Women, Politics and Democratic Prospects in Latin America

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Foreword

Over the last decade, Latin America has witnessed unprecedented gains of more than 50 percent in the number of women in power. This paper explains these gains and discusses factors that fuel and help forecast the continuing growth in women's political participation. The authors also explore the possible implications of this growth for the future conduct of democracy and the barriers women must overcome so that their share in the political ranks gets closer to their share in the population.

This paper is part of PROLEAD's effort to promote women's leadership, political participation and representation in the Latin American and Caribbean region. An IDB initiative, PROLEAD awards grants to organizations that promote women's political participation, provides capacity- building workshops to women and organizations and furthers research and knowledge in the area. For additional information on the program's activities, please visit PROLEAD´s website at www.iadb.org/sds/prolead.

We hope this paper will contribute to a further understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced in building democracy for all, and to the Bank's policy dialogues with borrowing member countries.

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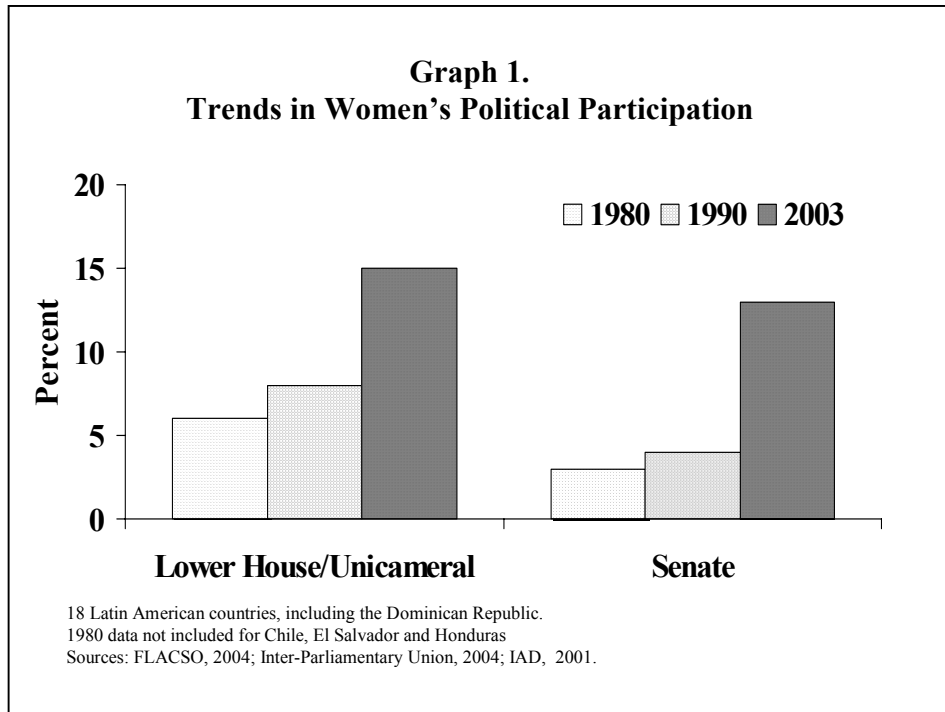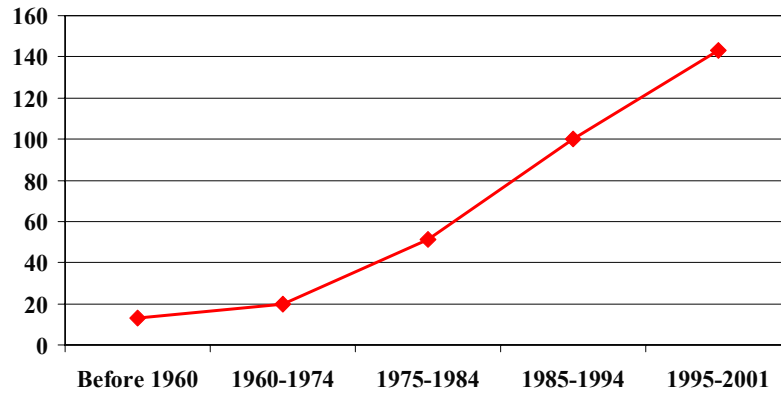Sustainable Development Department

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Gains in Women's Leadership

Along with the resurgence of democracy, Latin America is witnessing a visible trend toward the feminization of politics. In 2003, Panama had a democratically elected woman president, and Peru had a woman prime minister. Furthermore, women were in charge of the armed forces in Chile and Colombia. Women headed scores of other ministries in the region, and their representation in parliaments, while still in the teens, grew sharply. In the last decade, women's participation rose, on average, from 9 to 14 percent in the executive branch (in ministerial positions), 5 to 13 percent in the senate, and 8 to 15 percent in the lower house or unicameral parliaments (see graphs 1 and 2). These figures represent a gain of more than 50 percent in all cases. Why is this so and what does it mean for the future conduct of democracy in Latin America? This paper attempts to answer these questions based on recent evidence and a public opinion poll on women's political participation. It also discusses the barriers women must overcome so that their share in the political ranks approaches their share in the population.

