Latin American Research Review: Living in Actually Existing Democracies

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By now, many of you are familiar with the first-ever special issue of the *Latin American Research Review*: *Living in Actually Existing Democracies*. As is often the case with unprecedented endeavors, unanticipated problems can catch one off guard. In this case, it was only after the volume was in the mail that we learned that Nancy Postero of the University of California, San Diego, was not recognized as the Guest Editor for the special issue. Working closely with me, her invaluable contribution made the issue much better than it otherwise would have been, and on behalf of the LARR editorial committee, I want to formally thank her. We also discovered that the introduction we co-wrote was omitted from the special issue. That introduction is reproduced here, and will also be available at LARR Online.

Like the proponents of Latin American democracy, we are learning from our mistakes and expect the next special issue to reflect that. In the meantime, we hope that the special issue and our introduction will be of value to those strive to understand the region's complex socio-economic and political dynamics.

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Living in Actually Existing Democracies: An Introduction To LARR Volume 45, Special Issue, 2010

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It seems that the value of Latin America's current generation of democracies has been challenged virtually since its origins in the democratic transitions of the late 1970s and early 1980s. For some, the "problem" was rooted in flawed, elite-dominated transitions that ensured that little, if anything, would actually change with inauguration of regimes based on relatively free and competitive periodic elections (MacEwan 1988; Petras and Vieux 1994). Such extreme pessimism was only reinforced (albeit unintentionally) by the so-called "transitologists" who welcomed the return of political democracy at the same time that they cautioned against the dangers posed by transitions that seemed to favor the popular majority at the perceived expense of the political and economic elites most closely associated with the outgoing authoritarian regimes (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). Indeed, the historical record strongly suggested that the most enduring democracies in Latin America were based on elite agreements or pacts (Karl 1990), which by definition constrained voter alternatives and deliberately erected obstacles to the kinds of structural changes necessary to tackle historical problems of poverty and inequality.

Now that formal democratic transitions are a thing of the past (even Mexico, which was the last country to experience a democratic transition, has had a second presidential election since its historic 2000 elections), attention has turned increasingly to the effectiveness of elected governments in meeting the electorates' expectations, not to mention winning their trust. While public opinion surveys consistently show that, in general, more Latin Americans than ever before believe that political democracy is the "best" form of government, they are consistently unsatisfied with the governments that are actually elected, and substantial minorities (and sometimes even majorities) suggest they would support an authoritarian regime under various circumstances.[1] In an effort to understand why this is the case, a growing body of literature has focused on the problematic *quality* of Latin American democracies, (Oxhorn 2006b; Oxhorn and Ducatenzeiler 1998; United Nations Development Program 2002). Central to this approach has been the noting of unequal or "disjunctive" access to citizenship rights, as societies continue to be divided by race, ethnicity, and class (Caldeira and Holston 1999, Postero and Zamosc 2004). Such structured inequalities have been exacerbated during the last two decades of neoliberal economic policies, which have widened the gaps between rich and poor and deepened the distrust of political elites who are seen as accountable more to the global market than to their own constituencies. Continuing inequalities and deepening distrust have had a significant impact on democratic processes in recent years. In the so-called "turn to the left," politicians and civil society have not only critiqued the neoliberal policies put in place under the "Washington Consensus," but they have also pushed alternatives to electoral democracy, focusing instead on popular or "multitude"-like forms of participation (Arditti 2008:65, Postero 2007).

Scholars studying this era have generally distanced themselves from the earlier critiques of the transitions themselves, yet the question that the earlier literature raised nevertheless remains: How much of a difference has democracy actually made for

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the common citizen? As Guillermo O'Donnell cogently points out, we need to seriously question "the effectiveness of political citizenship when referring to individuals who are severely deprived of civil and social rights" (O'Donnell 2004: 31).

