

## Entrevista

# Interview with Barbara Geddes: Bureaucracy and the Functioning of Democratic Institutions

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One of the most-cited authors of works on bureaucracy and comparative studies, Barbara Geddes is professor emerita at the Department of Political Science of the University of California (Los Angeles). She earned her Ph.D. from the University of California (Berkeley) in 1986. Throughout her career, she explored a varied range of themes, such as democratization, regime transition, and bureaucratic reform. She chaired more than 50 dissertation committees and was awarded several prizes, such as the UCLA Political Science Department's Best Mentor prize and the American Political Science Association's Bingham Powell Graduate Mentoring Award.

Barbara Geddes is a major bibliographical reference when it comes to the politicization of bureaucracy in Brazil. Her publication *Politician's Dilemma: Building State Capacity in Latin America* explores the different strategies presidents may choose to nominate individuals to high-level bureaucratic positions. In Brazil, whose institutional set is marked by coalitional presidentialism,



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certain presidents combined these strategies to advance their policies. This book was so relevant that it is still cited in most-recent works on bureaucrats and political nominations in Brazil.

In line with the theme of this special issue - Bureaucracy, Society, and Democratic Institutions - this interview sought to approach several topics related to the relationship between bureaucracy and the performance of democratic regimes. On the one hand, the classical concept of bureaucracy is related to technical knowledge. On the other hand, several scholars have expressed concerns regarding the isolation of bureaucrats from the interests of society. In this sense, the term politicization of bureaucracy refers to the political connections bureaucrats may have, such as ties with political parties and interest groups<sup>1</sup>. It has frequently been defined as the replacement of merit-based criteria for appointment and promotion by political reasons. Therefore, the level of bureaucratic politicization raises debates about whether neutrality is possible and positive for State capacities.

Moreover, since the third wave of democratization, concerns of scholars have turned to the performance of democracy instead of regime transition. In this sense, the reemergence of so-called hybrid regimes<sup>2</sup> raised questions about whether contemporary democracies were already flawed or faced a new crisis. Bureaucrats play a key role in this context insofar as they are responsible for implementing the government's policies. Not surprisingly, autocratic leaders usually make efforts to reduce bureaucratic autonomy by nominating their allies or removing opponents.

Bearing this in mind, we asked Barbara for her views on the relationship between public bureaucracy and the functioning of democratic institutions with a focus on contemporary regimes. Taking into consideration the interviewee's expertise, the following questions address a varied range of topics, such as comparative methods, democratic transition in Latin America, and the role of bureaucrats and institutions. Professor Geddes kindly explained relevant concepts in Political Science, especially those regarding state capacity and bureaucratic autonomy.

These concepts are salient for those willing to understand the role of bureaucrats in the functioning of contemporary democracies. This interview raises relevant issues not only for scholars but also for citizens.

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance: Geddes (1994), Bersch, Praça & Taylor (2017), Abrucio & Loureiro (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Several authors investigated the reemergence of hybrid regimes, such as Levitsky & Way (2002) and Norris & Inglehart (2019).

**Mariele Troiano and Nayara Albrecht:** Your theoretical and methodological work has been widely referenced in comparative studies. In Brazil, your books and papers, such as *How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get*, integrate several syllabi in both undergraduate and graduate courses. How did you become interested in this topic, especially regarding the application of comparative methods to Latin American countries? Were you inspired by any specific authors or studies at that moment?

**Barbara Geddes:** Irritation with some widely believed literature on development motivated me to begin thinking about selection bias. During the 1970s and 1980s, many scholars interested in explaining why some less rich countries were developing much more rapidly than others had reached the conclusion that faster growth depended on repressing wage demands, and thus on repressing the ability of workers to make effective demands through strong unions or democratic politics. It might seem surprising now that this idea was widely accepted, but it seemed plausible because it built on a simple economic logic about the tradeoff between investment and labor costs, and the most rapidly growing countries at the time were dictatorships. I doubted the argument was true because many European countries had grown reasonably fast despite strong unions and democracies that encompassed popular parties with close ties to workers. I thought the claim had noxious normative implications, and I felt strongly that we should not accept truth claims with anti-democratic or anti-egalitarian policy implications without strong evidence to support them. The arguments I was bothered by were mostly supported by small- or medium-N comparative case studies. Most of the time, authors had selected the cases for study because their rapid growth needed explanation. It was hoped that if scholars figured out why some countries were growing faster than others, the secrets to their success could be imitated in slower-growing countries. At the time, comparative studies of small numbers of cases selected because they had experienced an outcome of interest, such as democratization, revolution, or rapid growth, was probably the most common research design used in comparative politics.

