Introduction

The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America

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A sea change has occurred in Latin American politics. In most of the region, until the wave of democratization that began in 1978, authoritarian regimes were pervasive. Many democracies were short-lived, and many countries had experienced literally no taste whatsoever of democratic political regimes.

The situation has changed profoundly in the past quarter century. By 1990 virtually every government in the region had competitively elected regimes, and since 1978 democracy has been far more extensive and also more durable than ever before. In many countries democratic and semidemocratic regimes[1] have survived despite poor social and economic performances and despite lengthy authoritarian traditions. In Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil, democratic governments withstood annual inflation rates that went far into quadruple digits. In El Salvador and Guatemala, countries with histories of ruthless dictatorships, consistent repression of the indigenous populations, and horrendous civil wars, warring factions signed peace treaties and established competitively elected regimes in the 1990s.

The capacity of elected governments to survive in the face of daunting challenges and poor social and economic performance confounds most observers' expectations – and considerable comparative and theoretical literature on democratization as well. Today, the scholarly community takes for granted that competitive political regimes have survived, but when the transitions to elected governments took place, few observers expected that these regimes would be able to withstand relentless economic crises such as those experienced in the 1980s, widespread poverty, egregious income inequalities, and other nettlesome challenges.

Not only has democracy lasted longer in the region than ever before, but it is also broader and more comprehensive. Never before have as many people

[1] Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán define democratic and semidemocratic regimes in Chapter 1.

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exercised the franchise, and mass publics have held local and national governments more accountable than at any time in the past. Latin America's achievements are all the more impressive when one considers that *mass* democracies have taken root where earlier, narrower, elitist democracies failed routinely.

Yet the post-1978 wave of democratization has been far from an unqualified success. Notwithstanding some democratic advances in the 1990s in several countries – most notably Mexico – democratization experienced setbacks across the Andean region and continued to be truncated in other countries. These setbacks are attributable in part to dismal government performance. In most countries, democratic regimes have failed to promote growth, reduce poverty, ameliorate inequalities, and address rampant crime. In the context of two decades of meager economic growth, soaring crime rates in many countries, and the poor performance of most regimes in addressing citizen needs, satisfaction with democracy declined, opening the door to more antiestablishment populists with equivocal attitudes toward democracy. In recent years, the situation has worsened in many countries. The banking system in Argentina collapsed in 2000, and along with it, much of the confidence of the Argentine electorate in established political parties and politicians. Popular uprisings, military actions, or legislative deposals have ousted presidents in Ecuador (1997 and 2000), Argentina (2001), and Bolivia (2003). Most of the recent scholarship on the post-1978 wave of democratization has focused on these and other deficiencies of democratic and semidemocratic regimes. We focus on the deficiencies but also emphasize the democratic transformation of the region. Both are important.

This volume, which offers an ambitious and comprehensive overview of the post-1978 wave of democratization in Latin America, has three objectives. The first is to chart these unprecedented and unanticipated advances as well as the setbacks in what Huntington (1991) called on a global scale the "third wave" of democratization. In early 1978, among the twenty countries listed in Table I.1, only Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela were democracies. The other seventeen had patently authoritarian regimes. By the beginning of 1992, fifteen of these seventeen authoritarian regimes had given rise to semidemocracies or democracies. During this protracted burst of democratization, there was not a single breakdown of a democratic or semidemocratic regime. The pattern since 1992 has been mixed, with some advances and setbacks, but as of mid-2004 the region had only two openly authoritarian regimes, Cuba and Haiti. Given its breadth and durability, the trend that it ushered in can no longer be considered a mere swing of a pendulum, as seemed possible not so long ago (Pastor 1989a).

