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## Democratic Governance and the 'New Left'

## Repoliticizing Latin America: The Revival of Populist and Leftist Alternatives

By Kenneth M. Roberts

Over the past decade, popular social and political movements have been revived in much of Latin America following an extended period of fragmentation and demobilization. Popular movements had been placed on the defensive for most of the 1980s and 1990s by political and economic events largely beyond their control—in particular, the region-wide debt crisis, market-oriented economic reforms, and restrictive democratic transitions. In recent years, however, indigenous groups, workers, and the urban and rural poor have demonstrated a renewed capacity to engage in collective action and political mobilization. Grass-roots protest movements have driven presidents from office in Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and they have eclipsed or realigned traditional party systems in a number of countries. Meanwhile, a diverse set of populist and/or leftist leaders have been elected president in Venezuela (1998), Chile (2000 and 2006), Brazil (2002 and 2006), Argentina (2003), Uruguay (2004), Bolivia (2005), Peru (2006), Ecuador (2006), and Nicaragua (2006)—countries which comprise nearly two-thirds of the regional population.

This revival of popular and leftist movements has shaken up Latin America's post-Cold War political landscape, and it has startled scholars and policymakers alike. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the diffusion of the so-called "Washington Consensus"<sup>1</sup> for free market or neoliberal reform,<sup>2</sup> many came to believe in the definitive triumph of political and economic liberalism—or democracy and capitalism—in the region. Colburn,<sup>3</sup> for example, claimed that the left had "all but vanished" by the 1990's, placing Latin America at "the end of politics," if not Fukuyama's "end of history."<sup>4</sup> With labor unions in decline, populist and leftist parties in disarray, and neoliberal technocrats in control of policymaking arenas, Latin America appeared to be locking in a new model of development based on market individualism and global economic integration. This model of development was strongly supported by the United States and international financial institutions, and it seemingly confirmed the uncontested character of U.S. hegemony in the region following the demise of the Soviet bloc.

Today, however, the "end of politics" appears to have been little more than a

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Kenneth M. Roberts is professor of government at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. He is the author of *Deepening Democracy: The Modern Left and Social Movements in Chile and Peru* (Stanford University Press 1998), along with a forthcoming book from Cambridge University Press on party system change in Latin America's neoliberal era. His research is focused on inequality and political representation in Latin America.



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respite—or, more accurately, a critical juncture that realigned states, markets, and societal actors in ways that laid a foundation for new patterns of political contestation. Latin America, in short, has been “repoliticized” since the late 1990s: popular mobilization has been revived, ideological and programmatic competition has returned to party systems, and policymaking arenas have been opened to the input of new actors and ideas. This repoliticization cannot be equated with the end of the neoliberal era, given the uncertain political and economic viability of the alternatives in gestation. Nevertheless, repoliticization signifies that the Washington Consensus has been punctured, and that neither U.S. hegemony nor neoliberal policies will reign uncontested—surely, a significant shift in the region’s political landscape.

But what explains this shift, and what are its implications for Latin American societies and hemispheric relations? And how are we to make sense of the bewildering variety of political forms encountered within this revival of popular and leftist movements? Indeed, is it even possible to consider such disparate leaders as Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and Chile’s Ricardo Lagos as representatives of same general political phenomenon? To address these questions, this essay begins by exploring the dual “fault lines”<sup>5</sup> in Latin American democracy that have contributed to

the rise of new popular and leftist movements—namely, the tensions between democratic citizenship and social inequality or exclusion, on the one hand, and the contradictions between democratic governance and the erosion of national sovereignty, on the other. It then proceeds to examine the diversity of political expressions found within the revival of popular and leftist movements, moving beyond the dichotomous categorization of “radical populist” and “social democratic” subtypes that structures much of the debate on the topic.<sup>6</sup>

### THE FAULT LINES OF DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

Latin America’s dual political and economic transitions in the 1980’s combined with the collapse of the Soviet bloc to create a post-Cold War regional order with three primary cornerstones: electoral democracy, free markets, and U.S. hegemony. In Washington, this alignment of political and economic liberalism was presumed to be a natural expression of their intrinsic complementarity—a presumption that was powerfully reinforced by the parallel dual transitions in post-Communist Eurasia. Latin America’s historical record, however, suggests that such an alignment of political and econom-

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The Latin American Program’s Project on Democratic Governance and the ‘New Left’ in Latin America explores political trends and policy outcomes in eight countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The Project aims to understand how or why left governments have come to power at this moment in the region’s history, and to assess the implications for democratic governance of specific public policies in the areas of social welfare, political inclusion, citizen participation, accountability, and human rights.

