

From the President

by **Jo-Marie Burt** | LASA President

Last November, far-right libertarian Javier Milei was elected as president of Argentina. His election, surprising but not unexpected, highlights a regional trend that inspired the theme of the 2024 Congress, *Reaction and Resistance: Imagining New Futures in the Americas*: the rise of extreme right-wing parties and movements in Latin America and across the globe. In this issue of *LASA Forum*, Latin American scholars from a variety of disciplines reflect on this dynamic, considering the implications for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

This issue of *LASA Forum* follows the summer issue, which also included a dossier related to the theme of LASA2024. That included essays from a diverse group of scholars and activists analyzing collective forms of resistance in the Americas. The next issue will focus on the problem of land disputes and forced displacement in rural, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities throughout the Americas, largely the result of mining, agro-industry, and mega-development projects as well as illicit economic activities such as illegal logging and mining. All of these themes will be featured prominently at the LASA2024 Congress, which will take place in a hybrid format from June 12–15 at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia.

Alongside preparing these issues of *LASA Forum*, the LASA2024 Program Committee has been busy organizing for the 2024 Congress, along with the LASA Secretariat and the dozens of LASA members who have volunteered their time as Program Track Chairs, Section Chairs, and members of LASA's numerous prize committees. Here I report on some highlights of the preparations for the Congress, including the process of evaluating the nearly 2,500 proposals received by our members; efforts to obtain

external funding to make LASA2024 more inclusive and accessible; and the ways we are working to build bridges between the recent LASA/Africa Continental Congress in Accra, Ghana, with the 2024 Congress in Bogotá.



LASA2024 in Bogotá

The LASA Secretariat and the LASA2024 Program Committee, consisting of myself and Program Co-Chairs María Eugenia Ulfe and Desmond Arias, have been working intensively on preparations for the 2024 Congress. Between September and November, the LASA2024 Program Committee, alongside 83 Program Track Chairs, reviewed 1,572 individual paper submissions and 948 session submissions, including 697 panels, 141 roundtables, 55 workshops, and 55 book presentations. In addition, the Sections submitted 104 sessions. Other submissions include 10 Presidential Sessions, 17 invited Sessions, 12 Featured Sessions, 48 Business Meetings, and 15 Receptions.

We are especially grateful to the Program Track Chairs who volunteered their valuable time to review and evaluate the submissions. Due to the large venue at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, we were able to accept the vast majority of proposals, with a rejection rate below two percent. Letters confirming acceptance to the 2024 Congress were sent out in November.

LASA2024 will also facilitate the organization of several Pre-Conferences at the conference site. To date, LASA has received submissions for eight Pre-Conferences. The deadline for submissions was extended until the end of January at the request of the Section Chairs. LASA2024 will also feature the traditional Film Festival, Book Exhibit, and student mentorship program. The Book Exhibit will offer discounted rates for independent publishers to ensure a broader variety of publishers at LASA2024.

Diversity and Inclusion Efforts for LASA2024

LASA has always been a space for critical and interdisciplinary intellectual exchanges as well as networking opportunities for scholars, students, activists, practitioners, and policymakers from the North and the South. A series of factors, including the pandemic, economic instability across the region, and the precariousness of academic work, make it difficult for many academics and activists to participate in intellectual exchanges such as LASA.

With these concerns in mind, I have made efforts to secure additional funds for LASA2024. My primary goal has been to find ways to ensure that LASA2024 includes a broad diversity of views and perspectives from scholars, students, activists, and practitioners from underrepresented communities, including indigenous, Afro-descendant, and LGBTQIA+ communities. Another objective is to facilitate the participation of activists and practitioners who are critical sources of knowledge production about a range of issues in the region and whose expertise and perspectives will make valuable contributions to the discussions at LASA2024. I also wanted to find ways to facilitate the participation of Colombian students, scholars, and activists who reside outside of Bogotá in the LASA2024 Congress.

