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# The Crisis of Democratic Representation in the Andes: An Overview

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This book analyzes and explains the crisis of democratic representation in five Andean countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. In this region, disaffection with democracy, political parties, and legislatures has spread to an alarming degree. In Bolivia (2003), Ecuador (1997, 2000, and 2005), Peru (2000), and Venezuela (1993), democratically elected presidents were not able to finish their terms of office because of popular and elite discontent. In Peru and Venezuela, massive discontent with existing party options gave rise to surprising collapses of the party system in the 1990s. Political outsiders with anti-establishment discourses have flourished as traditional parties have faded. In Ecuador, a successful military coup removed a democratically elected president in 2000; in Peru, a successful palace coup led to a democratic breakdown in 1992; and in Venezuela, a coup in 2002 removed the democratically elected president for one day, although he made a rapid comeback to the presidency. Some parties that in the recent past were major electoral contenders and won the presidency have seemingly suffered their terminal demise.

The crisis of democratic representation in the Andes is important both intellectually and politically. Understanding what has gone wrong with democracy in Latin America and many other "third wave" democracies has become one of the outstanding intellectual challenges of our day. The widespread dissatisfaction with democratic representation is a core ingredient in the crisis of democracy in the Andes and throughout much of Latin America. In recent years, as the wave of transitions to democracy and semi-democracy in Latin America has ebbed, intellectual and political attention has turned to how to build more robust democracies that satisfy the aspirations of more citizens—and how to comprehend the grave shortcomings of most existing democracies and semi-democracies in the region. Because the Andean countries provide clear examples

of the weakness of mechanisms of democratic representation, they are an excellent set of countries for examining this problem.

Politically, this subject is important because the Andean countries have the potential to be negative role models in a region (Latin America) that has historically had strong demonstration and diffusion effects in terms of regime changes (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, forthcoming). Moreover, a deep discrediting of mechanisms of democratic representation can have grave implications for democracy. In Peru, disenchantment with traditional mechanisms of democratic representation helped pave the way to a democratic breakdown in 1992. In Venezuela, the growing disaffection with conventional vehicles of democratic representation led Hugo Chávez to the presidency in 1998. Under his leadership, democracy in Venezuela has eroded, and the country has polarized sharply between his followers and foes.

We hope that the book makes five main contributions to political science and to understanding Latin American politics. First and foremost, we hope to contribute to the broadening of theoretical and empirical horizons about democratic representation by studying a region in crisis. Our work shifts the mainstream thinking about representation in three ways. Most of the work on democratic representation focuses on the advanced industrial democracies, and almost all of it analyzes how representation works. Analyzing the Andes suggests a more innovative (in relation to the existing literature) question that is more important for our region and some other parts of the world: why representation sometimes *fails* to work.[1] This issue is paramount because in the Andes as well as some other parts of the developing world the perceived failures of democratic representation are widespread and profound. In the extensive literature on political representation, to the best of our knowledge this is only the second book to focus on a crisis of democratic representation (see Novaro 1994). Many previous works have dealt with a related subject, namely, a decline of political parties, but most of this literature has focused on the advanced industrial democracies, where (perhaps excluding Italy) there is nothing resembling the crisis of parties and of democratic representation that has plagued the Andean region.

Much of the existing literature assumes that programmatic convergence between voters and legislators is at the core of democratic representation and exclusively analyzes such convergence. In contrast, such programmatic or ideological representation is very weak in the Andes. To understand representation in this region, it is essential to look beyond programmatic and ideological convergence between voters and their representatives.

Most of the literature on the advanced industrial democracies posits that patterns of political representation remain relatively stable over time (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Converse 1969; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). When we turn to many post-1978 democracies, however, it is important to think about a range in patterns of democratic representation, running from more to less legitimate and

stable. We pose new theoretical questions about why patterns of democratic representation in many countries do not achieve the stability that most of the theoretical literature posits.[2]

Second, we aspire to enrich empirical knowledge about democratic representation in the Andes. New work on this type of representation in Latin America is needed because of its importance in democratic theory and the paucity of empirical work on it for Latin America (see Chalmers, Martin, and Piester 1997; Hagopian 1998; Luna and Zechmeister 2005; Roberts, forthcoming). For Latin America, there is extensive literature on legislators and legislatures and on parties and party systems, and a growing literature on voters. There is little, however, on democratic representation, which involves the relationship between voters and parties or elected politicians.

