

151

THE 1980 IMAGE-INDEX SURVEY
OF LATIN AMERICAN
POLITICAL DEMOCRACY

Kenneth F. Johnson

University of Missouri at St Louis and Emporia State University of Kansas

Every five years a survey of this sort is attempted with the goal of reflecting the "democratic weathervane" of Latin American politics. Since Russell Fitzgibbon launched the experiment in 1945, regular attempts have been made to tap the minds of expert panelists in a reputational evaluation of which countries are the most and least democratic. Many Latin American nations claim that political democracy is their goal (my understanding of democracy in theory and practice is alluded to in the notes below), although they choose to reach it via contrasting routes. Blatant dictatorships often use the plebiscite as a means of demonstrating that they enjoy popular approval and acclaim, and single-party "democracies" regularly give the appearance of popular support via controlled elections. Latin Americans may feel that North Americans have an excess baggage of ego and ethnocentricity in pretending to evaluate democracy to the south according to our criteria; that is probably a just reaction. But the Latin Americans do boast constitutional structures and theoretic pronouncements patterned after ours. They have also accepted considerable North American assistance and financial largesse in the alleged quest for the democratic "good life." And Latin American scholars frequently evaluate the status of political democracy in the so-called Anglo-American parliamentary states. Evaluating democracy is thus a two-way street, and the enterprise may yield mutual rewards and pitfalls.

As is customary, our panel of experts (see note 9) was asked to evaluate each of the Latin American republics according to the criteria that appear in the figure. Detailed instructions to guide (not coerce) the process were provided and have been discussed and reproduced in the publications cited in note 8. Despite unavoidable conceptual overlap and other methodological problems that have been acknowledged previously, the goal of maintaining the longevity of this study as a rough device for measuring "thrust" in Latin American politics was considered the controlling motive for continuing the study; in that spirit, my good colleagues participated once again.

Latin American Research Review

It is instructive to compare briefly perceptions of Latin American political democracy in 1980 and those of 1970.¹ In the latter decade some scholars believed that modernizing military regimes were emerging. The new soldiers were "progressive" and there appeared some reason for optimism. The military establishment which took over Peru in 1968 did seem bent on socioeconomic reform and it set a "pattern for new military rulers."² That was also the wisdom of the famous *Rockefeller Report*, which saw the centurions as capable of adapting their authoritarian traditions to the rising popular outcry for socioeconomic change. It was also argued that the legacy of the 1960s, i.e., President Kennedy's goals for change as embodied in the Alliance for Progress, had made an impact on the new military men of the day. Even the military training programs offered in the United States incorporated the ethic of change, non-Communist of course.³ But hopes that the modernizing military establishment would be progressive did not work out in all cases. In 1973 the Chilean military reversed that country's democratic tradition and created one of the bloodiest dictatorships in the world. The Chilean generals' reach extended even to Washington D.C., where their former ambassador to this country was assassinated in broad daylight. Thousands of Chileans died and were tortured. Elsewhere, the Uruguayan military ended that country's democratic system in the same year of Chile's military collapse and also with violent carnage.

By contrast, Peru's military leaders prepared the way for new elections which returned to power the very same man they had ousted in 1968, Fernando Belaunde Terry. Much the same had occurred with the military-to-civilian transition in neighboring Ecuador during 1979. Brazil's military regime under João Baptista Figueiredo showed a surprising willingness to soften existing authoritarian patterns of rule. By 1980 Brazil had been opened to restricted political competition and public criticism on a scale unknown since the hard-line and U.S.-supported coup of 1964. Amnesty was even declared for Brazil's exiles abroad. And Panamanian dictator Omar Torrijos stepped down in 1979 leaving behind him the Canal Treaty he had signed with the United States plus some of the formal trappings of democracy. So it is true that some generals emerging out of the 1970s did make ostensible contributions to modernization and to political democracy. But this was not true everywhere: while the Dominican Republic continued to grope toward political pluralism, Bolivia remained caught in the grip of military adventurism, with one barracks uprising following another.

With events such as these occurring in varying degrees of frequency throughout Latin America, it is difficult to be optimistic about the future of political democracy in that region. And here I am not arguing that democracy should occur, nor that it will bring with it the "good life." But since the Latin Americans continue to hold elections in

quest of the elusive democratic goal (or so they say), then my continuing task is to use the Image-Index as an imperfect guide to reflect the reputational degree to which Latin Americans are indeed achieving their declared goal.