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ic liberalism is likely to be tenuous and fraught with contradictions; indeed, the post-Cold War liberal order may prove to have been more of an anomaly than a natural expression of congruence or elective affinities. The region boasts a long history of economic liberalism attached to oligarchic rule, and the contemporary manifestation of “neo”-liberalism is indelibly marked by its political birth defects in Pinochet’s Chile, no matter how many presidents with democratic credentials followed his lead in the 1980s. Likewise, there is a long tradition of popular movements that are democratizing (in the sense of politically incorporating the working and lower classes) but illiberal in their economic and political forms. Classical expressions of populism, such as Peronism in Argentina, marked the onset of mass politics in Latin America, and thus the very possibility of democracy; yet they clashed with the individualist thrust of liberal norms in both the marketplace and democratic procedural arenas.

Indeed, the coincidence of political and economic liberalism in the 1980s and 90s was facilitated by—and quite possibly predicated upon—the demise of the mass party-labor blocs associated with state-led capitalist development in the middle of the 20th century. This demise helped clear the way to power of neoliberal technocrats, while insulating them from popular democratic pressures once they had gained control over the levers of public policy. Technocratic autonomy was reinforced by the narrowing of viable macroeconomic policy options in the context of the debt crisis, hyperinflationary pressures, and tightening global market constraints. By the end of the 1980s historic statist or labor-based populist parties had become sponsors of technocratic market reform in countries like Mexico, Bolivia, Argentina, Costa Rica, and Venezuela, often in defiance of their electoral mandates.<sup>7</sup> In so doing they turned the conventional wisdom derived from the Chilean and Southern Cone experience on its head: far from requiring the iron hand of authoritarian rule to overcome popular resistance

to market competition, neoliberal reform could be advanced by the democratic legitimacy and fiscal discipline spawned by competitive elections.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, such a liberal equilibrium—whereby free markets are democratically sustained and reproduced—is vulnerable to several destabilizing forces. Prominent among these are financial crises (such as those in Brazil in 1998 and Argentina in 2001–02) and the renewal of popular mobilization (as in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia). The former is a risk attendant to liberalized capital markets; the latter is a latent response to the dual fault lines of liberal democracy in contemporary Latin America. The first of these fault lines concerns the inherent tension between democratic citizenship rights and the extreme forms of social inequality or exclusion found in Latin America. Citizens who possess the right to vote, assemble, and speak out often demand that states provide a measure of protection from certain forms of market insecurities—that is, that they establish rights of social citizenship as the natural complement to political and civil rights.<sup>9</sup> Rights of social citizenship that were created under populism—such as employment security, old age insurance, collective bargaining rights, etc.—were often eroded as states relinquished regulatory and redistributive responsibilities during the transition to neoliberalism. Although this transition undermined the capacity of the poor to organize politically against social exclusion, demobilization need not be a permanent condition.<sup>10</sup> Popular mobilization has increased since the late 1990s, and while it often includes a different set of actors and issues from the class-based movements that took center stage during the populist era, it has nevertheless taken direct aim at the social deficits of new democratic regimes. These deficits include a regional poverty rate of over 40 percent, nearly half of all workers toiling in the informal sector, and an average Gini index of inequality that stands at .542, far above the world average of .381.<sup>11</sup>

A second democratic fault line concerns the erosion of national sovereignty and the extreme



forms of political and economic dependency embedded in the new liberal order. Since democracy presumes self-government, it stands in tension with many forms of economic transnationalization found in Latin America—and thus, implicitly, with U.S. hegemony in the region. Democracy is diminished when global markets dictate or severely restrict the policy options of national governments, and citizens often expect states to defend national policy autonomy and local control over economic and natural resources. It is hardly surprising, then, that the revival of popular mobilization in Latin America has not only repoliticized social inequalities, but also resurrected expressions of economic nationalism that frontally challenge both U.S. hegemony and market-based globalization.

