

**Ethnicity, Race and Democratic Consolidation: The Dominican Republic,  
Guatemala and Peru**

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## **Ethnicity, Race and Democratic Consolidation: The Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Peru**

Compared to some parts of the world, like Africa, Latin America (or more precisely Iberoamerica) is relatively homogeneous.<sup>1</sup> The region is principally Spanish-speaking and Catholic. However, the region is also a place of complex racial and ethnic mixing. The mestizo and mulatto races, if not originating there, flourished in the region. There are still regions where the indigenous population has maintained its ethnic identity despite over 300 years of subjugation. In numerous countries, the descendants of slaves who were brought from Africa to perform arduous agricultural labor still struggle to be considered as equals. And to this date, in most countries of the region political and economic power are wielded by an elite that is predominantly European and Caucasian in lineage. This racial and ethnic melange has most likely affected the political development of the region.

This paper (which is intended to eventually be a chapter in a book-length manuscript) argues that racial and ethnic mixing in Latin American has been one of several factors of vital importance to democratic development in Latin America. More precisely, racial and ethnic differences have helped to impede the development of democracy in the region, because elites, normally European-Caucasian, have been hesitant to allow democracy to flourish in populations that are different from them racially and ethnically.

### **I. Elite Consensus and National Unity as Preconditions for Democracy.**

The extensive literature on democratization suggests several conditions necessary for the establishment and consolidation of democracy. While complete agreement is lacking, there is some general consensus on several basic preconditions that appear to be important for most analysts. Scholars seem to agree for example that democratic consolidation requires elite consensus, a “civic culture,” socioeconomic development, and national unity. In this paper, we emphasize the importance of elite behavior and national unity. In doing so, our intent is not to minimize the importance of other potentially important factors, but to give closer attention to the importance of national consensus and unity, both at the elite and societal level, for the establishment and maintenance of democracy.

As with all studies of democratization, the concepts of democracy and democratic consolidation are very important here. Most recent works on democratization have tended to employ Dahl’s definition of democracy as a political system where all citizens are allowed to contest the political system and to participate politically.<sup>2</sup> Thus,

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<sup>1</sup>Larry Diamond and Juan J. Linz, “Politics, Society and Democracy in Latin America, “ in Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, editors, Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America, Volume 4 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), pg. 41.

<sup>2</sup>See Robert Dahl, Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

contestation and participation have become the principal features of a healthy democracy. Political systems that are non-polyarchic are those that limit participation, contestation, or both. Democratic consolidation as a concept has been a bit more vague and elusive. Higley and Gunther argue that

a *consolidated democracy* is a regime that meets all the procedural criteria of democracy [contestation and participation] and also in which all politically significant groups accept established political institutions and adhere to democratic rules of the game.<sup>3</sup>

As with this definition, most analysts have a difficult time clearly specifying what features characterize democratic consolidation. One characteristic of democratic consolidation is somewhat obvious. A democracy cannot be considered consolidated unless it persists over time. Thus, *democratic stability* must be an important feature of consolidation. A second characteristic of democratic consolidation is less obvious and more difficult to measure. If contestation and participation are the most important features of democracy, then a consolidated democracy must maintain and where possible enhance these two characteristics over time. That is, for democracy to be consolidated it must be stable over time and it must be deepened. When a nation inaugurates a polyarchic regime there may be some initial limits or barriers to participation and contestation. However, over time we would expect the system to erase those barriers and limitations. Only then can a democracy be fully consolidated. We suggest therefore that democratic consolidation has two important elements: *stability* and *deepening*.

As suggested by the definition of democratic consolidation above, some students of democratization have relatively recently argued that elite unity and elite consensus are of paramount importance for the inauguration and consolidation of democracy. Those who focus on elite attitudes and behavior suggest that the emergence of competitive democracy depends upon "... leadership behavior, on the leaders' ... willingness to compromise ... and on elite decisions made at critical historical junctions."<sup>4</sup> These scholars have directed their attention toward the voluntaristic actions and choices of national elites because elite pacts or accords have in the past resulted in the consolidation of democratic politics. After studying the three most enduring, stable democracies in Latin America, Peeler concluded: "The establishment of liberal democratic regimes in all three cases [Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela] was made possible by explicit pacts of accommodation between rival elites."<sup>5</sup>

A basic assumption of this study, then, is that a democratic political system cannot become consolidated unless the principal elites in the society agree upon the rules of the game of that system and are willing to abide by those rules. The basic rules of a

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<sup>3</sup>Higley and Gunther, editors, Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin American and Southern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pg. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Ergun Ozbudun, "Institutionalizing Competitive Elections in Developing Societies," in Myron Weiner and Ergun Ozbudun, eds., Competitive Elections in Developing Countries (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), pg. 418.

