

Violence in the small and relatively poor countries of Central America tends to displace the news of peaceful democratic changes. Mexico and Colombia in the past year have replaced their leaders through democratic elections. Costa Rica has a firmly established democratic tradition. Venezuela is in the midst of a presidential election campaign, and Peru and Ecuador will have theirs next year. Argentina is also going through the process of returning to elected civilian government after eight years of military rule, and Bolivia returned to constitutional government last year. These are events that herald evolutionary democratic change which is important for the stability of the Western Hemisphere and which commands our support and encouragement.

Another feature of popular attitudes to Latin America concerns the respect for human rights. Some countries in the region currently have a deplorable record in this regard, but it is a mistake to assume that this is the situation in all of them. Many people in the Americas, including those in positions of authority, are concerned about abuse of human rights in the hemisphere. Many outstanding leaders in the struggle for basic decency in a state's behaviour towards its citizens are Latin Americans. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has courageously documented abuses and recommended measures to improve conditions and to ensure that human rights are observed more fully.