Authors of the studies of a few fast-growing countries believed that otherwise similar countries were growing more slowly, but they did not provide data to show that this was true. So, the first step toward deciding whether the claim was true was to look at the growth rates of all non-rich countries. Doing

this turned up some anomalies, especially among Latin American cases. It turned out that most of the countries under military dictatorship during the 1970s and 1980s (where unions were repressed, and workers could not press their demands through politics) had not actually grown rapidly in comparative perspective or relative to their own historic growth rates during earlier periods of democracy. Most of them had experienced short periods of rapid growth, but not more rapid growth on average. This quick, superficial look at growth rates for all less rich countries also showed that many very repressive dictatorships grew slowly. Once I had preliminary evidence suggesting that the argument linking labor repression and growth was wrong, I wanted not just to challenge the specific argument but to highlight the flaw in the research design logic that had led some very smart, well-intentioned scholars to reach the wrong conclusions.

Selecting cases for study from one end of the dependent variable is intuitively attractive because unusual outcomes demand an explanation. As this example shows, however, this research design helps analysts to identify a characteristic that all the examined cases share, which thus could plausibly be the cause, but cannot tell whether the characteristic identified occurs frequently in cases that have not experienced the outcome as well. If the purported causal characteristic is as common among other cases as it is among the cases that experienced the outcome of interest, then it cannot be what distinguishes the cases with unusual outcomes from others. Once we understand this logic, we see the flaw in our naïve intuition about how to study unusual outcomes.

**Mariele Troiano and Nayara Albrecht:** What are the main characteristics of democracies in Latin America? How do these countries converge and diverge in terms of the development of democratic regimes and their bureaucratic structure? What do their trajectories reveal about the limits and potential of contemporary democracies?

**Barbara Geddes:** What we think of Latin American democracies depends on how realistic our understanding of democracy elsewhere is. Within the field of Political Science, some subfields have developed realistic understandings of the way certain aspects of democracy work, while other subfields put more credence in ideas derived from theories or ideals that have less empirical support. I think it's more useful to compare democracy in Latin American countries to empirically realistic

understandings of how democracy works elsewhere than to compare it to expectations derived from unproved theories or ideals.

According to democratic theory, citizens influence the policy choices made by democratic governments by voting for the candidates who promise the policies that best reflect their preferences. A great deal of research on public opinion has shown, however, that most citizens know little about politics, and that their opinions about many subjects can be influenced by politicians and messages carried in the media. Consequently, citizens are unable to perform the role assigned to them by democratic theory. Democratic theory assumes that citizens understand their own interests and which policies would best further their interests. It also assumes that they know enough about political candidates and parties to understand which ones support the policies the citizen desires. It does not consider what would happen if politicians or others were able to shape voters' opinions about which policies would help them most. The real-world limits on citizen knowledge about politics and other aspects of how the world works mean that democratic political systems are susceptible to demagogues. This is as true in other parts of the world as in Latin America.

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A second limitation of democratic theory as a guide to understanding how democracy really works is that it does not explicitly consider what would happen if the policies preferred by most citizens led to unintended negative consequences. What if, for example, a preference for low prices maintained by price controls leads to reduced investment and growth? The theory implies that voters would punish incumbent political leaders for low growth in the next election. Political leaders would be able to foresee this punishment, however, and would try to avoid it. Most of the time, political elites are better informed than citizens about the likely consequences of economic policy choices, especially about constraints the international economy places on unfettered policy choices. Consequently, they tend to be responsive to these constraints even when most of the public wants different policies. In other words, politicians fail to support the policies voters want because they believe voters will punish them in the future for the consequences of today's policy choice. This situation has occurred often in Latin America, most notably during the 1990s when countries faced intense international economic pressure to liberalize economies and widespread public opposition to doing so. It is a continuing feature of the real world, and it has led to considerable alienation and disenchantment with democracy.

A third way that real democracies differ from expectations is that incomes tend to remain unequally distributed under a democratic government. Empirical research on the relationship between democratization and income distribution has turned up mixed results but has not provided strong support for the idea that democracies routinely redistribute. The expectation that democratization would lead to redistribution is usually attributed to the median voter theory. In informal language, the median influential person in a dictatorship is likely to be richer than the median voter in a democracy, so policies in democracies should benefit people who are less rich than those who benefit from dictatorship. Many observers have assumed that this logic implied redistribution in favor of the poor, but it only implies redistribution in favor of the median voter. If we rely for the sake of argument on the assumption that the median voter reflects the middle of the income distribution, then we might expect to see policies that benefit the middle of the income distribution, such as generous social security benefits for formal sector workers and free university education, but not necessarily policies to benefit the lowest quarter of the income distribution, where most people work in rural areas and/or the informal sector of the economy. Consistent with this expectation, social welfare policies that benefit middle- and upper-income citizens have characterized most Latin American democracies most of the time. Programs explicitly designed to reach the poor, such as the Bolsa Familia in Brazil and Opportunities in Mexico, were initiated in a number of countries in the 2000's and have helped reduce income inequality in some, but Latin America nevertheless remains the most unequal region in the world. Continuing extreme inequality may also contribute to disenchantment or the feeling that democracy is not fulfilling its promise.

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The likelihood of redistribution is further reduced by the various ways people behave in response to the incentives associated with competitive election systems. The poor and uneducated seem more susceptible to manipulation and more likely to sell their votes for small amounts of money or goods, which reduces their ability to use their votes to influence policy. In many democratic systems the rich gain extra influence by financing political campaigns. In other words, they exchange money for extra influence over policy.

