

WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS: PATHS TO POLITICAL POWER



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A REPORT CARD ON WOMEN IN
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®



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A Report Card on Women in Political Leadership

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Foreword

We are pleased to present this report on women in power in the hemisphere. Women in Latin America and the Caribbean are making tremendous strides towards achieving political leadership. In 2000, the Inter-American Dialogue and the Inter-American Development Bank partnered to host a dialogue of women political leaders. The report from that meeting concluded that in Latin America and the Caribbean, “the highest circles of power still remain largely male dominated.”

Today, that is certainly not the case. Since 2006, Michelle Bachelet, Portia Simpson Miller, and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner have been elected heads of state of Chile, Jamaica, and Argentina, respectively. Over two dozen women in the Americas have run for president since 1990, and two more—Blanca Olevar in Paraguay and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil—are poised to compete in their countries’ next presidential elections. Hillary Clinton is the leading candidate for president of the United States. Across the hemisphere, the percentage of women legislators in the region has jumped 35 percent between 2000 and 2006. Women lead political parties, serve in the executive cabinets, and compete against each other in national and local elections.

In light of these achievements and determined to keep the heat on for more and better policies in support of gender equity in politics, the Inter-American Development Bank, Inter-American Dialogue, and League of Women Voters of the United States convened a group of women political leaders for a conference, “Women in the Americas: Paths to Political Power.” We sought to explore what lay behind women’s recent accomplishments and discuss strategies to uphold those gains and promote further progress.

Greater numbers of women hold elected political office than before, reaching positions that were previously only occupied by men. Yet it is important to remember that significant challenges remain. The improvements cited above are not consistent among countries and are easily reversible. No nation has achieved gender parity in government. In most Latin American and Caribbean countries, women still hold far fewer than one-quarter of electoral positions, both in national legislatures and locally elected positions, such as governor and mayor. In addition, participants in our meet-

ing made clear that many Afro-descendant, indigenous, and poor women continue to be excluded from full democratic participation.

With these obstacles in mind, we provide the following analyses and recommendations for government officials, international institutions, and public policy professionals. We urge leaders to take the steps necessary to promote women's political participation. In preparation for the 2009 Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago, we support ongoing efforts to strengthen democracy in the hemisphere through advancing women's participation at all levels of government. We highlight particularly the need to include Afro-descendant, indigenous, and poor women, who remain systematically excluded from our hemisphere's democracies.

This report card would not have been possible without the additional support of the Organization of American States Summits of the Americas Secretariat and the Inter-American Foundation. We are also grateful to Vivian Roza and Ana Maria Brasileiro of the Inter-American Development Bank, whose insights and guidance were indispensable in carrying out this project. Special thanks are in order to Dialogue interns Alex Kalita, Luis Esquivel, and Brian Palmer-Rubin for their painstaking collection of data on women in political office, and to Joanna Corzo, for her careful logistical support at the Inter-American Development Bank. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the Dialogue's Thayer Hardwick for the overall management of conference preparations and implementation, and for her intellectual contributions as author of the rapporteur's report.

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WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS: PATHS TO POLITICAL POWER

Rapporteur's Report

A group of women political leaders from across the Americas met in Washington on March 28, 2007 to discuss the dramatic advances achieved by women seeking public office in the past ten years—and the

special challenges currently facing women in electoral politics. Held at the Library of Congress and the Inter-American Development Bank, the meeting *Women in the Americas: Paths to Political Power* was co-sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Inter-American Dialogue, League of Women Voters of the United States, Inter-American Foundation, and Organization of American States (OAS). The sessions on Capitol Hill were co-hosted by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Representatives Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO), Kay Granger (R-TX), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), Loretta Sanchez (D-CA), Jean Schmidt (R-OH), Hilda Solis (D-CA), and Jerry Weller (R-IL). Solis and Weller participated in the panel discussions.

Without Women, It's Not Democracy

Over the past two decades, international organizations have pushed to promote women's participation in politics. Beginning with the first presidential Summit of the Americas

in 1994 and followed by the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, these forums called for the empowerment of women, their full and equal participation in the development of their societies, and their equal opportunity to exercise leadership. International institutions agree that women's participation in politics is fundamental to upholding democratic governance—both the Summits of the Americas meetings and the Beijing conference recommended that governments increase the number of women in public administration.

Women in the Americas: Paths to Political Power builds on the progress of these international forums. Our conference brought together key women political leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean to identify the remaining challenges for women seeking political positions and to develop tactics to increase the number of women in government. **Anel Townsend**, former member of Congress of Peru, **Judy Morrison** of the Inter-American Foundation, and **Joe Clark**, former prime minister of Canada, served

“It’s not enough to be a democracy. It has to be a democracy for women.”

—CONGRESSWOMAN **MARÍA ANTONIETA SAA**, CHILE

as moderators. **Alicia Ritchie** of the Inter-American Development Bank was joined by **Peter Hakim** of the Inter-American Dialogue, **Mary Wilson** of the League of Women Voters of the United States, and **Carmen Marina Gutiérrez** of the Organization of American States to introduce the conference. Ritchie outlined why it is so important for women to be leaders in government.

“It is important for women to be represented at all levels of the political spectrum and the decision-making process, and we know why: because women’s political rights are fundamental in any democratic framework, because democracy isn’t complete without us, and because experience shows that women at high levels are more likely to bring changes and policies that improve the situation for other women,” she said.

Ritchie’s words are an eloquent reminder of the goals women in politics share. Her convictions are reinforced by the research and analysis commissioned for this conference, where scholar Leslie Schwindt-Bayer demonstrates that increasing the number of women in political power is not only a goal in and of itself but can also facilitate compliance with policy initiatives designed to improve the lives of women. In 2006, Schwindt-Bayer found that women legislators prioritize women’s equality and children and family issues more than male legislators, and that women are more likely than men to sponsor legislation to support these issues. These results underscore that for women, for men, and for democracy, women’s participation in politics is vital. The good news is that governments worldwide—in sync with international movements—have begun to implement measures to support women’s election to public office, and many countries have successfully increased the number of women in the legislative and executive branches of government.

Taking Stock: Where Do We Stand Now?

In Latin America and the Caribbean, women’s political accomplishments in the last decade are impressive. In 2006, Chileans elected Michelle Bachelet as their president, and Portia Simpson Miller was elected prime minister of Jamaica. One year later, Argentina has also elected a female president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. In the executive branch of government, women now make up 25 percent of ministerial cabinets in Latin America and the Caribbean, thanks to the efforts of presidents to appoint more women. Gains in the legislature are also promising. With the adoption of quota laws, women’s participation in national legislatures has jumped from 14 percent in 2000 to 19 percent in 2006—a 35 percent increase. In all areas of government, dedicated and talented women are steadily overcoming the sexism and machismo that has long dominated the political field.

This progress, however, should not mask the fact that women in the Western Hemisphere have yet to achieve political parity with men. Guatemalan women make up only 9 percent of their national congress, and even some countries with quota laws—like Brazil, Bolivia, and Paraguay—remain clustered at the bottom of the charts with 11 percent or fewer women in congress. Furthermore, quota laws are less effective at promoting women’s election in sub-national politics. At the municipal and even the state level, quota laws lack prominence, and political parties’ adherence to the laws is often unregulated. In 2006, only 11 percent of governors in Latin America and the Caribbean were women, and the number of women mayors in the region was less, at about 10 percent. Women are also underrepresented in the judicial branch of government.

Most worrisome, however, is participants’ sense that their gains are tenuous. Portia Simpson Miller lost Jamaica’s election for prime minister in 2007, after only one year in power. Michelle Bachelet’s approval rating has decreased to less than 50 percent in Chile, and despite her efforts, she was unable to maintain gender parity in her cabinet. Congresswoman **Olga Ferreira de López** said that Paraguay has gone back-

wards in terms of the number of women at the executive level. Participants stressed that despite the recent success of many women politicians, women's gains are reversible and must constantly be defended.

Furthermore, while campaigning for office or even once in power, women confront a stereotypically masculine model for exercising power. **María Antonieta Saa**, congresswoman from Chile, expressed concern that there is a cost to women behaving in the political arena in ways commonly perceived as "feminine." Caring women run the risk of being seen as less competent, while authoritative women may be criticized as unpleasant. Participants felt that women—in addition to facing electoral challenges—are often judged as leaders through a gender lens.

Moving Forward: Recommendations

The panel of women politicians at the conference represented eight nations in Latin America and the Caribbean and a variety of positions within the legislative and executive branches of government. Two women served as president of their political parties, and other participants' political trajectories ranged from legislators to senior statesmen. Their political views spanned the ideological spectrum, and their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds were equally diverse. Yet

the conference made clear that these women shared common concerns regarding women in politics. The following recommendations to improve women's access to political leadership positions emerged from the discussion.

1. Adopt quota laws to increase the number of women representatives in electoral politics. Nearly all participants supported quota laws as a valuable tool for increasing the number of women in politics. However, they warned that the success of a quota law is highly dependent on a number of external factors. Participants agreed that a quota law's impact depends on the specific features of the law and the broader political context in which it is adopted. Quota laws are most effective when they have high quota targets (30 to 40 percent), mandates that guarantee women's placement in winnable positions on candidate lists, and strong enforcement mechanisms. A number of countries have seen impressive improvements in women's representation after adopting quota laws, such as Argentina and Costa Rica, where women comprise 39 percent of legislatures.

