

# WOMEN AND POWER IN THE AMERICAS



A REPORT CARD

APRIL 2001

## PREFACE

The Women's Leadership Conference of the Americas (WLCA)—a joint initiative of the Inter-American Dialogue and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)—is pleased to present this report on women in political power in the hemisphere. The WLCA believes that the number of women in political leadership is a concrete indicator of a country's progress (or lack thereof) toward fulfilling its commitment to women's equity. The WLCA is releasing this report prior to the third Summit of the Americas—taking place in Quebec City, Canada, on April 20 to 22, 2001—as part of its continuing efforts to monitor progress on promises made to women.

The WLCA seeks to influence the summit process on behalf of women. The WLCA was key in getting women's concerns on the agenda of the first Summit of the Americas in Miami. Published as *Communiqué to the Presidents of the Americas*, the recommendations of the WLCA were conveyed to summit participants. This initiative led to the inclusion of a women's initiative in the summit's final *Plan of Action*, and shaped the content of that initiative. A second *Communiqué* was issued prior to the Santiago Summit. It addressed the lack of progress since the Miami Summit, suggested more specific steps, and called for monitoring and reporting by governments.

The first two summits have not produced strong government action on women's issues. The WLCA is working toward making this summit different. We want the heads of state to set out goals that are concrete and measurable, and we plan to hold governments accountable. This report card highlights one type of measure that heads of state can effectively implement. Presidents

## WOMEN AND POWER IN THE AMERICAS: A REPORT CARD<sup>1</sup>

and prime ministers can appoint more women into their cabinets, and take action to encourage equitable representation of women on election ballots. For that reason, we urge the heads of state who will gather in Quebec City later this month to pay attention to their performance and work to improve it.

The WLCA is a network of some 100 women leaders drawn from throughout the hemisphere, dedicated to expanding the numbers and enhancing the contribution of women in top leadership positions in Latin America and the Caribbean—and, in so doing—to help improve opportunities for all women in the region. The group's commitment to this mission is based on the conviction that leadership does matter, and that women in positions of power and influence will contribute in critical ways to the broader expansion of women's rights and opportunities in all sectors.

This report card would not have been possible without the sustained support of The Ford Foundation and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). Special thanks are in order to Mala Htun of the New School University for conducting the research and analysis with the assistance of Kelly Alderson of the Dialogue.

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Inter-American  
Dialogue

International Center  
for Research on  
Women (ICRW)

Women's Leadership  
Conference of the  
Americas (WLCA)

Country	Ministers	Deputies	Senators	Mayors	Average
Canada	27%	21%	32%	12%	23%
United States	32% <sup>2</sup>	14%	13%	21%	20%
Barbados	13%	11%	33%	n/a*	19%
Jamaica	12%	13%	24%	23%	18%
Costa Rica	18%	19%	n/a	9%	15%
Cuba	10%	28%	n/a	7% <sup>3</sup>	15%
Honduras	26%	9%	n/a	10%	15%
Panama	25%	10%	n/a	10%	15%
El Salvador	25%	10%	n/a	8%	14%
Trinidad and Tobago	11%	11%	32%	0%	14%
Colombia	19%	12%	13%	6%	13%
Mexico	16%	16%	16%	4%	13%
Chile	25%	11%	4%	6%	12%
Venezuela	21%	10%	n/a	4%	12%
Argentina	8%	27%	3%	7%	11%
Peru	7%	20%	n/a	2%	10%
Dominican Republic	8%	16%	7%	6%	9%
Nicaragua	8%	10%	n/a	10%	9%
Ecuador	7%	15%	n/a	3%	8%
Paraguay	8%	3%	18%	3%	8%
Bolivia	0%	12%	4%	6%	6%
Guatemala	8%	9%	n/a	1%	6%
Uruguay	0%	12%	10%	0%	6%
Brazil	0%	6%	7%	6%	5%

<sup>1</sup> This index is based on women in power in the year 2000, with the exception of mayors in the Dominican Republic, where data was only available for 1998. Please see country data in the Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> The figure refers to cabinet level appointments made by former president Bill Clinton who left office in January of 2001. Women make up 24 percent of cabinet members in the administration of George W. Bush.

