

SECOND EDITION

COMPARATIVE POLITICS OF

LATIN AMERICA

DEMOCRACY AT LAST?



DANIEL C. HELLINGER

ROUTLEDGE

Comparative Politics of Latin America

Students will explore and understand the evolutions and revolutions that have brought the region to where it is today in the fully-updated new edition of Daniel Hellinger's *Comparative Politics of Latin America*. This text offers a unique balance of comparative politics theory and interdisciplinary country-specific context, of a thematic organization and in-depth country case studies, of culture and economics, of scholarship and pedagogy. No other textbook draws on such a diverse range of scholarly literature to help students understand the ins and outs of politics in Latin America today.

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Daniel C. Hellinger is a Professor of International Relations and has been teaching at Webster University for over 30 years. He also serves on the Advisory Board of the Center of Democracy in the Americas (a Washington DC-based NGO) where he supports efforts towards a better understanding between the U.S. and Latin America. He is an authority on the politics of Venezuela.

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Democracy at Last?

Second edition

Daniel C. Hellinger

Commissioning Editor: Michael Kerns
Textbook Development Manager: Rebecca Pearce
Production Editor: Alf Symons
Cover Design: John Maloney
Companion Website Manager: Natalya Dyer
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Dedication

*To my good friends Steven Ellner, María Pilar García Guadilla,
Raúl Rodríguez, Bernard Mommer, Bernardo Álvarez, Angelo Rivero Santos,
and Eduardo Cavieres.*

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Preface

Perhaps the world's most exciting and controversial experiments in democracy are underway in Latin America. Neither liberal nor Marxist orthodoxy has much appeal to most people in the region today, and perhaps that explains why Latin America has been a hothouse for democratic experimentation. As I explore these transitions to democracy throughout the text, the question is less about whether or not democracy is the best form of government and more about what form of democracy makes the most sense for today's world. I believe that the answer is not wildly different for Latin America than for other parts of the world, including the United States. In my personal view, democracy must not only embrace choice, equality before the law, and civil liberties; it must also be participatory, be socially and economically inclusive, and extend deeply into social and economic structures. It cannot be limited to affairs of government.

I suspect that attentive teachers and students will recognize that this agenda for democracy puts me somewhere on the left of the political spectrum, but I hope they will feel this text has not failed to fairly represent arguments drawn both from the liberal tradition of democracy and from the orthodox pluralist views that dominate the field of comparative politics. I would like comparative political scientists whose work reflects different views on democracy to feel that this book is passionate and intellectually honest, not polemical or deliberately selective in its treatment of the issues.

My goal in writing this text was to provide students with a method for exploring the politics of Latin America through a specific lens, with which they are free to agree or disagree. Ideally, each student will reach his or her own conclusions about what "democracy" means and what forms of government appear best suited to the countries explored in the text. Because Latin America contains a large number of diverse countries, each with its own challenges to address, I believe a thematic framework is the best method to help students organize the massive amount of information typically provided in courses of this nature. As someone who has been teaching the course for many, many years, I am fully aware of the challenges students face with grasping and organizing its content, and with this book I hope to provide them with a better tool for learning about—and thinking about—politics in Latin America.

As Latin America continues to expand its presence in the global economy and leaders from regimes of old begin to fade away, it is an exciting and important time to be studying Latin American politics. Arguably, the worldwide human rights movement began in Latin America during its last transition from military rule to electoral democracy. In Latin America today, social movements are re-conceptualizing the state, civil society, and the market. Social movements throughout the region are attempting to tame both the centralized power of states and the tyranny of market forces.

Brazilians started experimenting 25 years ago with participatory budgeting, a practice now spreading to other parts of the globe. Indigenous Andeans have gone farther than anyone else in promoting responsible stewardship of the earth on a world stage, insisting that we can have the *buen vivir* without the materialism and consumption of unbridled capitalism. Venezuelans have provided the world with its first constitution written in gender-neutral language. Though deeply divided about what democracy should look like, they have taken the lead in insisting that democracy cannot exist without social and economic inclusion. Cubans now wrestle with how to open their economy and politics without losing the values of solidarity, facing the challenge of a transition from the old Leninist model of the state.

