

Women to the fore: The elections of Presidents Dilma Rousseff, Laura Chinchilla and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (left to right) were milestones for gender equality in Latin America.

INCREASING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

THE ARGUMENT IS OFTEN MADE THAT THERE JUST AREN'T ENOUGH QUALIFIED, COMPETENT WOMEN TO SERVE IN ELECTED OFFICE. (FUNNY, THAT NEVER STOPPED MEN.) HERE ARE THE REAL REASONS WHY—AND WHAT CAN BE DONE.

BY MAGDA HINOJOSA



FROM LEFT: EVARISTO SA/APP/GETTY; MANDEL NGAN/APP/GETTY; ALFREDO ESTRELLA/APP/GETTY

Dilma Rousseff. Laura Chinchilla. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Michelle Bachelet. The political successes of these women should not divert our attention from the sizeable gender imbalance in politics that exists across the region. Slightly more than half of all Latin American citizens are female, but women occupy only one of every seven seats in legislatures—and only one of every 20 mayoral posts in the region.

In fact, the existence of a *presidenta* appears to tell us little about how women fare politically in her country.

Although Dilma Rousseff holds Brazil's highest office, only 8.8 percent of federal deputies in Brazil are women and only 14.3 percent of ministers are women. This is far behind the rest of the region. And despite Michelle Bachelet's success in Chile, women's representation in Chile's national legislature is below the regional average. [SEE TABLE 1] Women have made tremendous gains since the 1970s, when women's representation in Costa Rica's national assembly (at a mere 7 percent) was the highest in the region, and when five countries filled less than 1 percent of their legislative seats with women. The most striking changes in women's legislative representation have come since 2000—not coincidentally, after the majority of Latin American countries adopted gender quotas

TABLE 1
WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Country	Mayors (%) 2007	Council Members (%) 2007	Legislators, Single/Lower House (%) 2010	Legislators, Upper House (%) 2010	Ministers (%) 2007
ARGENTINA	8.5	N.D.	38.5	35.2	25.0
BOLIVIA	4.6	19	25.4	47.2	31.3
BRAZIL	7.5	12.6	8.8	12.3	14.3
CHILE	12.1	26.8	14.2	13.2	36.4
COLOMBIA	9.0	14.5	12.6	16.7	23.1
COSTA RICA	9.9	47.6	38.6	—	37.5
DOMINICAN REP.	11.3	26.9	20.8	9.4	17.6
ECUADOR	6.0	23.0	32.3	—	32.0
EL SALVADOR	8.0	21.0	19.0	—	15.4
GUATEMALA	2.4	5.9	12.0	—	25.0
HONDURAS	8.1	20.4	18.0	—	25.0
MEXICO	3.0	27.6	26.2	19.5	20.0
NICARAGUA	10.4	37.8	20.7	—	31.2
PANAMA	9.3	0.0	8.5	—	21.4
PARAGUAY	5.7	20.6	12.5	15.6	10.0
PERU	2.8	27.8	27.5	—	26.7
URUGUAY	—	—	15.2	12.9	30.8
VENEZUELA	7.2	18.0	17.5	—	18.5

Sources: Data on suffrage: International IDEA, *30 Years of Democracy*, p. 14; data on women mayors and council members: International IDEA, *30 Years of Democracy*, p. 25; data on women ministers: International IDEA, *30 Years of Democracy*, p. 19; data on women's representation in legislatures: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>, last accessed on June 28, 2010. Dominican Republic data was obtained from the same site, last accessed on October 15, 2010. Data on Colombia was last obtained from <http://www.congresovisible.org/congresistas>, last accessed on October 15, 2010.

during the late 1990s. [SEE TABLE 2]

But even in 2010 only one of every five national legislators is a woman.

In executive positions both elected and appointed, women have fared better. A female minister was a rare sight even in the 1990s; today, women routinely occupy ministerial posts. Chile's Michelle Bachelet named the first cabinet in which females and males were equally represented just a few years ago.

Isabel Perón, the incompetent young widow of Juan Perón who was unable to fill the role that Evita had played so well, in 1974 became the first female president in the region. Two decades later in Nicaragua, another

widow of a prominent personality, newspaper publisher Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro, stepped into the presidential office. Only in the past few years, however, have we seen women without family connections elected president of Latin American countries. But there is still great variation across the region.

RESEARCH GAPS

There are a number of things we still don't understand about the reasons for that variation. Why, for example, does Argentina elect so many women to its Chamber of Deputies, while Brazil elects so few?