I have discussed these ways that real democracy falls short of the hopes many have had for it to clear the ground of some of the criticisms made of Latin American democracies. I think ordinary citizens

everywhere lack the very high levels of information about politics and general understanding about how economics and other aspects of the world work that would be needed to perform the role assigned to them in democratic theory. The lack of information and understanding makes many citizens susceptible to demagogues, crazy ideas -- even about subjects such as vaccination for contagious diseases -- and mobilization based on group identities, even when the policies advocated by group leaders undermine their welfare. The problems associated with these susceptibilities have arisen in Latin America but are not more serious there than in the U.S. and some European democracies.

The tendency of political leaders to ignore specific economic policy preferences of the voters to avoid medium-term economic consequences has been a bigger issue in Latin America than in richer countries because Latin American countries have less power relative to the international economy and are therefore more constrained by it. Latin American democracies are more unequal than other democracies because Latin American countries were historically more unequal. In general, democracies seem capable of taking incremental steps to reduce inequality, as has happened during the last twenty years in some Latin American countries, but they have not often carried out major redistributions. In short, Latin American democracies face some structural problems that are harder to deal with than those faced by richer democracies: high inequality and high susceptibility to international economic forces.

Within Latin America the robustness of democratic institutions and the strength of elite commitment to democratic values varies a lot. In most of Central America, elite commitment to democracy appears low as does state administrative capacity. The Central American civil wars seem to have left a long-term legacy of under-developed institutions for protecting welfare and the public interest (e.g., corruption safeguards), security services that pursue their own economic interests rather than providing basic safe streets, and easy access to weapons and the drug trade. Central America is also being heavily damaged by extreme weather events associated with global warming. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that many Central Americans seek exit when there is so little opportunity to exert influence through voice. Only in Nicaragua, however, has democratic backsliding resulted in full autocratization. Elsewhere, backsliding presidents have been replaced, sometimes by candidates with stronger democratic commitments, in regular competitive elections. In short, the

quality of democratic governance is undermined by the legacies of civil war and other terrible problems, but democratic institutions have been strong enough to survive so far except in Nicaragua.

In South America, I think democratic institutions have proved fairly strong despite the severe challenges associated with international economic shocks and the pandemic. Backsliding episodes have occurred, notably in Venezuela, Bolivia under Morales, Ecuador under Correa, and Brazil under Bolsonaro, but only in Venezuela did backsliding lead to full autocratization. In all, the backsliding president initially had strong popular support, which allowed some initial executive aggrandizement at the expense of other political elites. I don't think the election of any of these men indicates an unusual lack of democratic values among the public or a special susceptibility to demagoguery. None of the Latin American backsliders was obviously more unqualified to lead a country than Donald Trump or Boris Johnson.

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Democratic backsliding is often taken as evidence of democratic weakness, but when backsliding is reversed after new elections, we can see that democratic institutions have survived the attempt to undermine them. In all the Latin American cases of backsliding, presidents made efforts to concentrate power in their own hands and to aggrandize the executive relative to other political elites. Hugo Chávez was able to carry this process much further than the others. So it may be useful to consider how Venezuela differed from the other cases as part of an assessment of the strength of democracy elsewhere. Within the first year, Chávez held an illegal but popularly accepted constitutional convention that facilitated his elimination of opposition parties from effective representation in congress and, soon after that, from the electoral tribunal and high court. Opposition elites blocked the other executive aggrandizers from such a quick and complete elimination of institutional checks on the executive. Opposition elites elsewhere may have been more effective because they had learned from what happened earlier in Venezuela. I don't think you could say a priori that they were stronger or more entrenched.

A second difference that I consider very consequential is that Chávez, a highly popular former officer, had from the beginning a lot of support within the military. This support saved him from the coup attempted by opposition elites in 2002. After the coup attempt, he purged the military of all officers



whose loyalty was suspect, undermining it as a possible opposition player in the future. None of the other backsliders comes from the military, though Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua also has effective control of the army and other security forces through the Sandinista Party. Those who lack strong ties to the military must worry about which side security forces would choose during a crisis.

Chávez, Morales, and Correa all had periods of good luck during the commodity boom, when very high oil and gas prices allowed them to initiate some policies that really did benefit their poor supporters, which of course prolonged their popularity. The importance of oil prices is especially obvious in Venezuela, where poverty actually increased between 1998, when Chávez was elected, and 2003, despite the rhetoric about ending poverty. Poverty alleviation began when the oil price rose, and Chávez replaced the technocratic management of the state oil industry with political loyalists, which made it possible to divert the profits from oil away from reinvestment and maintenance toward distribution. The economic boom caused by high oil prices kept Chávez genuinely popular until 2010, when his party first lost the popular vote in a legislative election (though they maintained most seats because of gerrymandering). Although Morales and Correa tried to follow the Chávez strategy of rewriting the constitution and so on, they were never able to eliminate opposition elites, and they lost power after later democratic elections, which I take as an indication that democracy was still functioning in Bolivia and Ecuador despite some presidential depredations.

