PROJECT LATIN AMERICA 2000 SERIES


Democracy in the Americas: Approaching the Year 2000
A Rapporteurs’ Report

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Democracy in the Americas: Approaching the Year 2000

Introductory Remarks: Guillermo O'Donnell
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I. Andean Countries: Catherine Conaghan
Queen's University, Ontario

Discussant: Fernando Cepeda
Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

Session Rapporteur: Martin Murphy
University of Notre Dame

II. Brazil and the Southern Cone: Scott Mainwaring
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Discussant: José Octavio Bordón
National Senator, Argentina

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III. Central America: Terry Lynn Karl
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Discussant: Ricardo Stein
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IV. Mexico: Laurence Whitehead
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Discussant: Denise Dresser
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Inter-American Dialogue
Introduction

The Kellogg Institute hosted an academic workshop on “Democracy in the Americas: Approaching the Year 2000,” 29 April to 1 May 1994. This was the second annual workshop of Project Latin America 2000, supported by The Coca-Cola Company.

The purpose of the workshop was to analyze the challenges and opportunities the countries of the Americas face in trying to consolidate and improve democratic government. In some countries, democracy has been suppressed; in others it is not fully consolidated; and in others where it is well established it suffers from a lack of accountability and of participation. But in all countries of the hemisphere, citizens and politicians are looking for fresh and practical ideas about how to improve democratic government—how to make democratic institutions work.

Analysts presented papers on the state of and prospects for democracy in four Latin American regions and the United States. Each author submitted a paper on a country or region other than his or her own. During the workshop, scholars and politicians native to the areas under discussion provided critical responses to the papers, followed by debate open to the floor. Each session closed with remarks by a session rapporteur who summarized the main issues and themes discussed.

This report provides a summary of each session's paper, the discussant's response, the open debate, and the session rapporteur's final remarks.

Session I

Democracy that Matters:

The Search for Authenticity, Legitimacy, and Civic Competence in the Andes

Catherine Conaghan analyzed democracy in the Andean region at three levels: democracy as a procedural minimum, as an institutionalized political regime, and as a participatory ideal rooted in a strong civil society. She made some important distinctions among the Andean countries, but her paper concentrated on the shared problems of democracy in the Andean region.

Democracy as a procedural minimum consists of five elements: free and fair elections, universal adult suffrage, party competition, civil liberties, and government accountability. In the Andean countries, perhaps the greatest progress has been achieved with respect to the electoral dimension of democracy: most elections have been free and fair, something close to universal
adult suffrage is the rule, and partisan competition is intense. However, once delegated the power to govern through elections, government officials frequently enact policies diametrically opposed to those they were elected to enact. This lack of accountability raises doubts about whether elections are effective instruments for expressing policy preferences. In contrast to the progress made in the electoral arena, civil liberties have received only ambiguous and uneven protection throughout the region, and human rights violations have been particularly alarming where sustained guerrilla insurgencies threatened national governments. This points to a second area of problems with governmental accountability: the weak subordination of the military to elected officials. In many Andean countries, the military continues to defy civilian authority and 'coup fear' persists. A breach in democratic institutionality actually occurred with Peru's 1992 presidential 'self-coup,' while additional coup attempts were defeated both in Peru (November 1992) and in Venezuela (February 1992).

The institutional dimension of democracy constitutes a second level of analysis in Conaghan's paper. The institutions of democracy in the Andean countries suffer from severe crises of representation and accountability, to which three related phenomena contribute greatly: the hypertrophy of executive power, the denigration of the legislature, and the entrenchment of nonconsultative policy making by technocratic elites.

Each of the Andean countries has a presidentialist political regime. In addition to the concentration of power in the hands of the executive, the Andean presidents have frequently enjoyed special policy-making powers, particularly in the area of economic policy. The obverse of this is that legislatures frequently appear at best to be irrelevant for policy, mere rubber-stamps, and at worst obstructionist, blocking presidential initiatives without offering viable alternatives. The legislators' lack of resources and expertise makes it difficult for them to adequately formulate policy alternatives. In addition, economic policy questions are frequently presented as technical, as opposed to political, and special technocratic commissions are created as a way of insulating policy from political interference. Conaghan argued that although legislators tend to be strongly influenced by organized interest groups, technocratic policy making goes even further in weakening the representation and accountability essential for democratic legitimacy. Legislatures that do not legislate come to appear as useless, elite bodies consumed by demagoguery, clientelism, and the pursuit of personal aggrandizement. Political parties are also criticized for their lack of internal democracy, their tendency to represent only themselves and to further the interests of their leadership rather than representing and promoting the interests of significant elements of the polity. Citizens in the region identify themselves increasingly as independents and have been leaving parties in droves, while independent candidates have enjoyed great success in recent elections.
A third level of analysis ties together questions of civic competence, civil society, and participatory democracy. The effective functioning of democracy requires citizens with the opportunity, means, knowledge, and desire to participate in democratic self-governance. The relative absence of this civic competence in the Andean region is largely due to the persistence of mass poverty, to reductions in educational resources and in the scope of education, and to the retention in some grassroots organizations of nondemocratic practices. The mass media also bear responsibility for limiting public debate.

In Conaghan's view, the resulting alienation of citizens from politics, evident in their rejection of political parties, in the declining support for legislatures, the hegemony of technocrats and the presence of a politically disenfranchised underclass, resembles the same kind of malaise found in the United States and other advanced democracies. Her proposals for dealing with this malaise originate in the experiences of these advanced democracies. Participation in voluntary organizations can help build civic competence by teaching people how to deliberate and govern themselves; internal democratization of these organizations and of political parties is thus of central importance in the development of civic competence. Other proposals include the decentralization with democratization of government itself, education which privileges the development of deliberative skills, compulsory national service, the growth of investigative and 'public service' journalism, and the development of noncommercial centers of public opinion research. Finally, Conaghan calls for the rejection of narrow and impoverished definitions of democracy, in order to keep alive an ideal of participatory democracy which will inspire and orient the efforts to democratize the Andean region.

**Discussant's Comments**

Fernando Cepeda questioned the appropriateness of comparisons between Andean democracies and those of advanced industrialized countries. While similarities exist, he called attention to the fact that nominalistic comparisons may not sufficiently recognize that the same words in different contexts may refer to very different phenomena. The state of siege in Colombia, for example, has been due to the weakness of the state, and was a tool that facilitated the creation of the constituent assembly and the peace agreements with guerrilla groups. He also pointed to the need to confront the complex and paradoxical nature of democracy in the Andean countries. Which of its Janus faces predominates, when, and why? While Conaghan measured Andean democracy against an ideal of democracy common to the advanced democracies and found it—like the advanced democracies themselves—wanting, Cepeda tried to show the strides made by many Andean democracies in recent years. Where Conaghan emphasized the obstacles that continue to block democratic development, Cepeda pointed to the obstacles that
have been overcome. Despite the critical situations faced by the Andean countries, most have excelled in their capacity to improve their democracies.

Cepeda disagreed with Conaghan's assertion that Peru represents a tendency in extremis of what is happening in other Andean countries. In Colombia, presidents have implemented much of their campaign platforms and civil liberties have been enhanced. The human rights record is bad, but efforts to improve the situation have been significant and some military personnel have been punished. Colombia's new constitution allows for significant levels of judicial review and contains a number of new participatory features.

On the other hand, he agreed with Conaghan's emphasis on the foundational role of civil society in building and sustaining democracy, on her criticisms of political parties, the denigration of legislatures, and the importance of education and of the mass media.

Finally, Cepeda outlined five factors that contribute to the improvement of democracy in Latin America: the new awareness on the part of international financial institutions of the importance of investing in political development, the real changes due to international pressures with respect to human rights, the fact that most sectors of civil society today favor democracy, the new economic model that invites governments to concentrate on their essential mission, and the new role of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations (UN) in the defense and promotion of democracy. In Cepeda's view, the potential for democratic consolidation in Latin America is greater now than it has ever been.

Discussion

The discussion centered around two general themes: judging democracy and civic competence.

Judging Democracy

Democratic Performance, Popular Expectations, and Legitimacy

Alan Riding noted that many have focused quite simply on saying that what Fujimori is doing is negative, a demonstration of democracy not at work, without looking at why democracy failed to work in Peru during the previous twelve years. Why, he asked, is it that a lot of Peruvians were happy to see what happened in 1992, and a lot of other Latin Americans would be equally happy today to see such a thing happen? How do we deal with the fact that many of the current systems have such little credibility and do not work?
Ricardo Stein affirmed that Peru points up the very essence of the competition that exists between the legal and the legitimate. What direction ought democracy take in these circumstances, he asked.

Conaghan responded by first observing that the current analysis of Peruvian public opinion is a fascinating exercise, because surveys reveal how relatively narrow public expectations of democracy are. After the coup, a large percentage of people still perceived the Fujimori government as democratic, in part because Peru was still being led by an elected president. People tend to think that for democracy to exist, you must have an elected president and basic civil liberties, such as freedom of expression. Other sorts of dimensions of democracy, such as checks and balances between institutions, are seen as relatively unimportant. Peruvians accepted Fujimori’s coup because they did not see him as stepping outside the bounds of democracy; they saw the act as being democratic. Why do people have this kind of plebiscitary conception of democracy?

Riding wondered whether we, as outsiders, judge what happened in Peru more harshly than the Peruvians? We condemn it; a lot of Peruvians do not.

Conaghan then asserted that as analysts, as intellectuals, we have a certain responsibility to keep imagining democracy in its ideal forms, in the forms it has been conceived by traditional theorists. She added that she did not think that it is our job to accept the most narrow minimalist definition of democracy.

País Real vs. País Formal?

Guillermo O’Donnell observed that there was in the discussion a replay of very old themes in the history of Latin America, and indeed, in that of the Iberian peninsula and of France—the permanent, recurring argument that there are two countries. One is the país real (real country) the other the país formal (formal country). This contraposition had an infinite number of names, but the idea is that there is something which is in the realm of formalities, which usually is imported, and which is alien. Then there is a real country which is beneath that, which is behind the forms, which is much more authentic and which, if left alone, would produce a much more authentically participatory polity—maybe not a democracy, but a polity much closer to the culture and the lives of the people. How do we judge this, he asked. Is it right to try to impose imported forms of democratic liberalism in these different settings? Some argue that if a country’s regime does not fit the formal criteria, it is wrong to judge it negatively because to do so would ignore the deeper realities.

