

POPULISM IN LATIN AMERICA

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

POPULISM IN LATIN AMERICA

by

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ABSTRACT

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In the last two decades, Latin America has undergone substantial political, social and economic transformation; however, many new democratically-elected governments appear to lack the ability to engender public support, promote social stability, or successfully manage a national economy. This paper will explore the phenomenon of populism in Latin America, taking into account the realities of inequitable wealth distribution, rampant corruption, the rise of indigenous movements, Latin American views on the state's role in society, emerging norms for civil-military relationships, globalization & trans-nationalist entities, and ubiquitous over-indebtedness. This paper will address the sudden rise of populist leadership in Latin nations, the changing relationships among moderate democracies in the region, and a growing ambivalence towards the U.S. and its perceived policies.

POPULISM IN LATIN AMERICA

Framework

Following the end of the Cold War and the demise of one of the two leading ideologies, many of the world's peoples anticipated the establishment of a New World Order, a Fukuyaman "End of History," and a rapid advance of freedom and prosperity across the globe. Latin America was no exception. The initial euphoria faded as soon as it became clear that the world had changed, but not necessarily in a positive manner.¹ While freedom and prosperity did make progress in a number of places worldwide, a distinguishing feature of the New World Order was a trend to increased volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA). The scourges of international terrorism, political instability, xenophobia, uncontrolled migration, financial crises, depletion of natural resources, a shortage of clean water, poverty, inequality, protectionism, globalization, drug trafficking, guerrillas, Islamic fundamentalism, nationalism, arms races, culture clashes, and international crime are driving states--and democracies in particular--to respond with real solutions to improve both the international security regime and their citizens' welfare. All of these challenges reflect a lack of traditional political leadership. This lack of leadership results from a lack of concrete strategies to address the citizenry's needs. Historically, politicians have failed to take advantage of the very institutional tools that would permit them to respond to explicit public wants.

People from many nations wish to live better than their parents, enjoy the benefits of globalization, and have a natural expectation for an even better future for their own children. These legitimate aspirations are respectable and logical so long as contemporary political systems can provide acceptable and feasible solutions to

citizens' requests. It is very likely that addressing these fundamental issues poses the most significant challenge to democracy in the 21st Century.

In the late 20th century, a number of countries found themselves cast aside in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union. USSR (and post-collapse Russia) had neither the means nor the will to prop up satellite states and maintain living standards, once the ideological war had ended. The "free ride" was over.

Other states simply weakened and collapsed on their own. In both cases, an environment was created that was particularly susceptible to exploitation by a kind of political opportunism typically labeled *neopopulism*. It is an unusual—but not entirely uncommon--route to achieve the public's desire to improve their welfare. Under the values of liberal democracy, populism is not necessarily the best way to achieve improved welfare; however, populism is a phenomenon which appears to be gaining strength in certain quarters and which deserves further study.

At this point it is appropriate to provide a brief explanation discussing what distinguishes populism from neopopulism. Populism in Latin America arose as a protest movement, rejecting certain aspects of traditional politics and representative democracy. There are two fundamental characteristics of populism: first, *anti-intellectualism*, seen as a rejection of the elites who have traditionally held the reins of power and who have been able to retain an almost mythical status of infallibility; second, populism incorporates a *hyper- personalization* of movement's leader. In this way, the leader replaces the former elite by replacing one perception of infallibility with another. The leader possesses those very virtues that allow him to overcome a perceived barrier between representatives and represented, since he and his agenda are "of the people," he is

unlike the elites who stand apart from the masses. In contrast, neopopulism (while also rejecting “politics as usual” and focusing on a charismatic central figure) adds a strong dose of anti-capitalism, anti-globalization, and anti-conservatism. The neo-populists rail strongly against the spread of (American) globalization of commerce and culture, yet—much as modern terrorists do—they manage to paradoxically exploit all its advantages, especially contemporary communications channels such as the Internet.

Putting aside the agriculturally-based populism which emerged in countries such as the United States in the late 1880s and early 1890s with the Populist Party or Vladimir Zhirinovsky in Russia following the breakup of the old Soviet Union, we want to instead to focus on this phenomenon in its incarnation in Latin America. Here, neopopulism has taken on several forms over the years- as conventional populism from 1930s, to 1970s and as a resurgent, anti-globalization based neopopulism in the current era.