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In contrast to Chávez, Morales, and Correa, Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil has been both unlucky and unskilled. Rather than benefiting from a commodity boom, he has governed during a pandemic, which he mismanaged more seriously than one would have thought possible in a country like Brazil with its high level of state capacity. He has courted the military and done his best to damage administrative capacity, but he has not been able to eliminate opposition political elites from important positions in the political system. Brazilian democracy has been threatened and damaged, but in my view, Brazil is suffering more from terrible government than from democratic decline. It seems likely that most of what Bolsonaro has done will be reversed by future democratically elected governments.

**Mariele Troiano and Nayara Albrecht:** Although it has been nearly thirty years since the publication of your book *Politicians' Dilemma: Building State Capacity in Latin America*, it remains relevant for political analysis. In this work, you introduce the idea of state autonomy, which is related to a certain departure of the so-called bureaucracy from the interests of social groups. In other words, the idea is that bureaucracy supposedly involves a neutral, technical political agenda and that at most it would reflect the interests of civil servants' own careers. *Pari passu*, in the past 20 years, the role of states has changed drastically in democratic systems, especially in young democracies. Do you consider that the concept of state autonomy has been updated? What is the role of the bureaucracy in democratic regimes?

**Barbara Geddes:** The term state autonomy was first used by Marxist-influenced scholars to describe situations in which government policy strategies did not seem to reflect the interests of dominant economic classes, which according to Marxist theory, should have controlled policy making. Within Latin America, such policies included the adoption of import-substitution industrialization, which subsidized both manufacturers and workers in manufacturing, by countries with economies still dominated by agricultural or mining interests. ISI policies benefited manufacturers and workers at the expense of agriculture, so its adoption raised questions about why a major policy failed to reflect the interests of the dominant economic groups.

By the time I was writing, the term state autonomy had become generalized and was being used loosely to mean government actions that did not seem to reflect societal interests, but it was unclear what "the state's" interest might be or where a government interest that diverged from societal interests might come from. When I tried to find evidence of state autonomy on the ground to investigate these questions, I found that some politicians and professional bureaucrats were trying to insulate parts of the state administration not from the influence of organized interest groups but from being used as a source of patronage jobs and from the leakage of resources intended for development projects or welfare into the pockets of supporters of other politicians. I did not find much evidence that governments were trying to reduce the influence of economic interests. Quite the opposite. Some governments had created specific institutions within which private businesses were encouraged to share their knowledge and preferences with officials, and most governments had institutionalized

contact and bargaining with organized labor. Policymakers needed information and cooperation from interest groups to secure good economic performance.

The idea of state autonomy did not necessarily imply a neutral, technocratic bureaucracy. It just meant a bureaucracy pursuing goals different from those of important economic elites. However, norms about technical competence, substantive knowledge about policy areas, meritocratic appointment and promotion, personal integrity and intolerance for corruption, and a non-politicized style of interacting with the public seem to have developed within the more professionalized parts of state administrations. Such norms were taught in schools of public administration. These norms might have helped to keep administrations insulated from interest groups, and they also created pressure groups within the state apparatus in favor of limiting patronage jobs and the dissipation of resources for political uses.

269 The state's role in economies was greatly reduced during the liberal reforms of the 1990s. States now control fewer economic assets and have less control over basic allocation decisions. In other ways, however, nothing has changed. Politicians still want to be able to appoint loyalists to implement their signature programs to avoid shirking or sabotage of the programs they care most about. And state resources remain the main source politicians have access to for rewarding supporters. So the incentives to use bureaucratic jobs as patronage and to distribute state resources to the groups or areas that can deliver the most votes are unchanged. Electoral competition motivates the exchange of jobs and other resources for support, so we would not expect clientelism to decline in democracies. Many political scientists still study patronage and clientelism, but the word autonomy is no longer used to describe bureaucratic enclaves that are insulated from clientelism. The old Marxist-influenced expectation that economic elites control democratic government seems naïve now, so there is no need for a term to describe real-world situations that fail to conform to expectations we no longer find plausible.

**Mariele Troiano and Nayara Albrecht:** In the book *Politician's Dilemma: Building State Capacity in Latin America*, you explore issues related to the distribution of public positions in certain countries, such as Brazil. The Brazilian case revealed that different motivations may affect the president's choices. Do you believe the strategies behind appointments have changed over the past years?

**Barbara Geddes:** I think levels of training, expertise, and professionalization in the bureaucracy have increased, but that politicians still face cross pressures when it comes to using their powers to appoint top administrators. They want to achieve certain goals that they have promised voters, so they need to appoint administrators to implement those programs who believe wholeheartedly in them, will work loyally to achieve success, and are competent enough to implement programs effectively. At the same time, politicians also face pressures to use some of the resources to which they have access, which include influence over who is hired for certain bureaucratic jobs and where funds for purposes such as building clinics and roads are spent, to secure the cooperation of those who control or can influence blocs of votes. This means that politicians tend to devote some of their appointments to finding the best people to implement their policy choices and some to contribute to their own or their allies' reelection campaigns.

