Women Leadership and Political Power in Latin America: A Focus on Argentina

Presented by: Jazi Hiriart

As it is the trend in the rest of the world, women have historically been seriously underrepresented in leadership and political positions in Latin American countries.

This situation hinders not only representation but democracy, political equality, and justice.

An investigation of the specific historical, social, cultural and political problems women face in order to gain political power aids in fully understanding this issue.

Focus on Argentina

Its experience yields a series of lessons that are worth highlighting:

- As the quota law is a means to an end. Its proponents consider it a means to make it possible to attain gender equality and never as an end in itself.
- The use of quotas resulted in an Argentine Chamber of Deputies that was 15% female in 1952, a percentage higher than in any other democracy in the world at that time.
- The first law of allocating slots for gender in national elections of legislators was approved in 1991 with a minimum of 30%.
- Slots applied to the Chamber of Deputies resulted in a fundamental shift: From 1983-1991, only 4% of deputys were women; 1995, it increased to a 28%; and in 2009 to 38.5%, positioning Argentina as the 12th country of the world in the ranking of female representation in National Parliaments.
- In 1997, the World Inter-Parliamentary Conference established that quotas should be fixed around 30% since studies show that by increasing the representation of a minority group in political institutions, they acquire the capacity to raise problems in public agendas and to establish alliances that will favor them.

Generally, three factors seem to be responsible for the lack of female participation and representation in public positions:

1. Process of political socialization
2. Larger structural issues
3. Strong discrimination against women ingrainned in the “macho” culture

Three difficulties women face trying to gain access to political positions are:

a. Political parties acting as “bottle-necks,” making the access to positions of party leadership and candidacies for representative positions more difficult
b. Problem of influence in the superior ranks, giving less authority to women than to men
c. Problems in the interior of institutions as gender minority and as minority in party politics.

One way to increase political participation of women is by promoting proposals for the allocation of “minimum quotas” of female presence in directive positions and in the list of candidates for positions of popular election.

In 1997, the World Inter-Parliamentary Conference established that quotas should be fixed around 30% since studies show that by increasing the representation of a minority group in political institutions, they acquire the capacity to raise problems in public agendas and to establish alliances that will favor them.

Despite obvious women’s advancements in LA, many inequalities and forms of gender discrimination persist. The attempt to correct the imbalance in representation faces strong resistances on structural, institutional, and psychosocially levels, making it difficult to change in the short term.

Each country has its own dynamic and institutional reforms that have yet to mature. However, recent events and reforms make us think that the feminine advance in exercising leadership in democratic institutions is going to continue as a gradual but unstoppable process in the 21st century.

As the trend in the rest of the world, women have historically been seriously underrepresented in leadership and political positions in Latin American countries.

This situation hinders not only representation but democracy, political equality, and justice.

An investigation of the specific historical, social, cultural and political problems women face in order to gain political power aids in fully understanding this issue.

Focus on Argentina

Its experience yields a series of lessons that are worth highlighting:

- As the quota law is a means to an end. Its proponents consider it a means to make it possible to attain gender equality and never as an end in itself.
- The use of quotas resulted in an Argentine Chamber of Deputies that was 15% female in 1952, a percentage higher than in any other democracy in the world at that time.
- The first law of allocating slots for gender in national elections of legislators was approved in 1991 with a minimum of 30%.
- Slots applied to the Chamber of Deputies resulted in a fundamental shift: From 1983-1991, only 4% of deputys were women; 1995, it increased to a 28%; and in 2009 to 38.5%, positioning Argentina as the 12th country of the world in the ranking of female representation in National Parliaments.
- In 1997, the World Inter-Parliamentary Conference established that quotas should be fixed around 30% since studies show that by increasing the representation of a minority group in political institutions, they acquire the capacity to raise problems in public agendas and to establish alliances that will favor them.

Generally, three factors seem to be responsible for the lack of female participation and representation in public positions:

1. Process of political socialization
2. Larger structural issues
3. Strong discrimination against women ingrainned in the “macho” culture

Three difficulties women face trying to gain access to political positions are:

a. Political parties acting as “bottle-necks,” making the access to positions of party leadership and candidacies for representative positions more difficult
b. Problem of influence in the superior ranks, giving less authority to women than to men
c. Problems in the interior of institutions as gender minority and as minority in party politics.

One way to increase political participation of women is by promoting proposals for the allocation of “minimum quotas” of female presence in directive positions and in the list of candidates for positions of popular election.

In 1997, the World Inter-Parliamentary Conference established that quotas should be fixed around 30% since studies show that by increasing the representation of a minority group in political institutions, they acquire the capacity to raise problems in public agendas and to establish alliances that will favor them.

Despite obvious women’s advancements in LA, many inequalities and forms of gender discrimination persist. The attempt to correct the imbalance in representation faces strong resistances on structural, institutional, and psychosocially levels, making it difficult to change in the short term.

Each country has its own dynamic and institutional reforms that have yet to mature. However, recent events and reforms make us think that the feminine advance in exercising leadership in democratic institutions is going to continue as a gradual but unstoppable process in the 21st century.

Sponsored by: Dr. Kristina Mao