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

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- 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.

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**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%.

- *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:
  1. Political parties acting as "bottle-necks," making the access to positions of party leadership and candidacies for representative positions more difficult.
  2. Problem of influence in the superior ranks, giving less authority to women than to men.
  3. 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.

- 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

- 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 psychosocial 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.

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Sponsored by: Dr. Kristina Mao