270 In Brazil, I think it has been difficult for presidents, no matter what their values, to abstain completely from using a political logic to distribute patronage, development projects, and local public goods because these resources are often needed to hold legislative coalitions together or to "buy" the votes needed to pass important pieces of legislation in Brazil's fragmented party system. Since members of Congress are not bound by strong norms of discipline, presidents sometimes must trade resources for congressional votes. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso modernized this traditional system of exchange by using excel spreadsheets to keep track of what resources had gone to which members of Congress and how members had voted on relevant bills. President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva at first appeared not to understand the traditional way presidents achieved legislative cooperation. His team tried to accomplish the same thing by using straight-forward bribes for members of Congress, but they were caught, which led to a big scandal. Examination of legislative voting records during Lula's presidency suggests that he had begun using the same strategy as past presidents after a couple of years in office.

All Brazilian presidents have governed with legislative coalitions. This is a feature of the Brazilian political system caused by party fragmentation and the large number of parties that have representation in Congress. The smaller the president's party in the legislature and the more diverse

the coalition needed to pass the president's legislative agenda, the more dependent he or she is likely to be on exchanging state resources for legislative votes.

Jair Bolsonaro seems to have caused damage to Brazilian administration that goes beyond what might have resulted simply from appointing loyal supporters and benefiting his allies. I see parallels between Donald Trump's relationship with and attitudes toward the high-level permanent professional bureaucracy in Washington and Bolsonaro's regarding the equivalent Brazilian administrative staff. Trump's more extreme impulses were often blocked by members of the permanent professional administration. Elected Republican officials have rarely contradicted or disagreed with Trump because his popularity with the Republican base and his vindictive personality make them fear damage to their future election prospects if they cross him. This means that one of the main constitutional checks on executive aggrandizement, the Congress, did not constrain Trump very much. Nevertheless, Trump was not very successful in achieving changes he wanted. Some initiatives, such as the initial version of the Muslim travel ban, were blocked by the Courts, and some were blocked by professional staffers in the bureaucracy. Trump pursued multiple strategies to reduce the influence of professional administrative staff. He appointed as directors of agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency extreme partisans who disapproved of their basic missions, which of course demoralized permanent staff, leading to resignations and the diversion of resources away from agency goals. He forced some especially important or outspoken career administrators out of their jobs and damaged other parts of government administration by simply not appointing people to fill important posts. This was the strategy used to undermine the influence of the State Department (the US equivalent of the Foreign Ministry). Bolsonaro has faced more opposition in Congress because of big differences between the Brazilian and U.S. party systems, but he nevertheless sought to reduce the influence of the professional administration. He appears to have used some of the same strategies for dealing with the administrative apparatus, causing the damage to bureaucratic capacity that would be expected. Because Brazil has many trained professionals in the fields that have suffered damage, however, I expect the damage to be repaired by future presidents, as I believe the damage done by Trump is currently being repaired by the Biden Administration.

**Mariele Troiano and Nayara Albrecht:** Several scholars have emphasized the emergence of the so-called hybrid regimes, i.e., systems mixing characteristics from democracies and autocracies. Whereas some have pointed out a crisis of democracy, others claimed liberal democracy was already flawed. Do you agree with these perspectives? What are the impacts of hybrid regimes on the bureaucracy and state capacities in Latin America? Which role do bureaucrats play in this context?

**Barbara Geddes:** “Hybrid” regime is a new name for an old phenomenon. Different scholars may define the term somewhat differently, but what I understand it to mean is a political system characterized by democratic-looking institutions in which limits to competition, or a manipulated playing field make the incumbent unlikely to lose an election. The kinds of rules that create this outcome include limitations on which parties can run in elections, the legal disqualification of candidates or parties, physical violence against opposition candidates and/or their supporters, restrictions on the rights of assembly and speech, control of media by the incumbent, the use of violence and intimidation to prevent some groups from voting, and the pervasive use of state resources to provide necessary goods to supporters along with the threat of withholding such resources from those who fail to support the incumbent. Currently, most dictatorships fit this definition. About 70 percent of contemporary dictatorships hold elections that are superficially competitive. Before the end of the Cold War, less than 50 percent of dictatorships held competitive elections, but the number that did hold them was nevertheless quite large and included long-lasting dictatorships in Mexico, Brazil for most of the years under military rule, El Salvador under military rule, Guatemala under military rule, and many others that are less well known. I refer to these cases when I say that the phenomenon is old.

Some observers associate hybrid regimes with a crisis of democracy because they know of some cases, for example, Venezuela under Chávez, in which a democratic political system was undermined by a leader first elected in a free and fair election. Countries going through a transition from democracy to autocracy under the leadership of a sitting president often maintain the superficial features of democracy. They often continue holding elections that appear competitive on the surface but that are controlled in some non-obvious way by incumbent elites. However, incremental autocratizations like

the Venezuelan are not the only or most common way that dictatorships end up maintaining seemingly democratic institutions. Many long-standing dictatorships make use of them as well.