The Chilean political scientist Patricio Navia stated, *“Because it has negative connotations, the term populism is often used to disqualify political opponents or to label politicians and governments who are performing badly, using aggressive communication strategies to improve their approval ratings or adopting policies that are macro-economically irresponsible. Yet, not every bad or poorly performing government is a populist government. Just as not all forms of behaviors that are sometimes associated with populism are necessarily undemocratic or irresponsible.”*² So, in this cautionary context, this paper addresses specific examples to avoid the blurring of characteristics of non-successful regimes and populist regimes.

Driving the emergence of conventional—or traditional or classical—populism was a crisis of oligarchic rule and the consequent discussion of the “social question,” as emerging popular and middle sectors sought “their place in the sun” in terms of social and political inclusion.³ This crisis came about as a direct consequence of social movements flourishing in the wake of the Russian Revolution, the financial crisis of 1929, and the influence of the two World Wars.

In Latin America since the latter half of the 19th century, a long succession of oligarchic governments--both civilian and military--have drained the patience of the citizenry in their quest for political and social inclusion. Workers from mostly rural areas migrated in masse to cities in a quest for better living conditions, but instead became a large social underclass with a dim view of the elites' privileges, income, and benefits - all gained at their expense. A generalized sense of alienation affected virtually all groups, especially in big cities.⁴ If we add the incompetence of political classes in solving social problems, widespread corruption, over-centralized, inefficient direction and planning (vice private initiative) and a strong sense that political participation and representation were confined to the upper socioeconomic classes. It obviously, had promoted poverty and inequality as well we see a highly unstable environment conducive to the emergence of a certain class of leaders practicing inflammatory discourses to exploit popular dissatisfaction. These proto-leaders further spread and inflamed discontent among the population, adding to their power base. In summary, political, social, and economic inequalities driven by the arrival of the Industrial Revolution have triggered a number of Latin American populist adventures. These have occurred with an astonishing regularity.

What is Populism (Neopopulism)?

The concept of populism affords various explanations, definitions, and interpretations; the following discussion will attempt to explain a highly complex phenomenon in very simple phrasing.

Populism in this formulation is more than a tactical appeal to public sentiment; it is a utopian worldview for describing how public business might be conducted. Thus, populism recommends solutions for all aspects of human existence, qualifying it as a full-blown ideology. It devises solutions for intractable problems in education, the economy, military issues, social matters, foreign affairs, the use of propaganda or strategic communications, the role of the state in domestic matters, public health, private initiatives, culture, and many other areas. Populism is couched in language which implies that it entails a proper (and perhaps the best solution) to all problems. This is why purveyors of populism tend to migrate towards the position that the ideology contains within itself a breadth of understanding and a comprehensiveness of vision, despite the all too likely possibility that the vision could be wrong. In short, populism is an ideology complete in itself, rejecting other approaches and solutions. This aspect of populism lends itself to misuse by authoritarians and in its extreme expression could be almost dictatorial.

Populism finds fertile soil where leaders reward followers with social benefits and establish credible cases against the policies and activities of native oligarchs and foreign imperialists, establishing a personal and charismatic link with ordinary citizens. Usually, populist leaders have a special interest in social policies. They often offer state-dictated wage increases and bonuses, pensions and fringe benefits, while also

exploiting widespread resentment of the old order, asserting political as well as economic dominance. These leaders usually promise social justice and national greatness on the basis of future industrial and military strength.⁵ The particular points of view of populist leaders are classical. They generally show themselves as redeemers and reformers, with a messianic mandate to reshuffle all of governments' inputs, outputs, and structures. Their reforms are usually presented part and parcel with ideologies that stress centralization of resource management, direct state control of critical industries, and methodologies for the redistribution of wealth, typically at the expense of the oligarchic elements which comprise the old order.

It is important not to equate populism and socialism or communism. At first light these appear to be remarkably similar. But populism is not exclusively driven by currents of opinion from the left. The political right in Latin America also makes its own harmful contribution. This right-wing populism is also highly damaging. It promotes a savage market perception of gain for gain's sake, excluding the social mass as the true goal of all good government--the general welfare of the population. That is why the balance of political doctrines or schools of thought is an alternative to the ruling classes should refine.

