The Quality of Democracy in Latin America

edited by
Daniel H. Levine
and José E. Molina
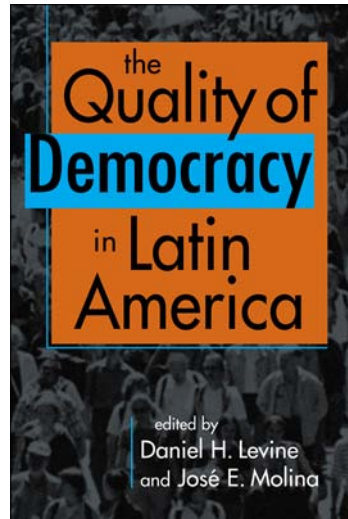
LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

1800 30th Street, Ste. 314
Boulder, CO 80301
USA
telephone 303.444.6684
fax 303.444.0824

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Evaluating the Quality of Democracy in Latin America

Daniel H. Levine and José E. Molina

SCHOLARS OF DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA, AND OF DEMOCracy and democratization in general, agree on a few important facts. There is agreement that the current wave or cycle of democracy has been more durable and has more depth and better prospects for survival than others in recent historical experience (Smith 2005). There is agreement that the origins of this new or renewed set of political systems can be attributed more to the operation of political variables—the discredit of previous authoritarian governments, qualities of leadership and pact making, and extensive social support—than to economic or purely institutional factors. Indeed, many of the new Latin American democracies emerged in the midst of economic crisis and have survived severe downturns that might have endangered their survival in earlier times (Levitsky 2005; Mainwaring and Hagopian 2005; Roberts forthcoming). As political realities have changed, the predominant focus of analysis has followed the course of events and moved from the concerns with regime change, transitions, and consolidation (but see Roberts forthcoming) that dominated earlier scholarship to more detailed consideration of the *quality* of these democracies. Analysis of the quality of democracy means examining the extent to which in theory and practice citizens are provided with a full range of rights and opportunities, and with the institutions and effective political rights to ensure that these are realities (Diamond and Morlino 2005; Mainwaring 2003; Mainwaring and Hagopian 2005; Morlino 2004; Munck 2007b; O'Donnell 2004a, 2004b; Smith 2005).

How to understand the origins, workings, and quality of democracy is a question that has occupied scholars of politics since Aristotle. In the context of the current cycle of democracy in Latin America, analysis of the quality of democracy has become something of a growth industry. There is an abundance of studies on issues ranging from the specifics of institutional formation, electoral systems, and political parties; to efforts to identify minimum "requisites for

democracy"; to governance and public policy; and to efforts to set political democracy in a general context of rights and liberties (Munck 2007b; Munck and Verkuilen 2002; Tilly 2007). The existence of rights and the degree to which rights are effective are often central to these discussions, particularly to the analysis of accountability, itself a central feature of the quality of democracy. Much of the literature considers rights and the rule of law as separate dimensions of the quality of democracy (Diamond and Morlino 2005; Mainwaring, Scully, and Vargas Cullell 2010; Munck 2007b; O'Donnell 2004a, 2004b). In our view, each of the dimensions of democracy has specific rights associated with it. Therefore, for present purposes, we consider rights as an integral part of the area of democracy they are intended to protect, and not as elements of a separate, distinct, and general dimension of rights. The advantage of treating rights in this way is that the rights included in the analysis are those directly and explicitly related to the quality of democratic processes and to specific areas of the political process.[1] Thus, in contrast to scholars like Diamond and Morlino (2005), Mainwaring, Scully, and Vargas Cullell (2010), and O'Donnell (2004b) for whom the quality of democracy depends on the extent to which civil rights in general are effective, we believe that the rights in terms of democratic procedure that should be taken into account in determining the quality of democracy as conceived here are those civil rights that are specifically linked to the making of political decisions and their control by citizens. Certainly all civil rights are important, but if we wish to distinguish the quality of democracy from an overall evaluation of the performance of government, then it is necessary to identify the quality of democracy by evaluating only those rights strictly linked to political decisions in a democracy, while others, such as social, economic, and religious rights, should be considered as part of the evaluation of governmental performance or of social life in general.

Democracy and the quality of democracy are of course closely related, but they are not identical. An extensive literature and a large number of indices exist that classify countries on a scale whose core lies in a distinction between *nondemocracies* and *democracies*, with intermediate categories added in some cases. The indices analyzed by Munck and Verkuilen are mostly of this type (2002). The aim of this chapter and the studies collected in this volume are different. Our goals are (1) to distinguish clearly between democracy and the quality of democracy, (2) working with a procedural definition of democracy, to provide an operational definition of the quality of democracy, and (3) to specify core empirical dimensions on which the quality of democracy can be measured. Although in some accounts there are important democratic or democratizing elements even within authoritarian regimes (Tilly 2007), we begin with the assumption that any analysis of the quality of democracy requires that a country be at least minimally democratic, that an index of democracy has already been applied. This assumption is also shared by Altman and Pérez-Liñán (2002) and Diamond and Morlino (2005). The next step is to con-

sider and to classify these democratic countries according to the quality of their democracy on a core group of theoretically derived dimensions.

