Comparative Study of Revolution and Violence," *Comparative Politics* 5 (April 1973): 414–19.

31. Ché Guevara, *Guerilla Warfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 2.

32. Bertrand de Jouvenel, *On Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 218.

33. See Samuel P. Huntington, "The Meaning of Democracy," *Geopolitique* 11 (Fall 1985): 83–87.

3

Democracy from Three Latin American Perspectives

LORENZO MEYER

Political democracy is still more a pilot project than a reality in Latin America. For this reason, the term democracy means different things to different people. The objective of this chapter is to present three different Latin American perspectives to the same set of propositions about democracy that are offered by several of the authors in this book.

The perspectives correspond to three views of the world that are prevalent among Latin American political elites: the conservative, authoritarian, and anticommunist point of view, that is associated with the military establishments in the region; the view of those who are as willing to be authoritarian as democratic depending on how the wind blows (the opportunists mentioned by Guillermo O'Donnell); and finally, the view of the bona fide democrats, whether conservatives, centrists, or leftists, who are united in their opposition both to the past and to the present authoritarian regimes of the region.

It is obvious that other perspectives—the two extremes—are missing. However, because the radical right and the radical left reject the philosophical and practical values associated with political democracy, there is no common ground with either of these groups for debating the ideas of those who are trying to understand and reinforce democracy south of the Rio Grande.

It should be understood that there exists no unified view of democracy among the military, the "fair weather" democrats, or the real democrats. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this essay, it is necessary to use some sort of an ideal model in the Weberian sense in order to focus on the important differences existing among the three views.

What is Democracy in and for Latin America?

As Latin America entered the twentieth century, democracy became in principle the only legitimate way to claim and exert the political power of the state. At the same time, the social, economic, and cultural bases for democracy in the

region were weak or nonexistent. For this reason, political reality and theory marched down very different paths in almost all cases of Latin American polities. Until the Second World War, democracy in the area was very much an idea without empirical content. After that, democracy became an experiment that failed in almost all countries.

Today we are looking at the resurgence of democracy and at brave attempts to make it a viable way of life in Latin America. At the same time we are becoming aware of the fact that there is no theory that can explain or guide those who are trying to understand or institutionalize political democracy in the region. Latin American political theory is rich in the analysis and explanation of dictatorship and authoritarianism but not in the theory of democracy. In more than one sense, democracy is still a *terra incognita* for the great majority of Latin American societies, and theory reflects this obvious and tragic fact. Masses as well as elites, social scientists as well as political practitioners are only now beginning to learn about democracy. The building of an adequate theory of Latin American democracy is a necessary step for advancing it in the region.

Huntington's proposition about the nature of modern democracy is basically the product of the historical experiences of the industrial western societies. Two centuries after the French Revolution, the political practices of the United States, Canada, and Western Europe have tended to give the concept of democracy an institutional definition. This is the "modest meaning" of democracy that Huntington stresses. From his vantage point, the essence of democracy is an "institutional arrangement for choosing rulers," and the core of such an arrangement is competitive elections.

Historical experience, says Huntington, shows that modern political democracies tend to behave in a way that may be called Aristotelian—always between the extremes. Their economies are mixed (with ample opportunities for private enterprise), their material growth tends to be moderate, and their income distribution is not too inequitable. Though they are not militaristic, they are also not well known for their pacifism. According to Huntington, there is one area in which mature democracies are closer to one of the extremes and that is the area of political stability. Democracies are extremely stable politically and they are also extreme in their respect for individual rights and liberties. But according to this view, these are virtues, not vices.

If democracy in Latin America ends up having the meaning that Huntington suggests—"At its best, democracy means conservatism without stagnation and reform without revolution"—there is nothing in that system that would make it unacceptable either to the military establishment or to opportunistic democrats. In fact, this kind of democracy may be a desirable goal for enlightened conservatives—military and civilian—because its institutionalized pluralism inhibits extremism by organized working classes, preserves internal stability, and avoids unnecessary and dangerous military confrontations with neighboring countries. These three elements are cherished by the military establishment and they are entirely compatible with the interests of the propertied classes, civilian administrators, and technocrats who accompanied the military in

establishing the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes of the 1970s. Today these groups tend to have distanced themselves from this form of government.

