

DEMOCRACIES AND THE CHALLENGES FROM THE AUTOCRACIES: THEIR IMPACT IN LATIN AMERICA FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Autores: Thomas E. Garrett / Gonzalo Pérez del Castillo / Max Boot
Andrés Fontana / Lila Roldán Vázquez

Editora: Lila Roldán Vázquez

Comité de Asuntos Euroasiáticos
Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales

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Autores

Thomas E. Garrett / Gonzalo Pérez del Castillo / Max Boot /
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CARI Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales

Uruguay 1037, piso 1º, C1016ACA Buenos Aires,

República Argentina

Teléfono: (+5411) 4811-0071 al 74 / Fax: (+5411) 4815-4742

Correo electrónico: cari@cari.org.ar / Sitio web:

www.cari.org.ar

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Este Documento de Trabajo compila las disertaciones de Thomas E. Garrett (Community of Democracies), Gonzalo Pérez del Castillo (Consejo Uruguayo para las Relaciones Internacionales), Max Boot (Council of Foreign Affairs), Andrés Fontana (Universidad Austral) y Lila Roldán Vázquez (Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales) en el marco del seminario “Democracies and the Challenges from the Autocracies: their Impact in Latin America from a Global Perspective”, organizada por el Comité de Asuntos Euroasiáticos del CARI, disponible para ver en el siguiente link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrShuJCDNBA>

El Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales agradece a los expositores por sus excelentes participaciones revalorizando los principios democráticos, al cumplirse 40 años del restablecimiento de la democracia en la República Argentina.

This document contains the presentations by Mr. Thomas E. Garrett (Community of Democracies), Mr. Gonzalo Pérez del Castillo (Uruguayan Council of International Relations), Mr. Max Boot (Council of Foreign Affairs), Mr. Andrés Fontana (San Andrés University) and Mrs. Lila Roldán Vázquez (Argentine Council for International Relations), in the framework of the Seminar “Democracies and the Challenges from the Autocracies: their Impact in Latin America from a Global Perspective”, organized by the Committee on Eurasian Affairs, CARI. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrShuJCDNBA>

The Argentine Council for International Relations expresses its gratitude to the speakers for their outstanding presentations, which stressed the values of the democratic principles, on occasion of the 40th anniversary of the re-establishment of democracy in the Argentine Republic.

Building Democratic Resilience through Youth Inclusion in Latin America

By Thomas E. Garrett

This seminar is on a subject of timely importance –“Democracies and the Challenges from Autocracies: their Impact on Latin America from a Global Perspective”. These challenges from autocracies are real, occurring in international bodies and within domestic political environments. But rather than spend too much time outlining or repeating the autocratic threats, I would like to discuss the resilience of democracy in response to these threats and about the strength of democracies as they push back against autocracies.

Around the globe, from Asia through Europe to Latin America, democracies are being rigorously tested. In recent years, and particularly in recent weeks, the world has experienced events that have shaken the foundations of international order and democratic governance.

From where I sit in Warsaw, the unjustified aggression of Russia against Ukraine serves as a stark and ongoing reminder of the threat to liberal democracies and to the international rule of law’s framework of territorial sovereignty. There is the tragic and longstanding conflict in the Middle East, with this latest terrible chapter, and both have been joined by the rise of authoritarianism across West Africa. Meanwhile in Asia, an assertive Beijing is threatening its neighbours, international boundaries, and major water trade routes. All pose severe challenges to democratic institutions and principles. These events are not isolated. They are part of a broader, more complex picture of a world undergoing significant change.

The international environment today is far less favourable to democracy than it was in the past, particularly compared to the optimistic days of June 2000, when 107 countries, including Argentina and 18 other Latin American and Caribbean countries, came to Poland, in what was the largest gathering of democracies to date.

Over three days, 106 nations adopted the 19 principles of the Warsaw Declaration, which in turn formed the Community of Democracies (CoD). The Warsaw Declaration established a set of norms and standards essential for flourishing democracies. The Warsaw Declaration continues to provide a comprehensive framework for democracies, offering both a roadmap for transitioning democracies and a checklist for established ones to remain resilient.

How is the environment today so notably different from that of 2000?

First of all, authoritarian regimes have become more aggressive and focused in their work to undermine the values and norms of democratic societies. We see this in the multilateral system, as Moscow and Beijing push to change the longstanding international order with an alternative narrative which says human rights and freedoms are not universal – even as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Community of Democracies' Governing Council met in London the day before the CARI seminar. From Latin America, there was participation by Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and, as the newest Member of the Governing Council attending its first meeting, the Republic of Panama. A primary discussion of the Governing Council focused on the opportunities and challenges multilateralism brings, noting that cooperation advances tangible solutions to threats affecting all democracies. A well-functioning, effective, inclusive, and transparent multilateral system is important for the sake of protecting rights, the rule of law, and democracy – which, in turn, supports global peace and stability.

The United Nations (UN) is at the heart of this system. The engagement of a broader array of actors in multilateral institutions, including emerging and transitional democracies, allows for more comprehensive responses to the most complex challenges facing us today.

Latin America's democracies are at the forefront of defending the multilateral system. There are numerous examples but two quickly come to mind: Costa Rica's active role at the UN General Assembly in support of gender issues and the environment, and the strong example of Argentina's recent leadership of the Human Rights Council, an arena in which autocratic nations are greatly engaged.

There will always be a need for universal membership bodies like the UN, but we must recognize the need for democracies to defend these institutions as a unified bloc. Certainly, autocracies are working as a bloc within the multilateral system.

