

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN LATIN AMERICA

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If we consider part of the 80's decade and the 90's, the main concern of most of the Latin-American countries lay in making the transitions to democracy possible. Two decades after, the main challenge is not reduced to achieve a fully democratic political system, but to ensure good quality politics.

Mainwaring and Scully edited and published 'Democratic Governance in Latin America', a book that tries to quite clearly present a *state of the art* of the regional reality in the first years of the twenty-first century, submitting works that go beyond fundamental politics, economics and public policies analysis. This accurate text brings together different specialists not only from the '*world of academics*', but also thinkers, intellectuals who play or have played relevant positions at a high political level in their respective countries.

Those points of view certainly enrich any analysis about the central theme of the book, which has to do with the "democratic governance".

The introductory part of the book made by the editors alongside Jorge Vargas Cullell, conceive *democratic governance* in terms of the success of public policies implemented by governments, that is to say, in the ability to provide goods and services and to guarantee certain rights for the welfare of citizens within democratic institutions.

It is possible to think of a restrictive approach of the initial statement, given that is circumscribed to the improvement of the efficiency of the public sector, however, authors offer a methodological proposal consisting in a *measuring of success of governance* applied to several coun-

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tries of the region and that consists of nine dimensions that go beyond the procedures. The dimensions are as follows: level of democracy, rule of the law, containment of corruption, economic growth, inflation, job creation, poverty, education and citizen security.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part considers the regional context and focuses analysis on the level of success of the governments of their public policies. The second section refers to the national cases studies and their level of success in the matters of social policy. The third one puts together two final chapters that deliver conclusions and an urge to draw lessons regarding democratic governance in Latin America.

De Gregorio exhibits his chapter from a strong defense of the free market and economic growth in Latin America, analyzing a group of reforms that involved, among other measures, tax expenses control, decline of public expense, privatization of public enterprises and utilities, market's deregulation to motivate competition, etc. In the 90's, many governments of the region, with the exception of Chile, managed to deploy a large part of these measures, to address severe macroeconomic imbalances that came from the last decade.

In retrospective, these economic resolutions have not been exempt from criticism and, as Rodriguez emphasizes in its chapter, some of them are focused

on the type of a *mold* criteria, as he points out, "*one size fits all*". In other words, he gives importance on framing unique recipes, with a strong economist tone, leaving aside social reasons, and above all, the institutional political framework of the countries.

That is why, following this reasoning, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) carried out an internal effort, not programmatic and not idealized, defined as the "*productive transformation with equity*", as a single solution to all regional issues in a way to counteract against the applied model until then.

Foxley's considerations on the market and the State, has generated great debates on the future of the State itself. Regrettably, these discussions have had an ideological bias, turning around its size. The author believes that the size of the State is a false dilemma. The experiences in Latin America for almost fifty years point to the need of having a smaller State, but the complexity of the problems facing our society, and the profound imbalances, requires a more intelligent, strategic, regulator State, a generator of equal opportunities.

This raises the need for a reform of State performed in carried out in depth. The feasibility of this goal collides with three obstacles: first, the idealization of the topic; second; the tendency to consider that the modernization of the State is limited to the public services and

their management; and third, the low priority of this objective among government programs.

The electorate requests health, education, housing, quality of life in the cities, citizen security, protection of the environment, regional development and other priorities that configure the electoral platforms. Unfortunately, those requests are made without noticing that the compliance of such a complex variety range of objectives requires a new State with a modern capacity to formulate adequate well-timed public policies for the solution of these problems.

The cases' analysis that perform Huber and Stevens in his chapter, taking assorted elements of regimes in the region show successful results in the field of social policy. It is considered that Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica represent the most successful cases in Latin America. This is due, considering their specific historical backgrounds, to the consolidation of its party system as well as the economic structural reforms applied at the beginning of the eighties decade.