Anyway, these populist movements find outlets in political actors—both national and regional—who are unusually adept at appreciating and manipulating public symbolism in advance of their cause, and by their ability to act without regard for the constitutionally-imposed limits on the rule of law in their respective jurisdictions (They also act without regard before they arrive in power). In many cases, these movements achieve increased confidence in the righteousness of their crusade through their

struggle for power following the overthrow of oligarchic or democratically-elected elements of the existing government. Populist leaders can build on a broad discontent with globalization (and its proponents) and establish solid international links - often with leaders and governments having very definite positions regarding confrontation with the United States.⁶

Populism Environment

What are the critical environmental conditions which populism requires for its development? In a number of cases in Latin America, the conditions look remarkably similar; previous to the establishment of a populist government, a country passes through a phase of failed government, increased corruption, the strengthening of practices which force political exclusion (oligarchy), militarism, and rising poverty and inequality--these last being perhaps the most causal. Poor conditions for governance, weak institutions and contempt for democracy create special conditions for populism's development.

In his book, *"The Third Wave,"* Professor Samuel P. Huntington states that one of the causes of populism is the disillusionment of the electorate with traditional democracy. This occurs when voters rejected the traditional parties for their failure in solving people's problems and begin to seek out those who are *"outsiders"* with respect to the political parties and government in general.⁷

This popular dissatisfaction is the best ground to spread the seed of social's unrest and populism's leaders know it perfectly. The Cuban writer Carlos Alberto Montaner, cited by Julio A. Cirino in his paper titled *"Latin America, Populism for the XXI Century Walking Forward - Looking Backward,"* said: "...Latin-American populisms are

always the result of spectacular failures of what could be called normal politics, which follows the line of western democracies. They are direct consequences of corruption, extreme inequality, and a complete economic and political irresponsibility".⁸ What could be clearer?

Those conditions—often exacerbated by a linkage with nationalistic and anti-imperialistic feelings, notably anti-Americanism---make up a perfect storm for the spread of populism.

In populism's ideal configuration, the exhortation to nationalist fervor is a central topic. It gives the populist leader access to tools of mass domination largely using the media, especially if that country has a historical problem with a next door neighbor or other dominance relationship with respect to any other powerful international actor. The focused appeal to national values and the use of inflammatory rhetoric and verbosity is a common strategy for populist leaders to scatter his ideas and to redirect the public's attention away from problematic domestic problems.

In this regard, examples abound. Populist appeals to nationalist values are evident in the cases of Venezuela and its leader's harangues against Colombia and the United States; Venezuela's offer of military aid to Bolivia in the event that Evo Morales were toppled; tensions arising in Argentina with Uruguay for a pulp mill in Rio de la Plata; and discontent inside Ecuador with Colombia following a cross-border Colombian operation into Ecuador which resulted in the death of a major FARC leader. This last incident provoked Ecuador to sever diplomatic relations with its eastern neighbor.

The case of Venezuela and its diatribe against the United States is an example of classic anti-imperialist discourse that we can also hear in statements from the leaders

of such nations as Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador. Ecuador even makes anti-imperialist accusations against Brazil, a country with which it maintains an economic dispute for payment of services of a hydroelectric plant in which Ecuador refuses to pay \$242 million. Latin American anti-imperialist cant has a long and respected history.

One of the most tense situations to develop in recent memory--save a major crisis involving Hugo Chavez, who is more rhetoric than action-- deals with Bolivia and its President Evo Morales. After the busy months of August, September and October passed, Bolivia was on the verge of a coup d'état, prompted by Governors of Departments opposed to President Morales (Curiously not favored by the military but by civilian authorities legitimately elected by the people).

Following a number of violent protests and national work stoppages, the government was able to regain control of the country.

Following this convulsion, the conspiracy theories were not long in coming. In a public speech, President Evo Morales announced the expulsion of the U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia, accusing him of promoting the riots in his country and encouraging a coup d'état. Hugo Chavez showed an common solidarity with Bolivia when he did the same, expelling the U.S. Ambassador in Caracas during a remarkably rude, anti-American speech. The United States responded by expelling Bolivian and Venezuelan ambassadors from Washington, D.C. This situation continues to the present.

