



# 30 Years of Democracy: Riding the Wave?

Women's Political Participation in Latin America





# 30 Years of Democracy: Riding the Wave?

Women's Political Participation in Latin America

Co-authors: Beatriz Llanos and Kristen Sample

*30 Years of Democracy: Riding the Wave?  
Women's Political Participation in Latin America*

© International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2008

International IDEA publications are independent of specific national or political interests. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of International IDEA, its Board or its Council members.

Applications for permission to reproduce or translate all or any part of this publication should be made to:

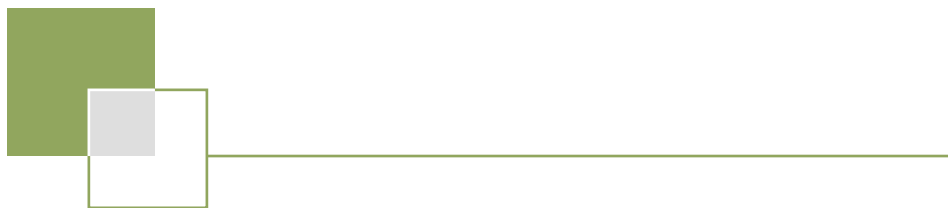
International IDEA  
SE 103 34 Stockholm  
Sweden

International IDEA encourages dissemination of its work and will promptly respond to requests for permission to reproduce or translate its publications.

Graphic design: Ruperto Pérez Albela  
Cover illustration: *Efectos en el tiempo*, by Lia Villacorta  
Printed by: Imprenta Miraflores E.I.R.L.  
First edition: March 2008

Hecho el Depósito Legal N° 2008-03409 en la Biblioteca Nacional del Perú  
ISBN 978-91-85724-38-3

Printed in Peru



# Contents

Preface	7
Executive Summary	9
1. Background: women's suffrage and the slow move beyond the domestic sphere	13
2. Executive power and the feminization of politics	16
3. Elected office: fighting for inclusion and awaiting equality	22
4. Electoral quotas: adoption, impacts and limitations in their implementation	27
5. Challenges for women's representation: beyond quotas	34
6. A pending challenge: from inclusion to representation	46
7. Conclusions and recommendations	48
Bibliography	51
Annex	55





## Preface

Since the start of the third wave of democratization in Latin America, countries in the region have made significant strides toward consolidating and strengthening democracy. Nevertheless, important challenges remain. One such challenge is the adequate inclusion, and, by extension, participation of women in representative and decision-making bodies.

Eleven countries in the region have adopted a quota system. However, despite the fact that in several of these countries this type of measure has accelerated the participation of women in political decision-making, in many cases even the best results are far from guaranteeing a critical mass whose voice can be heard and that can ensure pluralistic discussion of the problems, interests and aspirations of a truly inclusive democracy. It is time to look beyond the numbers in order to translate this quantitative access into appropriate representation at all levels, so as to encourage the development of policies that will help resolve structural inequalities affecting this sector of the population.

Since 1995, International IDEA has promoted gender equality through promoting the role of women in political and decision making fora; by fostering debate and the sharing of experiences about the obstacles women in politics face; by suggesting solutions that are appropriate and feasible; and by providing tools to strengthen the role of women as political leaders.

This publication is part of that effort. It offers an assessment of the progress made in Latin America over the past decades in terms of gender equality and

access to politics while also signaling a series of structural factors that limit their participation on equal terms. These factors underscore the urgent need to foster debate around these unresolved issues and work toward holistic solutions that go beyond just enabling women to run for public office and focus on the various stages through which they must pass to gain access to and remain in public life in their respective countries.



Vidar Helgesen  
Secretary-General  
International IDEA





## Executive Summary<sup>1</sup>

In 1978, when the third wave of democratization began in Latin America, the leading role of women in the social sphere did not translate into improvements in the political arena. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, women were involved in the grassroots movements that helped overthrow dictatorships and spur the transition (Jiménez Polanco: 2001: 2). Nevertheless, in the early years of the democratic period, women were not promoted to positions of leadership, and their political representation did not increase.

Three decades have passed since the start of the third wave. The purpose of this report is to review the current state of women's participation in the 18 countries in the region that have either maintained or adopted a representative and multi-party democratic system since 1978.

Over the last two years, the rise to power of two female presidents has generated a new level of attention and debate on women's political participation. This report seeks to go beyond the headlines however to analyze to what extent women are present in political office and party politics.

It is important to remember that this regional process has taken place within a broader dynamic of growing international consensus on the need for adoption of mechanisms that promote women's participation. As evidence of such, all countries in the region have signed international treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors thank Eileen Boyle and Zoila Cruz for help with systematizing the data presented in this article, as well as Marcela Rios, Maria Emma Wills and Niki Johnson for their comments on the text and Rosario Rey de Castro for her editing support.

against Women,<sup>2</sup> which commit them to establishing gender-equality policies for democracy that is representative and, above all, inclusive.

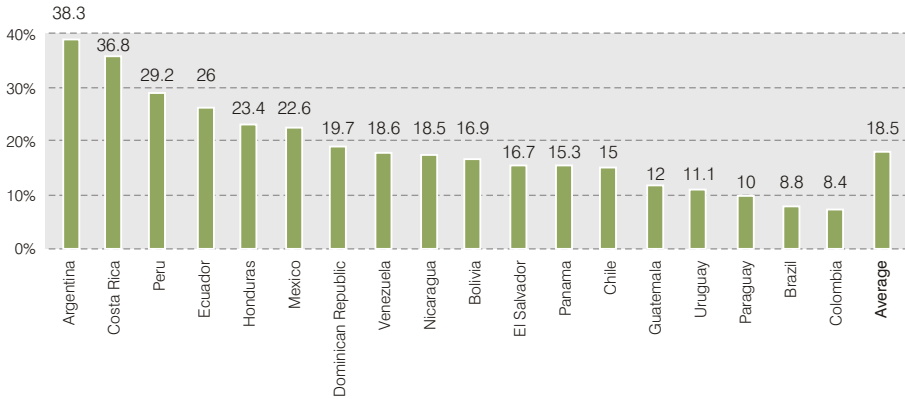
After an initial section that presents data on women's suffrage, the report offers a comparative analysis of the degree to which women have participated in public office (the executive and legislative powers, and local and regional spheres of government). While gains have been made, they have not been uniform across countries or in power venues. Positive aspects of women's political participation during the period include these milestones:

- Four women have won the presidency of their countries by popular vote: Violeta Chamorro in Nicaragua, Mireya Moscoso in Panama, Michelle Bachelet in Chile and, recently, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina;
- Women occupy 18.5 per cent of seats in the region's lower houses of Congress or unicameral legislatures, an achievement that has been accelerated by the approval in 11 countries of affirmative action measures, commonly known as quotas;
- Women also hold more Cabinet posts: 24.5 per cent of government ministers are women, and they hold portfolios that were formerly managed only by men. This trend has picked up steam thanks to campaign promises kept by various presidents, who pledged to include more women in their administrations.

---

<sup>2</sup> Approved in 1979. Also noteworthy is the Platform for Action that came out of the Fourth World Conference on Women organized by the United Nations in Beijing in 1995. Although it did not lead to a legally binding obligation, it is considered a moral commitment and a yardstick for measuring the progress made by governments.

**Figure 1**  
Percentages of women in unicameral legislatures or lower houses of Latin American congresses

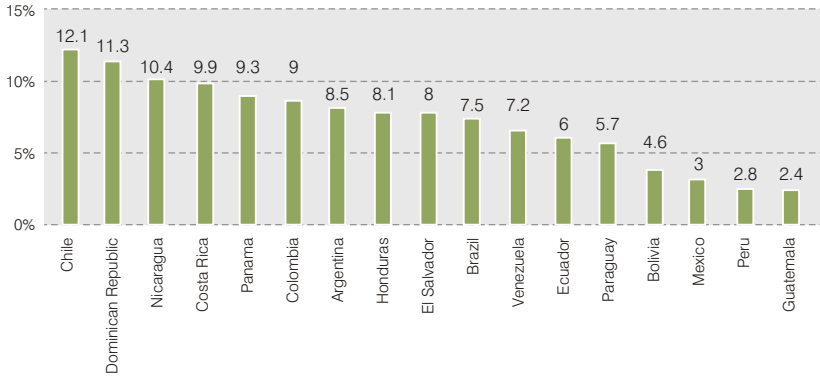


Source: International IDEA 2007a.

Nevertheless, it is revealing to look at the work that remains to be done to achieve truly equal access to the spheres of public power for women:

- Although 11 countries have adopted legislative quotas, in those countries only 20.5 per cent of the seats in the lower house of Congress are held by women; in the seven that have not adopted such policies, women hold only 14 per cent of the seats;
- Even in countries that have adopted quotas, there are notable differences in their effectiveness. Argentina and Brazil are a case in point: While women hold 38.3 per cent of the seats in Argentina, the figure for Brazil is a scant 8.8 per cent;
- The increase in the number of women in congresses has been overshadowed by the lack of progress in other arenas: in 15 countries, women hold less than 10 per cent of mayoral seats, and the percentage of women who head regional governments is in double digits only in Ecuador and Brazil.

**Figure 2**  
Percentage of women mayors in Latin America

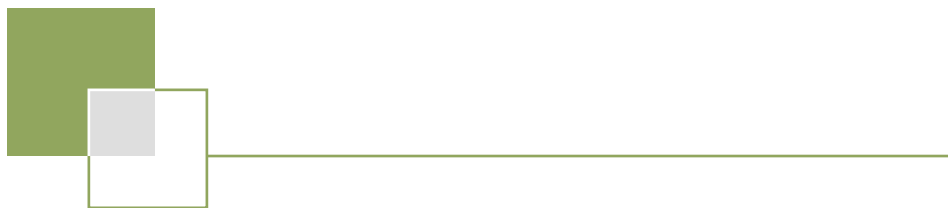


Source: International IDEA 2007a.

In this vein, this report will also analyze the impact of the adoption of quotas in the region and factors limiting their effectiveness, mainly the type of electoral system in which they are applied, the way the laws are drafted and the sanctions that are included.