With that question in mind, *LARR*'s Editorial Committee decided to commission the journal's first special issue, *Living in Actually Existing Democracies*. The choice of titles was deliberate, harking back to the height of the Cold War when theorists and policymakers alike tried to interpret the significance of "actually existing socialisms" based on the dramatically differing realities of socialist experiments in countries as far flung as the USSR, China, Vietnam and Cuba, to name but a few. Socialism, like democracy, is an ideal that is at best only approached by actual governments; the question then, as now, is whether existing regimes approach the ideal "well enough" to make a positive difference in the lives of people. Recognizing that each case demonstrates "limited" or "incomplete" democracy when compared to the ideal, particularly in Latin America today, we ask whether political actors are imagining, moving towards, or re-signifying democracy in different places in the contemporary moment and, if so, how? What new sorts of practices might come to characterize "democracy" in this post-transition era? Tackling such a broad topic required a bit of imagination, and we decided to leave that up to the contributors as much as possible. We were therefore pleasantly surprised that all the authors were largely talking about the same issues in generally comparable ways.

As editors, we chose four countries—Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Mexico—we felt would represent a wide range of experiences along several dimensions.. Most importantly, we chose cases that could demonstrate the tension between the movement toward a

more participatory democracy and the preservation of existing democratic institutions. As one of our anonymous reviewers pointed out, the cases exemplify four contrasting options, as captured on the following two-dimensional table:

		Are there strong, stable democratic institutions?	
		YES	NO
Is there a movement toward a more participatory democracy?	YES	Brazil	Bolivia
	NO	Chile	Mexico

Chile is an example of a well-established and stable electoral democracy with strong representative institutions that operate within the context of the rule of law, but Chile's democracy has few participatory features. Bolivia, on the other hand, has seen an explosion of participation. It is the one case in which social movements have come to power, but this has happened in the context of a virtual collapse of the party system and the erosion of political pacts that have underpinned democratic stability in the current democratic era. Bolivia is also a case where indigenous mobilization plays an important role in the redefinition of democracy.

Brazil's democracy has passed a number of tests of "consolidation." Brazil has also become an important site of democratic innovation, known globally for its participatory budgeting processes. The most discouraging case among this set is obviously Mexico. According to Alberto Olvera's contribution, Mexico "suffers from the structural political and legal stalemate created both by a constitution and a political system that represent an obstacle to

processes conducive to the consolidation of democracy." At the same time, Mexico exhibits "the weakness of both civil society and the culture and practices that can push democratic innovation." (Actually Existing Democracies: 79).

For each country, we asked three prominent researchers to contribute an original paper that focused on a particular aspect of "democracy" drawing on their particular area of research expertise.[2] Because *LARR* is an interdisciplinary journal, we tried to solicit articles from various academic disciplines, and perhaps more importantly, from differing points of view. There is often an assumption that traditional disciplines are homogeneous in terms of their approaches and conclusions, and the competing perspectives in this special issue are a powerful reminder that differences within disciplines can be as great as between them. We particularly wanted to open the discussion about democracy to those outside political science, which has traditionally dominated the topic, but also to different perspectives from within political science. Thus, there are political science analyses of institutions and electoral politics alongside chapters by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians focusing on social movements, indigenous organizations, and women's movements. Like democracy, the best we can hope for is to approach the "ideal" in terms of a multidisciplinary perspective on a crucial question facing all Latin Americans. Given that there are often marked differences of opinion among the authors, we feel we made a good start. For example, the authors of the Chilean chapters largely agree on the facts, but take divergent positions in their interpretations. The Bolivian chapters show perhaps the strongest disagreements, with Laserna and de la Fuente representing polar opposites in the facts they present as well as in their analyses of Evo Morales' strategies. While the

differences of opinion are perhaps less pronounced in the articles on Brazil, the contrasts and similarities in perspectives offer important insights into what "democracy" means for different actors. We hope these debates will be productive. We are particularly happy that so many Latin American authors contributed to this effort.

In this brief introduction, we focus on three central crosscutting themes that stand out: the definition of democracy, the role of participation and social heterogeneity in a democracy, and the relationship between democracy and the economy.

