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## **Political Parties: When do they work for Women?**

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

## Introduction

The electorates of Latin America are displaying a marked lack of faith in political parties. Flawed electoral systems have encouraged corruption and abuses of power, leading to a lack of clear party identity and low voter turnout during elections. On the other hand, however, there have been clear changes in the ways agents promoting gender equality perceive the role of political parties. From the 1990s, the scepticism of the 70s and 80s regarding the chances of advancing a gender perspective through the state and political institutions has given way to more positive approaches. These bodies are now thought to constitute terrains on which political struggles can be conducted, being therefore possible to be changed and influenced from within. Political parties in particular, because of the role they play in political linkage, in the selection and socialization of prospective political representatives and leaders, have become the target of gender-oriented strategies aimed at increasing women's presence and influence, and at advancing a gender perspective through the political party system.

This paper will analyse the interaction of gender issues with political parties in Latin America in order to assess the relationship between them and establish under what circumstances political parties best incorporate gender demands and contribute to mainstream the gender perspective. In order to achieve this I will focus on an analysis of women's access and influence in political parties. A good indication of a party's commitment to gender issues is given by the number of women within its leadership structures, the initiatives it undertakes to increase the presence of women in different spheres of political decision-making, and how seriously it undertakes the task of promoting gender equality through its political activities. Emphasis will be placed on the issue of the political participation of women in leadership and elected political positions. This is because increasing the presence of women in decision-making positions has lately become one of the main demands women have made of political parties. Also, as the literature suggests, it gives a good indication about the commitment of political parties to gender issues (Lovenduski 1993). I will also discuss strategies used by women within these institutions, and consider their effectiveness in advancing the gender-equality agenda. This paper will claim that the tendency of political parties to be more or less committed to the advancement of gender policies are related to a number of aspects linked to contextual, institutional, and agency variables. My analysis focus on the context of Latin America, but hopefully it will provide some general guidelines that might help broadly identify when, and the extent to which, political parties commit to gender balance in processes and outcomes.

## 1. Women's Political Access and Influence

### **The presence of women in the structure of political parties**

Despite recent improvements the number of women represented in leadership positions in political parties in Latin America remains low: overall it is below 10% and is only higher in those parties that operate internal gender quotas. Taking Brazil as an example, of the bigger political parties only the PT<sup>1</sup> and the PDT have quotas, and they are the only ones in which women occupy more than 10 per cent of the places on national political boards.<sup>2</sup> When quotas

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<sup>1</sup> At the end of this paper, a glossary is provided with the main acronyms and abbreviations of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The main political parties in Brazil, and the representation of women in their national boards, are as follows: Brazilian Popular Party – PPB (7%); Party of the Liberal Front - PFL (5%); Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement – PMDB (6.7%); Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) 8.4%; Democratic Labour Party (PDT) 17%; and Workers' Party (PT) 30%.

are in place the problem then becomes how to enforce them. The PDT, for example, adopted an internal quota of 20 per cent in 1996, but the number of women elected to its leadership has never reached that target. Political parties might also try to manipulate the implementation of quotas by having women as stand-ins – so as they show up in the figures, but in reality to not exert an influence in the party political structure.<sup>3</sup> Another tendency is for parties' non-compliance with this policy unless forced to do so, and even then only in a minimalist way. The quota percentage usually becomes a ceiling rather than a minimum.

A growing number of political parties have adopted quotas for the composition of their leadership structures and candidate lists. The first ones to adopt such measures are from the left: the PRD in Mexico and the PT in Brazil.<sup>4</sup> The PRD approved a quota of 20 per cent in 1990, which increased to 30 per cent in 1993. This quota is applied to the composition of both its leadership and its candidate slates (Galindo 2002). The PT approved a quota policy in its first national congress of 1991 and first implemented it in 1993. It pertains only to its leadership positions. These parties' initiatives provided the impetus for a trend that has been followed by other parties and organizations in the region. In Mexico the PRI and the PAN now also employ 30 per cent gender quotas, while in Brazil three other political parties, along with a number of socio-political organizations, have followed in the PT's footsteps: the PDT has a 20 per cent quota, and the PV and PPS have a 30 per cent quota. In 1993, Brazil's biggest trade union congress, the Central Workers' Union (CUT), also adopted a 30 per cent gender quota for its leadership positions. At present, all the other national union confederations also have internal gender quotas of 30 per cent.<sup>5</sup> The Union of University and Secondary Students (UNE and UNES respectively) also operate a 30 per cent gender quota in the composition of their leadership.