2. End the exclusion of Afro-descendant and indigenous women through affirmative action, quotas, and financing. Quota laws alone cannot erase all types of discrimination. Participants were quick to point out that Afro-descendant, indigenous, and poor women often continue to be excluded, even



Former member of Congress Anel Townsend of Peru, Senator Marta Lucía Ramírez of Colombia, and PRI president Beatriz Paredes of Mexico

after the adoption of quota laws. **Epsy Campbell**, president of Costa Rica's Citizen Action Party, argued that current quota laws, in some cases, have continued old patterns of exclusion. Women in Latin America of African descent claim only 0.03 percent participation in legislatures (11 Afro-descendent women total), despite comprising nearly 15 to 20 percent of the region's population. Senator **Marta Lucía Ramírez** of Colombia diagnosed the current state of democracy as "non-inclusive," and participants agreed that democracy must become accessible to those women and men who traditionally have been excluded because of race and class.

3. Improve campaign financing for women running for office. Participants pushed for more and targeted campaign financing for women as a way to address the problems of exclusion. Women often face large hurdles in order to raise the money needed to campaign, and even once a woman is elected, expenses can prove daunting. **Nemecia Achacollo Tola**, congresswoman of Bolivia, said that the cost of fuel while campaigning—which required traveling up to 900 kilometers throughout three provinces—was an enormous burden. **Beatriz Paredes**, president of Mexico's historic PRI party, agreed. "We women, we do have greater disadvantages in raising financing," she said. She suggested that Latin Americans look to organizations in the United States that support women candidates, such as Emily's List, as possible models for their countries.

4. Educate and train citizens—both male and female—to promote and accept gender equity. In addition to political reforms, participants stressed that a change in consciousness fostered at home, in schools, and among women themselves remains fundamental. If society demands the political space for women's participation, then quota laws, campaign finance reforms, and other political efforts will meet with greater success. **Billie Miller**, who currently serves as senior minister and minister of foreign affairs and foreign trade of Barbados, stated that, after many years of experience, she saw that "legislation works best when it reinforces what people have already accepted."

Technical assistance should be provided to ministries of education in order to incorporate gender equity into the national curriculum; parents should make a conscious effort to teach and practice gender fairness in their homes; and the media and other opinion makers ought to avoid basing their critiques of political leaders and candidates on gender stereotypes.

Participants pointedly put forward the caveat that women politicians also need to be trained to promote gender equality. "Not all women have a gender equity point of view," said **Beatriz Paredes**. Women from feminist organizations can serve an important role in training women politicians in gender equity, suggested Congresswoman **Dayana Martínez Burke** of Honduras.

5. Encourage unity among women—across class, ethnicity, geography, and political party affiliation. Participants unequivocally affirmed the need to generate a network of solidarity among women, both nationally and internationally. Creating a united front "is one of the most important priorities we must have," said **Nemecia Achacollo Tola**, although she added that women's unity need not create further division from men, who can also serve as strong allies. The women agreed that increased networking—including more events like the day's conference—were important in bringing together women of different backgrounds to discuss future strategies and increase cohesion. "Globalization can be a positive tool for promoting human rights and inclusion," said **Epsy Campbell** of Costa Rica.

We present these five guidelines—priorities of the women leaders at the conference—for consideration by policy makers, along with the policy recommendations provided in the following report card. The guidelines are designed for policymakers in the executive and legislative branches of governments, officials in international institutions, public and private donors, and anyone who is committed to promoting gender equality in leadership. Despite recent dramatic gains by women seeking political power, the participants in the roundtable affirmed that there is much work to be done.

WOMEN AND POWER IN THE AMERICAS: A REPORT CARD¹

By Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, University of Missouri

Introduction

In 1975, female politicians and women's groups from around the world met in Mexico City for the U.N.'s First World Conference on Women. They discussed the plight of women, from their absence in politics to the unique social and economic problems women face, and devised a set of recommendations for improving women's status. These recommendations laid the groundwork for the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was passed in 1978 and has since been ratified by almost every country in the world. The most specific plan of action emerged from the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing in the form of the Beijing "Platform for Action." Since Beijing, countries have made significant progress toward implementing recommendations in the Platform, and numerous international and regional organizations have followed up on the success of the Beijing meeting with meetings and efforts of their own (such as the Summits of the Americas) to encourage countries' compliance with the recommendations.

CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action encourage states to take steps to end discrimination against women and promote

women's equality. They recommend that states remove discriminatory language from laws and constitutions, establish government institutions to monitor and promote gender equality, and pass legislation to eliminate economic, social, and political inequality for women. The plans address a wide range of problems that women face including poverty, sex trafficking, limited reproductive health freedoms, violence against women, inequality in marriage and divorce rights, lack of access to education, discrimination in the workplace, and limited roles in political decision making. They also suggest ways countries can eliminate these problems. Efforts thus far show progress toward achieving the goals of women's equality, but while discrimination against women has been reduced, it is far from eliminated.

This report focuses specifically on the progress that countries in the Americas have made getting women into positions of decision-making power. Increased access to political power is not only a goal in itself but can facilitate compliance with other aspects of these international and regional accords. This report updates the Inter-American Dialogue's 2000 report on the status of women in politics. It begins by describing women's

¹ Comparative data on electoral positions are current through 2006, except references in the text to notable 2007 elections, such as Argentina's first election of a woman president and woman governor.



Congresswoman
Dayana
Martínez Burke
of Honduras

representation today and the changes experienced in recent years. Then, it examines some reasons why women's representation has increased and why it continues to vary widely across countries. It includes a separate section on the important role of affirmative action measures, specifically gender quotas, which have played a key role in women's increased access to decision making. Finally, it offers recommendations to build on past accomplishments and ensure continued progress for the future.

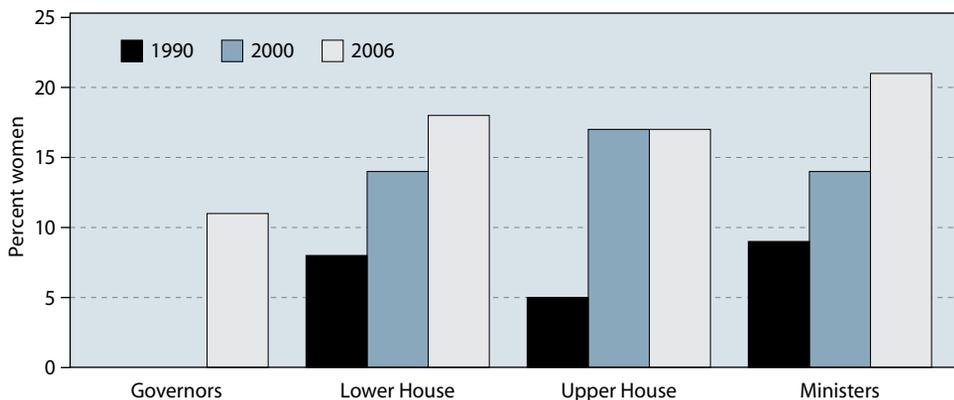
The overarching conclusion of this report is that women's participation in the political arena has increased, but there is still room for improvement. Women's gains

have been most impressive at the national level. Argentina, Chile, and Jamaica elected female heads of state for the first time, the proportion of women in cabinets has grown from 14 percent in 2000 to 21 percent in 2006, and women's representation in national legislatures has increased from 14 percent in 2000 to 19 percent in 2006. At the sub-national level, women are less visible. Of countries in the Americas with gubernatorial offices, women comprised only 11 percent of governors on average in 2006. At the mayoral level, only 6 percent of mayors were female in the early 1990's.² While the progress women have made is remarkable, it varies widely across countries in the Americas. And, most importantly, women have not achieved parity with men across the board in any country. Despite the accomplishments of the past six years, there is much work to be done to reach the goal of gender equality in political decision making in the Americas.

Where Are Women?

Women in the Americas have made great strides gaining access to the traditionally male-dominated political arena. From the top office of president or prime minister to ministerial positions in the executive branch to national legislatures and governorships, the numbers of women have increased over the past thirty years.

FIGURE 1. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS



SOURCE: Data collected by Inter-American Dialogue staff.

² Comparative data on mayoral offices are scarce.

CHIEF EXECUTIVES

On December 10, 2007, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was inaugurated president of Argentina and in March 2006, Michelle Bachelet was inaugurated president of Chile—the first woman to hold the top political position in her country. Also in 2006, Portia Simpson-Miller became the first female prime minister of Jamaica. These elections were heralded as examples of the significant progress women have made toward equality and political advancement in the Americas. While Ms. Bachelet became the first democratically elected president in the Americas who has not achieved prominence through the political connections of a male relative, she is not the first woman ever to be the chief executive of a country in the Americas. Fourteen women have now served in the top post. Eight have served as interim leaders for short terms of two years or less. The other three, exclud-

ing Fernández de Kirchner, Bachelet and Simpson-Miller, have served full terms in office, though had influential family connections to politics.