Based on previous research and work carried out by International IDEA, the report will also identify a series of persistent structural factors that impede women's equal participation in democratic processes, such as: the absence of "gender friendly" conditions within political parties; difficulties in obtaining financing for their campaigns; limited coverage in the media; and the effects of a political culture that is still unfavourable to women in the public sphere.

Finally, since the main challenge is not only to get more women into public office, but also to ensure adequate representation of their interests, which means fostering initiatives that will put a gender agenda into action, recommendations are made for increasing women's inclusion in Latin American politics both quantitatively and qualitatively.



## 1. Background: women's suffrage and the slow move beyond the domestic sphere

*“When we see a woman standing on a table or amid the tumultuous throng of a demonstration, she will have lost all her charm. The day the gentlewoman becomes a conservative, the cook a socialist and the housekeeper an independent socialist, we will have created chaos in the home.”*

*José F. Uriburu, conservative Argentine politician, 1929*

The year 1929 marked women's first access to a right that is inherent to democratic citizenship: electing those who govern. This marked the recognition of a struggle that—driven by women's suffrage movements, at times with important allies among male political leaders—fought to overcome the resistance of political sectors of various ideological stripes. In many countries, the struggle dates to the 19th century.

Ecuador was the first country in Latin America to recognize women's right to vote, but more than 30 years would pass before women in the rest of the region enjoyed this right. Paraguay was the last to grant it, in 1961.

**Table 1**  
Women's suffrage timeline in Latin America

Country	Year women's suffrage granted
Ecuador	1929*
Brazil	1932**
Uruguay	1932
El Salvador	1939***
Dominican Republic	1942
Guatemala	1945****
Panama	1945
Argentina	1947
Venezuela	1947
Chile	1949
Costa Rica	1949
Bolivia	1952
Mexico	1953
Nicaragua	1955
Peru	1955
Honduras	1955
Colombia	1957
Paraguay	1961

\* Vote optional for women (until 1967).

\*\* For married women with husband's authorization, and single women and widows of independent means.

\*\*\* For married women and single women of "good standing" with at least a sixth-grade education.

\*\*\*\* For married women.

Source: González del Riego 2005.

Nevertheless, in many countries in the region there was little chance of exercising this right, because the 20th century was marked by a predominance of "non-democratic" or "authoritarian" politics. Peter Smith points this out in his study,<sup>3</sup> noting that of the 1,919 "country-years" between 1900 and 2000, authoritarian governments held office for 47 per cent, electoral democracy represented only 26 per cent, semi-democracy 10 per cent and competitive oligarchy 18 per cent (Smith 2004: 10).

Thirty years ago, the fall of Joaquín Balaguer in the Dominican Republic after 13 years of authoritarian civilian government ushered in a democratic opening in various Latin American countries. This period lasted through the 1980s and became known as the "third wave of democratization." Now that the region's democracies have gained more solid standing at the ballot box, but still

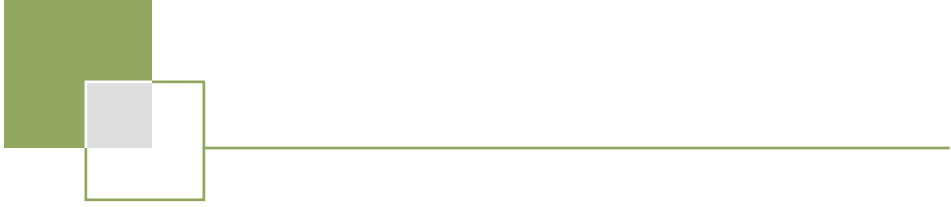
<sup>3</sup> Smith defines democratic periods as those when leaders take power as a result of free and fair elections; semi-democratic periods as those in which a leader takes power through elections that are free but not fair; oligarchies as those in which electoral competition was free and fair, but limited to the election of elites, with only certain sectors of the population allowed to vote; and finally, non-democratic or authoritarian periods as those with military coups.

face a series of challenges in institutionalizing democracy, Latin American women make up 50 per cent or more of the electorate in most countries.

**Table 2**  
Women as percentage of electorate

Country	Women as % of electorate
Argentina	51%
Bolivia	49.9%
Brazil	51.8%
Chile	52.4%
Colombia	51%
Costa Rica	50%
Ecuador	50.5%
El Salvador	54.1%
Guatemala	45.8%
Honduras	50.6%
Mexico	51.9%
Nicaragua	54%
Panama	58.3%
Paraguay	52.5%
Peru	49.7%
Dominican Republic	50.4%
Uruguay	52.4%
Venezuela	50%

Source: International IDEA 2007a.



## 2. Executive power and the feminization of politics

### a. Women at the head of government: Chamorro, Moscoso, Bachelet and Fernández

Four women have reached the peak of political power at the ballot box.<sup>4</sup> The first was Nicaragua's Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, widow of journalist Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, leader of the non-Sandinista opposition to dictator Anastasio Somoza, who was murdered in 1978 on orders from Somoza. She ran in 1990 as the candidate of the Unión Nacional Opositora (UNO) and defeated Daniel Ortega of the Frente Sandinista. She governed from 1990 to 1997.

The second was Mireya Elisa Moscoso in Panama, who, after the death of her husband, three-time Panamanian President Arnulfo Arias, took the reins of the Partido Arnulfista and won the 1999 elections, governing until 2004.

Both women gained standing because they had a high profile as partners of important political figures, although they drew on their own merits to capitalize on the popular image the men had created in their respective societies. But the new millennium ushered in a new kind of leadership, exemplified in the personal,

---

<sup>4</sup> Others who have reached the presidency, although not through elections, are Isabel Perón, who was vice president in Argentina when her husband, President Juan Domingo Perón, died in 1974; Lidia Gueiler, who was appointed on an interim basis in 1979 by the Bolivian Congress when a coup was staged against President Walter Guevara Arce; and Rosalía Arteaga Serrano, who held the presidency of Ecuador for a scant three days after President-elect Abdalá Bucaram was ousted in February 1997.



professional and party experience of the woman who would become President of Chile after winning the 2005 elections, Michelle Bachelet. A doctor by profession and Minister of Health and Defense under President Ricardo Lagos, the Socialist candidate for the Concertación was elected in a runoff with 53.5 per cent of the vote, to govern from 2006 to 2010.

One of the most interesting aspects of her rise to power was that her rhetoric and platform placed on Chile's public agenda the adoption of measures aimed at overcoming women's exclusion from political and economic life. Her two main proposals were modification of electoral legislation to introduce a quota law, and the so-called Code of Good Labor Practices. She also pledged to form a Cabinet with parity and extend the parity requirement to all political appointments.

Since she took office, the success of these initiatives has been mixed. Regarding parity, today 36.4 per cent of her Cabinet ministers are women and many more women serve in public administration. Quotas have not won the consensus or support of the Congress, while the Code of Good Labor Practices has been implemented in all public services and the private sector is being encouraged to adopt it (International IDEA 2007b: 24-25). Among the code's provisions are non-discrimination in access to employment and training, greater participation by women in leadership posts and positions of responsibility, policies to help balance job and family responsibilities, and measures for preventing and punishing labor abuses and sexual abuse.

Finally, Cristina Fernández is an example of both types of leadership. A lawyer by training, she has been a provincial deputy and a national deputy and senator. Although she has her own political background, during the campaign she positioned herself as heiress to the legacy of her husband, President Néstor Kirchner, pledging continuity of his administration (it was he who tapped her as the candidate of the Frente por la Victoria – Partido Justicialista). After winning the October 2007 presidential election on the first ballot, with 45 per cent of the vote and a lead of more than 20 points over her nearest rival, she took office in December as president of Argentina.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that Argentine voters cast nearly 70 per cent of their ballots for two women candidates. Second-place finisher Elisa Carrió, candidate of the Coalición Cívica, won 23 per cent of the vote.

### **b. Women in Cabinets: breaking traditional molds**

In recent years, it has been increasingly common for women to be seen in ministerial Cabinets. While the figure in the 1990s was barely 9 per cent (Duvinic and Roza 2004), that proportion had almost tripled by 2007, when women made up 24 per cent of Latin American Cabinets. The increase was largely due to presidents who kept their campaign promises to increase the number of women in these key positions.<sup>6</sup>

These presidents include Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Oscar Arias in Costa Rica, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua. These countries currently have the highest percentages: Costa Rica, 37.5 per cent; Chile, 36.4 per cent; Ecuador, 32 per cent; and Nicaragua, 31.2 per cent. When Peruvian President Alan García took office, he named six women ministers, totaling 40 per cent of his first Cabinet. After 18 months in office, however, the number of women ministers had dropped to four, or 26.7 per cent. In Bolivia and Uruguay, women hold about 30 per cent of these offices.

The other side of the coin can be seen in countries like Venezuela (18.5 per cent), the Dominican Republic (17.6 per cent), El Salvador (15.4 per cent), Brazil (14.3 per cent) and Paraguay (10 per cent), where there are very low numbers of women ministers.

---

<sup>6</sup> In some cases, the inclusion of women may be an effort to improve the image of politics and politicians amid the crisis of credibility and confidence facing parties in Latin America. In these cases, women's participation may be seen as a source of innovation or transformation of "old-style" politics.

**Table 3**  
Women ministers, November 2007

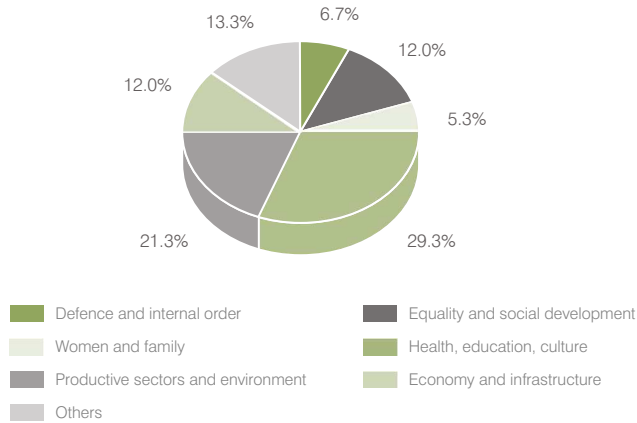
Country	% of women in Cabinet
Costa Rica	37.5%
Chile	36.4%
Ecuador	32%
Bolivia	31.3%
Nicaragua	31.2%
Uruguay	30.8%
Peru	26.7%
Argentina	25%
Guatemala	25%
Honduras	25%
Colombia	23.1%
Panama	21.4%
Mexico	20%
Venezuela	18.5%
Dominican Republic	17.6%
El Salvador	15.4%
Brazil	14.3%
Paraguay	10%
Latin American Average	24%

Source: International IDEA 2007a.

