

Transition to democracy in latin america essay (book review)

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



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Democracy simply means the rule by simple people. It was created as a solution to abuse of power by rulers. Democracy as opposed to other forms of governments guarantees basic human rights to every individual and ensures that there is separation of powers between different state institutions. Moreover, unlike other forms of governments, it grants sufficient freedom of speech, mass media, opinion and press among other rights.

Wisdom literature sufficiently demonstrates that there has never been any harmony between progress and authoritarianism. On the other hand, democracy guarantees progress through transparency given the fact that it does legitimize public policies since it is based on mutual deliberation and negotiation of interests.

In Latin American, international trade alone has not guaranteed the leveling effect on the remuneration of factors of production. This end can only be achieved through democratic governance. This article will discuss factors that threaten smooth transition to democracy in Latin America.

Most economies in Latin America flourished during the sixties as a result of direct contribution of foreign investment, domestic private sector and public investment. Despite widespread economic gains during this period, one problem still persisted, transparent and equitable distribution of these financial benefits to the wider public.

To demonstrate political autonomy to the outer world, Latin American countries realized that they needed a transparent political framework

sensitive enough to the interests of its people and this could only be achieved through democracy (Calderon, 2008).

Democratic transition and cultural reforms taking place in Latin America has elicited feelings of dissatisfaction and disappointment as well as increased expectations of sustainable progress and change that is certain to be initiated by democracy which is perceived by many to be the ideal form of government. People are able to freely express their feelings of dissatisfaction and disappointment by being more critical and open minded as a result of increased public spaces for dialogue, conflict and participation.

In part, political crisis being experienced in Latin America as a result of increased independence among the citizens can lead to renewed development and democratization (Calderon, 2008). Institutions and equity will finally have to adjust to change and reconfiguration taking place in the region. Equity and poverty are two social problems that politicians must confront if they are to be able to maintain a sustainable politico-institutional balance.

Development of democracy in Latin America has often been undermined by politico-institutional risks and crisis situations occurring in the region. These problems need to be addressed by creating a link between the society and institutions. These risks make it extremely difficult to consolidate democracies in the region. The relationship between institutions and society is dependent on how well people's expectations are managed.

If mismanaged, there could be civil unrest especially in presence of poor economic conditions and fragile public institutions. To enhance consolidation of democracy in the region, it would therefore be paramount to understand the nature of political changes taking place and their resulting benefits before searching for solutions to democratic development.

Intermediation and representation systems in this region face major criticisms from the people. Nobody trusts intermediation mechanisms and political parties anymore. Systems of representation are prone to reconfiguration given the emergence of movements composed of critical, independent and thoughtful citizens who go to great lengths to demand for recognition, gender balance and local participation.

These problems occur as a result of political parties' inability to represent people institutionally. It happens that most Latin Americans believe in a democracy that has many political parties, ironically, only a clique of them trusts those parties.

People are asking the government to expand democratic institutions and be more involved in the management of development. Through this, the state can work towards equity and social integration so as to strengthen the economy in terms of globalization. Most people in Latin America support government involvement in development as opposed to privatization so as to ensure equitable distribution of wealth. Citizen oversight over public authorities is seen as a key factor to increased transparency and reduced corruption.

Inequality and poverty pose a great challenge to transition to democracy. These problems are the center of socio-economic changes and influence democratic governance to a great extent. Latin America is one of the most unequal regions in the world. The gap between the rich and the poor is ever widening. The disparities between various subsections of the society in this region is appalling i. e. socio-economic groups, ethnic groups, sexes etc (Calderon, 2008). for instance, women with similar education to men earn relatively more.

Poverty mostly affects the indigenous people who in most cases live in rural areas. Social inequality compounds the problem of governance in the region since most leaders dominate their people instead of guiding them. This problem can only be solved when policies aimed at empowering the poor and improving their civic capabilities are put in place and implemented.

When people's expectations are not met, conflict and dissatisfaction are likely to occur. This situation can be aggravated by the extreme levels of poverty and inequality discussed earlier thereby undermining democratic governance. In this case, people dismiss promises under market economy and political programmes as unrealistic and may cause instability if proper checks and balances are not put in place.

Institutional crises occurring as result of poor governance by the ruling class could undermine democratic governance. Structural poverty and uneven distribution of income pose as a challenge to democracy in Latin America (Calderon, 2008). The elites in this region have been reluctant to address the

issue of poverty. Corruption in Judicial system and National congress in countries like Honduras make democratic governance to be all the more impossible.

Increase in social conflicts in Latin America is an issue of great democratic concern. Conflicts arising in work places, public protests and reactions have continued to hinder the state and institutions from attaining the objective of social progress, integration and recognition.

People have undertaken more drastic measures to express their dissatisfaction to the government. It is not uncommon to hear of protest movements such as Movement to Socialism in countries like Bolivia and elsewhere who come together to oppose a government that they feel is unable to cater for their needs. This automatically weakens progress made through democratic governance.

Governance is understood best by looking at how spaces of communication relate to political change. Media, especially television, cell phones and the internet are taking central role in politics. Media has become the space through which power struggle takes place. Most Latin Americans have put all their trust in radio and television media houses and most recently, the internet.

The impact of media on politics in this region was felt when President Lucio Gutierrez resigned as a result of mass protests organized against him through common cell phone text messages and email (Calderon, 2008). This

indicates a trend of audience democracy that is being perpetuated by media throughout the region.

Calderon, F. (2008). A Historic Turning Point. Political Change and the Socio-Institutional Situation in Latin America. *Cepal Review Journal*, 96 (3), 123-136. Web.