

## Latin American Transformations: 50 Years of Change

*Edited by Gilbert Joseph and Peter Winn*

### Introduction

by GILBERT JOSEPH | Yale University | gilbert.joseph@yale.edu  
and PETER WINN | Tufts University | peter.winn@tufts.edu

“The more things change, the more they remain the same” is an old adage that used to be applied to a Latin America that seemed stuck in its colonial past, a mostly rural society still bearing the legacies of the conquest and slavery, where frequent changes of autocratic rulers only confirmed the underlying social status quo. But as the six articles of this dossier—revised versions of the authors’ presentations to the LASA2016 Presidential Panel “Latin American Transformations: 50 Years of Change?”—demonstrate, LASA’s first half century has been a period of dramatic change in Latin America. Some of the changes have clearly altered the region, although their depth is sometimes deceptive. Moreover, as Alejandro Portes warns in his essay on migration and urbanization, not all transformations are positive; and we would add, not all positive transformations are irreversible, as the Latin American Left learned to its sorrow.

LASA’s members have witnessed—and analyzed—a tumultuous half century, and LASA’s 50th anniversary is a moment to pause and look back at where we were and how we have gotten to where we are. LASA was born in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, which boosted Latin American studies in the United States for reasons that had more to do with the Cold War than with scholarship.

LASA’s first years were Che Guevara’s last years. As Florencia Mallon argues in her contribution to this panel and Steve Stern concurs in his, LASA’s half century is also the era of the rise and fall of the myths

of both the heroic revolutionary and the heroic state liberating Latin America from its colonial chains. We would add that this leftist roller coaster has had more than one iteration over the past five decades, starting with the Cuban Revolution and the “heroic guerrilla” decade, which resurfaced in Central America with the Sandinista victory in 1979 and the Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil wars of the 1980s. But it also included Salvador Allende’s 1970s democratic road to socialism; the indigenous rebellion-turned-social movement in Chiapas that commenced in the 1990s; and the more recent “pink tide” of elected “revolutionaries,” led by Hugo Chávez and his Bolivarian “revolution,” and reformers, spearheaded by Lula in Brazil and the World Social Forum—a tide that now seems to be receding. The rise, decline, and legacies of a variegated and morphing Left that has reinvented itself several times is a theme of Stern’s intervention, with its evocation of “troublesome” youth and intellectuals, categories that could apply to many LASA members themselves over the past five decades.

But the ebb and flow of leftist politics was not the only political current that reflected efforts to transform Latin America during LASA’s half century. A counterrevolutionary Right that considered even a moderate Left to be subversive and set out to make sure revolutions could never again triumph in Latin America was arguably even more successful in its transformations.

One result was the civil-military dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s, with their bureaucratic authoritarianism and their massive and profound violations of human rights. As LASA past president Maria Herminia Tavares de Almeida brings out in her essay, before 1990 autocratic rulers and authoritarian regimes were the norm in Latin America. In the late 1970s, seventeen of twenty countries in the region were ruled by military dictatorships. But since 1990—and the end of the Cold War—democracy has become consolidated in Latin America and the issue is rather the quality and character of that democracy, an issue underscored by recent corruption scandals in several countries, crises of representation in others, and the questionable use of impeachment to oust an unpopular leftist president in Brazil. The impeached president, Dilma Rousseff, was a former leftist guerrilla and Brazil’s first female president, the hand-picked successor to Lula, who was the most popular president in Brazil’s history, despite being a self-educated rural migrant and blue-collar worker, a personal history that he shared with some 50 million Brazilians.

Lula was a mirror of the Brazil that he represented—and of LASA’s first half century. The last half of the twentieth century witnessed the largest internal migration in hemispheric history, with more than 100 million rural dwellers migrating to Latin America’s towns and cities, many more than those who migrated north to the United States during these same years. As a result, a Latin America that was 60 percent rural in 1950 is over 80 percent urban today, the most urbanized region in the world. Moreover, as Portes underscores in his contribution to this dossier, the differences are qualitative as well as quantitative, creating new residential patterns of suburban

shantytowns and an unregulated informal economy as large as the formal economy, while also deepening the divide between rich and poor.