There have been moments when military regimes took steps aimed at pluralistic democracy since the 1975 Image-Index was administered. Bolivian strongman General David Padilla turned over his government to the civilian interim president Guevara Arze in August 1979. At nearly the same time the Ecuadorian military turned over their government to the newly elected president Jaime Roldós Aguilera, who pledged to join Bolivia in making the Andean Pact nations a bastion for democracy. Those nations, including Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru, took the historic step of jointly opposing the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua and urged him to resign for the common good of the hemisphere. It is felt that the Andean Pact nations gave invaluable assistance in bringing an end to the Nicaraguan civil war in 1979 and in doing so they bolstered the cause of political democracy. Yet, as these lines are written in 1981, Bolivia has slipped once again into chaotic dictatorship, Colombia is threatened by internal strife, and Venezuela claims it is invaded by illegal aliens. All five nations are feeling one of the hemisphere's newer causes of socioeconomic instability—the narcotics wars that seem totally beyond the control of any national government.

Dictatorial governments in the hemisphere seek to legitimize themselves with cloaks of democratic popular approval. A September 1980 plebescite was staged in Chile to approve a constitution giving the Pinochet dictatorship greater powers, extended longevity, and the appearance of popular acclaim. However, some foreign journalists in Chile reported widespread evidence of fraud in bolstering the government's "victory" at the polls.⁴ General Pinochet was able to proclaim this vote as a great defeat for international Marxism.⁵ In Uruguay there was another plebescite several months after that of Chile. In December the Uruguayan voters got an honest vote count and they rejected a military-proposed constitution that would have given the generals a permanent role in that nation's executive power. Despite the voter rejection, the Uruguayan military continued to rule, a fact that gave rise to this perceptive editorial query in the United States:

Once South America's finest democracy, Uruguay has been ruled outright by the military for a half-dozen years, this in the name of national security . . . but since Chileans, in a carefully staged referendum in September, accepted a constitution perpetuating the military dictatorship, the military rulers of Argentina were contemplating similar means of institutionalizing their power. The vote in Uruguay should give them second thoughts. Why do dictatorships want popular approval anyway?⁶

Central America was undoubtedly the prime arena for the most dramatic of changes in the political life of Latin America since 1975. Nicaragua's revolutionary process reached fruition in July of 1979 when the dictator Anastasio Somoza fled the country after having bombed most of his nation's business community into oblivion. That fact is striking because the Sandinista revolution may be the first Marxist-led revolution in the hemisphere to win the wholehearted support of both the national business community and the Church. Seldom, if ever, has a dictatorship been so odious that the national chamber of commerce made cause with Marxist-led rebels. But this happened in Nicaragua, and with the revolutionary Christian left and most of the national Church hierarchy on their side, the Sandinista's victory became inevitable during the last months of the fighting. That many Nicaraguans now believe the Sandinista-dominated junta and its Council of State will not honor their pledged respect for pluralism within a democratic framework is a matter of growing concern. The Image-Index results for 1985 will be telling in this regard.

Spawned by the Nicaraguan revolution, a renewed insurgency and guerrilla war erupted in neighboring El Salvador and Guatemala. The outcomes of these processes are not foreseeable as of this writing. The commitment of the Reagan administration to aid the security forces of both nations will have its effect just as did Carter's refusal to prop up Somoza. Another element to ponder, however, is the renascent antiwar protest movement that has mushroomed in the United States following revelations of atrocities committed by the U.S.-backed security forces in El Salvador and elsewhere.