**Minimalist, Maximalist or
Simply Appropriate:
Defining the Nature of Democracy**

In many ways, the early debates about the nature of "democratic" transitions turned on competing definitions of what democracy actually entailed, leading to quite contradictory criticisms of the same body of work (e.g., Levine 1988; MacEwan 1988; Petras and Vieux 1994). What stands out in our collection of essays is that all the authors have essentially moved beyond these often polemical debates about what democracy *is* to focus more on the potential that political or liberal democracy has for achieving accountable, responsive governments that strive to ensure greater social inclusion. This is not to suggest that there is a universal consensus on what constitutes the basic institutional and social parameters of democracy, but rather to emphasize that the authors in this special issue generally take as their common starting point a procedural definition that draws on the classic work of Schumpeter (1950) and Dahl (1971). For example, some authors clearly remain more faithful to this more traditional understanding (e.g., Laserna, Navia and Power).[3] Yet they also generally recognize a

greater social component of democratic governance than is normally attributed to this perspective—originally and forcefully criticized as "elitist" democratic theory (Bachrach 1967)—even if they simultaneously warn about the possibility that more participatory understandings of democracy might undermine the pillars of representative governance (see below). The other authors, however, stress that while the institutions of representative governance are a core element of democracy, these need to be complemented by various mechanisms for increased citizen participation that can encapsulate democracy "as a form of relationship between the state and civil society that may lead to a process of social and political inclusion" (Actually Existing Democracies: 182). While elections and the prominent role played by political parties in elections are generally accepted as necessary components of political democracy by these authors, they also stress that they are by no means sufficient. They need to be complemented in a variety of ways, including the actions of social movements (Carter) and civil society actors more generally (Avritzer, Delamaza, Olvera) as part of what Olvera (Actually Existing Democracies: 81) labels a "democratic participatory project." In particular, both Hernández Díaz and de la Fuente emphasize how such participation, especially of indigenous peoples, can add a distinctly cultural dimension to the definition of democracy, while Valdés, Ortiz-Ortega and Barquet underscore its importance for ensuring greater gender equality. Although such an expansive definition of democracy goes far beyond what Dahl and, in particular, Schumpeter imagined decades ago in many fundamental ways, it does so in a way that is not mutually exclusive with a narrower procedural definition, even if it simultaneously tests the limits of democratic liberalism (see Postero). This is a major change in the way Latin Americans,

particularly on the left, have historically viewed the elitism of "democratic politics." As Delamaza notes, this reflects a new understanding of democracy that recognizes the importance of "deepening democracy with a representative foundation" rather than replacing it with some form of "popular protagonism or direct democracy" (Actually Existing Democracies: 280).

Benjamin Arditti has discussed this change in some depth in his important 2008 *LARR* article on the left in Latin America. He argues that the left has responded to the "hits and misses" of the last few decades, arriving at an understanding that the goals of achieving equality, solidarity, and a change in the status quo are more important than ideological orthodoxy. As a result, he says, the left has downplayed the socialist agenda in favor of a wide acceptance of multiparty democracy. But, he argues, across the continent, the excluded have expressed dissatisfaction with electoral democracy, "motivated by the belief that there was something fundamentally wrong with representation and that it was worth experimenting with alternatives like *cabildos abiertos*, exodus, multitude, self-government, recall, and so on" (Arditti: 66). This has caused the left to adapt its definitions and its agendas. He concludes that "[e]ven if multiparty electoral democracy—the heart of the liberal conception of politics—is a fixture in the imaginary of the left, so is the experimentation with post-liberal formats of political participation" (Arditti: 67).