To committed or real democrats, Huntington's definition of democracy may appear less than satisfactory, especially for those on the left. Because of the state of economic and political backwardness and the social injustice that prevails in Latin America, and in order to fire the imagination and attract the allegiance of the masses to political democracy and away from authoritarianism, the democratic system of government must strive to achieve, at the same time, an institutional arrangement for choosing rulers and the preservation of individual rights, freedoms, and a significant degree of social justice. Latin American democracy, as late democracy, may have to be compatible with a higher degree of state intervention than what has been and remains the case in the industrial democracies of the West.

The dissatisfaction that democrats of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada have with the institutional definition of democracy stems from the differences between those who see political democracy as an end in itself (the institutional school) and those who consider it an instrument to transform society and achieve justice—not only in the formal but also in the substantive sense of the word. Within the wide spectrum of democrats in today's Latin America, those located to the left are more willing to emphasize the view of political democracy as an instrument to achieve economic and social democracy, and those to the right are more inclined to put the accent on democracy as an end in itself.

In any case, what is important is that a great number of those political activists who are committed to economic development and social justice as the ultimate goals of political action in Latin America are now more willing than they have been in the past to achieve these goals through political democracy and not through such dangerous shortcuts as the one-party system or other authoritarian and nonpluralistic solutions. With the passing of time, Cuba has lost some of its appeal as the best model for Latin America to achieve economic growth, development, social equality, and freedom. In short, political democracy is now a nonnegotiable item on the agenda of many progressive groups and movements in Latin America and the Caribbean.

There may be profound differences among key political actors in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding the ultimate ends of politics, but there is an amazing consensus—be it permanent or transitory—about the necessity to accept and defend formal democracy as the basis for the political game.

Mistakes to Be Avoided and How

Democracy needs a memory to learn from the past what to avoid and what to acquire. Historical and comparative analysis is necessary as an aid to new democracies as they confront the current danger, i.e., the economic crisis, through political crafting and institutional building.

In chapter 4, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan suggest that democratic legitimacy

can be insulated from perceptions of socioeconomic efficacy. Given the lack of real legitimacy, both historical and ethical, of the authoritarian regimes of the present and recent past in Latin America, leaders tried to base their right to govern on their ability to produce economic growth, to maintain social discipline, and to defend national sovereignty. These justifications have been undermined by the current economic crisis in the region, by the Argentine army's failure to regain control of the Malvinas islands, and by the exposure of systematic violations of human rights in authoritarian regimes. It seems that there is no easy way out of the current economic crisis of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a structural and not a temporary problem. Therefore, from the perspective of the military and of opportunistic democrats, the best exit is to let the new democratic regimes face the very difficult task of substituting nonmaterial rewards for economic growth while restructuring these economies. If democracy fails, authoritarianism can recover some legitimacy. If democracy succeeds, the military, business, and bureaucratic establishments will ensure that their long-term interests will be preserved at a modest cost by remaining in the wings.

While regime legitimacy may not be explicitly connected to socioeconomic efficacy, democrats would be mistaken to ignore the latter. Rather, they should, as Linz and Stepan suggest in the next chapter, educate the population to some of the reasons for the current crisis: the mistakes and the abuses of the recent authoritarian past, the unjust and exploitative nature of some central aspects of the international economic system, and the contradictions and shortcomings of the economic model of development adopted by Latin America after the Second World War.

It is especially important that democratic ruling elites be perceived as frugal, honest, and efficient in their administration of public resources in the midst of economic crisis. In contrast with the previous regimes, they should live without ostentation. This external symbol of austerity and sympathy for the average citizen can help direct the anger and frustration of the masses away from leaders and the new democracy. This task is difficult, but it is not impossible. For democratic leadership, the observance of the rule of law above all expediency is paramount. Democracy can maintain the loyalty of the great majority of people in society in difficult times if leaders can capture the imagination of the people by words and actions.

One of the key propositions of Linz and Stepan as well as Laurence Whitehead in chapter 6 is the necessity to introduce into the new democracies of Latin America permanent and effective mechanisms of civilian control over the military. Like similar mechanisms in the industrial democracies, such controls should include the appointment of a civilian minister of defense, the development of academic expertise in military matters, the separation of internal intelligence activities from military responsibilities, and the establishment of legislative committees to oversee the armed forces.