Our third contribution revolves around explaining why a crisis of democratic representation occurs. When voters have free choices from an ample array of party options, why do they remain deeply dissatisfied? Why can't they find a party option that satisfies them?

We do not definitively resolve why a crisis of democratic representation erupted in the Andes. This is a new research question that demands further examination, and disagreement over it is intractable. Two authors, Brian Crisp and Simón Pachano, focus on institutional arrangements to explain deficiencies in democratic representation. Crisp (Chapter 7) argues that in the Andes institutional incentives foster either too much or too little focus on national programmatic issues as opposed to district-level constituency demands. Pachano (Chapter 4) claims that many deficiencies of representation in Ecuador stem from institutional rules of the game. These rules of the game favor party system fragmentation, impede the formation of stable ruling coalitions, and encourage a focus on provincial and local constituency service rather than programmatic national issues. Both chapters are emblematic of institutionalist approaches to understanding the shortcomings of democratic representation. Both authors imply that citizens' deep dissatisfaction with democratic representation could be attenuated with well-conceived institutional reforms.

In their chapters, in contrast, René Antonio Mayorga (Chapter 5) and Scott Mainwaring (Chapter 10) see the crisis of democratic representation as stemming from governance (Mayorga's term) or state deficiencies (Mainwaring's focus). Mayorga asserts that deep dissatisfaction with democratic performance underlies the crisis of democratic representation and the rise of political outsiders. In the book's Conclusion, Mainwaring argues that institutional rules of the game are not *generally* at the core of the dissatisfaction with democratic representation. He asserts that the main cause of the crisis of democratic representation in the Andes has been state deficiencies in many arenas, ranging from citizen security to corruption and economic performance. For both Mayorga and Mainwaring, the rise of political outsiders, declining confidence in parties, high electoral

volatility, and the other manifestations of a crisis of democratic representation are products of bad performance by democratic regimes. Bad performance has bred dissatisfaction with politicians and parties.

To this performance-based argument, Mainwaring adds one other explanation for the deep dissatisfaction with democratic representation. Mainwaring argues that the zero-sum nature of party competition and the media focus on negative images of parties and assemblies help account for the discrediting of these agents of democratic representation. This explanation resonates with constructivist approaches to social science because it calls attention to the way in which political competition and media images help construct citizen conceptions of politics, and specifically of parties and assemblies.

Although neither this volume nor any other can definitively resolve what has caused the crisis of democratic representation in the Andes, our volume makes a contribution by explicitly putting this question on the intellectual agenda and by staking out three of the most important explanations: institutionalist, performance-based, and constructivist.

Our fourth contribution is to advance understanding of the consequences of a crisis of democratic representation. This issue comes to the fore in the chapters by Martín Tanaka (Chapter 2), René Antonio Mayorga (Chapter 5), and Daniel Levine and Catalina Romero (Chapter 8). Tanaka and Mayorga examine the consequences of the discrediting of democratic representation for democratic regimes. In many post-1978 democracies and semi-democracies, citizens have become disillusioned with the mechanisms of democratic representation. As both authors show, the discrediting of the conventional mechanisms of democratic representation in several Andean countries had ominous consequences for democratic regimes. In Peru and Venezuela, the perceived failures of traditional mechanisms of democratic representation, including most dramatically the collapse of the old party systems, paved the way for an erosion (Venezuela) and breakdown (Peru) of democracy. In both cases, political outsiders took advantage of the discrediting of the old parties, won the presidency, and began to attack and dismantle some key democratic institutions. In Bolivia, the decay of the major parties and the discrediting of conventional mechanisms of representation led to the forced ouster of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 2003, closing a chapter in Bolivian history during which the prospects for democracy in a poor, ethnically divided country temporarily improved.