Perhaps the greatest change is that now, as never before, women hold positions historically reserved for men. While in the 1980s, health and education were almost the only ministerial posts held by women — under commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women and in response to demands by women in each country — the spectrum then expanded to newly created Ministries of Women. Today, although there is still a tendency to appoint women to “traditional” portfolios, there is almost no sector in which they cannot hold the top post.

Of a total of 75 women ministers currently in office, 29.3 per cent are in the areas of “health, education and culture,” and 5.3 per cent are in “women and the family.” But a significant 21.3 per cent head “productive sectors and the environment,” 12 per cent head “economy and infrastructure,” another 12 per cent are in “equality and social development,” and a promising 6.7 per cent hold the top posts in defence and internal order, heading armies and police forces, institutions with a predominantly male organizational culture. Adding up these figures, it is clear that more than half the positions (52 per cent) are outside the portfolios — education, health, women — that women ministers typically filled in decades past.

**Figure 3**  
Positions held by women in Cabinets  
Percentage of women ministers by category



Source: International IDEA 2007a.

There is little doubt that this quantitative and qualitative leap to the pinnacle of power in the executive branch of government is having a significant impact on political culture in the region. Nonetheless, if there is to be true equality such measures should stop depending on the sometimes inconsistent goodwill of those in power and take the form of permanent public policies that include not only top posts, but all levels of public administration in each country.

By this measure, only two Latin America countries — Colombia and Panama — have legally established the obligation to include women in posts for political appointees, the former with better results than the latter. In Panama, regulations for implementing the Equal Opportunity Law mandate that 30 per cent of ministers, vice ministers, heads of independent and semi-independent agencies and other government entities must be women. Nevertheless, enforcement, monitoring and sanctions are still weak (International IDEA 2007b). In Colombia, while progress has been made in including women in public administration, there is still a notable lack of compliance and sanctions are generally not enforced.

## Colombia: actions for inclusion of women in public administration

Colombia is a contradictory case. Although it has no quota mechanism for election to representative positions, it was the first country in the region to pass affirmative action laws to ensure the inclusion of women in “decision-making positions” in public administration. Law 581, which took effect in 2000, establishes that 30 per cent of these posts must be held by women.

According to a report by the Department of Public Service of Colombia (*Departamento de la Función Pública de Colombia*) in 2006, significant progress has been made in compliance with the law, although in some areas there are still few women. While 44 per cent of the posts in control and oversight agencies are held by women, the figure is 38 per cent for the electoral agency, 34 per cent in the executive branch and independent agencies, barely 23 per cent in the legislature and 20 per cent in the judiciary.

National leadership posts held by women in 2006

Agency or entity	Women (%)	Men (%)
Executive branch and independent agencies	34	66
Legislative branch	23	77
Judicial branch	20	80
Control and oversight bodies	44	56
<i>Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil</i> (electoral authority)	38	62

Source: Public Employment Office of Colombia 2006.

The report also notes that of the 29 departmental governments providing information, 13 fell short of the 30 per cent quota for women in top posts. Of 19 mayoral offices in departmental capitals, six also fell short.

Non-compliance persists because sanctions against authorities who fail to comply\* are not enforced, and because failure to comply is not widely publicized. Nevertheless, it is important to note that in certain areas, women's movements are monitoring and demanding enforcement of the law, in an interesting and educational exercise in the defense of their political rights (International IDEA 2007b).

The case of Colombia shows that affirmative action has a positive impact on the inclusion of women in public administration. Lack of clear and effective sanctions in case of non-compliance (which also occurs in Panama) limits this effect, however, because it gives too much discretion to authorities who are often insensitive or indifferent to the quest for equal opportunity. This could be ameliorated by civic oversight, but it should be corrected by legislative means.

\* Article 4 states that failure to comply with the law is punishable by up to 30 days' suspension; if the conduct persists, it can be punishable by removal from office.



### 3. Elected office: fighting for inclusion and awaiting equality

#### a. Women in Congress (upper and lower houses)

Until about 10 years ago, in 1997, only an average of 10.8 per cent of seats in lower houses of Latin American congresses were held by women. Only two countries, Argentina and Costa Rica, exceeded 15 per cent, and eight —Panama, Honduras, Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Venezuela and Paraguay— were under 10 per cent.

Significant progress was made during those years, as the number of women in these positions practically doubled. On average, women now hold 18.5 per cent of seats in lower houses of Congress in Latin America. Nevertheless, the region is significantly short of achieving parity and even below the “critical mass”<sup>7</sup> (about 30 per cent) that would enable women to bring about certain changes in culture and in institutional norms in their legislatures. Only three countries have reached critical mass: Argentina (38.3 per cent), Costa Rica (36.8 per cent) and Peru (29.2 per cent). At the other extreme, in Colombia (8.4 per cent), Brazil (8.8 per cent), Paraguay (10 per cent), Uruguay (11.1 per cent), Guatemala (12 per cent) and even Chile (15 per cent), the lack of women in these positions is cause for concern.

---

<sup>7</sup> According to Drude Dahlerup, minority group’s impact is determined by its relative weight in broader society. When a group reaches a certain size (critical mass), it will be able to impose changes in culture and institutional norms (International IDEA 1998: 92).

**Table 4**  
Women in unicameral congresses or lower houses of Congress 1997 - 2007

Country	1997	2007
Argentina	25.3%	38.3%
Bolivia	6.9%	16.9%
Brazil	6.6%	8.8%
Colombia	11.7%	8.4%
Costa Rica	15.8%	36.8%
Chile	7.5%	15%
Ecuador	3.7%	26% <sup>8</sup>
El Salvador	10.7%	16.7%
Guatemala	12.5%	12%
Honduras	7.8%	23.4%
Mexico	14.2%	22.6%
Nicaragua	10.8%	18.5%
Panama	9.7%	15.3%
Paraguay	2.5%	10%
Peru	10.8%	29.2%
Dominican Republic	11.7%	19.7%
Uruguay	7.1%	11.1%
Venezuela	5.9%	18.6%
<b>Average</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>18.5%</b>

Source: Figures from the Inter-Parliamentary Union 1997 and International IDEA 2007a.

In upper houses of Congress in the eight countries that have a bicameral system, women's participation averages 14.9 per cent. Only Argentina has achieved a significantly higher level (38.9 per cent).

<sup>8</sup> Percentage won in the last congressional election held in October 2006. In November 2007, however, as a result of the election and subsequent inauguration of a Constituent Assembly, the Congress that was elected in 2006 was suspended. Today, thanks to a 50 per cent quota and the zebra-based ordering of candidate lists, 33.9 per cent of the seats in the Constituent Assembly are held by women.

**Table 5**  
Women in upper houses of Congress in 2007

Country	Percentage
Argentina	38.9%
Mexico	17.2%
Brazil	12.3%
Colombia	11.8%
Uruguay	9.7%
Paraguay	8.9%
Chile	5.3%
Bolivia	3.7%
Dominican Republic	3.1%
<b>Average</b>	<b>14.9%</b>

Source: Figures from Inter-Parliamentary Union 2007.

### b. Women in subnational governments

The significant strides made in ministerial positions and lower houses of Congress contrast notably with the absence of women from decentralized elected offices. At the regional level, except for Ecuador (18 per cent) — and Brazil (11.1 per cent) as a distant second — Latin American countries do not reach double digits in the election of women as regional governors, prefects or presidents. Bolivia, Peru and Uruguay have no women elected to these posts, and other countries have very few.

**Table 6**  
Women in regional office in Latin America

Country	Regional governors/ prefects/presidents
Ecuador	18%
Brazil	11.1%
Venezuela	8.3%
Paraguay	5.9%
Argentina	4.1%
Colombia	3.2%
Mexico	3.1%
Peru	0%
Bolivia	0%
Uruguay	0%

Source: International IDEA 2007a.



The situation is no better at the local level, where women tend to engage in social activism that, paradoxically, does not translate into adequate political representation. A country-by-country analysis shows that in four countries, women mayors account for less than 5 per cent of the total, 10 countries are in the 5 - 10 per cent range, and only Chile (12.1 per cent), the Dominican Republic (11.3 per cent) and Nicaragua (10.4 per cent) reach double digits. In Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay and Ecuador, the figures are abysmally low.

**Table 7**  
Women in local office: mayors and councilwomen<sup>9</sup>

Country	Mayors	Councilwomen
Argentina	8.5%	n. d.
Bolivia	4.6%	19%
Brazil	7.5%	12.6%
Colombia	9%	14.5%
Costa Rica	9.9%	47.6%
Chile	12.1%	26.8%
Ecuador	6%	23%
El Salvador	8%	21%
Guatemala	2.4%	5.9%
Honduras	8.1%	20.4%
Mexico	3%	27.6%
Nicaragua	10.4%	37.8%
Panama	9.3%	0%
Paraguay	5.7%	20.6%
Peru	2.8%	27.8%
Dominican Republic	11.3%	26.9%
Uruguay	n. a.	n. a.
Venezuela	7.2%	18%

n. d. = No data

n.a. = Not applicable

Source: International IDEA 2007a.

<sup>9</sup> In some countries, such as the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico, there is also the position of *síndico*, and in Nicaragua the position of *corregimiento representative*. Those percentages have not been included in the table. Data for councilwomen reflect only titular holders of those seats.

There are more women on municipal councils, though with significant differences among the 17 countries for which data was available. Panama, which has no elected titular councilwomen, and Guatemala, in which just 5.9 per cent of these posts are held by women, are at the lowest end of the scale. In Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and Bolivia, the proportion ranges from 12 per cent to 19 per cent, while the majority of countries, including Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Ecuador, Chile, Mexico and Peru are between 20 per cent and 28 per cent. Costa Rica and Nicaragua stand out, with 47.6 per cent and 37.8 per cent respectively, reflecting notable progress in the inclusion of women at this level of government.

