

Democratic Non-Consolidation in Latin America

This work looks at some of the ways in which path dependency and the logic of democratic consolidation have interacted in Latin America since 1982. On the whole, they have been in conflict. Evidently there are different national contexts, and the same story does not apply uniformly across the whole of the region. However, where there have been problems with democratic consolidation (a term defined in more detail below), it is generally possible to link them to pre-democratic institutional practices. Democratization has indeed made a difference to the region, but not so great a difference as most committed democrats once hoped and expected.

There has been a good deal of discussion among political scientists about how to differentiate what we might regard as institutionally effective democracies and less effective democracies. The concept of democratic consolidation, while not without problems, helps us here. Przeworski has famously stated that 'democracy is consolidated when under given political and economic conditions a particular system of institutions becomes the only game in town' (1991, p. 26). Furthermore, 'democracy is consolidated when it becomes self-reinforcing' (*ibid.*). Other writers such as Linz and Stepan (1996) and Diamond et al. (1997) have broadly accepted this definition. Diamond defines democratic consolidation as 'a discernible process by which the rules, institutions and constraints of democracy come to constitute "the only game in town"' (Diamond 1997, p. xvi). There is a theory underlying these definitions, which is that, as Montesquieu puts it, 'the people . . . are in certain respects the monarchy' (quoted in Przeworski 1991, p. 26). It is they who ultimately have the responsibility of upholding the constitutional process. In much of Latin America, though not all of it, these conditions are evidently unfulfilled. Democracy may be the only game in town, but the formal institutions of the democratic

process are not the only rules, and public opinion may not always uphold them.

Przeworski's definition of democratic consolidation has been the subject of much discussion, and not everybody accepts it. The concept is discussed in more detail below. What is, though, clear is that there is less disagreement about the empirical facts that have to be explained. Despite their other differences, almost all scholars accept that there is a problem with democratic institutionalization in much of Latin America. There are many countries in which elections are routinely held, but which are hard to describe as fully democratic. Whatever the precise words used, there is something recognizable in the behaviour of political systems, in Latin America and no doubt elsewhere, that hold regular elections but tend to stagger on from crisis to crisis, neither stabilizing nor breaking down.

There is also likely to be a relationship between precariously institutionalized political systems and relatively poor economic performance. It is reasonable to suppose that wealth holders are likely to see politically unstable or unmanageable countries as potentially risky. They will therefore tend to avoid them. This reluctance to invest will slow down growth rates and worsen economic inequality due to the fact that rates of return on capital will have to be high in order to attract any investment at all. Globalization, understood as (among other things) a set of processes that make it easier to shift money across the world, is likely to make it even harder for countries whose political institutions are problematic to attract capital at a reasonable cost, since it facilitates the 'exit' option. In fact capital flight has been a major problem in Latin America since the 1970s. It is also entirely likely that there is a relationship between development failure and the non-consolidation of institutions, in that poor policy performance may increase popular discontent, and this may tend to de-institutionalize the political process.

Freedom House indicators

Empirically, enough time has now passed for us to have a reasonably clear picture of how Latin America's democracies have been transformed since the present wave of democratization began at the turn of the 1980s. In fact the record shows that there has not been much transformation at all. No Latin American country has so far moved openly from democracy to dictatorship since 1980. Neither, though, has there been much progress since 1990 in making the majority of Latin

American countries more securely free, law abiding or polyarchic. If we take Freedom House figures as a basis for discussion, then the lack of relationship between democratic longevity and political freedom is clear. ('Free' is not the same thing as 'consolidated', but there is a relationship between the two.)