Academics often discuss differences across countries and attribute them to structural, institutional and cultural variables, but they rarely try to understand the differences within countries. Women's representation varies dramatically even within countries, something that is all too easily forgotten when the most oft-presented data summarizes women's presence in national legislative bodies.

Women's political representation also varies across levels of government. The general rule of thumb globally is that positions elected via proportional representation will result in more female members than those chosen via first-past-the-post elections. Proportional representation is regularly used in the region for legislators and council members. First-past-the-post elections are routine for electing executives such as mayors, governors and presidents. These electoral rules have real consequences for women.

Indeed, this holds true in Latin America. Women occupy fewer than one of every 10 mayoral positions in all but three of the countries of the region. Chilean women are best represented in this post: 12.1 percent

SLIGHTLY MORE THAN HALF OF ALL LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS ARE FEMALE, BUT WOMEN OCCUPY ONLY ONE OF EVERY SEVEN SEATS IN LEGISLATURES—AND ONLY ONE OF EVERY 20 MAYORAL POSTS IN THE REGION.

of mayors were women in 2007. In Guatemala, only 2.4 percent of mayors were women. But even in countries where women are extraordinarily well-represented as legislators, female mayors are rare. In Argentina, only 8.5 percent of mayors currently are women; in Costa Rica, it is 9.9 percent.

Female council members are considerably more commonplace, and in most Latin American countries women are better represented on municipal councils than in national legislatures. While Panama and Guatemala have very low levels of female council members, in Costa Rica 47.6 percent of council members are women and in Nicaragua—which, unlike Costa Rica, has no gender quotas—37.8 percent of council members are women.

In unelected executive ministerial positions, there are also variations by country. In Argentina, one of every four ministers is a woman. In Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, the number drops to one of every three posts. Paraguay is the clear laggard: only 10 percent of its ministers are female.

And despite all the excitement over the recent elections of women executives, one can still sadly count on two hands the number of female presidents in the region—though this still places Latin America ahead of much of the world.

WHERE'S THE PARTY?

Political parties are a significant factor in explaining the differences in women's representation across countries.¹ We can see this by looking at national legislatures.

For example, in Nicaragua, the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) holds 38 seats in the National Assembly; 14 of these are occupied by women. The next-largest political party has 25 deputies, but only two are women. While 37 percent of the legislators in the FSLN are women, only 8 percent of representatives from the *Partido Liberal Constitucionalista* are female.

In Peru, which uses a national gender quota, differences among political parties are still substantial. The *fujimorista* coalition, which nominated Keiko Fujimori in the 2011 presidential election, has more female representation than other parties (42 percent); only one of the seven deputies from the much smaller *Unión por el Perú* party is a woman. In Argentina, the prototypical gender quota success story, we still see significant differences. Women make up 64 percent of legislators from *Propuesta Republicana*, but only 21 percent from the *Unión Cívica Radical*. Surprisingly, ideology (and parties' positions on women-friendly policies) has almost no effect on the proportion of women that a party nominates or elects.

These substantial differences across political parties necessitate that policy prescriptions address the important role political parties can play in ameliorating the situation of women in the region.

The introduction of quota laws has led to dramatic changes, but those laws are not solely responsible for the changes we have seen. (Nor can they explain why we continue to see substantial differences across political parties.) Between 1970 and 1980, women quintupled their representation in Peru, almost quadrupled their representation in Argentina's Chamber of Deputies, tripled their numbers in the Dominican Republic, and doubled their numbers in Panama. But the first gender quota law was not adopted until 1991.

Although quotas have been successful in some countries, such as Argentina and Costa Rica, they have had no effect in Brazil. Gender quotas must be carefully designed to yield the desired results. We know that quotas are more likely to be effective in closed-list proportional systems with high party magnitudes. But even in those cases, quotas should be written with placement mandates to avoid having women pooled at the bottom, or they should require that male and female names alternate on lists. Most important, quotas must have "teeth."

WHEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY, CITIZENS ARE WILLING TO VOTE FOR WOMEN, EVEN FOR THE HIGHEST OFFICE. THERE IS ALSO A SMALL SUBSET OF VOTERS WHO PREFER TO ELECT WOMEN.

A quota without clear and strict enforcement mechanisms is unlikely to lead to much change.

