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978-0-521-14084-3 - Social Capital in Developing Democracies: Nicaragua and Argentina Compared

Leslie E. Anderson

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Social Capital in Developing Democracies

Drawing on extensive fieldwork in Nicaragua and Argentina, as well as public opinion and elite data, Leslie E. Anderson's *Social Capital in Developing Democracies* explores the contribution of social capital to the process of democratization and the limits of that contribution. Anderson finds that in Nicaragua strong, positive, bridging social capital has enhanced democratization, while in Argentina the legacy of Peronism has created bonding and non-democratic social capital that undermines the development of democracy. Faced with the reality of an antidemocratic form of social capital, Anderson suggests that Argentine democracy is developing on the basis of an alternative resource – institutional capital. Anderson concludes that social capital can and does enhance democracy under historical conditions that have created horizontal ties among citizens, but that social capital can also undermine democratization where historical conditions have created vertical ties with leaders and suspicion or noncooperation among citizens.

Leslie E. Anderson is a University of Florida Research Foundation Professor of Political Science at the University of Florida. She is a scholar of democracy, popular politics and protest, and democratic development. Professor Anderson is also the author of *The Political Ecology of the Modern Peasant: Calculation and Community* and *Learning Democracy: Citizen Engagement and Electoral Choice in Nicaragua, 1990–2001* (with Lawrence C. Dodd), in addition to multiple journal articles.

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All the people like us are We, and everyone else is They.

Rudyard Kipling

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Preface

When I was a doctoral student at the University of Michigan I rode a Yamaha 150 motorcycle around Central America so that I could more easily reach the rural poor, my subject of study. I continued to ride that motorcycle long after I finished my dissertation because it was the best and cheapest way to get around in Nicaragua. But it was a rough-and-tumble way to do research, and I got into trouble plenty of times. I got stuck in the mud. I had flash floods reach up over the handlebars. I ran out of gas. I knocked the chain off the gear wheel. Whenever I got into trouble, the Nicaraguans helped me out, rescued me, found me a pint of gas somewhere, leveraged the bike out of two feet of oozing mud, fixed the bike, replaced and oiled the chain, kept it running.

The Nicaraguan people were poor, always and everywhere, but their generosity toward me and toward each other never ceased to amaze me. Those who had nothing always seemed to have something to give. Although the Nicaraguans were certainly not saints, they had a stoic kindness, a willingness to pitch in, reach out, buckle down, work together. That willingness was so evident everywhere in the country, in rural and urban areas, and so constant over time that in the first ten years of my research on Latin America, I came to take it for granted, to consider it Latin American.

Then I went to Argentina. I began researching Argentina in the early 1990s, not too long after the nation had returned to democracy after nearly seven years of brutal dictatorship. But cruelty was still evident to a foreign visitor. In 1992, on a street in downtown Buenos Aires, I saw a bus stop at a curb to pick up an elderly, crippled woman. She moved slowly and painfully to the open door as the driver waited for her to climb in. But just as she reached the stairs onto the bus, the bus suddenly crept forward a foot or two. She nearly fell but recovered her balance. Then she slowly moved forward the additional two feet and tried, once again, to climb onto the bus. But once again the bus rolled forward another couple of feet. This time I knew it was no accident. The bus driver was doing this deliberately. I watched aghast at the cruelty I was witnessing. No one in the street did or said anything. It appeared that no one but I had even noticed. Suddenly a wave of anger rushed over me, and I started

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toward the bus and the woman. In fluent Nicaraguan Spanish, that bus driver was about to get a piece of my mind. But at that moment, suddenly the driver pulled away entirely and drove off. The woman stared at the bus as it went away. I stood in the street stunned, shocked by what I had seen.

By the time I was researching Argentina in the late 1990s, nearly ten years later, I no longer saw events like the bus incident, and sometimes I witnessed acts of real kindness among citizens on the street. Every time I came to Argentina, people seemed kinder, more trusting; neighbors more willing to open their doors, talk on the streets, help each other out. But there was always an edge of caution and distrust in Argentina that was simply not there in Nicaragua. Why? Why would Argentines, who had so much and who, relatively speaking, were so wealthy, be so cautious, ungenerous, and guarded toward each other while Nicaraguans, who are clearly so very poor, were so often generous, trusting, and kind? And while Argentines appeared to grow more trusting over time, there was always a marked difference between the two societies. This book tries to uncover why.