As noted previously, the populist leader is always on the lookout for possible conspiracies in order to safeguard their own hold on power. The conspiracy theory—usually not provable but containing elements which appeal to the populist's followers--is

probably a favorite tactic of the populist leader. The idea is to maintain the public in a state of “high alert” with respect to the political and social defense of the populist movement – sometimes called revolutions – as a direct way to protect their personal power. In countries with populist governments, it is relatively common to find the media producing remarkable headlines discussing possible overthrow attempts, military coups, or international conspiracies. Notable in this vein is an article by Enrique Krauze published in *“El País”* (a Spanish daily) on October 15, 2005, which reads as follows: “Populist systems are lashed by the ‘enemy outside.’ Immune to criticism and allergic to self-criticism, it is essential to find scapegoats for the regime’s failures; the populist government (stressing its own inherent nationalist and patriot roots) requires attention be diverted from internal issues towards the opponent from outside”.⁹

In the end, finding and exploiting a favorable environment for a populist campaign requires deep study and careful analysis of likely scenarios. Success will not emerge randomly. Behind a populist project lies a complex and well-planned blueprint--the people involved in the effort maintain a deep belief in its rightness and eventual victory. That is why they are so persistent in their projects. In general, a populist scenario is a well studied and executed political project. It is not left to chance.

Is Latin America's Populism a Disease?

Populism, either in Latin America or elsewhere, is more a symptom than a disease. It establishes itself in the absence of good governance, in places exhibiting defective democratic structures, and states which tolerate weakness in, or subversion of, their democratic institutions. The populist phenomenon shows us how sometimes statesmen fail in their duty to find out real answers for people’s problems.¹⁰ In Latin

America, standard electoral systems and sometimes highly fragmented and diverse political parties drive a breakdown of the political panorama and creates environments where misrule and delegitimizes traditional democracy. In many states, there is a belief that economic or social reforms can only be accomplished under authoritarian regimes. With the sole exception of General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte (1973-1990) in Chile, the only successful reforms under authoritarian regimes are those which subsequently led to a re-establishment of democracy. We can find examples in Southeast Asia, however they have bureaucratic and technocratic governments that do not necessarily exist in Latin America. The Southeast Asian model would not necessarily apply as a way to solve people's problems without falling into populist governments.¹¹

The Populist Leader

At this stage, it is useful to ask - what is a populist leader? Typically, there emerge charismatic politicians with an attractive personality; most hail from a left-wing political orientation and the middle class (without ruling out the possibility of populists representing the right wing). Socioeconomic status appears to be very pertinent; one characteristic of populist leaders is that they belong to the middle class-they rarely emerge from the lowest one. This is an important point because their orientation is aligned towards the lower class and minor the middle one. Their grievances are founded on the demands of the lower class and eventually the middle class. This is because the lower class comprises the largest fraction of the population, the greater portion of the electorate. However, the populist leader is not against the local employers or businessmen. They know those people are the engine of any country's economy, that

they are the people who create jobs for the middle class, so what would be the purpose to struggle against them?

Unequivocally different is the populist leader's view with respect to transnational business elements. Transnational businesses represent the presence of alien interests, huge powers that spend their time extracting and exhausting natural resources while simultaneously refusing to pay an acceptable amount of taxes while exploiting local workers.

As Alvin Toffler says in his book *"Power Shift"*, the relationship of transnational companies with national governments has changed and they now have the capacity to exert diplomatic pressure or even military pressure in defense of their interests and assets. He provides an example involving ITT and its contacts with the CIA to destabilize the populist regime of Salvador Allende Gossens in Chile since November 3, 1970 to September 11, 1973.¹²

This is the classic dichotomy of populist leaders. In one sense they need foreign investment. Recall that the countries that are the most susceptible to the blandishments of the populist are poor, with exceptional poverty and marked inequality of wealth distribution; however, they prefer to obtain these investments under their own "special rules", rules which often prove to be unattractive to any foreign investor.

Populist leaders often have very short political careers, taking advantage of certain specific political affairs that catapult them to fame and into the driver's seat. A review of several Latin-American examples is illustrative.

Until 1992, Hugo Chavez Arias was unknown in Venezuelan politics. He was an Army officer with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel who was probably only recognizable by

members of his regiment. After the attempted coup d'état against the President of Venezuela at the time, Carlos Andrés Pérez (February 2, 1989 – May 20, 1993), Chavez acquired an unusual fame with his populist discourse. After these events, only six years separated his emergence on the political scene and his assumption of the Venezuelan presidency. In any political structure, that could be considered a meteoric political career.¹³ Chavez was able to take power following the turning-out of the discredited and inefficient governments of Octavio Lepage (May 21, 1993 – June 5, 1993), Ramón José Velásquez (June 5, 1993 – February 2, 1994), Rafael Caldera (February 2, 1994 – February 2, 1999).