### **Women in Executive and Legislative Positions**

In recent years more women have been selected as candidates in elections and appointed to government positions at national, state and local level. At national level an unprecedented number of women have recently been appointed to ministerial posts: in the year 2000, 25 per cent of these positions in Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, and Venezuela were occupied by women. In 2002, the new president of Colombia Alvaro Uribe appointed six women to his cabinet – almost half of the total number of available positions. And in Brazil, after a period of

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<sup>3</sup> The PT for example (the party in government in Brazil, and the party with more representatives in parliament until very recently), has been observing its quota policy on a national level. However in some local and state levels where women are not so strongly organized it has consecutively tried to sabotage the implementation of this measure, only not succeeding amid women's protest and threats of not allowing for the registration of the party's slates.

<sup>4</sup> Other parties with quotas in Latin America include the Radical Civic Union (UCR) and the Justicialist Party (PJ) in Argentina; the Party of Revolutionary Action of Ecuador (APRE) in Ecuador; the Party for Democracy (PPD), and the Socialist Party (PS), in Chile; the Party for the National Liberation (PLN) and Party for the Cristian social Unity (PUSC) in Costa Rica; the Revolutionary Dominican Party (PRD) in the Dominican Republic; Farabundo Marti Front of National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador; Sandinist Front of National Liberation (FSLN) in Nicaragua; and the Democratic Action (AD) and Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) in Venezuela. For a full list of parties that have adopted quotas in Latin America see IDEA 2003.

<sup>5</sup> They are Union Strength (Força Sindical), the General Confederation of Workers (CGT), and the Confederation of Rural Workers (CONTAG).

nine years in which only two women had been ministers at national level, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva appointed five when he assumed the presidency in January 2003.

The number of women elected to legislative positions in the region has increased significantly. In the parliaments, the increased has been from 9 per cent in 1990, to around 18 per cent today (IPU 2005). In the senates, the figure has risen from 5 to 19 per cent over the same period. Although increments in women's numerical representation have not been uniform throughout the continent, there have been significant improvements in many countries, and the principal factor behind this positive development has been the application of candidate quotas. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela now apply gender quotas in the composition of their candidate slates for legislative positions at different levels.<sup>6</sup> Taking into account the national legislatures of these eleven countries, only in Argentina and Costa Rica has the percentage of women elected exceeded 30 per cent. In Brazil, Venezuela and Paraguay the percentage of women elected to national parliamentary positions is still under 10 per cent – which is to say far below what is specified by their quota regulations.<sup>7</sup> At the other end of the spectrum stand Costa Rica and Argentina, where the figures are 35.1 per cent and 33.7 per cent respectively. All the other countries lie somewhere in between.

The reason why this policy has been more successful in some countries than in others has to do with certain conditions that are mainly related to the electoral system.<sup>8</sup> In countries which have a system of proportional representation, employ closed lists of candidates, adopt a placement mandate indicating the position of male and female candidates in the lists, and have laws to enforce compliance, the number of women elected has been far higher – hence the progress made by women in Argentina and Costa Rica. In the absence of legal mechanisms that women can fall back on in cases of non-compliance with quotas, the tendency is for political parties not to meet their quota percentages, or to place their female candidates at the end of their lists. The electoral legislation in Argentina and Costa Rica states that in order for political parties to register their slates they must not only comply with the quota percentages but also observe this percentage in the placement order of candidates in their lists (so for every two men there must be a woman). Whether or not there is compliance with these legal requirements then depends on the ability of gender actors to put pressure on political parties, sometimes by threatening to take (or actually taking) legal action.<sup>9</sup> In Brazil, as quotas are not compulsory, none of the political parties or coalitions has actually fulfilled the quota percentage in any of the elections that have taken place since the policy was implemented. In terms of electoral legislation, two of the main changes women in Latin America have proposed have been a change from open to closed party lists, and a clear definition between the placement order of men and women in candidate lists.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> All of them, with the exception of Argentina, adopted quotas after the Women's Conference in Beijing.

<sup>7</sup> Brazil has 8.6 per cent, Venezuela 9.7 per cent, and Paraguay 10 per cent. All of them have a quota law of 30 per cent.