The Outcome Statement of the Community of Democracies meeting in London in November noted, “Against the backdrop of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this is a crucial moment to increase cooperation amongst democratic partners and showcase the diversity of national realities and responses when facing threats to democracy. It is an opportunity to demonstrate that frank, inclusive, and constructive conversations around democracy are not only possible but critical for continued engagement and positive progress”.

Individually, all democracies face challenges, internal and external. In addition to the traditional challenges of corruption, voter apathy or alienation, and polarisation, we also see malign foreign actors seeking to influence policy debate and elections through disinformation. The external threats from transnational crime and populism have also become more pronounced.

When tested by these challenges, many democracies have demonstrated ongoing resilience. They have responded to crises with agility and effectiveness. In launching the first Summit for Democracy, US President Biden noted that, for the first time in nearly two decades, it appeared that the ongoing erosion of democratic standards and norms slowed, and perhaps has begun to reverse. A June 2023 report by the OECD also underscores this resilience, highlighting the essential role of fostering public trust in government and strengthening the very foundation of democratic values.

Turning specifically to Latin America, we see a region that, like its global counterparts, has faced significant challenges in recent years. However, within these challenges we find stories of determination as I saw firsthand a few months ago in my travels in Argentina, Guatemala, and Panama.

Argentina’s commitment to human rights, particularly in addressing the actions of its military dictatorship, is an example. Argentina has not only worked to make wrongdoers accountable but has also established forward-thinking policies in fields such as gender rights, thereby setting an example in promoting democratic principles.

In Uruguay, another Community of Democracies Governing Council Member, we see a model to the world of democratic innovation and resilience. Uruguay has emerged as a leader in digital government in Latin America, with a strong focus on improving citizen access to public services through technology. The development of the Uruguay Digital platform, offering a wide range of online services, is a practical illustration of the country's dedication to transparency, efficiency, and inclusivity in governance.

Democracy that works and strives to deliver for its citizens, is a critical response to the authoritarian competition in the war of ideas today. It is true that along with these strides in democratic governance, Latin America faces its share of crises. The Economist Intelligence Unit's democracy index reveals a significant decline in the region since 2008. However, Latin America still scores higher in democracy than most world regions, alongside North America and Western Europe.

Latin American countries, with the important exceptions of Venezuela and Nicaragua, have shown remarkable democratic resilience. One of the pressing domestic concerns in Latin America is the widespread public discontent and distrust in democratic institutions, particularly in public security. This discontent risks driving voters towards divisive, not unifying, politicians. Over recent decades, populism has been a notable factor in the erosion of democracy in the region.

The second major topic of the Governing Council meeting in London spoke to the urgent need to build the resilience of democracies amidst frequent and concurrent crises that continue to impact the enjoyment of human rights around the world. As noted in the Outcome Statement adopted by consensus of the 30 Governing Council Member States, democracy requires ongoing efforts to protect, foster, and strengthen it, incorporating a variety of perspectives, including those of marginalised populations and youth.

This has been a year of focus on democratic resilience for the Community of Democracies, with a series of activities to look at democratic institutions, information integrity, civil society, and women's engagement in political participation. As an intergovernmental coalition composed of states, the Community of Democracies is keenly aware of the value of strengthening democracy through multi-stakeholder engagement. We act in coordination with a Civil Society Pillar, which is headed by the Latin American and Caribbean NGO network REDLAND through 2024.

We also act through a program focused on youth inclusion, the Community of Democracies YouthLeads, from all regions of the world. Building inclusion of currently marginalised groups in Latin America will be a central key to democratic resilience. The Community of Democracies strategy to support democratic resilience in Latin America, as well as in other parts of the world, is increasingly geared to the active and meaningful engagement of youth.

Meeting with Secretary Madeleine Albright a few years ago, I expressed my concern with the turn away from, and the direct challenge to, the international liberal framework of human rights, security, and prosperity built after 1945. Dr. Albright listened to me patiently and agreed this was concerning. But she asked me not to be too nostalgic for the framework of the past, but to use my position to equip young people to create the human rights and security architecture of the next 75 years.

The inclusive participation of all societal segments, especially the youth, in public policy dialogues, is essential for democracies to grow stronger and more adaptable to future challenges. This is particularly relevant given the significant youth population in Latin America, comprising around 127.9 million individuals aged 19 to 30 as of 2023.

While many feel dissatisfied and not included in decision-making, there are examples of youth leadership, activism, and mobilisation in countries like the United States in its last election, and as seen recently in Guatemala's presidential run-off election. There, the mobilisation of young voters, especially first-time voters, brought a welcome surprise to the democratic process.

Another regional example of global leadership on youth inclusion is Community of Democracies Governing Council Member Costa Rica. I was privileged to visit San Jose earlier this year as Costa Rica hosted a myriad of youth-focused events at the II Summit for Democracy.

In today's emerging democratic environment, youth participation extends beyond traditional political platforms. It encompasses involvement in everyday institutions like universities, civil society, but also in media like online videos. In the rapidly evolving global landscape, the inclusion and active participation of youth in decision-making processes is not just commendable—it's imperative.

Recognizing this, our Community of Democracies YouthLeads initiative emphasises the need to foster platforms where the voices of young democracy leaders are not only heard but actively lead activities and actions. The new cohort of YouthLeads includes 10 pro-democracy advocates from across the globe, invited to advise the Governing Council Member States of the Community of Democracies on effective practices and strategies to enhance youth engagement worldwide.

The youth demographic in Latin America, while crucial for democratic resilience, encounters significant challenges that hinder their active participation in public life. Reports have highlighted issues such as gaps in secondary education, escalating poverty levels, and the prevalence of unstable and informal employment as critical barriers for the youth in this region.

These challenges are not unique to Latin America but are universally recognized in various global contexts. This shared experience underscores the vital importance of democracies learning from one another and exchanging effective practices to enhance youth engagement and leadership.