■ Changes from the First to Second Edition

I have thoroughly updated and revised the text from the first edition. A few changes are especially worth highlighting:

- Reorganized chapter structure from 19 down to 16 chapters so that the text fits more easily with the traditional semester-long course.
- An all-new final chapter (chapter 16) where instead of covering the consequences of U.S. hegemony (chapter 19 in the previous edition), I discuss the consequences of weakening U.S. hegemony and new diplomatic initiatives by Latin Americans.
- Topical updates, including the Pink Tide, social movements' uneasy relationship with leftist parties, the expansion of the middle class, new hemispheric diplomatic organizations and initiatives for economic integration, post-Chávez Venezuela, post-Lula Brazil, the student movement in Chile, the revival of Mexico's PRI, the economic reforms launched by Raúl Castro, the impact of Chinese markets and investments and many other contemporary developments.

New Learning Aids in this Edition

In response to feedback from instructors, some new pedagogy has also been introduced, and existing pedagogy has been improved to help students better engage with the text.

Thumbnail “locator” maps are strategically placed throughout the text to help geographically challenged students develop familiarity with the location of countries. “Democracy Snapshots” of the 2013 Latinobarómetro poll results on attitudes toward democracy for various Latin American countries are also included where each country is discussed in depth. These “snapshots” provide instructors with an interesting talking point in class as the figures reveal a wide (and often surprising) gap between the degrees of support for democracy, from the highest (Venezuela) to the lowest (Mexico), in the region. Last, one of the most exciting new features to this edition is the “Punto de Vista” debate box. These boxes appear in nearly every chapter and ask students to debate issues facing citizens in Latin American countries, including affirmative action programs in Brazil, Ecuador's regulation of the media, Uruguay's amnesty for human rights abuses, and the U.S.-promoted drug war in the region.

Improved Learning Aids from the Last Edition

Changes to existing pedagogy in the new edition include the following:

- Revision of the introductory *Focus Questions* to make sure they correspond more closely to the chapter organization.
- *For Review* questions that appear throughout the text so that students can quickly check their comprehension. (Instructors might also utilize the *For Review* questions to get a pulse on their class's comprehension of the reading through classroom discussions, homework assignments, or quizzes.)
- *Discussion Questions* at the end of the chapter that encourage students to think critically about what they've read.
- Expansion of the glossary and number of key terms.
- Expansion of the *Resources for Further Study*, including more suggestions for readings (fiction and nonfiction), websites, films, and videos.

Companion Website

Routledge hosts a companion website that includes a number of useful resources for both students and instructors. Students looking for extra study aids will find chapter summaries, country profiles from Europa World, and web links to online resources. We are fortunate to be able to partner with Europa because they have a wealth of information available on the countries of Latin America. The inclusion of select Europa World content enables teachers to combine the thematic approach of this book with assignments to help provide students with a coherent narrative of the history, the social and economic features, and the recent development of individual nations in the region. It is also a good resource for students to have on hand if they are not familiar with the region or if they are researching a country-specific topic for the course. To help instructors with classroom preparation, the companion website includes PowerPoint lecture slides, suggestions for exam questions, suggestions for classroom activities, and more. The accompanying website has been thoroughly updated and revised by my colleague, Dr. Philip Meeks, professor at Creighton University. Phil brings a substantial and distinguished résumé in Latin American politics to this task. The companion website can be found at www.routledge.com/cw/hellinger.

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In addition to all of those who helped with the first edition, I especially want to thank several people whose work has helped enormously in this second edition. I always must start with my love and life-partner, Joann Eng-Hellinger, whose patience and support is invaluable. Once again I want to thank especially commissioning editor Michael Kerns at Routledge for his faith in this book. Also deserving of my thanks is Phil Meeks for taking on development of a website that I hope teachers and students will find to be an invaluable resource. When Sawyer Judge, a high school junior, approached me about helping do research for this book, I was skeptical she would have the background and skills at such a young age. I put her to work finding new entries for “Resources for Further Study,” and she did a fine job. As I was drowning in deadlines due to overcommitment to various projects, I received a lifeline in the form of Jake Seifert, who not only helped me compile the glossary and references, but who also read every chapter carefully with the eye of a student, identifying unclear and confusing passages in need of re-drafting, and culled out many of the mistakes in the penultimate draft of the book. And I save for last my thanks to Rebecca Pearce, the textbook development manager at Routledge. Among many examples of good judgment and suggestions is the inclusion of the “Puntos” sections in the chapters, which I hope teachers and students find allows them to enter into dialogue with Latin Americans about the issues that confront them. Of course, the success of this innovation depends on my execution of the idea. Any shortcomings or mistakes in this text are ultimately my responsibility. A special thank-you to the reviewers, anonymous and otherwise, whose insights and recommendations have helped to improve this edition:

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Introduction

Latin American Studies and the Comparative Study of Democracy

Focus Questions

- ▶ Why should we focus on democracy as the theme for an introduction to Latin America, a region long associated with political instability, military coups, and dictatorships?

- ▶ What do opinion polls tell us about support for democracy in Latin America today?

- ▶ Why does the study of Latin America fall into the field called “comparative politics”?

AS THE FIRST decade of the twenty-first century drew to a close, most of the political scientists, journalists, and policy makers following Latin American affairs seemed optimistic that the countries of the region were finally, after nearly 200 years of political independence, on track to enter a new era of stability, economic development, and democracy. The military were staying in the barracks, the students were studying, rebels were laying down their arms and founding political parties, poverty rates were falling, and the United States was no longer supporting dictatorships. Of course, just about everyone tempered this optimism with recognition of risks and concerns, but few doubted that progress had been made, and few doubted that the model of democracy preferred by Latin Americans was liberal, representative democracy.

Among the positive signs, they could point to the rising percentage of Latin Americans expressing confidence in democracy in surveys. Latinobarómetro, an annual poll of more than 20,000 Latin Americans in 18 countries, found in 2011 that 58 percent agreed that “democracy is preferable to any other form of government” (see Figure 0.1). Although almost everyone recognized some serious shortcomings, it seemed that regular elections where incumbents face loyal opposition and where governments accept basic human rights had become permanent features of the region’s politics. Democracy had come to Latin America—at last and for good.

The two principle threats to liberal democratic rule seemed to have receded. Between 1968 and 1990, almost all Latin American countries experience a prolonged period of harsh military rule. Two that escaped this fate (Mexico and Cuba) were dominated by a single political party. Central America was wracked by three civil wars involving leftist insurgencies against brutal military regimes. Two others, Venezuela and Costa Rica, remained liberal democracies, but they did not entirely escape social and economic forces eroding

confidence in their political systems. The fierce dictatorships of the period produced several effects that were felt even in those countries not under the rule of generals and admirals: the reputation of militaries was severely tarnished, and in the struggle to send the soldier back to the barracks, a strong, internationally supported human rights movement developed throughout the hemisphere. On the left, with only a few exceptions, few parties or movements seemed ready anymore to pursue revolution through armed struggle or guerrilla warfare.

Jorge Castañeda, a prominent Mexican intellectual who had once identified with the revolutionary movements, authored a widely read book, *Utopia Unarmed* (1993), proclaiming that Latin American leftists were no longer inspired by Fidel Castro's revolutionary experiment in Cuba. They had now, he thought, turned primarily to elections and other peaceful strategies to seek power—and mainly for reform, not revolution. Encouraging this development was the emergence of new social movements in the form of worker democracy organizations, neighborhood groups, women's organizations, indigenous peoples, and environmental groups, among others.

Nearly 20 years after Castañeda's book appeared, Michael Shifter (2011) of the Washington-based Inter-American Dialogue argued along similar lines that overall Latin America had experienced a "surge" in the pragmatic center, with both leftist and right-wing politicians moving toward more moderate positions. However, Shifter was less optimistic about the direction of Latin America's left. Castañeda (2006) had already expressed his misgivings. Both now began to warn that a new threat to democracy had emerged in the form of left, **populist** leaders. Until his death in 2013, the main target of criticism was Venezuela's president Hugo Chávez. Shifter warned that Chávez (and now Nicolás Maduro, his successor), along with Bolivia's Evo Morales, Ecuador's Rafael Correa, and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega, represented the tendency toward "autocratic concentration of vast power into the hands of a single person," even though that person was elected.