Second, the book seeks to explain both the post-1978 sea change from a region dominated by authoritarian regimes to one in which openly authoritarian regimes are the rare exception, and why some countries have achieved advances in democratization while others (including four of the Andean countries) have experienced setbacks. The analysis highlights the poor regime performance of

TABLE I.1. *Classification of Latin American Political Regimes, 1945–2003*

Country	Year	Regime	Country	Year	Regime
Argentina	1945	A	Guatemala	1945–1953	S
	1946–1950	S		1954–1985	A
	1951–1957	A		1986–2003	S
	1958–1961	S	Haiti	1945–2003	A
	1962	A	Honduras	1945–1956	A
	1963–1965	S		1957–1962	S
	1966–1972	A		1963–1981	A
	1973–1974	D		1982–2003	S
	1975	S	Mexico	1945–1987	A
	1976–1982	A		1988–1999	S
	1983–2003	D		2000–2003	D
Bolivia	1945–1955	A	Nicaragua	1945–1983	A
	1956–1963	S		1984–2003	S
	1964–1981	A	Panama	1945–1947	S
	1982–2003	D		1948–1955	A
Brazil	1945	A		1956–1967	S
	1946–1963	D		1968–1989	A
	1964–1984	A		1990–1993	S
	1985–2003	D		1994–2003	D
Chile	1945–1972	D	Paraguay	1945–1988	A
	1973–1989	A		1989–2003	S
	1990–2003	D	Peru	1945–1947	S
Colombia	1945–1948	S		1948–1955	A
	1949–1957	A		1956–1961	S
	1958–1973	S		1962	A
	1974–1989	D		1963–1967	D
	1990–2003	S		1968–1979	A
Costa Rica	1945–1948	S		1980–1982	D
	1949–2003	D		1983–1984	S
Cuba	1945–1951	S		1985–1987	D
	1952–2003	A		1988–1991	S
Dominican Republic	1945–1965	A		1992–1994	A
	1966–1973	S		1995–2000	S
	1974–1977	A		2001–2003	D
	1978–1993	D	Uruguay	1945–1972	D
	1994–1995	S		1973–1984	A
	1996–2003	D		1985–2003	D
Ecuador	1945–1947	A	Venezuela	1945	A
	1948–1962	S		1946	S
	1963–1967	A		1947	D
	1968–1969	S		1948–1957	A
	1970–1978	A		1958–1998	D
	1979–1999	D		1999	S
	2000	S		2000–2001	D
	2001–2003	D		2002–2003	S
El Salvador	1945–1983	A			
	1984–1991	S			
	1992–2003	D			

Key: D, democratic; S, semidemocratic; A, authoritarian.
Note: The year of a regime transition is coded as belonging to the new regime.
Source: Mainwaring et al. (2001), updated.

most post-1978 democracies and semidemocracies and the growing disillusionment with democracy. Third, the book aspires to contribute to the broader comparative literature on what makes democracy thrive, survive without thriving, or fail.

In an attempt to achieve these three goals, the first and concluding chapters present arguments about general trends and causes of democratization, while the nine chapters on countries, which were selected on the basis of their theoretical interest, pay attention to country-level specificities. Chapter 1 provides an overview of regime change in Latin America since the beginning of the Third Wave of democratization in 1978. Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán address two main questions: What explains the dramatic and historically unprecedented burst of democratization between 1978 and 1992, and what explains the difficulties of achieving further advances in democratization since 1992? To the best of our knowledge, this chapter is the first quantitative analysis of democratic breakdowns, transitions, and erosions in Latin America. While building on the broader literature in comparative politics and political sociology about regime change, the authors underscore that Latin America has distinctive regional dynamics, such that many findings in the larger literature do not hold up for Latin America. They highlight as auspicious for the region the embrace of democracy by the left (which in turn has diminished the fear of the right of a democratic order), and the new international, and especially U.S. and Organization of American States (OAS), support for democracy in the hemisphere. They attribute the democratic erosions of recent years above all to poor government performance.

The nine country chapters are not primarily intended to be historical overviews, informative descriptions, or accounts of current events. Rather, they analyze political regimes focusing on two central questions. First, how should advances and limits in democratization in each country be characterized over an extended period of time? Second, what explains democracy's achievements and shortcomings, advances, and regressions?