One lesson of Mayorga's and Tanaka's chapters is that the deep discrediting of agents of democratic representation is often dangerous for democracies. In this respect, Tanaka's and Mayorga's analyses are relevant for the large number of countries where there is a crisis of democratic representation. In this sense, the problems that we address have implications for democratic and semi-democratic regimes in Africa, Asia, the post-Communist world, and elsewhere in Latin America.

Levine and Romero ask a different question about the consequences of a crisis of democratic representation. While Mayorga and Tanaka examine the consequences of a crisis of democratic representation for democratic regimes, Levine and Romero analyze the consequences for how poor urban citizens pursue their interests. In both Peru and Venezuela, politicians and parties failed to deliver what citizens wanted. Levine and Romero argue that the "discredit and decay of established leaders and parties combined with institutional failure and sustained economic crisis opened the way . . . for a wide range of movements to emerge and claim a voice as 'civil society.'" Stated more generally, a crisis of democratic representation has profound consequences for citizen politics.

Our fifth contribution is conceptual. We define and operationalize a crisis of democratic representation in this introductory chapter. In our definition, democratic representation is the relationship by which voters authorize representatives to govern. We argue that citizen satisfaction with the agents of democratic representation (politicians, parties, and assemblies) varies widely, and that this variance is expressed in both subjective and behavioral indicators. At the subjective level, citizens express more or less confidence in parties, politicians, and assemblies, and they view these agents as having more or less legitimacy. At the behavioral level, citizens vote or withdraw from electoral participation. They remain loyal to the same party over time, or they might switch party preference with frequency in order to find a more satisfactory agent to represent them. They continue to vote for establishment parties or search for anti-system candidates because of their dissatisfaction with the existing party options. We use the term "crisis of democratic representation" to refer to contexts in which, at the subjective level, citizens do not trust or confer legitimacy to agents of democratic representation. At the behavioral level, they are more likely to support anti-system candidates and parties, to turn to new parties, to switch electoral preferences with frequency, and to withdraw from electoral participation.

The book also addresses other important questions. Can innovations in representation at the subnational level offset deficiencies at the national level? To what extent can institutional reforms of the formal mechanisms of democratic representation overcome perceived deficiencies in the system? Have the mechanisms designed to enhance representation of indigenous groups been good or harmful to democracy? Deborah Yashar (Chapter 9) sees these new mechanisms as advancing democracy, whereas René Mayorga (Chapter 5) argues that they have made democracy more inclusionary but that some indigenous groups have a utopian, anti-liberal-democracy discourse and practice.

This book primarily addresses the literatures on political representation and democracy. It is one of the first books in English to analyze democratic representation in Latin America. By examining the crisis of democratic representation, we hope to contribute to the literature that seeks to understand why many competitively elected regimes around the world have huge deficiencies.

In the vast literature on democracy, this book contributes to recent work on the severe shortcomings of many competitively elected regimes (e.g., O'Donnell 2003). In most of Latin America and in some post-Communist countries, competitively elected governments have failed to deliver the goods, generating widespread dissatisfaction with democracy and concern about its future. We contribute to this literature by looking at the deficiencies of democratic representation.

One of the fundamental arguments of this book involves the relationship between these two literatures, and in particular between a crisis of democratic representation and regime or state deficiencies. Tanaka, Mayorga, and Mainwaring argue that the crisis of democratic representation resulted largely from regime or state deficiencies. The profound delegitimation and repudiation of parties and politicians has paved the way for democratic breakdowns and erosions. Traditional agents of democratic representation—above all, political parties—may be deeply flawed, but democracy without parties is at best severely deficient, and at worst, as Schattschneider (1942, 1) wrote long ago, simply unthinkable.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, we undertake four tasks. First, we explain our reason for focusing on the Andes. Second, we examine why it has become meaningful to think of the five Andean countries as facing some common challenges. Third, we define the concept of democratic representation. Finally, we explain what a crisis of democratic representation is and examine empirical manifestations thereof.