O’Donnell then declared that he took the side of being an unremitting democratic liberal. The record shows that when the país real has been left on its own to manifest itself, it has produced periods of nasty authoritarianism. As a bearer of liberal democratic values, he said he
had the right to say that certain things are wrong. This is, and will be, a permanent and recurring debate in Latin America for decades to come. We have to take sides on this one, he insisted: at some point, as this discussion shows, it will be very difficult to be in the middle. The acid test is whether, even if it means not respecting the opinion of a majority of Peruvians, you are still ready to say, I do not like this; this is contrary to my values and principles; I am ready to condemn it. It is a value position, which is informed by a very complex reading and by a complex and long history which has been textured around these themes.

**Faute de Mieux**

According to Cepeda the solution in Peru, if it was a solution, should be judged in light of *faute de mieux*, the lack of anything better. All other options were worse, he continued. When you look back on the scenarios developed four years ago by political risk analysts, the Fujimori option was not there. Their scenarios were those of revolution, civil war, and a military coup. In the end, the Fujimori solution was the middle of the road, the second or third best choice.

Cepeda then distinguished between a public opinion coup d'état and a military coup d'état. Colombia's coup of 1953 was a public opinion coup d'état: political parties, social forces, the Catholic Church, and the media were behind the military take over. Later, disagreement with the military brought about another public opinion coup, ending the so-called dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla. This, Cepeda noted, was an example of why we must make our analysis of Latin America more complex, presenting both sides of the coin. In Peru you may have at one point a democratic government, but authoritarian procedures; and when you have an authoritarian government you may have democratic procedures and the support of public opinion.

**International Actors**

Michael Shifter agreed with Cepeda that the Peruvian situation was more complex than Conaghan described. For example, she described the international reaction to the April 5 *autogolpe* as weak. Shifter preferred to describe it more as mixed, or erratic, and wondered what would have happened in Peru—what would be the human rights practice and record of the Fujimori government—if the OAS, the United States, and international human rights organizations had not applied pressure to the Fujimori regime. For pragmatic reasons, linked to its desire to reininsert itself into the international financial community, the Fujimori government moderated a lot of its human rights practices. In fact, he concluded what was missing from the paper was that, according to both national and international human rights organizations, the violations in Peru have diminished in the last year or so, even though there are other problems with the administration of justice.
Bolivia As a Case of Relative Success

Laurence Whitehead commented from the standpoint of Bolivia, the country he said he knew best, but that received rather little attention in Conaghan’s paper. He said that if we compared what has happened in Bolivia with what anyone would have predicted twelve years ago, we would have to rate this an impressive success. Bolivia has had twelve years of multiparty elections, in which there has been genuine alternation, in which parties that put forth unsuccessful proposals have been weeded out by the electorate, and those that have come forward with relatively coherent and effective proposals to address real problems in the country have been rewarded. Bolivia’s regime has not just formally survived, but has addressed several longstanding problems, such as hyperinflation, militarization, and unconstrained class struggle in the public sector. This relatively coherent strategy was systematically implemented by broadly democratic means, it presently has reasonably good prospects of continuing to operate within democratic rules as formally prescribed, and it has resisted the contagion you might expect from civil war in Peru. After this experience, do we not have to admit that the pais formal in neoliberal Bolivia is over time beginning to reach out and alter expectations and modes of functioning in the pais real as well?

Conaghan responded that Bolivia’s future is still an open question, depending on how this finally plays out. She agreed with Whitehead that a consensus among the parties on the neoliberal model has allowed them to implement programs that have achieved undeniable successes. But looking at the three-way pact between the MIR, the ADN, and the MNR, she noted that the MIR has now completely disintegrated in the face of scandalous corruption and links to drug trafficking, as has Banzer’s ADN. So, with the disintegration of the party system, Conaghan asked what will happen over the long haul. In Venezuela a longstanding elite consensus brought democratic stability, but ultimately an elite consensus does not mean that the elites are connected up in a very fruitful way with what is going on in the rest of society. Her fear about Bolivia was that a similar elite agreement may become progressively disconnected with Bolivian society.

Civic Competence

One participant asked why Professor Conaghan proposed civic competence as a test to measure democracy, and another asked if she had any evidence that civic competence was in fact lacking in countries like Peru.

Conaghan explained that she had focused on civic competence in part because the political science literature dealing with democracy in Latin America over the last decade has tended to overemphasize the problems of democracy as a function of bad institutional design.
Obviously, institutional design is important to the success or failure of democracy, but our focus on institutions may lead us into the trap of thinking that democracy is just a question of good institutional design; that if we could just come up with the right sort of legal format then somehow this would solve our problems. Conaghan insisted that even if we came up with a lot of institutional innovations to improve the quality of democracy—as the Colombians have done recently—institutional design provides no guarantee that the reforms will work. What will make or break the Colombian reforms is if the Colombian people can mobilize and use those institutions to make democracy into something they think is genuinely important and not just a façade. How, she asked, can citizens become empowered to demand that institutions actually work?

The new Peruvian constitution contains innovations, such as provisions for a plebiscite and for a human rights ombudsperson. But there is a big difference between putting these things on paper and actually making them work. For them to work, citizens must get to the point where they are vigilant enough to demand that the new institutional designs work and have meaning.

**Comparative Political Malaise**

Abraham Lowenthal praised Conaghan’s paper as a careful, cogent analysis of the state of democracy in the Andean countries. He particularly liked the focus on citizenship rather than merely on the level of leadership. His one concern was Conaghan’s affirmation that “political alienation in the Andes resembles much of the malaise found in the advanced democracies, particularly the United States.” He did not think of the state of malaise in the United States as producing something like Sendero Luminoso or some of the other phenomena which are being discussed in the Andean countries. Conaghan had suggested that the remedies for the malaise found in the United States might be relevant to solving or alleviating the problems of democratic governance in the Andean countries. He asked Conaghan to explain this more, and discuss whether there are experiences in other countries, closer to the Andean countries in political history, socioeconomic status, cultural background, etc., that might provide more relevant remedies than those discussed here.

Conaghan admitted that she knew she was taking chances by using the case of the United States, but that she did so because she wanted to pose the following question: To what extent, when we discuss problems of democratic development in Latin America, are we facing problems that are qualitatively different from the problems that we experience in representative democracy in the United States? Might we really be talking about a quantitative situation—these democracies just do not do as well yet—or are there qualitative differences in the problems we are experiencing?
Technical Elites and the Popular Will

Ernest Bartell expressed concern about dealing with economic problems that involve such extremely complex technical issues. Technical elites have often played a dismal role in Latin America, but just abolishing them and following the wishes of the population will not make the problems and the interrelated effects of economic decisions go away. How might the popular will and technical expertise be brought together in the economic arena?

In response, Conaghan said that the tension between technocratic claims and popular claims is one which runs through any democracy. One of the things that intellectuals can do is to give some of this technical capacity to popular organizations, so that they can respond and get into the debate. Popular organizations in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador generally lack the kind of technical competence to be able to offer counter proposals. This is especially important given the decline of political parties; parties for the most part do not have that expertise either, because the technopolis prefer to float around. So popular organizations cannot even go to parties to get that kind of expertise.

Bartell noted that the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) recently funded the training of grassroots groups in just this way.

Conaghan added that it is not just a matter of expertise in economics. It would also be important to give these groups access to information on public opinion. Policy making in democracies is a war about how to interpret public opinion, and the public does not have access to information about what they themselves think. What needs to be done is to give these groups some lobbying capacity.

Civic Education

An unidentified participant said that he was intrigued by Conaghan's idea of civic education as a way of achieving civic competence, but wondered what civic education might look like in practice and if there are any models we can follow. Deliberative, critical approaches have usually been the domain of elitist liberal education institutions in Latin America, and some have argued that more vocational and more encompassing educational systems are needed. Conaghan had suggested that voluntary service could be a part of civic education; he wanted to know if there were other elements that would make this education both critical and inclusive of broad sectors of society.

Conaghan responded that one of the more interesting experiences in civic education came under the Borja administration in Ecuador, when high school students were drafted for a year-long literacy campaign. Despite initial resistance, this experiment was considered to be quite successful, both for the high school students and those they taught. The literacy training materials included documents from the United Nations on human rights so that people, as they
learned to read, also got to talk about what it means to be a citizen and to have rights. There are a number of experimental prototypes throughout the Andes, she concluded, so the question is how to mount a more national-level, comprehensive program that would work around these kinds of civic education initiatives.

**Final Remarks by Fernando Cepeda**

Cepeda said that one lesson from the Chilean experience has been to appreciate the importance of formalities in political life: the importance of 'empty' constitutions and more or less ineffective institutions. It is the same for Guatemala: a more or less impotent ombudsperson for human rights was in the end the solution—not the best solution—but a solution *faute de mieux*.

Civic competence is very important at the domestic level, he added, but in a world in which globalization is most relevant, civic competence at the international level is very important as well. Cepeda said that is why we talk about the problem of governability at the level of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, OAS, and the United Nations. Key economic issues are decided internationally, with no effective or fair participation by our countries. If we have civic competence with regard to these issues domestically, he said, and our own nations do not have civic competence with regard to these issues internationally, we are lost; we cannot survive politically.

Cepeda concluded by noting that one contributing factor for sustaining democracy in Latin America was the importance of a kind of academic analysis, which in addition to pointing out weaknesses also underlines the positive aspects and the progress that has been made. The permanent denigration of Latin American politics is not helpful, he asserted.

**Session Rapporteur's Summary**

According to Martin Murphy, Conaghan's paper centered on Andean democracy's incompleteness and vulnerability, and on the obstacles it faces. For Conaghan, the causes of democracy's weaknesses are found primarily in society and the civic educational level of the people. In Murphy's judgment, Conaghan employs a synchronic and somewhat absolute notion of democracy. She believes that what is wrong with Latin America can be fixed by changes in Latin American culture and its citizens' behavior, and by exposure to 'modern' concepts.

Murphy observed that while Conaghan viewed the Andean glass of democracy as half empty, Cepeda saw it as half full. Cepeda noted the important strides made by the region's governments in recent years, strides that are particularly remarkable within a context of economic restructuring and guerrilla and drug cartel violence. Murphy viewed Cepeda's approach as
diachronic and relativist, emphasizing that political institutions must be seen in the context of both internal and external forces.