Most indices of democracy, following the pioneering empirical classification of democracies by Dahl (1971: 231–249), work on two dimensions: contestation and participation (Munck and Verkuilen 2002). Much of the literature, such as the emphasis on general issues of rights and liberty, is also heavily influenced by and dependent on indicators and concepts provided by the United Nations Development Program (2005) and by Freedom House with data from panels of experts.[2] There is also emphasis on effective governance and public policy (Kurtz and Schrank 2007) and on the ups and downs of citizen satisfaction with democracy and views on alternative regimes.[3]

We take a different approach. In our view, there is an important distinction to be made between the effort to differentiate democracy from other political systems (dictatorship, for example) or to specify minimum requisites for democracy (inclusive citizenship, for example) and the analysis of the quality of a functioning political system that we can evaluate on the basis of a range of theoretically significant indicators. We coincide with the growing literature that considers the quality of democracy to be a distinct issue from analysis of the difference between democracies and nondemocracies (Abente 2007; Altman and Pérez-Liñán 2002; Andreev 2008; Berg-Shlosser 2004; Diamond and Morlino 2005; Morlino 2004; O'Donnell 2004a, 2004b; Smith and Ziegler 2008; Vargas Cullell 2004).[4]

In this chapter we clarify the concept of quality of democracy as different from the concept of democracy itself, and we consider the dimensions on which the quality of democracy should be measured. Working within the tradition of procedural democracy, we anchor the concept of quality of democracy in a compact group of theoretical and empirical dimensions that center attention on the quality of political processes (Tilly 2007: 7–10), on how democracies work as political systems, and on the rights and opportunities essential to the ability of any democracy to function, survive, and remain democratic.

There is broad agreement among scholars of democracy on the attributes identified by Dahl, whose work takes the understanding of democracy beyond a simple listing of social requisites or specifying the requirement of competition—which may or may not be democratic—to something more nuanced and dynamic. In *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?* Dahl writes that

> to be fully democratic a state would have to provide rights, liberties and opportunities for effective participation; voting equality; the ability to acquire sufficient understanding of policies and their consequences; and the means by which the citizen body could maintain adequate control of the agenda of government policies and decisions. Finally, as we now understand the ideal, in order to be fully democratic, a state would have to ensure that all, or at any rate most permanent adult residents under its jurisdiction would possess the rights

> of citizenship. . . . There is no need to describe here the basic political institutions of a modern democratic country; but it should be obvious that just as in the ideal, so too in actual purpose democratic government presupposes that its citizens possess a body of fundamental *rights, liberties, and opportunities*. These include the rights to vote in the election of officials in free and fair elections; to run for elective office; to free expression; to form and participate in independent political organizations; to have access to independent sources of information, and to have rights to other freedoms and opportunities that may be necessary for the effective operation of the political institutions of large-scale democracy. (2002: 136–137)

These reflections provide the basic elements for our understanding of what a procedural definition of democracy must include: (1) free, fair, and frequent elections; (2) untrammeled equal access to voting and to institutions; (3) information that is accessible and sufficient for citizens to make a reasoned judgment; (4) elected officials empowered to govern, but also accountable and responsive to their constituents; and (5) an inclusive definition of citizenship. These are not all-or-nothing conditions, but continuous processes that may be expanded or contracted in a given political system. They also do not necessarily all move and change in the same direction. Countries that have a strong record on free and fair elections may be weak on accountability or responsiveness.

Much recent scholarship and commentary on democracy in Latin America has argued that the quality of these political systems is low because they have not generated effective governments, have not substantially reduced inequality and raised standards of living, and have not generated more widespread and meaningful participation (Diamond and Morlino 2005: xviii; Morlino 2004; Tendler 1997; United Nations Development Program 2005). This inappropriately conflates the quality of democracy with governance and effectiveness of government, as manifest in good or bad public policy, and conditions the success of democracy on the implementation of policies that promote development, social justice, and civil rights beyond those linked to the political process. But these issues are analytically distinct: authoritarian regimes can deliver good policies without thereby acquiring democratic legitimacy; democracies may deliver bad policies, but are not therefore less democratic. The quality of democracy and good government are certainly both desirable, but the value of each is best understood if they are analyzed as distinct concepts.[5] As treated here, the quality of democracy depends on the operation of processes whereby the population selects and controls its government and influences public policies, and not on the efficacy of government in the solution of the problems of the country.

Procedural definitions of democracy run a serious risk of formalism by confusing the identification of the existence of elections and formal democratic rules with what may be a very different reality. What makes and keeps the political process *democratic* is the extent to which access and participation by individuals and organized groups, directly or through representatives, are

available on an unhindered basis throughout the social order. This directs attention to how political institutions are situated within a broader social context, to the strength of civil society, and, even more broadly, to conditions of organization and access to public life,[6] as well as to formal institutions of participation, such as electoral systems and legislatures and local governments.

