



Supermadre: Women in Politics in Latin America (Lilas Latin American Monograph)

Elsa M. Chaney

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The title of this book, *Supermadre*, is ironic. It means, not that women have begun to exercise real power in Latin American political life, but that their participation is mostly confined to roles that are extensions of their roles as mothers—health, education, welfare, for example—and then only on the lower levels of policy-making.

Elsa Chaney begins her study with an examination of various attempts to explain women's virtual absence from decision-making councils not only in Latin America but also world-wide, concluding that their motherhood role has had the profoundest effect on the nature of their political activities. She then analyzes the images and realities of women in Latin American society from colonial times to the present.

The remainder of the book is a detailed study of women in politics and government in Latin America, with emphasis on the contrasting cases of Peru and Chile. In conclusion, Chaney suggests that women will make only slow progress toward full participation in public life until they themselves stop seeing their role in politics as that of the *supermadre*.

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