Graph 1.
Trends in Women's Political Participation

□ 1980 □ 1990 ■ 2003

18 Latin American countries, including the Dominican Republic.
1980 data not included for Chile, El Salvador and Honduras
Sources: FLACSO, 2004; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2004; IAD, 2001.

Graph 2.
Female Ministers in Latin America

Based on 19 countries, including the Dominican Republic and Cuba.
Source: Iturbe, 2004.

Explaining the Gains

Changes in three basic conditions—women's human capital, cultural mores and the hold of democracy—seem to have combined with facilitating factors (legislation and quotas) to explain women's advances in Latin American politics.

Human Capital Gains

A unique feature in Latin America is the progress women have made in acquiring the capabilities that enable them to lead. Unlike most other regions of the developing world, where there are evident gender gaps in schooling favoring boys, in Latin America girls outperform boys, measured by enrollment rates, at all levels of schooling. Close to 60 percent of females are enrolled in secondary schooling and 19 percent in tertiary education; for boys, these percentages are 54 and 17 percent, respectively (IDB, 2000). A historical gap in primary school enrollments favoring boys was closed with the cohorts born in 1970, reflecting a secular trend toward equality between the genders in school registrations (Dureya et al., 2001). There is yet no convincing explanation as to why, compared to other regions, Latin America is such a good performer in terms of gender equality in school enrolments. Likely factors include easy access to schools in a highly urbanized region, which increases all children's chances to attend school; cultural preferences that value schooling for both sexes and do not restrict girls' social interactions and physical mobility; and higher unemployment rates for adolescent girls than for adolescent boys, which keep girls in schools while boys join the labor market.

The region's educational expansion has increased girls' access to schooling and likely helped to reduce gender inequalities in employment and politics through the direct effect of schooling on work and earnings, as well as through its strong association with better health for women and lower fertility. A recent worldwide study of the effects of educational expansion on the erosion of social inequalities found that education reduced gender-based inequalities more rapidly than inequalities based on race and ethnicity, although its overall inequality-eroding effect often is overstated. Reduced gender gaps in education are not always mirrored in reduced gender gaps in employment and income, and education does not change beliefs on racism (Buchmann and Hannum, 2003).

Cultural Openings

Recent decades have witnessed drastic changes in women's place in society. Doors have opened for women to participate in all facets of public life. At least two trends have contributed to this major cultural change. First has been the revival of the international women's movement. Re-emerging after decades of silence, it has generated a worldwide awareness of women's condition and reignited activism for women's rights. The second trend involves the effects of globalization and the communications revolution. These have resulted in the breakdown of geographical and informational frontiers, and have facilitated the global spread of information about women, their changing roles and their achievements in public life, as well as the formation of international women's rights coalitions. These trends took hold rapidly in Latin America because of women's high educational levels and the region's comparatively high integration into the world economy.

Democratization

After a decade or two of authoritarian regimes in many countries, democracy returned to Latin America in the 1980s. Since then, the region has undergone a growing process of democratization, or re-democratization, emphasizing representative and, increasingly, participatory democracy. This new democratic period has coexisted with a loss in the power and credibility of traditional political parties. Grassroots and other citizen movements, including those of women and indigenous peoples, have in part filled the gap left by the leadership vacuum in traditional parties. This democratic wave has courted women

voters and has enabled them to express and enact their own (not their husbands') political preferences. Women have flourished in this new democratic scenario as empowered voters, grassroots political organizers and political leaders.

Legislation

The adoption of international human rights treaties and conventions, coupled with domestic legislation regarding women's rights, has supported women's ability to enter into and remain in politics. Latin American countries adopted conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention of Belem do Para, International Labor Organization conventions and many others. Many countries have adapted these instruments to create national legislation covering rights to nondiscrimination, equal opportunity, basic education and healthcare, employment, family planning, property ownership and political participation, among others.

Governments have created special bodies and instruments to propose legislation, as well as monitor and implement policies that affect women. Most countries have Parliamentary Commissions on Women's Issues (see table 1). All Latin American countries have created special women's bureaus to monitor and implement public policies related to women, some at the ministerial level (see table 2). Following the agreements reached in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, many countries have also adopted national gender action plans that establish specific measures and programs aimed at women's advancement. This institutionalization of women's issues, and the mechanisms in place to monitor and implement international agreements and national legislation, has helped consolidate women's gains over the last two decades.