Even when quotas are effective, they can only do so much. As Kristen Sample of International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), an intergovernmental organization that aims to support democratic reform efforts, has written, quotas “can’t guarantee more women presidents, governors or mayors” and “can’t keep women in politics.”²

Moreover, there is no guarantee that quotas will be permanent. In Venezuela, quotas were ruled unconstitutional and were revoked in 2000, only three years after the initial quota legislation was passed. And some quotas, like the one soon to be implemented in Uruguay, have been written with a corresponding expiration date.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO INCREASE WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION?

Polls conducted in 2008 for the Latin American Public Opinion Project revealed that the majority of Latin Americans (84 percent on average) felt that women should participate in politics “just the same as men.”

They are certainly not doing so today. What can be done to produce more equitable participation?

One frequently used argument is that there just isn't a pool of qualified women ready to enter politics in the region. But my recent book demonstrates that women's underrepresentation in politics is the result of bottlenecks at the candidate recruitment and selection stages. In other words, to understand the variations in women's political representation, and to address the most serious inequities, we must examine (and address) what occurs within political parties, which overwhelmingly control candidate recruitment and selection.

This places the onus squarely on political parties.

How do we know that a lack of qualified female can-

didates is not the explanation for women's low levels of political representation? Across the region, women are delaying marriage, postponing childbearing, and having fewer children (2.5 on average). In much of Latin America today, women have achieved educational parity with men. Mexican women were 36 percent of university students by 1970, 42 percent of university students by 1980, and reached parity by the end of the 1990s.

Latin American women are more likely now than they have ever been to work outside the home. Women's participation in the labor force increased dramatically during the previous century, tripling between 1960 and 1990, and continued to rise due to women's increased educational attainment.³ These enormous changes in women's lives indicate the existence of a pool of qualified women who can enter politics. Women's participation in other political forms—as voters, as campaign volunteers, and as social movement participants—indicates their readiness to do so.

Does voter bias explain why women remain so unequal? The limited polling data available in the region appear to suggest that, when given the opportunity, citizens are willing to vote for women, even for the highest office. There is also a small subset of voters who prefer to elect women. As one Mexican mayor observed, “More than a few times people said to me, ‘I’m going to vote for you because you’re a woman.’ They just don’t have as much faith in male politicians anymore. People have the idea that male legislators are corrupt.” Stereotypical views of women may sometimes benefit female candidates.

A critical step in moving women to elected offices is improving procedures for selecting candidates. My own research indicates that parties often undermine their own efforts to increase women's political participation by adopting inappropriate candidate selection processes and rules. For example, many political parties have turned to using primaries without recognizing the obstacles these pose to women. One of these obstacles is

MEDIA AND WOMEN

NINA AGRAWAL

financial: women are less likely to have control over the family's purse strings, less likely to gamble their family's financial future on an uncertain political win, and less likely to have the personal resources or connections to finance both a primary election and a general election. Candidate selection in Latin America today is particularly open to reform. Political parties have recently been experimenting with different selection procedures, and national rules have been altered over the past two decades. This presents an opportunity to adopt women-friendly practices and refrain from processes that limit women's opportunities.

Parties also need to set aside funds for women candidates to use in general elections or should encourage outside groups to raise such funds. Susan Franceschet, a professor of political science at the University of Calgary, documents Chilean politician Adriana Muñoz' thoughts on the problem of election financing for women: "Men have access to circles or networks where money is lent—they are friends with bank managers. But we are not supported this way. For us, it's pretty complicated, this arena of power and money."⁴

The obstacles to financing campaigns can thus deter women from entering politics.

With limited resources available to Latin American political parties, party leadership should encourage the formation of organizations—both within and outside its ranks—that provide financial support, training or services to women candidates, and encourage their female members to seek the support of such organizations.

The political action committee EMILY's List in the United States is an example of what can be done. It has provided financial backing and support to pro-choice women running for office. Similarly, nongovernmental organizations in Ethiopia encouraged political parties to nominate women by providing much-needed office supplies and campaign materials to parties fielding female candidates.⁵

Parties must work to identify and recruit potential female candidates. Party leaders have too often been blind to the abundance of female talent among their own rank and file. Women represent 51 percent of party members in the region. Yet parties routinely neglect to even maintain gender-disaggregated membership lists.⁶

Collecting data on girls and young women active in youth wings would provide political parties with another recruitment opportunity. Women's sections can create databases containing data on the backgrounds of female party members to encourage the selection of fe-

New communications technologies have given the media industry an expanded toolkit to advocate for women's rights and gender equality in the twenty-first century. Here are a few highlights.