Three chapters examine the building of democracy in large countries with mainly authoritarian political heritages until their recent transitions: Argentina since 1983, Brazil since 1985, and Mexico since it began its transition to democracy in the 1980s. Three chapters examine the emergence of democracy or semidemocracy in countries with deeply authoritarian pasts and unfavorable social and economic conditions: Bolivia since 1982, El Salvador since 1985, and Guatemala since 1986. The other three country chapters study democratic erosions (Colombia and Venezuela since the early 1990s) or breakdown (Peru in 1992). Each country chapter takes as a beginning point the inauguration of a new competitive or semicompetitive regime where this transition occurred after 1978. For example, the chapter on Argentina addresses the twenty-one years of democracy since 1983. The chapters on Colombia and Venezuela trace patterns primarily since 1978. Taken together, these chapters offer a composite portrait of the region as a whole; taken separately, they preserve what is analytically distinctive about each case.

In the conclusion, Frances Hagopian analyzes why faltering economies destabilize some democracies, while in other countries public tolerance for economic stagnation and declining public services is higher. On the basis of the country studies presented in this volume, she argues that democracy is possible in inauspicious circumstances where civil society is connected to political parties and institutions. Such connections permit public tolerance for economic crisis and even personal insecurity. Her analysis suggests that the survival of democratic regimes depends not only on government performance in issue areas of high public salience but also on the quality of political representation.

DEMOCRACY IN HARD TIMES AND INAUSPICIOUS PLACES

Beyond charting the course of the Third Wave, we also aspire to contribute theoretically to the understanding of why democracies emerge, become stable or not, break down or not, and become solid or remain vulnerable and erode. Although there are minor theoretical divergences among the authors, this volume collectively offers some clear theoretical arguments.

The foremost theoretical contribution of this volume revolves around the hitherto unprecedented phenomenon of competitively elected regimes that survive despite widespread poverty, terrible inequalities, and (in most countries) bad economic performance. During the post-1978 period, democracy has survived in poor countries (Bolivia, Nicaragua), in countries with the worst income distributions in the world (Brazil, Guatemala), in countries with profound ethnic divides (Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru), and in countries that have performed very poorly economically.[2] Democracy can and has lasted in hard times and inauspicious places. At the same time, this volume shows that the combination of inhospitable structural variables (poverty and inequality) and poor regime performance easily has corrosive effects on regime solidity and quality. By regime solidity we mean the extent to which competitively elected regimes are reasonably full democracies (as opposed to semidemocracies) and appear to be relatively immune to breakdown or erosion. This concept cannot be understood in a static way; a regime that is solid today may yet erode somewhere down the line, as the deterioration of Venezuela's democracy since 1989 underscores.

Bolivia's stability in the 1985–2000 period epitomizes the ability of democracy to endure in unlikely places and under adverse conditions. Prior to 1982, Bolivia had been plagued by a long history of instability and chronic military coups. The country had little and restricted experience with democracy prior to 1982. Between July 1978 and October 1982, the country had nine different presidents – two democratic civilians who were quickly overthrown and seven

[2] India is the quintessential example of democracy surviving, albeit with a short-lived and partial breakdown from 1975 to 1977, despite seemingly long odds: terrible poverty when democracy was born in 1947, great linguistic diversity, and occasionally intractable religious conflict. On the survival of democracy in India under these conditions, see Varshney (1998).

different *golpista* military officers. Hernán Siles Suazo, the new democratic president (1982–85), inherited disastrous economic conditions and proceeded to make them worse. Inflation soared to an annual rate of 8,171 percent in 1985, and per capita income experienced a downward slide throughout most of the first decade of democracy. This economic decline exacerbated poverty in what was already one of the poorest countries in Latin America. Bolivia also has one of the most ethnically divided societies in Latin America, with an indigenous majority that for centuries has been exploited by a *ladino* (of white origin) minority. All these conditions augured poorly for democracy.