Table 1.
Parliamentary Commissions on Women's Issues in Latin America

Country	Year Created
Argentina	1995
Bolivia	1997
Brazil	1996
Chile	1991
Colombia	n/a
Dominican Republic	1995
Ecuador	1989
El Salvador	1991
Guatemala	1986-87
Honduras	1991
Mexico	1997
Nicaragua	1991
Panama	n/a
Peru	1996
Uruguay	1985
Venezuela	1997

Source: ECLAC, 1999; data for Honduras is from the *Comisión Ordinaria de la Mujer*.

Table 2.
Women's Bureaus in Latin America

Country	Year Created	Agency	Location
Argentina	1992	National Women's Council (CONAMU)	Office of the President
Bolivia	1993	General Directorate on Gender Issues	Vice-ministry of Gender, Generations and Family
Brazil	1995	National Council on Women's Rights	Ministry of Justice
Chile	1991	National Women's Service (SERNAM)	Ministry of Planning and Cooperation
Colombia	1999	Presidential Council for Gender Equity	Office of the President
Costa Rica	1998	National Institute of Women	Government Council
Dominican Republic	1982	General Directorate for the Promotion of Women	Presidential Secretariat
Ecuador	1997	National Women's Council (CONAMU)	Office of the President
El Salvador	1996	Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development	Presidential Ministry
Guatemala	1981	National Women's Office (ONAM)	Labor and Social Ministry
Honduras	1999	National Women's Institute (INAM)	Office of the President
Mexico	1998	National Commission of Women (CONMUJER)	Governance Secretariat
Nicaragua	1987	Nicaraguan Institute of Women (INIM)	Family Ministry
Panama	1998	National Women's Office	Ministry of Youth, Women, Children and Family
Paraguay	1992	Women's Secretariat	Office of the President
Peru	1996	Ministry on Women and Human Development	Office of the President
Uruguay	1992	National Institute of Family and Women	Ministry of Education and Culture
Venezuela	1992	National Council of Women (CONAMU)	Office of the President

Source: ECLAC, 1999.

Affirmative Action

As a result of direct pressure from the women's movement, eleven countries have instituted quotas that establish a minimum level of representation (between 20 and 40 percent) for women in party lists for legislative elections (see table 3). In addition, Colombia has defined a minimum quota (30 percent) for women's representation in the executive. Quotas have increased women's presence in legislatures by an average of nine percentage points, demonstrating their effectiveness in increasing women's political representation in the region (see graph 3). The effect of quotas, however, has varied across countries. For example, following the implementation of the quota law, the percentage of women in the unicameral Parliament decreased by almost 4 points in the 2001 Honduran elections. In contrast, the percentage of women in Costa Rica's unicameral parliament has increased by 19 points since the adoption of the quota law in 1996. Quotas have worked well when they have been tailored to fit the electoral laws of the particular country and when political parties have applied them rigorously (Htun and Jones, 2002).

Quotas, which have been in existence for about a decade, have elicited little public reaction, negative or otherwise. In fact, many Latin American political parties have voluntarily adopted rules for quotas in their lists. An unsuccessful attempt to modify the quota law took place in Ecuador in 2002 when the president of the electoral tribunal tried to change the progressive legislation adopted in 1998. This law mandates the participation of women in party lists to begin at 30 percent and increase by 5 percent in each electoral period, until it reaches 50 percent. The lack of public reaction to women's quotas stands in stark contrast with the recently instituted racial quotas (of 40 percent representation of Afro-descendants) in two Brazilian public universities, which have generated heated controversy (Rohter, 2003). There are several possible reasons for the different reactions. One of them is that political quotas for women affect a significantly smaller universe of people or pool of candidates (for legislative elections versus for entrance to public universities). Another is that there is a more visible merit component in women's quotas since names are included in party lists, enhancing women's opportunities to be elected rather than ensuring their election. A third possible reason is that all socioeconomic classes are represented in the case of women, while class interacts with race and ethnicity, making affirmative action measures based on class less threatening than those based on race (Htun, 2003). It is also possible that slots in universities are perceived as more desirable than slots in party lists. In fact, the scarcity of university slots has fostered severe competition. With only 30 to 40 candidates admitted to universities each year, the quota radically alters the equation in an already cutthroat process.

