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PRESENCE WITHOUT EMPOWERMENT?
WOMEN IN POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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Introduction

Women's participation in politics in Latin America and the Caribbean has grown steadily in the last ten years. Their share of parliamentary seats rose from an average of 13 percent in 2000 to 21 percent in 2010.[1] Yet there are important differences across countries and sub regions. Countries with statutory gender quota laws tend to have greater numbers of women in power. The influence of quotas outweighs the effects of economic development and other socioeconomic indicators. For this reason, fewer women have gained access to elective office in the Caribbean than in Latin America.

Women's growing political participation correlates with supportive public attitudes. The vast majority of Latin American and Caribbean publics express the belief that women make good political leaders. Presence in power has also correlated with change to some policies related to women's rights. Most countries have adopted measures to prevent and punish violence against women. LAC nations have also passed laws criminalizing sex discrimination and guaranteeing equal access to employment and education; many have further introduced conditional cash transfer programs that improve women's well being. Yet policy change on one issue remains elusive: abortion. Latin American countries—with the exception of Mexico City—preside over restrictive abortion laws that are out of sync with social practices and global trends. Laws in the Caribbean are slightly more permissive but only one country—Guyana—permits elective abortion.

This paper analyzes the political participation on women in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). We examine trends in the region as a whole, as well as trends in South America, Central America, and the Anglophone Caribbean. Central America includes Mexico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. The Anglophone Caribbean includes Belize, the English-speaking countries of mainland South America (Guyana and Suriname), and the English-speaking islands which are either fully independent (Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago) or part of the British Commonwealth (Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines).

Countries in South America and Central America are presidential democracies: they hold separate elections for the president and the legislature. Countries in the Anglophone Caribbean are parliamentary democracies, though some nations elect a parliament *and* a president, and the president then appoints the prime minister.[2] The structure of the legislative branch—a unicameral or bicameral assembly—is mixed throughout the LAC region, though representatives to the upper houses in the Anglophone Caribbean are appointed rather than elected.

Women in the Executive

LAC countries have a long tradition of electing women as heads of state. In the Anglophone Caribbean, three women have served as prime minister: Maria Eugenia Charles of Dominica (1980-1995), Portia Simpson-Miller of Jamaica (2006-2007), and Kamla Persad-

[1] Data from 2000 is drawn from Htun (2001). Data from 2010 is drawn from the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Averages exclude the Anglophone Caribbean.
[2] The one exception is Suriname, where the assembly elects the president.

Bissessar of Trinidad and Tobago (2010-present). In addition, Janet Jagan served as president of Guyana (1997-1999).

In Latin America, the region's first female presidents—both widows of prominent political figures--emerged in Central America: Violeta Chamorro in Nicaragua (1990-1994) and Mireya Moscoso in Panama (1999-2004). Bolivia, Haiti, and Ecuador had women presidents who served terms of less than one year in.

More recently, Michele Bachelet served as president of Chile (2006-2010). She has been followed by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner of Argentina (2007-2011), Laura Chinchilla of Costa Rica (2010-2014), and Dilma Rousseff of Brazil (2011-2015). Of the 33 countries in the LAC region, nine have elected female presidents or prime ministers to serve full terms, an achievement unparalleled elsewhere in the developing world.

Women's increasing share of cabinet positions also marks a significant change, as shown in Figure 1. In 2000, women comprised ten percent of ministers in South America and 16 percent of ministers in Mexico and Central America; in 2010, these figures had increased to 22 percent and 21 percent, respectively.[3] Nonetheless, these 2010 averages obscure large amounts of variation, as shown in Figure 2. South America and Central America have similar proportions of female ministers, making the average for Latin America combined 22 percent. Yet, the standard deviation is 12 percent. Some chief executives have appointed cabinets upholding the principle of gender parity (half female and half male), including Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and Evo Morales during his second term in Bolivia; other countries have only one female minister, as in Paraguay and El Salvador.

In the Anglophone Caribbean, women hold fewer cabinet positions (an average of 15 percent of ministerial portfolios). The smaller standard deviation (seven percent) compared to that of Latin America implies there is less variation across countries in the sub region. Though Belize has *no* female ministers, while Guyana and Grenada have over 20 percent, most countries have roughly 15 percent. Further, and contrary to conventional wisdom about the positive relationship between economic development and women's empowerment, the higher a country's GDP per capita in the Caribbean, the *lower* the proportion of female cabinet ministers.

What's more, women are disproportionately clustered in the "soft" portfolios (Taylor-Robinson and Health 2005). In a trend that has changed little over time, women tend to control portfolios such as social services, education, tourism, culture, and housing. Several ministers in the Anglophone Caribbean hold hybrid "soft" portfolios, such as "Education, Sports, Youth, and Gender Affairs" (as in Antigua and Barbuda) or "Education and Human Resources Development" (as in Dominica).

In Latin America, female ministers also concentrate in these less-powerful policy areas, though they have made greater inroads into the "hard" domains of commerce, industry, foreign affairs, work, development, and finance. Female ministers have gained access to these power portfolios with greater frequency in South America than in Mexico and Central

[3] Data on women in national cabinets is drawn from the United States Central Intelligence Agency 2010 World Leaders Database. Data from 2000 is from Htun (2001).

America, though women *throughout* the LAC are likely to serve as central bank presidents and ambassadors to the United Nations.