Observers writing in the early 1980s were understandably skeptical about the prospects for democracy in Bolivia (e.g., Whitehead 1986). Although the new regime tottered during its first years, by the mid-1990s, democracy had become stable, as René Mayorga's contribution to this volume attests. Until things began to unravel around 2000, the Bolivian case was a remarkable example of a democracy surviving despite formidable structural and economic circumstances and an authoritarian past. But events since 2000 have once again demonstrated the difficulty of building a solid democracy in a country with widespread poverty, egregious inequalities, and a weakened state.

Bolivia is not the only case of an elected government surviving in the face of imposing challenges. El Salvador and Guatemala also fit this description, as the chapters by Elisabeth Jean Wood and Mitchell Seligson show. The capacity of democratic and semidemocratic regimes to survive in hard times and inauspicious places has consequences for the theoretical understanding of what makes democracies endure. It supports some theoretical approaches to that question, and it works against other theoretical understandings.

Let us begin with the latter. One of the most influential theoretical approaches to studying democracy is modernization theory, which was originally formulated by Lipset (1959) and subsequently supported empirically by a large number of other scholars. Modernization theorists argued with ample empirical evidence that democracy was more likely to emerge in more developed countries. They did not postulate that democracy was impossible in countries with a low level of development, but they did contend that building democracy in poor countries was a difficult enterprise. Przeworski et al.'s (2000) path-breaking work similarly argued that democracies were less likely to endure in less developed countries.

The Third Wave of Democratization poses empirical and theoretical challenges to modernization arguments as applied to Latin America. Poor countries initiated the Third Wave in Latin America, and notwithstanding many daunting challenges, only one of them – Peru – has experienced a full democratic breakdown in the post-1978 period. The book shows that the relationship between the level of development and democracy has been surprisingly indeterminate throughout Latin America for a lengthy historical period. Of course, we are not dismissing the solid research that has shown that more economically developed countries are more likely to be democratic. The question is one of emphasis. The level of development generally affects the likelihood of the emergence of democracies and the likelihood of their durability, but in a Latin American

subsample, as Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (this volume) show, this effect is very weak (see also Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2003). Indeed, more economically developed countries actually had a slightly higher rate of breakdowns of elected regimes between 1945 and 1999.

Our collective emphasis on the possibility of democracy or semidemocracy in hard times and difficult circumstances also runs against the central argument of class approaches that claim that democracy requires either a strong bourgeoisie (Moore 1966) or a strong working class (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992). In Latin America, competitive regimes have emerged and endured in places where the class structure is not favorable to it, including the three countries analyzed in Part II (Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala). It has failed in countries where the class structure was (according to Rueschemeyer et al.'s theory) favorable, including most prominently Argentina in 1963, 1966, and 1976, as well as in Chile and Uruguay in 1973.

Finally, our emphasis on the possibilities of democratic or semidemocratic survival despite poor economic performance is at odds with work that has seen democracy in developing countries as resting significantly on economic growth. Performance-based arguments about the survival of new democracies are old (Lipset 1959) and intuitively sensible. The Latin American experience since 1978 suggests, however, that the impact of economic performance on regime survival is mediated by political factors. Almost surely democracy in most of Latin America would be in better shape if economic performance had been better. Nevertheless, although poor economic performance and poor results in other salient policy issues such as public security have weakened many regimes, they have not yet doomed them.

At a theoretical level, this book shows that attitudes toward democracy and a favorable international political environment – for this region, more than the structural variables tapped by modernization theory – have made a decisive difference in whether competitive regimes survive or break down. If the main actors are committed to democracy and if the international political environment is favorable, democracy can survive – at least for an extended time – despite widespread poverty, glaring inequalities, and bad performance. If key actors are not committed to democracy and the international political environment is not favorable, democracy may falter even if economic performance is credible and per capita income is moderately high. Of course, there are limits to the explanatory power of international variables. They usually explain change over time better than variance across countries at a given point in time, and in Latin America they have rarely been the main cause of a regime change. Moreover, international support does little or nothing to enhance the quality of democracy in contexts where it can be perilously low. The international community has devised mechanisms to deal with overt attempts to impose authoritarian rule, but it is ill equipped to deal with more subtle or gradual authoritarian regressions.