Socialist regimes seem to be realizing that they need a limited capitalist sector for the efficient production of key goods and services. Recent Cuban concessions to private agricultural enterprise and the Sandinista promise to allow a mixed socialist/capitalist economy underscore this fact. It will also, undoubtedly, generate some political pluralism. Municipal elections in Cuba plus pluralist participation in Nicaragua's Council of State are the evidence. Surely this does not excuse either Cuba or Nicaragua their infringements on freedom of the press, a key democratic tenet as this survey is intended to demonstrate. Nor is the myth of economic production a panacea. Here there is a major dilemma to be faced by democratic reformers in nations that have tried to emulate the Brazilian economic "miracle." That production plan has been amply demonstrated to have failed from the standpoint of socioeconomic justice. The dilemma is this: "Advocates of democratic reform face enormous difficulties. In many Latin American countries a demographic explosion is taking place while the economy relies on a capital-intensive technology that was developed in the labor-scarce states of Europe and North America—a combination that usually creates very high levels of

unemployment.⁷⁷ So out of this economic penury comes violent revolution against the regime, as in Central America. Mexico's burgeoning population is not being absorbed by its capital-intensive oil industry either. Should the pressure valve of clandestine worker migration into the United States be closed, Mexico could face major revolution from within.

Those are the forces that will shape the outlook for political democracy in Latin America during the decade of the 1980s. Whether democracy is pursued within a capitalist or socialist framework, or if it is even pursued at all, there is certain to be conflict flowing out of too many people trying to exist with too few resources, while alongside them rich elites, representing 20 percent or less of the total population, retain 50 percent or more of the available wealth.

The present survey results should be taken in the light of the foregoing comments about the thrust of Latin American political life in recent years. The methodology employed has been widely debated and discussed over the past thirty-five years and has been adequately explained in previous publications.⁸ Essentially it consists of quinquennial ratings by panels of experts of the reputational trends, i.e., scholarly images, of the fortunes of political democracy in Latin America. In the previous publications cited I have acknowledged the limitations of the method while introducing refinements intended to enhance its virtues. Here are the 1980 results of the Fitzgibbon-Johnson Image-Index survey that was conducted in nearly identical fashion to the 1975 version which appeared earlier, as cited in the *Latin American Research Review* (Summer 1976).

<i>Substantive Criteria for Evaluation</i>	<i>Select Criteria for Democracy</i>
1. Educational level	
2. Standard of living	
3. Internal unity	
4. Political maturity	
5. Freedom from foreign domination	
6. Freedom of press, speech, etc.	6. Freedom of press, speech, etc.
7. Free elections	7. Free elections
8. Freedom of political organization	8. Freedom of political organization
9. Independent judiciary	9. Independent judiciary
10. Handling of governmental funds	
11. Social legislation	
12. Degree of civilian supremacy	12. Degree of civilian supremacy
13. Freedom from ecclesiastical domination	
14. Governmental administration	
15. Local governmental autonomy	

160

Latin American Research Review

Substantive criteria for evaluation appear in the figure. Because of the unavoidable overlap between some of these criteria, five special or "select" criteria were chosen in 1975 for sharpening the focus of the experiment by stressing those criteria most intimately associated with political democracy, as opposed to the various conditions for it or the consequences flowing from it. Again, to avoid redundant methodological discussion, I refer the reader to the works cited above (note 8). It will be noted that when the total raw scores for the countries are ranked in table 2 according to *all* criteria, and then according to the *select* criteria, there is considerable difference in the rank orders of some countries. Table 1 contains the total raw scores by criterion for each of the twenty Latin American republics.

Since the 1975 survey Argentina dropped from fifth to eleventh place on all criteria, and to fifteenth place on the select criteria scale. This is a drastic change perhaps reflecting the status of human rights in that country. A similar reputational decline appears for Uruguay. Both Guatemala and El Salvador dropped notably on the select criteria scale, Cuba improved its image slightly, and Peru improved notably on the select criteria scale. Nicaragua made a notable improvement, reflecting expert confidence in the 1979 revolution. Apart from these there were