These recommendations will be resented and resisted by present military

establishments in Latin America. From their point of view, the less the government and the civilian elite know about their professional, social, and ideological structures the better. The more the military remains unpredictable to the civilians, the greater their importance as a political factor. On the other hand, democrats of all types need to know about the military in order to control it by introducing some or all of these changes.

However, it is possible and even convenient to wait a little longer to initiate some of these reforms because the democratic regimes cannot wage war on all fronts at the same time. Priority should go to the consolidation of power and to the resolution of the current economic crisis. The delicate problem of containing the military—a problem in existence since Latin America's independence—has to be accomplished one step at a time. It is a vital but long-term objective of the new democratic regimes.

Linz and Stepan have presented another idea to make Latin American democracy more resistant to political crisis: to replace presidential systems with parliamentarian ones. In times of crisis, it is easier to change the administration without damaging the government in a parliamentarian system than in a presidential one. The strong presidential tradition in the region combined with the weakness of political parties in some countries makes this idea problematic. In particular, the military, the semidemocratic and the democratic political elites are unlikely to accept this change. (One possible exception would be Chile, where the fragmentation of the democratic opposition could permit a parliamentary system to be set up in the post-Pinochet era.) However, in general, at this initial stage of the rebirth of democracy in Latin America there are more urgent matters—at least they seem more urgent—than initiating a debate and gaining a consensus in favor of parliamentarianism. The public has first to be educated and convinced of the virtues of democracy before addressing rationally a more refined and sophisticated issue like presidentialism versus parliamentarianism.

Guillermo O'Donnell in chapter 5 explores the critical period between the breakdown of authoritarianism and the establishment of a working democratic system. He describes the most common transitions: by collapse and by negotiation. In the latter case, such as has occurred in Brazil, there is a complex web of negotiations and accommodations between the leadership of the ending authoritarian regime and the opposition that is about to take power. Negotiation is much less common when the transition occurs by collapse (as in the Argentine case).

The main interest of the military is to persuade the new civilian rulers to respect its corporatist interest. This can be done for example by avoiding or reducing to a minimum all investigations of its past brutalities and by preventing any interference with its internal structure. Opportunistic democrats—often former collaborators of the military in the previous regime—and the military will try to reduce to the minimum the social and economic changes that the incoming democratic government may try to implement. However,

opportunistic democrats will be more concerned with avoiding changes in rules regarding property, taxation, tariffs, and similar matters than with preserving the privileges or reputation of the military.

After the breakdown of authoritarianism, civil society must be resurrected if democracy is to take root. The democratic leadership has to give this step highest priority or risk a return to the status quo ante. Unavoidably, this resurrection reopens class, regional and group differences and contradictions. It is the task of the democratic leadership to direct the social energies liberated by the disappearance of authoritarianism into a process of negotiation by means of the recreation of the party system.

More attention should be paid to the role of parties. In many cases, such parties will have few or no roots in the past. The task of creating and organizing such parties has to have a high priority on the agenda of the democratic leadership in the transition period. Parties have to be the institutions created to channel the energies of social movements, labor unions, and other anti-authoritarian forces present at the beginning of the reemergence of civil society. Without parties it would be very difficult to negotiate the necessary compromises among the main political actors and to neutralize the understandable but dangerous tendencies let loose by the "maximalists" (mentioned by Guillermo O'Donnell) who can undermine the transition to a stable democracy.

Whatever their ideological preference, Latin American democrats should take O'Donnell's point seriously: for democracy to succeed, it is necessary to abandon maximalist positions and learn how to negotiate with political adversaries. This is more easily said than done. Historically, Latin American political culture has placed a low value on moderation, as illustrated by the names, e.g., "intransigent" or "radical," of some prestigious political parties. It is time to change this deeply rooted conception of politics and to start by digging up those seeds of the next round of authoritarian politics.

In chapter 6 Lawrence Whitehead is concerned with the current problem of the great majority of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Whitehead poses the question: what is the best way to keep democracy alive until it develops roots and can shape in an adequate way its internal and external environments? Whitehead explains the fragility of democracy from the Rio Grande to Patagonia "in contemporary regional history and geopolitics, rather than in any supposedly inherent cultural or psychological attributes." This idea can easily be accepted by the democratic leadership, but not necessarily by the military or the neodemocrats. The authoritarian mind has tried to justify the repression it has exerted in the present or recent past with some variant of asserting the cultural (or even radical) impossibility of the Latin American masses acquiring the habits of self-discipline and self-restraint that are prerequisites of democracy. Only time and success can erase this deeply rooted mistrust of the traditional ruling elites toward the masses.