To work with youth, the Community of Democracies finds embracing the diverse backgrounds and experiences of young people is key. Fostering forums for multisectoral and intergenerational dialogue can provide valuable insights and foster a more inclusive approach to policy making.

When considering advancing youth participation, it is imperative to address the digital divide. In an increasingly connected world, access to technology and the Internet is crucial for the full participation of young people in democratic processes. This is not just about access to information but also about enabling youth to be part of the global conversation, to contribute to and benefit from digital innovation. Bridging this divide can enhance their ability to engage in political discourse, access educational resources, and participate in the digital economy.

Climate change and environmental sustainability have also become issues of paramount importance to today's youth. Young people are increasingly at the forefront of the fight against climate change and in advocating for sustainable practices. Their involvement in these areas not only represents a commitment to the future of our planet but also reflects their inherent capacity for leadership and facilitating change. As

members of the global democratic community, we must commit to supporting and investing in youth across democracies.

Their ability to adapt, to innovate, and to challenge the status quo is what democracies need to remain vibrant and responsive. In recognizing this, we must also acknowledge that the path to greater youth involvement is not without its challenges.

It requires us to rethink traditional structures and paradigms, to embrace new ways of thinking and doing, and to create spaces where young voices are not just welcomed but are integral to decision-making and shaping our democratic future. Enhancing youth political and public life inclusion is one path to maintain democratic resilience.

There are other paths, of course. The path ahead is undoubtedly complex and filled with challenges. However, the examples of resilience we have seen within the Community of Democracies provide us with both hope and an actionable roadmap.

Thank you once again to CARI for organising this important discussion, highlighting issues of impact for our democracies and for your commitment to the cause of democratic resilience.

Democracies and the Challenges posed by Autocracies: Impacts in Latin America

By Gonzalo Pérez del Castillo

The topic we have selected is broad to deal with in the available time but in spite of that I am going to take a minute to tell you something about CURI and Uruguay. There is a reason why I do this.

About CURI: it is composed basically of fifty Counsellors that include former Ministers of Foreign or Economic Affairs, senior international civil servants, academics, ambassadors, military officers, entrepreneurs or journalists. It is a pluralistic Council.

About Uruguay: it is not a very well-known country, we have no illusions about that, but it ranks 11th in the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index. In 2023 we surpassed Canada which ranked 12th so we took the number one place not only in Latin America but in America as a whole.

Now, I am not saying this to boast about my country but because democracy in Uruguay is in danger as is democracy in the whole western world. This is because there is a general decline in our faith in the principles and values that hold western civilization together and the threats to democracy are a part of this more general phenomenon. My main point in today's discussion will be that democracies are being threatened not so much by the advance of autocracies but, fundamentally, by our own deficiencies and misunderstandings about democracy itself. This applies to the whole western world and Latin America is no exception.

What I am saying is that democracy as a political system is not failing us, we are failing it.

I am a retired international civil servant who has lived a long time and spent most of my life working and living in different countries and continents, enough to take note that the most developed countries in the world, those with the higher Human

Development Indexes, are democracies still today. And those countries have regular voting, freedom of expression and association, and freedom from arbitrary rules. They live in plural societies, with higher degrees of gender equality and people coexist peacefully and are all equal before the law.

I also served the UN in countries ruled by dictators. My experience is that autocracies eventually collapse. Supreme and uncontrolled power leads to mismanagement, abuses and downfall. This may take years, sometimes decades, but autocracies eventually defeat themselves.

So my main concern is that we, democratic republics made up of citizens with rights, do not defeat ourselves. And I am concerned because I see many clear and real threats. I will only mention a few.

The first is that we are living in a constantly and rapidly changing technological world and that adaptation is not only desirable, it is unavoidable. New technologies are revolutionising the way we do things, the way we communicate with one another around the world, and it is all so much cheaper, efficient and convenient. This creates new demands and citizens expect democracy to solve these problems for us and democracy does not. The problem is that we do not blame the State or the market or the manner in which we manage our economy or public institutions, we take it against democracy. We conclude: "Democracy is not working for me".

Democracy is the process of making decisions that make life tolerable for every citizen. This implies the existence of political parties, free press, trade unions, NGOs who freely express their dissent and all these consultations do not make decision making any easier or faster. But it remains the best way to go. We experienced many dictators and autocracies in Latin America and we got rid of them, most of them. The West should take this experience not just as a lesson learnt from the past. It is a valuable lesson for the future because a democratic approach is the only chance we have to tackle problems that all of humanity needs to solve. I am thinking about global problems such as the environment, organised international crime, the preservation of species in the land and the sea, not to mention world peace or gender and racial problems. There is no better alternative than to open our ears and listen to what other people are saying.

Another very terrible problem that we are suffering, because of our lack of faith in the value of democratic and collective decision making, is that our political parties are becoming fanaticized. It is me, with my fanatic and uncompromising ideas, against you and your fanatic ideas. And I need to win this election, grab hold of political power, as if it was some kind of war trophy, and exclude you. Our academic secretary in CURI has been writing about the fall of secularism and the rise of religious influences in Christian, Jewish and Islamic societies. It is an interesting paper that we will shortly publish on our web page.

Yet another problem has to do with representation. The classic Greeks believed in democracy and the Republic, some more than others, but they believed that the political views held by the not too educated people, the *polis*, were counterbalanced by the wisdom of those elected representatives that were cultured and judicious. What we face today is that politics, and politicians, have been so downgraded in public opinion that it is not at all certain that we are getting the best and wisest to represent us. And, again, this has many consequences I will not go into.