A Procedural Definition of Democracy

Procedural definitions of democracy rest on a liberal and pluralist understanding of politics and the political process. Democracy is conceived as a system of representation with universal adult participation according to open and equal rules. In this vein, our analysis of the quality of democracy centers attention on procedures and on the rights required for them to operate as designed, and on the ways in which groups and individuals can exact accountability and help to shape and monitor policies. For a procedural democracy to function effectively, with procedures that can be described as fully democratic, some basic conditions have to be met: (1) inclusive citizenship, (2) free and open access to the political arena for all groups and individuals subject to transparent rules, (3) freedom of information and organization, and (4) formal as well as informal means of ensuring accountability. In the current literature, with rare exceptions (Beetham 2004; Hagopian 2005; Mainwaring 2003; Munck, 2007b; Powell, 2004; Rueschemeyer 2004), these are left as untheorized elements of a list of desirable traits. To theorize the question means to take the connection between political processes and the surrounding social order not as given, but as a prime focus of inquiry. This requires that we examine prevailing conditions of organization, including formal rules; cultural norms; and access to organization beyond the local level, including national and transnational links, the nature of public space, and barriers to access. The availability of a space that is public and open to all is central to citizen participation and engagement and can be self-sustaining. The ways in which emerging patterns of public participation and the use of space reshape the meaning of representation, both informal and official, are a central question for analysis (Anderson and Dodd 2005; Conaghan 2005; Hagopian 2005).

Procedural definitions of democracy have the attraction of clear analytical boundaries and portability across cases. Nevertheless, they can easily run into difficulties if the motivations and institutional channels specified in the definition are not linked explicitly with the surrounding social context. Elections and electoral systems provide such a link and are, of course, central to any definition of democracy, but the analysis required to address these issues satisfactorily has to reach beyond institutional rules and formal details to examine conditions of registration, access to voting, participation as individuals and through groups, and the flow of information.

How representation is provided for is also critical to the operation of any democratic society of a scale greater than a small group or town meeting. Conventional arrangements for representation—electoral rules, district magnitude, requirements for parties to register and present candidates—continue to play a central role in the quality of democracy (Snyder and Samuels 2001), along with recent innovations intended to multiply instances of citizen participation, including provisions for recall, referenda, rights to petition, participatory budgeting, and some formalized incorporation of civil society into government structures and operations (Avritzer 2002; Mendoza-Botelho 2009; Zovatto 2006). What we term *conventional arrangements* include formal, legal, and, occasionally, constitutional provisions, as well as informal rules and norms that give meaning to the ties between representatives and electors. Important issues here include possible elements of discrimination such as race, gender, and ethnicity; district magnitude and shape; the extent to which electoral rules translate votes into seats in an unbiased manner; the number and depth of offices actually open to election; and the neutrality, transparency, and efficacy of institutions that have the official responsibility of supervising and conducting elections and vote counting (Kornblith 2005; Levitsky and Way 2002).

Assuming universal suffrage and elections that are free, fair, and frequent (all matters for empirical verification), representation that is authentic and of high quality requires lowering barriers for registration, organization, and access to the voting process; multiplying instances and arenas of political action; making voting easier; and ensuring that representatives are more accessible and accountable. Reforms in this vein are intended to link up emerging groups and social networks with formal political institutions in ways that allow social energies to find expression, and affect policy in clear and transparent ways. This is no easy task and cannot be solved simply through measures of decentralization or devolution, although they represent a possible beginning. Decentralization by itself may simply multiply hierarchical units and proliferate subnational authoritarian enclaves (Gibson 2005, 2008). The theoretical challenge is to rethink the relations between the state and society, social movements and institutions, in ways that counter tendencies to group disempowerment and institutional isolation. The experience of Bolivia's Law of Popular Participation is instructive. The political process following the enactment of this law effectively changed a highly centralized prefect-based system into one with widespread popular participation. Central here was the combination of decentralization with lowered barriers to organization that elicited new kinds of participation and new strata of local and regional leaders while facilitating the incorporation of indigenous forms (this volume Chapter 7; Mendoza-Botelho 2009).

Issues of participation are not limited to elections: social movements of all kinds present opportunities for citizens to participate, such as mounting pressure on public officials and placing issues on the national agenda. A broad range of

social movements played an important role in Latin America's most recent round of transitions to democracy, but widespread expectations in many countries that these movements would provide the basis for a different and more participatory kind of politics in the new democracies generally have not been met. Indeed, the contrary has often been true because civil society has become fragmented and weakened, with many groups unable to survive, let alone create enduring connections to formal institutions of representation.[7] There has also been a notable drop in indicators of social participation in many countries, which is perhaps not surprising once the immediate issue of restoring or improving democracies was achieved. One result visible in much of the recent experience of the region has been a pattern of social mobilization marked by sporadic outbursts of activism with continued vulnerability and dependence on populist leaders (Feinberg, Waisman, and Zamosc 2006; Piven and Cloward 1998; Roberts 2006; Schonwalder 2002).[8]

Electoral Decision, Participation, Accountability, Responsiveness, and Sovereignty

In earlier work (Levine and Molina 2007a, 2007b), following what has become a norm in the literature on the quality of democracy (Altman and Pérez-Liñán 2002; Morlino 2004; Munck 2007b; Smith and Ziegler 2008), we took as our starting point a procedural definition of democracy derived from the work of Dahl (1971, 1998). We constructed an operational definition of democracy in terms of a collection of procedures—and the rights that sustain these procedures—through which citizens of a country are able to elect those who govern, influence the decisions of those elected, and hold them accountable. This operational definition and the idea of quality that we derived from it allowed us to establish what a democracy of maximal quality would look like, while at the same time recognizing that countries will differ from one another in terms of how and how much they achieve in any particular dimension.[9] These differences respond to the particularities of each country's political history and do not prevent the use of a common criterion of evaluation.

