



Women Legislators in Central America: Politics, Democracy, and Policy

Michelle A. Saint-Germain, Cynthia Chavez Metoyer

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During the years between 1980 and 1999, in the midst of war and economic crisis, a record number of women were elected to national legislatures in Central American republics. Can quantitative increases in the presence of elected women in Central America produce qualitative political changes?

In this detailed study, Michelle A. Saint-Germain and Cynthia Chavez Metoyer explore the reasons for this unprecedented political rise of women, and what effect it has had on the region. Focusing on Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, the authors analyze national and regional indicators to evaluate various hypotheses concerning the reasons for women's electoral success in the region, as well as to make comparisons with findings from other world regions. They find that the election of more women depends on three things: the presence of a crisis, a pool of politically experienced women, and a culture of gender consciousness. They also compare the characteristics of Central American women legislators to women in other national legislatures around the world.

The authors document how elected women have used their policy-making power to begin to change the lives of all Central Americans, women and men alike. In more than seventy-five in-depth, personal interviews, these women legislators reflect on their lives, political careers, and gender identities in their own words, providing deep insights into recent events in this region.

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