<sup>8</sup> For discussions related to this see also Htun 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Lubertino (2003) explains that in Argentina the quota policy has only been observed in places where women have been prepared to take judicial action against political parties in cases of non-compliance.

<sup>10</sup> In Brazil, according to the ways in which negotiations with political party leaders in the National Congress, about the electoral reform currently under discussion, are going, it is likely that they will manage to get strong support concerning changing the party's list from open to closed, but it is unlikely that they will manage to achieve much backing for a placement order between male and female candidates in the lists of the parties.

One of the main obstacles to women's representation is found in the process of candidate selection. Without mandatory quotas the number of women enlisted as candidates by political parties has invariably been much smaller than the number of men. As Baldez (2004) has suggested, the number of women actually elected by a political party may reflect bias on the part of the electorate, but the number of women selected as candidates gives a good indication of whether or not a party is gender-biased. A few political parties have recently introduced more democratic procedures into the processes of selecting their candidates. In Mexico the PRI (well known for its political centralisation), the PRD and the PAN have been using direct elections for selecting their candidates, and in Brazil the PT has had direct elections since 2001. However, participatory forms of candidate selection have not been the norm. The tendency is that the leaders of political parties will select their candidates employing criteria that are far from clear.

Gender bias on the part of the electorate is usually presented as one of the main reasons for the fact that political parties resist selecting female candidates. But actually, this is not an important factor in explaining the low numbers of women in politics in Latin America. A Gallup opinion poll based on interviews with 2,000 people in five major cities in the region found that 57 per cent believed that more women in politics would lead to better governments, that over 90 per cent would vote for a woman president, and that 69 per cent believed their country would elect a woman as president in the next 20 years (Inter-American Dialogue, 2001). A Vox Populis opinion poll carried out in January 2000 in Brazil revealed similar results: the respondents considered women to be more honest, trustworthy, competent, firm, capable and responsible, while 84 per cent of them said they would vote for a woman as a mayor and 72 per cent would vote for a woman to be president (Fêmea 2000). These findings suggest that the electorate offers rather less resistance to female political representatives than the parties themselves, and that one of the main obstacles to women's electoral success is to be found in the parties' political structure.<sup>11</sup>

Insufficient public funding of elections in the region has led to significant intervention from private sponsors and has led to political corruption. Men are invariably favoured when the provision of campaign resources are concerned as they are usually considered better candidates. With campaigns becoming increasingly expensive, particularly those for national legislatures and executive positions, this clearly reduces women's chances of succeeding at the ballot box. Useful initiatives for supporting the election of women would include efficient public financing of campaigns, better regulation of campaign funding, the creation of alternative resources to support women's elections, and the allocation of a percentage of the funds provided to political parties for spending on female candidatures.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A workshop organised by IDEA in Peru in 2003 to discuss the quotas policy in Latin America, as well as data from my own research with women federal deputies and senators and candidates to councillors' positions in Brazil, revealed that financial constraints and political parties' lack of commitment to the issues of women's representation are two central restraining factors to women's political participation. See IDEA 2003 (page 70 considers the main constraints on women's political representation discussed in the papers presented).

<sup>12</sup> Brazilian federal deputy Luisa Erundina da Silva has presented a law project which proposes that from the 30 per cent of public funds provided to political parties' research foundations in Brazil, 20 per cent is directed towards groups in the party that work with women. This project also proposes that 20 per cent of the time reserved for party political broadcasting on radio and television should be dedicated to the promotion of gender issues and women's representation. This project is part of the proposal for electoral reform currently being debated in the Brazilian National Congress.

## **Women's Influence in Political Parties**

Since the early 1990s in particular, women's departments (secretariats) have become a widespread form of organisation of women in political parties. Some women's department work as arms of political parties and are mainly concerned to achieve them support among the female electorate. However, in Latin America many women's department perform a critical double role: on the outside, they work in support of the party but on the inside, they work to transform unequal gender relations. Their main roles are to advise political parties on gender-related policies, to educate party members on gender issues, and to organise and train women politically. These departments are run on small budgets and tend to be isolated from the parties' main structures.<sup>13</sup> Activities aimed at the promotion of gender-political issues remain the responsibility of these departments and are usually developed independently.