Working from this understanding of democracy, we conceive of the quality of democracy not as an all-or-nothing phenomenon, but rather as a multidimensional continuum. We specify the quality of any democracy in terms of the degree to which its rankings vary from minimally acceptable to best possible conditions. In summary, democracies meet the following requisites:

1. Elections are free, fair, and frequent;
2. Government is effectively in the hands of those elected;
3. There is freedom of expression;
4. Citizens have effective access to alternative sources of information;

5. There is freedom of organization and of assembly, and associations have autonomy from the government; and
6. Citizenship is broadly inclusive with universal adult suffrage and no discriminatory barriers to electoral and political participation.

When democracy is understood as a group of procedures with the rights that sustain them, through which the citizens of a country can elect those who govern, influence their decisions, and hold them accountable, then the level of quality of any specific democracy can be determined by *the extent* to which citizens can participate in an informed manner in processes of free, fair, and frequent elections; influence the making of political decisions; and hold those who govern accountable. Determination of the level of quality of a democracy also involves *the extent* to which those who govern are those who really make decisions and do so in a way that is responsive to popular will. Given these determinants, the quality of democracy yields five empirical dimensions that together provide the basis for evaluation: (1) electoral decision, (2) participation, (3) responsiveness, (4) accountability, and (5) sovereignty. Each of these dimensions has a distinct set of empirical indicators and a clear relationship to the core theoretical understanding of democracy on which our analysis is founded. The following paragraphs elaborate on each dimension. In Chapter 2 we provide a more detailed exploratory analysis of indicators for each dimension as an illustration of how an index of the quality of democracy may be built on the basis of this conceptual scheme.

Electoral Decision

The requirement that elections be free, fair, frequent, and competitive, and that they lead to the designation of officials who have real power to act, is at the heart of any definition of political democracy and of its quality. This is a multidimensional requirement, which ranges from minimal to optimal on each component. One area that lends itself to measures of variation—and hence of quality—concerns free access to multiple sources of information and the provision of cognitive resources through the diffusion of education to allow for what Dahl refers to as "enlightened understanding" on the part of the voters (1998: 97).

A high quality of democracy depends directly on the degree to which citizens have access to ample and diverse sources of information on an equal and untrammeled basis (Rodríguez Arechavaleta 2010). If formal political equality, that is, one person, one vote, is a minimal condition for political democracy, in the same way, substantive political equality, which has as one of its essential components an equitable distribution of cognitive resources, contributes to a greater quality of democracy by enhancing the possibility of informed decisionmaking among the electorate (Dahl 1998: 97). The more

diverse, abundant, and egalitarian the distribution of cognitive resources through education and the lower the barriers to accessing information, the greater the probability that the political decisions of citizens accord with their interests and are taken with awareness of their possible consequences. The extent to which cognitive resources are equally available is thus a good indicator of substantive equality, not only in politics, but also in economic and social life (Diamond and Morlino 2005; Lijphart 1999: 182; Rueschemeyer 2004).

Intense electoral competition and close results are not sufficient for defining conditions of democracy: what makes a system democratic is that conditions exist (as defined by Dahl 1971) for competition that is free and fair. Analysis of levels of the quality of democracy thus entails evaluation of the effective conditions of organization, access, and competition, but not the *level* of competition as such. In contrast to Altman and Pérez-Liñán (2002), we do not take intensity of competition as a dimension of the quality of democracy, although certainly it is a factor that affects our participation dimension, in the sense that the more intense and close the electoral competition is, the larger the expected voting turnout and political participation (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998).

The quality of electoral institutions is also critical to the quality of electoral choice (Hartlyn, McCoy, and Mustillo 2009).[10] This is partly a matter of oversight and accountability, but since elections are so critical to political democracy, separate comment is warranted here. The national and regional commissions that manage electoral processes and oversee voting and vote counting in Latin America have a mixed record. Where democracies are strongest, as in Costa Rica, electoral institutions are well established and independent (Molina and Hernández 1999; Picado León 2009). In some cases, as with the last presidential vote in Mexico, they have refereed exceptionally close elections amid allegations of fraud by the losing side (Schedler 2009). In others, for example in Venezuela (Alvarez 2009; Kornblith 2005, 2007; Pereira Almao and Pérez Baralt Chapter 10) or Nicaragua (Martí i Puig Chapter 8), the autonomy required to manage elections in an impartial and equitable fashion has been challenged or entirely overcome by official pressures or under-the-table deals between major political forces.

Participation

Political participation includes both participation in formal political processes like voting or access to government offices and membership in groups that exercise such participation collectively, for example, political parties. It is through participation that citizens choose their government, control it, and influence policymaking either directly or through representatives. The greater the participation, the higher the probability that government and its decisions are responsive to the will of the people. The quality of democracy is therefore influenced directly by the level and character of citizen participation in areas

from voting and lobbying to membership in social and political party organizations (Araya and Barría 2009).