<sup>5</sup>John A. Peeler, Latin American Democracies: Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985, pg. 137.

democratic system are to allow for contestation and participation. We also assume that elites decide to inaugurate and respect democratic politics because it is in their interest to do so not because democracy is an inherently good thing. Elite support for democracy is often the product of agreements or pacts between all or some key leaders. Burton and Higley have provided perhaps the most lucid theory describing the processes through which elites achieve a consensual unity necessary for the development of a stable political system.<sup>6</sup> At the most general level, Burton and Higley posit that

"[e]lite settlements are relatively rare events in which warring national elite factions suddenly and deliberately reorganize their relations by negotiating compromises on their most basic disagreements."<sup>7</sup>

Such settlements have two important consequences:

they create patterns of open but peaceful competition, ... among all major elite factions ... and they transform unstable political regimes ... into stable regimes, in which forcible power seizures no longer occur and are not widely expected.<sup>8</sup>

In essence, an elite settlement transforms disunified elites into "consensually unified" elites. Consensually unified elites "operate stable, politically representative regimes," where "government positions [pass] peacefully among different persons and factions," usually through "periodic, competitive, and binding elections."<sup>9</sup> A regime transition that results in a long-lasting democracy is likely to be the product of an elite settlement, while a regime transition that leads to a failed democracy is likely to be devoid of a settlement.

Elite settlements, however, have two important dimensions; they are not all or nothing phenomena. And, the dimensions of elite settlements are directly linked to the type of democracy that emerges in the aftermath. A *comprehensive elite settlement* takes place if all of the paramount political groups in the society participate in the agreement. A comprehensive settlement will most likely provide for full political contestation since the principal political groups will be able to contest power in the resultant political regime. If one or more important political faction is excluded from the negotiations, then the agreement can be classified as a *partial elite settlement*. A partial settlement is likely to be precarious because the elites who were excluded may decide to undermine the new political regime. A partial settlement, in many respects, corresponds to Higley and Burton's concept of elite convergence, because initially a few groups resolve their differences and only subsequently are the more extreme groups incorporated into the regime.<sup>10</sup> There is an additional, important element in a partial settlement. A partial settlement that includes the leaders of the most powerful factions in the society is much more likely to result in a stable regime than a partial settlement that excludes one or more powerful faction. The resultant regime, however, will be stable more because of force than because of consensus, thus decreasing its chances for long-term stability.

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<sup>6</sup>Michael G. Burton, and John Higley, "Elite Settlements," *American Sociological Review* 52 (June 1987), pp. 295-307.

<sup>7</sup>Burton and Higley, pg. 295.

<sup>8</sup>Burton and Higley, pg. 295.

<sup>9</sup>Burton and Higley, pg. 297.

<sup>10</sup>See Higley and Gunther, pp. 24-30.

Elite settlements have a second dimension: they may be *exclusive* or *inclusive*. That is, the elites involved in the settlement may decide to exclude popular participation from the political system, or they may decide to allow all citizens to participate in the new regime. Exclusion is more likely to be a feature of a partial settlement than a comprehensive settlement, especially in the modern world. During a regime transition, there are of course two other possible outcomes. There can be a failed settlement (of any of the above variety), or there can be the absence of any attempt at a settlement.

Certainly, partial settlements are less likely to result in democratic consolidation than comprehensive settlements. Partial settlements are also more likely to result in a limited democracy since contestation and participation are more likely to be curtailed. But partial settlements can eventually lead to stable democratic regimes if elites benefit from cooperation and toleration and if strong, anti-system political forces do not emerge. For example, Colombian elites learned that limited political contestation and participation would not seriously undermine their power, and at the same time would help to halt the costly political conflict known as *la violencia*. Eventually even those groups that are excluded in a partial settlement may become incorporated into the political game and full contestation and participation -- the key elements of democracy -- can be added to the political system.

As stated above, most scholars have accepted the limited definition of democracy as a political system where groups are allowed to *contest political power* and all citizens are free to *participate politically*. Consequently, the concept of elite settlement is inextricably tied to democratization. Contestation and participation are the basic features of democratic regimes and they are also the key dimensions of elite settlements. A comprehensive settlement will naturally lead to full contestation because all elites will be allowed to contest power in the resulting regime. A partial settlement may exclude certain groups from the new regime, thus limiting political contestation. If an elite settlement, whether comprehensive or partial, limits participation then an important characteristic of democracy is compromised. A comprehensive-inclusive elite settlement will naturally lead to a democratic political system that has a good chance of consolidating. First, because elites have come to an accord and second because all groups can contest power and all citizens can freely participate in politics. As we can see, then, the characteristics of an elite settlement will help to determine whether or not a democratic system emerges from that settlement. More generally, elite settlements are linked to democratization because they represent the politics of accommodation and compromise rather than the politics of raw power and coercion.

