

democratic rule. The correlation between the two is strongly supported by the fact that most Western democracies are also the more industrialized and economically developed nations in the world. While the correlation is powerful, anomalies exist. India, for example, is very poor economically but it is in the process of consolidating its democracy. In Latin America, however, the most dramatic swing from authoritarian rule to a more democratic process occurred in the 1980s. This period, of course, is known as the "lost decade" because economic stagnation prevailed. Therefore, to analyze the connection between economic development and the transition to democracy, one must first of all discern the meaning of economic development.

Economic development is most frequently associated with economic growth. Growth, that is, the expansion of the gross domestic product, is the critical measure of the size and strength of an economy. Today, for example, the economies of Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile are expanding by between 4% to 7% annually. Colombia has for 20 years demonstrated a consistently strong growth, even during the 1980s. Venezuela's economy, although rich in oil reserves, is growing at about 2% to 3% annually. One can only wait to see if economic growth, or the lack of it, will be the significant factor in the democratic transition.

Growth alone, however, may not be the key variable. Brazil's economy grew exceedingly fast in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, the beneficiaries of that dramatic growth were few. When this occurs, disparities of wealth grow and a great deal of discontent, even revolt, can develop within the masses. Even if widespread poverty does not lead to significant political actions, the disparities in wealth in Latin America are a major impediment to the creation of truly democratic and civil societies, and those disparities have been exacerbated by the neo-liberal push for stripping the state of many of its previous functions. In Mexico, for example, since the dramatic movement toward economic and trade liberalization under President Salinas in the 1980s, the number of billionaires has increased ten-fold, while the peso devaluation of 1994 virtually destroyed the middle classes and further distanced the impoverished from the mainstream of society. Although the factors that gave rise to the Zapatista uprising in southern Mexico are complex, there is little doubt that the neo-