<sup>3</sup> This figure refers to provincial governors.

\*n/a=not applicable

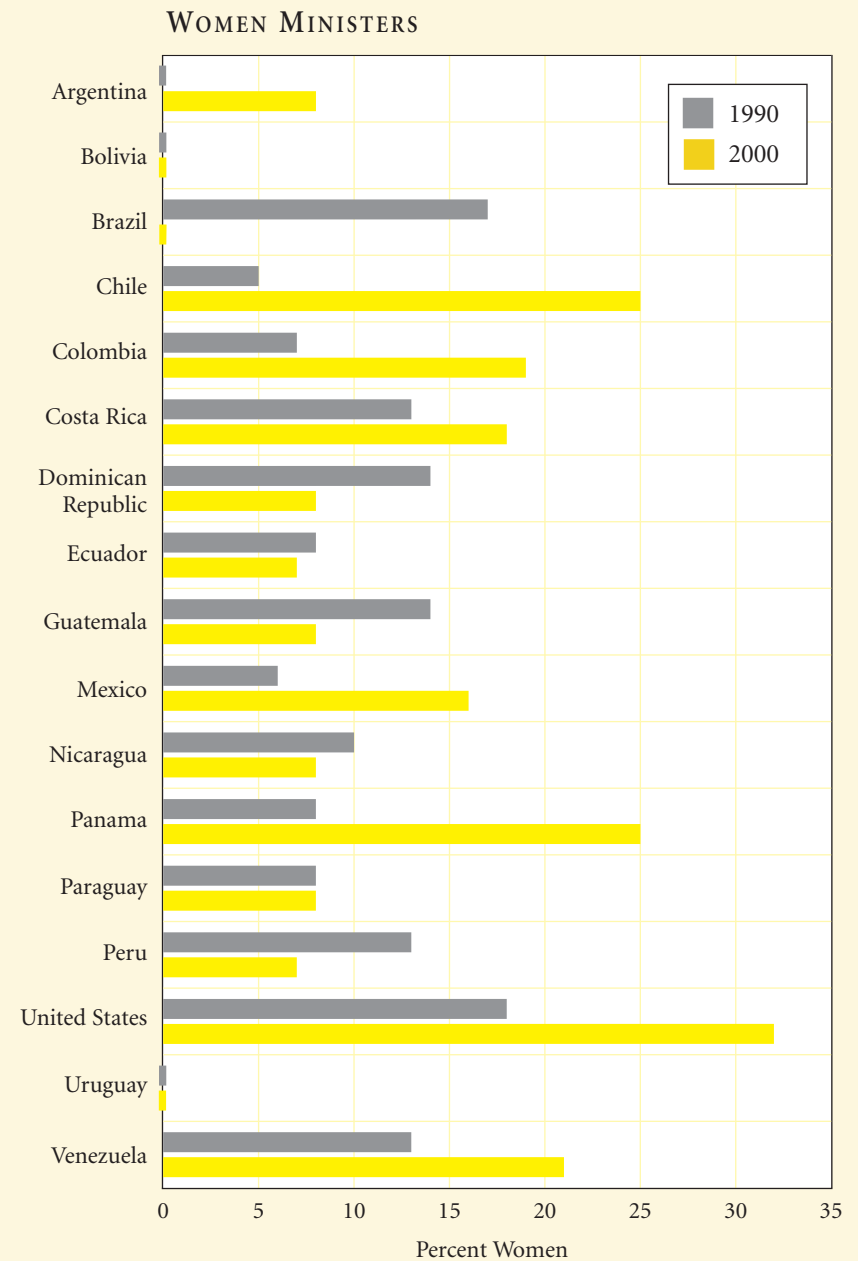
**More women have more power today than ever before. Averaging across the Americas, women represent:<sup>4</sup>**

	2000	1990
Ministers	14%	9%
Lower House of Congress Or Single Chamber	14%	8%
Senate	15%	5%
Mayors	7%	5%

Women leaders are doing better in some countries than others. Levels of women's participation in political office are highest in Canada, the United States, and Barbados, followed by Jamaica, Costa Rica, Cuba, Honduras, and Panama. Panama is the only country in the hemisphere to have a woman head of state. Women's presence in political office is lowest overall in Brazil, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Uruguay.