Whitehead also emphasizes the importance of imposing some limits on social reforms in order to make democracy tolerable to the propertied classes. If confronted with expropriations, radical tax reforms, or similar measures, vested propertied interests may react by subverting the new regime or by sabotaging the economy. In any case, it will be a real test for the democratic leadership to demand and introduce enough social reforms so as to give the lower classes a stake in the new regime without triggering a reaction by the military and the bourgeoisie. As Whitehead correctly points out, "the business sector has . . . served as a key constitutive element of virtually all the authoritarian regimes of the sixties and seventies [in Latin America]."

Whitehead's position on the neodemocrats is troubling. He is very clear that crimes committed by the military during the authoritarian period must be investigated and punished; no law of *punto final* should give the military impunity. On the other hand and to avoid unnecessary polarization, he advocates treating those civilians from the center to the right that collaborated with the military dictatorships as democrats if they claim to be converted. This proposition may be difficult to accept by those democrats who were persecuted by these new converts. However, ethical considerations apart, for democracy to survive in such an inhospitable environment as the one in Latin America, a marriage of convenience between true and opportunistic democrats may be indispensable. However, to forgive is not to forget. For the time being, opportunistic democrats have to be considered by bona fide democrats as partners today but as potential enemies tomorrow.

Another troublesome proposition in Whitehead's analysis is the one concerning radical and violent movements such as *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru. "This [type] of revolutionary leadership must be destroyed, or at least isolated from all social support, if their followers are to be 'reabsorbed' into the democratic mainstream. On this point, democrats must be clear and united, even sectarian." True, but this "destruction" must be accomplished within the law, while recognizing that some if not all the reasons motivating the radical and the violent left may be legitimate, even if their methods are not.

At the end, Whitehead returns to one of the central issues of this book: what can be done from the outside to foster and reinforce political democracy in the region? It has been almost a unanimous conclusion that democracy, like revolutions, cannot be exported, nor can it be imposed from without if it is going to endure. At the same time, a clear recognition emerges that external actors can make it easier or more difficult for democracy to establish roots in the region.

The most important external actor in the Latin American and Caribbean region is without any doubt the United States. Since the United States displaced the Europeans as the dominant power at the beginning of this century, a power with more strength and less sophistication than its predecessors, the policymakers of North America have tried to legitimize indirect or direct intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean by claiming to support democracy. At the beginning of the century, Woodrow Wilson intervened in the Mexican Revolution in the name of democracy, and in the name of the same democracy the administration of Ronald Reagan promoted a counterrevolutionary army on the borders of Nicaragua. In between, there have been other both direct and

indirect interventions of the United States in Latin America, but their efficacy as instruments of democratization has been rather poor.

One of the cardinal elements in the relationship between the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere, the United States, and the countries of Latin America has been the principle of nonintervention. This principle was accepted by the inter-American community in the 1930s, after Europe ceased to represent a threat to the Monroe Doctrine and U.S. hegemony. No great power can abstain from interfering in the internal affairs of countries that it considers within its natural sphere of influence, especially when it is engaged in a global struggle, as has been the case of the United States vis-à-vis the Soviet Union since the end of the Second World War. Nevertheless, principles such as the juridical equality of states and the nonintervention of one state in the internal affairs of others are important ideological and legal instruments by which Latin America and the Caribbean can try to redress the imbalances in the economic and political exchange between the societies north and south of the Rio Grande. For these reasons, such principles have to be defended very strongly by the new democratic regimes and even by the not-so-democratic ones.

Nationalism is always the byproduct of bitter confrontations. In this century, the main international conflicts of Latin America and the Caribbean countries have been among themselves or with the United States. The lines that divide nationalists from nonnationalists in Latin America and the Caribbean do not correspond exactly to the lines that divide democratic elements from nondemocratic ones. However, in spite of the nationalist attitudes adopted occasionally by some Latin American military establishments regarding the United States, the general pattern since the 1950s has been one of close collaboration based on a shared anticommunist view of the world. Exceptions have been few. The same can be said about conservatives and right-of-center politicians. The nationalist credentials of some of the neodemocrats are tainted by their alliances with the United States when they were part of the authoritarian systems of the recent past.