The authors here generally follow this line, and are largely concerned with whether greater participation and inclusion can be achieved within the framework of liberal institutions. That is, none suggest that "actually existing" and "participatory" democracies are mutually exclusive alternatives. They do differ, however, in the degree to which they believe the two can be

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reconciled. Again, the Bolivian chapters provide the starkest contrasts. Postero describes the tensions at play in the Morales government: an urgency on the part of the MAS and the social movements for radical political change to overcome legacies of colonialism and neoliberalism and the need to work within the constraints of a liberal democratic system. De la Fuente takes one side, focusing on the long-delayed demands of the indigenous social movements, and arguing that Bolivia requires another model of democracy and new social relations to overcome the limitations of Western representative democracy. Laserna takes the other side, arguing that the mob mentality of popular sectors in street protests and the undemocratic tactics of the Morales government fundamentally threaten democracy. Taking a position somewhere in between, Postero describes the MAS's struggle between its commitment to existing democracy and its aspirations for radical change, and concludes that this process may be producing a reworked or "vernacularized" form of liberalism (or what Arditti calls post-liberalism) that is more democratic and more relevant to Bolivia's indigenous populations.

This idea of democratic deepening and the expanded concept of democracy that it implies diverges from the classic Schumpeterian/Dahlian conceptualization in another way that is important to highlight: Democracy is viewed as inherently conflictual. Although competition (or contestation for Dahl) has always been central to democratic theory, the general presumption was that consolidated democracies reflected a high level of underlying social consensus that minimized trade-offs and the kind of zero-sum politics that frequently undermined Latin American democracies in the past. Indeed, it was a rejection of this assumption as unrealistic, if not inherently unjust in Latin American

societies marked by the high levels of inequality, that led many across the political spectrum to adopt an instrumental view of democracy, supporting it only insofar as it allowed different actors to pursue their own narrow interests (Garretón 1989 ; O'Donnell 1979).[4] For the authors in this special issue, democratic institutions are ideally viewed as mechanisms for resolving conflict peacefully, even if they disagree on the precise nature of those institutions or the relative balance between representative and participatory structures. For them, this is how social, economic and cultural heterogeneity can be addressed in a constructive way that brings societies together rather than tear them apart, as was frequently the case prior to the last wave of democratic transitions.[5] As Olvera (Actually Existing Democracies: 99) eloquently points out, "in the real world, urban and rural, Indian or not, it is not possible to get rid of plurality, difference, conflict and multiple power relations, which have to be processed politically (in a democratic way)." Indeed, Carter emphasizes in his article on the MST of Brazil how non-violent conflict may actually be required to force democracy to live up to its full potential by demanding greater levels of responsiveness and accountability from elected leaders.

Ironically, this new appreciation for political democracy also reflects a more realistic appraisal of the role of political elites. For the first time, there is now a general agreement that democracy is perhaps the best safeguard against abuses by political elites; rather than looking for nondemocratic alternatives to "elitist" political democracy, political democracy is now seen as the best way to counter the political and economic power of elites. The inevitability of having political elites is now more or less a given, as attention turns to the central importance of elite consensus. In some cases, elite agreement stands out because of the political

and economic successes it can bring as a result (Navia, Power). For most of the authors in this special issue, it is even more important to recognize the problems that a lack of elite consensus can generate (De la Fuente, Laserna, Olvera, Ortiz-Ortega and Barquet, Postero, Power). There can also be too much of a good thing, and in some cases an excessive level of elite consensus can lead to political inertia, if not stagnation, which prejudices the prospects for greater social inclusion and equity (Carter, Delamaza, Valdés). Ultimately, for all of the authors, regardless of their particular perspective, the challenge for currently existing democracies is to find an appropriate balance between the pursuit of elite consensus and the level of citizen participation beyond the electoral moment.

Participation and Social Heterogeneity in Democracy: In Search of a New Democratic Equilibrium

Once the role of elites and the centrality of conflict are acknowledged, the challenge then is to minimize the latter and circumscribe the influence of the former in ways that are consistent with democratic inclusion. For all the authors, the key to meeting this challenge is to determine an appropriate role for citizens to play in complementing representative institutions linked to free and fair elections, even though they may disagree on what that role should be. This is more than a theoretical issue. Defining this role in practice has become a central element of the political dynamics in all the countries examined in this special issue; even if there is a consensus that there is more to democracy than elections and that elites cannot do everything, people are still struggling to figure out what kind of "other" participation is called for. This search—both in theory and in practice—for new models of democracy that combine important elements

of representative democracy with innovative channels for civil society to influence democratic politics can be understood as a new search for a "democratic equilibrium." In particular, new forms of participation are generally viewed as mechanisms for increasing governmental responsiveness and accountability, at the same time that they subvert the elitism and hierarchy of clientelism (and, perhaps, representative democracy more generally).

