

## Editor's Letter

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I am very pleased to announce that with the publication of volume 43, number 1, the *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* undergoes a metamorphosis to become ***Latin American Politics and Society***. The renaming of a journal with more than 40 years of history is not something to be embarked on lightly or in haste. This decision has been the result of several months of intense debate among the members of our Editorial Board and also involving the participation of numerous Latin Americanist friends and colleagues throughout the hemisphere. My colleagues at the University of Miami's School of International Studies also participated in this discussion. After extensive consideration of various combinations and permutations (involving "politics," "society," "economics," "global," "international," "Latin American," and "Caribbean"), we reached a broad consensus in favor of ***Latin American Politics and Society*** as the option that best captures our collective understanding of the intellectual challenges now facing scholars of the region and its place in the world. In our view, the journal's new name resonates well with the far-reaching transformations taking place in the Americas since the journal first appeared in the late 1950s.

What are these transformations? My personal list—which in no way implies agreement on the part of Editorial Board members—focuses on several overarching shifts in the tectonic plates of Latin American politics and international relations. First, the Cold War has ended, and with it the old antinomies of (capitalist) reform versus (socialist) revolution have dimmed rapidly to be little more than antiquated nostalgias nurtured by ideologues whose time is now past. As a consequence, most observers would concur that contemporary "security threats" have little or nothing to do with old-fashioned ideological conflicts couched in the discourse of superpower rivalries. Instead, those concerned with hemispheric security must retool and confront *sui generis* challenges to state sovereignty and interstate cooperation. Among these challenges to state power and regional governance are the pervasive threat of environmental degradation, the impact of unregulated labor migration, and the scourges of drug trafficking and transnational criminal organizations that respect no national interest or boundary.

Second, and associated with the demise of Cold War politics, the military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes that proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s have, by and large, given way to civilian rule, although

in some regions, such as the Andes, militarism, albeit with *nuevo ropaje*, persists, while new-style neopopulist politicians exacerbate the normal (and desirable) uncertainties of electoral politics by challenging the logic of democratic representation via political parties. The “really existing democracies” in the region certainly are “real,” but they nevertheless raise vexing problems, old and new, regarding the varieties of democratic institutional design, respect for human rights, the imperative of strengthening the rule of law, and the necessity of a vigorous politics of promoting citizenship.

Third, the transition to a more democratic and competitive politics means that, although still plagued by endemic inequalities and entrenched authoritarian values and practices, dynamic civil societies characterized by a plethora of new organizations and social movements are emerging in most Latin American and Caribbean societies. This means that contemporary politics in the region must contend not only with the pathologies of inherited systems of class stratification but also with the consequences of new cleavages implicated in perplexing struggles over the place and limits of difference defined along the lines of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities, often interacting with conflicts stemming from multiculturalism and the problematic coexistence of plurinational identities.

Fourth, and related to the previous transformations, the dominant characteristics of the states and societies of the region, not to mention their relationship with the United States and their place in world politics and economics, have been radically changed by two decades of market-driven economic and social restructuring. Regional integration schemes (for example, NAFTA, MERCOSUR, and the Free Trade Area of the Americas), the globalization of trade, investment, and financial flows, and popular and elite culture are altering in fundamental and enduring ways both the deep structures and the surface contours of society, culture, and politics in the Americas. Globalization and regional integration, however, have not made the Americas more homogeneous or set them on a trajectory leading toward institutional and macroeconomic convergence. Rather, it probably is more accurate to observe that globalization has triggered new “winners” and “losers” within and among countries, thus initiating a pattern of deepening differentiation—within the various regional arrangements and even within individual societies—that defies conventional analytical categories.

These multifaceted transformations truly delineate a *nueva época* for the Americas. This new epoch obviously demands a rethinking of social science paradigms, while also requiring that we invent new ways to communicate. Clearly, a simple name change can be only a first step toward meeting these challenges. Nevertheless, with the advent of *Latin American Politics and Society*, we wish to signal this journal's will-

ingness to promote a reexamination of prevailing social science theories and concepts about Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as to renew and strengthen our commitment to the publication of high-quality scholarly research on the region.

More specifically, I want to make clear that our Editorial Board is fiercely committed to theoretical and methodological pluralism and will not adhere to orthodoxies. No method or approach is unwelcome at this journal. We will, moreover, affirmatively seek to promote innovative perspectives on the states, societies, and economies of the Americas in a globalizing world. To this end, we will place great emphasis on interdisciplinary studies in a way that expands the conventional concept of "area studies" by including comparative, cross-regional perspectives. We think it is vital, in this regard, that *Latin American Politics and Society* serve as a vital space for conducting important scholarly debates among political scientists, sociologists, economists, geographers, historians, and others who constitute our public, as our contributors and readers and as subscribers to the journal. We will endeavor to pursue these objectives through the publication of peer-reviewed articles based on original research on topics such as

- U.S.-Latin American relations in a globalizing world.
- Regime change, democratization, and the challenges of democratic governance, including state building and state reform.
- Political institutions, electoral and party systems, political culture, political participation, presidentialism, parliamentarism, courts, and legislative politics.
- Civil-military relations and the emergence of new national and regional security agendas.
- Civil society and social movements, including the politics of social differences and hierarchies (race, class, gender).
- Environmental politics and sustainable development.
- Economic development, social inequalities, and the political economy of market reforms.
- Hemispheric and subregional integration of trade, investment, and finance, and the recasting of relationships between domestic and international markets and systems of production wrought by the forces of globalization.

In addition to research articles, *Latin American Politics and Society* will make several innovations in the journal's format. A section of **Critical Debates** will promote inquiry with provocative review essays surveying major themes in the recent social science literature on the region. A **Policy Issues** section will periodically present contending perspectives on major issues of significant policy relevance. A **Research Notes** section will serve as an outlet for shorter pieces dealing with

questions of data, theory, and method. Finally, a **Book Review** section will provide readers with timely reviews of individual books designed to foster critical reflection as opposed to simple description.

I am grateful to Eleanor Lahn, the managing editor, and Alfred P. Montero, our book review editor, and to the members of the Editorial Board for their unwavering support during the months leading up to the appearance of this first issue of *Latin American Politics and Society*. I also would like to thank Lynne Rienner, our distributor, and Martha Peacock, journals manager at Lynne Rienner Publishers, for their sage advice during the transition process. All of us are enthusiastic in our commitment to enhancing the journal's status as a central participant and obligatory reference in the scholarly and policy debates about the contemporary political, social, and economic transformations in Latin America and the Caribbean in their domestic, regional, and global contexts. We welcome the suggestions and criticisms of our readership and invite all to collaborate with us in the journal's new epoch.