It must be recognized, however, that these fault lines, while present throughout the region, have not elicited a uniform pattern of popular response. Social mobilization has been strong and sustained in some countries, but muted, fragmented, or episodic in others. Similarly, resistance to market insecurities has been mobilized through institutionalized partisan and electoral channels in some countries, while in others it is manifested through extra-institutional forms of social protest—“on the streets,” so to speak. Most important, perhaps, the nature of the challenges posed by renewed popular mobilization to the three central pillars of the liberal order—electoral democracy, free markets, and U.S. hegemony—vary widely across the region. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explain the sources of this variation, what follows is a preliminary attempt to identify and categorize it.

### BEYOND POPULISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY: EXPLAINING POLITICAL DIVERSITY IN LATIN AMERICA

The revival of populist and leftist alternatives has generated considerable scholarly debate about the causes, significance, and forms of political change

in Latin America. While some of these alternatives clearly belong to the region’s storied populist tradition, others have roots in a Marxist tradition that has redefined itself and spawned a variety of offshoots. To sort through this variation, it is critical to recognize that in Latin America, as elsewhere, “leftist” and “populist” are separate analytical categories that sometimes, but not always, overlap. The defining features of the political Left are a commitment to using popular participation and state power to alleviate socioeconomic inequalities and protect individuals or groups from market insecurities. Populism, on the other hand, refers to the top-down political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders who challenge established elites (either political or economic) on behalf of an ill-defined *pueblo*, or “the people.”

Leftist leaders who subordinate or bypass partisan intermediaries to appeal directly to mass constituencies may also be considered populist; those held accountable to autonomous social movements or institutionalized bases of support are not. Similarly, populist leaders can be located on the ideological Left when they challenge the prerogatives of capital and redistribute income towards the poor. By nature, however, populism tends to be ideologically eclectic and malleable, and some variants—particularly those which combine militarism with authoritarianism, cross-class alliances, and exclusive expressions of nationalism or racism—have more in common with the ideological Right than the Left. Consequently, populist figures such as Perón or, in contemporary times, Ollanta Humala in Peru, cannot easily be located along the conventional Left-Right ideological spectrum. Indeed, they may even draw support from both ends of the ideological continuum. The revival of leftist and populist alternatives in contemporary Latin America may thus be rooted in similar reactions against technocratic neoliberalism, but they are hardly synonymous, and the latter should not be presumed to be a subset of the former.

To elaborate, political diversity within Latin America’s “left turn” is sometimes reduced to a

core differentiation between social democratic and populist alternatives.<sup>12</sup> This dichotomy is problematic on several fronts, however. First, it is too quick to attach familiar labels to new phenomena in different contexts. The social democratic label, for example, is often attached to contemporary governments in Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil, where relatively institutionalized leftist parties have been elected to national office behind moderate reformist agendas. Like European social democracy, these parties embrace liberal democracy and multi-class alliances, and they seek to redress inequalities through social programs rather than large-scale property redistribution. In the aftermath of neoliberal restructuring, however, labor movements in these countries are dramatically weaker than those which prevailed historically in the West European prototypes of social democracy. The densely organized class constituencies that provided a foundation for redistributive policies and corporatist patterns of interest intermediation in European social democracy are thus lacking in Latin America. Likewise, in light of prevailing global market constraints (and the absence of extensive oil rents), it is unlikely that these new leftist governments in Latin America will have the political capacity to redistribute income, decommodify labor markets, and construct welfare states on the scale associated with European social democracy. Latin American variants of democratic social reform may thus require a more contextualized set of conceptual tools for the purpose of comparative analysis.

Second, and even more problematic, the conventional dichotomy lumps together too many disparate cases under the populist concept. Indeed, it transforms populism into a residual category for the more economically radical or less politically institutionalized alternatives, such as those in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia, despite dramatic differences in the nature of leader-mass relations in these countries. So used, populism becomes more of a political epithet than an analytical construct—a crude signifier employed to demarcate the “good” or “responsible” left from

the demagogues and “idiots” (in Vargas Llosa’s contemptuous parlance). Such usage conflates political and economic characteristics that are analytically distinct and may or may not go together. It also tends to delegitimize socioeconomic alternatives that depart from neoliberal orthodoxy without submitting them to serious scrutiny—in essence, artificially reducing Latin America’s options to one or another variant of populism or neoliberalism. Scholarly understanding would be better served by conceptualizing populism in political terms—as a mode of political mobilization or linkage between leaders and mass constituencies—and then developing a more fine-grained set of analytical tools to assess statist, nationalist, or redistributive policies that challenge neoliberal orthodoxy.