Elites are unlikely to reach a settlement with opponents who hold a very different outlook on social life or who demand drastically different solutions to social problems, especially if the different outlooks are philosophically irreconcilable. Consequently, elite consensus will not occur in a society where elites have fundamental disagreements. Anderson has emphasized that in Latin America new "power contenders" are not admitted into the political arena unless they "... provide assurances that they will not jeopardize the

ability of any existing power contender to similarly participate in political activity."<sup>11</sup> Thus, I argue that an elite settlement, whether partial or comprehensive, is *preceded* by some degree of elite convergence or moderation. Only when elites share a common ideology or culture will consensus emerge and elite settlement become a possibility. This study proposes that the elite consensus necessary for democracy to emerge and flourish is difficult to achieve in a society that has racial and ethnic (cultural) cleavages. Thus, the degree of racial and ethnic homogeneity present in a society will greatly influence the degree to which elites will achieve consensus and support the establishment of democratic politics.

A number of scholars have through the years pointed to the importance of national unity as a precondition for democracy. In his classic book, *Polyarchy*, Robert Dahl stated simply, "... any system is in peril if it becomes polarized into several highly antagonistic groups."<sup>12</sup> Dahl referred to any sort of social division, such as class and ideological, but also emphasized the importance of ethnic divisions and subcultures. Like Dahl, Rustow has proposed that a political system requires a minimum level of national identity or unity before it can attain a reasonable level of democratic stability.<sup>13</sup>

The connection between social division and elite consensus is quite logical. Dominant elites will be much less likely to tolerate opposition in general and allow for popular participation in a racially or ethnically divided society. In Latin America, for example, even the casual traveler can easily detect that elites tend to be predominantly of European extraction. Lighter skinned people universally dominate the political, economic, and professional arenas. This tendency is so widespread that even in Cuba, where a revolution took place at least in part to end racial injustice, people of European descent still dominate positions of power.<sup>14</sup> This elite of European descent rules societies that are racially and sometimes ethnically different from them, with the exceptions of perhaps Argentina and Uruguay. We can hypothesize then that this European (Caucasian) elite has been hesitant historically to allow for democracy to emerge because they have viewed political contestation and participation as inimical to their cultural and material interests. The lighter skinned elite in Latin America have resisted democracy because they have feared that opening up the system politically would result in a threat to their political, cultural and economic dominance. In countries where ethnic divisions also exist, like the Andean region and Mesoamerica, the Hispanicized population and elite also have resisted the inclusion of the Indian population in the political system, lest the latter demand retribution for past injustices.

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<sup>11</sup>Charles W. Anderson, "Toward A Theory of Latin American Politics," in Politics and Social Change in Latin America: The Distinct Tradition, second revised edition, edited by Howard J. Wiarda (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), pg. 315.

<sup>12</sup>Dahl, Polyarchy, pg. 105.

<sup>13</sup>See, Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," Comparative Politics 2 (1970): 337-363.

<sup>14</sup>Watching television in Cuba is surprisingly similar to watching television in other Latin American countries. While the content is certainly different, one is struck by the fact that government leaders, top scientists, leading newscasters, etc., all tend to be much lighter in skin color than the rest of the population.

Thus, we suggest that the racial and ethnic makeup of a society will greatly affect the prospects for democratic government to emerge. In Latin America, the fact that most societies are dominated by people of predominantly European descent (Caucasian and Iberian in culture) has created conditions where elites have been hesitant to allow for full political contestation and participation. This racial and ethnic mix has not only tended to slow the development of democracy historically, but has also meant that the democracy that has emerged recently may be less polyarchic and consolidated than other democracies. We suggest that contestation and participation will be more limited in Latin America because of its peculiar racial and ethnic mix.<sup>15</sup>

## II. Elite Consensus in Three Countries

The third wave of democracy in Latin America began in 1978 when an opposition party was allowed to win power for the first time in the Dominican Republic. In that same year a free, competitive election chose a constituent assembly to write a new constitution for Peru, followed by national elections in 1980. In the footsteps of Peru, the Guatemalan military held constituent assembly elections in 1984, and after a new constitution was promulgated, held national elections in 1985. While all three countries experienced democratic transitions at relatively the same time-frame, only the Dominican Republic has maintained the democratic regime inaugurated in 1978 to this date and has made some progress toward democratic consolidation. In Peru, the democracy inaugurated in 1980 succumbed to the *autogolpe* of President Fujimori in 1992. In Guatemala, democracy fell to the copycat, failed *autogolpe* of President Serrano in 1993. We will now see that each of these countries experienced distinctly different elite behavior during their respective democratic transitions, helping to explain the different outcomes in each nation.