In addition to the successful elections of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Michelle Bachelet, and Portia Simpson-Miller, the past six years have seen growing numbers of women running, albeit unsuccessfully, for the office of chief executive. To win the Concertación's nomination as presidential candidate in Chile, Bachelet had to defeat another woman, Christian Democratic candidate Soledad Alvear. In Argentina, Fernández de Kirchner's closest rival was also a woman, former legislator Elisa Carrió, who came in second with 23 percent of the vote. In Peru, Lourdes Flores was a frontrunner for many months in the first round of the 2006 presidential election. She lost by less than one percentage point to Alan García who went on to defeat Ollanta Humala in

TABLE 1: FEMALE CHIEF EXECUTIVES IN THE AMERICAS

Name	Country	Years in Office
Presidents		
Isabel Martinez de Peron	Argentina	1974-1976
Lidia Gueiler Tejada	Bolivia	1979-1980 (8 months)
Ertha Pascal-Trouillot	Haiti	1990-1991 (11 months)
Violeta Barrios de Chamorro	Nicaragua	1990-1997
Rosalía Arteaga Serrano	Ecuador	1997 (2 days)
Janet Jagan	Guyana	1997-1999
Mireya Moscoso de Arias	Panama	1999-2004
Michelle Bachelet	Chile	2006-
Cristina Fernández de Kirchner	Argentina	2007-
Prime Ministers		
Mary Eugenia Charles	Dominica	1980-1995
Kim Campbell	Canada	1993 (5 months)
Claudette Werleigh	Haiti	1995-1996 (3 months)
Beatriz Merino Lucero	Peru	2003 (6 months)
Portia Simpson-Miller	Jamaica	2006-2007
SOURCE: Women World Leaders http://www.terra.es/personal2/monolith/00women.htm and research by Inter-American Dialogue staff.		

the run-off election. That same election saw another female candidate, Martha Chavez, come in fourth. This was Flores' second near-miss. She was also a candidate in the 2001 presidential election where she lost in the first round by one and a half percentage points to García.

CABINET MINISTERS

The number of women appointed to ministerial positions has increased as well. Today, Chile is the only country with parity in its cabinet. This is a result of a concerted effort on the part of newly elected president Michelle Bachelet to appoint women and men in equal numbers to her cabinet. Several other countries are close behind Chile: 41 percent of the cabinet in Paraguay is female, Peru's cabinet is 38 percent female, and Honduras and Colombia have 33 percent and 31 percent, respectively. All of these cases represent significant increases since 2000.

Several things have contributed to the recent increase in women cabinet members—a diffusion effect such that after one country adds women to its cabinet, others quickly follow; the rise of leftist parties and presidents who tend to appoint more women to cabinet posts than do rightist leaders; increased party competition in recent elections; and the growing numbers of women in legislatures, particularly in parliamentary systems where cabinet members must be members of parliament.³ Colombia's success is due, in part, to its May 2000 gender quota law for political appointments. The law mandates that 50 percent of all politically appointed posts, most visibly the president's cabinet, must be filled by women. Colombia is the only country to have passed such a law for political appointments, but other countries have made explicit efforts to increase women's access to ministerial positions.

In addition to the increased numbers of women in cabinets, the types of ministries that women head has diversified.⁴ Today, women in many countries occupy top bureaucratic

posts in ministries with high prestige, such as defense, foreign relations, economics, finance, and agriculture. For example, after his 2002 election, Álvaro Uribe appointed Marta Lucía Ramírez to be Colombia's first female defense minister. Michelle Bachelet also served as defense minister of Chile before running for president, and Soledad Alvear served as foreign minister before her bid for the Concertación candidacy. This is an important change from the past when the few women who were appointed to cabinets usually received posts in less powerful ministries dealing with traditionally feminine issues such as health, education, and social services, or more recently, women's ministries.

NATIONAL LEGISLATURES

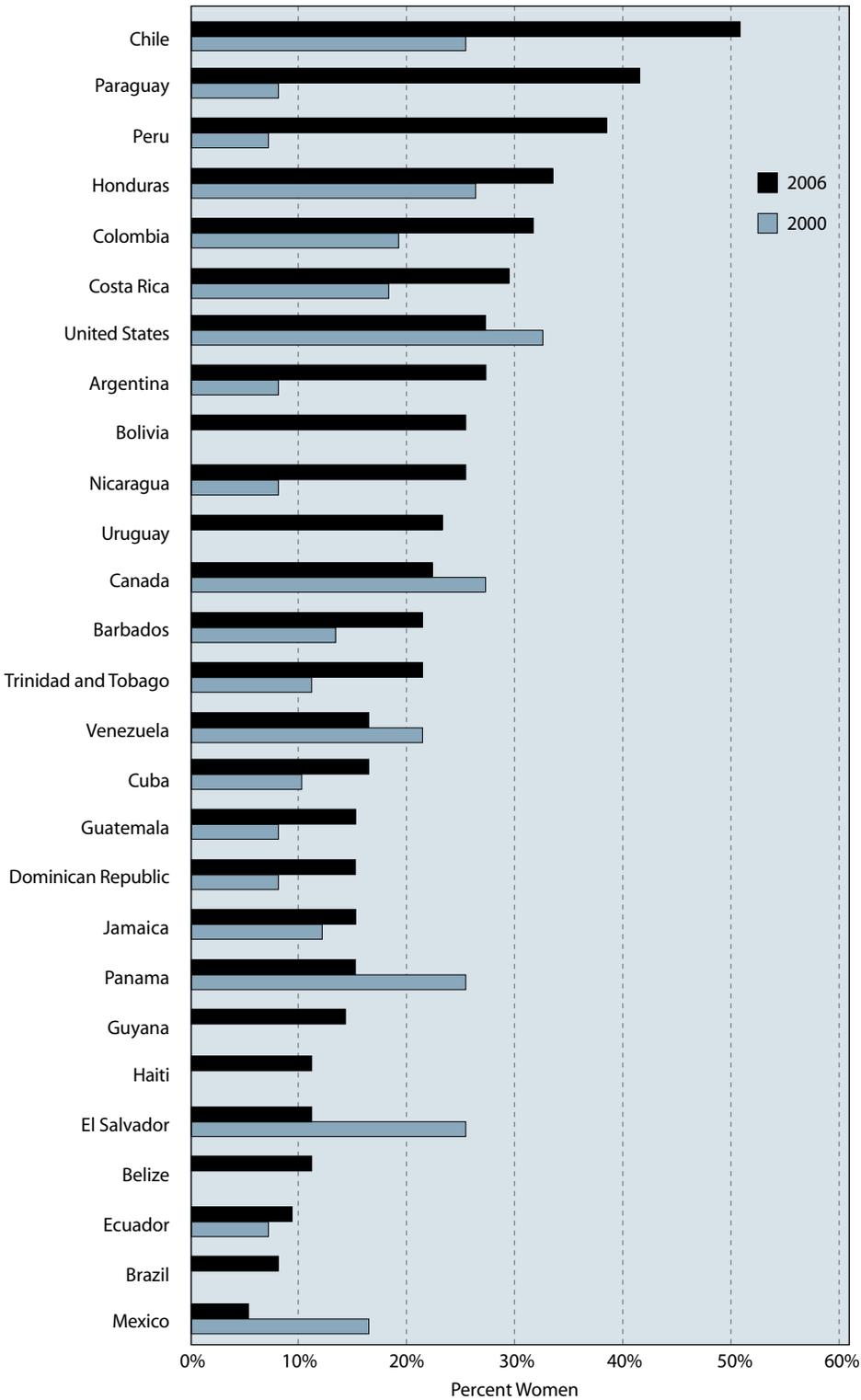
Representation of women in national legislatures, both lower and upper houses, has grown significantly in recent years. Just since 2000, the average proportion of women in congresses has increased 4 percentage points, from 15 percent in 2000 to 19 percent today. In 1980, the average percentage of women in legislatures in the Americas was only 5 percent.

The 19 percent Americas' average obscures wide variation in women's representation by country. With the 2006 election, the percentage of women in Costa Rica's Legislative Assembly grew from 35 percent to 39 percent, making it tied with Argentina as the country in the Americas with the highest representation of women. At the other end of the spectrum, several countries are still struggling to get anywhere close to the Americas' average. Averaging across both legislative chambers, Guatemala has the smallest representation of women with only 8.5 percent of the Congress of the Republic comprised by women. Other legislative chambers with very small proportions of women include Haiti's lower house (4 percent) and the upper houses of the Dominican Republic (3 percent), Bolivia (4 percent), and Chile (5 percent).

³ Escobar-Lemmon, Maria C., and Michelle M. Taylor-Robinson. 2005. Women Ministers in Latin American Government: When, Where, and Why? *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (4):829-844.

⁴ Ibid.

FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGES OF CABINET MINISTERS WHO ARE WOMEN



SOURCE: Data collected by Inter-American Dialogue staff.

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGES OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL LEGISLATURES

Country	Lower House		Upper House		Congress Average
	2000	2006	2000	2006	2006
Costa Rica	19	39	N/A	N/A	39
Argentina	27	35	3	43	39
Cuba	28	36	N/A	N/A	36
Peru	20	29	N/A	N/A	29
Guyana	19	29	N/A	N/A	29
Canada	21	21	32	35	28
Trinidad and Tobago	11	19	32	32	26
Ecuador	15	25	N/A	N/A	25
Honduras	9	23	N/A	N/A	23
Mexico	16	23	16	17	20
Barbados	11	13	33	24	19
Venezuela	10	18	N/A	N/A	18
Panama	10	17	N/A	N/A	17
El Salvador	10	17	N/A	N/A	17
United States	14	16	13	16	16
Belize	7	7	38	25	16
Jamaica	13	12	24	19	16
Nicaragua	10	15	N/A	N/A	15
Dominican Republic	16	20	7	3	12
Brazil	6	9	7	12	11
Uruguay	12	11	10	10	11
Bolivia	12	17	4	4	11
Chile	11	15	4	5	10
Colombia	12	8	13	12	10
Paraguay	3	10	18	9	10
Haiti	—	4	—	13	9
Guatemala	9	8	N/A	N/A	9
Americas Average	14	18	17	17	19

SOURCE: Data collected by Inter-American Dialogue staff. N/A is for countries that do not have an upper chamber.

A couple of chambers witnessed significant gains in women's representation in the past six years. Argentina's Chamber of Deputies and Senate both surpassed the 30 percent gender quota stipulated by law. In Peru, the percentage of women in the legislature increased 9 percentage points and in Ecuador, it increased from 15 percent to 25 percent with the 2006 election. Honduras saw an increase from 5.5 percent to 23 percent after its 2005 election.

