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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

***Gender and Latin America's Pink Tide***

# *Introduction*

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Today, the Left is in power across almost two-thirds of Latin America: 12 countries total with the recent exit from power of the Chilean Left. This scenario is in stark contrast to the 1990s when "Washington Consensus" leaders dominated Latin American politics with their decidedly rightist ideologies. Most scholars concur that the recent revival of the Left in Latin America can be attributed to persistent economic inequality, inequality exacerbated by the market-oriented Washington Consensus policies of the 1990s. Inequality, combined with the strengthening of democracy in the 1980s and 1990s, created demands for greater inclusion. Out of this discontent a variety of left governments emerged — from the radical Left of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela to the more moderate, market-embracing Left of Chile's Concertación.

Latin America's left turn has sparked a cottage industry of scholarship. Yet overlooked — with a few exceptions — is the role of women and gender equity, a curious oversight given that women and issues of gender rights and equity have always been a central element of leftist politics in the region, even though that relationship has often been contested and complicated.[1]

The rise of the Left in Latin America raises many important questions with regard to women and gender. Is this "new" Left different than previous Lefts with respect to women's rights and gender equity? How do the different varieties of contemporary Lefts compare to one another on these issues? Have women experienced greater opportunities for political participation? Have leftist governments improved the economic and social inequalities faced by women? And the rise of the Left raises more complex questions as well — we have

1. Space precludes a full review of this literature. Among the few that have examined gender and the Latin American left turn are Friedman (2009), Heumann (2010), and Kampwirth (2008).

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seen in several countries the importance of an indigenous political base and the advent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTTI) rights onto national political agendas. What are the implications of these cross-cutting issues, and what determines which of these (gender, race, sexuality, or the classic concerns of class) will get the most attention from the contemporary Left?

The contributors to this section begin to answer some of these questions and raise others. In so doing, they broaden and deepen a research agenda on the relationship between gender and the Left that has long been significant but that has been largely limited to Europe. In Europe, left governments have been found to increase gender equity significantly, and many have been supportive of sexual rights. An examination of gender and the Left in Latin America takes this agenda beyond Europe to a region where the "left equals gender equity" equation is much less clear-cut.

The authors in this section analyze gender and left in four Latin American countries: Jocelyn Viterna examines the political roots and consequences of the starkly conservative abortion policies of the revolutionary Farbundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) government in El Salvador; Amy Lind uses the lens of social reproduction to demonstrate the contradictions of Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa's revolution with a "woman's face"; Patricia Richards demonstrates the importance of an intersectional analysis when weighing the achievements of Chile's Concertación government under Michelle Bachelet; and I highlight the strategic uses of gender equality rhetoric in Peru's 2011 presidential elections, one in which a male left candidate faced off against a right-wing woman. Together, we show that consideration of gender, and gender in relationship to sexual rights and race in Latin America's left turn, provides a more complete, if complicated, picture of what the revival of the Left may imply for inequality in the region.

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## The Left and "Life" in El Salvador

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Throughout the past decade, governments across Latin America have experienced an unprecedented swing to the left. In this essay, I ask: Does the rise of the Left promote women's equality? Or in contrast, could women's continued subordination be an important factor promoting the rise of the Left? Using the case of El Salvador, I demonstrate how the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) deradicalized its public image — away from "guerrilla insurgents" and toward a viable political party — at least in part by converting its 1980s support for reproductive rights into present-day support for one of the most restrictive abortion policies in the world. I conclude that reversing the causal question about gender and left-leaning political parties may not only extend our understanding of the complicated relationship between gender and the Left but also improve our understanding of the factors moving Latin America from right to left, and from "red" to "pink."

In 2007, 19-year-old Glenda Liseth — a single mom with a four-year-old daughter — began to feel stomach pains. She lived in a poor, isolated rural area without accessible prenatal care. When the pains started, she went to the outhouse, thinking she needed to have a bowel movement. She expelled what felt like "a piece of meat." She tried to catch it, failed, and passed out. Her family found her unconscious and took her to the hospital. The doctors, fearful of prison time for not reporting suspected abortions, called the police. The police recovered the fetus from the septic system for evidence. Initially, Glenda appeared lucky; the court ruled that the fetus was miscarried and not aborted. Yet her luck was short-lived. The courts sentenced her to four years in jail for manslaughter. She should have not gone to the bathroom when she knew she was pregnant and perhaps miscarrying, they argued, but rather should have sought medical help. Her daughter

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