MAD MEN FOR WOMEN

In 2008 Nike, Inc., which aired the groundbreaking 1995 television ad "If You Let Me Play" to encourage girls' participation in sports, launched "The Girl Effect," a \$100 million campaign to empower adolescent girls in developing countries. The campaign, in cooperation with the Nike and Novo Foundations, has produced two short web videos that depict the ripple effects investing in a girl can have on her family, community and local economy, such as using the profits of a small business to feed her family. The videos have been viewed 3.7 million times on YouTube.

BUILDING OFF "I LOVE LUCY"

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media convenes meetings of entertainment industry leaders and content creators to advocate for more—and more varied—portrayals of girls and women. They offer a compelling argument: the institute's research team has found that males outnumber fe-

males three to one on screen in family films—and nearly five to one behind the camera.

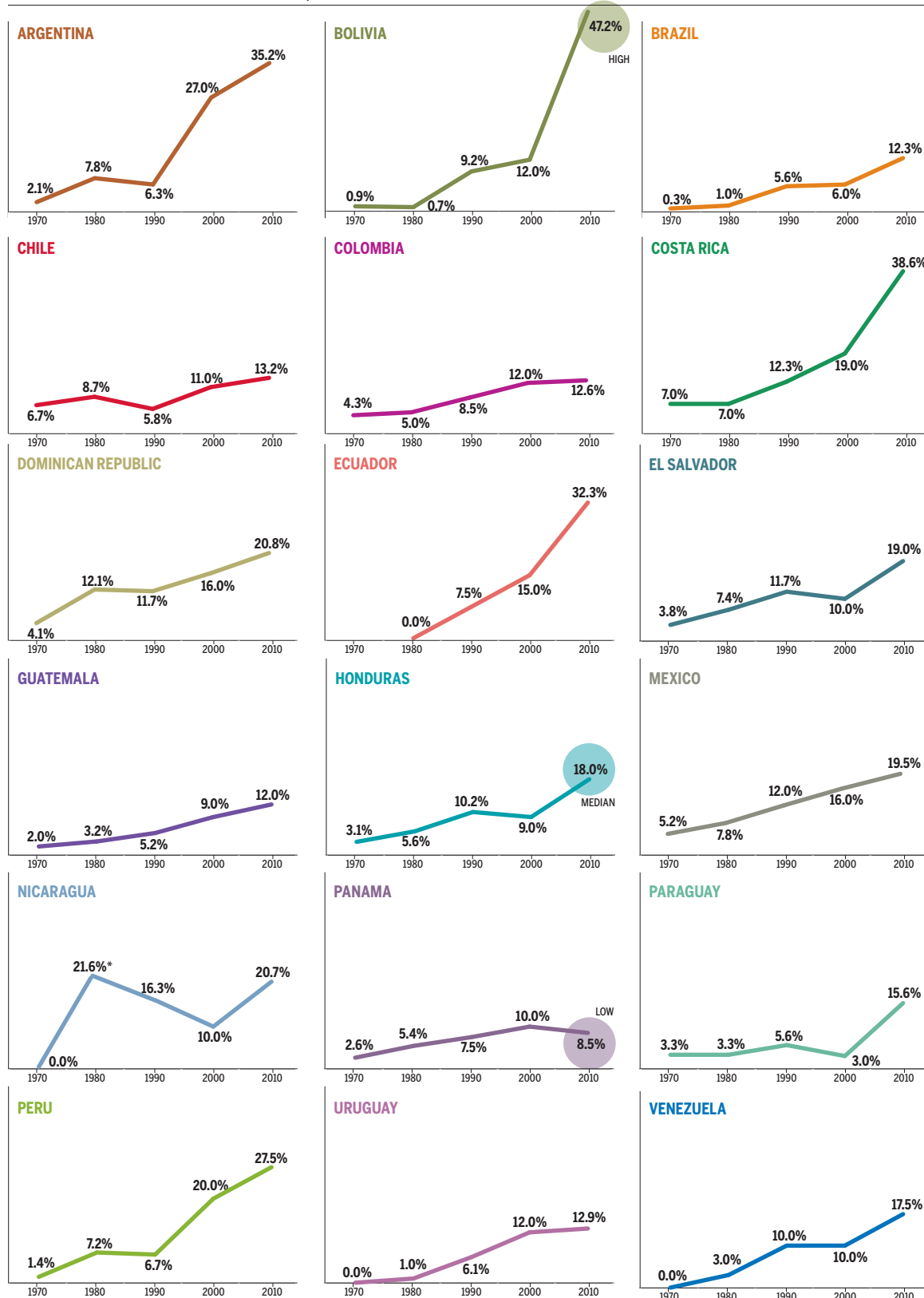
THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

Ahead of International Women's Day 2012, Bollocks to Poverty, the U.K. youth network of ActionAid, created a "Life in the 1950s" Facebook app, in which users remake their profiles according to the gender norms of a half-century ago. Gender equality also moved into the 140-character space this year, with "Happy International Women's Day" and #IWD trending on Twitter.