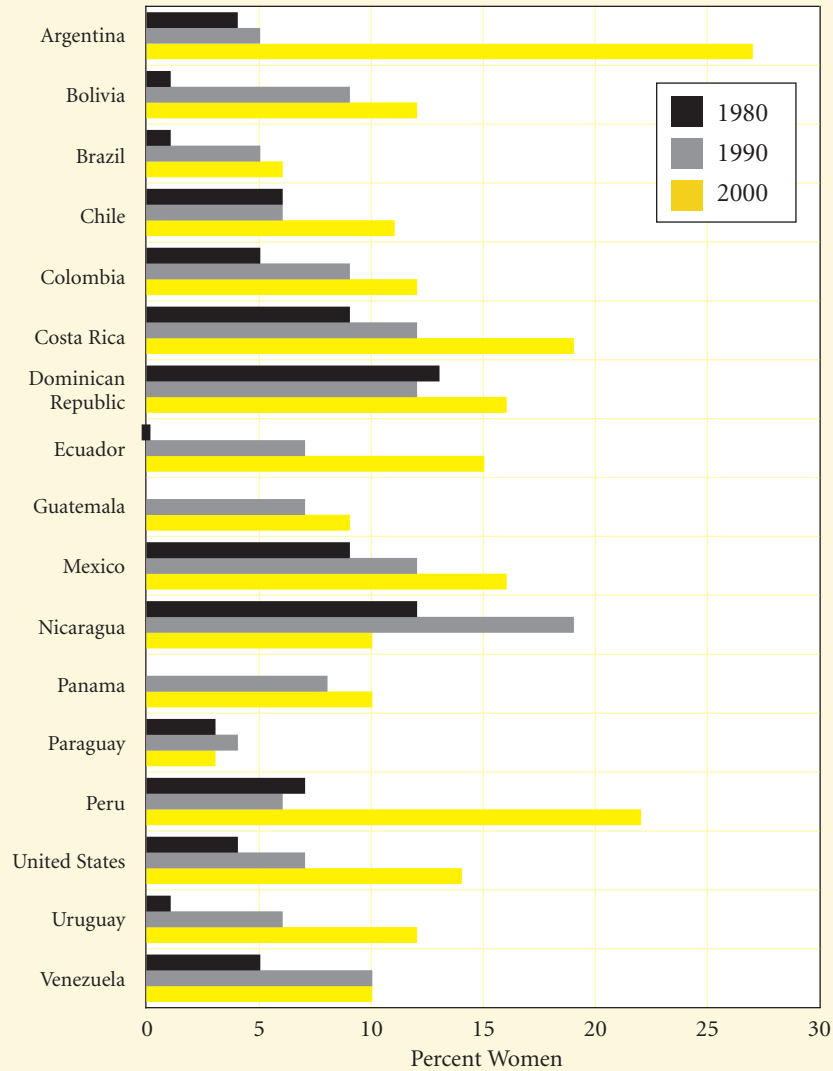
On average, women's participation in national cabinets grew 56 percent from 1990 to 2000 (from 9 percent of total ministers to 14 percent). This increase derives from surges in some countries, because in about half of countries, there were fewer women in national cabinets in 2000 than in 1990.

<sup>4</sup> These averages are based on data from all 24 countries, with the exception of: Ministers (17 countries, 1990), Senators (14 countries, 2000; 10 countries, 1990), Mayors (21 countries, 2000; 9 countries, 1990); Deputies (17 countries, 1990).