Women's political representation quotas have worked well in the region because they have helped expand a pool of already well-qualified applicants (highly educated women); enhanced opportunities rather than insured entitlements; benefited people across socioeconomic groups; and provided role models of women leaders that have helped change cultural stereotypes.
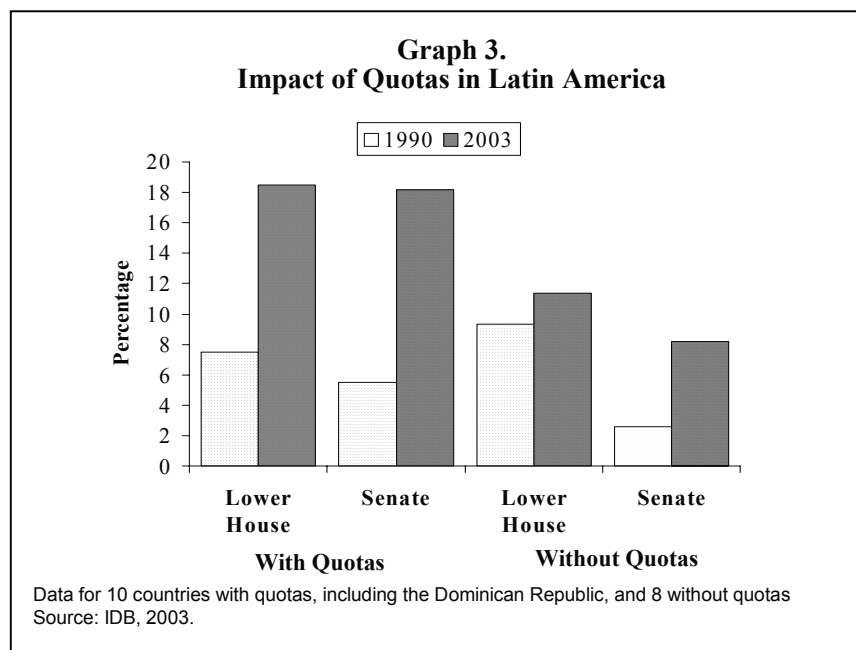
Table 3.
Quotas for Women in Latin America

Country	Year	Leglislative Body	Quota (%)
Argentina	1991	Chamber	30
	2001	Senate	30
Bolivia	1997	Chamber	30
	1997	Senate	25
Brazil	1997	Chamber	30
Costa Rica	1996	Unicameral	40
Colombia**	2000	-	
Dominican Republic	1997	Unicameral	25
Ecuador	1997/2000*	Unicameral	20/30
Honduras	2000	Unicameral	30
Mexico	1996	Chamber	30
		Senate	30
Panama	1997	Chamber	30
Paraguay	1996	Chamber	20
		Senate	20
Peru	1997/2001*	Unicameral	25/30

* The original quota law was modified, increasing women's minimum representation to 30 percent.
** Colombia has a minimum quota of 30 percent for women's representation in the executive.
Source: IDEA. Global Database of Quotas for Women.

Graph 3.
Impact of Quotas in Latin America

Data for 10 countries with quotas, including the Dominican Republic, and 8 without quotas
Source: IDB, 2003.

Looking Ahead

The trend toward the feminization of Latin America's democracy is here to stay. Four factors fuel and help forecast the continuing growth in women's political leadership. Two structural antecedents are the modernizing trend in voters' preferences in the region (favorable to women) and the demographic transition, with its impact on the former. To these are added the commitment of the international community, reflected in the Millennium Development Goals Declaration signed by world leaders in 2000, and the region's political crisis that, paradoxically perhaps, may open spaces for women in politics.

Voters' Preferences

A Gallup poll, conducted in 2000 for the Inter-American Development Bank with a random sample of 2,022 voters in six major Latin American cities (Bogota, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and San Salvador) showed that across cities, the average voter had positive opinions of women's place and performance in politics (Gallup, 2001). Over 90 percent of those polled were willing to vote for a woman presidential candidate. A majority (57 percent) opined that women were better government leaders than men and, contradicting the view of many political analysts, a majority (57 percent) also said that women's issues had a definite weight in voting decisions. In addition, women, educated voters and young voters had more positive opinions of women political leaders than men, less educated voters and older voters. More women (62 percent) than men (51 percent) believed that women are better at governing. Fifty-eight percent of highly educated voters versus 40 percent with little education said they had voted for a woman candidate. And both educated and young voters perceived more inequalities in the labor market and political opportunities by gender, suggesting a progressive "modernization" of views on gender issues. Corroborating these results, a 1998 poll in Lima showed that women, educated and young voters were most willing to vote for a female candidate in the 2000 presidential elections (Calandria,

1998). And, in fact, in the 2000 Peruvian elections, more women (27 percent) than men (17 percent) voted for the female presidential candidate (Yanez, 2001).

A 1996 Gallup poll conducted in Mexico City and San Salvador demonstrates that times have changed. Compared to the 2000 Gallup poll, the proportion of the population that thought the country would be better off with women in political leadership positions grew significantly in the four-year interval. Furthermore, in the 2000 poll there were more differences in voters' opinions across educational groups than across genders, reflecting the sharp educational inequalities in Latin America. This is different from the experience in many industrial societies, for instance, in the United States, where gender differences were stronger than educational differences in explaining voting preferences in the 2000 presidential elections (CNN, 2000). However, one would expect that gender differences will eventually be a stronger force than educational differences in Latin America as well, as the educational status of the population improves and educational differences diminish over time.

