

The Politics and Policies of Social Incorporation in Latin America

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The politics and policies of social incorporation in Latin America
(DRAFT VERSION, DO NOT QUOTE)

Fernando Filgueira*

* The section of this think piece draws heavily on a coauthored work: “Shallow states, deep inequalities and the limits of conservative modernization: the politics and policies of incorporation in Latin America” by Fernando Filgueira, Luis Reygadas, Juan Pablo Luna and Pablo Alegre published in Blofield, Merike *The Great Gap: Inequality and the Politics of Redistribution in Latin America*. Penn University Press, 2011

1. A great transformation and an incipient response

Karl Polanyi's classical work, *The Great Transformation* (1944), echoes in the odd twenty years following the demise of authoritarian regimes and the end of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) in Latin America. I will argue that the shift to the left that is currently taking place in the region is best characterized as an incipient response to a process of rapid and multifaceted socio-political conservative modernization that took place in the last two decades and a half.

Conservative Modernization is a process by which while certain spheres and arenas of society become based on "modern" social relations (capitalist, bureaucratic, democratic) others remain dominated by forms of elite enclosure and tradition, thus inhibiting the expansion of other modern dynamics (coercion-based social relations, traditional elite politics, status-based hierarchical). The end result was fascism as a final stage of conservative modernization. Populism in Latin America was one of the solutions to the crisis of incorporation. But the region demonstrated that other options could come of the crisis of incorporation: reformist, democratic and revolutionary experiments were part of the developments of the first crisis of incorporation in the 1930's and 1940's.

The elite project of the 1980s in Latin America known as the Washington Consensus was in many ways the last project of conservative modernization: accepting and even pushing for electoral democracy and for market expansion and education expansion, but limiting the range of acceptable policies in such a way that inequality and uneven distribution of opportunities remained a dominant feature of the region -if not a heightened one- due to representation faults in politics, incomplete, oligopolistic and segmented markets, and social enclosure and segregation of status and opportunity.

It is not simply inequality, poverty and exclusion that are the basis of recent political and policy developments. It is that in combination with other socioeconomic transformations

that carry with them promises of incorporation (urbanization, labor market incorporation, educational advancement, and exposure to new consumption patterns) and also, with one critical political ingredient: the expansion and experience with electoral democracy during the last two and a half decades.

There are five processes that in our view illuminate the incorporation push of these last 20 to 30 years in Latin America. These are: 1) the expansion of market dynamics and market exchange mechanisms among Latin Americans, 2) the exposure of the Latin American population to new consumption patterns and behaviours, 3) the processes of massive educational incorporation, 4) the continuing processes of urbanization and agglomeration of the Latin American people, and 5) the increasing electoral and political participation of the Latin American people.

I believe that the “shift to the left” in Latin America represents the political expression of what in political sociology was termed in the 1940s and 1950s an incorporation crisis. In the postwar period this notion was applied mostly to help explain the emergence of populist leaders, movements and parties. The emergence of a modern working class, the increasing demands of an already small but vocal middle class and the need to make room for large masses of rural migrants in regimes that remained politically elitist, economically limited in terms of the institutionalization of modern labor practices, and socially exclusionary created major political and social tensions in the 1940s and 1950s. The popular and in many cases populist shift that dominated Latin American politics in these years was its most clear political expression. In the 1990s a second crisis of incorporation was brewing in Latin America. In recent electoral waves, these “second crises” gave birth to their political offsprings, consolidating what is known today as a regional “shift to the left”. This is a shift that is born of three parents (uninterrupted electoral democracies, secular social change and the shortcomings --and achievements-- of the Washington Consensus era) and sustained by a contingent road companion, which was external and economic in nature (the commodity boom). Today, the political offspring of the second incorporation crisis is only taking the first unsteady steps towards a possible full blown developmental shift.

2. Modernity and its undelivered promise: labor market incorporation, education expansion, real and virtual consumption, migratory patterns.

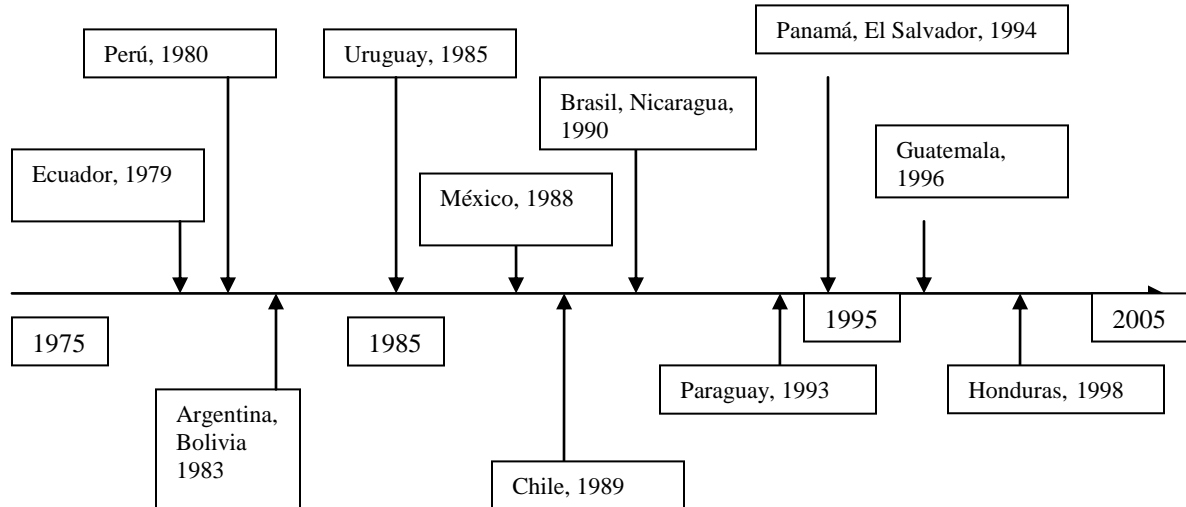
Sociologically, Latin America witnessed a major transformation during the last two decades. While this transformation creates a radically different scenario in terms of the frontiers and interactions between family, markets and the state, it is also fundamental to understand the micro-foundations of the political incorporation crisis that we describe in the next section. In other words, this social change is crucial to understand how collective political preferences are shaped and mobilized in contemporary Latin America.