By focusing on political and organizational dimensions, it quickly becomes apparent that several quite different patterns exist within the revival of populist and leftist alternatives in Latin America. A good starting point is the basic distinction between governments formed by established parties—i.e., parties founded prior to the adoption of neoliberal structural adjustment policies—and those formed by new political movements or parties that emerged during the period of economic transition or its aftermath. Where established parties have played a lead role, a further differentiation can be made between those with roots in Latin America’s Marxist or socialist tradition and those which originated in the populist tradition under import substitution industrialization (ISI).

One sub-type includes the aforementioned cases of Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay—countries where socialist or Marxist parties that were formed prior to the adoption of neoliberal reforms have come to power in the aftermath period. These cases share several features in common. First, in each case the governing leftist party (or coalition, in the Uruguayan case) has undergone an extensive process of ideological “renovation” and moderation. The Chilean Socialist Party, the Workers’ Party in Brazil, and the Broad



Front in Uruguay are all, in essence, post-Marxist parties. This process of moderation followed the intense ideological polarization of the 1960's and 1970's, when significant portions of the Left in each country challenged the legitimacy of liberal democracy, defined socialism in class terms, flirted with revolutionary tactics, and ended up being crushed by bureaucratic-authoritarian military regimes.<sup>13</sup> In each case, a chastened Left emerged from this repression with a renewed commitment to democracy and a pragmatic willingness to compromise socialist objectives in the interests of democratic co-existence and stability. Leftist parties thus played a significant role in the reconstruction of democratic regimes during the mid-to-late 1980s in all three countries.

Second, structural adjustment policies were adopted in these three countries by centrist or conservative leaders, allowing the partisan Left to gradually strengthen electorally by articulating concerns about the social deficits of their respective neoliberal models. These parties have been cautious and pragmatic reformers in office, however; they accepted the core of inherited neoliberal models, tried to steer clear of conflicts with capital, and appealed to broad multi-class constituencies by promising to strengthen social policies while defending democratic stability and fiscal responsibility. The parties have become increasingly professionalized and detached from historic patterns of labor and social mobilization, and they generally try to channel discontents into the electoral arena. This moderation is especially notable in the Chilean case, where the democratic regime has been most successful at generating sustained economic growth and reducing poverty levels under neoliberalism, even if it has made little headway in battling social inequalities.

The paradox, then, is that the dual transitions towards democracy and neoliberalism transformed some of the most radical parties and movements into what are today the most moderate and institutionalized left-of-center alternatives in the region. This transformation thoroughly realigned their respective party systems and con-

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tributed to their stabilization. Indeed, governing leftist parties in all three countries operate within relatively institutionalized party systems that provide them with serious centrist and conservative competitors—a factor that undoubtedly contributes to their moderation in office. Although it is tempting to interpret these cases as a Latin American variant of social democracy, the aforementioned qualifications suggest that it may be more accurate to treat them, following Panebianco, as a *professional-electoral Left* that is organizationally designed to win elections rather than mobilize civil society behind far-reaching socioeconomic reforms.<sup>14</sup>

A second sub-type can be found in Argentina and Peru, where established parties from the populist tradition have returned to power in the aftermath of economic adjustment. In classic “bait and switch” fashion, market reforms in both countries were adopted by a leader who had been elected as a populist figure—the Peronist Carlos Menem in Argentina and the personalist Alberto Fujimori in Peru. These transitions were marked by severe economic crises and political trauma in both countries, producing a breakdown of the party system in Peru and a realignment in Argentina that was followed by the collapse of the anti-Peronist side of the party system after 2000. The primary legacy of Argentina’s transition was the political hegemony of the Peronist party machine,

a product of successive economic crises that concentrated their political costs on the anti-Peronist bloc and allowed the Peronists to reap the dividends of stabilization—ironically, by embracing neoliberalism under Menem in the 1990s and then turning left under Néstor Kirchner following the collapse of the model in 2001–02. The party’s organizational and programmatic flexibility allowed it to adapt to rapidly changing political and economic contexts, contain the social protests that toppled the Radical Party government of Fernando de la Rúa in 2001, and revive its populist trajectory under Kirchner when Argentina’s neoliberal model faltered.<sup>15</sup>