Demographic Transition

Overall, Latin America is aging—a process that will accelerate between 2025 and 2050 (notwithstanding sizable differences between rich and poor countries and rich and poor people). The proportion of the young is expected to fall dramatically: from 40 percent of the population in 1950 to 20 percent in 2050. Simultaneously, the proportion of those 65 and older is expected to triple, to more than 15 percent of the population (IDB, 2000a). The majority of the elderly will be women, who tend to outlive men in the region and the world. Already by the end of the 1990s, on average, women represented 53.9 percent of the population over 60 in Latin America. In Argentina they were 59.6 percent and in Bolivia 52.2 percent (in the United States they were 56.9 percent).

Older women will likely become a significant voting block in Latin American elections, as is true in contemporary Europe and the United States, where women outnumber men in the electorate. The effect will be to influence the nature and content of democratic politics (Fukuyama, 1998; Norris, 2002). Women will vote more often and, if they continue to exhibit current preferences, they will vote more often for women candidates and give more weight to women's issues in elections. In addition, preference for women politicians should further be bolstered as the educational level of the overall population rises along with economic development.

The aging of Latin America's population, combined with women's greater longevity, underlies the feminization of the electorate. Studies have shown that, as democracies become more established, any tendencies for women to vote less frequently than men disappear (Norris, 2002). Supporting this notion, voter turnout rates of women in Chile's parliamentary and presidential elections rose by one percentage point between 1989 and 1997, while voter turnout of men *declined* by one percentage point. In the 1997 elections, voter turnout rates stood at around 53 percent for women and 47 percent for men. In contrast, in Guatemala (a relatively less developed country), voter turnout rates for women in 1996 were 36.8 percent compared to 63.2 percent for men (IDEA, 2003).

Political Crisis

After two decades of democratic regimes, Latin Americans are wavering in their support for democracy. Public support for democracy has plunged from 60 percent between 1996 and 2000 to 48 percent in 2001 (Lagos, 2003). While this discontent has much to do with Latin America's economic woes, most respondents remain deeply dissatisfied with the way their democracies work in practice. A majority of Latin Americans mistrust their political institutions and their leaders.

The region's political crisis may present a window of opportunity for women, as long as dis-

content does not result in the overturning of democracy. Because women have historically been excluded from public office, they have the potential advantage of being seen as outsiders. Reingold (2000) observes that, "by not being part of the problem, women come across as part of the solution." A growing number of Latin American voters, searching for fresh leadership, may be viewing women as a viable alternative.

International Commitment

With the emergence of an international women's agenda in the 1970s and the cycle of international conferences that followed, scores of governments have signed on to global agreements that aim to improve the condition of women. A global development agenda emerged in 2000 based on the major goals and targets agreed upon at the UN Conferences of the 1990s, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The international community and UN member states committed themselves to achieving eight goals related to poverty, illiteracy, hunger, education, gender inequality, child and maternal mortality, disease, and environmental degradation. The third goal, "promote gender equality and the empowerment of women," includes as one of its indicators the proportion of seats held by women in national legislatures. The reaffirmation that gender equality and women's participation in politics is key to development represents a significant achievement.

Governments and the international community have pledged to meet the MDGs by 2015. The use of indicators to measure progress should not only stimulate the collection of much-needed sex-disaggregated data, but also provide women's organizations with a technical and political instrument to oversee progress and hold their governments accountable. In addition, fulfilling the commitments should mobilize resources, promote policy and legislative reforms, lend legitimacy to women's rights advocates, and foster collaboration and networking among women and organizations.

Implications for Democracy

As women's political participation increases in Latin American democracies, how will the region's political landscape be affected? Based on studies, current trends and public opinion, we can hypothesize that women will increasingly become an important force for change. In the short to medium term, the female vote should gain increasing importance; women's issues may be better represented; leadership styles may be influenced by women; democratic institutions may achieve greater credibility and women candidates and public officials may acquire greater acceptability and support. In fact, the feminization of political leadership may help contain the growing dissatisfaction with democracy and possible return to authoritarian regimes.

**Do Women in Office
Support Women's Interests?**

It is often said that the mere presence of women in power will not automatically translate into support for and representation of women's issues. Stated differently, being a woman does not imply having an awareness of or commitment to gender issues. However, a growing body of literature suggests that women in power do indeed make a difference in representing issues of greater interest to women. In the United States, several studies have found that female office-holders exhibit more concern about issues pertaining to women, children and families, such as the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion rights, child support enforcement, and harsher penalties for sexual assault and violence against women. In contrast to their male counterparts, women are more likely to initiate and introduce such policies and take active roles in securing their passage and implementation (Thomas, 1991, 1994; Tamerius, 1995; Carroll, 2001; O'Regan, 2000; Little, 2001; Swers, 2002).