TABLE 1 *Scholarly Image of Political Democracy in Latin America for 1980: Country Criteria Raw Scores**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Argentina	341	312	246	178	296	163	100	146	170	220	218	89	283	255	187
Bolivia	120	110	160	112	177	118	116	158	139	134	151	88	258	143	130
Brazil	234	225	257	223	265	123	159	180	186	221	193	119	273	238	216
Chile	315	250	277	206	238	295	88	123	146	214	165	84	271	243	173
Colombia	235	220	247	266	270	357	304	308	271	229	233	304	231	227	225
Costa Rica	330	299	345	351	284	105	358	346	328	301	315	363	300	301	277
Cuba	317	243	321	255	167	259	111	118	153	264	337	265	310	269	220
Dominican Republic	183	182	253	218	184	252	270	261	230	209	208	250	254	208	193
Ecuador	174	181	229	209	236	151	260	248	223	215	215	221	231	208	196
El Salvador	165	151	156	128	171	150	122	143	148	157	167	124	237	169	147
Guatemala	136	149	149	130	176	101	132	145	142	151	142	120	226	160	147
Haiti	76	75	161	89	170	199	81	83	102	98	97	159	224	105	109
Honduras	138	143	208	175	171	199	177	182	176	170	163	145	237	166	164
Mexico	249	238	309	299	284	275	250	248	244	212	274	347	305	240	207
Nicaragua	184	172	271	216	254	238	167	196	204	245	284	239	279	222	214
Panama	238	231	276	220	221	236	196	194	193	190	233	173	269	205	188
Paraguay	131	131	221	129	198	106	91	103	110	124	121	118	237	149	134
Peru	197	193	229	236	244	269	289	288	242	229	245	231	251	218	204
Uruguay	335	288	274	211	233	138	105	143	163	210	227	109	278	234	183
Venezuela	275	293	310	324	301	337	355	349	290	263	285	327	290	264	248

*Derived from author's computer printout.

163

RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

TABLE 2 Image Index, 1980: Rank Orderings

All Criteria		Select Criteria	
1. Costa Rica	4855	1. Costa Rica	1752
2. Venezuela	4511	2. Venezuela	1658
3. Mexico	3981	3. Colombia	1482
4. Colombia	3865	4. Mexico	1364
5. Peru	3565	5. Peru	1319
6. Cuba	3455	6. Dominican Rep.	1270
7. Nicaragua	3385	7. Ecuador	1204
8. Dominican Rep.	3362	8. Nicaragua	1044
9. Ecuador	3298	9. Panama	922
10. Panama	3263	10. Honduras	879
11. Argentina	3204	11. Brazil	850
12. Brazil	3195	12. Cuba	752
13. Uruguay	3131	13. Guatemala	689
14. Chile	2916	14. El Salvador	683
15. Honduras	2614	15. Argentina	668
16. El Salvador	2336	16. Uruguay	658
17. Guatemala	2255	17. Bolivia	619
18. Bolivia	2114	18. Chile	564
19. Paraguay	2103	19. Paraguay	528
20. Haiti	1730	20. Haiti	526

Rho = .90 and is significant beyond the .01 level.

no major changes since 1975 and the value of Rho continued to show close association between the two rank orderings in the figure.

Results of the "power-rating-index" that was initiated in 1975, and repeated in 1980, will be forthcoming from Miles Williams and myself in the reasonably near future. In a footnote I wish to thank most warmly all the scholars who made the present research note possible with their valuable collaboration. As always your criticism and suggestions are welcome.⁹

NOTES

1. I set forth a statement on political democracy, drawing on the writings of a number of theorists, in the 1975 report of the Image-Index that appeared in LARR 11, no. 2 (1976). Briefly, the schema consisted of these criteria: (1) popular sovereignty under impartial rules; (2) a clear and enforced distinction between that which is public and that which is private; (3) free and honest popular elections, speech, and press; (4) public accountability-sanctions via recall initiative; (5) stakes in the political process are not so high as to render compromise by vote impossible; and (6) the state has a humanistic goal thrust (it serves the people rather than robbing and repressing them for elite enrichment). The reader is referred to the LARR article cited above, especially pp. 137-38, for fuller discussion.
2. Georgie Anne Geyer writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 1970.
3. Ibid.