By now some of you may be thinking: why is this man talking about technological changes, decision making processes, secularism and Ancient Greece instead of talking about Latin America? Well, I am talking about Latin America, because I am talking about Uruguay, we are the highest ranking democracy in Latin America and we sure have all the problems that I have mentioned and a few more. So I leave it up to you to imagine what goes on in the rest. And believe me, I am concerned and certainly not about what some autocracy may do to us. Not that I do not fear them. I have suffered from them. But I am concerned about what we are doing to ourselves.

So where do we go from here?

I will leave you with three premises that may help us move forward:

First of all, we better go back to respecting the principles and values in which western societies are founded. We better go back to the UN Charter and all Declarations and Covenants about human rights. When I am asked to talk about this I remind my audience that the UN Charter was not written by idealistic dreamers but by civilian and military men and women who had not only fought the worst war that mankind has ever known. They won it. They knew what they were talking about. The UN does not have a

specific Democratic Charter but the OAS has which brings me to my second consideration.

Latin America and the Caribbean are part of the Western World. We descend from a mixture of populations that include original inhabitants, migrants, slaves, forced labour, refugees etc., like most western countries today and, sure, we have different religions, skin colours and a large variety of traditional local or regional foods, dresses, songs and dances like any other modern western culture. But the point that matters is that our Latin American and Caribbean Republics came to life with the Illustration, the American Revolution and the French Revolution of 1789. That is our political culture from the word “go”. Whatever new international setup the future may bring, the western world should integrate more and make sure that we all benefit from it. And that includes Latin America and the Caribbean and with no double standards. Just ask yourselves: If the European Union had stayed with only six members as it started in 1957, with the events that occurred in Ukraine, what kind of Europe would we have today in November 2023?

So we legitimately share a common democratic political culture and that brings me to my third consideration.

Our reply to autocracies is cultural. If you ask me to single out one difference between Uruguay and the rest of Latin America that would best explain our high Democracy Index I would say that Uruguayans, all Uruguayans, right, left and centre, have a pretty good idea of what kind of country we would like to leave to our children and grandchildren. Our common country objective is not exactly the same, but if you exclude ten percent in the far right or left it is pretty similar, it is compatible and it is democratic. The common country objective can evolve and adapt according to what the French call “l’air du temps” but western style democracy in Uruguay is not negotiable. That is priceless.

In conclusion, let us watch out for autocracies by all means, but our best bet is to put our own common house in order.

Thank you.

Democracy and the challenges of autocracy: the impact in Latin America from a global perspective

By Max Boot

It's a pleasure to be here with all of you, extending my greetings from the Council of Foreign Relations in New York to the Council in Buenos Aires and everybody else who is in here.

This is galvanizing and it's a positive thing to see all of these leaders talking about how to preserve our common democratic heritage which is more under attack now than it has been in many years. I don't have to remind you of the crisis that democracies face. Freedom House, for example, found that democracy has been regressing in the world for the past fifteen years; the people living under democratic governments have been declining for roughly fifteen years and I don't see much hope that that will change. The Americas are generally one of the bright spots despite some obvious non-democratic regimes in places like Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua. Nevertheless, the Americas are the two continents that have much more entrenched democracies than much of the rest of the world. Defending democracy is a constant struggle not only overseas, as it used to be, but also at home which is not something that I would have expected to be saying in my lifetime.

Why is democracy under such threat today? I would argue that this has a lot to do with changes in the economy and in information technology. These are things that we have seen before and that have a massive ripple effect from the economic and technological sphere to the political one. Some examples are the impact of the Industrial Revolution beginning in the late 18th century and of course accelerating in the 19th century, and the spread of information technology. At that time the ability to print magazines and newspapers very cheaply and spread information much more widely, the growing literacy, the ability to understand the written word, etc., led to a crisis of the existing political regimes, largely the ancient regimes, the monarchies, and the kings and

emperors who ruled much of the world. Of course you saw the US revolution and then revolutions all over Latin America and the world. By the 20th century, monarchies were very much on decline and of course they suffered another calamitous event with World War I, which destroyed so many of the remaining monarchies. It led to the rise of republics, but the end of monarchies did not necessarily mean the rise of liberal democracies, although they were one of the trends. The 19th century also saw the rise of socialism, marxism and then fascism; I would argue that many of these movements were reactions of these economic changes; remember that Marx, for example, wrote in reaction to the Industrial Revolution and the huge inequality created with millions of people going from the countryside into these crowded slums and cities – and marxist mid-nineties analysis was that this was going to lead to the collapse of capitalists societies. But marxism and fascism were two of the ideologies that rose in response to the economic and technological changes. We have been struggling with that ever since.

Today we are seeing similar sweeping technological changes. The most sweeping since the Industrial Revolution is the impact of the information revolution which is leading to income inequality, creating winners and losers and upsetting traditional societies. Of course today we also have new information technologies which can bring about change: in the 19th century it was newspapers and magazines and of course you had radio and television, both of which were harnessed by demagogues, fascists and communists of all kinds as well as liberal democrats like Franklin Roosevelt. But today you have a similar expansion of information technology, particularly with social media. The fact that we have these revolutionary new forms of communication has also been destabilizing the established order in the world and social media is something that we have never seen before.