Inequality is also a focus of José Antonio Ocampo's opening overview of economic models and changes in Latin American economies during LASA's half century. In a provocative essay he rethinks structuralism—preferring “state-led industrialization” to “import substitution industrialization,” and “market reform” to “neoliberalism”—while maintaining that the former was more successful than the latter. The period of market reform, he argues, was one of mediocre growth, with the partial exception of the 2003–2008 commodities boom, itself a cautionary tale of export boom and bust only too familiar in Latin America's longer history. This alternation of commodity and financial cycles was matched by the rise and fall of economic models, with few of them living up to their advance billing or reducing inequality. Economic models had implications that transcended the economy. The market-oriented reforms popularly known as neoliberalism brought with them a decentralization of the state in several countries and a privatization of many state functions within education and public health. This even altered how scholarly organizations such as LASA did their business, propelling closer relations between academic associations and popular social movements, fund-raising drives to support Latin American scholars who were increasingly cut off from state-sponsored funding, and a new commitment to understand and disseminate grassroots research and knowledge regimes. Ocampo's nuanced neostructuralist reading of the political economy of LASA's half century provides a fine frame for other contributions, whether they are centered

on the politics of state power or the more diffuse movements of civil society.

LASA's first half century also witnessed the blossoming of civil society in much of the region, with social movements transcending political parties in several countries, from Mexico's far-flung and multivalent democracy movement that interrupted the PRI's permanent government in 2000, to the human rights movements in the Southern Cone and their demands for truth, memory, and justice. A striking development of the last 50 years has been the emergence of diverse social actors, from the indigenous movements highlighted by Mallon and the intellectuals invoked by Stern, to the workers mobilized by Brazil's Catholic Church and CUT labor confederation (Central Única dos Trabalhadores) and the evangelical Protestants who joined the Church of the Kingdom of God.

Particularly prominent among these new social actors have been women and their movements, whether as mothers protesting their children's poverty in Peru's “Glass of Milk” movement or Argentina's Madres de Plaza de Mayo demanding to know where their disappeared children are. They made the personal political but largely escaped the worst repression because they acted as mothers in their time-honored role as protectors of their children, or as poor women in Chilean or Peruvian shantytowns organizing communal kitchens that pooled their resources to guarantee their families a nutritious meal—another traditional woman's role. Also important were the middle-class feminists in Chile (and elsewhere) who taught less-educated women how to organize and who formed “Women For Life,” which opposed their culture of life to the Pinochet dictatorship's culture of death and showed their men how to unite across

class and political lines, while demanding democracy in both their country *and* their homes.

Inevitably, given the constraints of a LASA session, with its five presenters and one commentator, many important areas of change during the last half century were omitted, not least the changing roles of women. During LASA's first half century, women in Latin America entered the work force in growing numbers and multiplied the economic roles they play. They also emerged from the “four walls” of their houses to participate in social movements and lead struggles for human rights and historical memory. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo are only the most famous of the groups in Latin America that transformed motherhood into leftist politics, although Poder Feminino in Allende's Chile underscored that mobilized women might also support a rightist agenda.

During the past 50 years, women have also become increasingly active in the politics of their countries, at both local and national levels. In 2015, the presidents of all three ABC regional powers of South America—Argentina, Brazil, and Chile—were women, something that has yet to happen in the United States. Several countries now have laws requiring that a certain percentage of legislative seats and party positions be reserved for women. The old distinction between *casa* and *calle* as gendered spheres no longer seems to hold, or at least not as absolutely as it did in the past. Still, women remain underrepresented in most areas of government and politics. Moreover, women in Latin America still face machismo in their daily lives and confront sexism when they try to transcend their traditional roles. But they have also made significant advances in their struggles for personal fulfillment

and public participation during LASA's 50 years.