What about Bolivia? The case of Evo Morales Ayma is strikingly similar to that of Chavez. Entering public life in 1998 as a newly elected deputy in the National Congress of Bolivia, he was known before this only as a leader of coca farmers. After a stormy introduction to the Bolivian Congress, he came to fame after being expelled from the legislature for his attitudes and his breakthrough claim of indigenous rights. He vaulted into the Presidential race in 2005 and was elected soon thereafter. Before Evo Morales, Bolivia had four successive Presidents who were unable to serve their full terms or replaced former failed Presidents, including, Hugo Banzer Suárez (August 6, 1997 – August 7, 2001), Jorge Quiroga Ramírez (August 7, 2001 -- August 6, 2002), Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (August 6, 2002 – October 17, 2003), Carlos Diego Mesa Gisbert (October 17, 2003 - June 6, 2005) and Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé (June 9, 2005 - January 22, 2006).¹⁴

The current President of Ecuador, Rafael Correa Delgado, achieved his victory in 2006 elections as the candidate of the movement *Alianza Pais*. He reached his current

position after what can only be described as an accelerated political career. Until April 2005, when he took over the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the government of Alfredo Palacio, he was a figure virtually unknown in the political arena. In fact, before his job as a Minister of Economy and Finance he was a teacher. Hence, it took him 2 years to rise from instructor to his current position as Ecuadorian President.

Before Rafael Correa in Ecuador there were several Presidents who, in a political scene reminiscent of Bolivia, were unable to complete their constitutional terms due to dismissal, resignation following severe public disorder, or serving as replacements for previous failed governments. We can find out Abdalá Bucaram Ortiz (August 10, 1996 -- February 9, 1997), Jamil Mahuad (August 10, 1998 -- January 22, 2000), Gustavo Noboa (January 22, 2000 -- January 15, 2003), Lucio Gutiérrez (January 15, 2003 -- April 20, 2003) and Alfredo Palacio (April 20, 2005 -- January 15, 2007), until April 20, 2005 Alfredo Palacio was Vice President of Ecuador, then became the eighth President of this Andean nation in less than ten years after the Parliament dismissed Lucio Gutiérrez.¹⁵

Argentina has also suffered from political instability. Between 1999 and 2003, Argentina had five presidents. Nestor Kirchner decided to seek the presidency of Argentina in 2003. He was largely unknown outside his home province of Santa Cruz. Although at first his candidacy was not taken seriously by most observers, he ran a skillful campaign and received the strong endorsement of outgoing President Eduardo Duhalde, who was a key figure in the Peronist Party (formally the Justicialist Party). In the first round of voting in April 2003, he finished a close second to former president Carlos Saul Menem. Shortly before the scheduled runoff, however, Menem—trailing

Kirchner by a wide margin in opinion polls—withdrew his candidacy, and Kirchner became president-elect by default. A week later, Kirchner was sworn in as the president.¹⁶ Since the second presidential term of Carlos Saul Menem (July 8, 1995 – December 9, 1999), Argentina has had five presidents who did not serve out their complete terms, or they acted as interim presidents following the dismissal or resignation of the previous one. This includes Fernando de la Rúa (December 10, 1999 – December 20, 2001), Federico Ramón Puerta (December 21 – 22, 2001), Adolfo Rodríguez Saa (December 23 -- 30, 2001), Eduardo Oscar Camaño (December 31, 2001 – January 2, 2002), Eduardo Alberto Duhalde (January 2, 2002 – May 25, 2003). As we can see, in 2001 four separate individuals rotated through the Argentine presidency¹⁷.

This comparative analysis gives us a common denominator. It is almost axiomatic that before a populism regime can take power it is necessary that the previous government fails—perhaps catastrophically. The failure of classical politics almost always represents an open door for a newly-minted populist regime. A disastrous political process is a breeding ground for disenchantment and a willingness to listen to the appeals of populism. Therefore, populism is an opportunistic form of government. By its very nature, this kind of regime cannot construct a long term or clear government program. While this appears contradictory to our earlier assertion regarding populism's possession of a well planned and executed project, it is in fact not. The campaign to acquire power is well-planned; what receive little attention is the government's processes and procedures once it has come to power—in essence, a failure of nation-building following the overthrow of a previous regime. The government

program inevitably becomes linked with the self-centered and self-serving ideas of the populist leader and his particular point of view; in fact, they construct the campaign to take place over a route which considers how the electorate responds to the populist's appeals to nationalist and social sentiment. It is a case study in the ability to capitalize on rapidly emerging opportunities. We have to keep in mind that a populist regime is more centered in the person of populist leader than the institutions. He (or she) is the messiah. He or she arrives on the scene with all manner of magic solutions to a variety of different problems.