Not only have more women won legislative election in the past six years, but they have also gained access to top leadership positions within some legislative chambers. Nancy Pelosi became the first female speaker of the House in the United States after the Democratic Party won the majority of seats in the House of Representatives in 2006. In 1999, the Colombian Chamber of Representatives elected its first female president followed by another in 2005. The Colom-

bian Senate elected its first female president in 2005, as well. Peru has had four women lead their Congress since 1995. Costa Rica has had three women serve as president of the Legislative Assembly, two since 1999. In Bolivia, an indigenous woman was elected to head the Constituent Assembly that is rewriting the Bolivian constitution.

GOVERNORS

Recent reforms in Latin American countries have decentralized political and fiscal power to regional and local governments yielding a new locus of power in which women can be involved. Yet, women are

only slowly gaining access to these positions, as evidenced by the fact that only 11 percent of governorships in the Americas are held by women. The three countries where women comprise the largest percentage of governorships are Chile, Honduras, and Panama with 46 percent, 33 percent, and 25 percent, respectively. Six countries currently have no women serving as governors: Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Cuba, Peru, and Uruguay. Argentina and Cuba are particularly surprising given the large percentages of women serving in their national legislatures.⁵

TABLE 3: FEMALE GOVERNORS IN THE AMERICAS, 2006

Country	Number of Provinces ⁱ	Number of Women	Percentage of Women	Appointment Type
Chile	13	6	46	Appointed by President
Honduras	18	6	33	Appointed by President
Panama	12	3	25	Appointed by President
Ecuador	22	4	18	
United States	50	9	18	Elected
El Salvador	14	2	14	Appointed by President
Brazil	27	3	11	Elected
Colombia	32	3	9	Elected
Guatemala	22	2	9	Appointed by President
Venezuela	24	2	8	Elected
Paraguay	17 ⁱⁱ	1	6	Elected
Mexico	32	1	3	Elected
Argentina	24	0	0	Elected
Bolivia	9	0	0	Appointed by President
Canada	13	0	0	Elected
Cuba	15	0	0	Elected
Peru	26	0	0	Elected
Uruguay	19	0	0	Elected
Americas Average			11	

SOURCE: Data collected by Inter-American Dialogue staff.

ⁱ Some countries use the language of provinces, for others it is states or departments. For this table, they are all considered "provinces."

ⁱⁱ Does not include the capital district.

⁵ Although she will not take office until January 2008, Fabiana Ríos recently won the election as governor of Tierra de Fuego, making her the first woman governor of an Argentine province, another major gain for women in Argentina.

MAYORS

The proportion of mayors who are female traditionally has been small. In the early 1990s, women comprised only 6 percent of Latin American mayors, and between 1990 and 2000, there was only a very small increase in the number of female mayors across the Americas.⁶ In a rare exception, Costa Rica saw a rapid rise in the number of female mayors with its 2002 election when women were elected to 46 percent of the mayoral offices. This large increase likely stems from a number of factors, including that 2002 was the first year that mayors were elected rather than appointed and that the 1996 gender quota law applied not only to national elections but sub-national elections as well. In the United States, the proportion of female mayors was higher than the average for the Americas with 17 percent of mayoral offices held by women in 2006.⁷

In most of the Americas, women have gained access to sub-national governments much more slowly than national governments. This contrasts with the United States where local offices are viewed as stepping stones toward national political office, and consequently, women have entered local government much more rapidly than national government. This is due, in part, to the fact that political and fiscal decentralization has been relatively recent in most Latin American countries (past 10 to 20 years) such that local political offices have only recently become elected political positions with limited but growing political and fiscal power.⁸ It also reflects the emphasis of most gender quota laws, which have been designed more often for national legislative offices rather than sub-national governments.

SUMMARY

Women in the Americas have made significant gains increasing their numbers as chief executives, ministers, national legislators, and some local officeholders. However, the regional averages are still under 20 percent for most offices—far from equality with men—and the progress made by different countries varies significantly with some countries getting much closer to the international goals of parity in decision making than others. What explains these differences and how can countries continue moving toward the goal of gender equality in representation?

Why Has Women's Representation Increased?

There are a wide range of factors that affect women's election to political office including characteristics of the socioeconomic environment, party rules, and electoral rules.⁹ These factors influence different stages of the election process from getting individuals into the "candidate pool" (the body of citizens who have the experience and qualifications to be a candidate for political office) to recruiting candidates from the pool to serve on party ballots, to finally electing representatives from those ballots.

The socioeconomic environment in a country favors the election of women where countries are more economically developed, where women are getting university degrees in equal proportion to men, and where more women participate in the paid labor force. The growing numbers of women getting college educations and entering the workforce over the past forty years has contributed to the increased representation of women in

⁶ Massolo, Alejandra. 1998. "Women in the Local Arena and Municipal Power" in *Women's Participation in Mexican Political Life*, ed. Victoria E. Rodriguez. Boulder: Westview Press, 193-203.

⁷ Center for American Women and Politics, CAWP. 2007. Facts and Finds: Women Mayors. Accessed from <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/Facts/Officeholders/mayors-curr.html> [February 28, 2007]. Percentage is for mayors of cities with more than 30,000 citizens.

⁸ For example, Colombia only began electing governors in 1994 and Costa Rica only elected mayors for the first time in 2002.

⁹ Rule, Wilma. 1987. Electoral Systems, Contextual Factors and Women's Opportunity for Election to Parliament in Twenty-Three Democracies. *Western Political Quarterly* 40 (3):477-498. Norris, Pippa. 1985. Women's Legislative Participation in Western Europe. *West European Politics* 8 (4):90-101. Reynolds, Andrew. 1999. Women in the Legislatures and Executives of the World: Knocking at the Highest Glass Ceiling. *World Politics* 51 (4):547-572.

political offices. As women become more educated and economically independent, they gain experiences and qualifications that make them viable contenders for political office. This makes them more attractive candidates to political parties and voters. Increasing the number of women in the candidate pool is an important place to start, but it does not guarantee the election of more women. For example, countries such as the United States and Chile are developed countries with high levels of women's participation in education and the workforce but they fall behind many less developed countries in terms of the election of women.

Political parties often have very different rules for how they nominate candidates to their ballots. Some political parties tightly control the nomination process using a centralized system where a handful of party leaders choose the candidates. Other political parties use a decentralized process that puts the decision in the hands of party members or voters. If party leaders control nominations and those party leaders view gender equality in nominations as an important goal, then centralized nomination can help women. This is particularly the case in political systems with gender quotas that require a certain percentage of party ballots to contain women. Where gender quotas do not exist, however, the effect of nomination procedures may be different. Since party leaders typically are men and may see women's ascendancy to political office as a threat to their longstanding political power, centralized nominations may hurt women's chances of getting onto party ballots. Thus, in political parties or political systems without gender quotas, decentralized nomination processes may be better for increasing women's representation because, as research has shown, voters tend not to discriminate based on candidate gender.¹⁰

¹⁰ A large number of studies have shown that when women run, they are as likely to win as are men. There appears to be no identifiable gender or sex bias in elections. *Latinobarómetro*. Santiago, Chile, 2004. Burrell, Barbara. 1994. *A Woman's Place is in the House: Campaigning for Congress in the Feminist Era*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Matland, Richard E. 1994. "Putting Scandinavian Equality to the Test: An Experimental Evaluation of Gender Stereotyping of Political Candidates in a Sample of Norwegian Voters." *British Journal of Political Science* 24:273-292.

¹¹ Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A. 2005. The Incumbency Disadvantage and Women's Election to Legislative Office. *Electoral Studies* 24 (2):227-244.

"How do we create a new architecture of inclusion? This is a major issue for our 2009 summit in Trinidad and Tobago."

—CARMEN MARINA GUTIÉRREZ, ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

The benefits of decentralized nominations can be seen in Honduras, a country with a quota law, albeit a largely ineffective one (see next section). In 2004, Honduras moved from highly centralized candidate selection processes to decentralized primaries. In the 2005 election, the number of women elected to Congress jumped from 5.5 percent to 23.4 percent despite no change in its very weak quota law.

A country's electoral rules also influence women's election. Where districts have only one seat, women are less likely to win office than men. The larger the district size, the more women elected. This is because when only one seat is open, political parties generally favor a male candidate. When more than one seat exists, gender balancing is easier.

In addition to the size of a district, electoral norms for legislative reelection can hurt women. In the United States, incumbency is very high with approximately 90 percent of the Congress running for reelection, on average. This makes it very difficult for newcomers, who often are women, to enter the political arena. In many Latin American legislatures, reelection rates are much lower. This makes it easier for female newcomers to compete since they are not competing against incumbents. The advantage is even larger where term limits prohibit immediate reelection, which is the case in Costa Rica and Mexico (and Ecuador from 1979-1994).¹¹

“There is no doubt that opportunities are not the same for all women in Latin America. Conditions for Afro-descendant and indigenous women are not equal...there can be no exceptions when it comes to political participation.”

—EPSY CAMPBELL, CITIZEN ACTION PARTY, COSTA RICA

In addition to these characteristics, there are other factors that can affect women's election chances. Recent research in the United States suggests that women are less likely than men to consider running for political office.¹² They may be deterred by family or work obligations, childbirth, un-supportive spouses, and a lack of female role models, among other factors. In interviews that I conducted in Costa Rica (2002) and Argentina (2006), female legislators often mentioned campaign financing as a particular problem for women. They suggested that women often have a harder time asking for money than do men and this can deter women without independent sources of wealth from even considering running for political office.

Last, but certainly not least, gender quotas can influence the election of women. The following section examines how quotas affect women's representation, drawing on the experience of countries in the Americas with gender quotas.