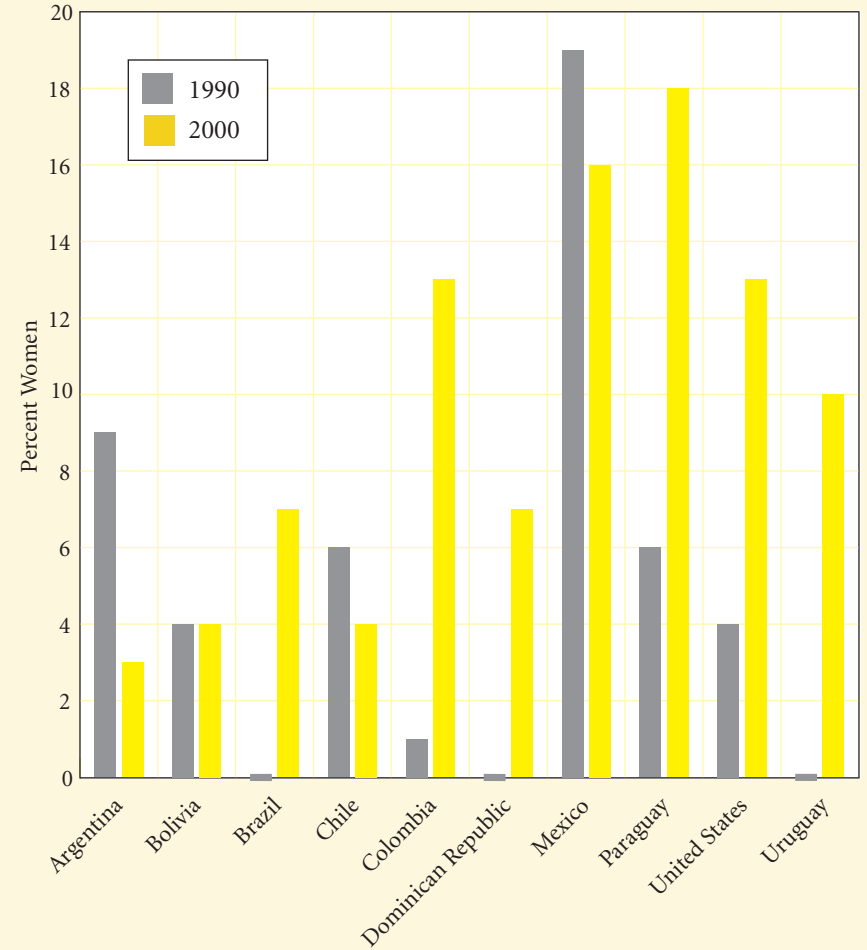


**Women's presence in the single or lower house of congress has advanced steadily, though gradually, in virtually every country, with the exception of Nicaragua and Paraguay.**