Women have faced greater barriers gaining access to executive authority at the subnational level. Few women have been elected as governor in LAC's federal countries. Argentina elected its first female governors in 2007, Mexico and Brazil have elected only a handful of female governors since the mid-1980s. Across the LAC region, women hold an average of nine percent of mayoral posts, as shown in Figure 3.[4] This marks an improvement over 1990 and 2000, when women made up some five percent of mayors (Htun 2001), but is far lower than women's share of legislative positions.

Why are women scarce in executive office? The posts of governor and mayor are highly valuable to politicians and parties because they control local budgets (political "pork"). Trends toward decentralization have tended to enhance the powers associated with local office. As a result, competition for these positions is fierce. Franceschet and Piscopo (2011) find that women in the Argentine national congress, who otherwise bear an impressive array of political credentials, are significantly less likely than male legislators previously to have occupied "high pork" offices such as governor and mayor.

The mode of electing people to executive office also tends to disadvantage women. In elections held according to majority or plurality rule principles and where only one position is being contested, parties tend to field the strongest candidates, which tend to be men. Women generally do better in races held according to proportional representation and when there are many seats to be filled per district (high district magnitude). This gives parties an incentive to "balance the ticket" with a diverse slate of candidates (Matland 2002; Norris 2004)

Women are far more likely to gain access to legislative than executive office at the local level. Figure 3 shows that women comprise 21 percent of city councilors in LAC, roughly their share of national parliaments.

Women's Presence in National Legislatures

Women's presence in national office has grown significantly in recent decades. Figure 4 shows this growth across time. In Latin America as a whole, as well as in the sub regions, women's legislative representation in single or lower houses of parliament has climbed steadily, from well below 5 percent in the 1980s to over 20 percent in 2010. In the wider LAC region in 2010, women constituted 18 percent of the members in the lower or single houses and nearly 24 percent of the upper houses.

These averages conceal important variations by sub-region and by country (see Table 1 for data broken down by country.). Women's presence in single or lower houses of parliament is higher in Latin America than in the Anglophone Caribbean. When it comes to the Senate, the opposite occurs: women are far more numerous in Caribbean senates. This interesting

[4] Data on women's political participation at the local level is drawn from the 2010 Gender Equality Observatory, organized and published by the United Nations' Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Data from the Anglophone Caribbean is limited to Belize, Dominica, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. Data on the proportion of women mayors in Jamaica is from the country's Bureau of Women's Affairs.

phenomenon owes to the fact that most senators in the sub region are *appointed* rather than elected.

What explains cross-national differences in women's election? The most important factor is the presence or absence of a gender quota law. Currently applied in twelve countries in LAC (a thirteenth country, Uruguay, will apply its law in 2014), these *statutory quotas*—laws or constitutional amendments—require that women constitute a certain percentage of a party's candidates in legislative elections. The threshold percentages vary from 50 percent in Bolivia, to 40 percent in Costa Rica, Argentina, and Mexico, to 33 percent or lower in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Honduras, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.[5] Most quota laws are found in South or Central America: Guyana is the only Anglophone Caribbean country to apply a statutory quota (See Table 2).

Figure 5 shows women's legislative presence in the LAC region and sub-regions. Latin American countries with gender quotas elect more women than countries without them: women's share of the single or lower house of parliament is 23 percent in quota systems compared to 18 percent in non-quota systems.[6] Women tend to do better in the single or lower houses of South America and Central America, due to the presence of quotas, and worse in the single or lower houses of the Anglophone Caribbean, where only Guyana employs a quota.

The presence of quotas also explains the sub regional trends in women's representation in the senate. Women's presence is lowest in the Central American sub-region, large due to the case of Haiti. Whereas quotas ensure that women constitute 26 percent of the Mexican Senate and 21 percent of the Dominican Republic's Senate, the absence of quotas means that women make up only 7 percent of the Haitian Senate.

In South America, by contrast, quotas apply to the senate, and women do quite well. The Andean region (Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia) stands out in particular: in South America overall, women constitute 21 percent of lower house representatives, and 20 percent of upper house representatives. In the Andes, they comprise 24 percent and 29 percent of the upper and lower house legislators, respectively. In the Anglophone Caribbean women are also highly represented in the senate, though here senators are appointed rather than elected.

The effects of quotas overwhelm the relationship between economic development, education, and other socioeconomic indicators on women's presence in power. There is little correlation between a country's development level and the proportion of women in parliament. The Bahamas, for instance, has the highest GDP per capita for the region (over 20,000 USD), but a relatively low proportion of women in power (12 percent in the upper house).[7] Likewise, Ecuador has a relatively low GDP per capita (less than 5,000 USD) but high levels of women's representation (32 percent in the lower house). For LAC as a whole, the correlation between GDP and women in parliament is *negative* for the single or lower

[5] Uruguay has adopted a statutory quota, which apply *only* for the 2013 legislative elections. Since the quota's implementation has not yet occurred, we do not count Uruguay as having a quota.
[6] Averages do not include the Anglophone Caribbean.
[7] 2009 World Bank Data, in current U.S. Dollars.

house and *positive* for the upper house; both relationships, however, are weak and indeterminate.

Examining the trends by sub-region reveals distinctive patterns, however. Whether or not a region has gender quotas affects the relationship between economic development and women's presence in power. In the Anglophone Caribbean and in Central America, where quota laws are less common, there exists a positive, and strong correlation between GDP per capita and women's presence in power. In South America, where quotas predominate, the opposite occurs: GDP per capita and women's presence are *negatively* correlated.

