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POPULISM AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

A few short years ago it was widely assumed that populism had run its course in Latin America (Drake 1982). The conventional wisdom associated populism with the rise of mass politics in the middle of the 20th century, when traditional forms of oligarchic domination were eclipsed by the social mobilization that accompanied the early stages of industrialization. Populism incorporated workers and capitalists within broad, multi-class political coalitions backing social reform and state-nurtured industrialization. It relied heavily upon nationalism and personalistic— often charismatic— authority to weld together diverse social constituencies, and it made special appeals to urban workers and labor unions, who were bound to the state by corporatist mechanisms for the distribution of benefits and the exercise of political control (Collier and Collier 1991; Conniff 1982).

This populist mode of political representation was supposedly rendered obsolete by the economic and political changes of the past several decades. Starting in Brazil in 1964, a wave of right-wing military coups led to the repression of labor and populist movements, and scholars argued that bottlenecks in the industrialization process had created pressures to contain wage demands, limit mass consumption, and break up the multi-class coalitions of populism in order to facilitate capital accumulation (Cardoso and Faletto 1979; O'Donnell 1973). When a new wave of democratization occurred in the 1980's, it coincided with the debt crisis and an era of economic austerity, which severely limited the capacity of civilian rulers to spend public monies in response to popular demands. Market-oriented structural adjustment policies that followed in the wake of the debt crisis supposedly sounded the death knell for populism, as they entailed cuts in wages and social programs, the abandonment of

efforts to redistribute income towards the poor, an opening of economies to international market forces, and the "flexibilization" of labor markets bound by corporatist regulations. These changes severely weakened organized labor, a traditional linchpin of populist coalitions, and they deprived governments of the policy tools that were previously used by populist leaders to build coalitions and mobilize support.

Deeply embedded in the so-called "Washington Consensus" (Williamson 1990) was the faith that the historical cycle of populist mobilization followed by economic crisis and authoritarian repression had been eclipsed by a new era of representative democracy, fiscal responsibility, and globalized markets. Populism, however, has proven to be far more resilient and adaptable than its detractors ever imagined. By the mid-1990's scholars had begun to explore the emergence of new patterns of populist leadership that coincided with market-oriented (or neoliberal) economic reforms in nations like Peru, Argentina, Brazil, and Ecuador. Populist leadership, it was argued, might help to secure lower class acceptance of economic measures that might otherwise provoke a political backlash. By the end of the decade the stunning rise of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela left little doubt that even more traditional expressions of populism retained a capacity to mobilize the political and economic discontents of the masses in contemporary Latin America.

What accounts for this resurgence of populism in the supposedly "post-populist" era? And what are its implications for democratic governance in Latin America? This essay addresses these questions, first, by exploring the social and political conditions that have spawned populism in both its traditional and more contemporary forms. Populism, I argue, emerges in contexts where substantial sectors of the lower classes are available for political mobilization but are not effectively represented by established

parties and do not possess institutionalized forms of political self-expression. These conditions existed during the early stages of mass politics in the middle decades of the 20th century, and they have reemerged more recently with the erosion of the mass-based representative institutions built by the first generation of populist leaders. Second, I argue that populism has an inherently ambiguous relationship with political democracy. As its name signifies, populism is a response to the demands of popular masses for political inclusion, and it is often generated and reproduced in democratic (or at least electoral) settings. On the other hand, populism thrives under and typically exacerbates conditions of institutional fragility, and it is prone to autocratic and plebiscitary forms of political leadership that clash with the institutionalization of political pluralism, democratic checks and balances, and the rule of law. As such, this essay concludes with some suggestions for institutionalizing the political representation of popular sectors in ways that can fortify, rather than undermine, democratic practices.

The Varied Meanings of Latin American Populism

Since populism is a notoriously elastic and loosely-defined concept in the social sciences, it is necessary to clarify how the term is used in this essay before analyzing its causes and consequences. In Latin American scholarly circles, populism has traditionally been treated as a multi-dimensional phenomenon which encompasses a style of political leadership (personalistic), an appeal to a social constituency (traditionally subordinate yet heterogeneous social groups), and a specified model of economic development (import substitution industrialization characterized by economic nationalism, extensive state intervention, and widespread distributive or redistributive measures). As economic crisis and neoliberal reforms spread across Latin America in the 1980's and early 1990's, however, scholars increasingly defined populism in narrow economic terms, associating it with expansive fiscal policies and

redistributive measures that were designed to enhance popular consumption, invariably at the cost of macroeconomic stability (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991). Populism, it was believed, led inexorably to fiscal deficits, foreign exchange bottlenecks, and acute inflation. Its presumed antithesis, neoliberalism, was seen as the remedy for such economic maladies.

More recently, however, political scientists have reclaimed the concept of populism and directed attention to its essentially political character. In the process they have decoupled the populist concept from any specific set of economic policies or development models. Populism, they argue, entails the political mobilization of largely unorganized masses by personalistic leaders who typically bypass or subordinate institutionalized forms of representation and challenge established political or economic elites (see especially Weyland 1996; also Roberts 1995). Understood in these terms, populism is not confined to statist and redistributive economic policies; it can co-exist with a variety of development programs, and may even emerge in contexts of economic austerity and neoliberal reform.