What is disturbing is the slow progress toward adequate representation of women in these positions. Decentralization is a process that, if implemented well, allows better redistribution of government functions and resources, while modernizing administration and infrastructure and promoting human development. Above all, however, it should be closer to the people and more effective in channeling their demands. This is a process in which women often lack even the potential opportunity to represent their interests and get their issues onto the public agenda. This suggests a need for further investigation of the specific obstacles to women's participation at the local level.



## 4. Electoral quotas: adoption, impacts and limitations in their implementation

### a. Quota fever and its uneven results

Approval in 1979 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) marked the beginning of the “visibility” of gender inequality on the agendas of international organizations. But not until the Beijing Conference in 1995 and approval of its Platform of Action did affirmative action measures, commonly known as electoral quotas, gain strong acceptance in the region as a necessary step for speeding up the inclusion of women in public office.

Argentina’s pioneering 1991 Quota Law established that at least 30 per cent of candidates for elected office must be women. Argentina was a unique case for several years. Finally, under the influence of the Beijing Platform, which resonated with women’s movements in various countries, national legislatures began to adopt similar mechanisms. Costa Rica, Mexico and Paraguay approved quotas in 1996, followed by Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and the Dominican Republic in 1997 and Honduras in 2000.

### Quotas and female candidacies

Given the strong imbalance in political representation between men and women, quotas aim to level the playing field for women, establishing minimum levels for their participation, either by setting aside positions on candidate lists or by reserving positions for women. In Latin America, where the choice has been to set aside positions on candidate lists, these measures have ensured a more balanced field of candidates. Before quotas were adopted, women were practically excluded from parties' candidate lists. In Peru, before the approval of this measure, only 11.25 per cent of candidates were women, while less than ten years later—in the 2006 general election—the figure was 38.6 per cent. In Chile, which has not adopted quotas, only 9.7 per cent of candidates presented by parties between 1989 and 2005 — one out of ten — were women (International IDEA and FLACSO Chile 2005). The overwhelmingly disproportionate presence of men on candidate lists affects not only the right of aspiring female candidates but also the right of the electorate to vote for women as their representatives.

Currently, 11 of the 18 Latin American countries have affirmative action mechanisms for setting aside slots for women on candidate lists for elected office. The proportions range from a minimum of 20 per cent to 50 per cent. The countries that have adopted higher quota percentages are Costa Rica (40 per cent) and Ecuador (50 per cent). In 2000, Ecuador amended its Organic Elections Law, establishing a new quota of 30 per cent (the figure had been set at 20 per cent in 1997), with a gradual increase of 5 per cent in each election until it reached 50 per cent.

**Table 8**  
Countries with quota laws, and the results in lower houses of Congress

Country	Year approved	Current quota (%)	Lower house seats held by women before law (%)	Lower house seats currently held by women (%)
Argentina	1991	30% (lower & upper)	6%	38.3%
Bolivia	1997	30% (lower) 25% (upper)	11%	16.9%
Brazil	1997	30% (lower)	7%	8.8%
Costa Rica	1996	40%	14%	36.8%
Ecuador	1997	50% (2006 elections)	4%	26%
Honduras	2000	30%	9.4%	23.4%
Mexico	1996	30% (lower & upper)	17%	22.6%
Panama	1997	30%	8%	15.3%
Paraguay	1996	20% (lower & upper)	3%	10%
Peru	1997	30%	11%	29.2%
Dominican Republic	1997	33%	12%	19.7%

Source: Based on data from [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org) and [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

### Frustrated reform in Venezuela

The case of Venezuela demonstrates the resistance that persists in the region to affirmative action mechanisms. In 1997, with the reform of the Organic Law on Suffrage and Political Participation, parties and political organizations were required to fill at least 30 per cent of the slots on their candidate lists with women. The electoral quota was set in Article 144. After the norm was applied fairly successfully in the 1998 elections, the National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral*, CNE) ordered that the article be ignored because it violated the principle of equality enshrined in the Venezuelan Constitution. That ruling was upheld by the country's Supreme Court.

Because of pressure from Venezuelan women's movements, in the last election (2005), the CNE required a zebra-list placement mandate on candidate lists for national, municipal and parish decision-making bodies, but there was a high degree of non-compliance. The requirement was established after the lists were already drawn up, and the CNE established no mechanisms to ensure enforcement.

It is unclear if the Congress will reinstate quotas through legal reform (International IDEA 2007b).

More than 10 years after the implementation of quota laws, it is clear that they mark a “before” and “after” in women's political participation in the region, and that they accelerated the inclusion of women in positions of power. Of the 11 countries that have adopted quota laws, only one (Mexico) had more than 15 per cent of its lower house seats filled by women. After quotas were adopted, the percentage doubled in those countries, reaching 20.5 per cent by 2007. Today the figure puts these countries above the average for Latin America (18.5 per cent), while the average stands at 14 per cent in countries without quotas.

Despite this significant impact, however, even among the countries that have adopted quotas (and even those with similar percentages), there are uneven results. While in Argentina and Peru the proportion of women elected is 38.3 per cent and 29.2 per cent, respectively, Brazil has only 8.8 per cent and Bolivia 16.9 per cent. This leads us to ask why quotas have worked better in some countries than in others.

### **b. Quotas and electoral systems: in search of the most favourable equation**

Widespread research has shown that electoral systems are not gender neutral and that they can, in fact, have a significant impact on the number of women elected. The speed of progress in this area, therefore, depends on the characteristics of each country. The simple existence of a quota law is not enough. Equally important is its compatibility with the electoral system, the precise language, and its implementation particularly in terms of sanctions. As will be discussed below, it is also essential that parties adopt policies that promote women's participation as members and candidates.

Research demonstrates that women have a better chance of being elected in systems with proportional representation than in single-member plurality/majority systems.<sup>10</sup> In the former, where they have the possibility of winning more seats, parties seek to include diverse social sectors so as to reach a broader electorate, while in the latter, they seek the "one" candidate they deem to have the greatest chance of winning, and the candidate chosen tends to be male. Another important difference is that proportional representation systems are compatible with quotas, whereas single-member plurality/majority systems make effective quota application difficult, if not impossible.

Nevertheless, proportional representation systems with quotas are no guarantee for increased representation. As an example, this report will briefly review the framework for election to the lower house of Congress in some of the countries that have quotas, such as Argentina, Peru and Brazil, which have adopted proportional systems of representation, and Bolivia, which has a mixed system.

---

<sup>10</sup> Under the principle of proportional representation, elected positions are assigned according to the percentage of votes obtained by each party, while under plurality/majority systems, the party winning the most votes is declared the winner.

**Table 9**  
Quotas, electoral systems and sanctions in Latin America

Country	Electoral system	Sanctions for non-compliance
Argentina	Proportional representation + closed and blocked lists	List will not be registered
Bolivia	Mixed system of proportional representation + closed lists and single-member districts	List will not be registered
Brazil	Proportional representation + closed and unblocked lists	The slots remain open and cannot be filled by men
Costa Rica	Proportional representation + closed and blocked lists	List will not be registered
Ecuador	Proportional representation + open lists	List will not be registered
Honduras	Proportional representation + open lists	Not established
Mexico	Mixed system of proportional representation + closed lists and single-member districts	Public reprimand and candidates will not be registered.
Panama	Proportional representation + closed and unblocked lists	Not established. If there are not enough women to meet the established quota, the slots can be filled by men
Paraguay	Proportional representation + closed and blocked lists	Lists will not be registered
Peru	Proportional representation + closed and unblocked lists	Lists will not be registered
Dominican Republic	Proportional representation + closed and unblocked lists	Lists will not be registered

Source: Prepared by authors, based on data from Payne, Zovatto and Mateo 2006.

In Brazil, the quota is implemented in a system of closed and unblocked lists without a placement mandate, in which the parties can present a number of candidates equivalent to up to 150 per cent of the number of seats up for election, and in which there is no specific sanction for not respecting the quota. As a result, Brazil's quota law has had no impact and the percentage of women elected to its Congress is among the lowest in the region.

In Argentina — since 1991, when the new Article 60 of the Electoral Code was approved — at least 30 per cent of the candidates on the list (closed and blocked) must be women. These candidates must be included in “proportions with a chance of being elected.” The rules specify that there must be one woman for every two men; if two positions are up for election, one of the candidates must be a woman.

In 1993, when parties abided by the percentage but ignored the placement mandate, despite clear regulations, some candidates filed complaints with the electoral court. As a result, the National Election Board (*Cámara Nacional Electoral*) defined the basis of “electability” the number of seats to be filled per party. This interpretation was subsequently made official in a regulatory decree issued in 2000, which established clear sanctions, giving the courts the power to

reorder women on candidate lists in accordance with the established rules if the party had not done so within 48 hours (Marx et al. 2007).

The success of Argentina's quota system is closely related to the electoral rules of the game. Factors such as closed and blocked lists combined with a placement mandate and a high party magnitude can be designed to practically guarantee that the number of women elected will not fall below a certain "floor" figure.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand the Peruvian system is based on the "preferential vote" (by which up to two candidates from the same list can be chosen). Under the Peruvian system, once the number of seats won by each party is determined by the distribution factor, the voters' preferential vote establishes the winner, regardless of the position the candidates held on the lists drawn up by the parties.

Peru's recent success in electing 29.2 per cent women to Congress is atypical and tests conventional wisdom that closed and blocked lists with a placement mandate are necessarily better for women.

According to some authors, the analysis should go beyond list structure to examine three additional decisive factors.<sup>12</sup> First, voters are increasingly willing to cast their ballots for women, a trend that has led to a greater number of women in Congress and that compensates to a certain extent for the lack of truly effective measures to ensure a minimal presence in the Congress. Second, there has been an increase in the "effective quota," or the real number of candidates, as a result of quotas. Because Peruvian rules establish that neither women nor men can constitute less than 30 per cent of the total number of candidates, election officials have decided that if in some districts the result is not a whole number, the quota should be rounded up. These measures have increased the proportion of female candidates from 30 per cent to 38.6 per cent. Finally, a third factor that may facilitate the election of women is the duality of the preferential vote system. According to Schmidt's analysis, "For example, a man with traditional values might be reluctant to cast his only preferential ballot for a woman, but willing to 'risk' voting for a female candidate as one of his choices" (IDEA International 2004b: 140).

