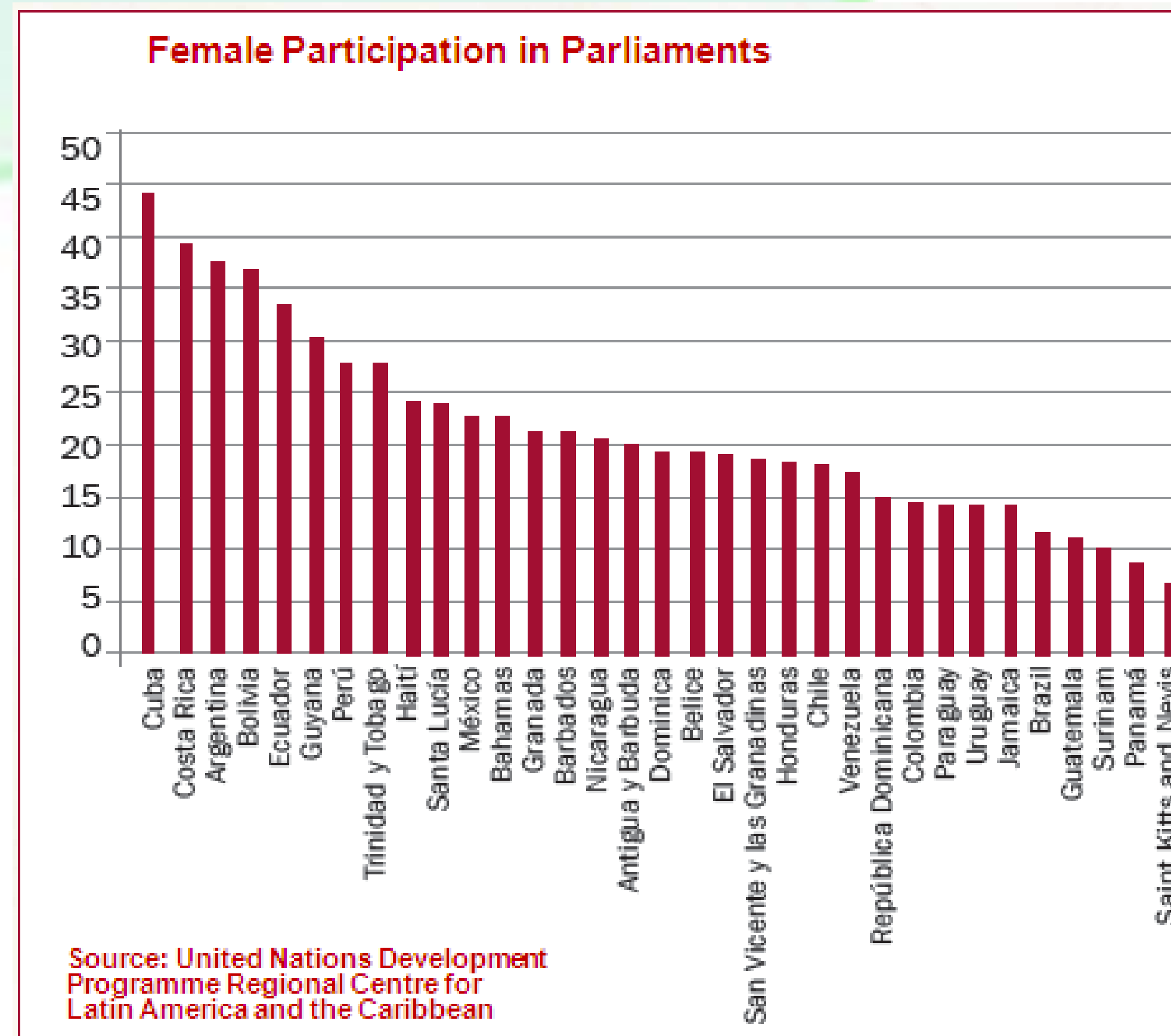


# WOMEN LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL POWER IN LATIN AMERICA: A FOCUS ON ARGENTINA

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“Whether there are innately female leadership styles... is not really the right question. It is more important to ask why there has been so little attention paid to women leaders over the years as well as why the styles of leading more often exhibited by women are particularly useful at this critical moment in history.”  
**Charlotte Bunch**

As it is the **trend** in the rest of the world, women have historically been seriously under represented 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:

- 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 a **4%** of deputies were women; 1995, it increased to a **28%** and in 2009 to **38.5%**, positioning Argentina as the **12<sup>th</sup>** country of the world in the ranking of female representation in National Parliaments.
- In **1993** Argentina became the **first country** to use gender quotas for national legislative elections.
- The number of women **senators** increased dramatically from **5.8%** in 1998 to **37.1%** in 2001 and to **42.4%** in 2005.
- The **Nestor Kirchner** (2003-7) administration increased the number of women in the cabinet, appointing women to head three of the ten ministries.
- Kirchner's wife, **Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner**, was elected president in **2007**.

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 ingrained 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-Parliamentarian 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.