Consistent patterns also fail to appear when considering LAC countries' scores on the Human Development Index (HDI).[8] Latin American countries with relatively high levels of human development such as Argentina and Costa Rica *do* elect high proportions of women to their legislatures. But similarly ranked countries such as Panama and Chile elect very few women. Mixed evidence also appears in the Anglophone Caribbean. Barbados, the Bahamas, and Trinidad and Tobago all score very highly on human development, but Barbados and the Bahamas elect very few women (10 percent and 12 percent in their respective lower houses), while Trinidad and Tobago stands out for its high proportion of female legislators (nearly 29 percent, the second highest in the Caribbean, and topped only by Guyana, which employs a quota).

Similarly, countries that score better on the United Nations' Gender Inequality Index do *not* necessarily have more women in parliament. Barbados, for instance, receives the highest gender equality score for all the LAC, but elects few women; the vast majority of LAC countries receive poor gender equality scores but have parliaments where fewer than 10 percent of seats are held by women (Panama) to houses where women hold more than 30 percent of seats (Ecuador). Only for the Central American sub-region does high gender inequality consistently correlate with low women's representation; for the Anglophone Caribbean and for South America, the relationship is nonexistent. What's more, antecedent levels of gender inequality do not predict whether or not a nation will adopt a quota law.

By contrast, a tentative relationship appears to hold between women's overall educational attainment and their entrance into national legislatures. In the LAC region, adult women's literacy rates are very high, averaging 90 percent, with lower rates appearing in Central America and higher rates appearing in the Anglophone Caribbean and South America.[9] While the correlation between women's literacy and women's greater legislative representation is positive in both Central America and the Anglophone Caribbean, there appears an *inverse* correlation between literacy and legislative representation in South America. Again, we see that the strength of statutory quotas in the South American sub-region accounts for women's electoral success and supersedes the anticipated negative effects of underdevelopment.

More interesting comparisons derive from women's and men's educational attainment. With few exceptions, women in LAC will spend *more* years in school than men: the average expected years of school for Latin American and Caribbean women is 13.3, compared to 12.7

[8] 2008 Gender Inequality Index (formerly called the Gender Development Index) and 2010 Human Development Index, as calculated and reported by the United Nations.
[9] 2008 Literacy rates are from the World Bank's "GenderStats" database.

for men. Women are also enrolled in secondary and tertiary school in greater numbers than men.[10] Nonetheless, LAC women's educational advantage does not translate into a political advantage. With the exception of Argentina, all LAC countries where women average one or two years more school than men also elect women in numbers *below* the regional average. Thus, women's greater educational attainment does not correlate with women's higher legislative representation.

Though the effects of quotas are strong, they are not a panacea. Research has demonstrated that quota laws alone are insufficient to guarantee big jumps in women's political representation. Additional factors—including the type of electoral system, the details of the law, and vigorous implementation—are equally important (Jones 2009; Htun and Jones 2002).

Quotas work best when *party magnitude* is high. *Party magnitude*—a concept derived from district magnitude (the number of legislators elected per district)--refers to the number of legislators elected from a district that belong to a particular party.[11] The higher the number, the greater the likelihood that the group will include women as parties pull politicians from deeper positions on their party lists (Matland 2002; Jones 1996).

Next, quotas are more likely to be effective in a closed-list proportional representation electoral system. Quotas typically require that women's names are placed on the list so as to alternate with men's names. These "placement mandates" preclude parties from clustering female candidates at the bottom of the list, where they stand little chance of getting elected.

In addition, quota statutes must eliminate loopholes, stipulate oversight mechanisms, and dictate penalties for noncompliance. In Mexico, for instance, political parties are exempt from filling the quota if they choose candidates via internal primaries, but the Federal Electoral Institute lacks the capacity to certify parties' claims that primaries have indeed occurred (Baldez 2008). In Argentina, by contrast, there are no exemptions to party compliance. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal has a long history of excluding noncompliant parties from electoral competition (Marx et al 2007).

In sum, the effects of quotas are uneven throughout Latin America. In Argentina and Costa Rica, quotas ensure that women make up around 40 percent of congress but in Panama, even with quotas, women hold just nine percent of the seats.[12] In no case has women's presence exceeded the threshold of the quota. Political parties generally treat quota percentages as ceilings, not floors.

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[10] Data on men's and women's average years of schooling, as well as on the female:male ratio of secondary school enrollment is from the year 2008 and is from the World Bank's "GenderStats" database.

[11] As Matland and others argue, district magnitude can be high but party magnitude low if there are many parties competing and gaining seats.

[12] Data on women's legislative representation is drawn from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, with two exceptions. Data on Colombia was taken from the non-governmental organization *Congreso Visible* and data on Venezuela was taken from the official website of the Venezuelan Assembly. All figures are from the more recent legislative election.

Women's Representation and Public Opinion

Studies suggest that citizens in LAC hold views favorable to women's leadership. The World Values Survey includes a question asking respondents whether or not they agree with the statement that "men make better political leaders than women." Table 3 lists the percentage of LAC respondents who "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed."

As the table shows, the overwhelming majority believe that women are equally capable of political leadership. There are slight variations across countries. Public endorsement of women's leadership is strongest in Peru and Trinidad and Tobago. In Chile and the Dominican Republic, support for women is weaker than in other countries, though most still believe they make good political leaders.