The idea of democratic equilibrium highlights the ways current perspectives on democracy contrast with dominant perspectives of the not-too-distant past. Holding elections for the sake of having elections regardless of whether they are meaningfully free and competitive is no longer tenable. It is only when elections are meaningful in this sense that the political rights which are the lynchpin of political democracy can "be used for conquering other rights" (O'Donnell 2004: 49). Rather than the search for "stability" or "order" that was the quid pro quo for elite and middle class acquiescence to democratic rule in the past, there is general agreement that stability cannot be disassociated from the quality of democratic governance. At a minimum, most of the authors would agree that while political stability may be necessary, it is not sufficient and it may even be undesirable if the regime is not democratic, regardless of whether it is linked to measurable material improvements in the quality of life for the majority. In particular, popular participation can be seen as an essential mechanism for correcting the shortcomings and institutional flaws rooted in the nature of the transition process itself (Delamaza, Valdés, Carter).[6]

As a number of authors explain, achieving such a democratic equilibrium is often problematic for a variety of reasons. It may even reflect inherent contradictions between liberal democratic ideals and institutions, and the types of democratic institutions that may come to typify what Arditti (2008) calls new "post-liberal" models of democracy (Postero). At one extreme, civil society may be mobilized at the expense of representative institutions (Laserna, Navia), even when such mobilization has the explicit goal of strengthening their democratic qualities in order to make them more inclusionary (de la Fuente, Postero). This perspective contrasts with one that argues that excessive elite consensus can severely limit the space available for civil society—and citizens more generally—to participate in democratic politics independently of periodically held elections (Delamaza, Valdés). What is striking is that in all of the countries examined in this special issue, there are no guidelines for what such a balance between representative democracy and its socio-political complements *should* consist of, either in terms of some consensual normative ideal or in what it currently means to "live in an actually existing democracy." While some authors (e.g., Avritzer, Delamaza, Olvera) offer the outlines of what such a balance may entail, it is still, at best, a goal that various actors in each country are still striving to achieve.

Achieving this goal is complicated for many reasons. One important reason is that in general, citizen participation is most easily achieved at the local level. This creates important challenges when local governments themselves enjoy limited autonomy from the central state (Hernández-Díaz). It also creates challenges of trying to "scale up" from the local to influence national politics and policies. In many ways, this problem of scaling up goes to the heart of the current political debates in Bolivia (de la Fuente, Laserna, Postero), as well as Chile (Delamaza, Navia, Valdés), even if the authors in this special issue do not necessarily agree on the most appropriate way to achieve this balance, or even what that balance might entail. Similarly, the contrasting perspectives offered by Avritzer and Carter in many ways reflect the difference between participation in a local rather than national or regional political arena.

Even more important for achieving this balance is the fact that there is an inevitable tension between political parties and civil societies created by the centrality of elections themselves. Political parties in many instances seem to compete with civil society actors for political influence (Oxhorn: 1995), with the result that political parties have come to undermine civil society in many instances when their role has become too dominant (Delamaza, Valdés, Olvera Ortiz-Ortega and Barquet).[7] Indeed, one of the principal conflicts that democratic regimes struggle to address is this tension between political parties and civil society. Perhaps the most poignant example of this is the "puzzle" of democracy in Brazil, which "is strongly legitimate at the elite level but weakly legitimate at the mass level" (Actually Existing Democracies: 220).

More generally, this tension may also reflect the very different roles that political parties and civil society actors play in any democracy. Political parties are quintessential aggregators of citizen interests, and their "success" is often measured in terms of the breadth, if not depth, of their public support. Civil society, on the other hand, is itself an arena for mediating conflict and difference, even if the literature often treats it as a unified actor (Oxhorn 2006a). Depth, not breadth, of support is key to understanding the role a strong civil society can play in democracy by giving voice to different segments of society so as to maximize political and social inclusion. To a certain extent, this adds yet another dimension to the possible limits of liberal

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democracy as suggested by Postero in her contribution to this special issue. From the perspective of civil society, this role raises two challenges.