For some scholars, contemporary leaders such as Fujimori, Menem, and Collor represent a brand of "neo-populism" that has an "elective affinity" for neoliberal reforms and is related to, yet distinct from, the classical forms of populism associated with leaders like Perón, Cárdenas, Vargas, and Haya de la Torre (see Weyland 1996). Other scholars have rejected any application of the populist concept to leaders who embrace neoliberal reforms, arguing that they lack the mobilizational and democratizing impulses of historical populist figures (Lynch 1999; Quijano 1998). It should be recognized, however, that there is really little new in the marriage between populist leadership and economic liberalism, nor is there anything new about forms of populism that mobilize support in the electoral arena without constructing mass-based labor or party organizations. Indeed, throughout 20th century Latin America

the populist label has been applied to two rather distinct variants of personalistic leadership, neither of which is restricted to a particular stage of socioeconomic development (although they clearly may be more or less likely at particular stages of development). One variant, which included classical leaders like Perón, Cárdenas, Vargas, and Haya de la Torre, advocated statist and nationalistic economic policies and created mass-based party or labor organizations to encapsulate their followers. Chávez in Venezuela is the closest contemporary approximation to this variant of populism, although his commitment to mass organization remains in question. A second variant of populist leadership strayed less far from economic liberalism and did little to organize its followers, generally limiting political mobilization to the electoral arena or to public gatherings where government handouts were distributed. Early representatives of this variant— the predecessors of today's neoliberal populists— included José María Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador, Mañuel Odría in Peru, and perhaps Arnulfo Arias in Panama.

Rather than deny the populist tendencies of contemporary leaders, or apply a "neo" prefix that masks historical continuities and provides little connotative precision, it may be more useful to differentiate between state-corporatist and liberal-pluralist subtypes of populism that can appear at various stages of development (see Roberts 1995). The first subtype is characterized by statist development strategies and the construction of mass organizations linked to the state, whereas the second adheres to a market logic and more pluralistic or individualized forms of representation. Recognizing that populism has variable economic expressions, organizational forms, and patterns of sociopolitical mobilization, such an approach would allow populist phenomena to be categorized by their mix of properties regardless of the time period in which they emerge. It would also recognize that the political mobilization triggered by populist leaders is inevitably episodic and partial, never permanent

and all-inclusive.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to sort through these conceptual and terminological disputes, however. What matters is that the populist concept has been dusted off and is now widely adopted in the analysis of a new generation of political leaders who mobilize mass support while bypassing representative institutions and suppressing democratic checks and balances (Crabtree 1998; Panfichi and Sanborn; Kay 1996; Knight 1998; Torres 2000). Whether this phenomenon is labeled populism, neopopulism, "delegative democracy" (O'Donnell 1994), ceasarism, or plebiscitarianism, it has major implications for democratic governance in Latin America, and it warrants closer examination.

The Social and Political Correlates of Populism

There is, of course, a long tradition of personalistic and autocratic political leadership in Latin America. What separates populist leaders from the military *caudillos* who often governed in the 19th century is that the former operate in a context of mass politics. As such, populist figures must be capable of obtaining popular ratification of their leadership; at times this may occur "in the streets," by way of popular mobilization and rallies, but often it occurs in the voting booth. This popular ratification constitutes a vote of confidence in the person of the leader, based upon singular leadership qualitites rather than the leader's organizational affiliations, institutional position, or programmatic stance. Although populist leaders may build parties or otherwise organize their followers, their political support is a function of personal attributes more than organizational loyalties.

Populist mobilization, therefore, is an inherently top-down process that often feeds off a direct (or "unmediated") relationship between a leader and a largely unorganized (at least initially) mass of followers. The political space for this type of mobilization is restricted where party systems are strong

and inclusive. Under such conditions, most citizens vote on the basis of partisan membership or loyalties rather than leadership qualities, leaving few opportunities for leaders to arise outside existing representative institutions. Likewise, party organizations control access to public office, and their recruitment and socialization activities serve to channel and filter political ambitions. Strong, inclusive party systems are thus an important counterweight to the rise of populist leadership.

Populist mobilization is also unlikely to emerge where civil society is strong and densely organized. The self-constitution of representative organizations in civil society is an indicator of a citizenry that is capable of self-expression and confident of its ability to advance and defend its interests. Such a citizenry can mobilize politically from the bottom-up, and it is unlikely to sacrifice its political autonomy or transfer its political voice to an autocratic figure, however charismatic or messianic such a leader might be. An autonomous and well-organized civil society, like a strong and inclusive party system, thus constitutes an important bulwark against the rise of populism.