Krauze is entirely correct when he says: *"The populist not only uses and abuses of the word, he seizes it. The word is the specific vehicle of his charisma. The populist is the supreme interpreter of the truth and also the news agency of the people. He talks to the public on an ongoing basis, stokes the public's passions, "illuminates the path..." and does all this without restrictions or middlemen"*.¹⁸

Populism, Law Enforcement, Corruption and Crime

In populist regimes, there is a marked tendency to underestimate how a traditional model of liberal democracy that is well known in the Western Hemisphere (the so-called neo-liberal model) can be subverted. The necessary constitutional changes, the overall reform and overhaul of the constitution and the delivery of discretionary powers to the populist leader create a perception of authoritarianism without legal controls and flexibility that is preceded by the emergence of extensive legal bodies outside national legislative bodies. This is done in order to restructure the state, its services, and its methods of redistribution of power structure among the supporters of the regime.

The weakening of democratic institutions is perhaps one of the factors that most influence the emergence of rampant corruption of officials, organized crime, drug trafficking and of authoritarianism in all its expressions. The institutional weakness starts first in the executive branch through the vesting of additional powers in the person or office of the Head of State. It then moves to the legislative branch, which conducts a campaign of total reform through a constituent assembly or with substantive and very well calculated changes to the electoral system, aiming at promoting the political forces that support the populist leader and delegating legislative power to the executive. The next step relates to the Constitutional Court and its composition and, finally, the Judiciary and the appointment of new judges, applying pressure to the courts to issue rulings in one way or another, ignoring other branches' failure to comply with court rulings, and other lapses.

In summary, the executive begins to run almost everything by way of decrees issued by the President. Many of these decrees will fall outside the constitution or stand in substantial conflict with it. Here is where the pressures and challenges to the Constitutional Tribunal begin--when that institution recognizes the executive's transgressions and begins to reject the presidential decrees as unconstitutional. The solution typically involves a change out of the members of this important body to alter the constitutional balance in the country. This is an issue of particular relevance in Latin America. In the United States, the responsibilities of a Constitutional Court are certified by the Federal Supreme Court of the U.S. In countries where legislation is governed by the civil law tradition, it is usual for the Constitutional Courts to ensure the constitutionality of laws issued by the National Congress or of the decrees issued by the

executive. The rejection of a law or decree force the Congress or the President of the Republic, as appropriate, to fix the defect constitutionality before enacting the challenged law or decree.

Regarding the implementation of the law and common crimes, it will be normal that the police become involved more deeply in political affairs than in those to combat common crime. A sustained increase in crime is thus commonly observed in populist regimes. The evidence relates to crime rates in big cities of Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina. The case of Brazil is somewhat exceptional in that it does not reflect the current government's leanings. Rather, Brazil's high crime rate is a legacy of previous governments that bore the populist stamp, especially those prior to Ex-President Carlos Enrique Cardozo.

The survey *Latinobarómetro 2007* evaluates the opinion of the people regarding crime or the fear of the people in certain countries of Latin America. This prestigious Chilean company has conducted opinion surveys in Latin America since 1995, with a vast database of different social, economic and political matters in general. In the 18 Latin American countries comprising the latest survey (2007), the question, "Have you, or someone in your family, been assaulted, attacked, or been the victim of a crime in the last 12 months?" was answered 'yes' by 49% of Venezuelan respondents (1st place), 47% of Argentines, 44% of Hondurans, 43% of Peruvians, 42% of Brazilians and Bolivians, respectively.

The relationship between 4 of the 6 countries where people show higher rates of fear of a common crime cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence. Government policies in those states are due to the so-called populism or trends in this direction.