Affirmative Action in Action: How Effective are Gender Quotas?

In 1991, Argentina passed a national gender quota law requiring that women comprise 30 percent of the candidates put forth by all political parties running for election to the Chamber of Deputies. The idea of

gender quotas was not new (international organizations had been pushing quotas since the 1975 U.N. First World Conference on Women) nor was the use of gender quotas new as some political parties, most commonly in the Nordic countries, had used quotas since the 1970s. But, the Argentine law was the first by a democratic state that applied to all political parties and, consequently, offered the greatest opportunity to increase women's representation in the entire legislature not just in one political party's legislative delegation.¹³ Evidence from Argentina suggests that quotas have been successful. In the 1993 election, the first after the quota law went into effect, women won 14.4 percent of the seats in the Chamber compared to only 5 percent in the 1991 election. By 2005, Argentina's Chamber of Deputies was 35 percent female and the Senate was 43.1 percent female, placing Argentina among the top ten countries in the world in terms of women's representation in national parliaments.¹⁴

Twelve countries in the Americas followed Argentina's example and adopted gender quotas either through national legislation or constitutional provisions (or both) in the years since 1991. However, many of these countries have not been as successful as Argentina in implementing gender quotas. Honduras, who adopted a quota law in 2000, saw an initial decline of 3.9 percent of the number of women elected. Brazil's lower house elected 5.7 percent women in its first post-quota election in 1998 and that increased to only 8.6 percent in 2002 and 8.8 percent in 2006, even after increasing the mandated percentage of women on party ballots from 25 percent to 30 percent for these latter two elections.

Some quotas are more effective than others because quota laws vary across countries. The laws differ along three key

¹² Lawless, Jennifer L., and Richard L. Fox. 2005. *It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹³ Nepal constitutionalized a 5 percent gender quota in 1990, but being a non-democratic monarchy, it was far less notable than Argentina's change to its electoral law.

¹⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). 2006. "Women in National Parliaments (as of February 28, 2007)" <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> [accessed March 9, 2007].

TABLE 4: PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION PRE AND POST GENDER QUOTAS

Country	Chamber	Pre-Quota	Post-Quota	% Change
Argentina ⁱⁱⁱ	Upper	2.8 (1998)	33.3 (2001)	+ 30.5
Ecuador	Unicameral	3.7 (1996)	17.4 (1998)	+ 13.7
Argentina	Lower	5.9 (1991)	14.4 (1993)	+ 9.4
Peru	Unicameral	10.8 (1995)	20.0 (2000)	+ 9.2
Paraguay	Upper	11.1 (1993)	17.8 (1998)	+ 6.7
Mexico	Lower	16.0 (2000)	22.6 (2003)	+ 6.6
Venezuela	Lower	5.9 (1993)	12.1 (1998)	+ 6.2
Bolivia	Lower	6.9 (1993)	11.5 (1997)	+ 4.6
Dominican Republic	Lower	11.7 (1994)	16.1 (1998)	+ 4.4
Costa Rica	Unicameral	15.8 (1994)	19.3 (1998)	+ 3.5
Mexico	Upper	15.6 (2000)	17.2 (2006)	+ 1.6
Guyana	Unicameral	18.5 (1997)	20.0 (2001)	+ 1.5
Venezuela	Upper	8.0 (1993)	8.8 (1998)	+ 0.8
Panama	Unicameral	9.7 (1994)	9.9 (1999)	+ 0.2
Bolivia	Upper	3.7 (1993)	3.7 (1997)	0
Paraguay	Lower	2.5 (1993)	2.5 (1998)	0
Brazil	Lower	6.6 (1994)	5.7 (1998)	- 0.9
Honduras	Unicameral	9.4 (1997)	5.5 (2001)	- 3.9

SOURCE: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), various years.

ⁱⁱⁱ Argentina's Senate held its first election in 2001, the year the quota went into effect. Prior to 2001, the Senate was an appointed body.

dimensions. The first is the quota target—the percentage of women that the quota requires political parties to include on their ballots. In the Americas, this is as high as 40 percent in Costa Rica and as low as 20 percent in Ecuador for its first quota election in 1998. The second dimension on which quotas vary is whether the quota law includes a placement mandate. A placement mandate stipulates that female candidates must be placed in winnable positions on party ballots. Eight countries in the Americas have placement mandates. They usually require male and female candidates to alternate on the list—one of every three candidates if the quota is 30 percent, for example. The third dimension is the strength of the quota law's enforcement mechanisms. Some countries specify no means by which the quota can be enforced while oth-

ers include hefty consequences for parties that submit lists of candidates not meeting the quota. Strong enforcement mechanisms usually require parties to comply with the law or prohibit them from running any candidates. Weaker enforcement mechanisms are those such as Panama's where parties have to make a "good faith" effort to comply with the quota, but if they fail, then they can nominate men in those positions. This turns the quota into a mere recommendation.

The quotas that have resulted in the largest average increases in women's representation in national legislatures are those with high quota targets, placement mandates, and strong enforcement mechanisms.¹⁵ Three of the countries with the largest percentages of women in their legislatures, Argentina, Costa Rica, and Mex-

“Quotas are useful because we need to create a political mass.”

—BEATRIZ PAREDES, PRI, MEXICO

ico, all have high quota targets (30 to 40 percent), placement mandates, and strong enforcement mechanisms. The quota countries with lower legislative representation of women, Panama, Venezuela, and Brazil, have smaller target percentages (25 to 30 percent), no placement mandates, and weak or no enforcement mechanisms.

The broader political context in which quotas are implemented also condition their effectiveness. For example, quota laws only work when they are compatible with electoral rules.¹⁶ Quotas in single-member district electoral systems, where parties only nominate one candidate per district, make little sense because parties can only nominate a man OR a woman. They are much more applicable in proportional representation electoral systems where the number of candidates on the party ballot is equal to the number of legislative seats in the district. In these systems, parties can nominate both men AND women.

In addition, quotas will be more effective when parties decide the order of candidates on the ballot and electoral rules do not allow voters to disturb that order with a preference vote, such as closed-list proportional representation systems. If voters can select the individual candidate that they prefer, as they can in open-list, single transferable vote, and preference vote systems, then quotas with placement mandates become meaningless.

Citizen and government perceptions of quotas also will condition their effective-

ness. If quotas are minimally supported in society and/or the broader political system, then the quota law risks being tweaked or derogated entirely via a popular referendum or court ruling. This is exactly what happened in Venezuela where the gender quota was eliminated after Hugo Chavez took power and rewrote the constitution. The Court struck down the quota law in 2000 as unconstitutional. In contrast, broader political support for affirmative action measures within countries can yield more powerful quotas laws than initially implemented. In Argentina, a 1993 court ruling upheld and even strengthened the quota, adding a placement mandate and enforcement mechanisms. A similar situation arose in Costa Rica where the Legislative Assembly initially passed a watered-down quota law leaving many women frustrated. They took their fight for placement mandates and stronger enforcement to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal where they won a revision to the law in 2000. Colombia's quota law for political appointments faced a threat similar to what occurred in Venezuela. Male political leaders, including President Andrés Pastrana, tried to have the law declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court but women's groups, some female politicians, and quota supporters rallied behind the law and won.¹⁷

For affirmative action measures to increase the representation of women, they must be implemented effectively and in an environment of wider political support. Quotas need high target percentages, placement mandates, and strong enforcement mechanisms, and they must be adopted in political systems with electoral rules compatible with the quotas. Perhaps most importantly, they need political support to get adopted in the first place and avoid being overturned later.

¹⁵ Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A. 2006. “The Effectiveness of Gender Quotas.” Prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association in Atlanta, January 5-7.

¹⁶ Htun, Mala N., and Mark P. Jones. 2002. 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*, edited by N. Craske and M. Molyneux. New York: Palgrave Publishers.

¹⁷ Importantly, gender quotas are highly divisive among women, themselves. Some feel that quotas can hurt women's election by serving as a ceiling rather than a floor or that women elected under quotas are simply tokens, or perceived as such, rather than highly qualified and capable politicians.

TABLE 5: GENDER QUOTA LAWS IN LATIN AMERICA

Country	Chamber	Year Adopted	Preference Vote	Target Percentage	Placement Mandate	Enforcement Mechanism	Percentage of Women Elected ^{iv}
Argentina	Upper	2001	No	30	Yes	Strong	38.2
	Lower	1991	No	30	Yes	Strong	26.3
Costa Rica	Unicameral	1996	No	40	No/Yes ^v	None/Strong	31.0
Guyana	Unicameral	2000	No	33	No	None	24.5
Mexico	Lower	2002	No	30	Yes	Strong	22.6
	Upper	2002	No	30	Yes	Strong	17.2
Peru	Unicameral	1997	Yes	25/30 ^{vi}	No	Strong	22.5
Ecuador	Unicameral	1997	Yes	20/30/35 ^{vii}	Yes	Weak	19.5
Dominican Republic	Lower	1997	No/Yes ^{viii}	25/33	No/Yes ^{ix}	Strong	17.7
Bolivia	Lower	1997	No	33	Yes	Strong	15.6
	Upper	1997	No	25	Yes	Strong	7.4
Honduras	Unicameral	2000	No/Yes ^x	30	No	None	14.5
Paraguay	Upper	1996	No	20	Yes	Strong	13.4
	Lower	1996	No	20	Yes	Strong	6.3
Panama	Unicameral	1997	Yes	30	No	Weak	13.3
Venezuela ^{xi}	Lower	1997	No	30	No	Weak	12.1
	Upper	1997	No	30	No	Weak	8.8
Brazil	Lower	1997	Yes	25/30 ^{xii}	No	Weak	7.4

SOURCE: Adapted and updated from Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A. 2006. "The Effectiveness of Gender Quotas." Prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association in Atlanta, January 5-7.