So-called hybrid regimes also arise after military coups, popular uprisings, and revolutions much as other dictatorial institutions do. In my view, holding regular elections that allow some competition solves a problem dictators have with monitoring and controlling lower-level officials. Local officials in dictatorships face temptations to get rich by collecting bribes, beat citizens up to ensure the payment of bribes or compliance with rules, force women to engage in unwanted sex, and in other ways exploit and abuse the people they are supposed to govern. Dictators want to prevent serious abuses of power by officials because abuse generates opposition to the regime, which can sometimes unseat the dictator. Most dictatorships lack the ability to monitor local officials. Holding competitive elections for local offices and legislators makes it possible for citizens to identify the most abusive or incompetent officials and get rid of them without requiring a big investment in self-policing by the dictatorship. I think many dictatorships adopt some aspects of democracy because doing so helps to solve some of their domestic problems and because they experience pressure from the richer democracies to show “progress” toward democratization.

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In short, I think decisions to make use of democratic-looking institutions depend on calculations made by dictatorial elites about what will help them survive in power. They thus have little to do with the many flaws that plague democracies. In other words, I don’t believe that citizens fed up with democracy vote for certain candidates because they want to live in hybrid regimes or other forms of dictatorship. In fair elections, citizens vote for candidates who appeal to them for various reasons. Backsliding, or transition from democracy to dictatorship led by an elected incumbent, results from elite actions to aggrandize the powers of the incumbent relative to other political actors who would otherwise be able to constrain executive actions. Once the backsliding executive has reduced or eliminated these constraints, he can initiate a strategy to reduce opposition’s ability to oust him in subsequent elections. As a result, citizens who become disenchanted with the backslider often have difficulty removing him. Although some dictators are genuinely popular for periods of time, we should not assume that the votes received by elected dictators reflect the popularity they would have in fair elections.

I doubt that there is a simple relationship between political regime and state capacity. Many dictatorships have very low state capacity and abysmally corrupt and incompetent bureaucracies. However, we also know about dictatorships with highly developed state capacity, for example Singapore, Malaysia for most of the years since independence, South Korea under military rule, Taiwan under the Kuomintang, Mexico under the PRI, China under Communist Party rule. Arguably Brazilian state capacity increased during military rule while Argentine state capacity declined.

274 The idea that there is an affinity between dictatorship and empowered bureaucracy may derive from claims made by Guillermo O'Donnell about South American military rule from the 1960s to the 1980s. O'Donnell argued that rule by the professionalized militaries of the most economically advanced countries of Latin America differed from traditional experiences with rule by military caudillos in that the modern military regimes of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay were controlled by collective military decision-making bodies and closely allied with professional bureaucrats with whom officers shared a conservative worldview and technocratic decision-making style. He labeled these regimes bureaucratic-authoritarian (B-A) to highlight this relationship. I think O'Donnell was correct in identifying a different, less personalized form of military rule, but that he was largely wrong about the relationship between military rulers and bureaucracies in these Latin American countries. Bureaucrats in Latin American countries with substantial democratic experience, like those that experienced the B-A coups, had been appointed by and promoted during the mostly centrist and leftist democratic governments that the military coups of the sixties and seventies ousted. They were not especially conservative. They included reformers such as those who led Chilean land reform under President Allende, blatant political cronies such as those whose appointment caused a political scandal during the administration of Brazilian President Goulart, and supporters of conservative economic policies who owed their appointments to conservative parties elected in earlier years. After the coups that brought the military regimes to power, many bureaucrats were purged, indicating military rulers' lack of confidence in them.

Alfred Stepan has described the way the Brazilian Escola Superior de Guerra (Superior War College or ESG) trained high-level administrators alongside the most promising officers in classes that covered



economics and sociology as well as military subjects. These classes brought officers and bureaucrats into contact with each other, helped to develop mutual respect and shared ideas that helped shape the policies pursued by the military government after the coup. However, only a tiny proportion of professional bureaucrats attended these classes. Even after extensive purges, military leaders tended to distrust civilian administrators they did not know. In fact, the Brazilian military regime placed security agents in all bureaucratic agencies to spy on employees. Their purpose was to try to ensure compliance with military laws and goals as well as with norms about attendance and work ethic much the way the Soviet Communist Party installed party commissars to monitor and spy on bureaucrats leftover from tsarist times. Although I don't doubt that military leaders had some important allies in the highest ranks of the civilian administration, including some who had attended the ESG, I don't see the Brazilian experience as confirmation of an argument about natural affinity between bureaucrats and officers.