The flip side of our argument that democracy can survive in hard times and inauspicious places is that it need not endure even in seemingly favorable conditions. Our cases show that even at moderately high levels of per capita

income, democracy in Latin America has been, and again can be, vulnerable. This vulnerability may grow if the United States becomes less concerned with supporting democracy; its initial support for the April 2002 coup in Venezuela suggests that this is a realistic possibility, in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

In downplaying the independent effect of structural factors and emphasizing the central role of political factors (especially the importance of actors' commitment to democracy) in explaining the common thread of regime durability and the weak regime solidity in Latin America in the past quarter century, this book resonates theoretically with earlier works by Robert Dahl (1971: 124–88), Daniel Levine (1973), Arend Lijphart (1977), Juan Linz (1978), Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (1986), Adam Przeworski (1991: 51–99), Alfred Stepan (1978), and Arturo Valenzuela (1978). These scholars emphasized that attitudes toward democracy (Dahl, Levine, Lijphart, Linz), capable leadership or the lack thereof (Linz, Stepan), the effective functioning of political institutions (Valenzuela), and the strategic behavior of political leaders (O'Donnell and Schmitter, Przeworski) are critical factors in understanding regime change and stability. Several chapters in this volume build on this tradition, including Mayorga's view of the salutary effect of Bolivia's posttransition institutional reform in the 1985–97 period, and Beatriz Magaloni's contribution to understanding Mexico's democratization through the prism of the strategic bargains among elite actors that led to the creation of a key institution, the Federal Election Institute.

A key theme of this book is that what allows a democracy to emerge and survive does not guarantee that democracy will be good or immune from antisystem challenges and citizen disaffection. Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán advance the argument that regime durability and regime solidity may have sharply divergent causes. Whereas elite attitudes toward democracy and a favorable international political environment have been key factors in understanding regime durability, regime solidity is better explained by the interplay of structural factors, regime performance, and mass political attitudes.

A fundamental argument of this volume is that regime performance does not predict the ability of democratic and semidemocratic governments to endure. Political factors are key in understanding when regimes can survive despite poor performance. While accepting the primacy of political variables in understanding the viability of democracy, this volume pushes this tradition farther by considering not merely elite but also mass attitudes toward democracy and citizen connections to political parties. Whether democracy can survive withering economic crises and poor performance in other policy arenas depends not only on elites but also on the behavior and attitudes of the mass citizenry and the linkages between citizens and elites. In the countries examined here, public tolerance for economic crisis, unemployment, corruption, crime, and flawed justice systems has varied. In their chapters, Michael Coppedge and Mitchell Seligson argue that poor government performance in Venezuela and Guatemala in areas of high public salience has jeopardized public support for faltering

governments and weakened regime solidity. But elsewhere, mass support for democracy has allowed governments to stay afloat in turbulent economic waters. Mass support, in turn, may be abetted by the connections of civil society to political parties and political institutions. Steven Levitsky's chapter suggests that the dense networks of the Peronist party cushioned a faltering regime in Argentina from public rejection. In Bolivia, according to Mayorga's analysis, deteriorating networks of representation could not do the same. In the conclusion, Hagopian highlights the importance of quality political representation for understanding why some democratic regimes remain solid in hard times, while others, given the same or even better economic circumstances, are more fragile and vulnerable to antisystem political agents.