Another area of change that we would have liked to address is religion. LASA was founded in the wake of Vatican II and just before Medellín made “liberation theology” and its “preferential option for the poor” mandates for change in a Catholic Church that had too often been identified with the status quo in the past. The 1980s and 1990s, however, witnessed the long reign of a conservative pope—John Paul II (1978–2005), followed by the equally conservative Benedict XVII (2005–2013)—who would roll back many of those changes and promote conservative clergy to positions as bishops and cardinals. LASA's most recent years, however, have seen the election of the first Latin American pope, Francisco I, who has embraced many of the values behind liberation theology, while following his own path. LASA's half century has also witnessed the explosive expansion of evangelical Protestantism, often in sharp conflict with Catholicism and embracing a rightist politics, but responding to the concrete needs of Latin Americans cut loose from their Catholic moorings by migration, civil war, and messages in the mass media.

Evangelical Protestantism, principally Pentecostalism, came to Latin America from the United States, but has become indigenized, transformed into Latin American religions. Still, U.S. religious influence remains strong, with Latin American televangelists often emulating their U.S. counterparts or Billy Graham, who filled Brazil's giant Maracanã Stadium in 1974, inspiring a generation of Brazilian evangelists. For many analysts, this is an example of U.S. soft power and cultural hegemony.

In LASA's founding decade, the United States was the major foreign power in Latin America, which it pressed to play a supporting role in the Cold War between the United States and the USSR. It had forced the nations of Latin America to oust a revolutionary Cuba from the Organization of American States (OAS) and quarantine it with an economic embargo and a rupture of diplomatic relations. Washington also pushed through the OAS a resolution legitimating U.S. intervention to suppress a popular rebellion in the Dominican Republic in 1965, and backed a 1964 military coup in Brazil. In the 1970s, the United States covertly destabilized Allende's elected government in Chile and backed the Pinochet coup and dictatorship that put an end to Chilean democracy for 17 years. In the 1980s, Washington created a “Contra” army to undermine Sandinista Nicaragua and spent \$6 billion supplying a Salvadoran military notorious for its human rights abuses to fight a leftist guerrilla movement to a stalemate. During the Cold War it also propped up Guatemala's genocidal military regime and sanctioned the Mexican PRI's more tepid version of dirty war, especially in the indigenous southern region of the country.

Yet, in the twenty-first century, many analysts saw U.S. hegemony in the hemisphere as in decline, with China displacing it in many countries as the leading trading partner and investor, with Brazil and Venezuela heading regional groupings that disputed U.S. hegemony, and with a post-9/11 United States so obsessed with jihadist Islam in the Middle East that it largely left Latin America to its own devices. In his provocative essay in this dossier, past LASA president John Coatsworth disputes this conclusion, arguing that the United States is still hegemonic in Latin

America and that what other analysts view as proof of its decline—namely the smaller number of U.S. interventions in the region since 1990—can be read instead as demonstrations of continuing U.S. hegemony. Thus, he suggests that U.S. influence has become so pervasive that it does not need to be defended through U.S. unilateral interventions.

Of course unipolar or unilinear conceptions of culture and power have become increasingly difficult to sustain to over the course of the past 50 years, which points to a final area of change that our omnibus panel could only gesture to broadly: the transnational historical dynamic that has reciprocally reshaped Latin America's multistranded relationship with the United States and changed our conception of the locus of “the field” itself. Indeed, LASA's return to the great multicultural megalopolis of New York City—the site of its initial Congress in 1966—to celebrate its 50th anniversary was particularly fortuitous, for reasons more profound than historical symmetry. Over the course of the last 50 years, New York (along with other cities in the global North) has become a critical crossroads for the study of Latin America in its rich transnational and multilayered context. To study Latin America from the perspective of New York is to appreciate how imbricated Latino/a society, politics, and cultural imaginaries are with those of places traditionally regarded to be Latin American. Portes touches upon this dynamic in his assessment of the longer waves of international migration, not least when he observes that “what goes around comes around.” Dynamics of power and resistance in the hemisphere play out on multiple levels and often with unanticipated outcomes, as Coatsworth also suggests in his characterization of U.S.-Mexican relations in the current

## Half a Century of Deep Economic Transformations in Latin America

by JOSÉ ANTONIO OCAMPO | Columbia University | [jao2128@columbia.edu](mailto:jao2128@columbia.edu)

moment. Fifty years after the creation of LASA at the height of the Cold War, we find ourselves almost routinely obliged to interrogate conventional notions of north-south and south-south encounters and politico-spatial concepts such as the imperial core and its peripheries.