In Peru, the remarkable restoration of Alan García and APRA to power in 2006 was indicative of the institutional fluidity bequeathed by the country’s turbulent transition from ISI to neoliberalism, when hyperinflation and a severe recession coincided with the trauma of political violence unleashed by the Shining Path insurgency. The primary legacies of this transition were a breakdown of the party system in the 1990s and a domination of the political arena by a fluid set of independent personalities and electoral movements. Although APRA was virtually extinguished as an electoral force under Fujimori, it was revived when García returned from exile following the implosion of the Fujimori regime in 2000. APRA capitalized on García’s personal appeal and his improbable emergence as the most viable “establishment” alternative to the more radical and polarizing populist outsider Ollanta Humala in the 2006 electoral campaign. After running for office as a populist critic of neoliberalism in 2001, García turned increasingly cautious and conservative in the runup to the 2006 race, demonstrating the ideological malleability of populist leaders and their party machines. As such, the Peruvian case should not be coded as one of the new leftist governments in the region; like Argentina, however, it is an example of the revival of a historic *populist machine* under reinvigorated populist leadership.

The Sandinistas’ return to power under Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua borrows elements from both

of these two subtypes. Like the governing leftist parties in Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil, the Sandinistas have roots in Latin America’s Marxist tradition; unlike these others, the Sandinistas first came to power through an armed insurrection. Although they have moderated over time, it is less than clear whether this moderation is rooted in a reflective process of ideological renovation or simple political opportunism. Given the entrenchment of Ortega’s authority within the Sandinista Front, and the widespread exodus of other prominent leaders, the party has increasingly operated as a personal vehicle with a malleable political profile—in short, as a type of post-revolutionary populist machine. Ortega’s victory in 2006 did not reflect a vote shift toward the Left; indeed, his vote percentage declined from the levels he obtained in 1990, 1996, and 2001. Instead, his victory was made possible by a change in the electoral law and a split within the conservative opposition to the Sandinistas that allowed Ortega to capture the presidency with only 38 percent of the vote.

In these six countries, then, three quite different types of established parties have sponsored new populist or left-leaning governments in the aftermath of economic adjustment. In Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, on the other hand, new political movements forged during the period of economic transition or its aftermath undergird the leftist alternative. In all three countries, these new movements articulated widespread social disenchantment with neoliberal reforms adopted by traditional parties. Indeed, the rise of the new movements both reflected and contributed to the breakdown of established party systems, as traditional parties have now been thoroughly eclipsed in all three countries. The Venezuelan and Bolivian cases clearly anchor the more radical, nationalistic, and fervently anti-neoliberal wing of the regional shift to the left. In striking contrast to the evolutionary patterns on the left in Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil, the new movements led by Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in



Bolivia openly identify with Latin America's socialist and revolutionary Marxist traditions. They combine the discourse and imagery of this revolutionary tradition with a strong dose of Bolivarian regionalism, a trenchant critique of U.S. hegemony, and—particularly in the Bolivian case—an identification with indigenous cultural influences.

These similarities aside, however, the two movements differ in important respects, and they are associated with distinct sub-types of new leftist governments. The most important differences involve the weight of populist leadership and the degree of autonomous, grass-roots social mobilization. In Venezuela, Chávez's charismatic populist leadership has defined the movement and largely structured lower-class social mobilization from above. Although mass protests greeted the initial adoption of austerity measures by Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1989, and scattered resistance continued among workers and community or left party activists thereafter, no national movement predated or spawned the rise of *chavismo*. His movement was born in a civil-military conspiracy, then captured the public imagination with a failed coup attempt against the unpopular Pérez. Transformed into a symbol of disillusionment with Venezuela's political establishment, Chávez ran for president as the leader of a new independent movement, an outsider who could appeal to diverse groups but was beholden to none.<sup>16</sup> The small leftist parties and civic groups that embraced his candidacy were subordinated to his leadership, while many supporters were incorporated into new community-based *chavista* organizations that played central roles in the social programs or "missions" of the Bolivarian government in areas like land use, health care, food distribution, and education.