It is not surprising, then, that two historical periods have proven to be especially prone to populist mobilization in Latin America. The first period coincided with the demise of oligarchic political domination and the rise of mass politics between the 1920's and 1950's. The Great Depression sounded the death-knell for the commodity-export model of development in much of the region, encouraging a commitment to state-led industrialization in the largest and most advanced countries in Latin America. Urbanization and industrialization transformed the sociopolitical landscape, dramatically expanding the ranks of middle and working classes whose interests were poorly articulated by the traditional oligarchic parties of landed and commercial elites. These urban masses were cut off from paternalistic forms of social and political control in the countryside, and they were poorly incorporated

into representative institutions in either the political system or the workplace. In a context of weak or non-inclusive party systems, incipient forms of labor organization, and a civil society still in gestation, these urban (and sometimes rural) masses provided the social fabric for the rise of populist leaders—most prominently Perón in Argentina, Cárdenas in Mexico, Vargas in Brazil, and Haya de la Torre in Peru. These populist figures mobilized the masses from the top-down, challenging the oligarchic order with their promises of political inclusion, social organization, and economic well-being for the working and lower classes. When given access to public office, most of them also expanded the economic role of the state by protecting and subsidizing basic industries, restricting foreign investment, regulating labor markets, and providing a broad range of social benefits.

The second, more recent wave of populism corresponds to the erosion of the social, economic, and political architecture erected during the era of state-led import substitution industrialization, much of it built by the first generation of populist leaders. The debt crisis and inflationary spirals of the 1980's wreaked havoc with statist and nationalist development models, paving the way for neoliberal reforms and an opening to global markets. Labor movements, an organizational bastion of classical populism, were dramatically weakened by these economic changes, which often accompanied or followed in the wake of severe political repression under military dictatorships. Union membership plunged across most of the region, while the number of workers in largely-unorganized informal and temporary contract sectors of the labor force swelled. Political parties that had the misfortune to administer economic hardship were severely damaged, while populist and leftist parties were traumatized by the discrediting of their historic economic platforms and the pulverization of their organized mass constituencies. New social movements that had arisen to contest military dictatorships and uphold democratic values often

demobilized in the aftermath of democratic transitions (Oxhorn 1994), and they remained too fragmented or marginalized to constitute a national-level option for political and economic change (Roberts 1998). Even where economies stabilized, the deepening of social inequalities and the transparency of political corruption weakened attachments to established parties and democratic institutions (Hagopian 1998).

In part of the region, especially the Southern Cone and Costa Rica, party systems have, to date, been able to adapt and contain the deinstitutionalizing consequences of these economic and political changes. New expressions of populism have either been weak in these nations or, in the Argentine case, channeled within an established (if poorly institutionalized) party organization (see Levitsky 1998). In other nations, however, especially in the Andean region, political decomposition has proceeded apace, creating fertile terrain for the emergence of new expressions of populism. Where party systems are congenitally weak and fragile, as in Ecuador and Brazil, and where once formidable parties have entered into decay, as in Peru and Venezuela, a variety of populists and political outsiders have risen to prominence. Buttressed by new technologies— especially television and public opinion surveys— that allow them to tap popular sentiments and appeal directly to unorganized mass constituencies without the mediation of party institutions, the new generation of populist leaders specialize in the cultivation of personalistic loyalties. They exploit popular discontents by attacking established parties and political elites for their venality and incompetence, while portraying themselves as untainted outsiders who incarnate popular sentiments for change. Their anti-establishment discourse clearly resonates among large blocs of voters who are disillusioned with traditional parties, detached from organized labor, and on the margins of civil society.

This "politics of anti-politics," however, can be packaged in a variety of different forms. Whereas Menem in Argentina used an established populist party as a launching pad for his personalist project, leaders like Collor in Brazil, Fujimori in Peru, and Chávez in Venezuela arose outside of and in complete opposition to the existing party system. Some of the new populist phenomena have proven to be highly fragile (Collor in Brazil and Bucaram in Ecuador), while others have demonstrated surprising durability (especially Fujimori in Peru). Finally, whereas Fujimori, Menem, Collor, and Bucharam pursued market reforms and international economic integration, Chávez has been a strident critic of neoliberalism and a strong proponent of Bolivarian nationalism, although his economic and foreign policies have been cautious and ill-defined during his first year-and-a-half in power. It follows, then, that the Chávez phenomenon has increasingly polarized Venezuelan society along class lines: his core constituency is drawn heavily from the lower classes, while staunch opposition has emerged within the middle and upper classes. In contrast, leaders like Fujimori, Menem, and Collor forged broad multi-class coalitions, appealing to the masses with populist and anti-establishment discourses while winning over elite support through their implementation of free market reforms.

One of the most striking commonalities in the new generation of populist leaders, and one of their most important departures from earlier expressions of populism, is their disdain for political organization. Classical populist figures like Perón, Cárdenas, Vargas and Haya de la Torre were institution builders who organized their mass constituencies, even if they subordinated these organizations to their personal interests (McGuire 1997). The party, labor, and in some cases peasant organizations that were built by this first generation of populist figures were often remarkably durable, surviving political proscription,

military repression, and even the death of their founding leader. Contemporary populist figures, by contrast, have been loathe to create representative institutions to mediate their relationships with mass constituencies. Viscerally critical of so-called *partidocracias* (Coppedge 1994), these leaders have repeatedly clashed with established parties without making a serious effort to fill the political vacuum with new representative institutions. In their place they have raised the banner of a misnamed "direct democracy" predicated upon an unmediated relationship between the leader and his supporters.[1] The aversion to political organization has been carried to its most logical extreme in Peru, where Fujimori has created a new "party" vehicle for every electoral cycle only to deactivate it once voters have gone to the polls. This culminated in scandal when his intelligence service forged over a million signatures in an effort to register a new official party for the 2000 elections. In Argentina, Menem undoubtedly hurt the Peronist party and exacerbated its institutional informality by conflating his personal political interests with those of the party. Even in Venezuela, where contemporary populism comes closest to the historic state-corporatist form, the tension between personalism and organized popular participation has also plagued *Chavismo*. These tensions contributed to the exodus of one of the left-wing parties from Chávez' governing coalition, and they account for the organizational underdevelopment of his own party vehicle, the *Movimiento Quinto República* (MVR).