Effective opportunities to vote are another important component of participation. This refers to lowered barriers and greater ease of access to registration and voting, to the sheer number and variety of offices open to election, and to the opportunities to vote. These vary substantially across political systems. Federal systems have something of a built-in advantage insofar as they offer more levels of electoral choice. Recent trends to more independent municipal and regional governments, and moves to decentralization, can also enhance participation, although there is evidence that many neoliberal reforms, by removing functions from the state, also remove incentives for organizing and lobbying the state. The ironies are apparent: reforms ostensibly intended to promote individual participation end up reducing opportunities or confining them to the least effective and most sporadic forms of participation (Holzner Chapter 5; Kurtz 2004).

In most political systems over a minimal size, participation is organized through formal systems of representation. But as noted earlier, formal arrangements for participation do not tell the whole story. Formal political representation gains in quality to the extent to which it is situated in a rich and open context for citizen activation in groups and movements independent of the state, which is a core element of most definitions of civil society. There has been much interest lately in Latin America in the promotion of *direct democracy,* such as citizen forums, roundtables, referenda, and recalls, as alternatives to more conventional arrangements for representation. These and related provisions intended to multiply opportunities for citizen participation and enhance citizen influence over decisionmaking are potentially valuable additions to the democratic repertoire (Mendoza-Botelho Chapter 7; Van Cott 2000, 2008). But as a practical matter, it has been difficult to implement direct democracy schemes in ways that can overcome the peril of state and leadership manipulation, and to get around the problems that size alone creates for direct political participation. The level and quality of education, the level of freedom of information and of the press, and the extent of citizen engagement are critical to the possibility of neutralizing or reducing the danger of manipulation. In this sense, the quality of the electoral decision is closely tied to the quality of participation.

Accountability

The term *accountability* directs attention to a range of social and institutional means available for making public officials, whether elected or appointed, subject to control and possible sanction (Mainwaring 2003). Accountability can be both formal and informal: formal means of accountability are institutionalized in laws, administrative norms, and independent or semi-independent offices specifically charged with ensuring accountability, such as attorneys general,

ombudsmen, oversight committees, public defenders, and independent electoral commissions. Accountability can also exist without formal sanctions, as in cases where accountability is demanded by public pressure or press or media campaigns. Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006a) call this *societal accountability*, and point to a range of social movements, for example, pro–human rights and anti-corruption, that aim to mobilize public pressure to judge and sanction officials.

The common spatial metaphor of horizontality or verticality calls attention to alternative and sometimes complementary aspects of accountability. Horizontal accountability is exercised by elements within government explicitly charged with review of the actions of officials and government offices, for example, judges, accounting offices, investigative services, and oversight committees. Vertical accountability is exercised by citizens through regular elections along with referenda and recalls (O'Donnell 1994a, 2003). Core elements of horizontal accountability are recourse to the rule of law and to sanctioned judgments about the legality of official actions. The validity of vertical accountability obviously depends on the quality of the electoral process, which links this dimension with the previous two of participation and electoral decision.

Although they are analytically distinct, vertical and horizontal accountability are related and interdependent. Our understanding of both is enriched to the extent that we can situate them in a context of societal accountability, where citizens and organized groups and elements of civil society raise issues, change public agendas, press for redress of grievances, organize demonstrations and campaigns to keep cases alive, and occasionally provide alternative means to monitor official activities. Societal accountability is highly flexible and not constrained by official calendars or routines. It may be "activated on demand, and can be directed toward the control of single issues, policies or functionaries . . . without the need for social majorities or constitutional entitlements" (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006b: 150).

Responsiveness

Powell defines *responsiveness* as "what occurs when the democratic process induces the government to form and implement policies that citizens want" (2004: 91). He points to a chain of responsiveness that links leaders, citizens, and policies together over time and across levels of government. A higher degree of responsiveness distinguishes democratic leadership from those who remain in the traditional mode of bosses or *caciques* and from those who say one thing in electoral campaigns, but later do the opposite without bothering to convince the public of the wisdom or need of doing so (O'Donnell 1994a; Stokes 2001). The concept is not without complications. A government could prove itself to be highly responsive by enacting policies that have majority support, but which produce bad or even disastrous results, undermining the very popularity it sought to maintain. Issues of timing are also relevant. Some policies might not

pay off in the short term, and by the time results did come in the government could be doomed. In line with our general orientation, we use "responsiveness" here to refer to policies and not necessarily to results.

Sovereignty

Sovereignty is rarely considered in discussions of the quality of democracy, but the requirement that those elected really have the power to govern means that democratic governments not be puppets, and not be so constrained by nondemocratic forces, whether domestic or foreign, that their independence is in question (Dahl 1971: 191). The concept of sovereignty includes formal political independence, which was accomplished a long time ago in Latin America, but goes further to encompass a measure of the extent to which a government is actually able to rule. An elected government faced with an aggressive, powerful military veto player, or forced to operate under a burden of debt and financial constraints so powerful as to preclude policy independence, is not effectively sovereign. Diamond and Morlino treat sovereignty as a minimal requirement for democracy rather than a dimension of its quality (2005: xxix). But this makes sovereignty an all-or-nothing phenomenon, rather than something that varies from greater to lesser along a range of indicators. In contrast, we define sovereignty in terms of the extent to which those elected are able to make decisions, substantially free from control, direct or indirect, by sources outside the democratic process, such as foreign powers, transnational public or private economic institutions, or the military. This is not a zero-sum proposition: all governments are constrained in some ways, and thus democracies may be said to be more or less sovereign. The less autonomy a government has with respect to external pressures, such as financial or diplomatic and internal forces, such as religious, military, or financial, the lower the quality of democracy.