## *Case Selection: Why Focus on the Andes?*

If the problems that we are addressing are common throughout the world today, why focus on one specific region within Latin America rather than adopting a cross-regional research strategy such as that successfully pursued by Beissinger and Young (2002) in their book on state failure? We have two reasons. First, the Andean region is widely perceived as being in crisis, and its international importance has grown as a result of the crisis. The perceived deficiencies of democratic representation and the discrediting of parties are more acute in the Andes than in most of the rest of Latin America. Therefore, it is a particularly good region for examining the subject at hand. Yet the Andean region, as a region, has not been studied in much detail. In contrast to the situation with the Southern Cone and Central America, there are few works on the Andes as a region (Burt and Mauceri 2004; Conaghan and Malloy 1994; Crandall et al. 2005; Drake and Hershberg, forthcoming; O'Neill 2005). An attempt to fill this gap is important.

This is not to claim, however, that the Andean region is unique in experiencing a crisis of democratic representation or in experiencing severely deficient competitive regimes. On this score, the Andean region is illustrative of many struggling democracies in and beyond Latin America.

Second, regions of the world, such as Latin America, and, within them, subregions, such as the Andes, are important in world politics (Gleditsch 2002; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, forthcoming). Within the Andean region, there are powerful cross-national influences and demonstration effects. The rise of President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (1998–present), for example, influenced the electoral victory of President Lucio Gutiérrez in Ecuador (2003–present), as well as the emergence of Evo Morales, Bolivia's most famous leader of coca growers, as a viable presidential candidate in 2002. Morales was subsequently elected president in 2005.

These five countries have created some regional organizations that have reinforced common influences and the sense of a regional identity. On May 26, 1969, the governments of these five countries signed the Cartagena Agreement, thus beginning an early process of regional integration. The current Andean Community consists of a set of organizations known as the Andean Integration System, which includes the Andean Parliament, the Andean Tribunal of Justice, the Andean Presidential Council, the Andean Council of Foreign Ministers, and the Andean Corporation of Promotion.[3] Common institutions and some common problems make a focus on the Andes a reasonable way to geographically delimit our study.

Although our focus is the Andean region, an important part of our research design, especially when we explain a crisis of democratic representation, involves comparing the Andes to a broader set of countries. Without such comparison involving variance in the dependent variable (i.e., the extent to which the democratic representation is in crisis), it would be impossible to explain the outcome.

## *The Andean Region in Crisis*

The Andean region as understood in this book includes Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. It does not include Chile and Argentina, although both countries have borders along the Andean range. These two countries are part of the Southern Cone. We include Venezuela as part of the Andean region even though most of its inhabitants see themselves as more geographically, ethnically, and culturally aligned with the Caribbean than with the Andean region. The same is true of the Colombian population living along the Atlantic Coast. The reason for including them is that both countries were part of the set of republics whose independence was established by Simón Bolívar, and they have long been part of the set of countries with common membership in Andean regional organizations.

Until the late 1980s or the early 1990s, a book on democratic representation in the Andes would have made little intellectual sense. There would have been no compelling grounds for grouping these five countries together in terms of

their systems of representation. The five countries faced very different political challenges from 1958 until the late 1980s.

During these decades, Venezuela and to a lesser degree Colombia were among the most successful democracies in Latin America. In 1976–77, they were exceptional cases in the region; along with Costa Rica, they were two of three islands of democracy in a sea of authoritarianism. In contrast, the other three countries analyzed in this volume had only short-lived experiments with democracy before 1978. Bolivia had a semi-democratic regime from 1956 until 1964, followed by a string of mostly harsh military dictators from 1964 until 1982, interrupted only by two very short-lived efforts to install democracy in 1979 and 1980. Ecuador had semi-democratic regimes from 1948 until 1962 and from 1968 to 1970, but they were punctuated by military coups. Until 1980, Peru's only experience with democracy was short-lived, lasting only from 1963 until 1968. Peru also had semi-democratic regimes from 1945 to 1948 and from 1956 to 1962.