New populist leaders clearly view institutionalized party structures as constraints on their political autonomy, and they see little functional need for such structures when they can communicate with the

[1]In political theory, the concept of direct democracy refers to the active participation of the citizenry in political deliberation and the making of public policies. The delegation of political authority to autocratic figures, however popular they might be, could hardly be more at odds with this conventional understanding of the term.

public and mobilize electoral support through the mass media. Likewise, they do not view organized labor as an effective vehicle for reaching out to lower and working class constituencies. In contemporary Latin America, union membership rarely extends beyond the relatively privileged sector of the workforce with permanent employment in the formal economy, making labor unions unrepresentative of the huge number of workers with informal, temporary contract, and noncontract forms of employment. Furthermore, historic ties to states and parties often made organized labor a member of the political establishment that contemporary populists have blamed for an array of social maladies. Leaders like Collor, Fujimori, and Chávez have thus sought support among the unorganized poor while clashing with organized labor. Fujimori, for example, weakened Peruvian unions-- which were already in a state of decline due to economic crisis and political violence-- by deregulating labor markets to ease dismissals, facilitate temporary contract labor, and encourage competition between multiple unions in the same workplace. Chávez sought (unsuccessfully) to break organized labor's traditional partisan attachments by altering procedures for the election of union officials. In Argentina, where Menem was swept into office with the backing of the Peronist labor movement, neoliberal reforms split organized labor, as Menem coopted support from sympathetic unions while marginalizing those which resisted structural adjustment policies (Murillo 1997).

Supporters of contemporary populist figures are thus not expected to be party or union activists who are continuously involved in the political arena, and they are not encapsulated within mass organizations that are bound to the leader. Typically, little is expected of them other than an occasional vote of confidence; extended periods of political dormancy are thus punctuated by fleeting mobilization during electoral cycles. Mass support can be maintained in the interim through charismatic bonds, most clearly

seen in the Chávez phenomenon in Venezuela, or through paternalistic manipulation of public spending and targeted poverty relief programs, which Fujimori has rendered into an art form. These mechanisms may create a fawning public or servile clients, but they do little to generate active citizen subjects who claim and exercise democratic rights.

In lieu of party organizations, leaders like Fujimori and Chávez have looked to the military to provide institutional support for their political projects. This tendency, combined with the erosion of parties and other representative institutions, raises serious questions about the implications of contemporary populism for democratic governance. It is to these questions that I now turn.

Populist Challenges to Political Democracy

As stated above, populism has an inherently ambiguous relationship with political democracy in Latin America. Early populist figures helped to incorporate the working and lower classes into the political process for the first time, expanding the ranks of democratic citizenship and broadening the social bases of democratic regimes. They often shepherded the tumultuous transition from oligarchic politics to mass democracy, providing a new sense of dignity and self-respect for subaltern sectors of society, who were encouraged to recognize that they possessed both social and political rights. Certainly, these leaders were often wildly popular and capable of winning any free and open democratic contest. But as Conniff states, populist figures "promoted democracy even though they did not always behave in democratic ways" (1999: 7). In office they often exhibited autocratic tendencies and showed little respect for the rule of law, political pluralism, and democratic checks and balances. In many nations they polarized the political arena in ways that made democratic co-habitation all but impossible.

This paradoxical relationship between populism and democracy continues in more recent times. All

the new populist leaders have relied on electoral procedures to gain access to public office, although Chávez parlayed a failed military coup against an unpopular democratic government into a reservoir of support for his electoral candidacy. The electoral victories of these figures clearly expressed public discontent with the status quo and a desire for political change. Populist campaigns gave new voice to sectors that felt excluded, marginalized, or alienated from the democratic process, and they breathed life into the democratic principle that an alternation in power could elicit changes in public policies and governmental performance. Campaign slogans were designed to reinforce the image of leaders who had emerged from "the people" and would return power to them, displacing corrupt and elitist incumbents who had hijacked democracy for self-serving interests. Voters were thus told that Fujimori was "a Peruvian like you," and that "with Chávez the people rule."