The central questions in the discussion, according to Murphy, were whether scholars or citizens can best judge democracy, and whether we are trapped in the ageless debate of ideal vs. real models. In Murphy’s view, the papers and discussions were striking in their omission of the notion of citizens as actors; of an understanding of the Andes as heterogeneous, plural societies, with class, ethnicity, and gender distinctions as key variables; and of an appreciation of the notions of appropriate and acceptable power relations and roles by members of society’s various social units. Society creates parties and politics, he concluded, not vice versa.

Session II

Democracy in Brazil and the Southern Cone: Achievements and Problems

Scott Mainwaring analyzed the successes and failures of the new democratic governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay by focusing on four issues: economic performance, the ability of governments to address poverty and inequality, the quality of democratic practice, and the degree to which these governments enjoy popular support and legitimacy. Mainwaring argued that differences in democratic performance are related to several factors: the strength or weakness of democratic institutions, the economic legacy of the prior military regime, leadership skills, and policy choices. The survival of democracy is itself an accomplishment, but poverty, inequality, and weak institutions are still present. The great variations in democratic performance allow for only a few generalizations about the state of democracy in these countries.

Formal Institutional Dimensions

By way of introduction, Mainwaring explained that all four countries qualify as democracies, but suggested that democracy be treated as a continuous variable, instead of making a simple dichotomous distinction between democratic and nondemocratic. In Uruguay, competitive elections, broad adult citizenship, and protection of minority rights and civil liberties are in place, whereas Brazil only meets the first two of these criteria. The current Argentine administration has shown little regard for democratic institutions and even undermined mechanisms of accountability. In Chile, a constitution inherited from the military regime impedes full democratization.
Economic Performance

In contrast to the renewed optimism of many analysts who believe that after the lost decade of the 1980s, Latin American economies have turned the corner and begun to resume growth in the 1990s, Mainwaring was cautious, stating that only Chile has done so, and serious problems remain for the other three countries.

In Argentina, the new democratic government of Alfonsín inherited a disastrous economic legacy from the military regime, and attempts at stabilization through the Austral Plan in 1985 proved incapable of generating economic growth. By 1988 coherent economic policy making, along with the incumbent administration, had altogether disintegrated. Reversing campaign promises, Menem was quick to impose tough neoliberal stabilization and adjustment measures, but these did not accomplish their objectives. Policies enacted by Minister of Economy Cavallo later resulted in impressive and stable growth, but the economic situation remains fragile.

In Uruguay, economic conditions inherited from the military regime were similar to those of Argentina. Sanguinetti involved parties and Congress in economic policy making, hoping that his consensual policies would solve economic problems. This approach strengthened democratic institutions, but did not produce the necessary structural adjustment policies. Economic revitalization did not take place and when he left office in 1990, inflation reached more than 120%. Lacalle introduced economic adjustment policies and reduced the size of the state, which led to a moderate expansion of the economy, although investment remains low and economic growth rests on a precarious base.

In terms of investment and growth, the Brazilian military regime was the most successful of these countries, and its economic legacy allowed the Neves and Sarney administration to start on a rebound economy. After implementing the Cruzado plan the economy grew, inflation declined, and income distribution improved. Yet the serious negative side effects that it created were ignored for political reasons. Within five years, Sarney had turned a relatively robust economy into a disaster. Collor de Mello’s heterodox policies maintained some degree of protection for domestic producers and left the state with a greater role in the economy than orthodox neoliberal policies would assign to it. Dependent on the votes of clientelistic politicians who opposed a reform of the state, he failed to improve state efficiency and to enact fiscal reform. Instead of promoting public sector efficiency, the reforms undertaken in democratic Brazil weakened the state.

The economic legacy of the Pinochet regime is better than that of the other three military regimes. In contrast to the other cases, the Chilean military regime promoted a profound liberalization of the economy, dramatically reducing the size of the state. Thus, the new democratic regime not only inherited a good economic situation, but also a state capable of implementing
policies without needing to first undergo a painful process of state reform. In addition to these positive initial conditions, the Aylwin government achieved considerable economic success itself.

**Poverty and Inequality**

Mainwaring postulated that if the countries under consideration wish to advance in the consolidation of democracy, they must solve the issue of poverty and inequality. Economic and social conditions influence citizens’ support of the new democratic governments and of democracy itself.

In Argentina, poverty and inequality have increased and the recent economic growth has entailed high social costs. In Uruguay, a worsening trend during the military regime has been reverted by the Sanguinetti government. Income distribution and real wages have modestly improved. Social inequalities are greater in Brazil, and they have become worse during democratic rule. Chile has a moderately good record, with real wages steadily raising, unemployment decreasing, and income distribution improving.

High inflation has terrible consequences for poverty and inequality. Some of the recent democratic governments paid more attention to macroeconomic stability and in doing so relegated the social question to a low priority. This may have serious consequences for the survival of democracy in these countries, as governments risk losing not only their legitimacy but also important human resources, which will become an increasingly important factor in global economic competition.

**Quality of Democratic Practice**

Political rights and civil liberties are more respected in Chile and Uruguay than in Brazil and Argentina, where they have deteriorated. Mainwaring also examined the degree to which democratic mechanisms of accountability function effectively.

Despite some reserved domains which continue to impinge on its democratic regime, Chile has achieved a high level of accountability. This is noteworthy because constitutionally, it remains the least democratic of the four countries. In Argentina, little was done to strengthen institutions. Alfonsín often considered Congress and political parties as obstacles to circumvent rather than as elements of a consolidated democracy. Menem appropriated democratic institutions to advance his own political project, thereby undermining formal mechanisms of accountability. Although Collor was impeached, mechanisms of accountability are still weak in Brazil. Congress has little effectiveness despite its capacity to block presidential policy initiatives. Sarney’s and Collor’s records on democratic practice are poor and show a strong tendency towards antipolitics.
Popular Support and Legitimacy

The massive popular support that swept Alfonsín to office dissipated quickly. Four years later, the Radicals had lost their political capital. Alfonsín’s failure paved the way for an easy victory of the Peronists. Despite his authoritarian style, Menem lost surprisingly little public approval. In Uruguay, Sanguinetti and Lacalle had low approval rates, but public dissatisfaction is limited to the government, and democracy as a political regime has legitimacy. In Brazil, Sarney enjoyed public support, but by the time he left office both politicians and the political establishment were discredited. Mainwaring explained that this situation helped the political outsider Collor, although his public support vanished quickly. Political institutions are viewed with apathy and cynicism in Brazil, and many Brazilians have a weak adherence to democracy and to the Constitution. In Chile, Aylwin’s coalition was able to maintain a broad alliance of political parties and has retained high levels of public support. This marks a sharp difference with the other three countries, where the party that won the first presidential election of the new democratic period suffered setbacks in the second.

Explaining the Differences in Democratic Performance

Democratic Traditions and Institutions

In Chile and Uruguay the rule of law and civil liberties are respected. Political parties in both countries are solid, party systems have long been established, and the party organizations have a life of their own despite the importance of their leaders. In contrast, in Brazil and Argentina, democratic institutions are less likely to constrain presidential actions, and mechanisms of accountability are weaker and less effective.

Economic Legacy of the Prior Military Regime

Economic conditions inherited from the military regime have influenced the governments of all four countries, though economic success or failure of the new democratic regimes is not determined by that legacy alone. The president’s ability to develop coherent economic policies is also important.

Leadership and Luck

Chile’s president found a good mix between implementing necessary changes and providing enough continuity in its economic policies. Chile’s leaders could also draw political lessons from being the last country in the region to undergo a transition to democracy. Brazil has had poor leadership at the presidential level. All three presidents undermined or bypassed Congress and parties. In Argentina, Alfonsín and Menem manipulated economic policies for
political gains, but Menem showed some abilities in implementing an economic stabilization program. In Uruguay, Sanguinetti became the consensus builder in a country difficult to govern due to its political institutions. Lacalle failed to get the support needed to implement his program.

Mainwaring concluded by calling attention to several policy implications. First, if democracies have shortcomings, then there is room for democratic invention and reform. One such source of invention could come from institutional engineering, a path that has not been explored much in these countries. Second, building democratic institutions is important. The legislature, judiciary, and political parties are discredited in most of these countries, and more often portrayed as the problem than the solution. Yet an institutionalized party system supports democratic governability. Third, each country needs an effective state. In most Latin American countries, the state is corroded by clientelism, patrimonialism, and corruption. The problem is not size but efficiency, requiring a more careful approach to state reform than that taken by Argentina. Fourth, achieving macroeconomic stability and growth must be the foremost objective of economic policy, but without neglecting the pressing issues of poverty and inequality. If democracy cannot offer a better life for most of the citizens, fewer will care about it.

Discussant's Comments

Senator José Octavio Bordón welcomed the comparative approach of Mainwaring's paper and stressed that it captured the interdependence between the socioeconomic development process and the construction of an institutionalized political environment.

Survival of Democracy

Bordón conceded that international factors have contributed to the return of democracy in the region, but as Haiti and Peru show, endogenous factors are much more important. He viewed the increased commitment to democracy of political actors, the behavior of elites, and the modifications among the left as the most important factors. Many people in society have acquired an anti-authoritarian conviction stemming in part from being victims of dictatorial regimes. This is a profound sociocultural change, which influences political elites, parties, and the left.

Bordón highlighted the growing regional cooperation that has resulted from strengthened democracy. The Southern Common Market (Mercosur) and concerted nuclear policies between Argentina and Brazil are unprecedented, giving reason for hope as these countries face the difficulty of constructing pluralistic and institutionalized democracies.
Economic Performance

Bordón commented that Mainwaring did not sufficiently emphasize some of the more positive results. He argued that although Brazil continues to suffer from high inflation, its growth rates and the general level of its productive structure, which is more industrialized than those of the other countries in the region, qualify the extremely negative evaluation. Brazil has shown important signs of growth and is entering a crucial phase with the implementation of a new economic plan. And this is occurring in a difficult institutional period, due to the election year.

The important economic expansion witnessed in Argentina over the last three years is basically a result of three factors: a better international image, a cycle of low international interest rates, and the idle capacity of the majority of industrial sectors. Together, these factors produced an unusual savings rate with which consumption could be financed. In this sense, the results have been significant. Bordón also believed it will be necessary to export more and to slow the growth of consumption.

Consolidation of Democracy

Bordón agreed with Mainwaring that the survival of democracy in the region is an extraordinary accomplishment. In order to consolidate democracy, these countries need to grow with social equity, and find a solution to poverty.