Economically, too, there was a sharp contrast among these five countries until the late 1980s. In most of the post-1945 period, Venezuela had the highest per capita income in Latin America. Colombia was well behind Venezuela, but had a per capita income and a standard of living far higher than that found in Bolivia and Ecuador. In contrast, Bolivia has been one of the poorest countries in Latin America since the early twentieth century. Ecuador was also much poorer than Venezuela. These economic differences underpinned contrasts in democratic representation during those interludes in which democracy existed in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru. Venezuela was a wealthier, more educated, and more urban society than the other four countries, with corresponding differences for democratic representation.

That today these five countries face some important common challenges in democratic representation is remarkable in view of their very divergent histories. The emergence of an intellectually interesting common puzzle about a crisis of democratic representation in the 1990s reflects the confluence of striking changes in these five countries. One change is positive. With the exception of the Peruvian breakdown of democracy in 1992, all five countries have had democratic or semi-democratic regimes since the Bolivian transition to democracy in 1982. While Colombia and Venezuela underwent early transitions to competitive political regimes in 1958 and 1959, respectively,[4] Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia restored such regimes during what Huntington (1991) called the "third wave of democratization" at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.

Other changes have been inauspicious, and a shared sense of crisis that has roiled the five countries has contributed to the relevance of analyzing them as a subregion within Latin America. Venezuela's once solid democracy began to face serious challenges in 1989 with the outbreak of massive popular protests against President Carlos Andrés Pérez. In 1992, a military coup led by future president Hugo Chávez failed, but it nonetheless signaled the growing disenchantment

Table 1.1

*Support for Democracy, Latin America, 2005*

| Country or region | % of respondents who unconditionally favor democracy |
|---|---|
| Bolivia | 49 |
| Colombia | 46 |
| Ecuador | 43 |
| Peru | 40 |
| Venezuela | 76 |
| Average—Andean Region | 51 |
| Total—Latin America | 53 |

SOURCE: *Latinobarómetro* survey, 2005.

with the existing political system. Deepening repudiation of the establishment parties made possible Chávez's election in 1998. Colombia's democracy also eroded in the 1990s, victim of an armed conflict between drug lords, paramilitary forces, left-wing guerrillas, and of a weakened state in the rural areas (Bejarano and Pizarro Leongómez 2005). Once Venezuela and Colombia stood out as more democratic than their Andean counterparts; by the 1990s, the challenges they faced were more similar to those of their Andean neighbors than had been the case in the previous four decades.

Thus, a region that was once characterized by profound contrasts in terms of democratic representation, running the gamut from relatively stable and legitimate patterns of democratic representation in Venezuela and Colombia to dictatorships in the other three countries during much of the 1960s and 1970s, started to acquire some similarities. In all five countries, political outsiders burst onto the scene and challenged for the presidency—successfully in Bolivia (2005), Ecuador (2002), Peru (1990), and Venezuela (1998).[5] In all five countries, electoral volatility escalated, reflecting citizen discontent with existing party options. In all but Venezuela,[6] public opinion reflected poor evaluations of parties and Congress, two pillars of democratic representation. Support for democracy is fairly low in all the countries except Venezuela, as Table 1.1 shows. The table gives the percentage of survey respondents who agreed that "Democracy is always the best form of government." Respondents were given two other options: (1) "For people like me, the form of government does not matter"; and (2) "Under some conditions, an authoritarian regime is better."

Economically, too, there has been some convergence among these five countries, mainly as result of Venezuela's protracted economic demise. A country that once prospered relative to its Andean neighbors no longer stands out so distinctively. In 1960, Venezuela's per capita income was 3.4 times greater than Colombia's; by 2002, its per capita income was only 31 percent higher. During these four decades, Venezuela's per capita income slid from $3,720 to $2,979,

TABLE 1.2
*GDP per Capita in the Andes, 1960–2002*
(constant 1995 U.S. dollars)

| | 1960 | 1980 | 2002 | % change, 1960–2002 | % change, 1980–2002 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bolivia | $ 848 | $1,014 | $ 940 | 11 | −7 |
| Colombia | 1,104 | 1,868 | 2,282 | 107 | 22 |
| Ecuador | 1,090 | 1,816 | 1,796 | 65 | −2 |
| Peru | 1,875 | 2,569 | 2,380 | 26 | −7 |
| Venezuela | 3,720 | 3,991 | 2,979 | −20 | −25 |

SOURCE: World Bank, World Development Indicators Database.

while the per capita income of Colombia and Ecuador increased substantially, and that of Bolivia and Peru increased modestly (11 percent and 26 percent, respectively) (Table 1.2).