Research in other parts of the world also shows similar policy-related gender differences. In a study of Argentina's Chamber of Deputies, Jones (1997) found significant gender differences in the policy priorities of women legisla-

tors, specifically in the areas of women's rights, children and families. In a 2002 survey of Congressional Women's Caucus members in Brazil, 88 percent of those surveyed stated that women's rights were among their priorities; and of that 88 percent, 20 percent listed women's rights as their "top" priority (Htun, 2003). Similar studies carried out in Finland, Great Britain and Norway also demonstrate that women are more likely to push agendas of interest to women (Henig, 2001; Karvonen and Selle, 1995). In other developing regions, a study in West Benegal (India) showed that mandated representation of women as leaders of village councils had significant effects on policy decisions, with women investing more in public goods that are directly relevant to the needs of rural women (drinking water, fuel and road construction). Interestingly, the study also showed that women are more likely to participate in the policy-making process if the leader of their village council is a woman (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2001). Similar results in different countries and across cultures suggest that women do hold distinct policy priorities in issues pertaining to the welfare of women and children.

In Latin America, women in decision-making positions, in concert with a vibrant women's movement, have contributed to a better representation of women's interests. Over the last three decades, women have achieved significant gains in policies and legislation dealing with women's rights, discrimination, domestic violence, reproductive rights, family issues and affirmative action. In 1998, the Chilean Senate approved a law presented by SERNAM, the Women's Bureau, that put an end to any legal distinctions between "natural," "legitimate" and "illegitimate" children (ITEM, 2000). In Venezuela, female legislators pushed through an intensely debated maternity-leave law. In Mexico, former mayor Rosario Robles shepherded through reforms that expanded the circumstances under which abortion is legal (Htun, 2001a). In the early 1990s, under the leadership of Mexican PRD congresswoman Amalia García, women from all ideo-

logical spectrums and parties formed a coalition that ultimately led to the passage of a rape law (Rodriguez, 1998). In Brazil, the Congressional Women's Caucus, in partnership with feminist lobby groups, achieved passage of numerous laws securing women's rights in the areas of violence, maternity leave, sexual harassment, and reproductive health (Htun, 2003).

In a conference of Latin American female ministers held in 2003 at the Inter-American Development Bank, several ministers mentioned introducing gender disaggregation and a gender perspective into policies. Guatemala's Minister of Peace, Ana Catalina Soberanis, successfully pushed for disaggregating homicide rates by sex and Nicaragua's former Minister of Health, Marta Palacios, mandated having data on morbidity disaggregated by sex and looking beyond maternal and child health programs in the health sector. The former Honduran Minister of Finance, Gabriela Núñez, introduced accountability for actions benefiting women in public expenditures (mandating gender-budgeting exercises in the government's annual budget).

As Latin American women continue to make gains in public office, women's issues may gain greater prominence in public and congressional debates. As women reach a "critical mass" in the executive and legislative branches throughout Latin America, they may have a greater ability to influence the debates and political agendas in their countries.

**Do Women in Office
Bring Different Leadership Styles?**

The claim that women possess different characteristics and values that they can bring to public office is a matter of debate. Some evidence suggests that women in office do have distinctive ways of "doing politics." Women are considered more approachable, cooperative, inclusive and responsive to the needs and demands of their constituents. A study of leadership behavior in the US legislature shows that, even when controlling for age, mentorship or legislative experience, women committee chairs exhibit an integrative rather than competitive style of leadership based on participation, shared power, and collaborative problem-solving (Rosenthal,

1998). In another study of US legislative leadership, Jewell and Whicker (1993) found that women legislators exhibited a "consensus style" of leadership, while men were more likely to adopt a "command style."

Evidence also suggests that women may place greater emphasis on constituency work than men. Thomas (1992) found that black council members and female council members in the United States spend more time than whites and males performing constituency service. A British survey found that women prioritized constituency work more than men and devoted a larger amount of their time to helping individual constituents with problems. Men spent more time in meetings and committees (Henig, 2001). Interestingly, a 2004 study funded by the British Electoral Commission found that, in constituencies represented by a female MP, women were more likely to agree with the statement, "government benefits people like me" (49 percent compared to 38 percent). This gap was reversed where a man represented the seat (Norris et al., 2004).

A study published in the Costa Rican *Parliamentary Bulletin* reports that women spend more time in parliamentary commissions and in meetings with their constituents than men. Specifically, women dedicate 70 percent of their time to these activities compared to 26 percent for men, who dedicate more time to other economic activities, such as their profession or private business dealings (Figueres, 2002).

Not all, however, would agree that women have a distinctive style of leadership. Many, in fact, would disagree with such stereotypes, arguing that it is precisely these arguments that have been used to justify women's exclusion from power. Supporting this notion, several other studies carried out in the United States have found that men and women do not differ in their leadership styles. In a study of state legislatures in Arizona and California, Reingold (2000) found that women legislators do not spend more time than men in constituent-related activities. Another study of mayors in Milwaukee found that men and women had very similar views regarding the essence of leadership. Both sexes admired qualities that tend to be associated with

the stereotypical qualities valued in femininity: motivation, concern for people, vision, commitment, listening and communication (Tolleson-Rinehard, 2001).