The impact has been mixed, both good and bad, but on the bad side it has been very negative because with social media, for the very first time, we are losing a shared reality. In the old days, if you wanted information you had to get it from your daily newspaper and every major city in the world had one. Then there were a handful of television networks – in the US there were basically three or four big ones – and that, along with a couple of news magazines, were the ways in which you could inform yourself. A lot of people in the US complained about the dominance of the LA Times, New

York Times, The Washington Post, ABC News, etc., and of course this was true in every single country around the world, but this gave us a common shared reality: you could disagree on politics and people obviously did, but you had a kind of basic set of facts that you worked from. People agreed that “these were the facts” and then discussed them. Today we don’t have that, we don’t have one set of facts; everybody has their own and that is facilitated by social media because its algorithm is designed to tell you not what is true but what you want to hear – and what people want to hear is information that reinforces their biases -. There have always been conspiracy mongers and extremists, but their power has been greatly enhanced by the internet and social media. All of a sudden all these extremists gather together online and spread their misinformation and what we have seen is that fake news actually go more viral than actual news and verified information, so we have this terrible breakdown of the basic foundation of our political order which should be a shared set of facts or understanding of the world.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the late great US senator from New York State, used to say that everybody is entitled to their own opinion but not everybody is entitled to their own facts. In fact, today everybody has their own facts, so you have phenomena like Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is running for president of the US and who is basically denouncing attempts to end the COVID pandemic saying that vaccines are bad for you and spreading crazy conspiracy theories about what the ukrainians supposedly did to provoke russian invasion – stuff that is blatantly false and that people believe in. And if people believe it, then Kennedy could actually wind up being a deciding factor in the US presidential election next year – and of course that is to say nothing of Donald Trump who inhabits a completely alternative universe in his completely fact free approach to the world where he thinks that Kim Jong-un is a wonderful person but hates America’s democratic allies.

This is not an isolated phenomena; this is true in almost every democracy that I am familiar with: they all have a large populist movement and a large movement against science. The problem of the US is that our political system is particularly conducive to empowering minority extremists for a variety of reasons. Our founding fathers created a political system that was focused on limiting the power of the majority but as a result we now have an increasingly extremist minority in control of our politics because the

extremists are increasingly in control of the Republican Party which is one of our two major political parties. Republicans have a huge amount of power even though they have only won the popular vote for president of the US once in the last 30 years. Now you have Donald Trump running for office on basically a platform of destroying American democracy. That's very dangerous to the US and to every democracy in the world because the US is the most powerful democracy, so if our democracy is in danger then all are. Our democracy is in danger right now: Trump is basically promising to fire all of the civil servants who run the US caravan and appoint these right-wing fanatics that will do whatever he wants, who will not respect the Constitution and who will put lawyers into the government who will tell him that there are no limits to his powers. And despite all of this, Trump is running neck to neck with Biden and has a good chance to win the next presidential election. That is a major cause for concern not just for Americans but for everybody who believes in democracy around the world. What is happening in the US is a particularly extreme example of a phenomena that we are seeing in pretty much every single democracy: the proliferation of right-wing populism, and in some cases of left-wing populism like with AMLO in Mexico or Lula in Brazil, but left-wing populism is at this point probably a largely Latin America phenomena because there aren't many successful left-wing populists outside the region. Often the beliefs of left-wing populists and right-wing populists aren't that different: they often share a hostility to science and the US and have sympathy for undemocratic regimes and have little patience for constitutionalism, the rule of law and checks and balances, that are the foundations of functioning democracies.

The big picture of what is happening all over the world is that we are all going through this wrenching economic and technological changes as a result of the economic revolution. It's leading to greater income inequality; it's creating winners and losers; it's creating evil in our societies at the same time that social media is making it possible for insurgent movements, outsiders and extremists to exert more power than ever before. That is a very dangerous combination and has led to the anti-democratic trend that we are seeing around the world. There is no obvious or easy solution to it. I think that eventually the economic and technological upheavals may slow down, but maybe they won't. Artificial intelligence is coming on and it could have another major destabilizing impact because it could lead to the loss of many more jobs and another major transformation in

society which could be extremely dangerous for our political systems. Unfortunately I think that the turmoil and upheaval that we are looking at is still not going away and it is going to be present tomorrow, so we will have to deal with it.

There is no easy solution beyond the kind of things that we are doing here of trying to strengthen the power and stability of existing democracies; trying to push back against the extremists; trying to explain why liberal democracy, for all of its faults, remains the best form of government. It's not just the threats from within, there are also threats from countries like China and Russia that are harnessing a very powerful and effective challenge to liberal democracies. The threat of Russia and China in particular is not just militar but also ideological. The old soviet regime and the old chinese communist ideology do not hold a lot of power anymore. China in particular has stumbled on to a powerful alternative to liberal democracy which is basically combining capitalism and authoritarianism and that's a model that turned out to be really successful. After the collapse of the USSR and the "end of history" there was a lot of optimism that capitalism and liberal democracy would go hand in hand, but China has shown that you can actually can have capitalism without democracy; that dictators can harness information technology and capitalism to stay in power while still delivering a reasonable standard of living for their people. That's a powerful model that has appealed to other countries. The best thing that we can do is simply to try to strengthen and build up our own democracies, beginning with the US.

I think that it is also imperative to defend democracies under attack, for example Ukraine: if Russia gets away with its invasion, that would set a very dangerous precedent for the 21th century which shows that democracies are weak, international law is meaningless and strong nations can invade their neighbors with impunity. That would be an extremely dangerous signal to send at the same time that democracy itself is coming under attack in our own countries. To show that democracy is weak abroad would be a terrible precedent for the rest of the century. If there is one thing we can do to defend democracy is to defend Ukraine in this battle between liberalism and dictatorship in the world, but also to defend other democracies including Taiwan and many others as we try to deal with these internal threats at home.

This is a monumental challenge and I used to be very confident in the outlook for democracy in the US and elsewhere – in many ways I’m a child of the end of the Cold War and that very hopeful moment – and frankly I don’t have that faith anymore. Yes, democracy can survive, but it’s going to require all of us fighting for it to survive. We can’t imagine that the triumph of democracy is inevitable; we can’t all pray to this view of history and imagine that human history is leading inevitably to the triumph of freedom and democracy; I don’t think that’s the case: it’s not leading to any direction in particular; it’s leading to this continuous battle between freedom and dictatorship. That’s a battle that past generations fought with bloody results, for example in WW2, and unfortunately is a battle that we are forced to fight today if we want to continue to live in liberal democratic regimes. We can’t take it for granted in this age of transformation, upheaval and populism.