Nevertheless, other aspects of the populist phenomenon fit uncomfortably with the norms and procedures of representative democracy. Perhaps the most troubling contradiction arises in the area of democratic checks and balances, since populist leadership has a built-in tendency toward the autocratic exercise of political authority. Leaders who are elected with broad mandates from unorganized masses tend to view themselves as the embodiment of "the people" and the incarnation of the popular will. As anti-establishment political outsiders, they chafe at the restrictions posed by existing democratic institutions, which limit their political autonomy, force them to compromise with opponents, and impede their efforts to implement the popular will (as they interpret it). The rule of law, an independent judiciary, and congressional opposition are seen as vestiges of a discredited political establishment that need to be circumvented or swept aside in the name of political change. Conflicts with legislatures are especially common, since most populist leaders cannot count on a strong party organization to mobilize

legislative majorities. Indeed, Fujimori, Collor, Bucaram, and Chávez all faced opposition majorities in congress that threatened to block their proposals for change.

Not surprisingly, populist leaders have tried to circumvent these constraints by seeking authority to rule by decree and/or alter the institutional rules-of-the-game. Menem, for example, packed the Supreme Court with supporters and amended the constitution to allow his reelection. Fujimori went even further, launching a military-backed "presidential coup" to popular acclaim that allowed him to suspend the constitution, purge the judiciary, shut down regional governments, and close a legislature that was controlled by opposition parties. The political reorganization that followed produced a compliant congressional majority and a new constitution that concentrated power in the executive branch while allowing Fujimori to run for reelection. In a successful bid to win a third term in office, Fujimori blatantly disregarded democratic norms and procedures: members of a constitutional tribunal that declared his candidacy unconstitutional were sacked, a popular referendum on the issue was blocked, the national electoral council was manipulated and packed with loyalists, a new official party was fraudulently registered, opposition candidates were harassed, newspapers and television stations were transformed into instruments of the Fujimori campaign, and electoral irregularities were widespread. Finally, in the Venezuelan case Chávez relied upon extra-constitutional plebiscitary procedures to uphold his campaign pledge to elect a constituent assembly and overhaul the nation's democratic institutions. Controlled by a 94-percent *Chavista* majority, the constituent assembly moved quickly to claim extra-constitutional authority to refound Venezuelan democracy. It proceeded to purge the judiciary, write a new constitution, shut down the congress, and convoke new elections to "relegitimize" public officials at every level of the political system.

Popular referendums are often used to ratify and justify institutional changes, allowing populist leaders to claim a democratic mandate for their attempts at institutional engineering. Nevertheless, democratic consolidation is clearly challenged when fundamental institutions and the underlying rules-of-the-game are so fluid that they can be rewritten at the whim of temporary and contingent electoral majorities (or, more accurately, at the whim of populist leaders in whom these majorities deposit their confidence). When such plebiscitary tactics are used to neutralize institutionalize checks on executive authority or bias the competitive process in favor of incumbents, they carry the risk of overconcentrating political power and trampling on the rights of minorities. They are thus inevitably viewed as illegitimate by political opponents, causing political competition to shift from a contest over public office to a more basic and destabilizing conflict over regime institutions and rules-of-the-game. Democratic consolidation is unlikely to occur in the midst of such fundamental conflicts.

These concerns are magnified by other challenges posed by populism to political democracy. First, where populist leaders rely on institutional support from the armed forces rather than parties or other representative organizations, as in Peru and Venezuela, they inevitably expand the political role of the military and draw it into political conflicts that are far removed from its normal professional responsibilities. Fujimori relied on military support to execute his presidential coup, and his shadowy intelligence advisor has exercised considerable behind-the-scenes power. In Venezuela, Chávez put military officers in charge of public works programs and appointed them to major cabinet positions. In both nations this role expansion proved to be politically divisive within the armed forces. A politicized military is necessarily a political actor that will be sought out by potential civilian allies and tempted to intervene on behalf of its own institutional or political interests. These dynamics invariably weaken

civilian representative institutions and blur the distinctions between democracy and authoritarianism.

Second, to the extent that populist leaders skirt institutional checks and balances, they erode the transparency of public administration and undermine the capacity of democratic regimes to monitor and control corrupt (or incompetent) behavior. Anti-corruption crusades are a standard component of populist attacks on traditional parties, but the cure is often worse than the disease, as the lack of institutional accountability under populist governments presents an open invitation to collusive behavior between public authorities and private rent-seekers (Weyland 1998). Lacking the organizational resources of a strong party, populist leaders are heavily dependent on private contributions for electoral campaigns, and their political associates are not held accountable by party organizations. The isolation of populist leaders from other institutions of government can create a double-edged sword, neither of which is positive for democracy: either the leader succeeds in undermining judicial and legislative oversight, as with Fujimori, or he is left exposed to their charges of corruption and incompetence, as with Collor and Bucaram. While the first has proven impossible to remove from office, the latter two saw their popularity dissipate with remarkable speed and were unceremoniously dumped in acrimonious proceedings. The Collor, Menem, and Bucaram governments were plagued by severe corruption charges, while those of Fujimori and Chávez have hardly been immune from them.

Likewise, campaign promises to make government more efficient often ring hollow in office when populist outsiders who lack organized support must fill the public administration with inexperienced political loyalists. A stunning example of the bureaucratic incompetence that can result was provided by Venezuela in May 2000, when national, regional, and local elections had to be postponed three days before voters went to the polls because Chávez' handpicked electoral council was technically incapable

of administering the nomination of candidates and the printing of ballots. Such blatant administrative failures are symptomatic of a more deeply-rooted political de-institutionalization that hardly augurs well for the quality and stability of democracy in the region.