The research for this book combined extensive fieldwork with public opinion and elite surveys in both Nicaragua and Argentina.¹ Between 1984 and 2009 I visited Nicaragua 16 times. My work in the 1980s addressed citizen involvement in the Sandinista revolution both before and after its 1979 triumph. I researched rural and urban revolutionary participation in 1984 and continued that work during a six-month visit in 1985. I returned for visits of two or three months in 1986, 1987, and 1990. During the 1990s I returned every twelve to eighteen months, and I observed national elections in 1990, 1996, 2001, and 2006, as well as the municipal elections of 2000, 2004, and 2008. I conducted interviews of citizens and political leaders in Nicaragua. Interviewees included citizen activists, former and current legislators, political leaders, party organizers, union activists, opposition activists, editors of the major newspapers, and presidential and vice-presidential candidates. During the 1996 and 2001 elections, I conducted nationwide public opinion surveys funded by the National Science Foundation and the Manning Dauer Research Fund at the University of Florida. These surveys asked questions about associational memberships, social activities, political participation, support for democratic institutions and processes, and democratic values, as well as about the elections themselves. In 2002 I conducted a survey about associational membership and political activism in a Sandinista neighborhood in Managua. Finally, between 2001 and 2003 I surveyed 53 members of the 92-member single-chamber legislature.

I visited Argentina nine times between 1992 and 2009. I began by focusing on social and human rights movements and developing democratic institutions. I spent six weeks in 1992 researching the role of social movements in Argentina's return to democracy. I returned as a Fulbright Scholar for four months in 1993 to continue research on popular movements and citizen

¹ These surveys are described in the Appendix.

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initiative. I observed the national and midterm elections in 1995, 1997, and 2000. Funded by a Howard Foundation Fellowship from Brown University, I returned for five months in 1997 and 1998 to study the relationship among citizens, the legislature, and the president. I returned again in 1999, 2000, 2002, and 2005 for brief visits. In 2008 I received a second Fulbright Fellowship to continue my research on Argentina. I spent a full semester in Buenos Aires at that time, during which period I also taught a class of doctoral students at the University of Buenos Aires. I offered them a course on social capital in Argentina and elsewhere. I am appreciative of those students for their insights on my research in this book.

These visits allowed me to conduct in-depth interviews in Argentina with citizen leaders, social-movement activists, members and leaders of human rights organizations, political party activists and leaders, current and former legislators from both the Senate and the House of Deputies, political advisors, government ministers from the Alfonsín and Menem administrations, and former President Alfonsín. In 1997 and 2000 I conducted public opinion surveys funded by the Institutions Program, Department of Political Science, University of Florida and by a Humanities Award, also at the University of Florida. These surveys addressed associational memberships, social activities, political participation, support for democratic institutions and processes, and democratic values, as well as electoral opinion. In 2002 I conducted a survey about associational membership and political activism in a Peronist neighborhood in Buenos Aires. In 2002 and 2003 I surveyed 83 members of the national Congress.

A number of individuals expressed great faith in this project at different points in its development. One of the earliest true believers was my father, Thornton Hogan Anderson, who became excited about my theory even before this book became a manuscript. He was often on the phone, calling me in Argentina, asking what I had learned in my field research that week. I am sorry that he is not around to see the completed book now. I also thank Aimee and Bill Hagerty for the support they showed during my sabbatical year of 2003–4. I am greatly appreciative of my Kentucky cousins, who have kept careful track of the development of this project and supported it throughout its history: Mildred and Jack Woodruff, Elizabeth and Bernie Conrad, and Steve Woodruff. Although I have never lived there, my cousins have certainly given me a sense of my old Kentucky home. Other strong supporters include Nancy Bermeo, Robert Dahl, Daniel Levine, Guillermo O'Donnell, Robert Putnam, and Theda Skocpol. Powerful intellectual mentors, they inspired me to do my best, lest I disappoint them. I thank them for their interest and support.