Coatsworth's and Portes's contributions are typical of the informed provocations that animated the presidential panel in New York City, all with the goal of sparking debate on the issues raised by our reflection on LASA's first half century. We hope that by sharing these revised essays in the *LASA Forum* we will spark further debate among LASA's membership. To enhance the discussion and bring it up to date, we invited some of the contributors to extend their analyses into the Trump era. Portes, Stern, and Coatsworth took up that challenge, with Portes questioning Trump's Mexican Wall, Stern seeing Trump as complicating the "what now" question with his "extreme caricature," and Coatsworth arguing that if Trump resorts to Cold War style bullying he is likely to diminish U.S. hegemony and stimulate a movement to "make *Mexico* great again." But better for you to read their comments and then decide for yourself . . . ■

The half century that has passed since the creation of LASA has been one of deep economic transformations in Latin America. In 1966, the region was in the midst of a rapid industrialization process and about to experience its fastest rate of growth in history in 1967–1974 (6.7 percent per year). The industrialization model was already undergoing significant changes since the early 1960s, particularly the decision of most countries to mix import substitution with export diversification and regional economic integration. The combination of these strategies, which was behind the 1967–1974 boom, is why the term "state-led industrialization" captures much better the nature of the development process under way at the time than the usual term "import-substitution industrialization." Growth continued until the end of the 1970s, supported by high commodity prices and access to external financing on a scale that the region had not known since the 1920s, thanks to the recycling of petrodollars from the oil price rises of 1973 and 1979. This was, however, the prelude to Latin America's worst economic crisis of the twentieth century: the debt crisis of the 1980s that led to Latin America's "lost decade," when in most countries of the region foreign capital flows ceased, growth stagnated, and unemployment soared, and five of them experienced hyperinflation.

There have been intense debates about why the debt crisis was so strong. One hypothesis is that this was the result of the distortions generated by high levels of state intervention and the macroeconomic instability that characterized the industrialization process. However, this interpretation is not convincing. The levels of state intervention in Latin America were actually weaker on average than those of other developing countries. Moreover, the countries undergoing market reforms<sup>1</sup>—

trade liberalization, privatization of state enterprises, and deregulation of the financial sector—in the second half of the 1970s, those of the Southern Cone, were actually more affected by the debt crisis, notably in the scale of their domestic financial crises. Chile, the market-reform poster child, suffered a 16 percent decline in its GDP between 1981 and 1983. Lack of macroeconomic discipline, particularly large public sector budget deficits, did spread prior to the debt crisis, but this had not been a general trend in the region during state-led industrialization, except in the Southern Cone and Brazil. A more persuasive interpretation is that Latin America once again became a victim of boom-bust cycles of finance, an experience that had been familiar in the past (the last time in the 1920s–1930s) and has continued to be frequent in recent decades. The unfortunate management of the crisis by international financial institutions—the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—was also a major reason for the depth of the crisis, particularly because of their initial diagnosis that the crisis was only a temporary phenomenon and their stubborn decision later on to exclude any write-off of the debt as part of the recovery package. This was only done seven years after the outbreak of the crisis, with the 1989 Brady Plan, which provided a moderate reduction in debts and played an important role in putting an end to the "lost decade."

Market reforms that reduced the state role in the economy have spread throughout the region since the mid-1980s, under strong pressure by international financial institutions, but also as a result of changes in the balance of the economic debate and the power relations generated by the crisis. Most countries, therefore, followed the path set by the Southern Cone, notably Chile, in the 1970s. There were, however,