THE CASES

The nine country cases included in this volume represent a wide range in the post-1978 evolution of political regimes. This case selection is consistent with the objective of maximizing variance on the dependent variable – in this case, regime outcomes. Because the post-1978 wave ran counter to the expectations of some previous social science findings, and because it could not have been expected on the basis of Latin America's past, it was important to include some cases of unexpected though partial advances in democracy under especially adverse conditions. It was also important to include some cases of democratic erosion or breakdown. Finally, we included the countries with the three largest economies, which previously had largely unsuccessful experiences with democracy but have now built some of the fuller democracies in contemporary Latin America.

We eschewed a strategy of including chapters on every major country in the region, opting instead for a more thorough analysis of a set of cases carefully selected for their theoretical import for understanding advances and setback in democratization. We were especially interested in cases whose outcomes were not overdetermined. For this reason, this volume does not include country chapters on Costa Rica, Uruguay, and Chile, the most likely cases of democratic endurance. Though Uruguay and Chile experienced authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and 1980s, before 1973 they had the strongest democratic heritages in Latin America. Costa Rica has had uninterrupted democracy since 1949. That democracy has survived in Costa Rica, Uruguay, and Chile is therefore not surprising.

Part I: Advances in Democratization Despite Authoritarian Heritages

Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico have long been less than stable, exemplary democracies. The difficulty of establishing and maintaining democracy in Latin America's three largest economies not only has been disappointing but has also confounded social science theory. Democracies are supposed to flourish where certain minimal socioeconomic preconditions are met, and these are

middle-income countries with highly urbanized societies, strong industrial sectors, and reasonably well-educated work forces. Yet the political histories of these countries are troubled. Despite its wealth and high level of adult literacy, Argentina experienced a half-century of failed presidencies and authoritarian closures of political space punctuated by very few years of democracy between 1930 and 1983. Levitsky aptly tags Argentina as "one of the world's leading democratic under-achievers for much of the twentieth century." If Argentina appears to be an "easy" case of building democracy in retrospect, it certainly did not appear so in 1983, when the new democratic regime was inaugurated. Brazil had a longer period of political democracy in the post World War II period (1946–64) than either Mexico or Argentina, but it also had a stable and well-entrenched military dictatorship for more than two decades (1964–85), which poignantly illustrates the difficulty of establishing an inclusive mass democracy in a country with gross inequality. Mexico experienced seven decades of one-party, authoritarian rule and never enjoyed democracy before 2000.

Seen from the expectations that existed when the Third Wave began in Latin America and from the vantage point of regime economic performance, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico are cases of surprising success in democratization. Argentina may be the most intriguing of these three cases. Since 1983 it has enjoyed its longest period ever of democracy despite experiencing a profound economic crisis in the late 1980s and again in 2001–03, what Levitsky aptly calls "the most serious depression in the country's history." In 2002, as Argentina was experiencing a crisis of the presidency, the banking system lay in shambles, and public confidence in government had plummeted to all time lows, some wondered whether Argentine democracy might collapse. We offered Steve Levitsky an opportunity to revise his fine chapter, and asked him specifically if he wished to abandon ship. With either the optimism of a naïve Pollyanna or the prescience of a Greek oracle, Levitsky stayed on board and on course. We agree with Levitsky that Argentina's democratic prospects are solid. The fact that the political system did not outright collapse amid such an economic catastrophe is as remarkable as any positive development in Latin America's democratization of the past quarter century. Democracy in Argentina has weathered economic disaster to a far greater extent than one would have imagined given the country's history, and also more than other countries on the continent with democratic pasts.

Brazil has sustained a democratic regime since 1985, and democracy has become more stable in recent years. In his chapter, Kurt Weyland classifies the Brazilian democratic regime since 1995 as "immune to challenges." Although he calls Brazil's democracy "low quality," Brazilian democracy is more robust today than it has ever been. The steady transfer of presidential power in January 2003 from Fernando Henrique Cardoso to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a man whom in 1989 many actors regarded as a threat to democratic and economic stability, attests to the maturing of Brazilian democracy.

Whether one counts the election of an opposition majority in the national Congress (in 1997) or the election of a president from a party other than the