At the University of Florida I have received support from multiple sources. I am indebted to H. Russell Bernard for helping me to discover the scholarship of social capital beyond political science. In the Department of Political Science, I have received strong encouragement from Richard Conley, Margaret Conway, Aida Hozic, Renee Johnson, Margaret Kohn, and Richard Scher. I am deeply grateful for their interest and enthusiasm. I have benefited from

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particular insights about the various issues of this book from several of my colleagues. On the desirability of participatory democracy, I have learned a lot from Dan O'Neill. On corruption, the perception of the common good, and differing visions of community, I have learned much from Beth Rosenson. And on the commonalities between German and Argentine culture, I have gained important help from Conor O'Dwyer. Won-ho Park helped with some aspects of the statistical analysis. Scholars who read an earlier version of this book and offered helpful comments include Elizabeth Anderson, Nancy Barber, H. Russell Bernard, Laurent Berthet, Margaret Conway, J. Samuel Fitch, Yael Harari, Goran Hyden, Daniel Levine, Cynthia McClintock, Dan O'Neill, Anne Pitcher, Beth Rosenson, and Katrina Schwartz. In the final stages of the revision process for this manuscript, the Latin American Collection at the Smathers Library of the University of Florida purchased the recent Latinobarometro data for inclusion in this book. I am grateful to Richard Phillips and Paul Losch for entertaining my purchase request in the midst of the economic crisis, and to John Ingraham, Associate Dean of Libraries, for authorizing the purchase of the Latinobarometro data for the University of Florida scholarly community. The graphics for this book were paid for by funds from my University of Florida Research Foundation Professorship. I would like to thank Carmen Diana Deere, Director of the Center for Latin American Studies, for nominating me to compete for the professorship. I also thank Associate Deans Allan Burns and Lou Gillette for encouraging me to compete for the professorship.

In Argentina and from Argentines, I have also received support that deserves particular recognition. To be Argentine today and still be able to acknowledge the true character of Peronism, including the knowledge that Argentina produced such a movement in the first place, is to display a level of personal courage and intellectual honesty that is difficult and rare. Individuals who have supported this work and displayed that level of courage include Aníbal Corrado, Carlos Escudé, Andrés Fontana, Ana Maria Mustapic, Enrique Peruzzotti, and Guillermina Seri, as well as Guillermo O'Donnell, mentioned above. Andrés, Ana Maria, Enrique, and Guillermo deserve a second mention for having waded their way through an early draft of this manuscript. Aníbal read a later version in its entirety and gave extensive detailed comments. Thanks to all of them. The book is better for their input. Nicaraguans who have supported this project include Ricardo Chavarría, Milagros and Gabriela Chavarría, Sergio Santamaría, and Marvin Ortega. The pollsters I have worked with have been invaluable: Maria Braun of MoriArgentina and Gerardo Androgué of KNACK, both in Argentina; Sergio Santamaría of CINASE in Nicaragua; and Gustavo Mendez of DOXA in Venezuela, who conducted the earlier polls in Nicaragua.

I would like to thank Charles Chamberlin and Erin Johnson of Erin Johnson Designs for meticulous work on the graphics for this book. At Cambridge University Press I received excellent input from two anonymous reviewers.

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I also thank Eric Crahan, of Cambridge University Press, for believing in this book from early on and seeing it through to publication.

I thank Lyle and Teresa Sherfey, Tinker Harris, Helen Gould, and Randy and Cheryl Winter for keeping me riding and keeping me sane. I thank my husband, Lawrence C. Dodd, who has supported me and this project through it all. I will never know why I got to be so lucky as to have found him. Finally, this book is dedicated to my mother “who raised a banner and pointed the way.” It is dedicated to her because, after all, we still need each other and because, although she finds it hard to believe given her fundamental faith in humanity, we still have a very long way to go.

Boulder County, Colorado

July 19, 2009