Dividing democratic rule in contemporary Latin America into three periods, he explained that the first was fundamentally concerned with the recovery of democratic institutions. The second attempted to obtain macroeconomic adjustment, and the task of the third is to develop modern social policies to help overcome the social, productive, and cultural fragmentation of these societies. This requires microeconomic policies that support medium and small enterprises and help increase the competitiveness of the large economic groups. These kinds of transformation also necessitate a smaller but more effective state, one that is capable of responding to the dynamic challenges presented by globalization and flexible production. Finally, they require new leadership that understands how to combine deregulation and decentralization with participation, control, and solidarity.

Bordón argued that the significance of some political events was not adequately treated by Mainwaring. The unprecedented impeachment and resignation of a president in Brazil could very well be considered a protagonistic manifestation of Brazilian society. The impeachment did not constitute a structural transformation of Brazil’s democratic system, but reflected an evolution, comparable to the transition from Alfonsín to Menem in the midst of hyperinflationary chaos.

Bordón suggested that Mainwaring may have underestimated some of Brazil’s successes and overestimated Chile’s success. For example, he thought the advances made by President Itamar Franco in response to the grave problem of poverty needed recognition. He reminded
conference participants that constitutional problems remain in Chile, such as the continued lack of
civilian control over the armed forces and the designated senators. Once the second democratic
term ends in Chile, it will be possible to make a better evaluation of the Chilean case. Four years
is a short period of time to adequately assess performance. Using this last point, he noted that
time is an important consideration. Chile has only recently finished its first four years of
democratic rule, which occurred in the '90s, while the other three countries have had democratic
regimes for more than a decade, beginning during the debt crisis of the '80s.

Variation of Democratic Performance

Regarding Mainwaring's explanatory variables, Bordón emphasized the institutional
dimensions of democracy. Without supporting or rejecting Mainwaring's argument that Menem
has not adequately respected democratic institutions in Argentina, Bordón focused on the most
recent period, arguing that institutional equilibrium and interinstitutional controls are fundamental.
In this sense, political freedoms and human rights are important for the growth of a democratic
culture.

Bordón suggested that the relationship between an institutionalized political party system
and the political leadership is not always verifiable, nor unidirectional. For parties to consolidate,
honest and committed leaders are needed. Their coming to power may enable political parties to
consolidate. Hence the relation may be bidirectional.

Discussion

Institutions

Conaghan challenged the participants to think of the unthinkable. The weakness of
democratic institutions in Brazil is always emphasized by academics. However, could it be
possible that in Brazil, more democratic institutions are not going to be put in place? Such a
scenario makes it necessary to ask if democracy could function even if it did not evolve
institutionally.

Political Parties and Party Systems

In relation to Brazil's party system, O'Donnell remarked that there are also valuable
exceptions, such as some politicians of the Worker's Party (PT) who have demonstrated excellent
parliamentary behavior. Unfortunately, they are loosing power within their own party. O'Donnell
predicted that should either Lula or Cardoso be the next president, there is reason to believe that
both can govern despite institutional difficulties.
Bordón picked up on O'Donnell’s remarks concerning the presidential candidates and explained that Lula and Cardoso can awaken rational or irrational tendencies. Yet he believed that for both, Brazil's economic and political success is a more important goal than the outcome of their own electoral struggle.

Eugenio Ortega R. emphasized common problems of the region. Even though there is consensus among political parties, the long-term problem of the countries could be their lack of a constitutional consensus. He pointed out that electoral systems formed a recurrent theme in the discussion. A reform may be one way to improve political party systems, which in his view lack flexibility. While Argentina has not yet witnessed a coup, the system's inflexibility was particularly apparent under Alfonsín, who could not complete his term.

Mainwaring concluded that it is positive to have a breadth of opinion represented by different parties. However, the problem in Brazil is not breadth. Options are essential and good for democracy, even in a system where accountability exists primarily in elections. The problem in Brazil is that politicians have too much autonomy from parties, and show too little party discipline. Coming back to O'Donnell's example of the PT, Mainwaring explained that a possible victory of the PT is often seen as a disaster by the international media, which in his opinion would not be the case.

Democratic Legacy

Samuel Valenzuela observed that the discussion had focused primarily on short-term perspectives. On the one hand, he encouraged discussants to compare the current situation with the historic legacy that existed before the authoritarian regimes. The evaluation of what failed or succeeded should also take into consideration the previous democratic regimes. In addition, the exit of the authoritarian regime often produces an institutional resurrection from the previous democratic regime. Therefore, if political parties and institutions were working successfully under the prior democratic regime, this may help the consolidation of a new democracy. On the other hand, he noted that the authoritarian regime itself shapes institutions. In Chile, for example, political parties of the right have been contaminated with military politics—a situation not present prior to the coup. Analyzing Brazil along these dimensions, rather than comparing it to an ideal model, may yield insights.

Final Statements

Mainwaring returned to some of the participants' comments. He stated his belief that democracy can work despite the kind of political parties that exist in Brazil. Necessary institutional changes are not out of the question. To what degree democracy can improve if the party
system is not reformed is a different question, however. There is space for reform, but institutional and structural constraints make it unlikely that an effective government and presidency can be institutionalized. Hence the need for a reformed party system. He also stated that democracy is not about to break down in Brazil. A possible overstatement of problems in the Brazilian case was meant to foster critical reflection and discussion.

Bordón agreed with Valenzuela's assessment regarding the importance of the political and institutional legacy of the prior democratic regime. Nevertheless, he pointed out the emergence of new political parties and the decline of established ones. Thus, he challenged participants to predict how Argentina's political map would look two years hence.

Session Rapporteur's Summary

Rosario Espinal summarized the session, noting that the main reactions and criticisms to Mainwaring's paper implied questions about the method employed to assess democratic development comparatively. While his comparison based on a set of factors was useful, such analysis must be sensitive to the individual structural and conjunctural peculiarities of each case.

Espinal also highlighted the discussion about whether institutionalized party systems are needed for effective democracy. Several questions emerged: a) Can we think of democracy differently and assess it differently if institutionalized parties are no longer there? b) Can democracies operate without highly organized party systems? c) Can advanced democracies, witnessing the decay of their own party systems, promote the need for highly institutionalized party systems in Latin America? d) Could it be that a wide range of political options, as in Brazil, is more democratic than having a highly institutionalized party system of narrow choices as in Argentina?

A final troubling issue, which was also debated in the Andean session, concerned the future of democracy in Latin America. In light of continued weakness of political institutions, the power of the media in shaping public opinion, widespread corruption, and entrepreneurial politics, how can democracy be consolidated?

Session III

Central America in the Twenty-First Century: The Prospects for Democracy

Terry Lynn Karl focused most of her discussion on four Central American countries—Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua—and asked whether the elections being held throughout the region represent a first step toward democracy, or merely a brief period of
liberalization before a step is taken backwards toward authoritarianism. At the beginning of her paper, Karl set out four propositions. First, she argued that the probability of regression to the 'reactionary despotic' regimes of the past is low, although it is more likely in Guatemala than in the rest of Central America. Second, the likelihood that fragile democratic processes will deepen, consolidate, and be able to deliver long deferred public goods to their populations is also low. Third, most probable in the medium term is the establishment of hybrid regimes, which mix authoritarian and democratic practices across functional and territorial domains. Finally, whether these regimes have the capacity to govern and to become more democratic depends upon the extent and direction of organized pressure from below, the presence of reformers in government, the degree of elite competition and flexibility, and the level and direction of international influences.

**Optimism or Pessimism? An Overview of the Region**

After discussing some of the specific features and trends in each of the Central American countries, Karl offered two contrasting sets of assumptions underlying optimistic and pessimistic visions of the future of democracy in the region. Among the optimistic assumptions, she included first the idea that social forces have been irrevocably transformed. On the one hand, the traditional alliance between agrarian Oligarchs, the military, and foreigners has virtually disappeared, while on the other, popular forces have left their organizational mark on politics. A second assumption is that the present stalemate has created the conditions for the type of historic compromise which often undergirds democracy. Third, the competing forces have recognized this opportunity and have designed new rules of the game to shift struggle from military to political terrain. And fourth, international actors will alter their longstanding support for the status quo and support democratization and structural transformation.

In contrast to these assumptions, Karl laid out an inverse set of assumptions supporting a pessimistic view of the future of Central American democracy. First, she said, the traditional alliances have been transformed, but the result has been the emergence of the New Right, which seeks state power and a divided and disarmed popular movement. Second, rather than a healthy balance of forces, we have a conditional truce of old and new dominant groups coupled with the conditional defeat of popular organizations, which will not prove conducive to democracy. Third, the much-vaunted new rules of the game still favor traditional dominant groups, and will limit the degree of democratization in the future. Finally, despite international assistance and an environment favoring democratization, neither foreign domination nor gross social and economic inequalities have disappeared. On the contrary, neoliberal projects threaten to recreate socioeconomic and political dynamics similar to those which led to civil conflict in the first place.
Democratizing Central America: An Especially Difficult (If Not Herculean) Task

Why is democratizing Central America an especially difficult task? Karl noted that if one were to adhere to the theory that holds that certain social, economic, cultural, and institutional conditions are essential for democratization, Central American polities would be among the least likely candidates to succeed in their transitions to democracy. Karl does not adhere to this theory, but does argue that there are enormous constraints on democratization in Central America, constraints which become evident when Central America is compared with the rest of Latin America.

In the first place, the United States has had a far greater economic and military impact on Central America than on the rest of Latin America. The political legacy of this relationship includes longstanding ties between an external power and antidemocratic domestic forces, and restricted room for maneuver for weakened domestic social forces.

Second, Central America's economies offer less support for democratization than do the economies of the rest of Latin America. The level and growth of per capita GDP is lower in Central America, while inequalities in wealth and income distribution are greater than in South America. The type of economy prevalent in Central America is also important: unrestricted democracy has never been established in any Latin American country where agriculture was the crucial export sector, where the dominant type of agricultural production was labor intensive and coercive, and where production was primarily domestically owned. Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala all fit this description, while Honduras and Costa Rica do not. These agro-export economies are extremely vulnerable to world economic downturns and commodity price fluctuations.

Third, Karl affirmed that in Central America—like in Eastern Europe—the regime change from autocracy to democracy had to be dealt with at the same time as other socioeconomic transformations, in contrast to South America and Southern Europe, where these changes could be dealt with sequentially. This is due, she said, to the close intertwining of the economy and politics in Central America.