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Experiences in other parts of the world seem more consistent with an affinity between dictators and state bureaucrats. Looking at them may help to identify the conditions conducive to such an affinity. The first post-independence military dictatorships in some African countries suggest a stronger basis for a military-bureaucratic alliance. In Ghana, for example, the first military intervention in 1966 replaced a democratically elected government that had alienated much of the pre-existing state bureaucracy trained by the departing British by swamping the civil service with many untrained partisan appointments. Since the officer corps had also been trained by the British, they had a lot in common with British-trained civil servants, and both groups formed important parts of the small African educated elite at the time. The military government purged many of the political appointees from the state administration and found it easy to cooperate with the British-trained civil servants. Dan Slater has made an argument about post-independence dictatorships in Southeast Asia that has some similarities with African experience in the 1960s. He argues that the British built up state bureaucratic apparatuses with high coercive capacity and anti-communist economic ideology in Singapore and Malaysia as a bulwark against communism. Post-independence governments could then use these effective states to foster rapid state-led non-communist economic development. What the African and Southeast Asian experiences have in common is that both occurred very soon after independence, when top bureaucrats and officers shared recent training by the colonial power and a

similar status in a mostly rural and uneducated population. In contrast, officers and bureaucrats in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s had traveled on divergent paths for more than a century before the B-A coups.

Contemporary hybrid regimes and democratic backsliders in Latin America have had the opposite relationship with state bureaucrats to that claimed by O'Donnell. Chávez, Maduro, and Bolsonaro actively attacked professional administrators in important positions. Most notably, Chávez replaced the professional and technocratic management of Venezuela's state oil industry with political cronies willing to divert resources from investment, new exploration, and maintenance in the industry in order to subsidize food and medical care for poor Chavista supporters. Venezuelan oil production and export have never recovered. Morales and Correa appointed their own supporters to high-level administrative jobs, as previous democratically elected presidents have done. These appointments probably reduced levels of education and technocratic competence in the bureaucracy, especially in Bolivia, because of the composition of the president's support base among the indigenous and the relatively poor. In the backsliding cases, the changes in personnel occurred primarily because administrators who opposed the president's ideas or thought them unworkable blocked or undermined implementation, so presidents replaced them where possible.

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**Mariele Troiano and Nayara Albrecht:** Although authoritarian populism is not a new phenomenon in Latin America, it has been reshaped recently with the re-emergence of right-wing leaders. What are the main changes Latin American countries have experienced in terms of the functioning of their democratic institutions? Do you believe these institutions are facing a major political crisis? What are the reasons?

**Barbara Geddes:** When we try to assess the effectiveness of political institutions, we should keep in mind the background of events and international economic trends that Latin American democracies must cope with. Serious crises are often associated with radical political change and instability, even in previously stable democracies. It's important to remember that Latin American countries have experienced high economic volatility at least since the 1930s. There have been many serious, multi-year economic crises and some periods of rapid, euphoria-inducing growth. Many of the first Latin

American democratic governments to emerge after the end of military rule had to turn their inexperienced eyes immediately to contend with the fallout from the debt crisis and the pressure from the international economy to liberalize. Liberal policies were often unpopular, and governments were not especially adroit in handling changes. In addition to economic problems, during the last twenty years, extreme weather has buffeted some countries, and the pandemic has wreaked havoc in all. Finally, mind-boggling corruption scandals have erupted in one country after another. The pandemic, the weather events, and some of the economic crises have hit Latin American countries like meteor strikes. Latin American governments did not cause these calamities, though some handled them better than others. Governments did cause other economic crises by choosing policies that caused inflation, balance of payments crises, or capital flight. They also permitted and, in some instances, encouraged corruption.

Citizens often punish incumbent political leaders who they blame for crises. Governments should be held responsible for the economic crises they cause and for corruption; the only way citizens can hold them responsible is to vote them out of office. They should not be held responsible for crises they did not cause, but citizens often seem unable to tell which disasters are caused by governments. They tend to “throw the bums out” after crises, regardless of what was really to blame.

Being blamed for a crisis tends to discredit both the leader in office and his or her party for a period of years. When crises occur frequently, first one party and then another can be discredited in the voters’ eyes. This sequence of events creates openings for outsider candidates to win presidential elections. By “outsider” candidates, I mean those who have not had careers in politics, have not built their support base within an established party, and have no relevant experience of political leadership before running for president. Using this definition, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori was an outsider candidate, as was Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Others, such as Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, Bolivian President Evo Morales, and U.S. President Donald Trump, were not complete outsiders, but came close. The decade preceding Chávez’s first election included first an unpopular and politically maladroit attempt at economic liberalization, a corruption scandal involving the president, and then a long period of economic crisis as political leaders resisted liberalizing but failed to find a feasible alternative strategy. Both of Venezuela’s strong traditional parties were discredited by these events.

Before the late 1990s, Venezuela's strong, stable party system would have forced anyone with political ambitions to work with and attract support within one of the two traditional parties. The parties controlled would-be candidates' access to the ballot, and most citizens had strong party loyalties, so there was little political space for outsiders. By 1998, however, after the long period of crisis that neither party had been able to overcome, most voters found a candidate undamaged by association with an unsuccessful party attractive. That he did not come from the light-skinned elite and had tremendous communication skills made him even more attractive. Chávez was able to use TV to reach large numbers of informal sector workers and slum dwellers who had been largely unreached by the traditional parties, which based their outreach to ordinary citizens on union organizations and peasant associations. As elsewhere in Latin America, the informal sector had grown rapidly in Venezuela during the long period of economic crisis associated with the debt crisis and bungled economic liberalization, so the number of people left marginalized by the traditional party system had increased dramatically.