Another important question concerns the extent to which women's presence in power shapes public attitudes. Though many people have argued that women's leadership would promote greater support for gender equality among the public at large (c.f. Htun 2003), there is little systematic evidence to support this claim. Others have contended that women leaders would increase public confidence in political institutions or increase the political engagement of female citizens (Schwindt Bayer and Mishler 2005; Lawless 2004). Empirical tests, however, find little support for these propositions. Zetterberg's study in Mexico, for example, revealed no relationship between women's leadership and public beliefs in the legitimacy of political parties and legislatures; nor was there a relationship between women's election and the increased political interest of female citizens (Zetterberg 2011).

Representation of Gender Interests

Does women's greater presence in power lead to policy outcomes more favorable to women's rights? The trends identified in this paper show that women are achieving greater inclusion in political office. Yet inclusion does not lead automatically to the substantive activity of representation. Changing policies to benefit women involves the introduction of bills and amendments, lobbying, voting, consciousness-raising, speeches, issuing executive decrees and administrative decisions, and other myriad political tasks.

An additional concern is whether women are sufficiently powerful and influential to secure policy change. Even when they act in favor of women's interests by making speeches and introducing legislation, women politicians may be unable to get legislation, budgets, or executive decisions approved. Women face numerous obstacles to achieving policy success. For instance, they may encounter principled opposition to their proposals; they may be excluded from a busy committee agenda; or they may lack the political clout to insure their proposals are discussed in plenary sessions.

Franceschet and Piscopo's study of the Argentine congress confirms that women will act on behalf of other women but also illustrates some of the obstacles to making feminist policy (2008). Women's rising presence led to greater advocacy for progressive policies on violence against women, reproductive health, labor rights, and sexual harassment; this advocacy occurred because most female legislators recognized a mandate to promote gender equality policies, Yet bills related to women's rights were more than twice as likely to fail as other types of bills. Lacking the support of party presidents and chairs of congressional

committees, the bills sponsored by female legislators tended to die before they arrived for a full vote in the plenary (Ibid: 416-7).

Research has shown that across Latin American countries, women tend to be clustered in the legislatures' less prestigious committees, which are those dealing with social issues. Women also tend to be overrepresented in committees devoted to women's, family, or gender issues. Women are virtually excluded from powerful committees (such as those distributing federal funds) and from those dealing with economics and foreign affairs (Heath, Schwindt-Bayer, and Taylor-Robinson 2005). Yet in some cases, women may specialize in social policy and gender policy because of their professional background and expressed preferences. Zetterberg's study of Mexican state legislatures found that women often asked to be placed on justice and education committees. They rarely requested the more powerful finance and budget committees (2008).

Women politicians in the executive branch also face barriers to policy advocacy. As is the case with their counterparts in the legislative branch, women have tended to occupy "soft" ministerial positions, though the pattern has changed. Many more women have been appointed to head foreign ministries (Mexico, Colombia) and defense ministries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia) than was the case in the 1990s (Schwindt Bayer 2007).

Scattered evidence suggests that many women ministers have introduced small policy changes to support women's rights. In Argentina, for example, the female Minister of Defense created a department on gender issues and revoked a rule requiring pregnant women to be discharged from the armed forces.[13]

Among female heads of state, Michele Bachelet of Chile stands out as the most vocal supporter of women's rights. Her government included a cabinet picked according to gender parity principles. In addition, she expanded Chilean women's access to contraception, passed laws that protected working mothers from employment discrimination, and presented an (unsuccessful) quota bill to the Chilean Congress (Jaquette 2010; Franceschet 2010). Other female heads of state, such as Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina, have eschewed the "feminist" label and distanced themselves from organized constituencies of women.

Policy Changes

Progressive policy changes have occurred in some policy areas but not others. Change has been far more likely on violence against women and gender quotas. These policies advance the status of women as a group but do not confront religious doctrine (Htun and Weldon 2010). On abortion, a far more contentious issue, policies have remained largely unchanged for half a century or longer.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Latin American and Caribbean countries made considerable progress on policies to prevent and punish violence against women (VAW). Htun and Weldon (n.d.) develop a ten-point scale to evaluate and compare policy on VAW. A score of ten means that a country has a comprehensive array of policies on domestic and sexual

[13] Piscopo, Interview with civil society leader Buenos Aires, Argentina, July 2, 2009; Htun interview at defense ministry December 2009.

violence, including shelters, rape crisis centers, and other facilities; public awareness campaigns; training programs for judges, police, and other law enforcement personnel. Their data show that policies in the ten Latin American countries included in their study evolved from an average of 0 in 1975 (no measures to address VAW) to over six in 2005. Specific scores for each country from 1975 to 2005, as well as the decade averages, are presented in Table 4. As the table shows, Cuba's inaction on VAW depresses the regional average.

These advances owe to the combined effort of women's movements in civil society, women politicians, and transnational advocacy networks. Multi-level and multi-sectoral activism helped consolidate international and regional norms (embodied in treaties such as the Inter-American Convention on Violence Against Women, adopted by the Organization of American States in 1994). Activists then brought these norms home: they mobilized to raise public awareness and to lobby governments for policy change. In legislatures across Latin America, female politicians formed coalitions for change and convinced male legislators to support their proposals (Stevenson 1999; Piscopo 2011; Walsh 2011; Htun and Weldon n.d.)