Conference on Democracies and the Challenges from Autocracies: Impacts on Latin America from a Global Perspective

By Andrés Fontana

I started my presentation with the statement “Democracy is a system which works among equals”. Of course, this refers to Democracy as a system of government in Ancient Greece. The latter, considered the origin of Democracy in many respects, was mainly a system of rules and values shared by the citizens, a rather small sector of a rather small community. For its functioning, Democracy relied upon the citizen’s involvement and commitment as basic preconditions. W. G. Forrest (1970) explains in *The Emergence of Greek Democracy 800-400 BC: The Athenian demokratia* was founded on two cardinal principles: an absolute acceptance of the laws... and on the belief that everyone who was admitted to the society governed by these laws had an equal right and almost an equal duty to administer and maintain them. Principles and beliefs shared and respected by those who were “admitted to the society” implies that not everyone, in the community at large, participated in the benefits and demands of Democracy. Forrest also explains that “the equals” were not that equal for, with economic development, prosperous manufacturers became citizens, although they were not members of the aristocratic, traditional elite.

This is perhaps the first – and certainly one of the most relevant – examples of the unstable nature of “Equality”, both in social terms and in its relation to Democracy. Through History, this notion, as a concept and as a moral value, suffered many changes and, therefore, so did its relation to Democracy.

Equality has been assimilated to Democracy. It has been considered a precondition of it, and also placed in contraposition to it – both in terms of hierarchy, and sequence (which comes first in either sense) – many times showing that there is affinity between them in theory, and a basic tension in practice.

Most cultures and religions developed fundamental notions in relation to Equality, “being equal in the eyes of god” is, perhaps, the most popular example. In the Western World – although not exclusively – “equality before the law” constitutes an unequivocal, not always respected, principle.

On that basis, many societies built their legal systems. In turn, Equality of Sovereign States established the origin of the International System. More recently, the International Community conformed by the end of the First World War and years to follow – a community to be consolidated at the end of the Second World War – recognized that all human beings are equal, as they share some basic rights related to human dignity, rights which must be universally protected and guaranteed, independently from race, gender, political circumstances or any additional consideration. From then on, State sovereignty became increasingly subordinate to that notion of human Equality.

I certainly believe that that is one of the most important developments of our History, leading to a conception of Equality that founded the basis of the most transcendent norms, set of rules and political efforts of our time, at the national, international and global levels.

However, while this must be considered one of the most important achievements of human History, its relation to Government – in general – and to Democracy – in particular – is still incipient. Not thoroughly inexistent but, I would say, extremely preliminary.

To preserve those basic values, those basic rights, and to establish human dignity as a central notion that guides the actions of both Governments and the International Community is, perhaps, one of the major achievements of our time – however preliminary its effectiveness may be. And it is, at the same time, one of the major challenges that both Governments and the International Community face, looking at the present and the future as well. Therefore, the nature of those achievements and challenges in relation to Democracy deserves careful consideration.

Today, demands and social identities in regard to Equality are much more extended and sought for than social demands for Democracy as a guarantee of civil and political rights or, much less, as a source of material welfare. People seem not to believe in the latter any longer. By and large, Democracy is losing its strength and stability, as well as the citizens’ support in most regions of the planet. At the same time, while Equality has

grown in many respects, it has also declined in material terms, both among people and among nations.

Therefore, the question about The Future of Democracy, undoubtedly a most relevant one, seems to be related to different factors which contribute to Democratic Erosion: 1) the limited capacity of Democracy to provide citizens and the population at large with a certain level of welfare; 2) the limits to citizens' effective participation in politics and in major governmental decisions; 3) the poor quality of institutions, which favours corruption and the capacity of the Executive to subordinate the other branches of government; 4) the rise of ultraconservative political identities and political actors, who disseminate intolerance, racism, ultra-nationalism, xenophobia and related non democratic values and, finally; 5) Democracy's limited capacity to offer a framework of values and political mechanisms which favour Equality in all its dimensions, the most traditional ones and, particularly, the more recent ones.

However, in contrast to the predominant tendency of the past Century, most challenges to Democracy are not related to coups d'état and the establishment of military rule, but rather to the imposition of authoritarian regimes through the weakening of Democracy's major institutions and values.

During the last 20 or 25 years, many studies of Democracy have shown that the predominant authoritarian tendencies are not related to abrupt interventions, led by the military or by civilian actors, but to the gradual processes of Democratic Erosion. Through the 1990s, Guillermo O'Donnell persistently argued that Democracy was suffering a long, gradual agony, not an immediate death but a process of deterioration and accumulative disappointments, leading to extreme weakness and vulnerability. More recently, a tendency to replace facts and evidence with "narrations", namely, discretionary versions or constructions of reality made by individuals and cult conglomerates, developed as a new factor of Democratic Erosion.

"Reality", a term which has been challenged by every school of thought since Classic Philosophy and before, is today being demolished by hundreds of millions of users of Internet – actually, "Internet" sounds like talking about the past – and thousands of apps and virtual spaces to spend one's time and live one's (imaginary) life, as everyone pleases.

It seems difficult to imagine how any political system may process the demands which arise from such a variety of versions of what is true, what is right, what should be done (if anything should be done collectively, as a Community), etc. In addition, this rises a very simple question in relation to Democracy: If Democracy is meant to work among equals, how could it function among people and groups who are not just different, but build their own realities, and their own discretionary versions of what is (“really”) true, and what is (“really”) right?

