

# President's Report

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Some thirty years ago, it was far from certain that democracy would replace authoritarianism in Latin America. O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead's seminal study, published in 1986, was cautiously named "Transitions from Authoritarian Rule," a title implying that the crisis of authoritarian rule could be resolved in a number of different ways. Political democracy, that is, was only one of the possible outcomes of the transition from the crisis of Latin American autocracies, the others being totalitarian forms of socialism or reversion to dictatorship. Indeed, the region's past experience of democracy's frailty and political instability, especially during the Cold War period, endorsed a prudent attitude regarding the political prospects for Latin American countries.

But against all odds, democracy prevailed. Free and fair elections, allowing for the shifting of groups in power, have become the norm in the region, even when excessive concentration of power in the presidency may ring an alarm. Indeed, political competition and a decent amount of respect for civil liberties have extended the limits of the public realm, permitting the expression of new social forces, some of them built around new identities and agendas. While it remains a territory of multiple and entrenched inequalities—of income, of gender, of ethnicity, of "color" and of cultural recognition—Latin America today has become an arena where new rights are formulated, demanded and fought for.

In this issue of *LASA Forum* we have chosen to focus on recent developments regarding the successful struggles for, and remaining obstacles to full recognition of the rights of same-sex couples. Recently, legislation in the largest countries of the region has grappled with the issue and made undeniable progress in the matter. Those developments, important in themselves, also shed light on

societal changes that go far beyond the acceptance of the democratic rules of political exchange, since they suppose the transformation of the core values, beliefs and behaviors that have sustained patriarchal conservatism in Latin America. This is because, in fact, it is a specific idea—and a specific ideal—of family that is at stake. These developments also expose not only the resistance of traditional conservative elites, both secular and religious, but also the internecine contradictions of progressive political forces, such as left-wing parties and progressive branches of the Catholic Church, which, in several countries, played an important role in the resistance against authoritarian regimes.

The three articles we publish here disclose the complexity of the process through which the very model of family is being transformed. They are as informative as they are insightful.

Rafael de la Dehesa analyzes with great political sensibility and richness of detail the process through which Mexico City became the first city in Latin America to legalize same-sex marriage.

Horacio Sívori compares the Argentine and Brazilian experiences, their different trajectories and results, emphasizing the role of LGBT militant groups, their capacity to build an intelligible and convincing discourse for public opinion, and their strategies towards governments, courts and legislative bodies.

Esteban Paulón brings the force and freshness of the LGBT movement to the center of his analysis. He traces its history in Argentina since the 1970s, and reminds us that the approval of the same-sex legislation it is not the end, but some point on the road towards equality.



The quality of these three contributions should certainly help compensate for the absence in this issue of the section *On the Profession*. It will be back in our Spring issue.

## LASA2012

Preparations for the LASA 2012 International Congress in San Francisco are gaining momentum under the leadership of chairs Timothy Power and Gabriela Nouzeilles, who have selected a host of committed track chairs. You will find all the information you need to participate on the LASA Website: <http://lasa.international.pitt.edu>. Also, LASA's various award committees have been appointed and are ready to receive nominations.

The San Francisco Congress will be the last to be run on a once-every-eighteen-months basis. At Toronto, the Executive Committee voted to move to an annual meeting, which we hope will increase the opportunity for participation and, at the same time, allow for meetings of a more manageable size, facilitating personal and informal exchange among participants. It will be certainly a huge challenge for everybody, from our Executive Director and LASA staff to Congress and track chairs. But we are confident and optimistic regarding the academic results. It will be a great step we invite you to take with us. ■