### A. The Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic experienced a democratic transition in 1978 where a strong degree of elite consensus emerged.<sup>16</sup> Since 1978, competitive elections have been the principal means for selecting the political leadership and there is a basic agreement that democratic rule is paramount.<sup>17</sup> Sanchez has pointed out that in 1978 "elite behavior

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<sup>15</sup>For a very interesting and frank historical account of racial mixing in Latin America, see Magnus Mornier, Race Mixture in the History of Latin America (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967).

<sup>16</sup>See James Ferguson, The Dominican Republic: Beyond the Lighthouse (London: Latin America Bureau, 1992); Peter M. Sanchez, "The Dominican Case" in Higley and Gunther, Elites and Democratic Consolidation; Howard J. Wiarda, and Michael Kryzaneck, The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Crucible, second edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); Jan Knippers Black, The Dominican Republic: Politics and Development in an Unsovereign State (Boston: Allen & Unwin, Inc., 1986); and, Rosario Espinal, "An Interpretation of the Democratic Transition in the Dominican Republic." In Guiseppa DiPalma and Lawrence Whitehead, eds., The Central American Impasse (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

<sup>17</sup>While most scholars agree that procedural democracy has perhaps been consolidated in the Dominican Republic, many point out, correctly, that democracy has not brought substantive

changed dramatically ... and [that] a political environment in which all political and military leaders respect the rules of the game and refrain from challenging the regime by force was created."<sup>18</sup> The elite consensus that emerged in 1978 was the result of secret negotiations between the dominant political party (Joaquin Balaguer's Reformist Party or PR), the armed forces, and the main opposition party (the Dominican Revolutionary Party or PRD). These secret agreements during June and July 1978 were of paramount importance for several reasons. First they were essential in depoliticizing the Dominican armed forces, that had been an important barrier to democratization in the past. Second, they provided Joaquin Balaguer, who had won the presidency in the last three consecutive elections through coercion and manipulation, with what he saw as a graceful exit from power. Finally, the secret agreements paved the way for a peaceful transfer of power, from *Balaguerismo* to rule by the PRD. Thus, an elite agreement in the Dominican Republic, what Karl would term a foundation pact, paved the way for at least a partially consolidated democracy.<sup>19</sup>

The 1996 elections in the Dominican Republic have demonstrated the importance of the 1978 elite pact. In what has been another watershed electoral contest, *Balaguerismo* has been finally relegated to the past. First, Joaquin Balaguer, the omnipresent *caudillo* and president, was prevented from seeking re-election through constitutional changes. Second, the two leading candidates represented a newer generation of political leaders: Francisco Peña Gomez of the PRD and the man who some have credited with instigating the 1965 civil war that led to US direct intervention; and Leonel Fernandez, the man who has taken the reins of Juan Bosch's left-leaning Dominican Liberation Party, or PLD. The era of *caudillismo* in the Dominican Republic is over and electoral politics continue to consolidate. This unlikely democratic success-story in the Dominican Republic has been possible because a comprehensive-inclusive elite settlement took place in 1978.

## **B. Peru.**

The Peruvian case represents a more difficult and limited transition to democracy. While the 1980 regime change represented an important break from the past, the level of elite consensus emerging from the 1980 elections was severely limited. Almost ten years after the transition, in 1989, Sanchez argued:

The Peruvian transition exhibits the characteristics of a partial elite settlement. There can be little doubt that an "understanding" existed between the GRFA [armed forces] and APRA [the chief opposition party]. This understanding was crucial for the successful transition to democracy in 1980.<sup>20</sup>

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benefits to the majority of Dominicans. This may be more a characteristic of procedural democracy than a lack of "real" democracy in the Dominican Republic, as some suggest.

<sup>18</sup>Sanchez, "The Dominican Case," pp. 316-317.

<sup>19</sup>Sanchez, "The Dominican Case," pp. 308-316.

<sup>20</sup>Peter M. Sanchez, "Elite Settlements and Democracy in Latin America: The Dominican Republic and Peru," Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas, 1989, pg. 207.



However, the partial settlement excluded a large and important segment of the political spectrum -- the electoral and violent left -- and excluded a significant portion of the Peruvian population -- the indigenous peoples. As a result, Sanchez wrote: "... despite the existing consensus between urban elites, there still exists a lack of national integration that could in the future seriously jeopardize the current democratic political system."<sup>21</sup> That jeopardy materialized in 1992 when President Fujimori closed down congress and autocratically suspended political liberties in his now infamous *autogolpe*. Nevertheless, according to Dietz, the Peruvian transition represented a political change where "... the basic condition for an elite convergence -- a readiness among elites to contest for power in electoral terms -- exist[ed]."<sup>22</sup> While important elites came to an understanding during the 1978-1980 transition in Peru, significant elite disunity remained to prevent a comprehensive elite consensus from emerging. Under such conditions, the 1980 Peruvian transition resulted in a democratic regime that could be classified only as partially, or weakly, consolidated. While an elite settlement occurred in the Dominican Republic in 1978, only a partial-exclusive settlement took place in the Peruvian transition.