Bolivia has a mixed system of proportional representation for the lower house of Congress and has established two forms of simultaneous voting: one with a simple plurality/majority and the other with proportional representation. Under this system, 68 of 130 legislators are elected by plurality/majority

<sup>11</sup> Party magnitude is calculated as the average number of representatives elected in the electoral districts by each party. The greater the party magnitude, the greater number of possibilities that the candidates have who are at the bottom of the party lists (where the female candidates are usually placed), to win a seat in Congress.

<sup>12</sup> See International IDEA 2004b and 2007c.



in single-member districts, and the rest (62) are elected in nine districts, from party lists, under the system of proportional representation. In the multi-member districts, one of every three candidates must be a woman. The quotas, however, are not applied in the 68 single-member districts. This differentiation has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of women in the multi-member districts, while levels remain low in the single-member districts. For example, in the 2002 elections, 27 per cent of the candidates elected in multi-member districts, but only 10 per cent of those in single-member districts, were women.<sup>13</sup>

Another obstacle to greater effectiveness of the quota is that Bolivian legislation establishes for every elected position the possibility of titular and substitute candidates, applying the 30 per cent quota to both positions. Parties may comply formally with the rules by placing more women on the substitute lists than on the lists of titular candidates. This, along with the political harassment suffered by women who are titular candidates in an effort to get them to step aside and yield their slots to male substitutes, may largely explain the slow increase in the number of women in the legislature.<sup>14</sup> This situation demonstrates the resistance in many parties to implementing these measures; once they are approved, therefore, it is crucial that women's organizations monitor their implementation and enforcement.

Despite the importance of quotas in Latin America, the preceding contrast illustrates the limitations to their implementation in many countries. These obstacles dilute the goal of ensuring equitable gender representation. The laws have guaranteed a greater number of women candidates, but their effectiveness will remain limited if they are not accompanied by electoral reforms aimed at ensuring "electability" and clear sanctions for non-compliance.

---

<sup>13</sup> See International IDEA 2005.

<sup>14</sup> See Machicao Barbero 2004.



## 5. Challenges for women's representation: beyond quotas

While affirmative action measures are very important, they only apply to inclusion on candidate lists for elected office and as such represent only one link in a long chain of steps that a woman must take if she seeks a political career. Women's political participation is much more complex, and barriers to access extend beyond running for office. While more and more women are running and getting elected, in only a few cases has this translated into a critical mass of women holding elected office.

The quota, therefore, should be seen as one mechanism — and not the only one — for ensuring greater participation. It should be a means, not an end. It is a minimum foundation on which more equitable scenarios can be built for women seeking to go into politics. The following sections analyze four areas in which women face greater or particular obstacles.

### **a. Political parties as gatekeepers of representation and leadership**

In determining whether women's political participation is equitable, it is crucial to analyze parties, particularly given their responsibility for defining candidate lists. Women's influence at this level is therefore vital if they want to run for office. What degree of participation and decision making do women have in parties, so that besides ensuring compliance with legally established or voluntary quotas, they can also promote equality in participation in their own party organizations?

### a.1. The myth that “there are no women”

Research on this topic by International IDEA found that the great majority of the region's political parties do not have gender disaggregated data on their membership. In only five countries was it possible to obtain information about the number of female party members, and only in one case, Mexico, did the information come from the parties themselves (the Partido Acción Nacional, PAN, and Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD). In Paraguay, 46.5 per cent of party members are women; the figure is 45 per cent in Panama, 46 per cent in Peru, 52 per cent in Mexico and 29.9 per cent in Guatemala.<sup>15</sup>

Unofficially, however, many parties insist that about 40 to 50 per cent of their members are women. Although they do not quantify it, the parties are aware of significant “female capital” in their organizations. Nevertheless, as elections approach and there is an urgent need to meet the quotas established by law, it is common to hear party leaders complain that there are no suitable female candidates or that women refuse to run.

This discourse reveals the parties' limited effectiveness in turning their members into leaders who are willing and able to face electoral competition. This could be accomplished with ongoing intra-party education aimed at building the confidence and skills necessary to take this step. It also says little of their ability to attract women from other spheres, such as the social arena, where they have long played a leadership role. It is likely that the problem, then, lies not in the lack of women, but in “unfriendly” party structures that discourage women's participation. This would seem to be especially true in the case of party members who, upon being relegated to logistical or organizational tasks, have little incentive to try to build a political career and run for leadership positions within the party or for public office.

### a.2. Lonely at the top: women's leadership in political parties

The fact that between 40 and 50 per cent of party members are women, and that thanks to quotas in some countries they represent at least 30 per cent of candidates on party lists, has not resulted in a significant presence of women in decision-making spheres, much less changes in party organization. In fact, only three countries are known to have more than 30 per cent women in terms of representation on party leadership committees.

<sup>15</sup> Information for Paraguay and Panama was provided by national election authorities; information for Guatemala came from studies by FLACSO-Guatemala and the OAS Democratic Values Program; and information for Peru was taken from the International IDEA publication, “*La igualdad esquiua: una mirada de género a las elecciones generales 2006.*”

Women are still welcome at the party grassroots, but rising through the ranks does not seem to be encouraged by the organizations, except in the case of Costa Rica, which has achieved near-parity in party leadership.

**Table 10**  
Women in executive bodies of Latin American political parties<sup>16</sup>

Country	Women in party leadership (%)
Costa Rica	43.9%
Honduras	34.6%
Mexico	30.6%
Argentina	29.5%
Colombia	27%
Peru	25.5%
Nicaragua	24.3%
Ecuador	20%
Chile	20.1%
Panama	18.8%
Paraguay	18.9%
Guatemala	18.2%
El Salvador	15.8%
Dominican Republic	14%
Uruguay	12.5%
Venezuela	n. d.
Bolivia	n. d.
Brazil	n. d.

n.d. = No data

Source: Prepared by authors based on International IDEA 2007a.

In analyzing Latin American parties' by-laws and rules, it appears that quotas seem to be gaining legitimacy in the political arena. A number of parties have adopted these measures, even in countries where they are not required by national legislation. This is true of a number of parties in Colombia, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela.<sup>17</sup>

A close examination of the types of quotas adopted by each of these parties reveals however that they generally establish percentages for lists of candidates for party leadership posts (and also for elected office). As a result, the system only guarantees an increase in the number of candidates; it cannot

<sup>16</sup> The figures are based on information verified by national researchers for the project on "Good Practices for Women's Participation in Latin American Politics," carried out by International IDEA in 2007 (International IDEA 2007a). For Mexico, 2004 has been used as the base year for quantifying the number of women in leadership positions in the Partido Acción Nacional, Partido Revolucionario Institucional and Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PAN, PRI and PRD).

<sup>17</sup> See Annex.

guarantee a real increase in the number of women in top party decision-making spots. It is also important to note that these data reflect the presence of women only at the formal level, since the “strongman” culture that predominates throughout much of the region means that major decisions are often made by the leader (that may draw on a small circle outside the official party leadership).

As a result, women's participation in decision making spheres generally depends on the interest that party leaders might have in promoting “inclusive” structures. Unfortunately examples of genuine commitment to gender equality represent the exception, rather than the norm. Most parties continue to follow traditionally masculine behaviour patterns. Many of the parties that have made a move to promote equity through the adoption of voluntary quotas tend to regard these measures as sufficient in themselves. Additionally, there are a number of cases where gender quotas have been incorporated within by-laws but not put into practice.

#### Effects of quotas on the makeup of party leadership

Although a study of the impact of quotas for party leadership posts exceeds the scope of this article, Costa Rica deserves mention. In 1996, the modification of Article 60 of the Electoral Code required parties to include in their by-laws the mechanisms necessary to ensure that women held 40 per cent of positions in party leadership, on candidate lists for elected office, and in district, canton and provincial assemblies. In a subsequent reference to the lists, the Supreme Election Tribunal (Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones) ruled that women had to be in “electable positions” on the lists (International IDEA 2007b). This explains why 43.9 per cent of positions in party decision-making bodies in Costa Rica are held by women.

The case of the Partido Socialista in Uruguay is also noteworthy. Because it established a “mirror” quota that reflects the percentages of women in active membership, 39 per cent of the members of its National Executive Committee and 43 per cent of the members of its Central Committee are women. Before this measure was implemented, there were no women on the National Executive Committee and women made up only 12 per cent of the Central Committee (International IDEA 2007b).

The presence of more women in party decision-making positions could help preserve, guarantee and promote more equitable conditions for their political participation and allow parties to offer voters a better gender balance on their candidate lists. This would avoid situations like the one that occurred in Peru during the 2006 general elections, when only 24 per cent of the lists that won representation in Congress were headed by women, even though in recent years women congressional candidates have been the top vote-getters. (International IDEA and Asociación Civil Transparencia 2007a).

### **b. Women, politics and money**

Studies by ECLAC (2004 and 2007) have demonstrated that despite the rapid entry of women into the work force in the past three decades, in 2004 nearly half the Latin American women over age 15 still lacked their own income sources. In addition, at all economic levels, female heads of households had lower incomes than males. In 2002, only 36.7 per cent of workers were women, and they were usually in unstable, poorly paid jobs. Wage discrimination is another problem affecting women. In the same year, it was found that women earned only 68 per cent of the amount earned by men. Finally, in most countries domestic work — which is disproportionately borne by women — remains “invisible”.

The “female face of poverty” is a significant barrier to access to public and political life for women. It is clearly more difficult for women to obtain resources, if they cannot meet the needs of their family, businesses and personal lives. The importance of political funding is heightened by electoral competition in this age of “video politics.” Candidates find that they must use increasingly costly strategies to reach voters, especially in elections with lists that are open or closed but unblocked.

This is the case in Peru, where, as mentioned above, the possibility of a preferential vote exacerbates competition, not only between candidates from different parties, but among those in the same party. The goal of the study published by IDEA and the Asociación Civil Transparencia — “Elusive Equality” (*“La igualdad esquivada. Una mirada de género a las Elecciones Generales 2006”*) (International IDEA and Asociación Civil Transparencia 2007a)) — was to determine whether female candidates had the same opportunities as men. One conclusion was that male candidates spent an average of 4.6 times the amount spent by female candidates on advertising in private media (television, radio and print), which gives an idea of the difficulties that women face in obtaining and managing resources.