Women's political activism has been an important source of energy for political parties. Women's closer connections with civil society and grassroots groups have proved important organizing and mobilizing resources for political parties in particular during electoral times. But their role is usually viewed instrumentally: as a means of raising political support for them. Political parties sometimes indulge in rhetoric in favour of gender equality while shying away from any active commitment to achieving it. Gender equality has been promoted in the manifestos and programmes of a number of political parties in Latin America, however women's political potential has rarely been recognised at their leadership and decision-making structures. The self-interested nature of political parties' relationship with women is manifested in the way they deal with female candidatures. In a supra-partisan seminar organised in the city of Florianópolis (Brazil) in July 2004 to discuss campaign strategies for women, the predominant view put forward by councillor candidates was that political parties seek female candidates as a means of increasing votes for their slates and thus helping to elect potentially stronger male candidates. Women who were actively engaged in community and church work, in particular, claimed they were strongly encouraged to enlist as candidates and were promised resources for their campaigns, but that once they enlisted they were left on their own. Thus, even when they had real chances of winning, they tended not to be successful due to a lack of financial and political backing.

In cases where more women have taken up positions in leadership structures of political parties, this has not automatically translated into a greater political influence for them. In some cases, women are nominally elected for some leadership positions that are in fact performed by men. Also, on the whole, women tend to have been selected for positions that are labour intensive, but are rarely entrusted with those posts entailing real political visibility and weight such as the presidency and general secretariat of political parties.

Institutional aspects, such as the internal functioning and culture of political parties, serve as further constraints on women's political participation and influence. The activities of political parties are usually organized with little regard for women's specific needs. Also, the political behaviour and skills that tend to be valued within these organizations are those commonly displayed by men, such as forceful assertiveness and verbal eloquence. In this environment, women have to work harder in order to prove themselves politically capable and reliable.

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<sup>13</sup> For further discussion of this issue see Sacchet (2002) on Brazil; Luciak (2001) on El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala; and Lubertino (2003) on Argentina.

## **2. Gender Initiatives and Strategies**

A number of positive changes have been achieved within political parties and representative institutions as a result of women undertaking strategic action. The implementation of many gender-policy initiatives has been a consequence of concerted campaigns, forceful lobbying, and effective political coordination by women. I shall discuss some of these strategies below.

### **Quotas**

Quotas have been widely pursued in the region as a strategy for increasing women's presence both in leadership and in decision-making positions. This policy is usually assumed to be necessary in order to increase the number of women in political positions to the point at which it can actually make a difference in political terms (the critical mass theory). In fact, in campaigns for quotas, the claim for this policy has not always been based on arguments about policy results. In Latin America, the most common argument presented in defence of this policy is that women should have the same right as men to participate in political decision-making irrespective of their political contribution. When the topic of political presence is linked to that of policy outcomes, it is usually articulated in a language of probability rather than certainty – either that, or this line of reasoning is pursued for strategic reasons (Sacchet 2002).<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, as far as women's presence in legislative positions is concerned, studies have revealed a strong correlation between descriptive representation and policy outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

Quotas have proved a worthwhile strategy, even in countries where the number of women elected has not significantly increased as a result. The processes of campaigning for this policy, and the initiatives undertaken after its approval in order to encourage and strengthen women's political representation, have empowered women and favoured their unification across political divides. They have also contributed to giving public visibility and raising the profile of issues related to gender political inequality.

### **Coalition Building**

Throughout Latin America women have used coalition building across political and social sectors as a means to advance their policy agenda. This was seen in Chile during the military regime when, despite divisions in their parties, women organised independently to call for an end to the dictatorship (Baldez 2002). Similarly, in El Salvador, when women were excluded from the peace process they formed a coalition called 'Mujeres 94' to use the election of 1994 to raise awareness about gender issues and to put pressure on the parties to listen to their demands (Friedman 2002, Luciak 2001). Women's unity in these countries has helped increase their bargaining power in pursuing their policy agenda, and at the same time has worked as an inspiration to men to do the same. In Brazil, women's organization across political and social divides has been a long-standing characteristic. In the National Constituent Assembly of 1988, the coordination between state feminists, female politicians in the National Congress, social

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<sup>14</sup> For a theoretical consideration of the main arguments for quotas see Phillips 1995, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Although most academics would not claim a clear correlation between descriptive representation and policy outcomes (thus avoiding incurring in essentialist notions about women's identities and interests), research findings have provided evidence of changes in policy content when more women are incorporated into the process of political decision-making. They not only reveal that women parliamentarians are usually better advocates of gender-related interests, but also, that they make a distinct contribution to political processes related to other issues (Broughton and Palmieri 1999, Carroll 2001; Lovenduski and Norris 2003; Thomas 1994).