**WOMEN DEPUTIES**

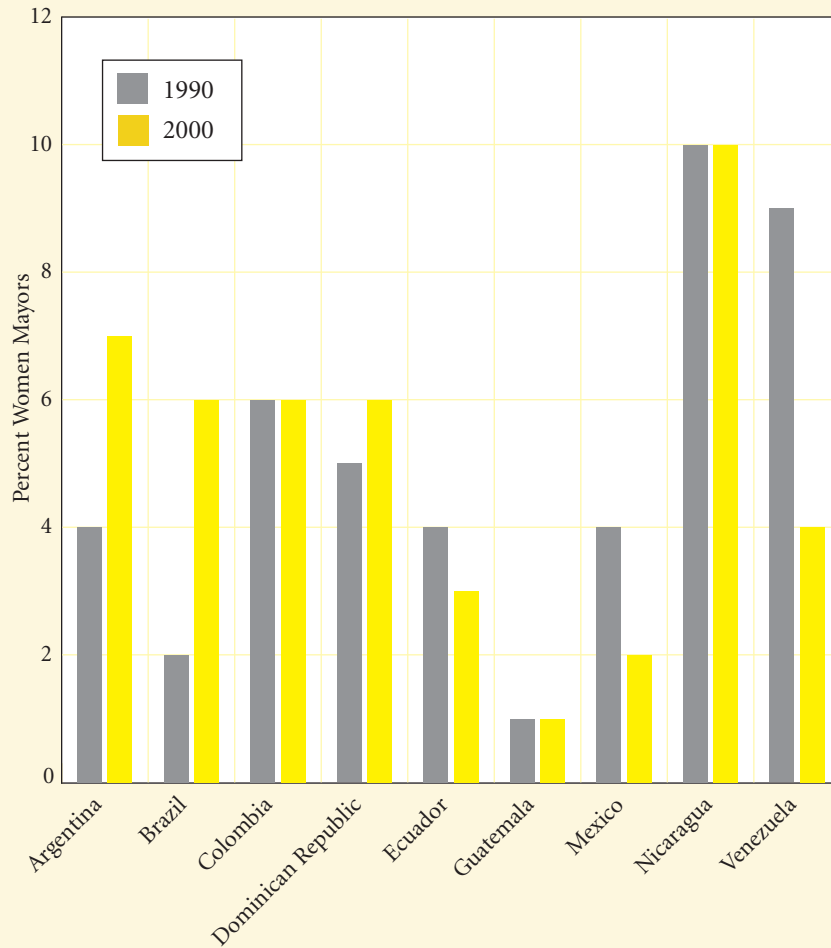


**WOMEN SENATORS**



The number of women mayors has remained static in the nine countries for which time series data were available. The percentage of mayors who are women grew in three countries, stayed the same in three, and declined in three.

### LOCAL EXECUTIVE POWER



Relative to the number of positions available, more women have been elected to legislative than executive posts and at the local than the national level. In 2000, women occupied an average of 14 percent of seats in the single or lower house of congress, 15 percent of senates, 18 percent of state legislatures, and 18 percent of municipal councils.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, women made up 7 percent of mayors, 5 percent of governors, and 4 percent of presidents.<sup>6</sup>

### WOMEN'S OPPORTUNITIES TO GAIN POWER

	Local	National
Legislative branch	Highest (municipal councils, state legislatures)	Growing (congress, senate)
Executive branch	Lower (mayor, governor)	Lowest (presidency)

Compared to the rest of the world, women's participation in congress in the Americas is somewhat above average. The region lags behind Nordic Europe, is similar to Asia, and is slightly ahead of the rest of Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Pacific.

Region	% Women in Single or Lower House
Nordic Countries	39%
Americas	15%
Asia	15%
Europe (excluding Nordic countries)	14%
Sub-Saharan Africa	12%
Pacific	12%
Arab States	5%

<sup>5</sup> State legislature data is from three countries in 2000 and one country in 1995, and municipal council data is from five countries in 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Data on governors is from eight countries, and on mayors, from 23 countries.

## WHAT EXPLAINS THE DIFFERENCES IN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION ACROSS COUNTRIES?

### DEMOCRACY?

The top three countries on women in power—Canada, the United States, and Barbados—are also the most highly ranked in Freedom House's survey of political and civil liberties. This suggests that democratic advances may be necessary for more women to gain more power.

But democracy is not enough to guarantee greater opportunities for women. Uruguay scores high on political and civil liberties but ranks near the bottom in terms of women's participation.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

Besides having the best scores on women in power and the Freedom House survey, Canada, the United States and Barbados are also the richest countries in the hemisphere. There appears to be a correlation between national wealth and women's opportunities at the top level.

Yet a low level of economic development is not an obstacle to women gaining power. Honduras has the second-lowest GDP per capita of the group (after Nicaragua), but ranks fifth in terms of women's participation.