### C. Guatemala

Our third case, Guatemala invites comparison because the 1985 transition was devoid of any elite agreement or compromise. Guatemalan analysts virtually unanimously agree that the 1985 transition lacked any hopes for democratic consolidation.<sup>23</sup> Jonas points out that Guatemala's "political opening" in 1985 was nothing more than a ruse used by the armed forces in alliance with economic elites to continue the counterinsurgency campaign that had been waged for over thirty years.<sup>24</sup> Democratic stability did not emerge from the 1985 transition because there was no compromise among key elites and factions. Most importantly, the ongoing armed insurgency that called for dramatic changes in the status quo created a situation where the economic elite and the armed forces joined forces precariously in an effort to maintain that status quo. One year prior to the 1993 *autogolpe*, Sanchez argued:

[the] ... extreme polarization of Guatemalan society during the transition period made it almost impossible for even a few groups to reconcile their differences. As a result, Guatemalan democracy as it currently stands has almost no chance of becoming consolidated.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Sanchez, "Elite Settlements and Democracy in Latin America:...", pg. 229.

<sup>22</sup>Henry Dietz, "Elites in an Unconsolidated Democracy: Peru During the 1980s," in Higley and Gunther, Elites and Democratic Consolidation, pg. 254.

<sup>23</sup>Peter M. Sanchez, "Elites and Democratization in Latin America: The Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Peru," paper presented at the 1992 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, September 3-6, 1992; Susanne Jonas, The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and US Power (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Mario Solorzano Martinez, "Guatemala: Between Authoritarianism and Democracy, in Di Palma and Whitehead, The Central American Impasse; and, Jim Handy, "Resurgent Democracy and the Guatemalan Military," Journal of Latin American Studies 18 (1986): 383-408.

<sup>24</sup>Jonas, The Battle for Guatemala: ..., pg. 161-170.

<sup>25</sup>Sanchez, "Elites and Democratization in Latin America:...", pg. 37.

Sure enough, in 1993 President Serrano, perhaps emulating Fujimori's *autogolpe*, closed down congress and attempted to establish a military supported dictatorship. Guatemala thus represents an important case for comparison since it reflects a democratic transition devoid of both elite unity and regime consolidation.

These three transitions raise very important questions. First, what factors help to explain why the Dominican Republic, less-developed socioeconomically than most countries in Latin American, transitioned to democracy sooner than most other countries in the region during the third wave of democracy? Second, why did Guatemala and Peru succumb to democratic breakdown so soon after their democratic inaugurations in 1985 and 1980 respectively? Third, why do all three countries still appear to have difficulty with consolidating polyarchies, where contestation and participation are fully developed?

### **III. Ethnic and Racial Divisions as Barriers to Democratic Consolidation**

The regions in the western hemisphere that were conquered by Spanish and Portuguese *conquistadores* eventually became populated by peoples of different races and ethnicity. During the colonial period a social stratification developed that led to what one scholar labeled a “pigmentocracy.”<sup>26</sup> In Iberoamerica those who were white or light-skinned were at the top of the strata, while those who were darker were relegated to the bottom. More specifically people of “mixed blood” -- mulattos and mestizos -- were often outcast, especially those who were “illegitimate.” At the lowest level were the Indians and slaves. While over time slavery was abolished and laws to protect Indians were promulgated the legacy of pigmentocracy remains to this date. Racism and cultural chauvinism still prevail and people of darker color or people who are not Hispanicized as often perceived as inferior.

Racial and ethnic differences have most likely played a strong role, along with other factors, in the delayed democratization of Latin America. We suggest below that race and ethnicity also played a role in the recent democratic development of the three countries under study. Finally, we will also suggest that race and ethnicity will continue to play a strong role in the deepening of democracy, such that democracy in Latin American will continue to have problems with consolidation. While able to maintain stable democracies, many countries in the region may experience problems with democratic deepening. And a few, particularly Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Peru, may experience democratic breakdowns in the not to distant future, owing to the recent political awakening of their indigenous population.<sup>27</sup> A politically active indigenous community will most likely be perceived as a threat by most elites in these countries, as evidenced by the Mexican government's reaction to the *Zapatista* uprising in Chiapas.

If democratic deepening is difficult to operationalize, race and ethnic division is even more difficult to measure. It is relatively easy to note that roughly 50% of Peru's

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<sup>26</sup>Alejandro Lipschütz, *El indoamericanismo y el problema racial en las Americas*, 2d edition (Santiago Chile, 1944).