Nevertheless, even in this new context, we still imagine Democracy as a system of rules and beliefs which allows different actors, with different interests and beliefs, to find ways of working together, and produce shared formulae and solutions compatible with their different – and eventually opposed – points of view.

As Prof. Perez-Liñán from the Kellogg Institute for International Studies argues,

...good Democracies are Democracies in which people, political parties, and all kinds of organisations, have very strong disagreements... We have a healthy Democracy when people are tolerant of differences, and political parties have very strong disagreements, but politicians are willing to negotiate, and find ways to reconcile those different positions.

Further, Prof. Perez-Liñán points out that

...on the contrary, when politicians exploit those differences and exacerbate those divisions, we know that Democracy is in trouble. The question at this point is whether Democracy has the capacity to overcome those tendencies¹.

Let me make a few comments about the different academic approaches to the question of democratic stability and consolidation vis a vis democracy’s weakening and eventual break down. The emphasis on actors’ interests, beliefs and perceptions reflected on Perez-Liñán’s analysis of Democracy, its strength and the challenges to it, departs from the predominant approach to these matters during the second half of the 20th century. At that time, traditional research on Democracy and Authoritarianism emphasised the relevance of structural economic and social conditions, such as the levels of economic development, poverty, job opportunities, and social inequality, among other factors,

¹ Quotations taken from an interview with Prof. Perez-Liñán, published on the Institute’s web site.

together with those belonging to the international context, many times referred to with such concepts as “Imperialism” or “Economic Dependence”.

Guillermo O’Donnell developed a critical view of those approaches in his initial work on “Modernization and Authoritarianism”. Later on, by the 1980s, together with the contemporary work of Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan and other scholars – reflected on their classic volume *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* – O’Donnell analysed the dynamics of Authoritarianism and how difficult it was for this type of Regime to legitimise itself, to justify its existence and continuity, and the consequent transitions to Democracy. In doing that, O’Donnell shifted from the emphasis on the aforementioned structural conditions – as the major factor determining the breakdown of Democratic Regimes and the rise of Authoritarianism – to an emphasis on the behaviour of, and interaction among political and military actors, their perceptions, beliefs and strategies, together with the particular interests they represented.

From then on, the analyses of Democratic Transitions and Democratic Consolidation, followed by the analyses of the gradual deterioration of Democracy (Delegative Democracy, Democratic Erosion, etc.) focused on the behaviour, perceptions and strategies of political leaders, political parties, military officers, trade union leaders, and the like. Of course social and economic conditions have always been present as major factors in most analyses. But the emphasis had already shifted from structural factors to actors’ interactions and the predominant values and beliefs.

This change of direction of academic studies is meaningful in different ways, and is not neutral from a political point of view. It means that what we do is relevant. It means that actions taken by individuals and social organisations, as well as by political organisations, matter. Because, when political actors identified with anti-democratic values predominate, the system will sooner or later collapse. But that can be counterbalanced by citizens’ actions, and that is what particularly matters when democracy is in trouble. In this regard, Democracy goes back to its original meaning in Athenian society 400 years BC.

To bring this presentation to a close, I would like to refer to Norberto Bobbio’s seminal work (1984) *The Future of Democracy: A Defense of the Rules of the Game*. Bobbio tells us that once citizens’ rights and freedom have been established in a society –

particularly, when they have been constitutionally recognized – the regression to Dictatorship or Authoritarian Rule will sooner or later be rejected by the very memory of Democracy. Democratic values are there, the memory of Democracy is there and, one way or another, Authoritarian Governments have to recognize that they are transitory.

Democracies and the Challenges from Autocracies: their Impact in Latin America from a Global Perspective

By Lila Roldán Vázquez

Behind the public reasons President Putin invoked to justify the war on Ukraine, in particular his purpose to change the European security architecture, there was a hidden, deep motivation: Russia's fear of a democratic contagion from its once closest neighbor. The Russian war destabilized the international chessboard, it weakened trust among nations and, as a secondary effect, it also unveiled trends that were already taking form and which just needed an impulse to come into the open.

One of those trends is the competition between liberalism and illiberalism, between democracies and autocracies all around the world, which has intensified during the last decade. Another phenomenon is the surge of populist leaders, elected by popular vote who, once in power, put in practice autocratic ways of government.

Some of the countries that are generally considered modern democracies, actually have only a "label" of democracies. In fact, they are either diminished democracies or disguised autocracies, where institutions have been weakened, the balance among constitutional powers is not respected, critical media is undermined and citizens are deprived of their rights.

Recently, even consolidated democracies have had to face disruptions in their electoral processes, which in some cases were provoked by foreign powers. They have even suffered attacks on national institutions, which have certainly weakened them. In the United States, a well installed democracy that has lately been facing these problems, the next presidential election is somehow seen as a choice between democracy and autocracy. This leads us to the question of presidential regimes, which in many cases may favor a concentration of power in one or a few hands, with the consequent risk of an autocratic drift.

During the last decades, autocracies have been on the rise. A network of solidarity and cooperation has gradually been woven between autocratic regimes. Some of them have even left behind their old pretensions of embodying democratic governments according to the Western conception of democracy, claiming the right of each nation to define the meaning of democracy or the type of democracy that it deems more convenient.

A good example of this trend is Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping's joint communiqué on February 4, 2022, just a few days before the Russian full invasion of Ukraine. The document reflects the shared conviction of both leaders, that countries have the right to choose the forms and methods of implementing democracy that would best suit them, as well as their opposition to color revolutions and to certain States' attempts to impose their own "democratic standards" on other countries, or to monopolize the right to judge the level of compliance with democratic criteria.