Moreover, the rate of change in women's participation in power has exceeded the rate of change in women's economic and social position. Between 1980 and 1998, women's life expectancy increased an average of 7 percent, labor force participation, 21 percent, literacy, 13 percent, and school enrollment, 24 percent. Between 1990 and 2000, by contrast, women's share of cabinet ministries grew 45 percent, while the representation of women in national senates and chambers of deputies rose 200 and 43 percent, respectively.

### CHANGING PUBLIC ATTITUDES ABOUT WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Public opinion supports women leaders. A survey of around 2000 Latin Americans in six major cities<sup>7</sup> conducted by Gallup on behalf of the Inter-

<sup>7</sup> Buenos Aires, Argentina; São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Bogotá, Colombia; Mexico City, Mexico; and San Salvador, El Salvador. For a full report on the Gallup poll, please see the Inter-American Dialogue website, [www.thedialogue.org](http://www.thedialogue.org).

American Development Bank and the Inter-American Dialogue suggests that public attitudes are creating opportunities for women to gain power.

- ▶ *A majority believed women are better leaders.* Sixty-six percent agreed that women are more honest than men, and 85 percent agree that women are good decision makers. Sixty-two percent of people expressed the belief that women would do better than men at reducing poverty, 72 percent at improving education, 57 percent at combating corruption, 64 percent at protecting the environment, 59 percent at managing the economy, and 53 percent at conducting diplomatic relations.
- ▶ *A majority believed more women produce better government.* Fifty-seven percent of people in the study said that having more women in political office would lead to better government (23 percent reported that more women will not make a difference). Over 90 percent claimed they would be willing to vote for a well-qualified candidate for president who happened to be a woman, and 69 percent believed that their country will elect a woman president over the next 20 years.

In the United States, a CNN/Gallup/USA Today poll conducted in January 2001 showed that 40 percent of Americans believe a woman will be elected president in the next 10 years, and 42 percent in the next 25 years. Only 8 percent reported that a woman will "never" be elected president.<sup>8</sup>

### AFFIRMATIVE ACTION QUOTA LAWS

Between 1991 and 2000, eleven Latin American countries adopted quota laws establishing a minimum level of 20 to 40 percent for women's participation as candidates in legislative elections. These laws oblige political parties to include a minimum number of women in their candidate lists. A twelfth country, Colombia, enacted a law requiring that women occupy 30 percent of appointed decisionmaking positions in the executive branch of government.

<sup>8</sup> The survey was conducted by Gallup Organization, January 15 to 17, 2001 and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,055.

## CONCLUSION

Women's participation in power has improved across the Americas. Compared to the past, these improvements are impressive. But the region still has a long way to go. The average level of women's participation in power is below 10 percent in eight of the 24 countries studied in this report. Women's participation averaged 20 percent or above in only two countries—Canada and the United States. At 22 and 20 percent, however, Canada and the United States are still far from the 30 percent benchmark mentioned at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, and even farther from the participation levels achieved in the Nordic countries.

Latin American and Caribbean countries have made some advances not reflected in these numbers. While Panama is the only country in the hemisphere currently to have a woman head of state, women have recently been president or prime minister of Guyana, Nicaragua and, for a brief period, Ecuador. More women are running for the presidency with a realistic chance of winning—most recently in Argentina, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela. Several countries, including Barbados, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Venezuela have women vice presidents or deputy prime ministers. Women govern, or have recently governed, the region's two largest cities: São Paulo and Mexico City.

Countries can make changes to expand women's opportunities to gain power, but most are not doing so. Twelve countries have enacted quota laws for women's representation in political office, but most of these laws have not been applied rigorously. Presidents can affirm the importance of having women in power by appointing more women ministers. Improving performance requires that public officials work harder to create more opportunities for women.