Finally, as alluded to above, populism can have a degrading effect on democratic citizenship. Populism requires that mass publics elect or acclaim a leader, but once this leadership is installed it may provide few institutional means by which citizens can continue to provide political input or hold the leader accountable to their wishes. Elections are thus transformed into a delegative exercise where "the people" decide whom to entrust with political authority. Once in office populist figures like Fujimori, Menem, and Bucaram have used this authority to impose neoliberal reforms that were radically at odds with the platforms on which they campaigned (Stokes 1995). Such "bait-and-switch" tactics (Drake 1991) strip the electoral process of its policy content and deny citizens the right to establish policy mandates. As the Peruvian case suggests, even the ability to hold a leader accountable by threatening to revoke his electoral mandate can be undermined by the manipulation of state patronage and the electoral machinery. In contexts of grinding poverty and urgent social needs, the poor can hardly be blamed for exchanging political loyalty for handouts from a paternalistic state, but such clientelistic relationships are a poor substitute for democratic citizenship and more institutionalized forms of democratic accountability.

Limiting Populist Challenges to Democracy

Given the challenges posed by populism to democratic governance in Latin America, what can be done to minimize its likelihood and consequences? Perhaps the most obvious and powerful antidote to populism in the region— a shift from presidential to parliamentary forms of democracy— is also the

least politically viable, as the political momentum for such basic changes in regime form have diminished over the past decade. Although the Italian experience in the 1990's demonstrates that parliamentarism is no guarantee against the rise of anti-party populist outsiders, institutional barriers to such phenomena are clearly created where the executive is chosen by a legislative partisan majority rather than by a direct popular vote. Parliamentarism would encourage party rather than personality-based governments, and make executives more accountable to parties and the legislature rather than just the electorate at large. It would also force populist figures to build party institutions if they sought access to executive office, something that Latin American leaders like Collor and Fujimori disdained.

But assuming basic changes in regime form are not forthcoming, what steps can be taken to limit populist challenges to presidential democracy? A necessary first step is to recognize that populism is not a simple manifestation of a deeply-rooted personalist strain in the political culture of Latin American societies. Were it such, little or nothing could be done in the short-term to remedy the problem. A more effective response can be forged if populism is understood to be spawned by a confluence of specific social and political conditions: the political marginalization or alienation of the working and lower classes, the fragility or delegitimation of party systems, and the weakness of autonomous forms of political expression in civil society. To contain populism necessarily requires that these underlying conditions be recognized and addressed, as suggested below.

Reinvigorating Party Systems

In essence, populism is an informal alternative to institutionalized forms of political representation, primarily that provided by political parties. There is no longer any question that the classic model of encapsulating, mass-based party organizations is in retreat worldwide as a result of socioeconomic and

technological change. In contexts of social heterogeneity and ready access to the mass media, parties have shallower roots in social cleavages, weaker bonds to organized social constituencies, less ideological definition, and more narrow and professionalized organizational structures. Citizens are thus less bound to vote according to their social station or organizational loyalties; they are more detached and individualized in their political preferences, and more heavily influenced by the personal qualities of competing candidates (Mair 1997; Panebianco 1988). Contemporary parties rarely organize civil society or perform social integration functions like the mass parties of the past, and they are increasingly restricted to electoral activities. Given the erosion of social linkages and their inward turn toward self-interested electoral pursuits, it is not surprising that Latin American political parties typically rank last in public opinion surveys of confidence in national institutions.

Nevertheless, parties remain the central vehicles of electoral representation in all established democracies. Even accepting that mass parties may never return in their traditional form, the strengthening and re-legitimation of party systems are essential if counterweights to populism are to be built in contemporary Latin America. A major step in this direction would be the adoption of serious reforms to regulate the financing of election campaigns and political advertisements. Especially in contexts of endemic corruption and gaping social inequalities, parties are easily discredited as the captive instruments of special interests when they are forced to rely on large-scale private contributions to finance their activities. The integrity of the electoral process can be enhanced by reforms that restrict private campaign contributions, require their public disclosure, limit party expenditures, and/or provide public financing for electoral activities. Likewise, restrictions on television advertising and the provision of free and balanced access to radio and television airwaves would create a more level playing field and

counteract impressions of media bias and influence peddling. In Mexico, for example, reforms designed to strengthen democratic competition in the 1990's limited parties' use of private funds and allocated public financing, along with free radio and television time, according to the balance of partisan strength in the congress. Such reforms can help consolidate party organizations, solidify their public character, and bring greater transparency to the electoral process. By providing campaign resources and media advertising spots for parties that have previously established their popular support, they also discourage the rise of independent outsider candidates, who would face significant competitive disadvantages.

