



## Sharing Power: Colombia's Dramatic Surge of Women Leaders (1957-1998)

**Barbara Frechette**

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*Sharing Power* is the story of the rapid rise of Colombian women to leadership between the years 1957 and 1998, a time when Colombia's drug violence was raging. When Barbara Frechette, a journalist, editor, author, and wife of the US ambassador to Colombia arrived there with him in 1994, she was surprised to find that even though the nation's women had not won the right to vote until 1957, strong, capable women were holding leadership positions in banking, finance, foreign relations, and the legislature.

Frechette sought to understand how and why women, not only in Colombia but in Latin American and Caribbean nations in general, had progressed so far, so quickly. Between 1974 and 2010, eleven Latin American countries (Argentina twice) had elected women presidents. This second edition of a 1999 work first published as *Sharing Power: Colombia's Remarkable Women Leaders* holds possible answers to that question, but additionally places it in the larger context of Latin American female political activism.

The volume features interviews with seven extraordinary women, two of them former presidential candidates, who decided against the confrontational political style of male leaders, engaging instead in noncombative efforts to unite all the nation's women—regardless of their status or beliefs—in political activism to promote laws to protect women and children. Frechette capably shows how, through hard work, good mentoring, and a spirit of cooperation, Colombian women have been elected to legislatures in numbers sufficient to make some of their goals a reality despite death threats, exile, and a strong patriarchal history and tradition bolstered by the Catholic Church.

Of compelling interest is the author's discussion of how the women's movements of both the United States and Colombia have lost momentum since 2006, and for opposite reasons: US feminists have prioritized economic equality with men and neglected the importance of legislative parity, while in Colombia, women aimed for political equality in the belief that holding legislative power would allow them to eliminate discriminatory laws that worked against women and children. Frechette makes a strong case that, to achieve political and economic equality, the women of both countries must learn from each other.

Strong colors and good design characterize the book's front and back covers, and the back matter is enhanced with full-color head shots of Frechette's interviewees. The copyright page is well designed and the table of contents, in outline form, gives readers a good feel for what will be found in each chapter. Especially informative are the author's note and the introduction, which provide insight into the background and conditions prevalent in Colombia during the time periods covered by the book. Ample endnotes offer substantial opportunity for further research, and the text is refreshingly error free.

Labeling this book as an autobiography/memoir is a bit of a misnomer. The volume would better reach its appropriate audience were it also classified under women's studies or even Latin American politics and/or Latin American feminism.

Frechette has done the worldwide women's movement a great service with this well-written and inspiring work.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March 29, 2013)

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