Populism and the Media

The relationship between populism and the media is another interesting topic to review. Populist leaders are usually masters of how to use the media in their own favor. In the current globalized world, the message of the populist leader needs to reach every corner, so the media has a special place in his planning. The television, internet, radio , magazines or newspaper are good ways to spread ideas. The use and abuse of media power is a central idea in populist projects, usually with spectacular announcements in short and simple words, easy to understand and easy to recite. The goal is to penetrate the mind and feelings of audiences with a clear and understandable message. The message is generally utopian in nature and probably unattainable under existing political conditions. That, of course, is the populist's point. The idea is to change the current system. So, populism—in its message and its tactics—tends to align quite substantially with revolutionary ideologies of the past, with respect to its views and plans regarding the current or classical establishment. Note that this changes dramatically once the populist gains power. The media closest to the opposition suffers harassment and censorship as a means to achieve silence. The charges against opposition media and its hypothetical relationships with conspiracies continue until demands are made to close the offending outlets altogether. The editors, journalists, or executives of television and radio channels, newspapers, etc., are pursued relentlessly and the regime shows a clear tendency to deal with media conflict through the courts. So, the tenure of media in a populist regime, as a means of measuring democratic health and limiting government control of information, comes under real threat. A populist leader does not need any journalists sniffing in the regime's darkness. In the words of Krauze:

Populism produces the truth. Populists carried to its conclusion the Latin proverb "Vox populi, Vox dei." But as God does not appear every day and people do not have a single voice, the government "populist" plays the voice of the people; his version is elevated to the status of official truth, and dreams of ordering the single truth. Of course, the populist condemns freedom of expression. He confuses criticism with militant enmity, by seeking to discredit it, control it, silence it.¹⁹

The Way to Populism

The steps to populism, in general, have clear and discernible patterns. After becoming empowered, the populist leader takes advantage of the citizenry's disappointment with traditional policies. This is why he was elected. Once in power the first step is to call for constitutional amendments.

We find this pattern in Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Ecuador. If the scenario is not conducive to the establishment of a constituent assembly, well it will be a profound constitutional reform through the National Congress. The goal is always to adapt the democratic system and subordinate it to the personal interests of the populist leader.

The aforementioned reforms or the general plan for the constituent assembly usually has a highly distinctive element. It is—unsurprisingly—the re-election of the populist leader. A single presidential term is almost never enough to realize his grand scheme. Therefore, a reform to allow re-election is essential. Venezuela's case is perhaps the most striking.

The issue of re-election is perhaps the greatest threat to the democratic system of a country that has become immersed in populism. The other inevitably involves

control of the media, the military, natural resources and private property. Note how similar this pattern is to that of traditional socialist revolutionaries in the 1960s. That is why populists' models are widely rejected in formal democracies or those attached to more moderate models.

Countries which follow a model which utilizes constituent assemblies appear most susceptible to overturning the results in favor of the recent elections that have led to power and otherwise, in order to change the power balance in the Congress. It is well known that in a traditional democratic regime deep constitutional amendments require a large quorum (supermajority) to be approved. So leveraging the Congress to produce the desired end state is a long term process with a highly debatable outcome. Otherwise, the constituent assembly is a good choice to maintain the last election support translating its means in good chances to win a next referendum to set a constituent assembly and thus be able to introduce grater reforms. This pattern is verifiable in Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador. In other cases a constitutional amendment has been sufficient to cement a populist victory, as in Argentina or Nicaragua.

But the pattern is clear: the previous constitution or its interpretation by the previous oligarchy or democratically-elected government is a source of displeasure for the populist leader. Therefore, one of his first moves is to modify it at his discretion. This is central to the populists' models in Latin America. Without constitutional reform there is no program.

Once in power, the next step will be to atomize the opposition. Unfortunately, the pattern is for legitimate political opposition to boycott referendums for constituent

assemblies, leaving the way clear for the government to pass populist reforms at will. This flaw we see vividly in Venezuela and Bolivia, where opposition is eliminated from the elections, leaving the way free for greater reforms that have subsequently produced disastrous consequences for the ongoing health of democracy in these countries.

Recommendations

We need a section on recommendations here. How do we deal with populism? How do we avoid it? How do we counter it or deal with it once it arrives?

One of the best way to avoid populism is the adoption of a liberal Democratic style is one concrete response. Until this moment we do not know another better model, without ruling out a future that might have been. Meanwhile, liberal democracy but with high levels of social justice, equity and high growth rates, so far appears to be a good alternative when deciding on either model. The Chilean case is a highly successful model to explain the arguments of how a small country, with a somewhat traumatic recent past was nevertheless able to regroup since its foundation to achieve high standards of social, economic and political institutions with solid, well-entrenched, official probity and hope rooted in their future.

That is why the traditional (non-populist) governments can adopt pragmatic approaches and should be able to provide specific answers to their constituencies' concerns, in short periods of time, not decades, but in one or two presidential periods. This should show positive results.