Case studies from the Anglophone Caribbean reveal fewer policy changes than in Latin America. By the 2000s, all countries except Suriname had passed legislation addressing gender-based violence. Yet these statutes—which recognize psychological violence and assign severe criminal penalties—are confined largely to cases of domestic violence. Laws fail to address situations when a woman's assailant is *not* a family member or intimate partner (Robinson 2000; Robinson 2004). Some statutes fail to recognize marital rape (as in the Bahamas) or stranger assault (as in Barbados) (Robinson 2007).

In the Caribbean, most domestic violence cases are heard in family courts, which tend to emphasize reconciliation instead of protection of the victim and punishment of the perpetrator (Lazarus Black 2008). These courts are overburdened and bureaucratic systems are weak. As a result, most of the advocacy work—raising awareness about domestic violence and providing victim services—is undertaken not by Caribbean governments but by foreign aid organizations (donor governments and the United Nations) and grassroots groups (Muturi and Donald 2006).

Legal change on other women's issues has developed unevenly in the Anglophone Caribbean. The Constitution of Guyana affirms women's right to equal participation with men in all aspects of public life and mandates laws to recognize women's participation in management in the public and private sector (Vassell 2006). But the Constitutions of Jamaica and Barbados do *not* recognize sex as a basis for freedom from discrimination (Barrett 2005; Robinson 2007). Only Belize, the Bahamas, and St. Lucia have legislation that recognizes sexual harassment as a criminal offense (Robinson 2004). A draft of sexual harassment legislation has languished within the assembly of St. Kitts and Nevis since 2000 (Rollins 2009).

In the entire LAC region, abortion laws have changed the least, as shown in Table 5. In an era when women's rights underwent dramatic change not only in Latin America but in the broader world, abortion laws did not change. With the exception of Colombia, no Latin American country has liberalized restrictive laws on abortion. Colombia's changes, introduced through a Constitutional Court decision in 2006, added rape and mental health to the limited grounds under which abortion is not subject to criminal punishment. Only

one subnational entity—Mexico City—decriminalized the practice, though this move provoked a backlash as 17 Mexican states amended their constitutions to protect life at the moment of conception (Htun 2010: 15).

In fact, laws in Latin America have become more restrictive over time. Three countries (Chile, El Salvador, and Nicaragua) that used to permit abortion under very limited circumstances have now banned the procedure completely, even when the mother's life is in danger. For this reason, the average scores in the Mexican and Central American sub region shows a slight decline over time (see table 6).

Abortion laws in the Anglophone Caribbean tend to be more liberal than in Latin America (see averages compared in table 6). This does not mean that abortions are actually affordable and available to all citizens, however. Only Guyana provides unrestricted, safe, and affordable access to abortion services (Antrobus 2006).

In sum, the depth and breadth of gender policy in Latin America and the Caribbean is as varied as the numbers of women in public office. In the Anglophone Caribbean, Guyana stands out as a success story: the country elects high numbers of women under a gender quota regime, and its constitution and policies reflect the principles of sex equality, freedom from violence, and reproductive health. Other Anglophone countries show mixed gains: for instance, abortion is legally available in Jamaica and Barbados, but these countries fail to address sex discrimination in their Constitutions.

Nearly all LAC countries have signed the myriad international conventions that recognize women's rights and suggest policy reforms, including the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Yet large gaps remain between international commitments and domestic statute change, and between statute change and effective implementation. In Argentina, for example, public and private health clinics are legally mandated to provide free family planning services and distribute contraceptives. But local religious opposition has thwarted their ability to meet women's demands (Piscopo 2009).

Conclusion

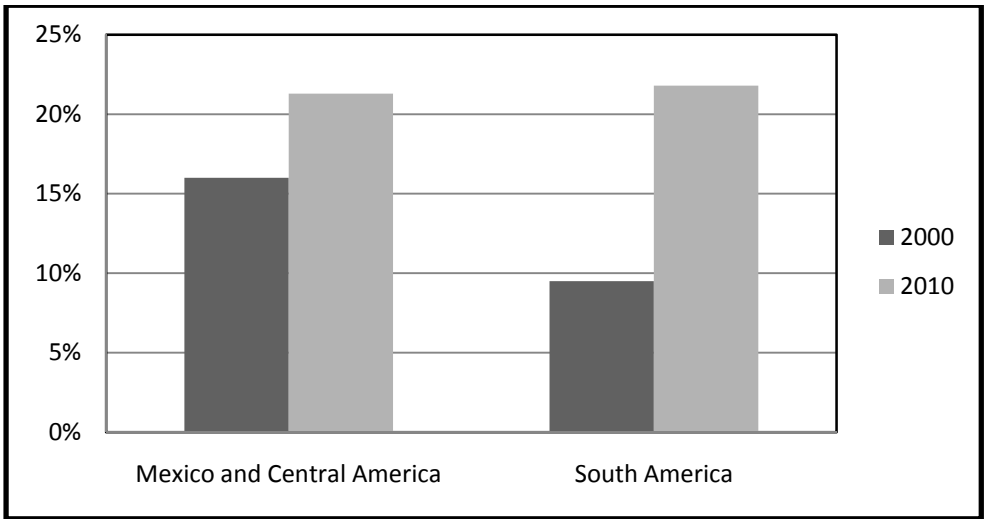
In Latin America and the Caribbean, women have made inroads into executive and legislative power in local and national governments. Effective quota laws—meaning laws with placement mandates and sanctions for noncompliance—have been largely responsible for the growth in women's legislative representation.