In the process of strengthening established parties, however, care must be taken to avoid creating "cartel parties" (Mair 1997) that collude in monopolizing state resources and excluding challengers from the democratic arena. Incumbent cartels may end up distancing themselves from society, and they have a pernicious effect on political representation. Far from inhibiting outsider populist challenges, political systems dominated by cartel parties may be especially prone to their eruption. It is important to recall that recent populist episodes in Latin America have occurred not only where party systems were very weak and fragile, as in Ecuador and Brazil, but also where they were overly-entrenched or cartelized, as in Venezuela's "partyarchy." Reforms that shape the competitive balance (such as public financing of campaigns or free media advertising) or control ballot access (such as restrictions on independent candidacies or stringent registration requirements) can easily be transformed into incumbent-protection devices that narrow representation and generate disillusionment. There is thus a thin line between institutional reforms that encourage a healthy strengthening of established parties and those which create a potentially destabilizing representational bias in favor of incumbents.

Tendencies toward cartelization can be countered by reforms that democratize parties' internal

organizational structures so that they are more responsive and accountable to their constituencies. Latin American parties are often viewed as centralized, hierarchical organizations controlled by self-interested and self-reproducing bureaucratic elites or patronage networks. Reforms that decentralize party organizations, giving local and regional branches the opportunity to select candidates, debate the party line, and develop programmatic positions on local issues can strengthen parties at the grass-roots level. Likewise, the competitive jolt of primary elections, such as those undertaken in Argentina's Peronist party in the late 1980's, can help rejuvenate a party by loosening the hold of entrenched elites, facilitating participation by new actors or tendencies, and encouraging ideological renovation (Levitsky 1998). By promoting leadership rotation and the participation of grass-roots members and civic groups, such reforms can enhance the adaptability and representative character of parties while strengthening their roots in society. Although these reforms might weaken the authority and autonomy of party hierarchies, this price may need to be paid if parties are to become less insulated and more secure in their social foundations.

The gap between party hierarchies and society can also be bridged by moving from strict proportional representation (PR) electoral systems to mixed PR/plurality systems, which maintain proportionality while allowing local constituencies to develop stronger ties to legislators. Countries with such diverse party systems as Mexico, Bolivia, and Venezuela have experimented with mixed systems of representation in an effort to combine constituency representation with proportionality. By the same logic, political decentralization can encourage parties to sink deeper roots in society by forcing them to compete, mobilize support, respond to demands, and provide channels for participation at local and regional levels. Decentralization forces parties to operate at levels that are closer and more accessible

to citizens, and it allows them to provide services that can fortify their local constituencies.

Finally, parties should be encouraged to revitalize their programmatic and ideological linkages to societal actors. Globalized markets, the demise of socialist development models, and the international diffusion of a market-oriented policy consensus have drastically narrowed the range of ideological debate in Latin American party systems. When stripped of their programmatic functions— the capacity to articulate policy alternatives and appeal on programmatic grounds to competing societal interests and values— parties are weakened as representative institutions and transformed into little more than self-interested (and interchangeable) cabals of office-seekers. The historical ideological cleavage between capitalism and socialism that helped to structure partisan competition and institutionalize political loyalties has clearly been superseded, but there remains ample room for debate over alternative models of capitalism that prescribe varying roles for the state in fostering production, regulating markets, developing human capital, and reducing social inequalities. Party systems in Latin America are ill-served by international pressures to adhere to a "Washington consensus" that undermines their programmatic functions by artificially narrowing the range of responsible development alternatives.

Strengthening Civil Society

Populism thrives in contexts of social atomization. Where the middle and lower classes lack autonomous forms of social and political expression, personalistic leaders can appeal directly to an amorphous *pueblo* and claim to embody its interests. Civic organizations that defend human rights, monitor electoral procedures, combat corruption, protect the interests of workers and other economic, professional, or cultural groups, and facilitate grass-roots participation in community development are important bulwarks against the concentration of power in the hands of autocratic leaders. Such groups

can reinforce pluralism, check abuses of power, and provide alternatives to clientelistic modes of political incorporation. They encourage individuals to recognize and exercise citizenship rights, and they help develop social capital that is conducive to both economic development and political democracy (Putnam 1993). Especially at a time when political parties have ceased to perform many of their traditional representative and integrative functions, civic organizations are vital intermediaries between states and citizens, and they can be effective conduits for the articulation of societal voices in the public realm.

Civic organizations are frequently (and legitimately) wary of partisan manipulation, and they often jealously guard their political autonomy (Oxhorn 1995). Nevertheless, there is no necessary tradeoff in the relative power of party and civic organizations. Parties, in fact, can play a critical role in stimulating the organization and participation of civil society, especially at subnational levels of government. For example, municipal governments led by the Workers' Party in Brazil and the Broad Front in Uruguay have not been content simply to improve public services; they have also encouraged the establishment of municipal councils and neighborhood associations to open new channels for popular participation in the design, implementation, and oversight of social programs (Nylen 1997; Winn and Ferro-Clérico 1997). Such efforts are doubly important: not only do they strengthen civil society against the rise of autocratic leaders, they can also help to restore parties' societal linkages and thus diminish the anti-establishment appeal of political outsiders.

Indeed, the work of electoral commissions, development councils, and other local or national government agencies can be greatly enhanced if they incorporate representatives from respected, independent civic organizations. These groups often possess valuable substantive or technical

knowledge, social networks, and the political credibility required to design and implement successful public policies, and their collaboration with public agencies in broad-based "associative networks" provides a participatory counterweight to autocratic or state-centric policymaking tendencies (Chalmers, Martin and Piester 1997). In Brazil, for example, environmental organizations have been awarded a number of seats on government commissions as non-governmental consultants (Hochstetler 1997: 209), translating their expertise into political influence that can enrich the public policymaking process.