The first challenge for civil society is to mediate its own heterogeneity. Such heterogeneity has multiple dimensions, including class, race, ethnicity, language, religion and gender, and struggles for democratic deepening reflect a deliberate effort to ensure that the groups associated with these sometimes competing identities are included in democratic politics (e.g., Carter, Delamaza, Valdés). Thus, we see important moves to expand existing democratic institutions in places where indigenous peoples who have been marginalized for centuries have now begun to exercise citizenship rights and participate in local and national politics (Postero, Hernández-Díaz). Many of the post-liberal forms of democratic practices our authors describe reflect indigenous influences, as these new citizens begin to mold liberal institutions to their own culturally specific values and customs (Postero). But such heterogeneity is also the source of much of the conflict in democratic politics, making consensus difficult to achieve in practice (de la Fuente). Even social groups that we sometimes treat as unified actors are, in practice, divided along a variety of dimensions, including indigenous identity (Hernández-Díaz) and gender (Ortiz-Ortega and Barquet). All of this makes it difficult to arrive at any consensus, at the same time it warns us that such efforts at consensus building need to be sensitive to the various perspectives—including elite perspectives, as Laserna, Navia and Power remind us in different ways—that are contained within any national context. Democratically working through these complexities is often a central aspect of democratic politics as discussed in the various articles in the special issue.

The second challenge, however, has more to do with the strength of civil society. Very simply put, is civil society necessarily up to the task? In other words, does civil society possess the autonomy and organizational capacity to allow it to influence in positive ways how democratic politics unfolds in each country? Several authors here describe forceful actions by social movements, such as indigenous and popular organizations taking part in the Constituent Assembly in Bolivia (de la Fuente, Laserna, Postero) and the landless movement in Brazil (Carter). These can be contrasted to other less successful movements, like the feminist movements in Chile and Mexico (Valdés, Ortiz-Ortega and Barquet). The experiences of each country, and often within the same country, are quite varied in this regard.

Democracy and the Economy

A third and final issue that the authors in this collection focus upon is the relationship between democracy and economic development. As Navia points out, there has been a longstanding debate about whether development is a precondition to democracy or whether democracy is necessary to foster development (see, e.g. Przeworski et al. 2000). Not surprisingly, this dualistic opposition has not proven helpful, and most scholars have ended up agreeing that, whatever the causal relation, these factors are mutually reinforcing in practice. O'Donnell has recently provided a compelling argument about why that might be (2004). He suggests that the discourses of democracy, development, and human rights are all based upon a similar moral, and in some cases legally established conception of the human being as an agent, with rights and potential capabilities. This builds on the work of economist Amartya Sen, who has argued that all humans have the right to achieve their most basic

capabilities, "such as living a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, and enjoying a decent standard of living" (UNDP 2000: 20). O'Donnell suggests that attainment of those rights and capabilities—a process we might call human development—is not merely the result of an increase in material resources, but rather, comes about through political and very often conflictive processes. While it is theoretically impossible to identify precisely the set of rights and capabilities that would be necessary to generate an "adequate" level of human rights and development, he concludes that democracy is important as "an enabling milieu for the struggles usually needed in order to inscribe need-claims as effective rights." (2004:11)

This argument points to a fundamental question about democracy: What rights do citizens as agents expect from a democratic society? Most would argue that citizens are entitled to political, civil, and cultural rights; but what about economic rights? This is, of course, the subject of a very old debate. Under classic liberal notions of democracy, the economic sphere is considered to be separate from the public sphere, where "politics" are carried out. What a liberal order guaranteed was the freedom to contract and engage in the market and the protection of private property. This limited notion of rights was expanded in the twentieth century, when, as T.H. Marshall famously documented, so-called welfare states also extended "social" rights to their citizens (Marshall 1949). Under a Keynesian version of liberalism, citizens were entitled not only to negative rights such as the freedom from unfair arrest, but also to positive rights such as the right to health, education, and housing security (Brown 2003).