Anyway, autocrats frequently use the resources of democracy to attain power, and to degrade democracy once in power. Elections are often considered to be in the roots of democracy. But elections are not always synonymous with democracy: autocrats frequently manipulate them by crashing on their political opponents, by changing electoral rules before elections, by interfering in electoral campaigns through technological means or using state-controlled media for propaganda goals. Presidential elections in autocratic or dictatorial regimes frequently give a large margin of votes to the autocrat or dictator that seeks reelection: figures of 80% or 90% acceptance do not demonstrate a true free and sovereign election.

Judiciary mismanagement is another tool frequently used by autocrats, either by designating loyal judges and members of their countries' Supreme Courts or by changing laws and legal procedures to their own convenience or even by denouncing "law-fare" when accused of wrongdoing or corruption.

In an era with multiple media, which have traditionally been considered the "fourth power", autocrats use them as tools to spread propaganda and misinformation. Independent journalism is often restricted or persecuted, TV or radio chains are closed, journalists are imprisoned or have to go into exile, news content is supervised and

censured. Very often, under the guise of freedom of expression, the only voices that can be heard are those permitted by the regime.

In the framework of a world in rapid evolution from a bipolar constellation to a unipolar one and then again to the present rearrangement of the international scenery, where there are two or three big powers and a larger group of middle countries trying to influence the overall outcome, weak democracies are perhaps easier to hide behind the label of “liberal democracy”.

Geopolitics and geo-economy have a role to play in this: some wrongdoings are easier overlooked when economic, commercial or political interests overrule them. Human rights violations, institutional weaknesses or populist regimes are not always denounced as they should, when they occur in a country which is otherwise useful for economic or political purposes.

Big transnational companies also play a role, through intensive lobbying with the governments.

Many wrongdoings committed by autocrats have been overlooked, just to be able to continue “business as usual”. As an example, the Uyghur people’s destiny is not unfortunately an obstacle for the flourishing of China’s commercial relations with practically the entire world.

As for Latin America, even though peoples in the region are essentially inclined to sustain Western values such as democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and consequently, autocratic regimes should be hard to accept, democratic institutions have deteriorated due to long periods of authoritarian or populist regimes.

In the 60’s and 70’s, the military coups that took place in the region and the subsequent dictatorships that followed them, subverted the democratic architecture while sustaining a regrettable performance in human rights, causing great damage not only to the civic rights of their citizens, but also to the international image of the region.

In Argentina we celebrate this year the 40th anniversary of the reestablishment of democracy, after a long interruption due to those military regimes. Once democracy was restored, in our country, as well as in other countries of the region, there was an

intensive effort to recover the full functioning of democratic institutions, as well as cooperation between neighbors, through the launch of regional integration mechanisms.

Since several countries in the region saw the end of military dictatorships almost simultaneously, these “democratic coincidences” gave them high hopes for a future in harmony and shared growth.

During some time, institutions grew stronger and both bilateral and regional cooperation began to flourish.

Unfortunately polarization, due to conflicting political ideologies of governments in the region, seriously affected bilateral relationships as well as the progress of regional integration processes.

Autocracy and populism had also their share in the regional divide. Even today, cooperation and political coordination are difficult to achieve, due to the persistence of some authoritarian regimes in the region, such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

MERCOSUR, for instance, adopted a Democratic Clause, which is binding for all its Member States. Democracy and respect for democratic institutions are a prerequisite for membership as well as a condition for continued membership. This democratic clause has already been applied twice: the first time in 2012, when Paraguay was suspended due to the Parliament’s impeachment, without following the legal proceedings, to then president Fernando Lugo. The second time was December 2016, when Venezuela was suspended in view of the country’s disregard for democratic institutions and the break down of the democratic order. Venezuela is still suspended.

At the hemispheric level, after repeated demands from the Organization of American States to both Venezuela and Nicaragua to respect the democratic order and human rights, and when discussions on their suspension were already on the way, both countries asked to leave the organization.

Regional organizations can thus play a leading role in keeping democracies functioning in their area of influence.

In relation to foreign influence on the democratic status of the region, in recent times we perceived a diminished interest of the United States in the Latin American

region, its traditional main partner, particularly from the political point of view. This indifference has affected hemispheric and bilateral relationships and it created a void, which has been exploited by other external actors, such as China and Russia, and in a lesser extent, by India and Iran.

These countries have approached the region through different strategies: while China has become the main commercial partner of many countries in Latin America and it vows no interest in meddling with their national politics, Russia -with lesser economic power, but having the advantage of the romantic ideals of socialism still present in some circles, has been able to influence some countries' regimes through its soft power. Even more, in cases like Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, it has gone further by providing economic and military aid.

As for China, more than twenty Latin American States have already adhered to the Belt and Road Initiative, thus favoring Chinese investments in energy and infrastructure projects in their respective countries.

Another autocratic power, Iran, is also present in those countries, particularly in Venezuela.

The situation in Latin America is not different from that of other continents, where big powers are competing for markets as well as for political leverage, and autocratic regimes are on the rise in many places. Does the autocratic surge mean that people are more interested in having a good living standard than in living in a democratic regime? Are they more inclined to overview autocratic practices, provided they enjoy economic stability? Or is it distrust vis-à-vis politics and politicians that has weakened Democracy? Maybe a combination of all these factors.

Probably the way to stop the rise of new autocrats and the confrontation between liberal democracies and expanding autocracies, is greater involvement of citizens, particularly the younger generations, in the public policies of their countries, not only through the vote, but in several other ways.

Civil society must play a central role in confronting the challenges of autocracies to democracies, so that in the future we could witness a rapid decline of autocracies and the resurgence of strong democracies around the world.