exclusion of an indigenous majority can be. President Mahuad was overthrown in January 2000 when protesting indigenous leaders and junior military officers attempted to form a junta, only to be swept from the scene in deference to the Vice-President after senior army officers — under considerable pressure from within the military and the US — pulled the plug.

THE CONTEXT

The threats to the quality of democracy in Latin America are rooted in structure, culture, and institutions.

Structure

Latin American democracies are different from democracies in other regions of the world because the structural and historical conditions in which they emerged were different. To give a specific example, Latin America is the region of the world where wealth is most unequally distributed. While the region has grown economically over the past decade, the "pathology of inequality" has not been overcome. A recent report released by the Inter-American Development Bank says that 150 million people in the region live on $2 a day or less, and that the gap between rich and poor widened in the 1990s. As Peter Hakim notes, "More than half of Latin America's national income goes to one seventh of the population" (Hakim 1999).

> Inequality is inimical to the long-term survival of democracy for three reasons. First, lack of growth is threatening to all political systems, democracies included, and high levels of inequality can threaten sustained economic growth. Second, inequality can undermine the positive effects that growth would otherwise have on stabilizing democracy (Muller 1997). Military coups became less common as per capita income rises, but this positive effect of growth can be diminished by inequality. Because of inequality, Latin America is at greater risk of the erosion of democracy than would be predicted by its level of economic development. Finally, a wide range of undemocratic practices and institution — clientelism, corruption, patrimonialism — are engendered or abetted by both inequitable income and lack of equitable access to state services (health, education, justice).

Culture

Latin American societies are cultural hybrids that combine colonial European and native American traditions. The superimposition of liberal political institutions on hybrid cultures often has unexpected consequences. For example, in Latin America,

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liberalism is historically associated with authoritarianism and the expropriation of communal lands. Thus, the oft-heard objection that Latin American democracies are "illiberal" needs to be qualified by an appreciation of the distinctive experiences with liberalism in the region. The cultural baggage of competitive individualism may make liberal democracy unattractive to indigenous peoples accustomed to a more consensual style of decision-making.

If indigenous peoples tend to abstain from voting in Guatemala, or support rebellion in Chiapas, Ecuador, and Bolivia, this should lead us not to conclude that they are "anti-modern", a conclusion that invariably leads to disastrous policy implications, but rather should encourage us to examine how democratic institutions could be made more congruent with local habits, customs, and mores. By the same token, notions of an idealized consensus within indigenous communities may be as fallacious and the presumption that indigenous mobilizations will always support democratization. The uprising against President Mahuad, for example, was the result of a convergence between the military intelligencia among the colonels and the indigenous leaders who had developed links with the army. Public exasperation with President Mahuad led to a coalition of strange bedfellows. For some, the fight against social inequality and the quest for better integration of the indigenous people in the Ecuadorian political system was primary; for others the main goal was to improve conditions for the military and the performance of the executive. The complexity of these issues was dramatized by the collapse of post-coup talks between indigenous leaders and the Ecuadorian government after Indian leaders demanded amnesty for the junior officers involved in the uprising.

Institutions

Democracy can be viewed as a system of elections in which political leaders compete for votes. However, democracy-as-elections only works when voters are citizens. In other words, elections in the absence of the full set of rights, obligations, and freedoms associated with citizenship are likely to be quite a bit different from elections where citizenship is secure. And, of course, the state is the ultimate guarantor of citizenship rights. Without a state there are no citizens, and without citizens there can be no democracy.

The typical historical sequence of institutional development in Latin America involved the creation of oligarchic states that provided the initial (highly exclusionary) foundations of the rule of law. However,