^{iv} The percentage of women elected to the chamber averaged across all elections that have occurred between adoption of the quota and December 31, 2006.

^v Costa Rica implemented a placement mandate and enforcement mechanisms in 1999, such that they applied to the 2002 election.

^{vi} Peru increased the quota target to 30% prior to the 2001 election.

^{vii} Ecuador's quota law passed in 1997 with a target of 20%. In 2000, a revision to the quota increased the target to 30% and specified that it should increase by 5% with every succeeding election. In the most recent election (2006), the quota was 35%.

^{viii} The Dominican Republic adopted an open-list proportional representation electoral system prior to the 2002 election.

^{ix} Amendments to the Dominican Republic's electoral code in 2000 increased the target to 33% and added a placement mandate.

^x Honduras changed its electoral law to allow voters to express a preference vote for as many party candidates as there are seats in the district. This coupled with a widespread desire to vote incumbents out of office may have led to the sudden increase in the number of women elected in 2005—24.5% (Personal communication with Michelle Taylor-Robinson, 2007).

^{xi} Venezuela's quota was passed in 1997 and applied to the 1998 election but was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2000.

^{xii} Brazil's quota increased to 30% for the 2002 election.

Quotas can be effective mechanisms to increase representation of women but only if implemented appropriately.

Conclusion: Policy Recommendations

The numbers of women in decision-making bodies in the Americas has increased significantly just in the past six years. Yet, numerous obstacles still remain to achieving parity with men. How can countries continue working towards gender equality in decision making and build on past success?

- **Prioritize women's education and economic independence:** Increasing the proportion of women in higher education and the workforce will broaden the pool of female candidates with qualifications and experiences needed to run for and win political office. Further, diversifying the fields in which women get degrees and the sectors of the workforce they enter (engineering, political science, economics, etc.) will help to increase women's access to the candidate pool.
- **Adopt effective gender quotas:** Gender quotas are a key tool to increasing the number of women in office *if and only if* they are implemented fully. They need to specify a moderately high proportion of women (30 to 40 percent)

to be represented on party ballots, mandate that women must be placed in electable positions on ballots, and include strong enforcement mechanisms.

- **Decrease advantages for incumbents:** While reelection is good for creating more professionalized legislatures, it can hurt women's ability to enter the political arena. Prohibiting reelection is one solution, though not very desirable given its other effects. Another solution is decreasing the advantages that incumbents have when they run for reelection. This puts incumbents, who tend to be men, and newcomers, who may be women, on more equal footing at election time. This may mean providing special training to women in how to ask for money and finance campaigns or providing additional advertising access to newcomer candidates.
- **Training and educational programs for women:** If not enough women consider running for political office, then political parties, NGOs, and government agencies could offer training and educational programs to women encouraging them to get involved in politics. Some political parties in Latin America have already created women's divisions to carry out these kinds of activities in an effort to attract female candidates to the party. Building on these examples is one way to get women to consider an election bid.

These are just a few recommendations for continuing the progress that women have made in the past six years. Women's groups, political parties, and governments need to continue to promote women's equality and develop more effective ways to increase women's access to the political arena. The path to political equality is long, and while women in the Americas have made significant progress, this must be tempered with recognition of the work still ahead.



Congresswoman María Antonieta Saa of Chile

Excerpt:

FROM PERSUASION TO POWER? WOMEN'S POLICY MACHINERIES IN LATIN AMERICA¹

By Susan Franceschet, University of Calgary, Canada

Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, women's policy agencies² (WPAs) have been created in the context of democratization and state modernization, a context which has exerted considerable influence over the

trajectory of these agencies throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Because the recent wave of democratization in the region occurred amidst heightened global awareness of gender inequality and the emergence of transnational norms prescribing more proactive state responses for improving the status of women, all Latin American and Caribbean countries have created some form of policy machinery for women.³ Although some countries created agencies in the 1980s, most did so in the 1990s. While the most visible role played by these agencies is to design policies to promote women's rights, a less visible but nonetheless crucial role is to help to create an environment in which women in other arenas—civil society and electoral politics—can have a greater impact. Despite substantial progress in

recent years however, numerous challenges remain in ensuring that the gender equality commitments made by Latin American and Caribbean governments at international and regional forums are translated into reality. In this paper, I outline the central roles that WPAs can play in the struggle for gender equality, and then analyze the extent to which agencies in the region are able to fulfill these roles effectively.

The key roles of women's policy agencies:

WPAs play a number of specific roles in the broader struggle for gender equality. First, these agencies are often involved in educating the public about the status of women, and communicating the extent of gender-based discrimination in various spheres of

¹ The full version of this paper can be found on the Inter-American Dialogue's website, www.thedialogue.org.

² Amy Mazur (2005) defines a women's policy agency as "any state-based agency...that seeks to promote the advancement of women and gender equality."

³ The creation of state agencies to promote gender equality emerged as a key recommendation at successive international conferences on women and was one of the twelve recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995.

Congresswoman
Nemecia Achacollo Tola
of Bolivia



society and the state. This function can be critical. For example, greater support for legislative initiatives to improve Chile's domestic violence legislation followed from the dissemination of studies carried out by Chile's National Women's Service (Sernam) about the extent of domestic violence in the country. Of course, carrying out this function requires a prior capacity to gather data (both through quantitative and qualitative studies about women's social, economic, and political roles), along with a capacity to disseminate findings widely, not just via the media, but also through public awareness campaigns that educate society about the seriousness of problems such as domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace (see Rai 2003).

A second role for WPAs is to design public policies and in some cases legislation that improves women's status. In addition to designing policies and legislation addressing domestic violence, labor force discrimination, and reproductive health, WPAs have also addressed the problem of women's under-representation in politics.

Many WPAs played a key role in lobbying for candidate gender quotas, or, where quota laws are already in place but are relatively ineffective, WPAs have proposed reforms to make them more effective.⁴ In addition to promoting quota legislation, an important role for WPAs in countries with quota laws is to monitor parties' compliance with the law. Argentina's National Women's Council (CNM) played a crucial role in monitoring the implementation of that country's quota law. In the first round of elections following the adoption of the quota law, the CNM scrutinized electoral lists and enlisted the support of female journalists around the country to publicize cases of non-compliance. It also organized the support of female lawyers to initiate judicial proceedings for non-compliance (Krook 2005, 339). Costa Rica's National Women's Institute likewise initiates judicial proceedings for party lists that violate that country's quota law (CEDAW, 2003).

A third crucial role for WPAs is to help to create an environment where women's participation in electoral politics can have a greater impact. Although quota laws in Latin America have produced an unprecedented increase in the number of women elected, they do not, on their own, create the conditions needed for female legislators to have a positive impact. There is substantial evidence from both developed and developing countries that "strategic partnerships" are necessary for successful policy outcomes (Mazur 2005, 3). These partnerships include female legislators, women's policy machineries, and women's movement organizations.⁵ Relationships between female legislators and "femocrats"⁶ in WPAs can be critical given that political systems in Latin America are executive-dominated, and thus legislators frequently lack the resources necessary to produce

⁴ In Chile, a country where quota legislation does not exist and women's participation in electoral politics is well below the regional average, Sernam's current director has engaged in extensive consultation with political parties to try to mobilize support for affirmative action policies. In Brazil, where quota legislation has failed to increase the number of women elected, legislators have introduced bills to reform the law to make it more effective and Brazil's Special Secretariat for Women (SPM) has been lobbying to have these bills approved.

⁵ This is similar to what Vargus and Weiringa (1998) call "triangles of empowerment."

highly technical legislative initiatives (see Haas 2005). The location of WPAs in the political executive often means that they enjoy greater access to technical and human resources that can be crucial to producing successful gender rights bills. While this can potentially create a competitive dynamic between WPAs and female legislators, women in the two arenas can also develop co-operative relations to promote favorable policy outcomes. Female legislators in Chile worked with Sernam officials to achieve far-reaching reforms to the country's domestic violence law in 2005. Brazil's reformed domestic violence law, signed by the president in 2006, also emerged out of cooperation between the Special Secretariat for Women and female legislators.

WPAs can also create both formal and informal spaces for dialogue and agenda-setting among female legislators, "femocrats," and civil society organizations who seek gender equality. This task is critical because, if increases in women's "descriptive representation" (the number of women holding public office) are to have a positive impact on women's "substantive representation" (the promotion of women's interests), then it is important for political women to engage in consultation with women's organizations to establish a set of priorities that give content to "women's interests."

To what extent are WPAs in Latin America and the Caribbean fulfilling the roles outlined above? In the remainder of this paper, I outline the considerable variation in terms of the capacity of WPAs in the region to be important sources of policy changes that improve the status of women. While there are some encouraging trends in the region, for example WPAs in at least four countries have been restructured in ways that increase their power and influ-

"These are exciting times. Politically powerful women in Latin America and the Caribbean are no longer a rarity."

—ALICIA RITCHIE, INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

ence within the state, many of the problems that researchers noted in the 1990s have yet to be resolved. There are two factors, present to a greater or lesser extent throughout the region that pose challenges to the effectiveness of WPAs. First, the very dynamics associated with the institutionalization of gender policy in the state can lead to a weakening of societal-based mobilization around women's rights issues in some cases. Although WPAs in many cases have created opportunities for women's organizations to participate in policy discussions on gender issues, women's movements in some countries remain divided over the question of engaging with state actors. Second, all too often, the policy commitments to gender equality made by political leaders are not matched with a sufficient outlay of administrative and financial resources. Although legislation that advances women's rights is increasingly the norm in Latin America, there is insufficient political will to enforce the law or to devote sufficient financial resources to ensure effective implementation. In a context where women's movements in some countries have become more fragmented, political leaders often do not perceive enough pressure "from below" to translate their rhetorical commitments into reality. In this context, a crucial role for WPAs is to undertake measures that will help to rebuild stronger women's movements.