Shifter, Castañeda, and other analysts express a viewpoint common among those who make or influence U.S. foreign policy, seeing these presidents as the radical, undemocratic part of a political tendency called the "**Pink Tide**." "Pink" here serves partly as a way to suggest that the leftist leaders and parties are diverse, ranging from moderate social democrats such as Chile's Michelle Bachelet to more militant leaders such as Venezuela's Chávez. But even the firmest supporters of Chávez, who called themselves *rojo rojito* (loosely, "red through and through"), do not think of themselves as "reds" in the sense of being committed to communism as it was associated with the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century. All of these leftist presidents, though friendly to Cuba, have said that they do not want to replicate the Cuban example. More specifically, they refer to the Soviet single-party state model as "twentieth-century socialism," and they express their preference, without much detail, for a new model of "twenty-first-century socialism." And all of them have been elected. But this does not mean in the eyes of critics that all of them are democrats. Chávez, Argentina's Cristina Kirchner, Ecuador's Rafael Correa, and some others are seen by some commentators as authoritarian populists, in contrast to other Pink Tide presidents, such as the former and still influential president of Brazil, Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) and Bachelet.

But there is significant dissent about this perspective among those who study Latin America. Steve Ellner (2012), an American historian who has lived in Venezuela for over 40 years, argues that this is a simplistic division. What separates the more radical leaders

from the moderates has been advancement of reform of Latin America's highly unequal economic order and experimentation with new participatory institutions. For Ellner, this is not a return to stale populism or an authoritarian tendency but a commitment to construction of a more profound form of democracy better suited to Latin America's needs.

Argentine political scientist Atilio Borón (2005) objects that the United States should not be preaching about democracy to Latin America, given its own problems conducting clean elections, as the 2000 presidential election showed. Unlike Venezuela, he points out, the United States does not permit its people the right to vote by referendum on important national issues or to recall a president through a popular vote. As for human rights, the United States repeatedly violated the human rights of prisoners held at its base in Guantánamo Bay. Borón also argues that the kind of **liberal democracy** (discussed in chapter 1) promoted by the United States seeks to instruct Latin Americans to “accept meekly our ineluctable neocolonial destiny under the dominion of the American Rome.”

By 2010, there were already doubts about just how broadly and deeply democracy had been consolidated throughout the region. New social movements were raising questions about the appropriateness of liberal democratic institutions for dealing with economic inequality and persistent social problems. More ominously, between 2009 and 2014, some storm clouds began to gather over a few countries. Sabers were rattling in places like Honduras and Ecuador; mass protests in Chile challenged what seemed to be a model of success for combining a market economy with electoral democracy; Venezuela's future lay in doubt as the country relapsed into polarized conflict after the death of President Hugo Chávez; Brazil, the region's great economic “success story,” experienced mass protest over lavish spending to host soccer's World Cup and the Olympic Games; Mexico's government seemed to be losing control of swaths of territory to drug gangs or vigilantes fighting them.

In this introduction to the politics of Latin America, we take a closer look at the strengths and weaknesses of democracy in Latin America in what is undoubtedly—given the end of the **Cold War** (1948–1991), the rising concern with terrorism, and unprecedented globalization—a new era. To accomplish this task, we need to study the history and culture of the region and to draw upon the many different academic disciplines that contribute to the study of Latin America as a unique area of the world. Some questions we will want to address include the following:

- Did the shift to more market-friendly economic policies and free trade in the final 20 years of the last century encourage or discourage democracy?
- Have popular demands for more influence of common people, economic justice, and defense of human rights strained or enriched the practice of democracy and its institutions?
- Has the left given up armed insurgency and the right given up coup-making, both committed now to contesting politics through constitutional processes?
- Has globalization weakened or strengthened democratic institutions?

To address these questions we will draw in depth upon **comparative politics**, that field within political science that provides tools and theories relevant to our quest to evaluate the democratic condition in the region. But if we are to address whether or not democracy has arrived there “at last,” we need to think about what democracy means to us and also what it means to Latin Americans.