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Outsiders are more likely to have extreme views than politicians who have risen through a stable party and had to attract support from various factions in order to be successful. Their extremeness and their outspokenness help distinguish them from a field of traditional politicians who tend to be very careful not to offend anyone, and I suspect these traits appeal to the somewhat marginal voters who become the loyal base of support for outsider politicians. The forthright expression of prejudices and hostility create an impression of honesty in contrast to the mealy-mouthed caution of much political speech. The voters attracted to these candidates tend to be people who have felt left out of the traditional party system or that their views and opinions have been ignored. In countries with large numbers of marginalized informal workers or excluded indigenous or racial minorities, leftist appeals promising inclusion and redistribution tend to be more successful. Where large numbers of voters are angry about changes in gender norms and racial hierarchies and fearful of being left behind by economic changes, right-wing or nationalist appeals promising a return to older values and "greatness" can be successful. I think that whether left- or right-wing populist candidates emerge depends on characteristics of the reservoir of not fully included potential voters in a particular time and place. There are some countries in which either a left- or right-wing appeal could find a sufficient pool of potential supporters.

Populist political leaders tend to be democratic backsliders because, having built their successful political base in opposition to the traditional political system, they lack respect for traditional norms. They also often lack knowledge about how the political system normally functions and how different offices fit into the machine. They may be unaware of how limited a president's legal powers are, so they are often frustrated by their inability to get things done or by being blocked by Congress or the Courts. They often try to pack the institutions intended to serve as checks on the executive with their own loyalists and to eliminate other kinds of constraints on presidential power. Thus, they tend to aggrandize the executive through changes in both institutions and personnel.

279 So far, I have not talked about how particular political institutions or routinized political practices have contributed to the emergence of populist backsliders. I have emphasized instead the importance of background conditions, which I think need to be kept in mind. Examining the populists does highlight the importance of one feature of some democratic systems, however: despite universal suffrage, some groups feel marginalized or excluded from effective political participation. In the old days, the poor and subordinate racial groups were purposefully excluded. Suffrage restrictions before the 1980s in Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil limited the right to vote of the indigenous and the poor. Nowadays, however, my sense is that political marginality is largely a consequence of economic marginality and the difficulty many political parties have in reaching citizens who work in the informal sector and get most of their news from social media. These problems are not caused by institutions per se, but democratic institutions do not work as expected if the conditions in which large numbers of people live make reaching them with information and benefits difficult. People who have been unreachable by traditional parties are available as supporters for populist backsliders.

**Mariele Troiano and Nayara Albrecht:** Concerning the context we are living in; how will the pandemic reshape democracy and governance globally?

**Barbara Geddes:** I think the pandemic is like other serious crises in the sense that voters tend to vote against incumbents when bad things happen while they are in office. In the absence of the pandemic, it is likely that Trump would have been reelected in the U.S. I expect the pandemic to help defeat Bolsonaro as well. Trump and Bolsonaro “deserve” to be defeated, of course, because of egregious

mismanagement of the response to the pandemic. A lot of other political leaders are also likely to face defeat at the polls, even if they handled the pandemic response fairly well, just because they were in office during a disaster.

Whether more serious political instability results will depend on how serious the economic crisis caused by the pandemic is in different parts of the world. For example, if China goes into a serious recession because its stringent lock-down policy reduces production in its major manufacturing centers, the countries in the global south that normally supply China's huge appetite for commodities will be damaged by reduced demand for their most important exports. If the pandemic is followed by recession or depression, then we may see not just election defeats, but the destabilization of previously stable party systems as happened in some Latin American countries during the repeated economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s.

280 The pandemic is the most globally visible symptom of climate change right now, but we can expect many more weather-induced disasters. Most public attention to climate change seems focused on extreme weather events. These events can be devastating to the people and region involved, but they are geographically concentrated, and they usually take only a short time. Afterward, governments and ordinary people can mobilize to rebuild and recover. Other consequences of global warming will be harder to deal with. The current pandemic is unlikely to be the only new disease humans will suffer. Scientists are already identifying new diseases and pests in food crops and domestic animals, and some existing diseases and pests are expanding their numbers or their range in new conditions. These pests and diseases are likely to reduce the world food supply beyond the reductions expected from warming per se.

I expect the most serious challenges to democratic (and also authoritarian) governance to come from climate change and the global price changes and massive human migrations to be expected in response to rising sea levels, changing crop patterns, new diseases, and the devastation of large areas of land by drought and repeated wildfires. All governments will struggle to deal with these things, and people will respond by trying to change the way they are governed or where they live. In general, violence and extremist movements become more likely when people feel threatened, as I expect they will.

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