Some would further argue that women get ahead by emulating men. In other words, once in power, women adopt a male style of leadership. Interestingly, the majority of people polled by Gallup would agree: 66 percent believed that women become just as aggressive and competitive as men after assuming political office (without saying whether it is good or bad) (Gallup, 2001).

Do Women in Office Uphold Democracy?

Public opinion and preliminary studies suggest that women are perceived as more honest and trustworthy than men and less likely to engage in corruption. The Gallup poll shows that 66 percent of those surveyed believed that women are more honest than men. In a 2001 poll conducted in Brazil, the majority of those surveyed believed that women in senior government positions were more honest and trustworthy than men (Femea 2002, cited in Htun, 2003a). In a public opinion poll carried out in Lima, Peru, 64 percent felt that women politicians were more honest than men, and a mere 6 percent felt that men were more honest than women (Calandria, 1998). In addition, cross-country statistical analyses (Dollar et al., 1999; Swamy et al., 2001) have substantiated the hypothesis that an increased number of women in public office results in lower levels of corruption.

The perception that women are less corrupt led the cities of Lima and Mexico City to increase the number of women in the police force and place them in key police assignments to combat corruption, on the explicit assumption that they would be harder to bribe (Moore, 1999; Treaster, 1999). Presidential candidates and public officials have also drawn on the public's perception that women are less corrupt in order to gain public support. In Peru, Lourdes Flores Nano drew on her reputation for integrity in her bid to be-

come the country's first female president in the 2001 elections. Her poster slogans included the message "unimpeachable."

However, the dearth of studies, inconclusive evidence and provocative nature of such claims has made this an extremely controversial issue. In fact, many argue that once women's access to networks and opportunities to engage in corruption increase, women's level of corruption will mirror that of men. Others warn against the dangers of holding such stereotyped views regarding the virtues of women. In an Inter-American Development Bank seminar of Latin American feminists, scholars and practitioners, participants warned that if women should become the standard-bearers of institutional and political reform, they may find themselves held to a higher ethical standard than their male peers. Women who are labeled as exceptionally honest will be set up for a violent fall as soon as any evidence (or simply an allegation) of corruption comes their way (IDB, 2000b). Clearly, more research must be done before any definitive claims can be confidently made.

Nevertheless, the feminization of politics may be a key factor in moderating people's growing dissatisfaction with the conduct of democracy and, therefore, reducing the risk of a return to undemocratic regimes.

Do Women in Office Beget Women in Office?

As women continue to gain positions of leadership in business, academia, media and civil society organizations, public perception regarding women in positions of power should gain greater acceptability and normalcy. Jewel and Whicker (1993) argue that as more women hold highly visible positions such as newscasters and political commentators, public opinion will increasingly associate women with politics. In Latin America, as the labor force participation rate of women increases and the longer they are in power, we can expect greater acceptability and support for women in leadership positions.

What Can Go Wrong?

Several factors could potentially moderate the further growth and impact of women's political leadership in the region. They include social exclusion, lack of unity, barriers to women and lack of government commitment.

Social Exclusion

The absence of large social groups from involvement in political life could further destabilize Latin American democracies. Poverty and inequality continue to prevent a majority of citizens from participating in basic social, political, and economic life. Large disparities exist between rich and poor, rural and urban, afrodescendent and nonafrodescendent, and indigenous and nonindigenous populations.

Gender interacts with deeply rooted inequalities based on race and ethnicity that are resistant to change. As a result, women in excluded populations have the lowest levels of well-being when compared with all other groups. Indigenous women's education levels are much lower than those of their nonindigenous counterparts. Over half of the indigenous girls in Bolivia and Guatemala have dropped out of school by age 14 (Arias and Duryea, 2003). Indigenous women are most likely to work in low-paid, informal jobs in Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru, compared to nonindigenous women; the same holds for afrodescendent compared to white women in Brazil (Duryea and Genoni, 2004). Indigenous women also have less access to reproductive health services, and have the region's highest maternal mortality and fertility rates (Ruiz, 2003). In the political sphere, only a handful of indigenous and afrodescendent women have achieved positions of power. These large disparities among women could well undermine the gains of the women's movement and contribute to destabilizing democracy. To help "level the playing field," race and ethnic discrimination issues should become centerpieces in the gender equality agenda, and gender concerns should take on increased importance in the agendas of socially excluded groups (Buvinic, 2003).

Lack of Unity Among Women

A growing concern is that women may see their differences rather than their similarities. Women are divided by different ideologies and party loyalties, as well as by different social classes, backgrounds, experiences and skin color. Successfully pushing forth a women's agenda will depend on many factors, including women's ability to form coalitions across ideological spectrums, social classes and racial and ethnic groups. It will also require strong ties between women in power and the women's movement. Multi-partisan coalitions, particularly between politicians and feminist interest groups, explain some of the major policy advances attained in the 1990s (Htun, 2003a).