The rise of *chavismo* thus displaced, split, and subordinated the more partisan-based leftist alternatives in gestation during the 1980s and 90s, a process that continues with Chávez's recent call to consolidate a plethora of loyal organizations within a single unified revolutionary party. From the out-

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set, his movement's official party organ has been poorly institutionalized and directly subordinate to his authority, and Chávez has tolerated or encouraged a proliferation of grass-roots *chavista* groups that have little or no relation to the party. Once elected to public office, he used state social programs to direct populist mobilization from above, using charismatic linkages and oil resources to weave together the disparate strands of grass-roots *chavismo*. Chávez, then, was the fulcrum of a new political movement that formed under his leadership and remained subordinate to his authority, with high levels of social mobilization but low levels of political autonomy. His government thus represents a type of *populist left* that combines top-down political mobilization with a commitment to significant redistributive policies (and, increasingly, changes in property ownership as well).

In Bolivia, however, the level of autonomous social mobilization has been much higher, and it played a formative role in the gestation of the political leadership of Morales and his Movement Towards Socialism (MAS). In contrast to Venezuela, where political resistance aborted the process of neoliberal reform, Bolivia adopted one of the most thorough programs of market restructuring in the region during the 1980s. Although the initial process of market reform decimated Bolivia's historically-powerful, mining-based labor movement, over the course of the 1990s diverse new expressions of popular resistance emerged to contest the neoliberal model.<sup>17</sup> Morales' political leadership was a direct outgrowth of this social



mobilization, as he began his political career as a leader of the largely indigenous coca growers' union. The union of *cocaleros* drew support from laid-off miners, and it grew rapidly by mobilizing opposition to U.S. drug eradication programs. It also developed ties to other sectors of organized labor, as well as peasant groups with land claims and both lowland and highland movements for indigenous rights and cultural autonomy. A series of popular mobilizations subsequently wove together indigenous cultural claims, communal demands for control over natural resources, and class-based demands related to land and labor.

Despite the heterogeneous nature of these demands, they converged on their opposition to Bolivia's neoliberal model, which had long been seen as a showcase for the region. For example, mass protests against the privatization of municipal water supplies and foreign control over natural gas exports—the so-called “water wars” of 2000 and the “gas wars” of 2003—expressed popular demands for local and national economic autonomy from transnational corporate interests. These protests toppled two presidents and provided political and organizational momentum for the reconstruction of the Bolivian Left under the banner of MAS, which sponsored Morales' successful presidential campaign in 2005.

Bolivia's new leftist government, then, is the direct outgrowth of widespread and autonomous social mobilization from below, and while it often aligns itself internationally with Chávez, it represents a quite different mode of socio-political organization. The MAS and the political leadership of Morales are both extensions of the social protest movements that swept across the country after 2000. Indeed, Bolivia offers a rare example of social movements that move beyond mass protests to develop overarching appeals, enter and contest the electoral arena, and capture state power by electoral means. Obviously, capturing state power is not the same as exercising it; the MAS cannot govern Bolivia as a social movement, and tensions are bound to arise between the government and its mobilized grass-roots

constituencies. Nevertheless, the political leadership of Morales and the MAS are far more rooted organically in autonomous social mobilization than that of Chávez in Venezuela. Bolivia, then, has not experienced the top-down mobilization of mass constituencies that is integral to a political conceptualization of populism. Whatever his international alignments and economic policies, Morales' leadership has a different political source, social composition, and organizational logic. It is a logic that channels social mobilization into formal institutional arenas and translates it into political power—the logic, in short, of a *movement Left* that is the very antithesis of populism.