### AFFIRMATIVE ACTION QUOTA LAWS

Country	Date of Law	Quota %	Legislative Body	% Women (before law)	% Women (after law)
Argentina	1991	30	Chamber	6	27
Bolivia	1997	30	Chamber Senate	11 4	12 4
Brazil	1997	30	Chamber	7	6
Colombia	2000	30	n/a* ( <i>Colombia's law applies to appointed executive posts</i> )		
Costa Rica	1997	40	Unicameral	14	19
Dominican Republic	1997	25	Chamber	12	16
Ecuador	1997	20	Unicameral	4	15
Mexico	1996	30	Chamber Senate	17 15	16 16
Panama	1997	30	Unicameral	8	10
Paraguay	1996	20	Chamber Senate	3 11	3 18
Peru	1997	25	Unicameral	11	20
Venezuela (pre-2000)	1998	30	Chamber Senate	6 8	13 9

Quotas have boosted women's presence in congress by an average of five percentage points. This result, though impressive, conceals variation in the effects of quotas across countries. In Argentina, women's participation in the Chamber of Deputies rose from 6 to 27 percent, but in the Chambers of Brazil and Mexico, women's presence actually declined with the quota.

Quotas can help more women gain power. But the effectiveness of quota laws depends on how they are drafted and implemented. If quota laws are not tailored to a country's electoral system and applied rigorously by political parties, they will produce few results for women.

\*n/a=not applicable



## APPENDIX

## COUNTRY DATA: WOMEN IN POLITICAL OFFICE

Argentina	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	8%	0% ('92)	—*
Chamber of Deputies	27%	5%	4% in ('83)
Senate	3%	9%	7% in ('83)
Governors	0%	0% ('94)	—
State legislatures	25%	—	—
Mayors	7%	4% ('92)	—
Barbados	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	13%	—	—
Chamber of Deputies	11%	—	—
Senate	33%	—	—
Bolivia	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	0%	0% ('93)	—
Chamber of Deputies	12%	9%	1%
Senate	4%	4%	8%
Mayors	6%	—	—
Brazil	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	0%	17%	—
Chamber of Deputies	6%	5%	1%
Senate	7%	0%	1%
Governors	4%	0%	—
State legislatures	10%	5% <sup>9</sup>	2% <sup>10</sup>
Mayors	6%	2%	1%
Municipal Councils	12%	—	—
Canada	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	27%	—	—
Chamber of Deputies	21%	—	—
Senate	32%	—	—
Governors	8%	—	—
Mayors	12%	—	—

<sup>9</sup> This figure is an average of women's participation in six state assemblies (Goiás, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Pará, Paraná, and Pernambuco).

<sup>10</sup> Average participation in six state assemblies.

\*— = not available

Chile	2000	1990	1970
Ministers	25%	5%	—
Chamber of Deputies	11%	6%	6%
Senate	4%	6%	2%
Mayors	6%	—	—
Municipal Councils	14%	—	—
Colombia	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	19%	7%	—
Chamber of Deputies	12%	9%	5%
Senate	13%	1%	1%
Governors	3%	—	—
State legislatures	—	7%	6%
Mayors	6%	6%	—
Municipal Councils	—	8%	8%
Costa Rica	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	18%	13%	14%
Congress	19%	12%	9%
Mayors	9%	—	—
Cuba	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	10%	—	—
Congress	28%	—	—
Governors	7%	—	—
Dominican Republic	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	8%	14% ('93)	—
Chamber of Deputies	16%	12%	13%
Senate	7%	0%	7%
Mayors	6% ('98)	5%	0%
Municipal Councils	14% ('98)	10%	13%
Ecuador	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	7%	8%	—
Congress	15%	7%	0%
Mayors	3%	4%	0%
El Salvador	2000	1990	1980
Ministers	25%	—	—
Congress	10%	—	—
Mayors	8%	—	—