What else can be done? Political parties can adopt measures to expand women's opportunities to gain access to political office. They are largely responsible for identifying, training, and nominating women to elected office. For women's gains to be sustainable, party leaders must support their participation in partisan affairs. One signal of such a commitment is the decision to devote a minimum portion of party funds to support female candidates. In Mexico, for example, the 2008 gender quota law compels parties to allocate 2.3 percent of their budgets to such programs. In the Anglophone Caribbean, political parties in Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago have also provided training for female leaders (Vassell 2006). These initiatives will help more women enter the recruitment pipeline.

To improve support for policy changes on women's rights, politicians can work to formalize women's caucuses and commissions in congress. These institutions—which function in only a handful of Latin American countries--encourage cross-party cooperation among female legislators, facilitate communication between women legislators and feminist groups, and facilitate the development and advocacy of bills and other proposals. They have proven to be effective (González and Sample 2010). The Mexican Congress's Bicameral Commission on Gender and Equity, for example, has helped female legislators write *and* secure approval of reforms to domestic violence legislation, social welfare laws, and quota mechanisms (Piscopo 2011).

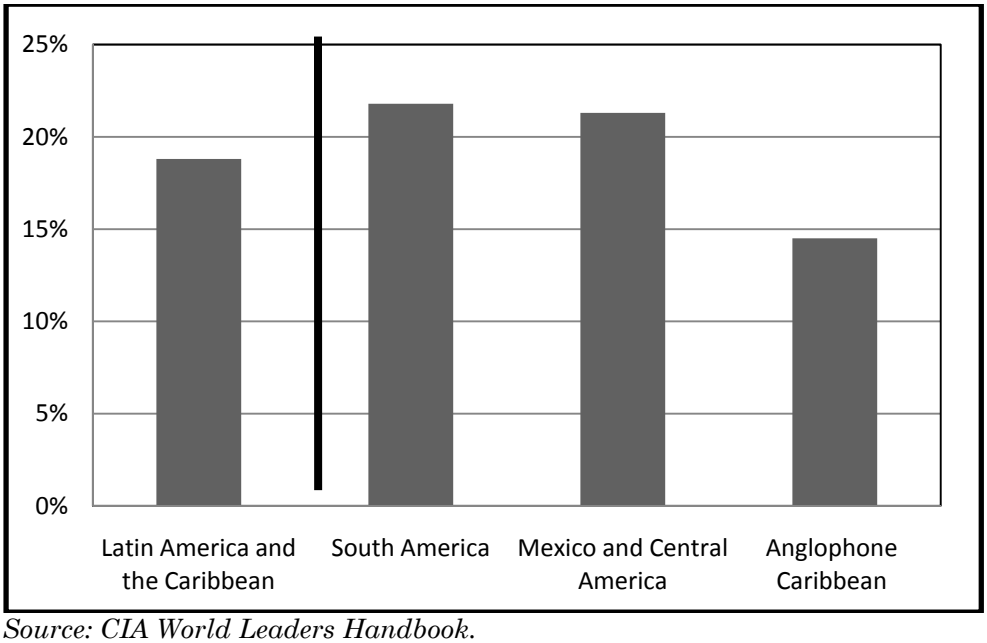
The connection between women's presence and their empowerment depends not only on having a "critical mass" in political office but also on the social beliefs and institutional arrangements that structure their opportunities to act effectively. Policies have changed when domestic and international actors worked together to hold political leaders—male and female—accountable for advancing women's rights.

Figure 1. Trends in Women's Representation in Cabinets in Latin America.



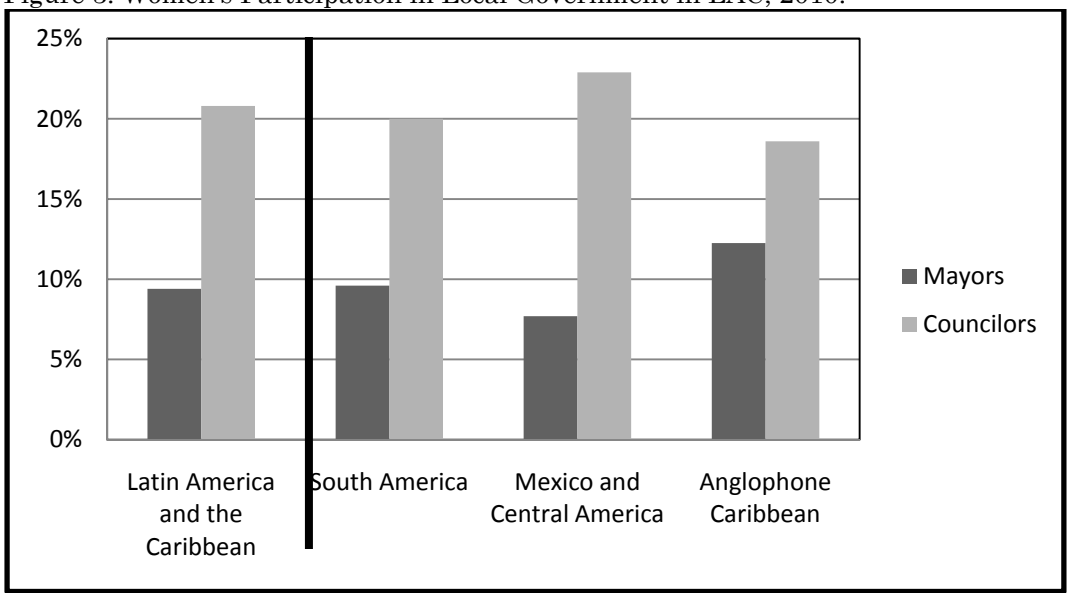
Source: Data from 2000 is from Htun (2001). Data from 2010 is from the CIA World Leaders' Database.

