

# Introduction: How Pink Is the ‘Pink Tide’?

**M**ANY ARE SPECULATING ABOUT THE TRUE COLORS OF Latin America’s much-heralded “pink tide.” Just how close to socialist “red” are the region’s new left-leaning governments? This Report approaches the question from a different angle: Do the new governments promote the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, who are often associated with the color pink? We take a critical look at the opportunities and obstacles that Latin America’s shifting political context presents to Latin Americans who challenge sexism, homo- and transphobia, and their intersection with class and ethnic/racial exclusion. Without providing easy answers, the contributors to this issue—including journalists, academics and activists from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela—analyze the potential for change in the new environment.

This “tide”—which includes the “21st-century socialism” proclaimed by Venezuela’s thrice-elected President Hugo Chávez and the liberal capitalist social democracy of Chile’s first-ever female president, Michelle Bachelet—is far from homogeneous, as is the situation for activists, whose prospects are conditioned by these governments’ various agendas. Argentina’s President Néstor Kirshner has deployed a “recipe” for co-opting social movements that has complicated relationships among that country’s “LGBTTTT” organizations; this contrasts with the situation in Bolivia, where President Evo Morales’ “indigenous nationalism” is opening up spaces where indigenous Bolivian women may finally be listened to. Nothing, however, quite compares to the maneuvers of Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega, whose pacts with right-wing parties and “covenant” with the Catholic Church has led feminists to declare themselves “in a state of ‘civil disobedience’” against his new government.

Having the left in power makes an undeniable difference in the life conditions of people across the region. Brazil’s massive poverty-reduction program; Venezuela’s health care, nutrition, education and employment missions; Chile’s legislative reform and targeted social programs; and Argentina’s welfare and nondiscrimination policies are helping millions. But, as this Report’s authors make clear, no matter how “red” the pink tide becomes, the new governments actively resist challenges to gender relations and the construction of sexuality. This is particularly so in the case of the push to legalize abortion—a central demand of the region’s feminist movements—which center-left and left political leaders and parties have gone to extraordinary lengths to thwart. The issue of female leadership is less

clear-cut: While Bachelet’s fulfillment of gender parity in political appointments has proved stimulating to women, and Venezuelan feminists are seeking to increase the suspended quotas for female candidates, Bolivian quota legislation “worked to consolidate male leadership” and the elite urban women linked to it. The resistance to race- or ethnicity-based demands is also a mixed story, given the contrast between developments in Bolivia and in Brazil, where black women are still neglected in public policies.

Latin America’s feminist and LGBT activists use a range of strategies to confront their varied situations. Gioconda Espina describes how an “elastic core” of Venezuelan activists has been able to work across both historical and contemporary political divisions to advocate a “minimum agenda.” Vilma Reis analyzes the expansion of Afro-Brazilian women’s mobilization from protesting racial and gendered brutality to offering an engaged critique of the effects of institutional racism and sexism on their country’s development. Alejandra Sardá offers a snapshot of the cacophonous rainbow that is Argentina’s “LGBTTTT” movement, whose members “speak and act from their own unique circumstances, in which their other identities (class, race, age, etc.) play a determining role.” Karin Monasterios P. explores the ideological polarization in Bolivia between a liberal, NGO-based “gender technocracy” and anarcho-feminists, and their distinct relationships with the majority of Bolivian women, who in turn mobilize through territorial, class and ethnic organizations. And Marcela Ríos Tobar observes that while Chilean feminists have in some cases succeeded in wielding institutional power, their professionalization has become an obstacle to developing a common political project with grassroots women’s organizations.

The failure of middle-class or elite feminist and LGBT activists to connect with the majority of women, men and transgender people who come from marginal classes and areas is a common finding. Unsurprisingly, left governments have not immediately altered this historical tension in the region’s progressive gender-based organizing—particularly in cases where the organizing itself is beholden to the agendas of national political forces and/or international institutions. But given the commitments of the pink-tide governments to address social exclusion, at least rhetorically, this may be a unique moment to bridge long-standing divisions.

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