<sup>27</sup>Stefano Varese, “The Ethnopolitics of Indian Resistance in Latin America,” *Latin American Perspectives* 23 (Spring 1996): 58-71.

population is comprised of indigenous people. What is very difficult to evaluate is to what extent that population feels a common bond with each other and different from the segment of the population that is not indigenous. Also, it is virtually impossible to measure the racial attitudes of the European elite that is different racially and culturally from the indigenous and black/mulatto populations. Compounding the difficulty of measurement is the fact that it would be near impossible to determine how the racial and ethnic attitudes of the dominant elite toward the non-white population translates into limits on contestation and participation historically and at present. These problems suggest that scholars may have stayed away from race and ethnicity or treated these factors superficially as preconditions for democratic development because of inherent difficulties with measurement.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the problems suggested above, there are some basic measures of national homogeneity that can shed some light on the importance of race and ethnicity to the development of democracy. Very generally, Figure 1 shows that in 1988 there was a weak relationship ( $r = .34$ ) between the level of democracy and the degree of homogeneity for Latin America.<sup>29</sup> The scatterplot shows that the least democratic nations tend to be those that have large indigenous populations, especially keeping in mind that both Guatemala and Peru succumbed to democratic breakdown in 1992 and 1993 respectively. More specifically, figure 2 shows the Ethnic and Linguistic Homogeneity Index<sup>30</sup>, which operationalizes the sense of "national unity" which Rustow and Dahl have asserted as a precondition for successful democratic consolidation, for the three countries in this study, as well as for Costa Rica. Costa Rica is included since it is normally highlighted as the most democratic country in Latin America.<sup>31</sup> The chart clearly shows that Guatemala and Peru are much more heterogeneous than the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica.

In contrast, the two cases that we believe have had successful transitions to democracy, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, have very high levels of cultural homogeneity, ranking 16th and 28th respectively out of 135 countries. Peru and Guatemala, on the other hand, are ranked 91st and 95th, respectively, reflecting very divided societies. The data suggest that national unity may indeed be a necessary condition for elite consensus and consequently for democratic consolidation. The data suggest that Guatemala and Peru have had difficulty with democratization because of ethnic divisions. Conversely, the more homogeneous populations in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic allowed those countries to inaugurate democratic regimes earlier than most other countries and to maintain stable democratic politics.

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<sup>28</sup>It is certainly possible that another reason for staying away from ethnicity and particularly race has been because of its "sensitive" nature. Most Latin Americanists I know are fully aware of the dominance of a white elite in Latin America. However, very few experts on the region have looked into this phenomenon as a factor in explaining the process of democratization.

<sup>29</sup>Level of democracy is measured using the Polity III data; and homogeneity is measured using the Ethnic and Linguistic Homogeneity Index in George T. Kurian, The New Book of World Rankings, third edition, updated by James Marti (New York: Facts on File, 1991), pp. 43-44.

<sup>30</sup>Kurian, pp. 43-44.

<sup>31</sup>The Polity III data, and other measure of democracy, validate this assertion.

Beyond showing some degree of covariance between the degree of homogeneity and democracy in Latin America, it is very difficult to show a clear relationship between ethnic and racial heterogeneity and democratic development. We must remember though that democracy requires that citizens be treated as equals. In nations where racial and ethnic differences exist there will be a tendency for people to see each other as enemies, resulting in less trust and cooperation. This tendency will be most intense in nations where a conquering group establishes slavery or represses and decimates an indigenous population, as occurred in the western hemisphere.

#### **A. The Dominican Republic: One culture, two races.**

The Dominican Republic stands out because of its relatively early success with democracy. While most Latin American countries wallowed in authoritarianism, the Dominican Republic transitioned to democracy in 1978, when an opposition was allowed to take power. At least part of the reason for this success is that fact that the Dominican Republic is more homogeneous than most countries in the region.

The Spanish conquest of the Americas began in the Caribbean. In Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, the conquerors eventually wiped out the indigenous populations. As a result, they brought in slaves from Africa to perform strenuous manual, agricultural labor. The Dominican Republic, however, differed from Cuba in that cattle raising rather than sugar can cultivation became the dominant economic activity.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, slavery was less prominent and different in the Dominican Republic. For example, Betances points out:

A relationship between master and slave pointed to solidarity... In this type of setting slaves did not run away, as happened on plantations dependent on slave labor, but they rather saved money in order to buy their freedom.<sup>33</sup>

The point is not to say that slavery was benign in the Dominican Republic but to point out that it was less brutal and permanent than in countries that were economically dependent on slavery because of their extensive plantations. Eventually, the Dominican Republic became a major sugar producer but much of its labor needs were provided by Haitian immigrants rather than Dominicans, particularly the most distasteful work. The “others” in the Dominican Republic were the Haitians not the domestic *negros* as in Cuba or Brazil.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, the Dominican Republic was less populated by Spaniards than Puerto Rico or Cuba, thus minimizing the white population and allowing for mulattos to become the predominant racial group. While racial mixing took place just as in all countries in the hemisphere, in the Dominican Republic the vast majority of the population became mulatto. The size of the European or light skinned population is so small that mulattos for

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<sup>32</sup>Emelio Betances, State and Society in the Dominican Republic (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pg. 9.