For Review

What were the reasons that observers like Castañeda and Shifter were relatively optimistic about democracy? What is the Pink Tide? How do critics, like Castañeda and Shifter, of the Pink Tide's more radical leaders see them differently than do observers like Ellner and Borón?

What Is Democracy?

So where do I come down in this debate? I prefer to let my answer unfold as we go through the chapters, and I hope to offer you a fair summary of the contrasting views. However, it is customary in such introductions for the author to reveal his own values so that the reader may be aware of biases that influence the book. Just about every political scientist will profess his or her allegiance to democracy, but that usually takes the form of expressing a commitment to democratic values and institutions, such as regularly scheduled elections, respect for minority and individual rights, and some system of checks and balances.

Although I too believe in these democratic principles, such statements are not very enlightening about what other kinds of opinions about democracy the author holds. Is a capitalist economic system a prerequisite for democracy? Should “economic freedom,” usually meaning a less regulated market and inviolable property rights, be included? Or, on the contrary, does democracy seem to be compatible with other kinds of economic systems? If people have the right to participate but do not, can the political system still be regarded as democratic?

The question “what is democracy?” is deceptively simple. In chapter 1 we explore some of the different answers that have been given as far back as the ancient Greeks, as well as today. Here I offer my preferred definition: *Democracy is a system whereby ordinary people in a society have the ability to participate as equals in the major decisions that shape the future of their nation and communities.*

A *necessary* condition for democracy is that people have the ability to hold government accountable for its policies through periodic elections and that there exist protections of civil liberties (i.e., freedom of speech and association) that guarantee the ability of loyal opposition to contest incumbents. However, this is not a *sufficient* condition for democracy because extreme inequalities in wealth and income translate into great differences in real power in a society. Such inequalities limit the ability of people to participate as equals in shaping the future of their societies. Besides class differences, so also do differences arising from racial, ethnic, religious, and gender prejudices hinder democracy, even if discrimination is illegal. Real equality in a democracy involves more than just legal, civic equality. Many of the fundamental decisions about the future of a society take place beyond the reach of government, most importantly under the powerful influence of enormous global corporations.

Many political scientists would regard my view as idealistic or wrongheaded. Most in the mainstream of political science focus much more narrowly on what I have just called the *necessary* conditions—elections, civil liberties, and opposition. I will not say that most

Latin Americans would agree with my conception of democracy, but I do think most are dissatisfied with these more limited conceptions associated with liberal or representative democracy. I hope that this book allows you to think through your own position by exposing you to issues of democracy in Latin America.

Another way that political scientists differ from one another on the question “what is democracy?” involves the amount of weight we place on each of three characteristics of democracy: choice, participation, and equality. Indeed, we all think these are good values, but we do not agree on how much the latter two matter, and we do not agree on what each of them means. A theme of this text is that liberal democracies, which today are sometimes called **polyarchies** (defined and explained in chapter 1), generally score well on “choice,” meaning that elections and civil rights ensure the ability of citizens to choose who governs them. Some theorists of liberal democracy would even go further and argue that societies that minimize the state control over the market maximize economic choice, something that the organization Freedom House calls “economic freedom” (see www.freedomhouse.org; also www.heritage.org/index/ranking, accessed November 4, 2013).

“Participation” here refers to more than just rates of turnout in elections. Participation can also mean extension of democracy into social and economic life—for example, encouraging more forms of direct democracy (referendums, citizen meetings to decide directly on public spending, and worker ownership and control over factories and farms). Many liberal democrats see such forms of participation as intrusions on property rights or unrealistic expectations of citizens, but as we shall see, many Latin American countries are experimenting with participatory democracy. Finally, some theorists of democracy think that civil rights and elections laws have little meaning in societies with great social and economic inequality, where the ability, for example, to buy expensive media time gives some people more louder voices than others.

We will draw upon the literature in comparative politics for some definitions, theories, and data, but we also will consider perspectives from within the region and from other traditions of democracy. Along the way, then, we will find ourselves examining our own values and ideas about democracy. For North Americans, Latin America represents something of a mirror in which our notions of democracy are reflected, testing our true degree of commitment to it.