The Quality of Democracy: Distinguishing Political Process from Results or Governance

As we suggested at the outset, each of these dimensions presupposes the existence of rights specifically associated with the activities involved, and which are considered integral to each area. An advantage of treating rights in this fashion and not as a distinct and separate dimension (Diamond and Morlino 2005) is that the rights included are those directly linked to the quality of democracy. Making rights in general a separate dimension runs the risk of stepping over into evaluation of government policies and quality of governance, and thus beyond the quality of democracy. The difficulties associated with a general focus on rights are visible in Freedom House, whose indicators are commonly used in evaluations of the quality of democracy (Altman and Pérez-Liñán 2002; Diamond, Hartlyn, and

Linz 1999: 62; Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 173–209; Mainwaring 1999: 22; Smith 2005). Freedom House considers economic freedom and private property as one of the "civil liberties" it uses for its evaluation of freedom and democracy. However desirable full economic freedom might be—and this is a basic element of disagreement between left and right—it is better regarded as a field for policy decision and evaluation of government performance, and not as inherent to the quality of democracy. Linking democracy to a particular economic system could unfairly reduce the chances of polities with leftist parties in government being considered high-quality democracies. The same could be said about other freedoms as long as they are not directly linked to the procedural components of democracy.

The preceding definition of quality of democracy and its dimensions centers attention on procedures and not results. This distinguishes our approach from that of authors like Abente (2007), Berg-Schlosser (2004), Diamond and Morlino (2005), Morlino (2004), Munck (2007b), or Ropelato (2007). These authors include level of socioeconomic equality as an indicator of the quality of democracy, and Morlino also includes the level of development of civil rights in general terms. Diamond and Morlino include the extent to which democracy "satisfies citizen expectations of governance (quality in terms of results)" within their definition of the quality of democracy (2005: xii). As stated earlier, we take a different position. A central point in our analysis is the need to distinguish the procedures by which decisions are taken from the results of those decisions. If the procedures involve free and fair elections and full citizen participation, respond to the predominant view of the citizenry, and can be subjected to institutional social and electoral control and accountability, then the quality of democracy would be high, even if the results of the policies do not resolve the problems at hand, including social inequality. To include the level of socioeconomic equality and the development of rights not strictly linked to the political process is to enter into the area of policy evaluation, judging what is and is not good policy or effective governance, and this runs the risk of infusing judgments about the quality of democracy with ideological criteria. A case in point might be the decisions taken in some states within the United States concerning gay marriage. One might support one or another outcome, but if the decision is taken following democratic procedures and with guarantees of the rights attached to these procedures, then whatever the outcome, this neither adds to nor reduces the quality of democracy in that country.

The question of levels of social and economic equality warrants further comment. Morlino includes this within his dimensions of the quality of democracy (2004). In our view, the level of political equality is an element of the quality of democracy and forms part of one of its dimensions. Political equality is demonstrated by the extent to which citizens enjoy equal resources for political action and decision. Among these basic resources are level of education and level of information. The socioeconomic resources available to the population

and the degree to which these are distributed equally are factors that may influence levels of education and information, but which are not equivalent to them. Socioeconomic differences do not translate automatically into differences in education, information, or political resources. Populations and governments can develop social, educational, or communications policies that may reduce the differences in political resources between social groups, and, in this way, reduce political inequality even in conditions of broad socioeconomic inequalities. We do not suggest that reducing social inequality, eliminating extreme poverty, and promoting economic development are not worthy goals or that they are not important as elements of the quality of governmental performance in a democracy (see Mainwaring, Scully, and Vargas Cullell 2010). They are indeed important, but we believe that they must be kept conceptually distinct from the quality of democracy. Depending on one's point of view, a democratic government may be good or bad in terms of the results of its socioeconomic policies, but this does not necessarily imply that it is more or less democratic.

In our view, the quality of democracy is more than a measure of the development of basic elements of democracy. Altman and Pérez-Liñán conceptualize the quality of democracy as a measure of the extent to which the basic elements of democracy have been developed in a particular country (2002: 86). In contrast, for us, the quality of democracy involves other dimensions than those included in the minimal definition of democracy. Dimensions such as accountability and responsiveness, or elements like level of representativeness, are not, strictly speaking, minimum requisites of democracy, but they are fundamental for determining the level of its quality.

Vargas Cullell presents a definition that differs considerably from ours. He conceptualizes the quality of democracy from the perspective of what are known as "citizen audits." In this view, in accord with the logic of the citizen audit, the level of the quality of democracy is given by the extent to which the performance of institutions coincides with the aspirations of citizens.[11] This definition includes our dimension of responsiveness and corresponds to an evaluation of the quality of democracy from the point of view of citizen satisfaction with democracy.

There is a considerable body of work that relies on qualitative analysis of elections and rights to classify democracies as either liberal or illiberal (Smith 2005). An important antecedent of this dichotomy, and indeed of most studies of the quality of democracy, is the classification made by Dahl that used two dimensions—participation and contestation—to distinguish among polyarchies as either "totally inclusive polyarchies" or "quasi polyarchies" (1971: 248). Others rely on Freedom House scores of political and civil rights as the basis for classification (Altman and Pérez-Liñán 2002; Diamond, Hartlyn, and Linz 1999: 62; Inglehart 2003; Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 175). Freedom House rankings are themselves derived from qualitative analyses carried out by panels of experts on ten political rights items and five civil rights items. Diamond, Hartlyn,

and Linz (1999) used Freedom House rankings to classify Latin American democracies as liberal or electoral, a dichotomy broadly equivalent to that proposed by Smith (2005).