<sup>33</sup>Betances, pg. 10.

<sup>34</sup>See Maurice Lemoine, Bitter Sugar: Slaves Today in the Caribbean, translated by Andrea Johnston (Chicago: Banner Press, 1985).

many years have constituted a portion of the elite. Assisting in homogenization is the fact that the entire population has been Hispanicized. The existence of one culture is the result of the elimination of the indigenous population, the lack of a large African segment in the society, and the historical process of socialization into the Hispanic culture. Unity has also been enhanced by the threat of a Haitian invasion and by the racist attitudes toward the Haitians, who are considered by all Dominicans as *negros*, or blacks.

Despite the Dominican Republic's cultural homogeneity there is still racism present in its society. A small white elite still dominates the society as with most countries in the region. This elite will remain weary of providing for full contestation and especially full political participation since they will fear that their position in society may be jeopardized. As years pass, however, and the light-skinned elite see that democracy does not promote major changes in the economic order they may lose their fear of democracy. However, at the same time, as the masses see that democracy does not provide any material benefits, they will perhaps become very disappointed with the existing system and make greater demands. Thus, it is difficult to predict the prospects for democracy in the Dominican Republic. If prosperity comes and the white elite become more secure, then democracy will flourish. If, however, prosperity does not come, then democracy will eventually fall on hard times. We may conclude then that the prospects for democracy have more to do with how the economy fares than with any inherent qualities of democratic rule.

## **B. Guatemala and Peru: Many Races, Many Cultures**

Both Guatemala and Peru differ greatly from the Dominican Republic. We may say generally, as shown in figure 2, that both countries are more heterogeneous. Specifically, both Guatemala and Peru have large indigenous populations, that have maintained their cultural identity for centuries. Thus, large segments of the population in Guatemala and Peru have not been Hispanicized. Consequently, in these two countries we have both racial and ethnic divisions. Additionally, the indigenous populations possess many cultures not just one "Indian" culture.<sup>35</sup> In both countries, in addition to the small white elite, there is a large mestizo population and a large indigenous population. The lines of course are blurred. Many lighter skinned people are of course mestizo and mestizos often have the phenotypical characteristics of the *indigena*. In addition, both countries also have small populations of African ancestry. Adding to this heterogeneity is the fact that large segments of the indigenous population in both countries have maintained their language and customs. Thus democracy in these two countries has suffered from both racism and chauvinism.

This dual, racial and ethnic, cleavage has historically impeded the development of democracy for two basic reasons. First, the non-white and non-Hispanic populations have been viewed as inferior. Second, the white population has feared that the political enfranchisement of the non-white and non-Hispanic would jeopardize their power, wealth, and status. Even to this date elites in Guatemala and Peru have a less-than-favorable view

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<sup>35</sup>While in both Guatemala and Peru have African and African-descendent populations, here we will focus on the larger indigenous populations.

(to be generous) of the indigenous population.<sup>36</sup> Elites in these countries believe that their nation's lack of development has been caused by their larger than average indigenous populations. Additionally, elites rationalize the lack of political participation by indigenous peoples by saying such things as "they are not made for politics," or "they are a simple people and just want to be left alone."<sup>37</sup> Underlying such arrogant, bigoted statements, of course, is the fact that the European elite are afraid of what would happen if the indigenous people were given political power. As one Peruvian military officer confided to this author: "There has always been a great fear in Peru of what would happen if the Indian were to get out of the bottle." Similar sentiments are quite common in Guatemala. One government minister in 1992, declared to the author, "the Indians are just being used by the guerrillas; but they are not sophisticated enough to understand this."