For Review

How might two or more political scientists vary in how they define “democracy”?

■ What Do Latin Americans Tell Pollsters about Democracy?

Let us shift our attention from what intellectuals think about democracy in Latin America to the attitudes of the people in the region. In its 2013 report, *Latinobarómetro*, an international polling organization based in Santiago, Chile, summarized the findings of its annual

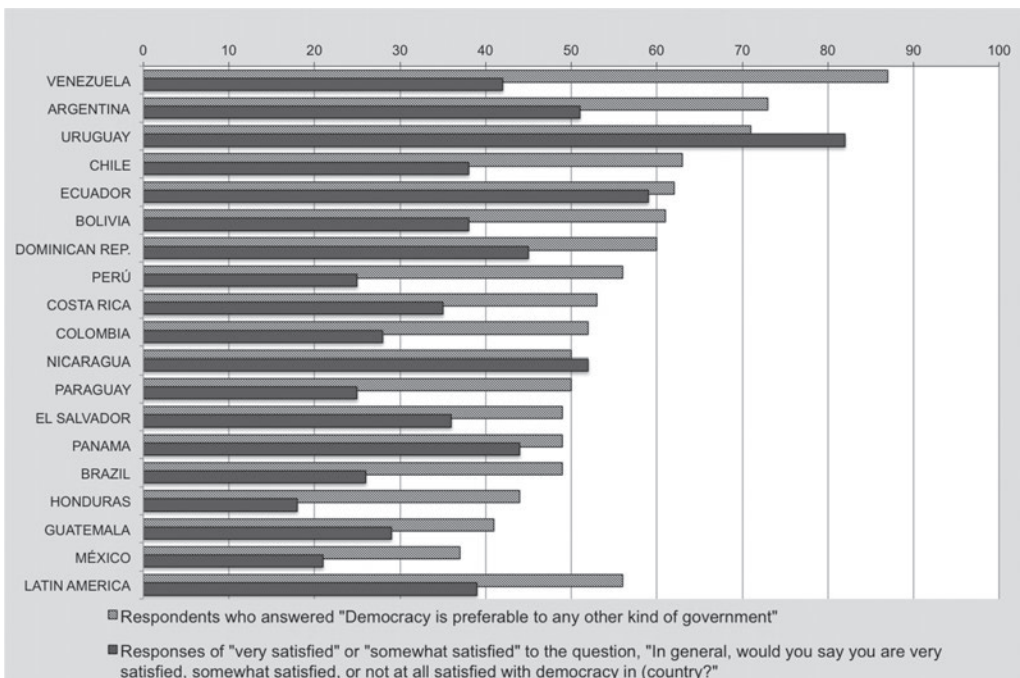
survey of 20,204 people throughout the region as follows: “There are now two Latin Americas, one which enjoys the benefits of economic growth and one which watches while the other enjoys. We are seeing more and more protests as an expression of citizens’ awareness of the deficiencies of the economic, political and social system. There is demand for more democracy” (1).

Figure 0.1 compares levels of support for democracy to levels of satisfaction with democracy registered in surveys carried out in 2013 in both Latin America and Europe. You can see that satisfaction varies greatly from country to country, but Uruguay is the only country where satisfaction (the darker of the two bars) really seems to be a consensus, and in only four other countries does it hover near 50 percent. On the other hand, perhaps we should not be too alarmed because the overall rate of satisfaction in Europe is nearly the same as for Latin America (or should we worry more about Europe?). More worrisome is the low score for Mexico, which has the largest Spanish-speaking population in the world. The level of satisfaction with democracy in the region’s largest country, Brazil, is merely 25 percent.

Although satisfaction scores may be low in most places, the responses of Latin Americans to another question are a little more encouraging. Seventy-nine percent told Latinobarómetro that “democracy may have its problems but is preferable to any other form of government. (See the lighter bar in Figure 0.2.) As you can see from the darker bar in Figure 0.2, however, almost half believe that their democracy “has major problems.”