From 1980 to 2002, per capita GDP fell in four of the five countries, all but Colombia, with a particularly protracted and steep decline in Venezuela. Colombia, which enjoyed modest economic growth during the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, has experienced economic stagnation since the mid-1990s.

The negative per capita economic growth for the region, coupled with poor job generation, has led to increasing poverty. According to data of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2001, 61 percent of Bolivians, 60 percent of Ecuadorians, 55 percent of Colombians, 49 percent of Peruvians, and 49 percent of Venezuelans lived in poverty. Poor economic growth and increased poverty have bred dissatisfaction with democracy, resulting in people's deteriorated image of two of the main pillars of representative democracy: parties and parliament.

A third factor that has fostered convergence across these five countries in terms of representation has been the social dislocation caused by a market-oriented model of economic development. The industrial crisis due to the demise of import substitution industrialization and the turn toward market-oriented policies in the 1980s and 1990s was a turning point in Latin America's political development. Government withdrawal, fiscal crises, and policies favoring economic austerity limited the flow of resources needed to sustain parties founded on clientelistic (Colombia) and corporatist (Venezuela) networks (Hagopian 1998; Roberts, forthcoming). Some parties and party systems in Latin America (Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica) have adapted to the new challenges ushered in by the era of market-oriented economic policies, while others have not.

Market-oriented models of economic growth and the decline in living standards for large sectors of society deepened the social chasm in most Latin American countries, especially in the Andean region, between groups either incorporated or unincorporated into the formal economy, social security, stable

employment, unions, public services, and legalized neighborhoods. The unincorporated sectors form Hugo Chávez's electoral base in Venezuela. They are also the source of widespread social and political movements responsible for popular protests in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru.

Since the mid-1990s, the Andean region has been the most volatile in Latin America. It has also been the region within Latin America of greatest concern to U.S. policy makers. Insufficient economic growth, rising poverty, increased economic inequality, disillusionment with the results of the democratic process, drug trafficking, and the risk that the armed conflict in Colombia will overflow the country's borders highlight the gravity of the situation throughout the region.[7]

## *The Concept of Democratic Representation*

Because democratic representation is the central subject of this book, it is crucial to be clear about what we mean by this term. We use the term "representation" to denote a principal–agent relationship whereby A (the principal) authorizes B (the agent) to act on her behalf. The clearest relationships of representation are those in which a clearly defined principal (an individual, a group, an association, the electorate, etc.) explicitly delegates a clearly defined agent to undertake a task.[8] Examples of explicit acts of delegation include voting for someone to represent one's interests or formally designating them to do so, creating a union to represent workers' interests, and hiring a lawyer to represent someone legally.

Our definition of representation is narrower and more clearly delineated than some. Some prominent definitions of representation are impossible to operationalize. For example, Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes (1999a, 2) define representation as "acting in the interest of the represented," or as "acting in the best interest of the public." We downplay whether the agent is acting in the interest of the public or the represented and instead focus on whether a principal authorizes an agent to act on her behalf. It is extremely difficult to establish whether elected representatives are acting in the best interest of the public or of the represented.[9] Hence, by Manin et al.'s definition, it is very difficult to establish when a relationship of representation exists.[10] In a similar vein, Pitkin (1967, 209) argues that representing "means acting in the interests of the represented in a manner responsive to them."

The definitions in Manin et al. and Pitkin do not stipulate that representation requires a principal–agent relationship. By their definitions, a vast and ill-defined range of actions purportedly undertaken on behalf of some people or of the public good could be understood as "representation." In contrast, our definition is easy to operationalize. We make no claim that elected representatives actually act on behalf of their constituents or the public good because of the difficulties in judging such claims.