In Latin America, during the 1960s and 70s, states (democratic or not) following this

development model embraced Import Substitution Industrialization, invested in state-owned industries, and began to develop social services and welfare programs. During the 1980s, however, newly democratizing governments rethought this form of economic development, often under pressure from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, opting instead for a neoliberal strategy to let market mechanisms determine what sorts of economic benefits their citizens could enjoy. In some countries, like Chile and Brazil, neoliberal strategies led to economic growth and stability, albeit with high poverty levels and marked inequalities between rich and poor. In others, like Bolivia and Mexico, structural adjustment programs led to tremendous suffering among the poor, high unemployment rates, and loss of rural livelihoods. To be sure, popular resentment against the costs of neoliberal restructuring was a central factor in the popular impeachment of Bolivia´s neoliberal president, Sánchez de Lozada, and the election of its current president, Evo Morales (Postero 2007). In Mexico, opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement fueled the Zapatista uprising in the mid-1990s. Disagreements with the neoliberal model are also motivating the general turn to the left across Latin America, from Venezuela to Ecuador to Paraguay, as societies re-evaluate the need for state involvement in the economy.

Thus, Latin Americans do not assume that democracy necessarily entails protection of economic rights or that it necessarily produces development and growth. But what is the relationship? What role does the economy play in fostering or undermining democracy? And how does it interact with the other fundamental shift that occurred during democratization, the rise of civil society? The authors in this collection bring to this discussion a variety of case studies and quite different interpretations of their meanings.

Navia and Delamazza describe the contemporary Chilean case. They describe how the Concertación alliance took over the government in the first post-Pinochet democratic elections, accepting a limited form of democracy that was the legacy of the Pinochet era. Elected under a constitution that included authoritarian enclaves and an electoral system that made any radical legislation impossible, the four successive Concertación governments opted for a strategy of slow and gradual political change while concentrating on producing economic growth and bringing down the poverty rates. In his article, Navia suggests that the Concertación strategy of "democracy to the extent possible" was based on the fear that any more radical changes would produce either a return to authoritarianism or to social conflicts. For democracy to flourish, says Navia, the government had to show that it could maintain a stable country and better distribute economic growth. . Navia argues that this was a successful strategy, as the Concertación governments have "helped heal deep social and political wounds and have presided over Chile's most successful period of economic growth, social inclusion and democratic progress in the nation's history." (Actually Existing Democracies: 298) Thus, in his analysis, economic growth was necessary for continued popular and elite support for democracy. Slowly, with this support, the governments have been able to adopt political and constitutional reforms that minimize the power of the country's authoritarian enclaves, and deepen democratic consolidation.

Delamazza is not so sanguine about the results. In his article, he argues that the fundamental dilemma of the Chilean society has not changed since the 1970s: how to make democracy more inclusive, and change the relations of power. This unresolved dilemma was the cause of the end of democracy in the first place, but the return to democracy has not resolved it either. Instead, the Concertación governments chose to engage in a long-term political pact with the right (and the elites) while gradually trying to bring down poverty. The problem, says Delamazza, is that the electoral system inherited from Pinochet has kept the political and economic elite in power, and blocked any real participation from civil society. As a result, neither the goals nor the practices of the pact have produced the hoped-for transformations. Instead, the neoliberal economy has segmented society and produced a political system that is rapidly losing its representative character. Thus, for Delamazza, despite economic growth, the failure of the Chilean government to adopt participatory processes that address the "need of development and social integration" makes it difficult to obtain the social adhesion necessary for democracy to flourish. (Actually Existing Democracies: 280)

So, what does a democratic country need to do to win the support of its people? Power's article about Brazil demonstrates that it may be fairly difficult. He shows that although Brazil's recent democratic governments have maintained moderate growth and low inflation, and have brought down poverty and inequality, support for the democratic process is remarkably low among Brazil's public. While democracy enjoys strong backing from elites, Power concludes that Brazil's public "remains unimpressed with democracy." Part of this may be a generalized distrust factor among Brazilians, but Power argues that a more plausible explanation to this puzzle is public recollection of pre-democracy economic growth levels. The glory days of the 1950s to the 1970s, during which the military