If the above fails and a populist regime come to an enthroned in society, it is estimated that a good strategy to cope with it is the citizens' participation in committees and referendums, and not joining forces in an attitude of surrender to the designs of the

popular author. Isolationist political movements, witnessing exclusionary tactics and riding a backlash of support from all who were disenfranchised by the populists, may choose to remove themselves from the political milieu at precisely the wrong time—boycotting (and thus losing) elections at all levels, resulting in significant damage to the democratic process. High levels of participation must be the golden rule. The opposition should not “opt out.”

The United States today is by far the most prosperous country on the planet. It has the potential to develop or already developed that may not imagine themselves or American citizens or foreigners who have been living in the United States for nearly a year of our lives in the company of our families. The United States of America remains an emergent society despite having a history of well over two hundred years. Its history, its institutions and its system of government created special conditions for human development. Their potentials are so enormous that probably the average citizen of U.S. has no real sense of its dimensions or their collective capacity. This special status given to U.S. is a global responsibility, as a first element is due to its citizens but that with its international presence should work to expand the areas of democracy in the world because the human race is one. The insecurities and threats that occur in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and South America have an impact on U.S. The proof of this assertion is the threats to the United States that loom large, including drug trafficking, international terrorism and organized crime. Therefore, it is not appropriate to compare the United States with the Roman Empire in relation to their presence or influence in the known world. The times are different, the world is different and, above all things, systems of government are different. That is why the United States has the historic opportunity

which has not had any other political organization in the history of humankind respect to help create a world for this or the next century, allowing the development of human beings in all their dimensions with a vision synergy between peoples. The security of one is the safety of others. The U.S. must return as a force for progress in the South American region. It shares with Latin America a single, world-spanning continent, a landmass uninterrupted by seas or oceans, so it is only right and proper that, in the next administration, the United States can and should act as an effective and efficient partner with the democracies and peoples of Latin America. The US has a responsibility to lead the peoples of the region—and the world-- through the great calamities that will occur in the future to threaten its interests and those of its Latin neighbors.

Conclusions

There are several general characteristics that are seen again and again throughout the rise and reign of populist governments, although it is fair to point out differences between the neo-populist as Rafael Correa of Ecuador and Kirchner of Argentina regarding the populist radicals such as Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Evo Morales of Bolivia and Daniel Ortega to Nicaragua.

The scourge of populism in Latin America is clearly a result of failed governments that have been unable to conform to the traditional interpretation of the designs of the people, making use of, and occasionally abusing old-style policies. We emphasize the idea that people want to be happy and realize their dreams in their present life, not a future one.

Populism is more a symptom than a disease. It is symptomatic of a disease that happens to a society. The populist opportunism is evident with short-term formulae that

the state takes possession of public and private, denying space to the free initiative of individuals. This denial of space fosters corruption, secrecy, the disaffection of those intermediary organizations in society that allow you to construct a stable democracy, thriving, healthy and durable over time, able to respond to the designs of the ordinary citizen. This disaffection occurs because the populism drains space nominally occupied by the people and private enterprise; it takes everything. Only the populist leader and their supporters are using the model. Populism artificially eradicates the existence of a healthy society by creating antagonism and exclusions under the banner of the people. After all, populism governs in the name of the people, by the people, but not the people.

If the answer hypothetically of this research is not on the formulation of policies of the left or right side of what is good is that? It would be extremely accommodative and the fickleness that is distant from one or another vision. The answer is simply the pragmatism to be nested in every good government. Whether the trend of left or right, to deny their existence would enter the field of populists who, with his independence denies his real ideological stripe. So a democracy that prides itself on not tempted to look permanently populist aspirations of their citizens, are viewed internally as their strengths and weaknesses tend to equity. The latter as an effective formula for constant revisionism. Complacency has harmful consequences for the future of a democracy. The best, ongoing review what society wants, where he goes the world, which wants people of flesh and bone. The state must do its role, of course, but no one can arrogate to be developed by real people, the ordinary citizen.

The issue for populism in Latin is manifestly good governance of the people, by the people, and for the people. A policy of inclusion is perhaps one of the best formulas

to prevent this scourge. When people do not feel represented, they will be prone to rebel against the system and are prone to riots, protests and attempts to overthrow. American and European histories are replete with these scenarios, including the recurring revolutions of 1789, 1830 or 1848 in Paris.

Endnotes

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