The fourth source of comparative disadvantage for democratization in Central America is the political legacy of brutal authoritarian regimes and war, including the displacement, detention, torture and death of persons, the destruction of infrastructure and productive apparatuses, the destruction of centrist and leftist political forces, the radicalization of the popular movement, and the proliferation of uncontrolled armed groups. The most worrisome legacy, according to Karl, is the disproportionate power of Central American militaries and the political effects of the militarization of civil society and a culture of repression and fear.
Central America's Hybrid Regimes: One Step Forward and a Long Way to Go

Despite these obstacles to democratization, Karl noted that there is today greater contestation and inclusion in Central America than in the past. Today's regimes are fundamentally distinct from their predecessors in that the landlord class has been weakened as the dominant political force, giving way to greater elite diversity and competition. The popular sectors have also reached a level of organization that allows them to push for political and economic alternatives, and makes a return to the past unlikely.

These new regimes may best be described as functionally and territorially hybrid: functionally hybrid when gains in the electoral arena are combined with a lack of civilian control over the military and the absence of the rule of law; territorially hybrid when different mixes of local authoritarianism, clientelism, and pluralism coexist under the same national regime. What is the future of these regimes? Karl argued that in the rest of Latin America, what determined whether a hybrid regime became more participatory was the strength of civil society and the effectiveness of political parties. She sees the present moment as an opportunity to extend hybrid regimes beyond their current functional and territorial boundaries. Sources of optimism in this new period include division among the aforementioned elites, changes in patterns of land tenure, and the fact that for the first time, the organized popular sectors in some countries are beginning to link up to parties. We may now witness the emergence of what J.S. Valenzuela calls a 'complete party system,' one in which the full spectrum of ideological positions are represented.

Yet, Karl concluded, three obstacles threaten this fragile political space. First, the hegemony of the neoliberal economic model threatens democracy in both the short and the long run: in the short run, because stabilization and structural adjustment policies directly undermine elements of the delicate peace agreements in Nicaragua and El Salvador. For example, social spending required for demobilization becomes unavailable under austerity measures. This model undermines democracy in the long run, because she sees the neoliberal model supporting export promotion policies, which in the past have led to economic stagnation, the concentration of wealth and the dispossession of peasants, political instability, and the outbreak of war. Second, Central American militaries are way too large and must be subjected to civilian control. And third, the institutional biases built into the present political rules of the game in some countries threaten democracy because if the rules are not fair and the winners generous, the losers will no longer play the game.

Discussant's Comments

While agreeing with Karl that both optimistic and pessimistic scenarios are possible in Central America, Ricardo Stein asserted that the question of which scenario is more plausible is
moot: all directions are in fact possible, and depend on the ability of political actors to identify constraints and to garner the support—including that of the international community—necessary to overcome them. Stein also agreed with Karl's depiction of Central America's regimes as politically hybrid and her affirmation that they are fundamentally different from their predecessors, but added that Costa Rica ought not be excluded: it fits Karl's definition, and its military has been growing.

The heart of Stein's commentary revolved around the four constraints on democratization in Central America highlighted by Karl: the decisive role of foreign intervention in the domestic affairs of Central America, particularly of the United States; the type of economies prevalent in Central America and their poor performance; the simultaneity of regime changes and other socio-economic transformation; and the political legacy of authoritarianism and war, particularly the disproportionate power of the military.

**Foreign Intervention**

Stein disagreed with both the importance Karl attributed to US influence and with her depiction of this influence as wholly negative. He argued that Karl had overlooked the ways in which the new role played in the region by the international community has altered the role of the United States. Multigovernmental bodies and regional accords have generated a multilateral conditionality that favors democratization. Stein also insisted that we must distinguish the role played by the United States in the past from the increasingly positive role it has been playing more recently, and the potential role it could play as a democratizing force.

**Economic Crisis**

Stein agreed with Karl as to the deleterious effects of economic crisis on the region's fragile democratic hybrid regimes. However, he argued that changes taking place on the economic front are altering the traditional agro-export nature of the region's economies. One of the most important new phenomena is that of economic growth without employment generation. This is due in part to a dramatic increase in the informal and illicit sectors of the economy. As a consequence of this change, we must also reinterpret the meaning of poverty statistics in the region. Some statistics suggest that poverty in Central America is becoming 'Africanized,' but these measures do not correspond to reality because important economic activity is hidden in the informal and illicit sectors. Another change involves the mushrooming tertiary sector of Central America's economies, and the fact that the financial sector has become predominant over other economic sectors in some countries. These changes, argued Stein, will result in the failure of old alliances and the creation of new ones, leaving us with a radically transformed map of social and political realities. Finally, Stein suggested that Central American economies may now experience
three types of vulnerabilities: the traditional vulnerabilities of agro-export economies, those which will result from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and those arising from the implementation of stabilization and adjustment policies.

**Intertwining of Economics and Politics**

Stein argued that it is not the simultaneity of political and socioeconomic transformation that is most important, but the lack of an authoritative capacity for establishing priorities due to institutional voids and gridlocks. The inability of institutions to deal with these kinds of problems leads to their worsening, and to a further weakening of the institutions, an entropic institutional dynamic which leads to deepening crises of governance. This dynamic notwithstanding, Stein pointed out that these crises of governance appear to be bounded: political and social actors seem to be taking care that their actions not lead to regime breakdown and chaos.

**The Legacy of Military Regimes**

Finally, Stein argued that Karl had partially misconstrued the legacy of the region's military regimes. First, far from wielding disproportionate power as the result of their quantitative build up, the military has actually lost power, unable to further subjugate civilian forces, and new civilian spaces have opened. Second, while the culture of repression may in some instances be responsible for citizen passivity, on the whole the organizational revival that Karl mentioned belies a tendency toward nonparticipation. Stein argued that disillusionment with elections is not the same as passivity with respect to citizen participation, and that real changes may be taking place not at the national but at the local level. Third, Stein argued that, without exception, the military as an institution has played a fundamental role in initiating the process of transition, and that in some countries it has been the backbone for the continuation of the process.

**Policy Recommendations**

Stein concluded by offering several policy recommendations. Central American economies require job creation and productive investment, coupled with equity measures providing social services and safety nets. Central American states must be modernized, their public bureaucracies rationalized, and their governments decentralized. Institutions defending human rights and the democratic process must be strengthened. Finally, the civilian components of government must be strengthened vis-à-vis the military, paramilitary organizations must be disarmed, and justice must be administered without impunity.
Discussion

Demilitarization

John Joyce asked how further demilitarization could be achieved. Karl responded first to a point made by Stein. She agreed that the expansion of the military has also led to its incapacity, but insisted that military personnel and budgets constitute a tremendous economic drain and political strain for democratizing countries. Will civilians be allowed to cut military budgets?

The question of how to demobilize is very difficult, she affirmed. International aid is not willing to pay for ex-soldiers, despite the importance of the problem. Now, armed bands—ex-military or ex-guerrillas—rob people for a living: they often have no education, no other way of earning a living. Demilitarization must take these groups, disband them, and give them something to do. In El Salvador, a new police force was created from these forces. Previously, the local police were very repressive; now the police are much closer to the people. But most governments giving aid do not want to participate in police and military training in Central America. Another obstacle to cutting the size of the military is the fact that Central American militaries have traditionally fought one another; reduction thus involves a regional balance of power.

Stein spoke to this point as well, affirming that the biggest problem of demilitarization is the irregular forces. He noted that demilitarization implies much more than reducing the number of people in arms: in societies that are militarized, social values must be changed as well. Together with demilitarization, a civilian government must be simultaneously built where none exists. In Guatemala there are places where the only presence of the state is the armed forces; their removal would create an absolute vacuum. One has to begin to install a civilian government before removing the military, in order to continue to provide minimal services.

Elections

Timothy Scully questioned whether elections really are no freer or fairer today in Central America than they were five or ten years ago. In that regard, Cepeda asked about the results of international electoral monitoring.

Karl clarified that she did not mean to say that elections were no freer or fairer than in the past. The problem is that citizens—say illiterate people in a rural area—must be convinced that this election is different. The difficulty is that in some areas within a country you see that it is different and in others you do not. The fairness of electoral rules varies from country to country as well: in Nicaragua the rules of the game are much fairer than in El Salvador for the simple
reason that the United States was on the side of the opposition in Nicaragua, and that no external force played that role in El Salvador. Another problem was that the Salvadoran left was not used to paying attention to the electoral rules. They were busy with other issues, so they agreed to take the old electoral rules and use them again. But the old rules were biased towards the military supported parties of the past. Once these rules were implemented, the playing field was not at all level. For example, access to television was not fair, and in some cases people could not even register to vote. In one town, 71% of those who tried to obtain a voter card never got it, and were prevented from voting on election day. Only 50% of the voters participated in what was supposed to be the election of the century, a turnout lower than that of 1984.

The Catholic Church

Robert Pelton asked whether the Roman Catholic Church is becoming more of a national actor in Central America? He noted that the Guatemalan Bishops seem to have taken a strong stand regarding the indigenous issue, while the Bishops of El Salvador still seem to be divided, and have not as a group entered into national issues.

Stein said that the power of the Catholic Church was being challenged more by other churches than by other elites. In several countries the Church, in the process of responding to these challenges, has reexamined its policies and confronted issues of interest to the majority of the population. Stein agreed that in Guatemala the Church had moved toward indigenous issues, but noted that this was not well regarded by all, and that the Guatemalan Church was split in much the same way as the Salvadoran Church.

The European Community

Whitehead noted that the European Community was once very interested in promoting pacification, reconstruction, and democratization in Central America, but since 1991 there has been almost total silence in Europe about these activities. Despite this lack of visibility, previously established institutions remain in place, generating strong programs and the largest source of external aid in Central America with democratic conditionality attached. These structures are divorced from the community in Europe interested in supporting democratization; are they divorced as well from the real strategies needed to support democratization in Central America?

Stein replied that the European Community has meetings twice a year with political representation at the highest level, and through these meetings it consistently and persistently expresses democratic conditionality and develops specific aid programs.
Role of the United States

Riding commented that the United States has played a central role in Central America, but seems now to have lost interest in the region. It seems to be saying that if you carry out a neoliberal economic policy, somehow you will get to a democratic paradise. Does the United States have a particular responsibility in Central America?