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oversaw an economic boom period with 7 percent average growth rates, raised Brazilians' expectations about what the country could achieve. As a result, although Brazilian democracy has been wildly successful in maintaining economic growth, reducing inequalities, and putting a broad social welfare safety net into place, the failure of the democratic government, especially during the first phase (1985-1994), to match these levels leaves many Brazilians ambivalent about democracy.

Leonardo Avritzer's article about participatory budgeting processes suggests a different reading of the Brazilian case. He agrees that Brazilians, like most Latin Americans associate the harsh economic conditions of the neoliberal years with democratic regimes. But that is only part of the story. Democracy, he reminds us, also opened venues for new democratic experiences, especially at the local level. Participatory budgeting, which has altered the political landscape at the municipal level, could not have come into being without the restoration of democracy. Bottom-up organizing has had major impacts: It has created a political process that included the poor in the political field for the first time; it has changed the priorities of allocating public goods, giving the poor greatly expanded access to them; and it has inserted a new political group coming from below into politics. Participatory budgeting has not resolved the legitimacy problems of the new Brazilian government that Power outlines, but it has "provided the poor citizen in Brazil with a vision that democracy may also create mechanisms to help him in spite of drawbacks related to the general situation of the country." Participatory budgeting allows the poor to take into their own hands the process of decision-making on urban policies and resource allocation. Although it did not resolve the problems of the poor, it did allow them to see democracy

as providing "a new method for the solution of these problems" (Actually Existing Democracies: 183)

In like manner, Hernández-Díaz points to the importance of local participatory processes to mediate the harsh effects of neoliberal economic restructuring in Mexico. He describes how indigenous groups, empowered in part by the democratic process, have taken advantage of political decentralization to become key actors in local and municipal government. While at the national level, elites have pushed for a mestizo nation-state, at the local level, indigenous people have maintained collectivities that are culturally distinct. Over the last decade, indigenous groups have used municipal government platforms as a geopolitical space from which to demand recognition of their ethnic difference and their vision of Mexico as culturally and linguistically plural. A central part of this is a recognition that by designing their own strategies of economic development and social life, "as well as being recognized as subjects of the inalienable (*intransferible*) task of transforming their own reality, it will be possible to establish a new social pact that will include them in the life of the nation" (Actually Existing Democracies: 155). This is an excellent illustration of O'Donnell's argument about the relation between democracy and development.

As all the authors included here suggest, such experiences are central to an understanding of what it means to live "in an actually existing democracy" in Latin America today.

Endnotes

[1] See the regional public opinion polls from *Latinobarómetro*, various years.

[2] In place of *LARR*'s normal internal review, each paper was revised in accordance with the comments of the issue's two editors. The entire draft issue was then sent to two anonymous reviewers for additional comments and suggestions.

[3] It is also worth noting that this perspective is also the one adopted by most, if not all, of the authors associated most closely with the transitology literature.

[4] This was most obvious for the left, which at best viewed political democracy as a "bourgeois trap." But the bourgeoisie, along with the oligarchy and middle classes more generally, did not feel that they inevitably were the beneficiaries of the so-called trap they alleged set. This is why, historically, they were even more antagonistic toward a type of regime that offered the potential to empower a majority who could then enact changes they fundamentally opposed.

[5] As Laserna and Carter stress, however, this aspiration may be difficult to achieve in practice.

[6] It is important to remember that this requisite "balance" also requires ensuring that civil society's role does not displace or supplant the central institutions of representative political democracy, a point emphasized by Laserna and Navia.

[7] This tension is often pronounced within political parties that have a strong foundation in social movements and civil society. This is particularly true for Evo Morales' Movement toward Socialism (MAS) in Bolivia, and to a lesser extent the Workers Party in Brazil.

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