Although this is a constant theme in discussions about the disadvantages that women face in politics, neither international norms nor national legislation — except in Costa Rica and Panama — include specific provisions for adjusting financing systems to overcome these obstacles (International IDEA and the Organization of American States 2004).

In Costa Rica, Law 7142 — the Law for Promotion of Social Equality — took effect in 1990, requiring parties to allocate a percentage of the resources they receive from the state to promote women's political training and participation. Costa Rican parties now have similar provisions in their by-laws. The rules of the Partido Liberación Nacional, for example, stipulate that at least 10 per cent of the party's budget must be used to promote political training for women in the organization, while the Movimiento Libertario establishes that at least 40 per cent of the budget allocated to the Secretariat for Promotion of Women's Political Participation will be earmarked for political formation and training for women. The Partido Acción Ciudadana has determined that 20 per cent of the funds it receives from the state will be dedicated to training and organization, and that no less than 15 per cent of the total will go to training women and youth (International IDEA 2007b).

In Panama, a modification of the Electoral Code in 2002 required parties to devote 25 per cent of public and electoral financing to training activities; of this amount, at least 10 per cent must target women members. Unlike the case of Costa Rica, only one party, Partido Panameñista, has incorporated this provision into its by-laws. That party has established that it will devote 30 per cent of the state funds it receives to women's political formation and participation (International IDEA 2007b).

### c. Women and the media

The media are a key scenario for modern politics. No longer mere intermediaries between leaders and voters, media often set the agenda around which politicians design their strategies and citizens form their opinions. Although people trust television less now than they have at other times, in Latin America this is the medium from which most people get their information about politics. When asked, "What is the source of information that you most trust when you get information about politics?" 51 per cent responded, "television."<sup>18</sup> But this media-

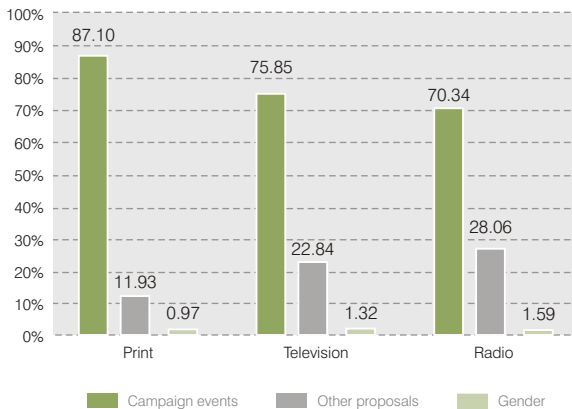
<sup>18</sup> See Corporación Latinobarómetro 2003 for data included in figures 6-8. Corporación Latinobarómetro is only responsible for the distribution of public opinion information and not for the interpretation of the public opinion surveys. The authors thank Corporación Latinobarómetro for the information provided. The opinions expressed in this report are the opinions of the authors.

driven agenda often extends beyond the thematic; it also defines the main actors on the political stage, and media coverage can determine which politicians or aspiring politicians and platforms get public exposure.

Although little progress has been made in the region in analyzing the media's influence on the construction (or "deconstruction") of women's political leadership, the IDEA and Asociación Civil Transparencia study of the Peruvian general elections (2007a) presents a monitoring of media during both the first round of balloting and the runoff. This consisted of following media coverage of the main political players and issues related to the general elections in each region, based on each medium's agenda setting during the campaign.

The monitoring showed that the issue of gender was generally absent from the electoral agenda of both media and politicians. Only 0.97 per cent of coverage in print media, 1.32 per cent on television and 1.59 per cent on radio addressed this issue. This occurred in a context in which coverage of deeper issues, proposals and platforms is minimal in comparison to coverage of happenings on the campaign trail or current events.

**Figure 4**  
Coverage of gender proposals in the media (first round of balloting)

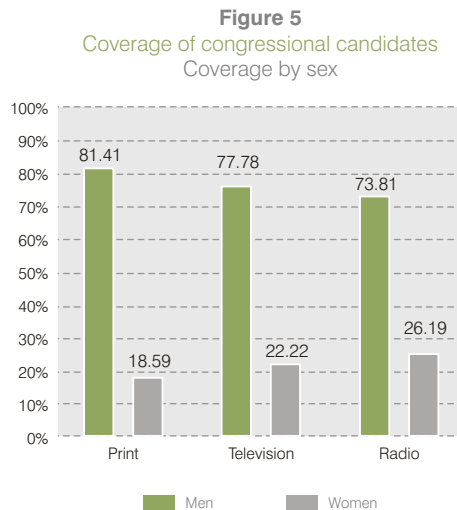


Source: International IDEA 2007b.

During the runoff election between candidates Alan García and Ollanta Humala, this coverage practically disappeared, dropping to 0.01 per cent in the print media, 0.23 per cent on television and 0.63 per cent on the radio. Coverage of congressional candidates was similar. Although they represented 39 per cent of all candidates, their media presence was not proportional. They obtained only 18.59 per cent of coverage in print media, 22.22 on television and 26.19 on the



radio. Although radio had the highest coverage, with 26.19 per cent, it was still 12.81 points below the 39 per cent that women candidates represented in the lists.



Source: International IDEA and Asociación Civil Transparencia 2007a.

A breakdown by political party also shows that in all cases, women received less coverage than male candidates from the same political group. This situation, in itself a disadvantage, is aggravated in the context of a highly competitive “preferential vote” system, in which lower media exposure clearly affects the possibility of getting elected.

Another relevant case is that of Uruguay. Johnson (2005) presents the results of media monitoring of television, radio and print media during the penultimate week of the campaign. According to this study, female candidates — who occupied 17.7 per cent of “electable” slots on the slates — represented only 10.6 per cent of the political figures who received media coverage during the monitoring. That percentage was even lower in relation to the total number of times those figures appeared: only 3.8 per cent. Similarly, when the type of appearance made by candidates on radio or television was analyzed, it was found that 81.3 per cent of the women’s appearances were “silent” — they were merely mentioned, or their image appeared with no words. In contrast, 51.1 per cent of male candidates’ appearances consisted of statements or interviews.

Although it is not known whether similar studies have been developed in other countries, the perception of many is that women’s candidacies and proposals are not reflected in the media, and their parties lack supportive strategies for strengthening their candidacies.

### A pioneer media effort in Uruguay

In the run-up to the 2004 elections, 30 female candidates from the leftist coalition of the Encuentro Progresista - Frente Amplio - Nueva Mayoría called a press conference to boost their candidacies and announce a common agenda that included, among other things, implementation of a National Plan of Opportunities and Rights, a National Plan for Prevention of Domestic Violence and a Plan for Equal Treatment and Opportunity in Employment, as well as recognition of sexual and reproductive rights and fulfillment of the commitments the country had made in international forums and conferences on women's rights. This was a creative, pioneering step that, if used regularly, could be effective in increasing media attention.

### d. Public opinion and resistance to equality

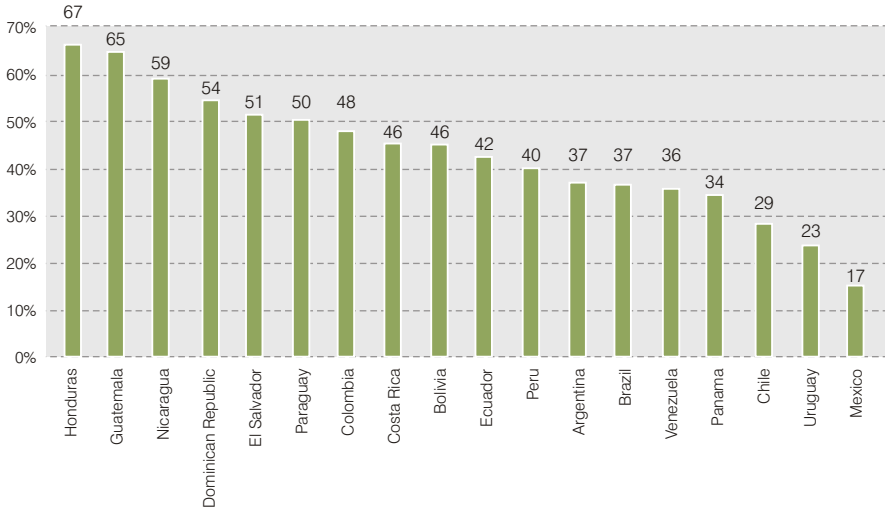
In Latin America, women have been strongly identified with reproductive and welfare roles, a traditional view that is still an obstacle to full insertion in the work force, and which permeates the public sphere and the political arena, despite undeniable progress in legislation and efforts by many women to gain equality and respect for women's rights.

It is therefore important to understand current attitudes of Latin Americans toward women's involvement in these types of activities. This task was undertaken in the 2004 Latinobarómetro Survey, with interesting results:

**Figure 6**

Women at home and men at work:

"It is better for women to concentrate on the home and men on work"



Percentages of the responses "Strongly agree" and "Agree."

Source: Corporación Latinobarómetro 2004 (n = 19,605)

As Figure 6 shows, when asked, "Do you strongly agree, agree or disagree with the phrase, 'It is better for women to concentrate on the home and men on work?'" in 11 countries 40 per cent or more of respondents said that they strongly agreed or agreed. In Central American countries such as Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador, as well as in Paraguay and the Dominican Republic, 50 per cent or more expressed this opinion.

