work of women representatives.

One dramatic example of the potential changes women leaders brings comes from Mexico. In 2000, Rosario Robles, then mayor of Mexico City, broke the Latin American abortion stalemate by introducing legislation to modify the city's criminal code on abortion matters. The proposal, approved through support by the PRD ((Partido de la Revolución Democrática))and PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) parties, legalized abortions performed if the mother's health (not just her life) is at risk and if the fetus has birth defects. Robles accepted the long-standing feminist argument that abortion is a public health problem, since resorting to clandestine abortions poses grave risks for women's lives and health. No other Latin American country has liberalized its abortion laws since the 1940s.

In general, however, Latin American women have disagreed seriously about the issue of abortion. It has been much easier for women to form political alliances around issues like domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape and quotas than around abortion. In order to maintain these alliances, moreover, sometimes women have had to agree in advance to keep abortion off of the agenda.

Women's alliances may also be shaped by partisan and other political conflicts. Women are elected through political parties, and most need to maintain their partisan positions and power bases. Sometimes party loyalties conflict with the promotion of gender issues and the formation of alliances with other women. There is evidence, moreover, of the growth of "instrumental feminism," defined as "the promotion of individual women leaders and/or their parties through events and mechanisms designed for women's advancement as a whole" in a way that ends up thwarting real gains in women's rights. In Venezuela, for example, women have sponsored legislation and managed local women's centers to benefit themselves and their parties, not out of a concern for other women.[32] Finally, not all women are democrats. After former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori assumed office following fraudulent elections in May of 2000, he installed four women in leadership positions in the national congress who had to act as defenders of the regime.[33] In these and other ways, women's political behavior may conform to the corrupt and clientelistic patterns that have long been present in Latin America. Women, after all, are not above politics.

Conclusion

The 1990s saw steady growth in women's participation in political power in Latin America. Women's representation in the lower houses of congress increased from an average of 9 per cent in 1990 to 15 per cent in 2002; in the Senate, from 5 per cent to 12 per cent in 2002; and among ministers, from 9 per cent to13 per cent in 2000. These numbers put Latin America behind Europe, on par with Asia, and ahead of Africa, the Pacific and the Middle East. In 2002, 10 countries had on the books quota laws setting a minimum level for women's participation as candidates in national elections. (An eleventh country, Colombia, applied a quota of 30 per cent to senior appointed posts in the state.) On average, these quotas boosted women's presence in congress by eight percentage points.

Moreover, Latin American countries have made some gains that are not reflected in numbers. Although Panama and Nicaragua are the only countries in the region to have elected a woman head of state, Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador have also had women presidents (although they were not elected directly). In Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela, women have run for president with a realistic chance of winning. In more countries, women have served as vice presidents, and women have governed the region's (and world's) two largest cities, São Paulo and Mexico City. In Mexico in the 1990s, women led two of the country's three largest political parties.[34]

Notwithstanding these gains, significant challenges remain. Women have gained power in many countries, but not in all countries. In several countries, quota laws have been weakly implemented and therefore produced few improvements for women (though in other countries, quotas pushed women into a critical mass). Women comprise at least half of political party members in many countries but have not achieved parity with men in party leadership. Women's political alliances have not always been successful in withstanding competing pressures of party loyalty, and not all women who have achieved formal office have been able to wield enough political power to accomplish an agenda of women's rights.

Advancing women's right to participate in power, women's civil rights, and women's equal opportunities is linked to the consolidation of democracy, to social development and to equitable economic growth. As long as the region's income gaps widen, many Latin American women will lack basic capabilities and remain excluded from eligibility pools for leadership. As long as millions of citizens are struggling to meet basic needs, there will be limited political space to build coalitions around a women's rights agenda. And as long as state institutions suffer from problems of corruption, inefficiency and mismanagement, it will be difficult to implement new policies such as quota laws. The embrace by so many leaders of the principle of equal opportunity for women is a cause for celebration, but Latin America requires further economic, political and social transformations to translate this principle into practice.

Endnotes

[1] Inter-American Development Bank. 2000. *Development Beyond Economics: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America. 2000 Report.* Washington: Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 4.

[2] Data on women's social position is from the World Bank (available on the internet at: http://genderstats.worldbank.org).

[3] UNICEF (available on the internet at: http://www.unicef.org/statis).

[4] United Nations Development Program. 2001. *Human Development Report.* Available on the internet at http://www.undp.org/hdr2001.

[5] Inter-American Development Bank. 1999. *Facing Up to Inequality in Latin America. Economic and Social Progress in Latin America. 1998–1999 Report.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 57.

[6] Ibid, p. 62.

[7] Subsecretaría de la Mujer. 1999. *Mujeres en Argentina. Estado de situación a 5 años de Beijing.* Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores. p. 42.