Barriers To Power

To achieve and exercise real power, women must overcome a multitude of barriers. First, many women continue to bear the sole responsibility of housework and childrearing. In a survey of 187 women politicians across 65 countries, 67 percent of respondents identified the balancing of time devoted to family commitments and political activities as the main hurdle they had to overcome when running for Congress (IPU, 2000). Until households adopt a more equitable distribution of domestic responsibilities and more governments institute family-friendly policies, the costs of simultaneously pursuing a political career and fulfilling family responsibilities may be too high for many women. Clearly, poor women will find it even more difficult to participate in political life when their major concern is meeting their basic needs.

Second, unless they adapt to or change the "masculine model" of political life, women may find themselves excluded from the realms of real power. Since males have always dominated the political scene, many institutions have been tailored to fit male standards, lifestyles and political attitudes (Shvedova, 2002). Upon entering politics, many women lack access to the "old

boy's networks," hampering their ability to raise campaign funds and participate in the negotiations and informal lobbying that take place behind the scenes (IDB, 2000b).

Third, women must continue making headway into the powerful committees and ministries concerned with foreign, economic and budgetary policies if they are to influence the economic, social and political development of their countries. While this is rapidly changing, women are often relegated to the so-called "soft" issues such as health, environment, family, gender and education. Moreover, women's gains during one administration may not carry over to the next. In many cases, the high participation of women in ministerial positions is linked to the administration in power and a change in government can lead to a drastic decline in women's presence.

Fourth, some women must overcome psychological and ideological obstacles such as the predetermined social roles assigned to women and men, their own perception of politics as a "dirty" game, their low self-esteem and the lack of or stereotyped media coverage of women's contribution and potential (Shvedova, 2002; IDB, 2000b). In addition, the public continues to hold stereotyped views of women. In the Gallup poll, the majority opined that women are more likely than men to get upset when faced with difficult situations in the workplace. Men (56 percent) hold this opinion more often than women (46 percent) (Gallup, 2001).

Fifth, some argue that the stereotypes regarding women's efficiency, honesty and capacity can act as a double-edged sword. As a result of these stereotypes, women are often held up to higher standards than men. If more is expected of women, they may encounter greater difficulties in proving their aptitude and in being elected.

Finally, the recruitment process, nomination practices, rules and structures of political parties may also hinder women's entry into politics. Women's success at recruitment and nomination appears to be influenced not only by the type of electoral and party system in place, but also by party rules and norms. These include the degree of participation and centralization of the nomination process, the strength of the women's movement, and whether the system is bureaucratic or patronage-oriented (Matland, 1998). In many cases, once a woman aspires to office, the real gatekeepers to elected office may be the political parties more than the voters.

Lack of Government Commitment

Gains made in legislation and international agreements will represent a hollow victory if governments do not enforce their implementation. Governments may not allocate sufficient funds, place trained staff to administer policies or grant political power to agencies responsible for implementing the public policies directed at women. Implementing international agreements and legislation protecting women's rights requires executive action (Htun, 2001). If women are not adequately represented in the executive branch, the advances reflected on paper and rhetoric may not lead to concrete outcomes.

Conclusion

Gains in women's leadership over the last two decades can be attributed to the region's educational expansion, cultural changes, democratization and adoption of women-friendly legislation and affirmative action measures. These gains, however, have not benefited all women equally. Indigenous, afro-descendent, poor and rural women have limited opportunities to access decision-making positions. Practically all women in Latin America continue to face economic, social, cultural and political barriers to their full and equal political participation.

Women's presence in political decision-making positions, while rising, remains low if we consider that they make up 50 percent of the population. What is most impressive, however, is the surge in the number of women appointed or elected to public office over the last decade, and in a wide range of functions, including as heads of defense and foreign affairs ministries. This is a relatively short period of time considering the years it took the Scandinavian countries to achieve a critical mass of women in power (Dahlerup, 2003).

Several indicators suggest that this trend toward rising numbers of women in public office will continue. Supporting evidence includes modernizing trends in voters' preferences, the feminization of the electorate, the demographic transition, and the international commitment toward fostering women's political participation.

If these trends continue in Latin America, an increasing number of women will undoubtedly reach the upper echelons of power. The expectation, given the structural antecedents mentioned in this report, is that this gradual accretion will continue, perhaps to the point of parity. More intriguing to consider is the effect women may have on politics and the people they represent. While the benefits generally associated with more women in power may or may not be fully realized, the ongoing feminization of politics should help consolidate and protect the exercise of democracy in Latin America. To further our understanding, the region would greatly benefit from additional gender-disaggregated surveys, and research studies on voter's preferences and behavior, legislative activity, the impact of women in office, links between women's political participation and representation, and the intersection between gender, race and political participation, among others.

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