⁶ The term "femocrat" was first coined in Australia to refer to feminists working in state bureaucracies. While the term initially had a negative connotation, today it is used in a more neutral manner to refer particularly to feminists working in women's policy machineries.

“The responsibilities that we take on need to be a joint effort between men and women.”

—CONGRESSWOMAN NEMECIA ACHACOLLO TOLA, BOLIVIA

Conclusions:

According to Mala Htun (2001), “women do not lack abstract rights; they lack concrete rights.” Unfortunately, this situation has not changed substantially, despite repeated commitments of Latin American and Caribbean governments at regional summits to promote women’s equality by strengthening women’s policy machineries. While all governments in the region have created WPAs, few governments have met their commitments to adequately fund their work and ensure sufficient human and technical resources. The uncertainty over resources and funding is a serious obstacle to the development of long-term programmes and policies to promote gender equality. Given the complexity and cross-cutting nature of gender issues, it is imperative that WPAs be sufficiently powerful to be able to encourage other ministries and departments to prioritize gender policy goals more highly. The ineffectiveness of domestic violence policies and legislation throughout much of the region speaks to the need for governments to match rhetorical commitments with greater financial commitments, and also to the challenges of cross-sectoral coordination which are inherent in a number of policy areas relating to women’s rights.

Despite the numerous challenges that WPAs continue to face in many countries of the region, there are some encouraging trends. In at least four countries, institutional re-organization has led to increased influence and more resources for WPAs, and additional gender institutions are being

created in other parts of the state, including parliamentary commissions and ombudspersons for women’s rights. Likewise, recognition of the importance of better policy coordination is leading to the creation of inter-sectoral committees at more senior levels of administration. Perhaps the most encouraging trend is the growing production of gender indicators and the practice of keeping gender-disaggregated statistics. In Chile, for example, Sernam has entered into agreements with the National Statistics Institute to produce more information that contains statistics that are disaggregated by gender. Developments such as these are important because this kind of information can be a powerful tool for women’s movements, female legislators, and WPAs to raise public awareness about the situation of women and the reality of gender-based discrimination. To the extent that gender-sensitive budgeting also expands in the region, it will become increasingly difficult for political leaders to make rhetorical commitments to women’s rights policies while not increasing budgetary outlays. It’s important to note that many of the improvements that have occurred owe to successful mobilization by women’s movements, often in alliance with legislators and “femocrats” in WPAs. Hence, women’s movements need to keep up their pressure on governments. Female legislators and WPAs, in turn, should encourage the formation of strategic alliances with women’s organizations.



Congresswoman Olga Ferreira de López of Paraguay and former member of Congress Anel Townsend of Peru

Excerpt:
**WOMEN IN POWER—HOW
PRESENCE AFFECTS POLITICS¹**

By Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, University of Missouri

Women have made great strides in the political arena but obstacles remain for women in political leadership. In addition to bringing women, children, and family issues to the political agenda, women in

office need to diversify their priorities such that they cannot be labeled as solely “representing women.” They need to be able to represent non-gender concerns and gain access to traditionally male-dominated political arenas. This is where women have had the most difficulty in recent years.

Schwindt-Bayer (2006) found female and male legislators are equally likely to prioritize issues such as economics, finance, employment, and agriculture in terms of the political attitudes they bring to the legislatures. However, women are significantly less likely to sponsor legislation in these areas. For example, in Argentina, Colombia, and Costa Rica, male legislators sponsored 23 percent of their bills in the area of economics. Female legislators sponsored only 19 percent of their bills in economics. This statistically significant four percentage point difference also exists for fiscal affairs and agriculture bills. This means that women are not successfully translating their issue

preferences into bill sponsorship, and consequently, are not able to represent fully the concerns of their parties and constituents.

A similar phenomenon is occurring for committee assignments. While sitting on women’s issue committees and social committees allows female legislators to work on policies that affect women, they also need to build a presence on committees that are not traditionally “women’s committees.” The most powerful committees in a legislative chamber tend to be those traditionally dominated by male legislators, such as appropriations, economics, foreign affairs, and agriculture committees. In Latin America, women are much more likely to sit on women’s issue and social committees and are less likely to be represented on the more powerful, traditionally male-dominated, committees (Htun and Jones 2002, Heath et al. 2005). This trend not only persists but moves in the wrong direction with the growing numbers of women in legislatures.

¹ The full version of this paper can be found on the Inter-American Dialogue’s website, www.thedialogue.org.

Board member Xandra Kayden of the League of Women Voters, Alicia Ritchie and Gabriela Vega of the Inter-American Development Bank, and Senior Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Billie Miller of Barbados



Heath et al. (2005) find that the “predicted probability that women will be assigned to power committees declines from almost 19 percent with only 1 percent of the chamber being female to only 4 percent when 29 percent of the chamber is female” (428). They suggest that the increasing numbers of women may be viewed as a “threat” to men’s traditional political power such that male leaders try to protect their interests by keeping women off of power committees. Women’s access to powerful committees also is hindered in legislatures where party leaders or chamber presidents (who almost always are men) control committee assignments and in legislatures with a committee specifically focused on women’s issues, such as Argentina’s Family, Women, Children, and Adolescents Committee (Heath et al. 2005). Heath et al. (2005) found that having

a women’s committee gives women an opportunity to focus specifically on women’s issues but also gives male leaders a way to marginalize female legislators—they put women on the women’s committee rather than giving them access to more powerful committees in the legislature.

These problems could be ameliorated as women gain access to positions of leadership in legislative chambers. Chamber presidents often have the power to make committee assignments, influence committee leadership elections, choose which bills will be debated in which order, and more broadly, influence the chamber’s political agenda. Unfortunately, women have not, as of yet, made much headway into legislative leadership even in the Latin American countries with the largest representation of women.

Excerpt:
**GENDER QUOTA LAWS IN GLOBAL
PERSPECTIVE¹**

By Mona Lena Krook, Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri

***Effective implementation of
“Varannan Damernas” in Sweden***

The most effective party quotas are those that operate in Sweden, where women’s representation in parliament is currently 47.3 percent (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2007a). Since the 1920s, women have mobilized inside and outside the political parties to pressure elites to select more female candidates. Their efforts resulted in a gradual strengthening of party measures to promote women: from the inclusion of at least one woman per list in the 1950s and 1960s, to recommendations and targets of “at least 40 percent women” in the 1970s and 1980s, to stricter 50 percent party quotas in the 1990s and 2000s. Importantly, the final push for equal representation came after women’s representation decreased in 1991 for the first time since 1928. Women from all the parties threatened to leave to form their own women’s party if the established parties did not take steps to recruit more female candidates. In response, most parties agreed to alternate between men and women on their party lists. Interestingly, many

insisted that this was not a ‘quota’ but rather the principle of *varannan damernas* (‘every other one for the ladies’), which referred to a tradition in Swedish countryside dances where men asked women to dance for one song and then women asked men to dance for the next song. (In many towns, this was also known as the practice of ‘democratic dancing’). Similar policies are known as the ‘zipper principle’ in Western and Eastern Europe and the ‘zebra principle’ in Southern Africa. Quotas have been particularly effective in Sweden because they have been adopted by all the political parties, they aim for 50 percent female representation, and—given the context of their adoption—parties believe that they would lose female voters if they do not fully implement these policies. The effects of these policies are heightened by the fact that Sweden has a proportional representation electoral system that employs closed lists, which enables parties to ensure that approximately 50 percent women will be elected (for more details, see Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005; Freidenvall 2005; Krook 2005).

¹ The full version of this paper can be found on the Inter-American Dialogue’s website, www.thedialogue.org.



Judith Morrison of the Inter-American Foundation and Rep. Jerry Weller (R-IL)

Legal Challenges and Reverse Discrimination in England

In some cases, parties adopt quotas but then are forced to abandon them due to legal challenges. For example, in the United Kingdom, the Labour Party instituted a policy in 1993 that pledged to consider only female candidates in 50 percent of all the districts that the party expected to win in the 1997 elections. However, this policy was soon challenged by two male party members who were overlooked as possible candidates, because their districts were among those that had been designated for all-women shortlists. The quota was eventually overturned by the courts in 1996 on the grounds that it violated the terms of the Sex Discrimination Act, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in appli-

cations for employment. The party did not challenge the ruling, but did not de-select those female candidates that had already been chosen through the quota. As a result, women's representation doubled from 9 percent to 18 percent in 1997, due exclusively to the Labour Party policy. Following a modest decrease in the number of women elected to parliament in 2002, the Sex Discrimination Act was subsequently reformed to allow positive action in candidate selection, but women's representation has since stagnated at 20 percent. Concerns about the legitimacy of the quota, combined with the difficulties in making dramatic increases in a majoritarian electoral system, have made further dramatic increases hard to achieve (for more information, see Childs 2003; Krook 2005; Russell 2005).

Excerpt:
**LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION FOR
AFRO-DESCENDANT WOMEN¹**

By Epsy Campbell Barr, Citizen Action Party of Costa Rica

Despite significant advances for women in Latin America, it is evident that Afro-descendant and indigenous women must make greater efforts, often with fewer resources, to pave the way for political representation.

Even in countries with a large Afro-descendant population and high levels of participation by women in the executive and legislative branches, the inclusion of Afro-descendant women is still paltry.