However, despite this relative success, the authors make an invitation to question the evidently economic scrutiny of the analysis of social policies, calling for a greater leading role of other social sciences in order to provide more inclusive solutions to increasingly complex issues and that go beyond a simple economic analysis.

Brinks executes an analysis in his chapter that attend to the in-

stitutional design and the judicial efficiency in five cases of human rights, emphasizes that we face a reality that is, socially, strikingly uneven and adds up an almost non-existent presence of citizen networks of support. This block, by itself, the advances of the institutional reforms that guarantee the efficiency of the judicial system.

The chapter addressed by Navia and Walker gives a general overview of the regional political developments and the quality of democracy. It points up that there are two obviously different flows to cope with the neoliberal reforms implemented in the 90's in the region. The first one, a populist reform based on politicians personal agendas and a noticeable internal leaderships; the second one, a non-populist reform centered on the strength of its institutions that have had certain corrections in the neoliberal model, to adapt them to the specificities of each reality so its sustainability can be ensured.

Finally, they emphasize in a series of articles disseminated in the region over the last years that widespread the expansion of the left wing populist wave. This situation according to authors is not supported in reality and to prove it, they point a couple of countries as examples to deny it. They perform a fundamental distinction regarding the association among political institutions, populism and democracy.

Alan Angell analyzes the case of Chile and the success in its

transition process and democracy consolidation in the 1990s. However he warns that this experience, many times acclaimed in the region, can hardly be applied as a model to other realities that do not have a strong state as the Chilean. On the other hand, Angell stresses that Chile has high levels of citizen dissatisfaction with democracy and institutional issues not yet resolved to improve its governance.

In this case, democracy is a disconcerting paradox. On one hand, it extends and is legitimated by the world, and on the other hand, consolidated democracies, some mature and others not so much, show a considerable disappointment and discredit on their institutions. Curiously, the causes of this discredit are the same elements that collaborated on the democracy expanding, such as the impact of capitalism and the globalization of social life.

The chapter examined by Seligson and Franzoni presents another case of success in the region, Costa Rica. However, it puts in evidence that despite a rich history of governance, the implementation of neoliberal policies in the country caused that broad social sectors did not feel benefited with the system and that only a few take advantage of it, creating a noticeable division and conflict.

The former president of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, defends the structural policies of economic reforms based on his own experience as president of Brazil in

the nineties. He considers that the Brazilian experience is successful given that he consolidated democratic governance in the country. However, he underlines that knowing the successful experience of his country, not all the implemented actions are transferable to another country, i.e. all decisions in this regard must consider the reality and the specific context of each one. In summary, there is no single recipe for success.

The book concludes with the analysis of the General Secretary of the *Organization of American States* (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, who has some very interesting reflections regarding democratic governance in Latin America, highlighting three central ideas. The first one, governance is consolidated with more democracy and not with limitations of democratic rights. Secondly, governments must have the capacity to govern with greater effectiveness and finally, consolidating a strong institution is an essential condition for ensuring the sustainable democratic governance in our countries over time.

Finally, the editors conclude that for the majority of Latin-American countries, the process of democracy consolidation and governance has turned out to be complex, producing a variety of experiences with very different levels of success between one and another.

Without doubt, this compilation is a mandatory reference to understand the changes and the future

challenges for the State and its institutions, to ensure good governance and the quality of democracy in Latin America. The prime responsibility for the maintenance of the governance resides in the State itself, so for its achievement, State must interact with civil society, the private sector and the different social and economic agents.

Complementing the final reflections of Mainwaring and Scully it is imperative to adequately, focus the problem of governance. It is easy to fall into the temptation of circumscribing the problem simply to the improvement of government and its ability to manage the process of economic development and to manage the efficiency of the public sector.

There are more deep and relevant variables to consider such as stability, legitimacy and governance of our political regimes. It is worth to say, a broad systemic approach surpassing the restricted and instrumental gaze. This book precisely provides us with some answers to the great questions that will continue to emerge on the governance in Latin America.