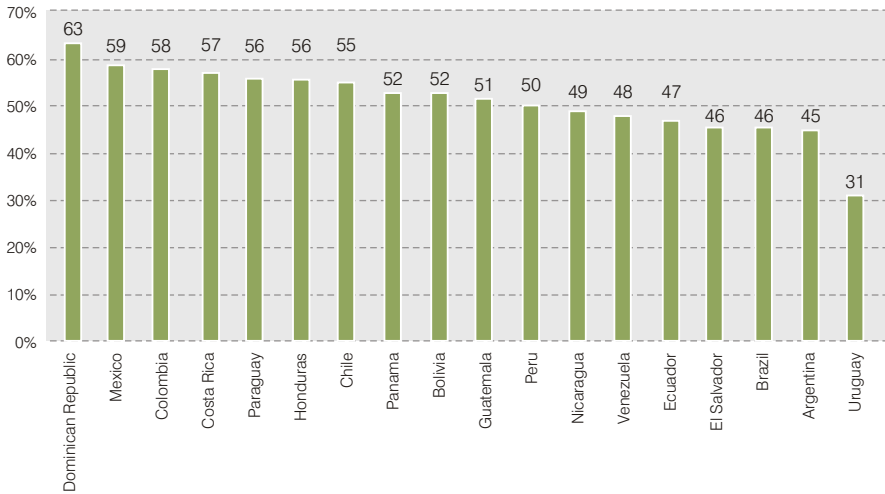
In general, all other countries — except Mexico (17 per cent) and Uruguay (23 per cent) — reflected significant percentages (one-third or more of respondents) of conservative positions with regard to women's labor autonomy.

This perception is aggravated regarding the relationship between women and economic income. Asked about the phrase, "If the woman earns more than the man, it is almost certain that she will have problems," in all countries except Uruguay, 45 per cent or more of those strongly agreed or agreed. In the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Colombia Costa Rica, Paraguay, Honduras and Chile, the figure was 55 per cent or more.

**Figure 7**

Women in trouble if they earn more:

"If the woman earns more than the man, it is almost certain that she will have problems"



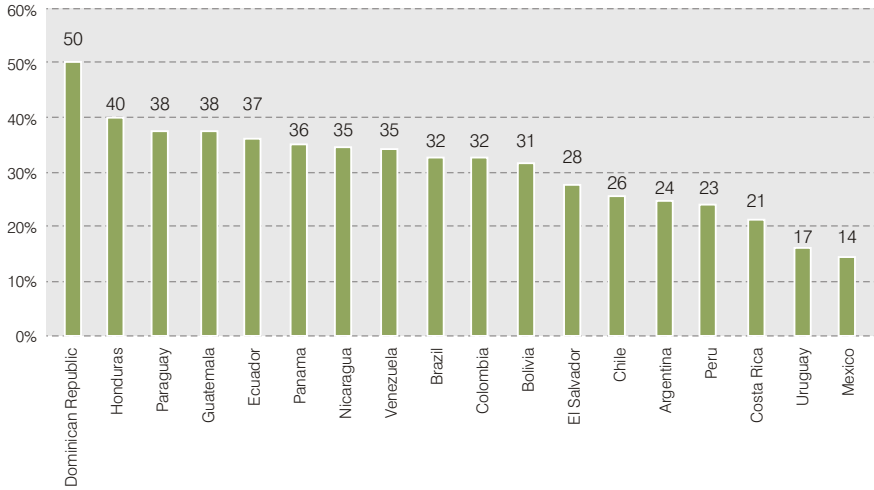
Percentage of responses "Strongly agree" and "Agree."

Source: Corporación Latinobarómetro 2004 (n = 19,605).

These two data sets reveal the resistance that persists in Latin American society toward equal rights and opportunities for women. Changes in Latin American political culture, notably influenced by patriarchal attitudes, are occurring more slowly than had been hoped. Nevertheless, the larger number of women in the political arena as a result of quotas could be causing transformations in public perceptions of their leadership ability.

When people are asked if they agree with the phrase, "Men are better political leaders than women," less than 25 per cent agreed only in the cases of Argentina (24 per cent), Peru (23 per cent), Costa Rica (21 per cent), Uruguay (17 per cent) and Mexico (14 per cent). Interestingly, Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico and Peru are countries in which experience with quotas dates back to the 1990s, and where women's participation in national legislatures increased after the measures were implemented. At the other extreme, Dominican Republic and Honduras have the highest levels of agreement with the statement, with 50 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively.

**Figure 8**  
"Men are better political leaders than women"



Percentage of responses "Strongly agree" and "Agree."  
Source: Corporación Latinobarómetro 2004 (n = 19,605)



## 6. A pending challenge: from inclusion to representation

While the presence of women in political decision-making positions has increased in many countries, it is important to “go beyond the numbers” to also examine the impact that women politicians can have in promoting gender equity. Do elected women represent the interests and identities of other women? Is it true that increased numbers of women in Congress create more opportunities for addressing the issues on that agenda?

This issue is rarely considered either in political debate or in academic research, both of which have been primarily concerned in recent years with the quantitative progress made in women’s participation.

A recent study by Marx, Borner and Caminotti (2007) explores the opinions of female legislators from Argentina and Brazil about the impact of their representation. Although the interviewees believe that both countries’ legislatures continue to be governed by eminently masculine codes of conduct, they also think that the presence of women has brought new issues to the legislative agenda. In analyzing the types of initiatives presented, the Argentine congresswomen particularly note, first, bills related to social policies, and second, those related to women’s rights. The Brazilian congresswomen, meanwhile, placed more emphasis on gender issues, as a result of the existence of the “Women’s Caucus,” an inter-party coordination and consensus-building body designed to promote such initiatives.

Various Latin American countries have such coordinating bodies. There are similar initiatives in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Brazil and Uruguay. Although it is not part of the organic structure of Congress, Uruguay's Women's Caucus, made up of just four senators and 12 deputies, has won the creation of a Gender and Equity Commission (with decision-making power) in the lower house of Congress, the approval of various laws (creation of a registry of deadbeat dads, procedures for handling crimes of kidnapping, rape and other sex offenses, regulation of domestic labor, the law on equal rights and opportunities between men and women, etc.), a change in male legislators' attitudes toward their performance, and greater awareness of their work in the media and among the public.<sup>19</sup>

This is clearly an issue that merits special attention. Although the right of women to be elected is beyond question, only by evaluating their commitment to promoting the pending gender agenda can one determine to what extent their participation has enhanced the quality of democracy.

---

<sup>19</sup> For more information, see Johnson (2006).



## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

The main progress in the region in these three decades has been the notable increase in the number of women in positions of popular representation, basically in unicameral congresses or lower houses of Congress.

One important explanation for this increase has been quota legislation in 11 Latin American countries. This has accelerated women's political participation, enabling them to practically double their presence in legislatures. As outlined in this report however, the impact of quotas has been limited in a number of countries due to particularities of the electoral system, the lack of specificity in the legislation, the absence of clear and effective sanctions for non-compliance, and the lack of complementary measures for leveling the playing field on which men and women compete, especially in access to financing and the media.

Thirty years after the start of democracy's third wave, the 18 countries analyzed in this report are still far from seeing participation that is not only equitable, but also sufficient to bring about cultural transformations and changes in power structures to which women have been latecomers. Only in Costa Rica, Argentina and Peru has women's participation at the congressional level reached levels of about 30 per cent. Even so, this figure is far from parity, which is an important requirement for truly representative democracy.

So despite the important symbolic effect of having two women recently elected to the presidencies of their countries, as well as the increase in the appointment of women to ministerial posts and the diversity of their functions,



the reality is that inclusion in the various levels of public decision making is very slow. Seven countries lack quotas for elected offices, and only two have adopted affirmative action for female political appointees. Also worrisome is subregional levels of government where the percentage of women mayors reaches double digits in only three countries: Chile, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua. In the case of women governors, only Ecuador and Brazil have topped 10 per cent.

Although the need to guarantee women equal opportunity in the exercising of their political rights has been at the top of the regional and international agendas as never before, the reality shows significant obstacles remain. A comparison of women's inclusion in the various arenas shows inconsistencies and contradictory trends, except in the case of Costa Rica, which has maintained more or less steady growth in the number of women legislators, female ministers, local councilwomen and women in party leadership position.

In the coming years, it is crucial that women make further gains in the political arena. This will require:

- Introducing electoral reforms that guarantee more effective application of affirmative action measures for election to public office. In countries where quotas do not exist, public analysis and debate should be promoted. Women must participate actively in the design of these reforms. In this sense, it is crucial to train more women as “electoral engineers”<sup>20</sup> capable of analyzing and influencing these processes, which are largely technical, but which have great political impact.
- Fostering debate and reflection on the need to adopt affirmative action aimed at ensuring inclusion in appointed positions in public administration.
- Working for genuine democratization of political parties, encouraging the adoption of best practices that allow women to participate as active members and leaders under truly equitable conditions, including the establishment of leadership positions reserved for women and the implementation of medium- and long-range processes for training and formation. This necessarily implies allocating specific resources for these tasks.
- Encouraging women who are active party members to organize and empowering them to influence party organization and decision making under equal conditions.
- Promoting initiatives that train, educate and accompany women who have a political leadership vocation, so their careers are more successful.

<sup>20</sup> A term associated with Pippa Norris. See Norris 2004.

- Studying and implementing reforms to incorporate gender criteria into regulations on political financing that exist in the region's countries, as well as gender-oriented criteria for the use of resources and control of spending by political parties.
- Encouraging strategies for supporting women who hold elected office, through creation of or support for inter-party consensus-building bodies such as women's congressional caucuses or networks of women in local public office.
- Working with the media to root out chauvinistic views of politics and urging them to put gender issues on their agenda and provide equal coverage of female candidates.
- Reflecting on "parity democracy" to include an enhanced understanding and awareness of the concept and the identification of mechanisms for its promotion.



## Bibliography

Beltrán, Elena y Virginia Maquieira, editors

2001 *Feminismos. Debates teóricos contemporáneos*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

ECLAC

2007 “El aporte de las mujeres a la igualdad en América Latina y el Caribe”. X Conferencia Regional sobre la mujer de América Latina y el Caribe. Santiago de Chile: CEPAL.

2004 Report “Panorama social de América Latina 2002-2003”. Santiago de Chile: CEPAL.

Corporación Latinobarómetro

2004 *Informe Latinobarómetro 2004*. Santiago de Chile.

2003 *Informe Latinobarómetro 2003*. Santiago de Chile.

Del Águila, Alicia

2004 *Mujeres en los partidos políticos del Perú. Situación y mecanismos para su promoción*. Lima: Asociación Civil Transparencia.

Del Águila, Alicia y Beatriz Llanos

2007 Cuota, sistema electoral y prácticas partidarias. Claves de los avances y barreras a la participación política de la mujer en la Región Andina (unpublished).



---

Dirección de Empleo Público de Colombia

2006 Report on women's participation in public administration management positions in 2006. Bogota: Dirección de Empleo Público de Colombia.