At first sight Freedom House figures for 2000 seem to indicate a relatively optimistic picture. If we take the data for South America, then six countries (Argentina, Uruguay, Ecuador, Chile, Paraguay and Bolivia) are described as 'free' and only four (Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela) as 'partially free'. This might seem reasonably encouraging. However, one ominous factor is that all four 'partly free' countries score less highly on Freedom House indicators than they did in 1990. This regression has occurred despite the holding of regular, contested elections in all four. Colombia and Venezuela have held regular elections since 1958 (contested ones since 1974 in the case of Colombia) but this relative longevity does not seem to have helped matters. Peru, whose recent political evolution is considered again in a later chapter, is an even clearer example of a country that moved the 'wrong' way in the 1990s.

Moreover the Freedom House description of Ecuador, Paraguay and Bolivia as 'free' seems unduly generous in view of recent political events in those countries. There was popular support for a coup attempt in Ecuador in January 2000 and considerable backing in Paraguay for the lawless career of General Lino Oviedo. In 1999 the Paraguayan president was impeached by congress and removed from office on charges that included the murder of the vice-president. In 2000 there was still some unrest within the military over this decision.

Meanwhile in 1997 the electorate in Bolivia chose a former military dictator to be the president. Since then there have been several outbreaks of civil commotion and the imposition of states of siege. An earlier president of Bolivia was heavily involved in the organization of illegal narcotic exports, though he was never brought to justice. Bolivia has so far mainly avoided real political upheaval at the top. However, as Whitehead points out (Whitehead 2001), elected governments have needed to rely on emergency powers quite regularly, the rule of law is very incomplete and the public administration remains significantly patrimonial. These three countries, therefore, do not give the impression of being entirely free societies or consolidated democracies.

One of the remaining countries counted as 'free' is Argentina, but it is unlikely that Argentina will retain this classification in 2002. The history of democratic Argentina has been one of recurring crisis. At the end of the 1980s there was both hyperinflation and military unrest, though the military activists were unpopular and did not prosper. Pres-

ident Alfonsín (1983–9) voluntarily ended his term early in order to forestall complete democratic breakdown. Carlos Menem's presidential term did see a considerable improvement in Argentina's economic performance and in the general quality of its economic management. However, there was strong evidence of executive tampering with the supreme court and the judiciary, and evident public suspicion that some of this was done to prevent insiders from facing corruption allegations. Subsequent to leaving office Menem was arrested and charged with corrupt involvement in the selling of weapons to Ecuador, although charges were later dropped.

Fernando de la Rúa, who was elected president of Argentina in 1999, was a more constitutionally minded politician than Menem, but his government's economic performance was poor. When debt default became unavoidable at the end of 2001 it was clear that there was among the Argentine public a high degree of frustration because of economic failure. This led to rioting, the decision of the Argentine congress to withdraw support from an elected president, and two presidential resignations in close succession in December 2001. (This does not include the resignation of designated interim figures, of which there were two others.) Overall Argentina cannot be regarded as consolidated. It is much too prone to development problems and political crisis.

Most observers would, however, accept that the final two countries in South America, Chile and Uruguay, are indeed free – and relatively consolidated by comparison with the others. The ending of General Pinochet's untouchability after his arrest in London in October 1998 seems to have demonstrated a self-reinforcing attitude to Chilean democracy. Even so, as Linz and Stepan (1996) and *Latinobarómetro* have both pointed out, the Chilean public is by no means totally committed to democracy as a preferred system of government. In the *Latinobarómetro* poll published by *The Economist* on 26 July 2001, only 45 per cent of the Chilean sample answered yes to the statement 'Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government' (79 per cent did so in Uruguay); 19 per cent agreed that 'In certain circumstances an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one' (as against 10 per cent in Uruguay). Yet Chile was one of the few countries of the region whose economic performance during the previous decade was strongly positive. Would a less favourable economic record have led to more popular support for non-democracy?

To sum up for South America, therefore, there seems to be little evidence to refute Uruguay's claim to have made an unproblematic transition to democracy. Slightly more scepticism is in order in the case of Chile, where there is a definite undercurrent of popular discontent with

the system. However, Chile scores much better than a clear majority of democracies of the region – Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina. In some of these countries (not all) the trend seems to be away from democratic stability. Taking the region as a whole, the most striking evidence is of an absence of trend.