[8] Grupo Impulsor Nacional. 1997. *Del compromiso a la acción. Después de Beijing, qué ha hecho el estado peruano?* Lima: CESIP. p. 32.

[9] Articulação das Mulheres Brasileiras. 2000. *Políticas Públicas para as Mulheres no Brasil. 5 anos após Beijing*. Brasília, p. 59.

[10] Lovell, Peggy. 1994. "Race, Gender, and Development in Brazil," *Latin American Research Review* 29, no. 3. , p. 20.

[11] See: Inter-American Dialogue. 2001. *Politics Matters: A Dialogue of Women Political Leaders*. Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Dialogue. Available at: www.thedialogue.org.

[12] Darcy, R,, Welch, Susan and Janet Clark. 1994. *Women, Elections, and Representation*. Second Edition Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

[13] Friedman, Elisabeth. 2000. *Unfinished Transitions: Women and the Gendered Development of Democracy in Venezuela, 1936–1996.* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press. p. 96.

[14] Personal Interviews with Margarita Zavala and Sandra Herrera, executive secretary and director of the Women's Secretariat of the PAN, Mexico City, August 2000.

[15] Htun, Mala and Mark Jones. 2002. "Engendering the Right to Participate in Decisionmaking: Electoral Quotas and Women's Leadership in Latin America". In *Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America*, Nikki Craske and Maxine Molyneux (eds). London: Palgrave.

[16] See also: Caul, Miki. 1999. "Women's Representation in Parliament: The Role of Political Parties". *Party Politics* Vol. 5, No. 1; Norris, Pippa. "Breaking the Barriers: Positive Discrimination Policies for Women". In *Has Liberalism Failed Women?* Jyette Klausen and Charles S. Maier (eds.) (Forthcoming).

[17] Caul, *op. cit.,* p. 81.

[18] Reynolds, Andrew. 1999. "Women in the Legislatures and Executives of the World: Knocking at the Highest Glass Ceiling". *World Politics* 51, 4 (July), p. 569.

[19] Mainwaring, Scott and Timothy Scully. 1995. "Introduction: Party Systems in Latin America". In *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*, Mainwaring and Scully (eds.). Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp. 4–6.

[20] Inter-American Development Bank. 2000. *Development Beyond Economics: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America. 2000 Report.* Washington: Johns Hopkins University Press pp. 181–2.

[21] These conclusions are based on analysis of five Latin American countries. Htun, Mala. "Electoral Rules, Parties, and the Election of Women in Latin America". Paper prepared for delivery at the 97th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September 2001.

[22] Htun, Mala. 2001. "Electoral Rules, Parties, and the Election of Women in Latin America". Paper prepared for delivery at the 97th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September.

[23] Norris, Pippa. 2000. " Women's Representation and Electoral Systems". In *The Encyclopedia of Electoral Systems*, Richard Rose (ed.). Washington DC: CQ Press.; Darcy, R., Susan Welch and Janet Clark. 1994. *Women, Elections, and Representation*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. Vengroff, Richard, Lucy Creevey and Henry Krisch. 1999. "Electoral System Effects on Gender Representation: The Case of Mixed and MMP". Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Matland, op. cit.

[24] Norris, Pippa. 2000.

[25] Rule, Wilma and Matthew Shugart. 1995. "The Preference Vote and the Election of Women". *Voting and Democracy Report,* available at www.fairvote.org. The resolution of this issue likely depends on who is most biased, party leaders or the electorate. Preference voting allows a feminist electorate to elect women against the desire of sexist party leaders, while closed-list systems permit party leaders to ensure the election of women in spite of a sexist electorate.

[26] See, for example: Carey, John. 1997. "Institutional Design and Party Systems". In *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies*, Larry Diamond, et al. (eds). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1997.

[27] Archer, Ronald P and Matthew Shugart. 1997. "The Unrealized Potential of Presidential Dominance in Colombia". In *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Shugart (eds). New York: Cambridge University Press. p. 133–4.

[28] Htun and Jones. 2002. pp. 34–35.

[29] Htun and Jones. 2002. pp. 39–40.

[30] Htun and Jones. 2002. pp. 52–53, fn. 7.

[31] Htun, Mala. 2001. "Women's Leadership in Latin America: Trends and Challenges". *Politics Matters: A Dialogue of Women Political Leaders.* Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Dialogue. p. 16.

[32] Friedman, Elisabeth. *Unfinished Transitions*. p. 255.

[33] Blondet, Cecilia. 2001. "Lessons from the Participation of Women in Politics". In *Politics Matter: A Dialogue of Women Political Leaders*. Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Dialogue. p. 53.

[34] Inter-American Dialogue. *Women and Power in the Americas*. p. 11.

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Readers are advised to peruse the numerous articles and references at: www.pippanorris.com.