The problem with this body of work is that a dichotomous scheme of analysis does not capture the full range of issues involved in understanding the quality of democracy. A twofold classification based on whether there is partial or full respect of civil liberties omits important dimensions, such as responsiveness, accountability, and sovereignty, and also leaves out elements of political equality, such as values. In contrast, Inglehart (2003) uses Freedom House rankings as indicators of the level of democracy reached in each country by adding up the scores in political rights and civil liberties. The result is an operationalization of the quality of democracy along a continuum that goes from 2 (best) to 14 (worse).[12] We think this method better captures the differences in the quality of democracy among the countries than using only a twofold classification. Polity IV also presents a scale that goes from –10, full autocracy, to +10, full democracy (Polity IV 2009). This scale addresses the extent to which the minimal institutional requirements for democracy are fulfilled, covering only partially the dimensions of the quality of democracy. It does not cover critical dimensions or aspects of dimensions concerned with the interaction between society and institutions such as responsiveness, electoral participation, social accountability, and level of equality in political resources.[13]

Our approach to quality of democracy also differs from the concept of democratic governance proposed by Mainwaring, Scully, and Vargas Cullell (2010). These authors propose an index to evaluate the success of governments in creating well-being for the population. The resulting index of Success in Democratic Governance is based on an evaluation of the results of public policies. In contrast, our index of the quality of democracy evaluates the process by which political decisions are taken. The Success in Democratic Governance index includes as one of its nine dimensions one relating to the *level* of democracy, but this element is different from the concept of quality of democracy we present here. As we show in this chapter and in Chapter 2, it is this process, and not the results of policies, that determines the quality of democracy. In effect, for Mainwaring, Scully, and Vargas Cullell (2010) the level of democracy is another result, one that forms part of the overall level of well-being of the population, along with the other eight dimensions. The only indicator they use to measure the level of democracy is the Freedom House index of freedom, which includes political rights and civil rights in general.

On closer inspection, therefore, our evaluation of the quality of democracy differs from the Mainwaring, Scully, and Vargas Cullell index of the level of democracy in the same way that it differs from the Freedom House index. Our index is specifically directed to the quality of democracy, while Freedom House is designed primarily to indicate the level of freedom, and includes neither the dimension of responsiveness, which is demonstrated by an evaluation of the

extent to which the population is politically informed as indicated by level of education, nor an analysis of electoral decision, which in our view is essential to any definition of the quality of democracy. Not being a specific index of the quality of democracy, the Freedom House index includes an evaluation of rights that goes beyond those linked to the democratic process. The global evaluation of rights may be adequate, we think, for a Success in Democratic Governance index that focuses on results, but not for a specific evaluation of the quality of democracy that focuses on the decisionmaking process, in the way we do in this volume.

We believe that it is preferable to maintain a conceptual distinction between the process by which decisions are made in a democratic regime, which represents the quality of democracy, and the results of these decisions in terms of the well-being of the population. That particular policies of a democratic regime may not be successful in solving a given problem does not imply that the process for arriving at those decisions was not democratic in character. The Success in Democratic Governance index proposed by Mainwaring, Scully, and Vargas Cullell (2010) tries to consolidate in a single evaluation both democratic processes and the results of public policies. For the reasons we have outlined here, it is better to maintain a conceptual distinction between these two dimensions. Maintaining this distinction helps avoid the error of criticizing democracy per se for the possible failure of any given public policy. The quality of democracy and governmental performance are different issues, and we believe it is necessary and valuable to evaluate the quality of democracy on its own, without in any way undermining important efforts by other authors to carry out a thorough evaluation of the policies undertaken by democratic governments.

The Evolution of This Project

This volume is the culmination of a multiyear effort directed at achieving a richer and more accurate understanding of the quality of democracy. We wanted to find a way of approaching the issues that would respect the importance of political processes and clearly distinguish the quality of democracy from both the minimal existence of democracy and the evaluation of governance or public policies. Our dissatisfaction with much of the literature led us to develop an alternative schema, centered on the five dimensions of the quality of democracy discussed here. We worked with an international group of scholars who exchanged ideas at a series of conferences and workshops beginning in 2005. Our goal from the beginning has been to combine a clear and straightforward approach to the quality of democracy with in-depth studies of a representative range of cases in the region. The cases represented here include countries with new democracies, such as Nicaragua; countries in which democracy was restored after extended and often violent bouts of military rule, including Ar-

gentina, Brazil, and Chile; and those engaged in extended efforts to expand and deepen democracy, with varying results to date, such as Mexico and Bolivia. Two cases represent examples of continuity of democratic institutions with deep problems. In Colombia, the quality of democracy is hindered by the impact of continuing and extensive violence. In Venezuela, a long-standing democracy has experienced severe decay in terms of accountability, access to information, and the openness and fairness of electoral institutions.