Figure 2. Women's Average Representation in Cabinets in LAC, 2010.



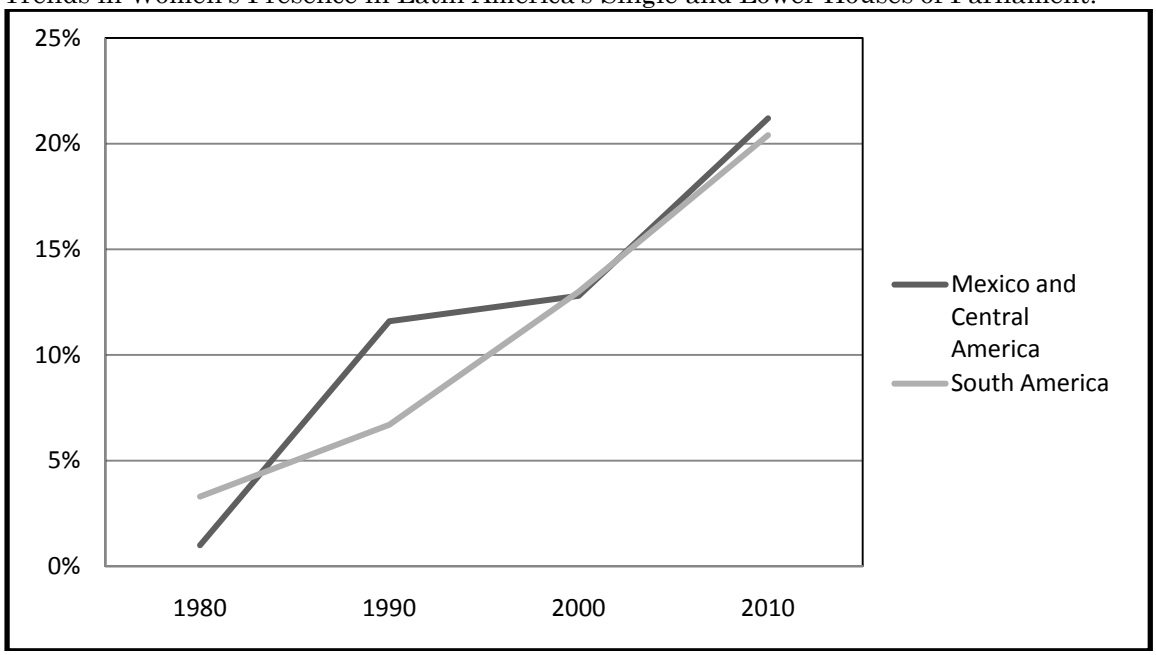
Source: CIA World Leaders Handbook.

Figure 3. Women's Participation in Local Government in LAC, 2010.



Source: 2010 Gender Equality Observatory, organized and published by the United Nations' Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean.

Figure 4.
Trends in Women's Presence in Latin America's Single and Lower Houses of Parliament.



Source: Htun (2001) for 1980, 1990, and 2000; the Inter-Parliamentary Union for 2010.

Table 1. Women in Congress in LAC.

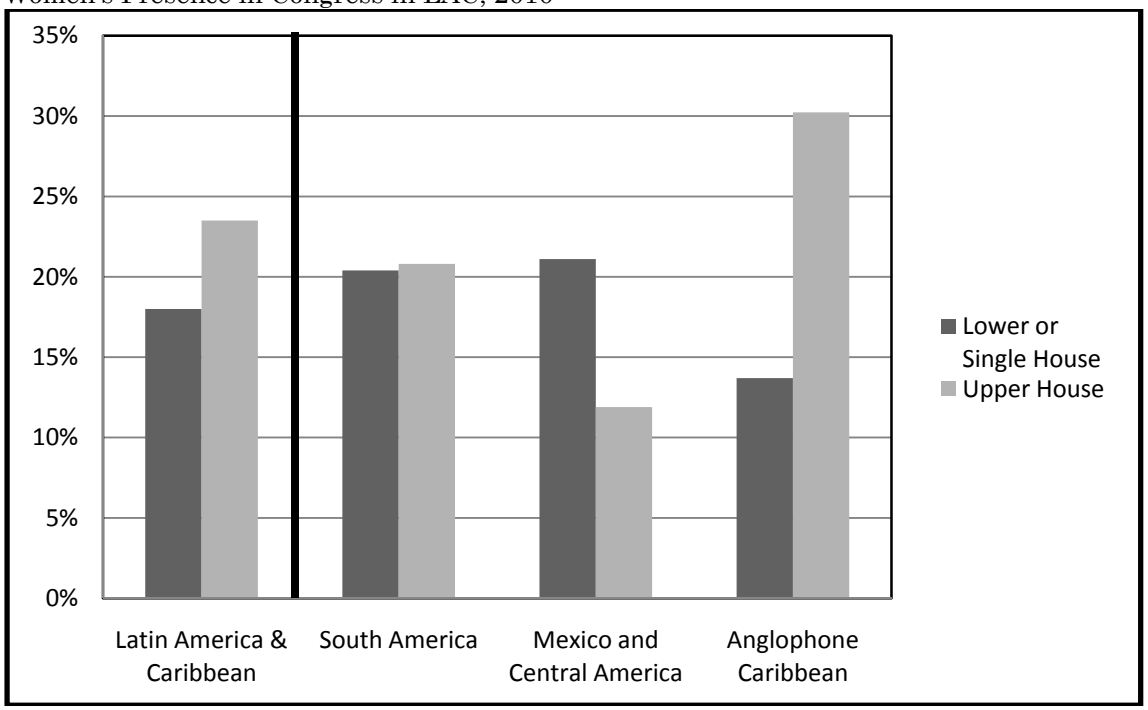
Country	Single or Lower House	Upper House
Antigua and Barbuda	10.5%	29.4%
Argentina	38.5%	34.7%
Bahamas	12.2%	33.3%
Barbados	10.0%	33.3%
Belize	0.0%	38.5%
Bolivia	25.4%	42.2%
Brazil	8.8%	12.3%
Chile	14.2%	13.2%
Colombia	12.0%	14.7%
Costa Rica	38.6%	.
Cuba	43.2%	.
Dominica	12.9%	.
DR	20.8%	9.4%
Ecuador	32.3%	.
El Salvador	19.0%	.
Grenada	13.3%	30.8%
Guatemala	12.0%	.
Guyana	30.0%	.
Haiti	4.1%	6.9%
Honduras	18.0%	.
Jamaica	13.3%	14.3%
Mexico	26.2%	19.5%
Nicaragua	20.7%	.
Panama	8.5%	.
Paraguay	12.5%	15.6%
Peru	27.5%	.
St. Kitts & Nevis	7.1%	.
St. Lucia	11.1%	36.4%
St. Vincent & The Grenandines	19.0%	.
Suriname	9.8%	.
Trinidad and Tobago	28.6%	25.8%
Uruguay	15.2%	12.9%
Venezuela	17.3%	.