The end of the ISI model and the thrust of the Washington Consensus had a radical effect in the degree to which market relations became a predominant channel through which people sought and gained a place in the world. This central transformation was joined by two additional factors to which Latin America became increasingly exposed to: transformed and expanded urban landscapes and a communications revolution that enhanced through demonstration effects and digital incorporation the exposure to and dissemination of new consumption patterns.

While going through these massive socioeconomic changes of the last 25 years, Latin America has also witnessed deep political change. In 1975 only four countries¹ in Latin America had electoral democracies and only one had had it for more than 20 years, Costa Rica. In the year 2000 almost all countries in Latin America were electoral democracies, however wanting they might be on issues relating to the liberal respect (Smith, 2004) or to substantive social incorporation. What is more important, between 1975 and 2005 more and more countries in Latin America elected their presidents and congress-members through open universal suffrage.

¹ These were Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic.

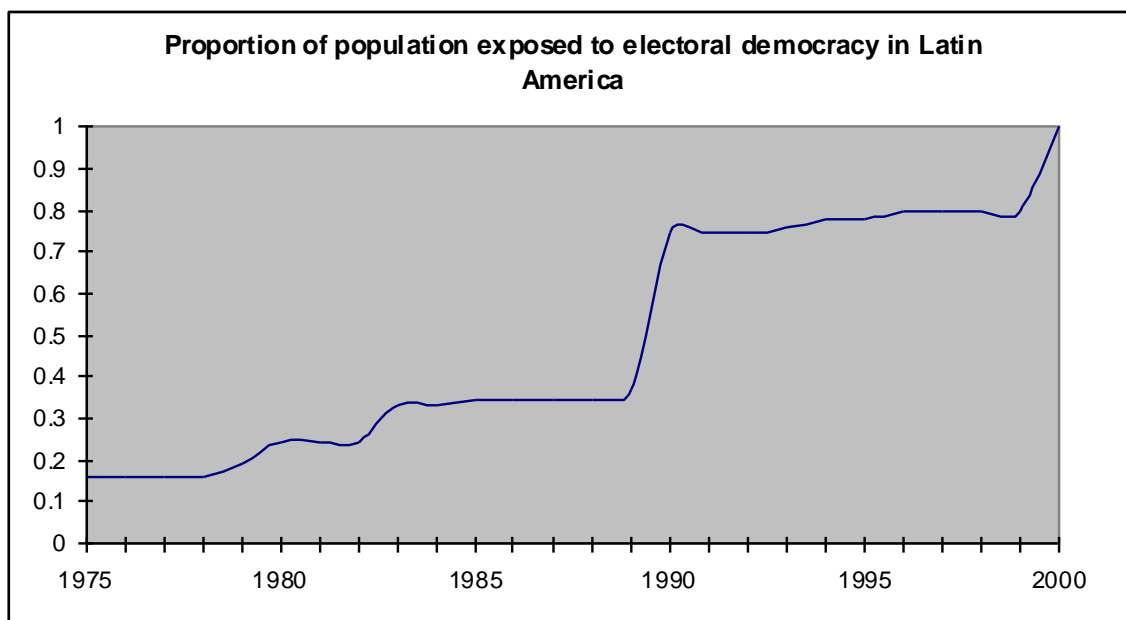
Figure 1. The invasion of the masses into Latin America through electoral democracy



Source: Smith, 2004, Przeworski et al, 2000

If we make a simple calculation we can through some simplifying assumptions estimate the increasing frequency of exposure to electoral promises, participation and eventually short term activism that the population in Latin America experienced in the last 20 to 25 years. Count each country and its population, classify it as electoral democracy or not and our chronology can be translated into the proportion of Latin Americans being exposed to competitive electoral processes. Thus for year “y” there are X_n countries with a Z proportion of population times 1 if they are classified as an electoral democracy and 0 if they are not.

Figure 2. Proportion of population exposed to electoral democracy in Latin America



Source: Authors' elaboration based on World Bank population estimates for the year 2000, and data from Smith, 2004 for democratic regime classification.

The curve is staggering. And yet this is a curve that changes because of “new entries” into electoral democracy. We have to add to this evidence that of the durability of electoral democracies. Going back to Smith (2004) we can assert that never did so many democracies last for so long in Latin America.

But, Latin American societies exhibit levels of inequality and poverty that almost two decades of democracy had failed to overcome in any meaningful way: in many cases

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