Afro-descendant women are discovering that one way to break Latin America's self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion is to pursue political office. As public officials they can be increasingly visible and serve as



President of Costa Rica's PAC party Epsy Campbell Barr, former member of Congress Anel Townsend of Peru, and PRI president Beatriz Paredes of Mexico

¹ The full version of this paper can be found on the Inter-American Dialogue's website, www.thedialogue.org.

leading actors in the process of constructing more democratic and inclusive societies now underway in parts of Latin America.

There is hard evidence that the population of Latin America is multicultural and multiethnic, debunking the myth of a predominantly mestiza and white Latin America. After decades of invisibility, official recognition of indigenous people and census data on Afro-descendants offer a new image of Latin America. Statistics reveal that racial and ethnic groups previously identified as minorities are actually a majority in many areas of the region. We cannot speak of democracy in the broader sense of the word if majorities find themselves without political representation proportionate to their numbers. Although the right to vote has been won, this right has not translated into real access to power.

Colombia, for example—which acknowledges a population of almost 12 million Afro-descendants—has not had more than seven Afro-descendant members of parliament in 13 years. Central American countries like

Nicaragua and Honduras each have one Afro-descendant woman member of congress and one substitute member. Costa Rica has one Afro-descendant woman legislator. She is the fifth black woman to arrive in parliament in the history of democratic Costa Rica. Peru counts one Afro-descendant congresswoman. Panama has two. Other countries, such as Ecuador, Venezuela and Uruguay, have no Afro-descendant women in their legislatures. In total, Afro-descendant women form less than 0.03 percent of representatives to the region's senates and parliaments.

We need to generate space in which Afro-descendant women leaders can meet each other as well as other women leaders in the region who share their goal of promoting the increased political participation of Afro-descendant women. I believe the task of guaranteeing rights to the voiceless majorities of the region should be on the agenda of all women in politics, not just Afro-descendant and indigenous women. We cannot change centuries of exclusion, poor development and poor government alone.



Irene Klinger of the Organization of American States and Carmen Marina Gutiérrez of the OAS Summits of the Americas Secretariat

WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS: PATHS TO POLITICAL POWER

Hosted by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and
Representatives Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO), Kay Granger (R-TX),
Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX),
Loretta Sanchez (D-CA), Jean Schmidt (R-OH),
Hilda Solis (D-CA) and Jerry Weller (R-IL)

AGENDA—March 28, 2007

Location: Library of Congress, Jefferson Building, Room LJ-119

8:30 Breakfast

9:00 **Welcoming Remarks:**

- Alicia Ritchie, Inter-American Development Bank
- Peter Hakim, Inter-American Dialogue
- Mary G. Wilson, League of Women Voters of the United States
- Carmen Marina Gutiérrez, OAS Summits of the Americas Secretariat

9:30 **Session I**—Why have women made such dramatic gains in achieving political power now? What are the enabling factors and obstacles, such as quota laws, public opinion, women’s agencies, political parties, race and ethnicity?

Moderator: Anel Townsend, Peru

Lead-off speakers: Beatriz Paredes, Mexico
Epsy Campbell Barr, Costa Rica
Nemecia Achacollo Tola, Bolivia

11:00 Coffee break

11:15 **Session II** – How have women leaders affected democratic practice and policy outcomes? What strategies have been effective, such as alliances with women’s movements, use of public opinion polls and the media?

Moderator: Judith Morrison, Inter-American Foundation

Lead-off speakers: Dayana Martínez Burke, Honduras
Marta Lucía Ramírez, Colombia
Olga Ferreira de López, Paraguay

1:00 **Luncheon discussion:**

What policy and institutional changes should be enacted to promote more women into power? How can women leaders become more effective advocates for women’s rights?

Moderator: Joe Clark, Canada

Lead-off speakers: Billie Miller, Barbados
María Antonieta Saa, Chile

2:30 Close: Gabriela Vega, Inter-American Development Bank

2:45 Taxis to Inter-American Development Bank—ANNEX
Enrique V. Iglesias Conference Center, CR-201
1330 New York Avenue, NW

3:30 **Roundtable with Women Political Leaders from Latin America and the Caribbean**

A discussion among women political leaders from Latin America and the Caribbean, journalists, and the audience on:

- Issues of priority importance being promoted by women leaders today
- Strategies employed by women political leaders to achieve these goals
- Personal trajectories of women who have achieved political power

Welcome: Myrta Cristina King Sale, Inter-American Development Bank

Moderator: Marcela Sánchez, Columnist, The Washington Post

Press Panel:

- José Carreño, El Universal
- Adriana Garcia, Reuters
- Paulo Sotero, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

5:00 Close: Gabriela Vega, Inter-American Development Bank



Rep. Hilda Solis
(D-CA) and former
Prime Minister Joe Clark
of Canada

APPENDIX II

FEATURED POLITICAL LEADERS FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Billie Miller, Barbados (Barbados Labour Party, BLP)

Dame Billie Miller is senior minister and minister of foreign affairs and foreign trade of Barbados. She previously served as the country's first female deputy prime minister and has been minister of health and national insurance, education and culture, international business, and tourism and international transport.

Beatriz Paredes, Mexico (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI)

Beatriz Paredes is president of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. She was recently a candidate for mayor of Mexico City, and she has served as the governor of Tlaxcala, national senator, member of Congress, and president of Parlamento Latinoamericano.

Nemecia Achacollo Tola, Bolivia (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS)

Nemecia Achacollo is first vice president of the Bolivian Congress. An Aymara indigenous activist, she formerly served as the executive secretary of the National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous, Aboriginal Women in Bolivia, and served as an elected member of the municipal council of Santa Rosa for ten years.

Marta Lucía Ramírez, Colombia (Partido de la U)

Marta Lucía Ramírez is a senator. Previously, she served as minister of defense and minister of foreign trade, and was Colombian ambassador to France.

Dayana Martínez Burke, Honduras (Partido Liberal, PL)

Dayana Martínez Burke is a member of Congress and coordinator of the Committee of Inclusion for Mexico, Canada and Central America. She was the founding president of the Federation of Disability Organizations in Honduras.

Maria Antonieta Saa, Chile (Partido por la Democracia, PPD)

Maria Antonieta Saa has been a congresswoman for four consecutive terms. She has served as vice president of the Party for Democracy (PPD) and mayor of the Municipality of Conchalí. She was president of the Constitutional Commission for the Prosecution of Augusto Pinochet.

Olga Ferreira de López, Paraguay (Partido Patria Querida, PPQ)

Olga Ferreira de López is a congresswoman and president of the Human Rights Commission. She also serves as counsel to Parlamento Mujer.

Epsy Campbell Barr, Costa Rica (Partido Acción Ciudadana, PAC)

Epsy Campbell Barr is president of Citizen Action Party (PAC). She was formerly a congresswoman, a vice-presidential candidate, and founding director of the Center for Afro-Costa Rican Women.

MODERATORS

Anel Townsend, Peru

Anel Townsend is a former member of the Congress of Peru.

Judith Morrison, Inter-American Foundation

Judith Morrison is regional director for South America and Caribbean of the Inter-American Foundation. She served as a senior associate at the Inter-American Dialogue and executive director of the Inter-Agency Consultation on Race in Latin America.

Joe Clark, Canada

Joe Clark is former prime minister of Canada. Elected eight times to the House of Commons, he was secretary of state for external affairs from 1984-1991 and also served as minister of constitutional affairs.

ORGANIZERS

Inter-American Development Bank

- Gabriela Vega
- Ana Maria Brasileiro
- Vivian Roza

Inter-American Dialogue

- Joan Caivano
- Thayer Hardwick

League of Women Voters

- Zaida Arguedas



Joan Caivano of the Inter-American Dialogue, Zaida Arguedas and Mary Wilson of the League of Women Voters



Inter-American Development Bank

INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

The Inter-American Development Bank, the oldest and largest regional bank in the world, is the main source of multilateral financing for economic, social and institutional development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its loans and grants help finance development projects and support strategies to reduce poverty, expand growth, increase trade and investment, promote regional integration, and foster private sector development and modernization of the State.

For the last 10 years, the IDB's Gender and Diversity Unit has been spearheading the *Program for the Support of Women's Leadership and Representation* (PROLEAD), an initiative aimed at promoting women's political participation and leadership in the region. PROLEAD awards grants to organizations that promote women's political participation, provides networking opportunities and capacity-building workshops for women and organizations and furthers research and knowledge in the area.

www.iadb.org



INTER-AMERICAN DIALOGUE

The Inter-American Dialogue is the leading U.S. center for policy analysis, exchange, and communication on issues in Western Hemisphere affairs. The Dialogue brings together public and private leaders from across the Americas to address hemispheric problems and opportunities. Together they seek to build cooperation among Western Hemisphere nations and advance a regional agenda of democratic governance, social equity, and economic growth.

The Dialogue's select membership of 100 distinguished citizens from throughout the Americas includes political, business, academic, media, and other nongovernmental leaders. Twelve Dialogue members served as presidents of their countries and more than two dozen have served at the cabinet level. Since 1982—through successive Republican and Democratic administrations and many changes of leadership elsewhere in the hemisphere—the Dialogue has helped shape the agenda of issues and choices in inter-American relations.

www.thedialogue.org



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE UNITED STATES

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to men and women of all ages. With more than 87 years of experience and more than 850 local and state League affiliates, the League is one of America's most trusted grassroots organizations.

Since 1923, the League has worked to support women's leadership around the world through its Global Democracy programs. The League's Global Democracy programs encompass a range of activities, including partnering with civil society groups, training grassroots leaders, working for fair elections, and promoting transparent and accountable governance.

www.lwv.org