INVOLVING THE PUBLIC SECTOR

"Women and Girls Lead," a multi-year campaign launched in 2011 by the Independent Television Service, Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Public Broadcasting Service, features documentary films that "amplify the voices" of women and girls effecting change around the world. The documentaries are broadcast on television, streamed online, presented at live screenings, and complemented by educational curricula and multimedia games. *Troop 1500*, for example, depicts five Girl Scouts whose mothers are in prison; *Kind-Hearted Woman* is a portrait of a Native American woman battling domestic violence in her community.

TABLE 2
WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN LATIN AMERICAN LEGISLATURES, 1970–2010
PERCENT OF WOMEN LEGISLATORS, LOWER/SINGLE CHAMBER



Sources: 2010 data on women's representation in legislatures: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>, last accessed on October 15, 2010. Data for 2000 is also available from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) website. All data for 1970, 1980 and 1990 was assembled by the author using data found in the IPU publication *Women in Parliaments, 1945-1990*. Please note that many of these countries were not continuously democratic between 1970 and 2010; consequently, the legislature may have been suspended during the year for which data is provided. Therefore, data in each of these columns represents the election of that year or of the closest previous election.

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male candidates and prevent political elites from claiming that they have been unable to find enough qualified women candidates. This strategy has proven successful in the Netherlands and Canada.⁷

Parties should also consider forming working groups to propose female nominees. Data from Canada show that when parties use search committees, they choose more women candidates.⁸ In Latin America, civil society organizations, where women have played an active leadership role, could be a rich source of political candidates, but parties routinely fail to make connections with these groups.

Non-party organizations, such as NGOs, can also play an active role in identifying and recruiting potential female candidates. El Salvador's Women '94, an organization comprising several women's groups, identified possible female candidates for the 1994 elections.⁹ A Sri Lankan organization prepared and distributed videos to prominent women whom the group believed could be viable candidates.¹⁰ In the U.S., the White House Project provides electronic postcards to recruit women to run for office.¹¹ Anyone can log on to the organization's website and encourage a talented woman to enter politics; this type of push might be the impetus that someone considering a run needs, or it could introduce the idea of a political career to an individual who never previously imagined one. Research by professors Richard Fox and Jennifer Lawless in the U.S. found that women are more likely than men to require external encouragement to seek office. Electronic postcards (or even snail mail cards) are a low-cost strategy that could be used by groups across Latin America to encourage women to enter politics.

Governments can encourage party actions that promote women's representation. They can provide benefits or incentives such as tax credits to parties that nominate and elect women—as, for example, is done in Canada.¹² In East Timor, as in many countries across Latin America, political parties that place women in high po-

sitions on candidate lists are rewarded with more free advertising time on television and radio than parties that do not make the effort.¹³

The amount of public financing for parties can be directly pegged to a party's efforts to recruit and field women candidates. Costa Rica and Panama already do this, requiring that a set percentage of public financing go to women's political training and participation.¹⁴

Finally, political parties, civil society organizations, and the state can play an active role in training women for politics.

The National Democratic Institute, a nonprofit organization working to strengthen democracy worldwide, provided political training to over 2,000 women in Bolivia to increase the number of female candidacies in the 2004 municipal elections; 93 of these women were nominated by their parties.¹⁵ In Chile, the national woman's agency SERNAM has also provided this type of training to women who wish to enter politics.

There is no magic formula for increasing the profile of women in politics; not even quotas are a cure-all. But political parties can do much more to give Latin American women the opportunity to compete on a more equal basis with men—and ensure that political leadership at every level reflects the voices and needs of half the population. As Susana Villarán de la Puente, mayor of Lima, said, "There is a serious problem: even though women are very well prepared [to enter politics], the parties are not preparing women."¹⁶

Magda Hinojosa is assistant professor of political science at Arizona State University. Her book *Selecting Women, Electing Women: Political Representation and Candidate Selection in Latin America* will be published by Temple University Press this summer.

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