Both Peru and Guatemala transitioned to civilian elected governments in the 1980s. However, both countries did so with the specter of active insurgencies determined to overthrow the newly elected regimes. In Guatemala civil war had been on-going since the early 1980s. In fact several Guatemalan experts have convincingly argued that the democratic transition in 1986 was nothing more than a counterinsurgency strategy by the Guatemalan military to restore legitimacy and to regain US military aid.<sup>38</sup> While the *autogolpe* perpetrated by President Serrano in 1993 resulted from many and complex reasons, the divisions within Guatemalan society was certainly an underlying cause. Throughout Guatemala's history democracy has been a pipe-dream at least partly because the dominant, white elite has been wary of giving political power to the indigenous masses. We can speculate that Guatemala will continue to have problems with democratic development, especially as its indigenous population mobilizes for political action, which it has increasingly been doing in the last few years.<sup>39</sup>

The recent peace accords between the government and the URNG are an encouraging sign however for democratic development, especially since one of the key points of negotiation was the accord on the Identity and Rights of the Indigenous

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<sup>36</sup>I want to make clear that racism and discrimination exist in all multiracial and multiethnic societies. By criticizing the racism and chauvinism in the countries under study, I do not intend to suggest that people in these countries are any more or less bigoted than people in other countries.

<sup>37</sup>The author has interviewed many elites in Guatemala and Peru. These types of statements are very common.

<sup>38</sup>See for example, Tom Barry, *Inside Guatemala* (Albuquerque: The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, 1992), pp. 4-6; and Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and US Power* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), pp.161-174.

<sup>39</sup>The many years of civil war and the new political opening in Guatemala have given birth to numerous indigenous groups. These groups are becoming more and more active politically and are sure to demand greater political power in the future. One such group, the Council of Ethnic Communities Runujel Unam, founded in 1988, argues: "We, as CERJ, have demanded much more than that which was set forth in the accord regarding human rights between the government and the URNG..." Such greater political assertiveness is common in many other indigenous groups in Guatemala today.

Peoples.<sup>40</sup> Through this accord the government officially concedes for the first time that Guatemala “...has a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual character.”<sup>41</sup> The document further concedes that Guatemala’s indigenous peoples, the Maya, Garifuna and Xinca, have been subject to discrimination, exploitation, injustice, and have been denied their political rights for centuries. While written accords do not necessarily change social conditions, this agreement is an important first step if Guatemala is ever to develop into a full polyarchy. Naturally, most Guatemalan experts are skeptical, not expecting racism or discrimination to disappear any time soon. Nevertheless, the Guatemalan government has finally admitted its long, tainted history of discrimination toward the indigenous populations and has accepted those populations are part of the Guatemalan nation. It will of course still be a long road toward democracy, but at least the journey may have finally begun.

Peru is strikingly similar to Guatemala with respects to its heterogeneity and divided population. Nationalism and thus unity is far from achieved in Peru.<sup>42</sup> The Peruvian transition to democracy in 1980 coincided with the inauguration of violent anti-government actions by the now infamous *Sendero Luminoso*. This Maoist insurgency had been clandestinely developing its organization and support in the Ayacucho region of Peru at least eight years before it began its violent operations in 1980. It is no small coincidence that the group originated in the poorest region of Peru with a large indigenous population. Although *Sendero* became a very violent and marginalized group that even terrorized the rural population, there is no doubt that its origins emanate from the fact that Peru is a country with deep cultural and racial divisions.

President Fujimori’s *autogolpe* and crackdown against insurgencies has severely hurt *Sendero*’s ability to operate. However, the conditions that led to the rise of *Sendero*, a large, marginalized and poor indigenous population, have not changed, and, therefore, Peru will remain an unconsolidated democracy. Eventually, as Peru’s indigenous population begins to assert itself politically, political conflict will certainly arise, as that country’s elite attempts to protect its interests.

Guatemala and Peru will have problems with both democratic stability and deepening because they are multi-racial and multi-ethnic societies. Certainly, democracy can be consolidated if institutional arrangements are fashioned so that the indigenous gain access to the political system. However, such an outcome at this time appears unlikely. Democracy may appear somewhat safe at this point but in the future as indigenous peoples become more participatory political conflict will be virtually inevitable.

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<sup>40</sup>See Coordinacion de Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala (COPMAGUA), Acuerdo Sobre Identidad y Derechos de los Pueblos Indigenas (Guatemala: Saqb’Ichil COPMAGUA, 1995).

<sup>41</sup>COPMAGUA, pg. 1.

<sup>42</sup>See Jose Tamayo Herrera, Regionalizacion E Identidad Nacional (Lima: Centro de Estudios Pais y Region, 1988).

#### **IV. Conclusions**

Scholars who study democratization have pointed out repeatedly that national unity is an important background condition for the development of democracy. However, few studies attempt to detail how national divisions may hamper democratization. Two of the most common divisions in societies are race and ethnicity. This paper has suggested that race and ethnicity have been key factors in the slow evolution of democracy in Latin America. The fact that the region has a small European elite has meant that Latin American governments have been hesitant through the years to allow for contestation and participation. The fear has been that opening up the political system would dramatically change the status quo in favor of the non-white and non-Hispanic.