movements and civil society actors was responsible for securing the introduction of important women's rights and gender-related policies in the new constitution. In 1995, hundreds of groups combined to form the *Articulação Nacional de Mulheres* (Women's National Coalition), a body that organised meetings in 25 Brazilian States in order to discuss proposals for the Women's Conference in Beijing. In the same year, their unanimous coalition within the National Congress was vital in approving the policy of quotas. Finally, in 2004, there were meetings in more than 2000 municipalities all over Brazil in which more than 120,000 women (from government, the voluntary sector and grassroots groups) participated, then around 2000 delegates attended a national conference in Brasilia to discuss proposals for national planning on public policies for women.<sup>16</sup> The strategy of coalition building has been essential in coordinating women's demands in Latin America, helping increase their resources and political clout. Women's ability to form alliances at strategic times has been an important asset that has sometimes counterbalanced their poor representation in political decision-making positions.

The forging of alliances with men in high-profile political positions has proved an important means of advancing gender policies within political organizations. In Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, support from men was essential in order to guarantee the approval and implementation of electoral gender quotas. Coalitions with men have also been used to secure approval for gender policies within political parties and trade unions. In the PT and the CUT, after much argument, support from male leaders was ultimately important in convincing party members to support gender quotas (Sacchet 2002). In the FMLN in El Salvador and FSLN in Nicaragua, alliances with men helped to secure formal gender equality and to advance changes in the internal culture of these parties (Luciak 2001). Although achieving support from men for gender-related initiatives is not always straightforward, the experience in Latin America shows that men can be persuaded of the legitimacy of claims for gender political equality and can come to actively support gender-related initiatives. This has important strategic potential, as in traditional gendered structures – such as political parties, trade unions and parliaments, which are numerically and culturally male-dominated – backing from men helps create a favourable environment for gender-related proposals.

### **Influencing the Media**

Another strategy used by women is that of influencing the media from within. It is usually difficult to attract media attention when the subject is related to gender equality, but certain tactics have helped to secure greater, and more favourable, coverage from the mass media. In Argentina and Brazil, for example, gender actors have developed closer alliances with the press and have strengthened links with journalists sympathetic to gender issues, thereby succeeding in getting the attention of the media at key political moments. Through the media the population are becoming better informed about certain gender issues and more aware of the gender-equality perspective.

### **Discourse Framing**

The ways in which demands for gender equality are framed is important both in pressing for changes within political institutions and in trying to persuade people of their legitimacy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This Conference, was called by presidential decree and the process was coordinated by the new organ created by the president, the Special Secretariat of Policies for Women. A total of nearly 3000 women – including delegates, observers and invited guests – took part.

<sup>17</sup> See Snow (1986) and Snow and Benford (1988) for discussions on discourse frames.

Women's leadership groups in political institutions have often conveyed their discourses strategically in order to educate people and gain their support. At the same time, they have worked from within the rhetoric on justice and gender rights of political institutions to claim political consistency (this is considered in more detail in the final section). The way in which discourses on rights and needs are framed is important as far as mustering support for gender demands and heightening awareness of gender relations are concerned.

In summary, it may be said that in Latin America gender-related initiatives are being advanced through party political structures. More parties are adopting gender quotas for their leadership and electoral positions. More women have been chosen as party leaders. The number of women selected as candidates is growing, as is the number being elected to parliamentary positions. Gender initiatives are being incorporated more easily into the policy programmes of governments and parties, and issues related to gender are being coordinated within different political spheres. However, the pace of changes would be much faster if political parties took on a more proactive role when it comes to promoting gender equality and mainstreaming a gender perspective, thereby correcting a number of issues related to their political structures. In order for political parties to work for the advancement of gender-related causes they must encourage women's participation in their political life, they should take on board women's political views, and they should endeavour to change their internal practices so as to account for women's particular needs. Political parties have an important role to play concerning the issue of gender balance in processes and outcomes, and in the mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in different spheres of political decision-making. If they came to assume this role more effectively, these aims would be more easily achieved. And they would become more than isolated initiatives promoted and upheld by women exclusively.