Table 2. Gender Quota Laws in Latin America and the Caribbean

COUNTRY	DATE OF FIRST LAW	DETAILS
Argentina	1991	30% of candidates for lower house and senate elections
Bolivia	1997	50% of candidates for lower house and senate elections
Brazil	1997	30% of candidates for chamber, state legislature, and municipal council elections
Costa Rica	1997	40% of candidates for unicameral parliament and municipal councils
Dominican Republic	1997	33% of candidates for lower house
Ecuador	1997	45% of candidates for unicameral parliament
Honduras	2000	30% of candidates for unicameral parliament
Guyana	2000	33% of candidates for unicameral parliament
Mexico	1996	30% of candidates for lower house and senate elections
Panama	1997	30% of candidates in primary elections for unicameral parliament
Paraguay	1996	20% of candidates in primary elections for lower house and senate
Peru	1997	30% of candidates for unicameral parliament
Uruguay	2009	33% of candidates for lower house and senate (to be applied in 2014)

Source: Elaboration by Authors

Figure 5.
Women's Presence in Congress in LAC, 2010



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Table 3. Public Attitudes toward Women Leaders

Percent Disagree that Men make Better Politicians than Women, 2005/2006	
Argentina	66%
Brazil	62%
Chile	58%
Colombia	69%
Dominican Republic	59%
El Salvador	63%
Guatemala	68%
Mexico	62%
Peru	77%
Trinidad & Tobago	75%
Uruguay	71%
Venezuela	60%

Source: World Values Survey.

Table 4. Policies on Violence Against Women in Latin America.
10 = extensive array of policies; 0 = no policy activity.

Country	1975	1985	1995	2005
Argentina	0	0	7	8
Brazil	0	2	7	8
Chile	0	0	6	7
Colombia	0	1	5	5
Costa Rica	2	2	7	8
Cuba	1	1	1	2
Mexico	1	1	5	7
Peru	0	0	6	7
Uruguay	0	0	4	5
Venezuela	0	4	4	6
Average	0.4	1.1	5.2	6.3

Source: Htun and Weldon n.d.

Table 5. Index of Abortion Laws in Latin America and the Anglophone Caribbean.
10 = no restrictions; 0 = banned under all circumstances.

Country Name	1975	1985	1995	2005
Antigua & Barbuda	1	1	1	1
Argentina	3	3	3	3
Bahamas	2	2	2	2
Barbados	5	5	5	5
Belize	5	5	5	5
Brazil	2	2	2	3
Chile	1	1	0	0
Colombia	1	1	1	1
Costa Rica	1	1	1	1
Cuba	9	9	9	9
Dominca	1	1	1	1
Dominican Republic	0	0	0	0
El Salvador	3	3	3	0
Grenada	2	2	2	2
Guyana	9	9	9	9
Jamaica	5	5	5	5
Mexico	3	3	3	3
Nicaragua	2	2	2	0
Peru	2	2	2	2
St. Kitts & Nevis	5	5	5	5
St. Lucia	2	2	2	5
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	5	5	5	5
Suriname	1	1	1	1
Trinidad and Tobago	5	5	5	5
Uruguay	5	5	5	5
Venezuela	1	1	1	1
LAC Average	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.1

Source: Htun and Weldon (n.d.) for Latin America; Boland and Katzive (2008) for the Anglophone Caribbean.

Table 6.
Sub regional Averages, Based on the Index of Abortion Laws

	1975	1985	1995	2005
Mexico and Central America	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.2
South America	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.1
Anglophone Caribbean	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.9

Source: Htun and Weldon (n.d.) for Latin America; Boland and Katzive (2008) for the Anglophone Caribbean.

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