

Democracy and Human Rights in Latin America

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Transitions from dictatorship to democracy

- Human rights violations during authoritarian regimes
- Third Wave (Huntington) transitions (1974-1990)
- Politically (not socially or economically) motivated transitions
- Dual transitions

Post-democratization and human rights

Progress

- Procedural democracy (electoral rights, rights to organize, constitutional and legal changes)
- Free and fair elections (media, international observers, independent electoral commissions)
- More likely that change will take place through ballots rather than bullets
- End of systematic government violations of human rights

...but significant issues remain

- Women's rights (femicide in El Salvador and Honduras)
- Violent crime
- Indigenous rights

Murderous metropolises

Homicides per 100,000 population, 50 worst cities*, 2015



Source: Citizens' Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice

*With populations of 300,000 or more

Indigenous Rights

- 20 indigenous groups in 15 democratic Latin American countries 5 years before and 5 and 10 years after transition to democracy
- Minorities at Risk (MAR) Project's (2009) data on political and economic discrimination
- Suggestive evidence with regard to country-level structural variables
 - In terms of democracy and economic development, indigenous rights have improved over time
 - With regard to political and economic discrimination of indigenous groups, it appears that higher levels of economic development are reflected in lower levels of discrimination, whereas, higher levels of democracy actually have a detrimental effect on indigenous rights

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Conceptualization of democracy and human rights**
 - Range from the most procedural (Schumpeter 1942, Dahl 1971, Huntington 1991) to most participatory, representative and freedom-protecting
 - Specific to Latin America: difficulty in consolidating democracy. Competitive regimes that contained both authoritarian and democratic elements labelled as semidemocratic (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2005, hybrid regimes (Karl 1995, Diamond 2002), and a host of other democracy “with adjectives” (Collier and Levitsky 1997).
- **Assumptions about the linkages between democracy and human rights**
 - “There is a definitive connection between democracy and human rights: a functioning democracy will, by definition, be respectful of human rights” (Hillman, Peeler, and Cardozo Da Silva (2002, 2)
 - Even in well-established democracies, however, minorities continue to face discrimination and abuses of their fundamental rights (Arias and Gurses 2012)
- **Imported/imposed concepts of democracy and human rights**
- **Measures of democracy (Freedom House and Polity)**

Challenges and Opportunities (cont'd)

Latin America and the World

- Region largely off the radar
- Democracy promotion in Latin America and rest of world

Conclusion

- Focus on procedural democracy
- End of political conflict but social and economic conflict persists
- Minority groups continue to be at higher risk for economic and political discrimination
- Legal and institutional structure in place that can allow for democracy and human rights to develop and improve