## **When do Political Parties Work for Women?**

Having examined the relationship between political parties and gender in Latin America, I will now consider the conditions under which political parties function most effectively in producing gender-equitable processes and outcomes.

Political parties have a greater propensity to respond to gender-related demands when a number of structural, institutional and agency factors are in place. The literature suggests the following:<sup>18</sup>

- Highly institutionalised political parties are more likely to attend to women's demands.
- Political parties in the centre and towards the left of the political spectrum are more responsive to gender-related demands.
- Political parties that have an internal organization of women that is well coordinated, and which are able to mobilize resources, tend to respond better to women's demands.
- The degree to which political parties respond to gender demands is influenced by the existing contextual political opportunity structures.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Based on the work of Caul 1999; Lovenduski 1993; Noris 1993; Sacchet 2002; Waylen 2003)

<sup>19</sup> The concept of Political Opportunity Structure usually involves macro and meso elements. They therefore would include the national and international conjunctures as well as aspects related to the political and party systems (Eisinger 1973; Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow, 1994, 1996). Here however, in order to make my analysis clearer, I will take this concept on a rather circumscribed way. In this paper, POS will refer exclusively those elements linked to

## Political Parties' Institutionalization and Ideology, and Political Opportunity Structures

Aspects such as party institutionalisation<sup>20</sup> and ideology are among the most important variables when considering features that influence political parties responsiveness to gender issues. Firstly, highly institutionalised political parties are said to be more committed to the gender policy agenda as they have more transparent structures and are governed by clearly defined sets of rules, making it easier for their members to demand accountability. This seems to have been confirmed in this paper. The first parties in Latin America to adopt measures in support of women's political representation, such as quotas, were those which were more institutionalised and which had more clearly defined, standardised and documented sets of rules governing their internal functioning.

Secondly, centre and left-wing parties are seen as being more committed to the promotion of gender-related issues (Caul 1999, Norris 1993, Rule 1994, Waylen 2003).<sup>21</sup> They advocate equality and inclusive citizenship, and therefore tend to be willing to take gender-related issues on board. They are also open to challenge from within their own ideological standpoint – which is what happened during the campaign for quotas within the PT, when by contrasting the party's notion of participatory democracy and substantive equality with the small percentage of women represented in its decision making structures (under 7 per cent), the women's secretariat accused the party of political inconsistency and pressured it into changing its internal practices by adopting quotas. Although right-wing political parties may endorse gender-related initiatives, it tends to be the case that parties of the left and centre-left start the trend and are then followed by others who also wish to attract women's votes (Lovenduski 1993). In Latin America, left-wing parties were the first to incorporate gender issues into their political programmes and the first to adopt gender quotas.<sup>22</sup>

Thirdly, the degree to which parties respond to gender demands is also influenced by external factors. Political opportunity structures<sup>23</sup> – which is to say national and international socio-economic, political and cultural trends – can either help lend legitimacy to gender-related demands or place obstacles in their path. Here, two major factors must be considered. Firstly, the topic of political parties and gender gained an increasingly high profile from the beginning of the 1990s. Internationally, this was a period of meaningful political changes. The crisis and subsequent demise of the former Soviet Union had profound repercussions for the Latin American left. The crises of 'real socialism' created a political vacuum for the left's political ideologies and projects. At the same time, left-wing parties in Latin America were being

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the bigger political context such as national and international political trends that impact on the activities of social actors.

<sup>20</sup> According to Norris (1993), party institutionalisation refers to a situation in which the internal rules of the party 'are detailed, explicit, standardised, implemented by party officials, and authorised in party documents' (327).

<sup>21</sup> Some of these authors have particularly stressed the tendency of 'new left' types of parties, because of their greater connections to social movements, to be more sympathetic towards women's demands (Caul 1999).

<sup>22</sup> The adoption of quotas is regarded to give a good indication of the level of political parties' commitment to gender issues. According to Lovenduski (1993) there are three main strategies that define the level of commitment of political parties' to women's demands: strategy of rhetoric, strategy of affirmative action, and strategy of positive discrimination (quotas). She places them in a continuum which gives the level of their commitment to gender issues. Those that adopted quotas are considered to have a greater commitment to promote gender related demands.

<sup>23</sup> A good discussion on the concept of political opportunity structures is presented by Tarrow (1994, 1996).

heavily criticised for supporting an obsolete project based on authoritarian practices. The weakening of the labour movement as a political force added to the problem. The crisis of the left made it necessary to turn to political alternatives and alliances, thus bringing left-wing and centre-left political parties closer to agents who had stronger connections with grassroots activism, including women's organisations.