In Mexico and Central America, the picture is again mixed. According to Freedom House indicators, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador are partly free. Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Panama are seen as free. Costa Rica would be judged by most observers to be one of Latin America's three genuine polyarchies (the others being Chile and Uruguay). However, the Dominican Republic and Panama both democratized in the aftermath of US invasion. In virtually all of the small countries of the region, international influences are of key importance. Changing directions in US foreign policy may have been more important in these cases than domestic factors (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992).

The case of Mexico will be considered in detail in a later chapter. At the end of the 1980s Mexico was not fully democratic at all. It did democratize during the 1990s, but Mexican democracy is still a fairly young plant. What is notable about Mexico, however, is that the period of democratization and market reform produced some severe financial crises. Mexico nearly defaulted on its debts in 1982, 1986, 1989 and 1995. In each case, the United States proved reasonably supportive – though not unconditionally so. Without significant US intervention and support – much more than that offered to Argentina or the Andean countries – Mexico could, on more than one occasion, have faced economic catastrophe. If it had done so, would the process of democratization have been threatened? One must assume the possibility.

While there are a range of national experiences, to which national path dependencies are no doubt relevant, we also have a reasonably general picture of the political evolution of the region as a whole – or, rather, the lack of political evolution. The political systems of most South American democracies and some Central American ones have neither become freer (in Freedom House terms) nor broken down. What is significant is the absence of trend.

We therefore seem to be faced in Latin America with systems that are not institutionally self-reinforcing but nevertheless somehow self-sustaining. We will therefore be asking two questions. One is how these systems have worked in practice in some Latin American countries. There are many differences between non-consolidated systems, but there are some common regional factors as well – at any rate within Latin America. The other question is why non-consolidated democracies have not either consolidated or broken down into non-democracy.

Academics have so far paid more attention to the non-deepening of democracy than to its non-breakdown (Haynes 2001). Yet, in respect of Latin America at least, non-breakdown may be the more surprising feature of the two. After all there have been many democratic breakdowns in South and Central America in the past. Furthermore many of the institutional characteristics blamed for democratic breakdown in the past remain in place, and Latin America's economic performance is generally worse today than it was in the 1960s and early 1970s when military intervention was common. Despite this, democracy, of a kind, has survived.

Defining and characterizing non-consolidated democracy

As noted, this work derives the term 'democratic consolidation' from Przeworski's central criterion – self-reinforcement. However, there is a significant literature on democratic consolidation, which contains some disagreements, and there are incompatible definitions of (and ideas about) consolidation. Some authors have even detected the development of 'consolidology' as a subject of study (Schedler 1998; Haynes 2001, p. 1). As noted, others are sceptical about the entire approach (Whitehead 2001). The sceptics are right about some things at least. Above all, we need to be careful about postulating a 'natural' transition from democratization to consolidated democracy. Latin American experience shows that non-consolidated democracies can survive over quite long periods of time.

The standpoint adopted here is that the concept of democratic consolidation is useful because it gives us something to measure. The notion of self-reinforcement also makes the concept less obviously judgemental than some other ways of evaluating democracy – such as the notion of 'freedom' already discussed. What matters is how people regard their own political institutions and how they behave towards them in practice.