Duvinic, Mayra y Vivian Roza

2004 *Women, Politics and Democratic Prospects in Latin America*. Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank.

González del Riego, Delfina

2005 *50 años del voto femenino en el Perú. Historia y realidad actual*. Lima: Ministerio de la Mujer y Desarrollo Social.

Htun, Mala N.

2000 *El liderazgo de las mujeres en América Latina: retos y tendencias*. Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Dialogue.

International IDEA

2007a "Good Practices for Women's Participation in Latin America" Project. (unpublished).

2007b "Good Practices for Women's Participation in Latin America" Project. Country documents: Arce, Mariela (Panama), Jagger Marcela (Costa Rica), Johnson, Niki (Uruguay), Ríos Tobar, Marcela, Maggi Cook y Daniela Hornazabal (Chile), Valdivieso, Magdalena (Venezuela), Wills, Maria Emma y Diana Cardoso (Colombia) (unpublished).

2007c *Diseño para lograr la igualdad. Combinaciones más idóneas, medianamente idóneas y no favorables de los sistemas electorales y cuotas de género*. Stockholm: International IDEA.

2005 "La representación política de las mujeres en la región andina". In *Democracia en la región andina, los telones de fondo*. Kristen Sample y Daniel Zovatto, editors. Lima: International IDEA.

2004a "La aplicación de las cuotas: experiencias latinoamericanas." Workshop report. Stockholm: International IDEA.

2004b "The Implementation of Gender Quotas in Peru: Legal Reform, Discourses and Impacts." In *The Implementation of Quotas: Latin American Experiences*. Stockholm: International IDEA (Schmidt, Gregory).

2004c "Unanticipated Successes: Lessons from Peru's Experiences with Gender Quotas in Majoritarian Closed List and Open List PR Systems." In *The Implementation of Quotas: Latin American Experiences*. Stockholm: International IDEA (Schmidt, Gregory).

---

1998 “Using Quotas to Increase Women’s Political Representation.” In *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. Stockholm: International IDEA (Dahlerup, Drude).

S.f. *Global database of Quotas for Women*. At: [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org)

International IDEA and Asociación Civil Transparencia

2007a *La igualdad esquivada. Una mirada a las Elecciones Generales 2006*. Lima: International IDEA and Asociación Civil Transparencia.

2007b *La política por dentro. Cambios y continuidades en las organizaciones políticas de los países andinos*. Roncagliolo, Rafael y Carlos Meléndez, editors. Lima: International IDEA and y Asociación Civil Transparencia.

International IDEA and FLACSO Chile

2005 *Cuotas de género, democracia y representación*. Santiago de Chile: International IDEA - FLACSO Chile (Ríos Tobar, Marcela and Andrés Villar).

International IDEA and the Organization of American States

2004 “Financiamiento político y perspectiva de género”. In Daniel Zovatto y Steven Griner. *De las normas a las buenas prácticas. El desafío del financiamiento político en América Latina*. San José: International IDEA and the Organization of American States (García Quesada, Ana Isabel).

International IDEA and Universidad Autónoma de México

2006 *Regulación jurídica de los partidos políticos en América Latina*. Zovatto, Daniel, Coordinator. Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México and International IDEA.

Inter-Parliamentary Union

W.A.A. *Women in National Parliaments*. At: <http://ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

Jiménez Polanco, Jacqueline

2001 *La representación política de las mujeres en América Latina*. At: [www.quotaproject.org/sources/southamerica.cfm](http://www.quotaproject.org/sources/southamerica.cfm)

Johnson, Niki

2006 Actuación parlamentaria y diferencias de género en Uruguay. *Revista de Ciencia Política de la Universidad de Chile*, vol. 46.

2005 *La política de la ausencia: las elecciones uruguayas 2004-2005, las mujeres y la equidad de género*. Montevideo: Comisión Nacional de Seguimiento Mujeres por Democracia, Equidad y Ciudadanía.



---

León, Magdalena, editor

2005 *Nadando contra la corriente. Mujeres y cuotas políticas en los países andinos*. Quito: UNIFEM, UNFPA, FLACSO Ecuador.

Machicao Barbero, Ximena

2004 “El acoso político: un tema urgente que enfrentar”. La Paz: CIDEM.

Marx, Jutta, Jutta Borner y Mariana Caminotti

2007 *Las legisladoras. Cupos de género y política en Argentina y Brasil*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editora Iberoamericana, Instituto Torcuato di Tella and United Nations Development Programme.

Norris, Pippa

2004 *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior*. Cambridge University Press.

Payne J. Mark, Zovatto Daniel, Mateo Díaz Mercedes

2006 *Democracies in Development. Politics and Reform in Latin America*. Inter-American Development Bank and International IDEA: Washington D.C.

Smith Peter

2004 “Los ciclos de la democracia electoral en América Latina”. At: [http://www.politicaygobierno.cide.edu/num\\_anteriores/VOL\\_IX\\_N2\\_2004/SMITH.pdf](http://www.politicaygobierno.cide.edu/num_anteriores/VOL_IX_N2_2004/SMITH.pdf)

## Annex

### Examples of quotas established in Latin American party by-laws

Country	Party	Percentage	Applies to slates for elected positions (public office and party leadership)	Applies to party leadership posts
Argentina	Alianza por una República de Iguales	No more than 70% per gender	Yes	Yes
	Partido Socialista	30%	Yes	Yes
Bolivia	Unidad Nacional	50%	Yes	No
	Movimiento Sin Miedo	50%	Yes	Yes
Brazil	Partido de los Trabajadores	30%	No	Yes
	Partido Democrático Laboral	30%	Yes	Yes
	Partido Popular Socialista	30%	No	Yes
Chile (there is no legal quota)	Partido por la Democracia	No more than 60% per gender	Yes	Yes
	Partido Socialista	No more than 60% per gender	Yes	No
	Partido Demócrata Cristiano	No more than 60% per gender	No	Yes
Colombia (there is no legal quota)	Partido Liberal	30%	No	Yes
	Polo Democrático Alternativo	30%	Yes	Yes
	Conservador	-		Two members of National Board
	Partido de la U	-		One member of National Board
Costa Rica	Liberación Nacional	40%	Yes	Yes
	Acción para el Cambio	Parity-based integration	Yes	Yes
	Movimiento Libertario	40%	Yes	Yes
	Unidad Social Cristiana	No more than 60% per gender	Yes	Yes
	Accesibilidad sin Exclusión	40%	Yes	Yes
	Unión Nacional	40%	Yes	Yes
	Frente Amplio	40-50%	Yes (50%)	Yes (40%)
Acción Ciudadana	Parity-based integration	Yes	Yes	
Ecuador	Movimiento Pachakutik - Nuevo País	40% in delegations to National Congress	-	-
El Salvador (there is no legal quota)	Frente Farabundo Martí	35%	Yes	Yes
	Cambio Democrático	No more than 75% per gender	No	Yes
Guatemala (there is no legal quota)	Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca	30%	No	Yes*
	Partido de los Verdes	50%	No	Yes
Honduras	Partido Demócrata Cristiano	30%	No	Yes**
Mexico	Partido por la Revolución Democrática	No more than 70% per gender	Yes	No
	Partido Revolucionario Institucional	50%	Yes	Yes
Nicaragua (there is no legal quota)	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional	30%	Yes	No
	Movimiento Renovador Sandinista	40%	No	Yes
	Partido Liberal Constitucionalista	40%	No	Yes*
Panama	Partido Cambio Democrático	30%	Yes	No
	Partido Revolucionario Democrático	30%	Yes	No
	Partido Panameñista	30%	Yes	No
Paraguay	Partido País Solidario	50% in the first one-third of the slate	Yes	No
	Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico	33-20%***	Yes	No
	Asociación Nacional Republicana	30% (20%****)	Yes	No
	Unidad Nacional de Ciudadanos Éticos	30%-20%***	Yes	No
	Partido Encuentro Nacional	30%	Yes	No
Peru	Partido Nacionalista Peruano	30%	Yes	No
	Partido Popular Cristiano	30%	Yes	No
	Solidaridad Nacional	30%	Yes	No
	Acción Popular	30%	Yes	No
	Somos Perú	30%	Yes	No
	Coordinadora Nacional de Independientes	30%	Yes	No
	Partido por la Democracia Social	30%	Yes	Yes (6 of the 18 members of the National Executive Committee)
Dominican Republic	Partido Revolucionario Dominicano	33%	Yes	Yes
	Partido Reformista Social Cristiano	33%	Yes	Yes (15% of National Political Committee)
Uruguay (there is no legal quota)	Partido Socialista	Percentage as minimum equal to percentage of members	Yes	Yes
	Vertiente Artiguista	33%	Yes	Yes
Venezuela (there is no legal quota)	Acción Democrática	30%	No	Yes
	COPEI	30%	No	Yes
	Movimiento al Socialismo	25%	Yes	Yes

\* Also applies to elected office.

\*\* Applies to party leadership positions, congressional deputies, Central American Parliament (Parlacen) and mayors, vice mayors and council members.

\*\*\* 30% for slates for elected office and 20% for slates for party positions.

\*\*\*\* Drops to 20% in jurisdictions that cannot meet 30% quota.

Sources: Prepared by the authors, based on national studies (International IDEA 2007a and International IDEA 2007b).

The year 2008 marks three decades since the third democratic wave began sweeping Latin America. Significant progress has been made in terms of women's political participation, particularly in recent years. Currently, Latin America has two women presidents and significant numbers of women in Cabinets and Congresses

But while public attention has been focused on the most visible facets of political participation, this publication sheds light on the role of women in other spheres of political decision making, asking whether women are really "riding the wave" in the public arena and political parties.

#### **International IDEA**

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an inter-governmental organization with 24 member countries. It supports democratic processes and institutions worldwide, providing resources for capacity building, developing policy proposals and supporting democratic reforms. International IDEA's main areas of expertise are electoral processes, political party systems, constitutional processes, and gender and democracy.

International IDEA  
Strömsborg  
SE-103 34 Stockholm  
Sweden  
Tel: +46 8 698 37 00  
Fax: +46 8 20 24 22  
info@idea.int  
<http://www.idea.int>

ISBN 978-91-85724-38-3