I am delighted to report some success in these efforts, having secured grants from the Ford Foundation and from The Open Society Foundations. These funds will facilitate the participation of scholars, students, and activists from historically underrepresented communities

as well as activists and practitioners working on critical issues in the region in the presidential and invited panels being organized by the LASA2024 Program Committee. These sessions will focus on critical issues linked to the LASA2024 program theme, including the rise of the extreme right in the Americas; the closure of civic spaces and authoritarian regression; feminism and LGBTQIA+ rights in the present anti-rights climate; forced disappearance as an ongoing practice in the region; extractivism, land conflicts, and forced displacement in rural, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities; the impact of illicit economies on local communities and democratic governance; climate change and attacks against environmental defenders; nature and rights; and global perspectives on racial justice. In addition, several panels will focus on Colombia, including panels on the peace process; restorative justice and local community peacebuilding; and art and politics.

The funds will also be used to provide travel grants to LASA2024, particularly for students, scholars, and activists from historically underrepresented groups and for Colombians who reside outside of Bogotá and who will present papers at the Congress. In addition, a special fund will be set up for indigenous, Afro-descendant, and LGBTQIA+ students from Colombia who reside outside of Bogotá to participate in LASA2024.

These efforts aim to strengthen LASA's inclusion of new members from younger generations, revitalize the participation of older generations of LASA members, facilitate participation of historically underrepresented groups, and encourage transversal intellectual communities that will broaden and deepen analysis of critical issues and policy responses.

The need is far greater than the funds available, no doubt. Donations from private foundations do not—and likely cannot—resolve what is a broader problem of structural inequality that makes the Congress inaccessible for many of our members. It is up to us as members of LASA to think

creatively about how we can make membership to the Association and participation in the Congress more accessible.

Building Synergies: The LASA/Africa Continental Congress and LASA2024 in Bogotá

The LASA2024 Program Committee is also working to build upon the connections and synergies of the LASA/Africa Continental Congress, which took place in Accra, Ghana, in November 2023, at the LASA2024 Congress in Bogotá.

The Continental Congresses are an exciting new initiative of LASA. The first Continental Congress, the LASA/Asia Continental Congress, took place virtually in 2022 under the leadership of Past LASA President Dr. Gioconda Herrera, followed by the hybrid 2023 LASA/Africa Continental Congress in Accra, led by Past LASA President Dr. Mara Viveros-Vigoya. Dr. Joanna Boampong was a key partner at the University of Ghana, which hosted the LASA/Africa Congress. The Colombian Embassy in Ghana, under the helm of Ambassador Daniel Garcés Carabalí, was one of the main sponsors of the Congress and facilitated the participation of several Afro-Colombian scholars, activists, and artists. The leadership and support for the Continental Congress initiative shown by LASA Executive Director Milagros Pereyra-Rojas has been key to its success.

The LASA/Africa Continental Congress was an incredible opportunity to exchange knowledge and build connections among scholars, students, and activists in Latin America and Africa working on common issues and themes. I was especially impressed with the comparative discussions about democratic backsliding, panels analyzing the comparative impact of extractivist industries on rural, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities, and discussions about the African diaspora, enduring efforts to combat everyday and institutional racism, and reparations for slavery. We will report more fully on the LASA/Africa Continental Congress in a future issue of *LASA Forum*.

I came away from the Accra Congress convinced of the importance of finding ways to bring the lessons learned from that historic meeting to the LASA2024 Congress in Bogotá. To that end, a portion of the funds raised for LASA2024 will be used to invite African scholars and students who helped organize and who participated in the Accra Congress to speak about their experiences at a panel at LASA2024 in Bogotá. The Colombian Embassy in Ghana has expressed interest in continuing its partnership with LASA to facilitate meaningful debate and intellectual exchanges between scholars, students, activists, and practitioners working in Latin America and Africa.

The LASA Community

An academic association such as LASA promotes academic excellence by providing a space for its members to share their research, develop new collaborations, and learn from other members of the community. LASA is also highly valued by its members because of its commitment to interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and its understanding of the importance of including the expertise of nontraditional scholars, activists, practitioners, and policymakers in its activities and events. I hope that our efforts to make LASA2024 more accessible will contribute to strengthening LASA's commitment to diversity and inclusion, which is critical to sustaining its role as a vital global community of knowledge production and exchange. //