Karl responded that the United States does have a special responsibility, but that it will not fulfill it, and that this is nothing new. Some countries are counting on aid, but not much aid will be forthcoming. More important economically are remittances: in El Salvador, these are the greatest source of foreign exchange.

What Kind of Democracy for Central America?

An unidentified participant asked if the Western liberal model of democracy is the only appropriate one for Central America. Can elections cure the malaise of democracy, or is participation more important?

Karl answered that when discussing definitions of democracy, we must realize that where control has been most forcefully exercised, and where we look to find change, is at the local level. What we have been focusing upon is change at the national level of politics, but when we look at what is happening at the local level we find that change is very uneven, varying greatly from village to village. In El Salvador, for example, democratization is most meaningful where the local police force has been changed; where it is no longer connected with the death squads but is part of the new police force made up of demobilized combatants. This kind of change, she added, is not captured well by most of the definitions of democracy we use.

Final Comments

Karl emphasized the danger posed by neoliberal economic stabilization programs to social policies required for the successful demobilization of military and guerrilla forces. She also argued that neoliberal policies, by once again emphasizing the agro-export sector of the economy, will lead to the concentration of wealth and the dispossession of peasants that led to war in the first place.

Stein agreed that the central problem was that of improving the economy, and that the question is, at whose expense? Adjustments should be made which privilege democratization and not the payment of the national debt.
Session Rapporteur's Summary

Michael Francis summarized the session's discussion with seven sets of questions. First, Karl argued that neoliberal economic policies are inappropriate for Central America because they will lead to a return to traditional landholding patterns and dictatorships. Francis asked: Is this true? What acceptable alternatives to this model do we have?

Second, over the years the United States has strengthened Central American militaries, thereby creating powerful political actors that threaten democracy. How can Washington help demobilize these militaries? What is the appropriate role for the United States in the event that the Central American peace accords are not respected? Ought the United States defer to the United Nations or the European Community in Central America?

Third, what is the criteria for judging if a Latin American government is democratic? How imperfect can a system be and still be accepted as a democracy? If a government is not democratic, what can be done to move it toward democracy?

Fourth, what do recent experiments at economic integration mean for the politics and economics of the area? Does economic integration via NAFTA constitute a new form of US influence in the hemisphere?

Fifth, how have the emergence of governmental and nongovernmental international organizations with concerns about issues such as human rights changed the political game in Latin America?

Sixth, what are the social characteristics and the political interests of the New Right in Central America, and what power does it wield?

Seventh, will Latin American diplomatic cooperation—such as the Esquipulas Accords—continue to exclude Washington, and should Washington accept or resist this development?

Session IV

The Peculiarities of Transition a la Mexicana

According to Laurence Whitehead, the most distinctive features of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) regime's *sui generis* form of authoritarian rule in Mexico are 1) its remarkable and unbroken longevity, 2) its unusually strong institutionalization, and 3) the considerable degree of legitimacy it has achieved over the years. The PRI regime was born under the auspices of a revolutionary legitimacy; over time, other principles of legitimation (such as national conciliation and socioeconomic modernization) were invoked to reinforce or displace this legitimacy, but without openly repudiating the regime's foundational principles. The regime has
also claimed an electoral mandate, but until recently this has been of secondary importance to its legitimacy. Today, Mexico confronts the possibility of a major shift from nonelectoral legitimacy to legitimacy based upon popular sovereignty. The question is whether this shift will take place incrementally under the careful control of the PRI—which Whitehead called ‘transition by stealth’—or through some kind of democratic rupture.

The strong institutionalization of the PRI regime intensely conditions the path to democracy. Some might expect a regime with a strong institutional base to be better able to manage a controlled transition. Whitehead, however, argued that since institutions in Mexico are profoundly penetrated by the PRI system of authoritarian rule, a transition to new principles of legitimation would require a far-reaching restructuring of these institutions.

Likewise, Mexico’s strong institutionalization could conceivably provide the basis for the strengthening of a more democratic institutionality, as impersonal rules are extended to control a wider range of undemocratic practices. However, the deeply authoritarian nature of this institutionalization has led to the selective enforcement of just those rules which best served to stabilize and perpetuate the regime. Rules that guaranteed elite circulation provided incentives for the pursuit of political ambitions from within the regime, while authoritarian disincentives limited challenges from without. Since institutional and authoritarian elements are united in a single system, partial reform would be very difficult: changes are likely to generate instability, turbulence, and uncertain outcomes.

The 1994 Chiapas insurrection and assassination of the PRI presidential candidate were signs of the vulnerability of the PRI’s authoritarian rule. While the Mexican regime has always been secure against certain sources of breakdown that have been important elsewhere—such as external military defeat, identification of the regime with an individual ruler, or US-sponsored democratization from without—its primary point of vulnerability has been the sexennial presidential succession. Succession according to a fixed calendar concentrates in one moment the transfer of great power from one incumbent to the next, by what Whitehead deemed undisguisedly authoritarian mechanisms, and the acquiescence of the losing aspirants. The role of the opposition is to give the elections an aura of contestation without seriously challenging the PRI’s predominance. Since the 1970s this electoral system has been fine tuned first to strengthen the opposition when it appeared too weak, and then to weaken the opposition when it appeared too strong. The visibility of this fine tuning, however, is more a point of weakness than of strength. A third point of weakness is the isolating and self-deceiving consequences of the regime’s constant monologue with itself.

Despite these weaknesses, the Mexican authoritarian regime does not recognize itself to have been defeated, nor does it acknowledge the existence of a democratic alternative capable of displacing it. It does recognize the need for electoral credibility, and this may lead it to a transition
by stealth: slow, controlled change which forestalls demands for further, more destabilizing change.

The alternative would be some sort of democratic rupture, in which the Mexican regime shifts to the clearly distinct legitimizing principle of popular sovereignty. This would entail far-reaching changes in Mexican polity as commonplace democratic practices begin to take hold. For example, the possibility exists that a president might serve the second half of a six year term with an opposition majority in the legislature. Similarly, state-federal political relationships would be transformed as state governors were elected without prior presidential approval.

Such changes would generate considerable political instability, at least in the short term, as they would engender opposition founded both in elements of political culture resistant to the institutionalized uncertainty of democracy, and in more material interests grown accustomed to the benefits of patronage, placemanship, impositionism, and impunity.

**Discussant’s Comments**

Denise Dresser drew a rather somber picture of the current and future Mexican scenarios. Disagreeing with Whitehead’s argument that Mexico is headed towards a democratic opening, she argued that the continued centralization of political power in the hands of a ‘hyperpresident’ preempts any prospects for the construction of strong institutions.

**Institutions**

Dresser agreed with Whitehead that, in one way or another, most institutions in Mexico are under the control of the PRI. Hence, Mexico lacks many institutional arrangements that could facilitate a transition to democracy. But unlike Whitehead, who argued that institutions penetrated by powerful interests hamper Mexico’s transition, Dresser argued that instead of creating new institutions or modernizing existing ones, the current Salinas administration purposely weakened or even eliminated institutions in order to strengthen itself. Thus, it is not the presence of strong institutions, but the lack thereof that makes a transition to democracy unlikely.

**Hyperpresidentialism**

According to Dresser, the Mexican system is based on institutional arrangements that make a successful transition to democracy unlikely. Hyperpresidentialism reinforces personalistic politics at the expense of institution building. For democracy to be born, elites must be willing to put rules above personal power. In Mexico, unless the political system transfers power away from the president, chances for a democratic transition are dim.
As a result, Salinas created a centralized political authority which allowed him to carry out structural economic transformations. Yet he failed in building democratic institutions through which power could be decentralized. Thus he himself ultimately rendered the Salinas experiment untenable. The political void in the aftermath of the assassination of the designated successor is a good case in point.

**Political Parties and the Party System**

Hyperpresidentialism is not only successful in appropriating political power, but also in weakening the opposition. While electoral and party reform have divided the opposition, party leaders themselves have done little to overcome their divisions. In part this is due to the fact that all parties exhibit extreme signs of clientelism and personalism. In Dresser’s view, opposition parties have yet to learn how to overcome their divisions, and more generally speaking, how to use the rules of the political system for their own benefits. Given the conditions of such a political system, no actor is willing or prepared to risk his/her political future, and this creates a general feeling of uncertainty within the Mexican party system.

**Elements of Regime Survival: Economy, Legitimacy, and Antidemocratic Forces**

Whitehead’s allusion to the regime’s ideological weakness along with the increasingly contested *dedazo* could be interpreted as emerging elements of an authoritarian breakdown. Yet, as Dresser pointed out, he failed to consider the most significant aspect for political change, or lack thereof, that is, the situation of the economy.

An improved economy could buy the PRI crucial time it needs in the aftermath of the turbulent Chiapas upheaval and the Colosio assassination. Survey results indicate that the Mexican population is more concerned about economic growth than about political participation. Thus, if Salinas and the PRI succeed, they may alleviate the pressures for a political change and thereby increase their chances to stay in power. If, however, the economy worsens, and should Mexicans decide to vote with their pocketbook, prospects for a democratic rupture could increase strongly.

The Chiapas experience has dramatically shown that Mexico is a dual society. The economic adjustment has had enormous social costs; 40% of the population continue to live in poverty, and real wages are below their 1980 levels. A very large number of peasants face the threat of being displaced as the agricultural sector bears most of the burden of the economic reform. Lacking political institutional alternatives, the only vehicle for legitimating the regime is economic growth. As O’Donnell and others have argued, if regime legitimacy is largely based on economic performance, support for it tends to disappear if the technobureaucratic elite is unable
to deliver economic growth. In this sense, the Salinas regime faces a serious performance challenge in the months ahead.

Dresser also stated that it is important to discuss what she called antitransition forces. In the aftermath of the recent NAFTA agreements, it is understandable that many observers believed a democratic transition was possible. However, the current state-business rapprochement suggests that as long as business is able to maintain its current pattern of interest representation, it has few incentives to replace authoritarian with democratic politics.

Sources of Regime Breakdown

Dresser briefly discussed the importance of external factors for regime change in Mexico. Unlike Whitehead, who explicitly stressed his preference for domestic factors, Dresser argued that Mexico has not remained immune to the influence of an embryonic transnational civil society. Nongovernmental organizations, and social movements on a global scale, have left an imprint on Mexico. These organizations, as well as the scrutiny of the international community, in all likelihood impeded a military escalation in Chiapas.