<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	8%	14% ('92)	—
Congress	9%	7% ('92)	—
Mayors	1%	1% ('92)	—
<b>Honduras</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	26%	—	—
Congress	9%	—	—
Mayors	10%	—	—
Municipal Councils	12%	—	—
<b>Jamaica</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	12%	—	—
Chamber of Deputies	13%	—	—
Senate	24%	—	—
Mayors	23%	—	—
Municipal Councils	26%	—	—
<b>Mexico</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	16%	6% ('91)	—
Chamber of Deputies	16%	12%	9%
Senate	16%	19%	6%
Governors	0%	3%	—
Mayors	4%	2%	—
<b>Nicaragua</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	8%	10% ('94)	—
Congress	10%	19%	12%
Mayors	10%	10%	—
Municipal Councils	—	13%	—
<b>Panama</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	25%	8% ('91)	—
Congress	10%	8% ('91)	—
Mayors	10%	—	—
<b>Paraguay</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	8%	8% ('91)	—
Chamber of Deputies	3%	4%	3%
Senate	18%	6%	3%
Mayors	3%	—	—

<b>Peru</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	7%	13% ('88)	—
Congress	20%	6% ('88)	7%
Mayors	2%	—	—
Municipal Councils	24%	—	—
<b>Trinidad and Tobago</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	11%	—	—
Chamber of Deputies	11%	—	—
Senate	32%	—	—
Mayors	0%	—	—
<b>United States</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	32% <sup>11</sup>	12%	12%
House of Representatives	14%	7%	4%
Senate	13%	4%	2%
Governors	8%	6%	4%
State legislatures	22%	17%	10%
Mayors	21% <sup>12</sup>	—	—
Municipal Councils	—	23% ('88)	10% ('75)
<b>Uruguay</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1970</b>
Ministers	0%	0% ('93)	—
Chamber of Deputies	12%	6%	1% ('72)
Senate	10%	0%	0% ('72)
Mayors	0%	—	—
<b>Venezuela</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1980</b>
Ministers	21%	13%	0%
Congress	10%	10%	5%
Governors	9%	0% ('89)	—
State legislatures	15% ('95)	11%	5%
Mayors	4%	9% ('89)	—
Municipal Councils	—	13%	14%

<sup>11</sup> The figure refers to the cabinet of former president Bill Clinton who left office in January 2001. Women make up 24 percent of cabinet members in the current administration of George W. Bush.

<sup>12</sup> Of the 978 U.S. cities with a population of 30,000 or more, 203 had women mayors.

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### WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS (WLCA)

The Women's Leadership Conference of the Americas (WLCA) is a hemispheric network of women leaders from throughout the hemisphere. It is dedicated to expanding the numbers and enhancing the contribution of women in top leadership positions in Latin America and the Caribbean—and, in so doing—to help improve opportunities for all women in the region. The WLCA's greatest strength is its membership of nearly 100 women leaders drawn from the United States, Canada, and 18 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. They include former presidents and cabinet-level officials, senators and congresswomen, business executives, leading academics, and directors of community and other nongovernmental organizations. They represent a wide diversity of political views and professional backgrounds. WLCA members have assembled three times in plenary session. The WLCA is co-sponsored by the Inter-American Dialogue and the International Center for Research on Women.

### INTER-AMERICAN DIALOGUE

The Inter-American Dialogue is the premier nongovernmental institution for policy analysis and exchange on Western Hemisphere affairs. Its select membership of 100 distinguished citizens from throughout the Americas includes political, business, academic, media, and other nongovernmental leaders. Nine Dialogue members served as presidents of their countries and more than a dozen have served at the cabinet level. The Dialogue works to improve the quality of debate and decision making on hemispheric problems, advance opportunities for regional economic and political cooperation, and bring fresh, practical proposals for action to governments, international institutions, and nongovernmental organizations. Since 1982—through successive Republican and Democratic administrations and many changes of leadership in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada—the Dialogue has helped shape the agenda of issues and choices on inter-American relations.

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### INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is dedicated to promoting development with women's full participation. ICRW works in collaboration with policy makers, researchers, and practitioners throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America to address the economic, social, and health status of women in developing countries. ICRW's focus is on economic policies, such as the effects of structural adjustment on women's employment and their access to credit and other resources; on the formation and dynamics of family and household structures; on women's health and nutrition as these relate to their roles as economic producers, nurturers and health care providers for their families; and on the links between women and environmental degradation and protection.

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