This raises a question: why would satisfaction be so much lower than support for democracy? Of course, we can simply think that people are being inconsistent, but the

FIGURE 0.1 Support for Democracy and Satisfaction with Democracy

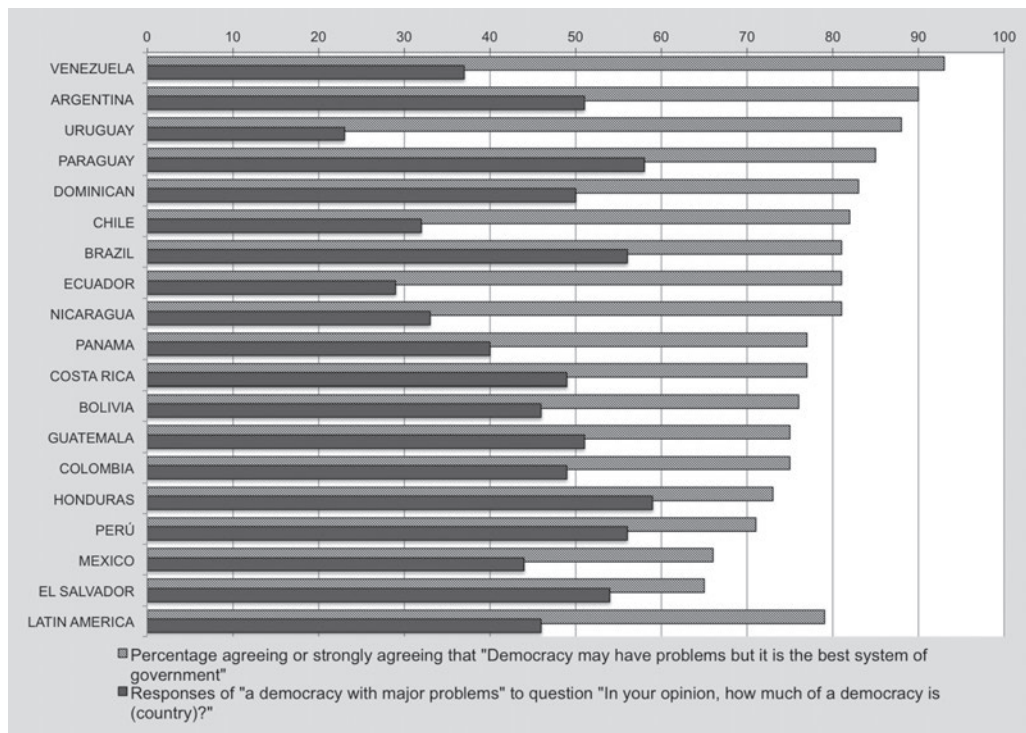


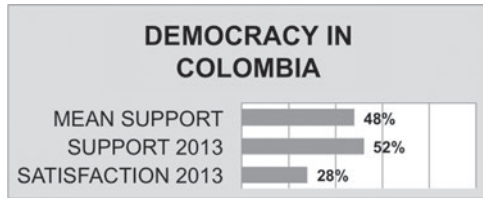
answer suggested by Latinobarómetro makes more sense. Perhaps people are discontented with social and economic conditions and think that the best answer is more democracy. One finding in the figures consistent with this theory is the case of Venezuela, where only 25 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with democracy, but where support for democracy far exceeds the average for Latin America, topping all the other countries. The country is highly polarized, and a year after this survey was published, violent clashes between predominantly middle-class citizens and the government broke out, with many of the protestors calling for the resignation of President Nicolás Maduro, the successor to the deceased Hugo Chávez. There seems to be a significant gap in the country between what the middle class expects of democracy and what the poorer classes expect; there also may be a gap between how they conceive of democracy.

“Why” will have to await further analysis; here we merely note that there is bad and good news on each side of the argument about Latin Americans’ views on democracy.

The numbers might indicate broad support for democracy, but they do not address how deep support may go. Some political scientists think support is superficial and temporary (see chapter 1). The transitions to civilian rule from military regimes that dominated the region in the 1970s were negotiated in a way that limited majority rule; few human rights abusers were held accountable for their actions. Some argue that acceptance of democracy is not firmly rooted in society (i.e., there is little **deepening of democracy**) and that many important issues have been walled off from democratic decision-making (i.e., little **broadening of democracy**).