164a

Latin American Research Review

4. Mary Helen Spooner writing in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 19 October 1980.
5. *Diario Las Américas* (Miami), 13 September 1980.
6. From an editorial in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 3 December 1980.
7. Tom J. Farer, "Reagan's Latin America," *The New York Review of Books*, 19 March 1981, p. 15. Many of the advocates of democratic reform alluded to by Farer are likely to have home countries which have received U.S. aid and assistance. Recent research has shown that such aid does not always go to the most benevolent and democratic regimes. As Lars Schoultz has written, U.S. military assistance in particular has "tended to flow disproportionately to Latin American governments which torture their citizens" ("U.S. Foreign Policy and Human Rights Violations in Latin America," *Comparative Politics* [January 1981], p. 155).
8. See, in particular, my article in Wilkie and Ruddle, eds., *Methodology in Quantitative Latin American Studies* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Latin American Studies, 1976). See also Johnson and Williams, *Democracy, Power and Intervention*, Special Studies No. 17 (Tempe: Arizona State University, Center for Latin American Studies, 1978).
9. William S. Ackroyd, Social Sciences, University of Arizona; Marvin Alisky, Political Science, Arizona State University; Charles D. Ameringer, History, Pennsylvania State University; John Bailey, Government, Georgetown University; Enrique A. Balovra, Political Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; J. W. Barchfield, Economics, Southern Oregon State College; C. Richard Bath, Political Science, University of Texas at El Paso; Marvin D. Bernstein, History, SUNY at Buffalo, Amherst Campus; Robert E. Biles, Government, Sam Houston State University; Jan K. Black, Social Sciences, University of New Mexico; George I. Blanksten, Political Science, Northwestern University; Cole Blasier, Political Science, University of Pittsburgh; John A. Booth, Social Sciences, University of Texas at San Antonio; Winfield J. Burggraaff, History, University of Missouri; David Bushnell, History, University of Florida; Roderic A. Camp, Political Science, Central College; William J. Carroll, III, Social Sciences, University of Arizona; Henry A. Christopher, Political Science, St. Louis University; Richard L. Clinton, Social Sciences, Oregon State University; Juan del Aguila, Political Science, Emory University; Edward C. Epstein, Political Science, University of Utah; Gaston A. Fernandez, Political Science, St. Olaf College; Julio A. Fernandez, Political Science, SUNY at Cortland; David W. Foster, Foreign Languages, Arizona State University; Michael F. Fry, Library Science, Tulane University; Charles Fleener, History, St. Louis University; Federico G. Gil, Political Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Jo M. Griesgraber, Social Sciences, WOLA, Washington, D.C.; Stephen Haber, History, Los Angeles; Howard Handelman, Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Ronald G. Hellman, Social Sciences, New York; Gary Hoskin, Political Science, SUNY at Buffalo; Philip L. Kelly, Political Science, Emporia State University; Michael Kryzaneck, Political Science, Bridgewater State College; William LeoGrande, Government, American University; Naomi Lindstrom, Foreign Languages, University of Texas at Austin; Sheldon B. Liss, History, University of Akron; Donald Mabry, History, Mississippi State University; R. Michael Malek, History, University of South Alabama; John D. Martz, Political Science, Pennsylvania State University; Ronald H. McDonald, Political Science, Syracuse University; Sandra McGee, History, N. Manchester, Indiana; James W. McKenney, Political Science, Wichita State University; Richard Millett, History, Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville; Robert A. Monson, Political Science, University of Arkansas; Stephen P. Mumme, Political Science, University of Arizona; Martin C. Needler, Political Science, University of New Mexico; Neale J. Pearson, Political Science, Texas Tech University; Robert L. Peterson, Political Science, University of Texas at El Paso; Adalberto J. Pinelo, Social Sciences, Northern Kentucky University; Guy Poitras, Political Science, Trinity University; Peter L. Reich, History, Los Angeles; Riordan Roett, Political Science, SAIS, Johns Hopkins University; J. Mark Ruhl, Political Science, Dickinson College; Lars Schoultz, Political Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Carl Schwarz, Political Science, Fullerton College; Mitchell A. Seligson, Political Science, University of Arizona; John W. Sloan, Political Science, University of Houston; Peter G. Snow, Political Science, University of Iowa; Charles L. Stansifer, History, University of Kansas; Dale Story, Political Science, Uni-

16464

RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

versity of Texas at Arlington; Andres Suarez, Political Science, University of Florida; Joseph S. Tulchin, History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Fred Turner, Political Science, University of Connecticut; Franz A. von Sauer, Political Science, Oklahoma State University; Brian F. Wallace, Political Science; Francis Marion College; Richard J. Walter, History, Washington University; Robert Wesson, Political Science, Hoover Institution; Howard Wiarda, Political Science, University of Massachusetts; James W. Wilkie, History, University of California at Los Angeles; Edward J. Williams, Political Science, University of Arizona; Miles Williams, Political Science, Central Missouri State University; R. L. Woodward, Jr., History, Tulane University.

Addenda: Robert Bezdek, University of Texas, Corpus Christi; Stephen Haber is History, Los Angeles State University.