The Correa government in Ecuador embodies an intriguing set of hybrid features from the Bolivian and Venezuelan examples—that is, from the populist Left and the movement Left. Like Bolivia, Ecuador developed an unusually powerful indigenous movement over the course of the 1990s with linkages to other popular constituencies. Indeed, cycles of social protest led to the removal of three consecutive elected presidents starting in the late 1990s. In contrast to Bolivia, however, Ecuador's popular movements have found it much more difficult to compete effectively in the electoral arena, despite the formation of an indigenous-based political party. Unable to spawn a nationally competitive political leadership of its own, the indigenous movement has resorted to supporting a series of independent presidential candidates (and, in the case of Lucio Gutiérrez, turning on him when it became clear he would continue neoliberal policies). Although Ecuador's popular movements are currently supporting Correa, his leadership, like that of Chávez in Venezuela, is hardly an organic expression of these movements. Instead, it is highly personalistic and independent. Unlike Chávez, however, Correa has little capacity to control popular mobilization from above; the movement long predates his leadership, and he has no significant social or political organization of his own to mediate his relationship to mass constituencies. As such, he must



contend with powerful and autonomously organized social movements that have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to paralyze (or bring down) governments. In no other Latin American country does there exist such a chasm between mobilized popular constituencies and formal representative and governing institutions.

The greater radicalism of the governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, and (possibly) Ecuador should not be attributed simply to political voluntarism—that is, to the preferences or whims of their individual leaders. In part, radicalism also reflects the political and economic contexts in which leaders operate. Those operating in competitive and institutionalized party systems have less room for maneuver than those operating in a political vacuum without institutionalized partisan opposition. Indeed, the latter context is likely to exacerbate the tension between two quite different conceptualizations of democracy—one based on the principle of institutionalized pluralism, and the other on the principle of popular sovereignty. Leftist parties that lived through the trauma of military repression in the 1960s and 1970s and subsequently helped to reconstruct democratic regimes typically understand democracy as institutionalized pluralism—that is, as a set of procedures to reconcile a plurality of competing societal interests. Some of the newer movements born in the throes of economic transition, social mobilization, and party system collapse, however, are more likely to understand democracy as the exercise of popular sovereignty. Such a conceptualization can empower popular majorities, but it may unnerve political minorities who fear that their rights or interests will not be protected. As such, the social and political polarization seen in contemporary Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador are not a simple response to the content of the policies adopted by new leftist governments; they also reflect the fears of political minorities (including but not limited to socioeconomic elites) who lack parties to defend their interests and institutional checks and balances to restrain newly mobilized popular majorities.

## CONCLUSION

The diversity of popular political alternatives in Latin America is not adequately captured by the simple dichotomous categories of populism and social democracy. To the extent that a dichotomy exists, it is between the cases where institutionalized pluralism survives—such as Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil—and those where it does not, either because institutions have evaporated or because pluralism is in jeopardy, or both. Although populism thrives in the latter set of cases, so do other forms of autonomous social mobilization that defy the populist label.

However they are labeled, the popular social and political movements that have emerged since the late 1990s represent alternative responses to the uneasy coexistence of political democracy and social exclusion. The “repoliticization” of social inequality suggests that the region has reached the end of the “end of politics,” if in fact such a state ever existed. That is far from saying that Latin America has reached the end of the neoliberal era; given global market constraints and the uncertain viability of the alternatives outlined above, it is certainly possible that a more socially conscious variant of market liberalism will prove to be the only sustainable option. The point, though, is that a broader range of alternatives is once again being debated and politically contested at both elite and mass levels; the aura of technocratic omniscience that surrounded the neoliberal model during the period of economic adjustment has been punctured, and popular actors have returned to center stage and broadened the issue agenda. Politics, it appears, has only just begun.

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## NOTES

1. John Williamson, "What Washington Means by Policy Reform," in John Williamson, ed., *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 1990).
2. The term "neoliberal" connotes a return to the free trade and free market doctrines of classical economic liberalism following a period of state-led capitalist development in the middle of the 20th century in Latin America. Neoliberal reforms typically included fiscal austerity, tariff reductions, the privatization of state-owned enterprises and utilities, and the deregulation of capital, labor, and exchange markets.
3. Forrest Colburn, *Latin America at the End of Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 72.
4. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1992).
5. Felipe Agüero and Jeffrey Stark, eds. *Fault Lines of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America* (Miami, FL: University of Miami North-South Center Press, 1998).
6. See Jorge G. Castañeda, "Latin America's Left Turn," *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2006; and Álvaro Vargas Llosa, "The Return of the Idiot," *Foreign Policy* 160, May-June 2007, pp. 54-61.
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