FIGURE 0.2 Churchillian Democracy and Self-Evaluation of Democratization





Throughout this book we have inserted “Democracy Snapshots” for each country in Latin America. These snapshots give you a quick, thumbnail reference to the degree of support and satisfaction with democracy for each country in the region, taken from Latinobarómetro’s 2013 report.

For example, the figure on the left is a large version of the snapshot for Colombia. You will see three bars. The top one, “Mean Support,” shows the average percentage of Colombians, for the years 1995 to 2013, who said that they agreed with this statement: “Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.” (They could have chosen instead to agree either with “Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one” or with “For people like me, it doesn’t matter whether we have a democratic or non-democratic regime.”) The second bar shows the results for the same question, only for 2013. This gives you a rough measure of whether support has fallen, risen, or stayed the same in recent years. The third bar, “Satisfaction,” gives the percentage of Colombians who answered in 2013 that they were “satisfied or somewhat satisfied” in response to the following question: “In general, are you satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the working of democracy in Colombia?”

As you can see, only about half of Colombians are supportive of democracy without reservation. Only about 28 percent are satisfied at all with how democracy is working. This happens to be low, compared to most other countries in the region. We can speculate on why, but Colombians are only beginning to emerge from a long civil war in which politics has been mixed with drug trafficking and serious atrocities. Perhaps personal security takes precedence for many people under such circumstances.

Political leaders of Latin American countries all say they believe in democracy. The list includes (now retired) Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro of Cuba, seen by Washington as the region’s “only remaining dictatorship.” Castro insists that Cuba’s political system is truer to democracy than others in the hemisphere. No Latin American leaders today say that they want to adopt Cuba’s system, but several (e.g., in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela) say they are experimenting with new forms of democracy. Their admirers see them as a breath of fresh air; critics dismiss their rule as merely a more popular version of dictatorship. By the end of this book, you should be better prepared to draw your own conclusions.

For Review

Looking at Figures 0.1 and 0.2, what does the Latinobarómetro poll indicate regarding popular support for democracy in Latin America? For which countries does support seem weakest, and for which does it seem strongest?

What Defines Latin America as a Geographic Area?

So far, we have been considering democracy in Latin America without thinking about just what countries should be included in our analysis. Exactly which parts of the Western Hemisphere should be included is not a settled question. There are regions north of the Rio Grande River, the modern boundary between the United States and Mexico, where the majority language is Spanish, not English. California, Nevada, and the states in the southwestern United States were once part of Spain's empire, and many Hispanic families there can trace their roots back well before settlers from the eastern states began arriving.

South of the Rio Grande, not all Latin Americans regard a language derived from Latin (mainly Portuguese or Spanish) as their native tongue. Many—a majority in some regions—speak an indigenous language. Wherever the European conquerors established plantation agriculture (sugar, cotton, cacao, etc.), people are predominantly descendants of enslaved Africans. Some countries (Belize, Jamaica, Haiti, the Guyanas, etc.) were colonized by the British, Dutch, and French and not by the Iberians. The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw important immigrations to South America from places such as Japan, China, Palestine, Germany, and other parts of the world. Are these people Latin?

The idea of “Latin America” was conjured up by the government of France, under the dictator Louis Napoleon III, around 1865. Napoleon III had designs to incorporate parts of the region into a new French empire. Aware of growing British and U.S. influence, the emperor enlisted French geographers to propagate the idea that these Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries had more in common culturally with his French-speaking country than with North America and Britain, the “Anglo” countries. The French designation became more firmly established as universities created area studies programs that baptized the region “Latin America.”

We will consider Latin America to include those countries that were once colonies of Portugal and Spain and where one of the Iberian languages predominates or coexists with indigenous languages. We will find it useful at times to refer to countries such as Haiti, Belize, the three Guyanas, and Jamaica that share some history and culture. We consider Puerto Rico, though ruled by the United States, to be part of Latin America. As a practical matter, we will not include areas of the United States with significant Hispanic populations as part of Latin America for the simple reason that these regions lie north of the internationally recognized border between the United States and Mexico.

For Review

How did the name “Latin America” come about? Why is it not clear that the name adequately describes what countries do or do not lie within the region?