The new democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean do not have to define their nationalism as openly anti-American, but their leadership will be weakened if they are perceived by the public as being too close to Washington. Nationalism is still a potent political force in the region, and one way to gain and maintain legitimacy for democracy is to contrast the independence and nonaligned foreign policy of present leaders with the willingness of many past and present authoritarian systems to take the side of the United States in the struggle of the two superpowers.

Whitehead's proposition that "there are compelling reasons why the promotion of democracy in Latin America can only be, at best, a secondary objective for the U.S. policymakers" is considered as self-evident by the majority of the leaders of the region, regardless of their political preferences. This does not mean that the United States and other governments should not reinforce democracy. Quite the contrary.

To repeat, the main responsibility for establishing democracy in the region

lies with the internal actors. The external environment can (except in extraordinary circumstances) weaken or reinforce democracy, but it cannot be the main force that creates or destroys it. Whatever their value, external efforts to reinforce democracy should be compatible with the nonintervention principle. For this reason, reinforcement will be more effective when it is positive, i.e., providing economic assistance, opening up markets, or softening the conditions of new and old loans to help new democracies, rather than when it is negative, i.e., punishing with boycotts or trade embargoes those regimes declared undemocratic. In any event, sanctions against nondemocratic regimes may work better if they are pursued collectively rather than unilaterally. Multilateral actions that are not contradictory with the principles of the United Nations and the Organization of American States have to be the result of open negotiations and consultation among the partners, lest they be viewed as part of an imperial policy.

Governments should not be the sole source of positive and negative external efforts in favor of democracy. In some cases, governmental actions may be counterproductive. Nongovernmental actors are not bound by the nonintervention principle, and they can be open in their partnership with democratic forces abroad. They can use a moral language that loses credibility when it comes from governments. Actors such as political parties, human rights groups, and ad hoc organizations are some of the political forces already acting as watchdogs of democracy. Actors outside the hemisphere, especially Europeans, are helpful. In summary, the political costs of deviance from what today is considered the democratic standard can be increased in Latin America and the Caribbean if international public opinion is mobilized against actual or potential enemies of democracy.

It is unfortunate that the new and the few old democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean that are trying to establish themselves as viable alternatives to the authoritarian tradition have to act in a very difficult international environment. The war in Central America is undermining the basis of the oldest democracy in the region, Costa Rica, and is making very difficult, if not impossible, the establishment and advance of democracy and pluralism among the other countries involved in the struggle. The generalized economic crisis—high foreign debt, inflation, unemployment, a depressed raw materials market—is making democratic regimes the managers of a disastrous economic situation. Under these conditions, it is going to be almost impossible to give an adequate response to the demands of the people for social justice. However, if Linz and Stepan are correct about the relative insulation of democratic legitimacy from economic performance, the economic crisis is going to make life even more difficult for existing authoritarian regimes. It is only in this limited and negative sense that economic hardships may produce something positive, because they will be helping—by eroding legitimacy—to create some of the conditions that are necessary for a transition to democracy in the hardest or oldest authoritarian systems in the region. Of course democracy remains fragile in the region, and one hopes that the oldest and richest democracies in and

outside the Western Hemisphere will take positive actions—political as well as economic actions—to facilitate the resurrection of civil society in the new Latin American and Caribbean democracies.

The idea of demanding from the great powers, especially from the United States, respect for autonomy and support for the economic development of Latin American democracies may sound like wishful thinking, particularly in Central America. Nevertheless, if stability in the Western Hemisphere is an important element in the definition of national security of the industrial democracies, then the support of democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean is an act of self-interest on the part of the western powers. Unfortunately, past experiences show that there are no strong constituencies within the United States, Western Europe, or Japan willing to sponsor acts of national enlightened self-interest if there is nothing immediate to be gained, and this is precisely the case of democracy in backward regions: few concrete groups or interests in the industrial nations will be better off if democracy succeeds in its struggle in Latin America. For this reason, democratic leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean should plan for the future without expecting any significant amount of external support from the great powers. In fact, they can count themselves lucky if they get no opposition in this difficult endeavour.

Part II

THE DECLINE AND RISE OF DEMOCRACY