Secondly, the 1990s were unprecedented in terms of legitimising issues of gender equality. Struggles for women's rights in different parts of the globe became connected through alliances and networks. International organisations, summits and conferences provided space for the sharing of ideas, and for the coordination and definition of policy proposals, while also highlighting and conferring cultural legitimacy upon demands for women's rights and gender equality. The UN Women's Conference in Beijing was a landmark in this respect. Women activists in Latin America were empowered in their calls for socio-political equality and gender mainstreaming. This international trend in favour of gender equality influenced political parties and institutions in Latin America, making them more open to gender-related demands.

Therefore, although parties of the left have indeed demonstrated a greater tendency to support gender-related demands, the degree to which they have responded to them has also been influenced by the existing political opportunity structures. Therefore in order to understand the tendency of political parties to support the demands of groups such as women we must also account for changes in the global and local political conjunctures trying to understand their impact in these structures.

### **Women Strategies and Bargaining Powers**

Political parties' commitment to gender-related issues is also shaped by the political clout of gender actors. The political influence or bargaining power of gender actors is largely dependent on their ability to recognize existing political opportunities, to strategize their actions, to mobilize and use their resources strategically, and to frame their claims in such ways that they will succeed in increasing the numbers of allies and supporters (Sacchet 2002). The ability of gender actors to perform strategically as to both to mobilize resources such as leadership, allies, and supporters (who will encourage and back their claims) as well as to frame arguments in their demands in a way that will either convince party member of their legitimacy or to threaten political parties with the loss of support (particularly in terms of votes), are essential elements in determining whether these organizations will be more or less likely to respond to gender related demands. The parties most likely to respond to gender-related demands are those in which women tend to be well organised and able to carry out concerted and resourceful collective actions, and in which they have links to other supportive organizations and to civil society which afford them higher political clout. The support of political parties in Latin America for gender-related initiatives has been achieved through constant processes of coordination among women and the strategizing of their action. Women's ability to coordinate resourceful campaigns was a highly important determining factor in, for example, the approval of quotas for leadership and electoral positions in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica and Peru. By unifying across parties and social sectors and inside political institutions, by working strategically on the way they frame their demands, and by making alliances with high-profile political leader (including men), women are being able to achieve support for their demands and to pressurise political institutions into approving gender related policies.

In conclusion, the degree to which political parties promote gender-related policies and incorporate a gender perspective depend on their ideology, on the degree to which they are

institutionalised, on the existing political conjunctures, and above all on the specific configurations, level of coordination and mobilizing dynamics of their gender actors. The achievements thus far in terms of gender policy outcomes within political parties and institutions have to a great extent been driven by structural and institutional factors, but above all they have been brought about by women's increasing ability to recognize existing political opportunities to push for their demands, and to coordinating their actions strategically in order to pressurise these structures into accepting their agendas. As the literature suggests, political parties of the left have been more responsive to women's demands. However, this has been largely due to the fact that women's political leverage within these parties tend to be stronger.

## Glossary

<b>CUT</b>	Central Workers' Union
<b>FMLN</b>	Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (El Salvador)
<b>FSLN</b>	Sandinista National Liberation Front (Nicaragua)
<b>PAN</b>	National Action Party (Mexico)
<b>PDS</b>	Democratic Social Party (Brazil)
<b>PDT</b>	Democratic Labour Party (Brazil)
<b>PFL</b>	Party of the Liberal Front (Brazil)
<b>PMDB</b>	Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement
<b>PPB</b>	Brazilian Progressive Party
<b>PPS</b>	Popular Socialist Party (Brazil)
<b>PRD</b>	Party of the Democratic Revolution (Mexico)
<b>PRI</b>	Institutional Revolutionary Party (Mexico)
<b>PSB</b>	Brazilian Socialist Party
<b>PSDB</b>	Brazilian Social Democratic Party
<b>PSDC</b>	Christian Social Democratic Party (Brazil)
<b>PT</b>	Workers' Party (Brazil)
<b>PTB</b>	Brazilian Labour Party
<b>PV</b>	Green Party (Brazil)
<b>UNE</b>	National Union of University Students
<b>UNES</b>	National Union of Secondary Students

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