Transnational linkages that provide political support and technical or material assistance can also help to strengthen civil societies in Latin America (Keck and Sikkink 1998), although care should be taken to avoid external dependencies and the displacement of domestic political actors— especially parties— to which civic organizations are potentially related. Transnational support may be especially useful in the development of coordinating mechanisms and horizontal bonds between civic groups; the political impact of such groups is all to often diluted by their organizational fragmentation, which can lead to a diminished scale of activities, the duplication of efforts, and competitive dynamics that divert resources and attention away from primary objectives. In the past, horizontal linkages were often constructed by political parties, but this entailed the sacrifice of civic groups' organizational autonomy. The retreat of parties from civil society has enhanced the autonomy of the latter, but often left it too atomized and marginalized to wield much political influence. The construction of new, more authentic horizontal bonds is thus a vital step in the empowerment of civil societies in Latin America.

Combating Corruption and Institutionalizing Checks and Balances

Chronic political corruption has clearly contributed to the political delegitimation of established

parties and political elites. The detachment and disillusionment engendered by repeated corruption scandals are breeding grounds for the rise of populist, anti-establishment political outsiders. The populist temptation is difficult to contain when public officials are perceived to govern on behalf of private interests, whether those of the officeholders themselves or their cronies and supporters. Corruption should not be tolerated as a residual defect of traditional political cultures, and neither should it be expected to disappear serendipitously as free market reforms eliminate patterns of state interventionism that provided opportunities for rent-seeking behavior. Corruption is more properly understood to be an indicator of institutional laxity, and it will thrive in any cultural or economic environment unless rules and procedures are developed to ensure transparency in public administration, enforce institutional checks and balances, and apply sanctions for malfeasance. Reforms that professionalize the civil service and insulate it from partisan competition can be important first steps (Geddes 1994), along with the development of strict accounting and independent auditing procedures for government procurements, contracts, and privatization ventures. Both corruption and executive abuses of power could be checked by enhancing the professional capabilities and resources of local governments, judiciaries, and legislatures (including, for the latter, research staffs and the development of subcommittee expertise). If the executive branch of government is the natural domain of populist figures, legislatures are the natural domain of political parties and the representation of societal interests, and their strengthening would create a potentially powerful counterweight to populist autocracy.

International Safeguards of Democratic Procedures

Even where populist figures gain access to public office, the international community— including foreign governments, multilateral organizations like the OAS, international financial institutions, and

transnational nongovernmental organizations— can employ a variety of diplomatic and economic instruments to discourage egregious violations of human rights or democratic norms. The weak U.S. and OAS response to Fujimori's blatant electoral manipulation in May 2000 would appear to represent a step backwards in the development of international democratic safeguards. Clearly, there is no regional consensus on the extent of appropriate international pressure to alter domestic political arrangements, and international responses have to be delicately orchestrated to prevent populist leaders from exploiting nationalist sentiments against foreign intervention. Nevertheless, the conditions that facilitate the rise of populism— fragile party systems, weak civil societies, and the absence of institutional checks and balances— also indicate that democracy rests on uncertain domestic foundations, which makes it especially important for international actors to defend democratic principles. The international community cannot substitute for domestic democratic institutions when the latter are absent, but it can certainly take steps to defend democratic actors and norms when they are threatened by autocratic tendencies. At the very least, aspiring autocrats should know that they will not be able to conduct international business-as-usual should they violate democratic principles. OAS Resolution 1081 authorizes the collective defense of democracy in the Americas, but this cannot function if it is perceived as a hegemonic imposition of the U.S.; it requires a pro-democratic critical mass in Latin America and strong regional leadership, variables that were clearly lacking in the recent Peruvian debacle.

Reducing Social Inequalities

Finally, although contemporary forms of populism generally do not emphasize redistributive economic policies the way that earlier forms did, it must be recognized that populism continues to feed

off the social, economic, and political exclusion of the lower classes. Severe social inequalities typically breed political marginalization or clientelist dependency, both of which facilitate the rise of populism. Indeed, Latin America's social inequalities— the most extreme in the world— create structural fault lines that are serious threats to the long-term viability of democracy in the region (Aguero and Stark 1998). The social and economic inclusion of the lower classes is essential if they are to pursue non-clientelistic forms of political incorporation and finally exercise the citizenship rights to which they are entitled under democracy. The international community has exerted tremendous pressure on Latin American governments over the past twenty years to adopt policies that maintain macroeconomic stability; the progress that has been made in this area makes it possible now to shift attention to reforms that can reduce social inequalities and better integrate society.

Clearly, there are no direct, simple solutions to the populist challenge in contemporary Latin America. Prescriptions for containing populism are by and large the same as those made for the strengthening of democracy in the region. That should not be surprising, as populism feeds off the frailties of democracy, while often exacerbating them. Populism, then, is both a cause of democratic instability and a reflection of it. Its future will largely depend on the course of democratic development in the region.

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