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“ PARLIAMENTS AND CHALLENGES TO
DEMOCRACY”
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Marta Lagos

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It is quite often these days to see tags attached to differentiate types of development of the third wave democracies, making it impractical to stick to the old categories and include everybody into analysis. This is an old debate and probably also a false one; Democracy has always been quite different, and it has always been difficult to set up common analytical categories.

Yet, different as these Democracies may be, they seem to have a certain synchrony in their evolution, they cross thresholds in groups. Some of them face the same type of challenges more or less at the same time; and as a result, they become most of the time understandable from the same clues. We must not let that blur the overall picture.

Study of democracy through empirical research has confirmed a paradox in the sense that re inauguration and inauguration of democratic rule, does not necessarily mean they can produce democratic societies. Democracy has been inaugurated in rather undemocratic societies, that suffer longstanding historical lags. The level of consolidation of democracy nevertheless, seems to be closely related to the level of democratization of the society as a whole, facing the difficulty of dismantling the non democratic ways of the societies they are inserted.

We must distinguish between the stages of this process and observe the general evolution in order to identify the challenges and tools that are at our disposal to enhance democratic consolidation.

Third wave democracies seemed to have gone through different stages in their evolution: the first one being the reconstruction of democracy and the recognition of human rights violations during authoritarian rule, followed by economic reforms and modernization of the nation states.

Democracy and economic reforms produced the first impact by opening societies to the world, after different lengths of authoritarian closed periods. Societies slowly start to open to the world, economically, politically, and culturally.

Now it seems we can identify a third stage which we will try to describe. This new stage is of course full of contradictory tendencies, but it seems to have some characteristics that are more or less generalized.

The first two stages build the basis for the development of the third stage. In fact public policies that expand education and health to broader segments of the population and economic reform that bring about higher degrees of economic stability, as well as the recovery of the asian economic crisis which bring about 5 years of continuous growth, produce critical citizens. It has taken in some cases 30 years for democracies to give voice to people. It is a slow process. The consequence is an expansion of democratic participation as imperfect as it maybe. Conventional forms of participation are replaced by

non conventional forms. What we observe today is a highly mobilized population ready to defend their rights.

In turn the failure to resolve the problems of poverty simultaneous with the expansion of freedom of expression make yesterday's inequalities intolerable today. Demand for inclusion rises as time goes by, generating a new stage of the process of democratization in the third wave democracies.

This stage is a consequence of the success story in which citizens are clinging to democracy as a tool to obtain higher degrees of freedom and equality. Tools for inclusion are: Electoral participation being used to access inclusion. Elite change is another instrument and this is the consequence of the first. Populism and Leftist governments are the results of the implementation of these instruments to access inclusion.

The tag "electoral democracies" does not allow us to comprehend the scope of the importance of this tool, as a means to consolidate more democratic societies. The tag "populist democracies" does not allow to comprehend the fact that populism has meant dismantling old oligarchies, a step forward to higher degrees of inclusion and democratization. None of these elements, nevertheless, are permanent elements, they simply indicate a particular stage.

Latin America for example went through a phase where some fourteen Presidents were thrown out of power, although in the majority of these cases institutional arrangements were respected. An Indian, two women, a priest, have been elected to office in the 2006 wave of elections symbolizing a change as well as a beginning of a process of inclusion. Two Latin American Societies are being dismantled: Bolivia, Ecuador. Paraguay is the next one on the line. Dismantling the old society and structure of power is an unavoidable road to higher degrees of democratization in some countries. Leftist governments are only an instrument to do so. We can only hope the left to be successful in achieving the goal of democratization for the sake of democracy.

Tagging democracies is misleading, because the tags "populist, left and electoral" all address the same problem which is: instruments to access inclusion, do away with old power structures which kept larger parts of the population excluded from society altogether. There are common traits to all of these things that have been put in different boxes, where the key indicator is "inclusion". It seems, rather, that citizens grasp whatever they can grasp as instruments to higher degrees of democratization: the left, populism or elections, and we will probably see new ones in the future.

More education, electoral processes and growth has brought a sense of political autonomy. Not only countries are going through the process of higher degrees of autonomy, but citizens. This part of the process makes some countries care more about solving internal problems before looking at problems that can be solved with others. This in turn affects policies towards international relations, migration and integration.

What are then the threats in this phase? By far the biggest threat that democratization processes have, is not to be able to democratize societies and market so that all can benefit

from progress. The threat is not being democratic enough, as much as is demanded by these new critical citizens. Will democracy fail to generate fair progress for societies?

Unfortunately in some parts of the world growth and development has widened the gap between those who feel part of society and those who do not. Markets are being questioned as a tool to distribute economic goods. The state is being looked at again, as an instrument to solve problems.

Leaders are learning the hard way that electorate expect inflation to be controlled, foreign investment to be favored, macroeconomic policies to be balanced with acceptable degrees of social protection and distribution of the benefits of progress and development. It is not acceptable for larger parts of the population to be left behind. Social, economic reform accompanied by democratic expansion and a sound and independent insertion into the globalization process, is a difficult undertaking, with little room for choices.

Democracy is miles away from the timid era of the inauguration, now countries have cristalized their democratic demands. If we bear this in mind, transformations will start to take place in this third phase, in different forms and speed. We should not dismay thinking this is a regression, it is the consequence of a success.

When looking at the imperfect democracies it is worth while observing the functioning of institutions, and the normative aspects of democratic rule, in order to observe the extent and scope of their imperfection. Two central values address that imperfection and are at the core of the transformations that are taking place and present the greatest challenges: Trust /distrust is one of the explanatory elements of the imperfection and influence the degree to which people legitimate institutions.

The second item is Freedom: Freedom is strongly correlated to democracy in three continents, Asia, Africa and Latin America according to the Globalbarometer aggregated ¹data. In other words, those countries that have stronger belief in freedom appreciate democracy more.

Trust and freedom (political, economic, social) are the expected results of the demanded transformations. Each country has its own reasons not to trust and not to give access, democratization is nothing but the story of how these are built.

Parliament plays a central role in this process inasmuch as it can be part of the problem, or part of the solution. Parliament is nothing more, and nothing less than the reflection of how given a society has been able to represent its plurality and diversity.

In this first celebration of the day of democracy let us hope for the sake of democracy that parliaments will grasp and interpret the demand for plurality and diversity producing higher degrees of freedom and trust in their societies.

¹ The first data set for Globalbarometers, comprises 57 countries, a compiled data set from the regional barometers :Afrobarometer, East Asia Barometer, Latinobarometro, Arab Barometer. The data set has the "global module" of questions that are identical in all barometers.