There is in Mexico an incipient form of citizenship that could become the building bloc of a transition to democracy. Although these groups fall short of promoting real democratization, there is a chance that they might push back the boundaries of what is and will be politically possible for the incumbent regime. Hence, in the future, aforementioned business interest groups and powerful state elites may face growing opposition to their clientelistic practices from other sectors of Mexican civil society.

On the Concept of Transition

Given the Mexican characteristics, Dresser called for a conceptual reexamination of the notion of transition to democracy. Instead of showing signs of dissolution of the authoritarian regime and the beginning of some democratic institutions, the Mexican case suggests that a transition may also include the possibility of a modernizing authoritarian regime. In essence, the basic pattern of policy making has not changed, despite reform cycles. Dresser contends that, since the 1960s and 1970s, selective incorporation, dialogue, and negotiation have formed recurrent strategies of what can be called controlled processes of an adaptive authoritarianism.

Prospects for What?

In conclusion, Dresser asked the participants to imagine how Mexico would look after a democratic rupture. Who would lead the rupture, and who would follow? Who and what are the driving forces that would shift the current political system towards a more democratic society?
Chiapas and the Colosio assassination revealed that the system, though dynamic, is also fragile. There is a delicate balance between the reformist and traditional sectors within the PRI, between the political forces of change and those of permanence, and between the presidency and the institutions. Mexico is headed for uncertainty, which may include, as Whitehead argued, a democratic rupture. Dresser, however, was more pessimistic. Rather than moving towards democracy, Mexico is headed towards an increasingly imperfect dictatorship.

Discussion

Hyperpresidentialism

Mainwaring wondered what was new about the Salinas regime in institutional terms that did not already exist before him?

Dresser responded that presidential authority had grown excessive. By making use of traditional political tools, Salinas was able to create new ones which helped him shore up his personal bases of support. He has demonstrated a highly discretionary use of presidential power.

Liberalization vs. Modernization of the Authoritarian Regime

In view of Whitehead's report of regime liberalization and Dresser's referral to a modernizing dictatorship, Lowenthal asked what lessons could be drawn from these two distinct analyses of the Mexican case.

Whitehead responded that the interesting point was to ask if the PRI regime can continue to perpetuate its own personnel and policies within a framework of liberalization? And even if, as some observers contend, the regime is able to 'muddle through' by making some concessions without relinquishing real control, the big question is how a possible widening of institutional spaces will operate in the future.

Dresser reiterated her conclusions. Opposition forces are divided, and without a clear position on the reforms currently debated in Congress. Civil society is in a difficult position because the Chiapas incident pushed it towards favoring a renovation of the system, but the Colosio assassination moved the pendulum back to where it was. Given these conditions and the continued abuse of political power by the government leaders, she saw no possibility for a pacted transition. In short, possibilities for fraudulent elections are high, the country is in a state of uncertainty, and postelectoral turbulence is possible as well.

Karl suggested that some common ground existed. Whitehead and Dresser both implied that the Salinas regime's exercise of control is high, but declining. Whitehead agreed with Karl's assessment, adding that democratization by stealth requires control over the political process. In Mexico, traditionally, the president has exercised this power. He also stressed that his paper is
mainly about the breakdown of the PRI, and not so much about a new political scenario. Thus, his analysis concentrates on the beginning of the transition, not the end of it.

**Regime Supporters**

Ben Ross Schneider commented that the economic reform had not received much attention in the discussion. He wondered whether economic reform might facilitate the democratization process in the sense that it would allow business sectors to be less dependent on the PRI, or even to become prodemocracy actors.

Whitehead answered that there is a difference between a numerically small but powerful business sector, which clearly benefits from the regime, and a large but relatively powerless business sector. This situation also constitutes a structural political constraint, as seen for example in the nationalization of banks.

Dresser agreed with Whitehead, adding that big business supports the regime as long as it is able to supply a stable climate. Whether there is any room for change within the business community remains to be seen, and will become more evident after the 1994 elections.

**Economic Factors**

Jorge Castañeda spoke about the influence of the Clinton administration in relation to Dresser's argument that a worsening of the economic situation could have potential electoral costs for the PRI. He thought that the United States was not willing to induce a devaluation of the peso, basically because the US economy itself has a vital interest in a stable Mexican economy.

**Final Statements**

Dresser wrapped up the discussion by saying that a breakdown of the authoritarian regime is possible, but unlikely. In terms of the notion of transition, Whitehead's democracy by stealth is unlikely because there exists no institutional apparatus around which a political negotiation could occur.

Whitehead warned that the current situation in Mexico is fast deteriorating, and that the political moment should be seized. In six years, the political scenario will certainly look different, and then much broader negotiations will be necessary in order to find a way to end the authoritarian regime.
Session Rapporteur's Summary

J. Samuel Valenzuela identified five issues discussed in the session on Mexico. First, what is the morphology of the Mexican regime, and how can we characterize it? Both Whitehead and Dresser agreed that the regime is authoritarian. Whitehead argued that the regime is highly institutionalized, with the combination of democratic institutions and authoritarian procedures creating a ‘parody’ of democracy. Disagreement on this point centered on the question of the relative strengths of the party and of the presidency: Dresser argued that previously the party had been more important than the presidency, but that Salinas had greatly strengthened the presidency at the expense of the party.

Second, why does Mexico have this kind of regime? Whitehead explicitly excluded this point from his paper, while Dresser held that Mexico has an authoritarian political culture. Valenzuela argued that cultural patterns can express themselves in a variety of institutional arrangements, so that a transition to democracy is possible even given Mexico’s authoritarian political culture.

Third, is a transition to democracy inevitable, or can the present system continue in Mexico well into the twenty-first century? Whitehead argued that the present system has entered into crisis: revolutionary legitimacy grows weaker, but democratic legitimation puts in evidence the antidemocratic elements of the present system, while the essential circulation of elites has diminished, generating discontent. Dresser noted the turbulence of the present system, but argued that it is not yet clear where this could lead: it could even lead to greater authoritarianism. An economic crisis could put enormous pressure on the system to change.

Fourth, what kind of transition is possible? Whitehead presented two possible types of transition, a gradualist transition by stealth in which the regime’s present leaders retain control throughout the transition process, and a sudden transition by rupture in which the regime visibly collapses. Whitehead argued that transition by stealth would be quite difficult, due to the PRI’s complete penetration of Mexico’s political institutions. He also noted that liberalization measures elsewhere have tended to lead to regime collapse, except when democratizing pacts were made with the kinds of players not present in the Mexican situation.

Here Valenzuela suggested an alternative scenario, in which an all-powerful president decided to move from dedazo to electoral succession by means of democratic primaries. Though this might seem unlikely, Valenzuela pointed out that since Mexico has many of the trappings of democracy, change in those specifically authoritarian institutions (such as the dedazo, electoral fraud, and the lack of respect for important civil rights) could bring about a transition to democracy.
Fifth, is Mexico really unique? Both Whitehead and Dresser considered the Mexican political system to be unique. Valenzuela asked, however, if there might not be other political regimes which, while not identical to Mexico's, share its characteristics as a parody or travesty of democracy. How many regimes meet our minimal criteria for democracy, but in significant respects also are parodies?

Session V

Three Challenges to US Democracy:
Accountability, Representation, and Intellectual Diversity

Jorge G. Castañeda argued in his paper and presentation that low voter turnout, institutional gridlock, lack of responsiveness of governmental authorities, the Perot phenomenon, and urban riots are all indications of dissatisfaction and disappointment with the US political system. The recurring fact that political elites' criticism of the system increases prior to a presidential election and then declines afterwards is no surprise. However, if the election of a new generation of leadership makes no difference because the system itself is capable of obstructing the initiatives of newcomers, it may be the case that the system has become immune to change. Hence, waning political responsiveness and citizen dissatisfaction can be seen as elements of a breakdown of the American democratic system.

Castañeda identified three principal problems of democracy in the United States: decreasing accountability of American institutions and processes, growing exclusion of significant sectors of American society from democratic rule, and persisting uniformity of mainstream intellectual debate on substantive policy options.

Accountability has decreased since the late 1960s. Elected officials either do not attempt, or fail to carry out, the policies on which they campaign. Citing the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations as evidence, Castañeda emphasized the contrast between their promises and actual accomplishments. Without improved correspondence between program and action, it will be difficult for Americans to regain trust in their political leaders, and voter turnouts will not improve. Already at levels in the range of 50 to 55%, which, comparatively speaking, is very low, voter participation is predominantly white, Anglo, and middle-aged suburban. Hence, elected official are accountable, if at all, primarily to that constituency and to the interest groups that supply the much needed campaign money. Meanwhile, many who choose not to vote justify their decision with the unaccountability of elected officials, thereby reinforcing the strong position of the incumbents and the lack of correspondence between promises and performance.
Related to the public perception of unaccountability is the role of money in elections. Many Americans have come to believe that representation has ceased to be an ideological, political, or generational question, and instead has degenerated into a problem of campaign financing and competition for costly high-tech media markets. In light of these trends, Castañeda argued that the separation between money and power is disappearing from US politics.

Short-term considerations such as corruption, trust, or political discourse aside, accountability should not be viewed as either improving or worsening. Instead, we should examine whether the entire system is capable of reforming itself. The last significant reform was the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which incorporated a previously excluded segment of society. And yet, this institutional reform left the existing electoral system basically intact. Castañeda suggested that diminished accountability is a result of the dissonance between a political system built in the past that does not and cannot change, while American society has been changing drastically.

The second problem confronting US democracy is the growing exclusion of significant sectors of American society from democratic rule. Sustained economic growth between 1940 and 1960 allowed the political system to postpone decisions over the redistribution of wealth, public services, employment, and inequality. The economic context provided enormous leeway, but with the decline of the US role in the world economy, difficulties in overcoming divisions in American society and confronting new social challenges have become more apparent.

Castañeda emphasized that the underlying problem was not the greater integration of the United States with the world economy, but the political system itself. More specifically, the main problem is the incapacity of the political system to successfully respond to new challenges brought about by a changing economic and social environment. As long as the majority of American society was middle class, representative democracy seemed to be expanding. But once economic changes produced a decline in the middle class, inequalities became more apparent. In addition, traditionally equalizing institutions such as the public school system, the military draft, or even the ballot box, lost their effectiveness or were abolished altogether. United States society became more polarized and, not surprisingly, many of the electorate became disenchanted and lost interest in participating in a system that has increasingly become unable to provide integration and representation. Without a more substantive debate about the choices and challenges involved, Castañeda predicted that the political system will remain ill equipped to address the new issues facing the nation.