Of the three cases in which democracy has been restored following military rule, Argentina has gone the furthest in confronting this unfortunate legacy, in a series of trials and convictions of high-ranking officers from the last regime for violation of human rights. In the process, Argentine democracy has survived economic and political crises that would likely have doomed earlier regimes. Democracy also has survived and has been consolidated in Chile with a slow, but steady, dismantling of Pinochet-era rules. In Brazil, there has been a continuing struggle to make democracy work in the context of great inequalities. In Nicaragua, a competitive, mass democracy emerged and was consolidated in the wake of the defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections. This democracy owed much to the social openings of the Sandinista revolution, but has lately shown evidence of institutional weakness and possible decay.

The emergence of democracy at the national level in Mexico following more than seven decades of one-party rule is highly significant, although it continues to coexist with subnational pockets of authoritarianism and with the effects of inequality. Bolivia offers perhaps the most striking case in the entire region of reforms that have succeeded in opening and extending opportunities for popular participation in what remains a highly unequal, ethnically divided, and multilingual country.

Our last two cases, Colombia and Venezuela, share the distinction of democratic longevity. In each case, democracy and democratic institutions date back to the late 1950s, albeit with notable institutional reforms and political changes along the way. But in both countries, the pressures on democracy and the signs of democratic decay are evident. In Colombia, as noted, these are the result of pervasive violence that undermines accountability and participation and reduces the effective sovereignty of the regime as it struggles to control all the territory of the nation. In Venezuela, the aggressive implementation of "revolutionary" measures under the several governments of Hugo Chávez, who has been in power since 1998, has undermined accountability and freedom of information, while raising serious questions about whether elections can any longer be regarded as free and fair.

The next chapter provides a detailed exposition of the way in which we and our authors have gone about measuring the concept of quality of democracy. Together with the conceptual analysis of this chapter, it provides a basis for what is distinct about the analysis of quality of democracy that inspires this volume. Following the presentation of the separate dimensions and how they combine

into an overall index of the quality of democracy, subsequent chapters are grouped in terms of the quality of democracy, ranging from highest to lowest. We begin with Chile, which is commonly ranked highest in the region, along with Costa Rica and Uruguay. We continue with a middle group of cases in which democracy has been restored or created anew and efforts to expand and deepen it are under way despite continuing challenges. This group includes Argentina, Mexico, Bolivia, Brazil, and Nicaragua. The last two cases presented in detail are Colombia and Venezuela, representing the lowest rankings. A concluding chapter reviews the issues, assesses the overall strengths and weaknesses of democracy, and sets the case studies in a regional context.

Notes

1. See Munck, who speaks of a "robust procedural conception" of democracy that "justifies the inclusion of standard political rights associated with the election of representatives, such as universal and equal voting rights, the right to run for office, the right to free and fair elections, and the right to regular elections." He goes on to suggest the inclusion of three other classes of rights: (1) rights exercised within the process of decisionmaking; (2) civil rights, such as freedom of movement, association, and information; and (3) rights surrounding equal participation, including such social rights as access to adequate work, health, and education (2007b: 35).

2. Freedom House, "Methodology," 2006, http:// www.freedomhouse.org/ template .cfm?page=35&year=2006.

3. Latinobarómetro, "Informe Latinobarómetro," 2005, http://www.latinobarometro .org/uploads/media/2005.pdf.

4. See also Chris Armbruster, "The Quality of Democracy in Europe: Soviet Illegitimacy and the Negotiated Revolutions of 1989," *Social Science Research Network,* 2008*,* http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1153416.

5. See Kurtz and Schrank (2007) as well as the ensuing response and rejoinder and Mainwaring, Scully, and Vargas Cullell (2010) for a thorough review of studies of governance and good government.

6. Anderson and Dodd make this point in their analysis of citizen attitudes and citizen voting decisions in Nicaragua (2005). Holzner shows how structural changes following neoliberal so-called reforms in Mexico undercut the availability of information and restrict participation for poor people (Chapter 5).

7. See Levitsky, who argues that the diffusion of civil society has been critical in preserving Argentine democracy (2005).

8. The experience of sustained indigenous movements in Ecuador and Bolivia is a counterexample that underscores the importance of institutional factors in facilitating participation. Representation and the extension of effective citizenship have been critical issues in the effort to construct democracies in both countries (Mendoza-Botelho 2009; Yashar 2005).

9. Distinct from Armbruster, as cited in endnote 2, but in accord with the rest of the literature, we seek to establish an operational definition of democracy that can be used to evaluate the political systems in Latin America and in the world.

10. See the papers collected in *América Latina hoy* on *gobernanza electoral* (electoral governance) for a comprehensive survey (April 2009: vol. 52).

11. Vargas Cullell (2004: 96) gives the following definition of democracy: "For the purpose of the audit, the *quality of democracy* was defined as the extent to which political life and institutional performance in a country (or part of it) with a democratic regime coincides with the democratic aspirations of its citizens."

12. A similar scale based on Freedom House scores is used by Mainwaring, Scully, and Vargas Cullell to evaluate the level of democracy as one of the nine components of their index of success in democratic governance (2010).

13. See Chapter 2 for a comparison of the Freedom House index, the Polity IV (Polity) scale of autocracy-democracy, and our exploratory index based on the five dimensions of quality of democracy discussed in this chapter.