The third and final challenge relates to the narrowness of political debate. Despite the end of the Cold War, political debate has still not grown beyond the perspective long held to be the only valid one. Hence, the real issues that need to be addressed—social and economic problems in the United States—are ignored. According to Castañeda, NAFTA and the Clinton
health care reform initiative are but recent examples of the conundrum of American democracy; i.e., the only options deemed viable are indistinguishable from the status quo. Meaningful debates that could offer substantive options are absent, due to the lack of referendary procedures and a clear majority in Congress, and to politicians' need to pay more attention to reelection than to political issues.

In conclusion, Castañeda examined some possible consequences of American democracy's three dilemmas. First, the way the United States solves these problems will shape its capacity as a political actor. International issues will be smaller in scope, but more complex, and most likely will not constitute vital threats to the nation. The political system must learn to adjust to this new situation. Second, the changing role of the US economy must be dealt with politically. Castañeda stated that if the United States had benefited from its long economic dominance, then it would also pay a cost for losing its dominance. Transformations of the US economy challenge the society to respond to these changes, and this calls for effective democratic governance. Finally, the distinction between domestic and foreign issues (jobs, immigration, drugs) has already begun to fade, making institutional and political reform necessary.

**Discussant's Comments**

Robert Dahl generally agreed with the basic tenet of Castañeda's paper, but he questioned what was new and what was old. Basic changes in the political system are hard to detect because they occur slowly over time and continue on in many different political processes.

**Accountability**

Dahl took issue with some parts of Castañeda's argument about decreasing accountability and the growing exclusion from democratic rule. He commented that it is not altogether clear that the constitutional separation of powers, of which a divided government is but one consequence, will necessarily lead to inertia or deadlock as depicted by Castañeda. The trend since World War II has been towards a divided government, but the number of laws enacted and the number of congressional investigations undertaken in periods of divided government are no different from those enacted and undertaken in periods of unified government.

Dahl furthermore questioned the argument that elected officials either do not attempt, or fail to carry out, the policies on which they campaign. Many elected officials pay too much attention to public opinion rather than too little. What prevents elected officials from carrying out their promises more often are unforeseen circumstantial changes and, more importantly, their
inability to form a legislative coalition in favor of policies they themselves would like to see implemented.

Voter Turnout

Dahl explained that the argument for a strong relationship between accountability and voter turnout is problematic. A number of authors have contested the premise that because many Americans do not vote they must be disinterested in politics. To the contrary, he cited a substantial body of evidence showing that the United States ranks higher than most or even all democratic countries in partisanship, sense of political efficacy, pride in political institutions, satisfaction with their government, and interest in politics. Still, Dahl referred to a puzzle: If because of education, interest, and other factors influencing motivations to vote, Americans should vote at higher levels than people in other democracies, why don't they? Dahl conceded that the answer remains elusive, requiring more research and continued efforts to explain this phenomenon.

The New American (Dis)Order

Dahl then offered another explanation for some of the current political dilemmas of American democracy, which he characterized as the new American political (dis)order. First, while government policies are made for ever larger, conflicting, and very heterogeneous interest groups, political institutions that allow for peaceful negotiation of different interests are to some degree weaker today than they were in the past. There is more fragmentation and less integration. The American political world replaced 'a regime of establishments' with a system that, though more open, is also more fluid in its attachments. Political parties, too, have undergone a serious decline in their ability to integrate, especially during the last several decades and at the electoral level. When parties are strong organizationally, their influence during elections and in legislatures tends to win out over that of interest groups. When political parties become fragmented, it is not only easier for political entrepreneurs to dominate and dictate their own agendas, but the number and influence of interest groups increases.

A second and related aspect of the fragmented political system concerns institutions, or rather, a lack thereof. Public opinion is still able to influence politics, but institutions that ensure that the opinions serving as the views of the public are taken into account have yet to be created. Dahl explained that the plebiscitary aspect of American political life has grown without a corresponding improvement in its representative and deliberative aspects. In today's high-tech world, politicians and citizens are able to communicate directly with each other. Yet, this apparent increase in communication obliterates, or at least diminishes, the influence of institutions, organizations, and groups that traditionally have functioned as intermediaries between
citizens and political leaders. Hence, plebiscitary politics negatively affects the capacity of the political system to contemplate and critically reflect upon the range of issues involved.

Finally, Dahl asked whether we are witnessing a general decline in Western democracies and the capacity of their governments to solve major problems. In particular he noticed a widespread unwillingness to raise taxes or even maintain them at present levels to finance social programs and redistributive policies. A good case in point is health care. Both the Truman and Clinton administrations have proposed a national health plan. While raising taxes may have been possible for Truman, special interest groups impeded the necessary legislation. Clinton, apparently unwilling to raise taxes, also faces opposition from the continuing influence of these interest groups. Thus, it could be that then and now, windows of opportunity for better social programs may be closing.

Discussion

Institutions and Middle-Class Democracy

Karl asked to what extent is it contradictory for the United States to promote multiparty political systems in Latin America, in light of the serious deficiencies of its own political institutions. She also noticed increasing regional disparities. While in Europe and the United States limitations of democracy manifest themselves through the existing party systems, in Latin America the wave of new democracies prioritizes the creation of these very institutions in order to consolidate new democratic regimes.

Castañeda responded that the contrast between Latin American and European political party systems is paradoxical. While there is exaltation in Latin America over democratic rule, there is general disenchantment with democracy in Europe. One of the explanations resides in the fact that the problem of democratic rule in Europe and the United States is strongly related to the success of a broad middle-class society, while in Latin America it is tied to a broad and majoritarian sector of the population.

The Breadth of Political and Intellectual Debate

Referring to the breadth of the existing political debate, Whitehead agreed with both Castañeda and Dahl that the range of alternatives in healthy democracies is narrow. Speaking of the United States, he pointed out that race, religion, and legal rights are important issues for the population, but their controversial implications are not debated.

Conaghan called attention to powerful media organizations and asked to what extent they contribute to trivializing politics and creating a cynical population.
Dahl concurred with Whitehead, and added that the most important issue facing the United States in its entire history, racial discrimination, has never been sufficiently debated. Although race and gender issues have become more important, many aspects still need to be looked at.

Dahl commented that there is no evidence of a significant decline in the belief of democracy, though the belief in its efficiency is on the decline. According to Dahl, the population does distinguish between democracy and its effectiveness.

Final Statements

Castañeda asked whether the issue is not so much what has changed and what has not, but to look at what has always been characteristic of the United States. Maybe it is the case that the institutions, Congress, and political parties, simply do not work as well as they have in the past. The role of the US economy in the world provided the freedom to avoid hard choices for a long time. Although the United States was never a homogenous society, the traditional institutional mechanisms were largely built to serve the majority white middle-class population. While these functioned adequately in the past, they are beginning to dysfunction as society becomes increasingly heterogeneous, and need to be rebuilt to work for the whole society.

Dahl believed that the categories we use to talk about democracy have become far too simple. In light of the existing diversity—about 190 countries currently exist—we must create new categories that allow us to distinguish better. He also called for a rethinking of our existing institutions. If institutionalization is complete, but social and political problems remain and dissatisfaction among citizens is high, where does the country go? The nature of politics will continue to change, and how we confront the twenty-first century also depends on our ability to think of new institutions.

Session Rapporteur's Summary

Michael Shifter found general agreement among participants of a crisis in US politics. Particularly worrisome is the incapacity of American political institutions to provide a solid foundation for meaningful political representation and deliberative democracy, and the system’s increasing inability to respond effectively to the needs of the population. A thorough assessment of American democracy must also consider other factors, including the implications of corruption in the United States and the growing influence of the media on politics and on the public perception of politicians and politics.
Concluding Discussion

Issues and Themes

O'Donnell commented that the debate about the precise meaning of democracy recurred throughout the workshop. Dahl's powerful and empirically grounded definition of 'polyarchy' distinguishes between cases of democracy and nondemocracy. Most of the Southern Cone and Andean countries qualify as political democracies. In contrast, several aspects of Dahl's polyarchy are not met in countries such as Mexico and El Salvador. Comparisons among these different cases have proven quite useful for analysis.

Discussions also focused on cases where representative mechanisms exist and, to some degree, work efficiently. Some countries lack these characteristics and seem to embody other criteria. Here O'Donnell recalled his own concept of delegative democracy, in which elections are basically an instrument to empower leaders who believe they know what is best for the country. Some of these delegative democracies meet Dahl's criteria for polyarchy, but further institutionalization of democratic rules is seriously hindered.

The workshop demonstrated that variations among democratic countries are immense and that institutions are fundamental to representative democracies: what then, are the consequences for democracy when existing institutions are weak?

A conclusion of the conference was that political parties are in crisis not just in Latin America, but in general. Is the very concept of political parties as representative organizations in crisis?

O'Donnell concluded by reminding the participants that beyond institutions, democracy is about being able to live without fear. In many countries, people still live in fear and lack fair treatment in courts. These low-intensity citizenship countries call for determined actions aimed at guaranteeing basic human rights for all.

Lessons and Tasks Ahead

Lowenthal noted that the analysis of democratic governance is a serious challenge for social scientists. The discussions brought up complex cases that defy easy categorization.

Lowenthal also mentioned US efforts to promote democracy elsewhere. Instead of spending resources and energy on nondemocracies (such as Haiti and Cuba) and coup prevention, he called for more thinking about the construction of democracy and its consolidation.

Scully took issue with O'Donnell's remarks on political parties, disagreeing that parties are in crisis everywhere. Why is it that in some countries, such as the United States, political parties are not functioning well but it does not matter much, while in others like Chile, parties
function well and it does matter a great deal? The task, he said, is not to find a replacement for political parties, but to improve them with the help of civil society.

To consolidate democracy, Karl called for more attention to the degree to which civil society has gained control over the armed forces. She explained that the Central American cases are different from the rest of the countries discussed because Central American societies have moved from civil war to peace, while the other countries have made a transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. Referring to problems of accountability and civic fatigue, she called for more attention to identity politics. According to her, this notion will become important in Central America as organized groups rally around issues such as gender or religion.

Whitehead recalled O'Donnell's remarks on the universal validity of fundamental human rights. He commented that despite all the inequalities and exclusions, the Americas have a shared set of beliefs about national identity and traditions built into the political culture. This provides a symbolic resource for the installation, survival, and consolidation of democracy in the Americas.