This work is less concerned with consolidation than with its antithesis, non-consolidation. The discussion focuses empirically on cases of overt and successful political illegality, because this offers tangible evidence of a failure of institutional self-reinforcement. It regards democracy as being non-consolidated if an ambitious but otherwise reasonable person (or group of people) can expect to achieve or maintain majority public support either in spite of or because of the open flouting of the formal rules of the political process. Where this condi-

tion is met, overt rule-breaking can make sense as a political strategy, and (actual or potential) open illegality therefore becomes an inherent part of the political process. All that is definitionally necessary is this one specific aspect. Democracy, at its most basic level, has to do with the rule of the people as expressed through elections. Yet, in non-consolidated democracies, the people have the right to vote but are nevertheless sufficiently alienated from the process of government either not to care whether the formal rules are broken or not, or else positively to welcome law-breaking. The people participate in the system, but do not guard it by defending its rules. It is not suggested that there is no regard for rules at all – a non-consolidated democracy need not be an anarchy – but that there is no predictable or coherent regard for them. Because of this seeming incoherence, non-consolidated democracies are systems that cannot be analysed satisfactorily either in terms of the formal rules alone or on the basis of complete disregard of the formal rules. We therefore need both institutional and extra-institutional forms of political analysis.

This definition, on its own, does not tell us much about the specifics of how any particular non-consolidated democracy might work. There is no reason to suppose that non-consolidated democracies need behave in any very similar way to each other – any more than consolidated ones do. Non-consolidation only makes sense as a concept when taken in conjunction with the specific features of any particular system. However, the concept of non-consolidation does add an extra dimension to our understanding of politics when we use it in conjunction with other forms of political analysis.

The working of consolidated democracies can be understood in terms of respect for laws, rules and procedures because consolidation involves the stabilization of shared expectations. Linz and Stepan (1996) point out that, as they define the term, democratic consolidation must be behavioural, attitudinal and constitutional. The rules not only exist, but they are internalized, accepted and valued. Under such circumstances, overt rule-breaking alienates people and is therefore impossibly costly – so much so that, for most practical purposes, its likelihood can safely be discounted. We can therefore plan our own actions in the light of stable expectations about the reaction of others.

This kind of planning needs to be different in non-consolidated systems because one's expectations of the behaviour of one's allies and adversaries will necessarily be less secure. If non-consolidated democracies are not based mainly on formal rules, then on what are they based? It would be tempting to answer 'informal rules', but such an answer would be too simple. There certainly are informal rules that shape political behaviour in non-consolidated democracies – more so

than in consolidated democracies, though informal rules exist to some extent in all systems. However, the notion of 'informal' or 'unwritten' rules involves an idea of structured behaviour that may be hard to apply across the range of non-consolidated democratic systems. An event such as a military coup attempt or a conspiracy to rig a popular vote is likely to be based on a mixture of formal rules, informal rules, and pure political calculation at a time of high uncertainty. One cannot just say 'the rules are what people do' because, due to these uncertainties, there may be no common understanding at all. The question of what sustains non-consolidated democracy therefore needs specific, empirical answers.

A part of the answer may come from a country's political culture. If public opinion does not generally care whether rules or laws are enforced or not – sometimes even preferring non-enforcement – then this could help explain why democratic institutions need not be the only game in town. There is survey evidence of the appropriate kind and quality dealing with Latin America (Lagos 1997; Diamond 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996), and this supposition is, to an extent, borne out. There are very significant variations between countries, but on the whole it is clear that the Latin American democratic state and the region's key democratic political institutions do not enjoy a high level of public trust. The concept of democracy is widely accepted, but specific organizations and institutions – the presidency, the congress, political parties, the courts, etc. – are regarded with suspicion or worse (Lagos 1997). This survey evidence suggests that many Latin Americans regard law-breaking as an ever-present feature of their system and are prepared to offer political support to law-breaking political leaders under what they consider to be appropriate circumstances. They do not consider this viewpoint incompatible with a preference for democracy as a form of government.

Within Latin America there also seems to be a reasonably significant relationship between institutional stability and popular attachment to institutional systems. Countries such as Uruguay that score high on one indicator also score high on the other. It is important to remember that there are a small number of Latin American democracies that can be considered consolidated. However, this work is concerned mainly with those countries that score low in public trust and low in institutional stability and yet remain democracies.

For these countries, the evidence of cultural distrust is illuminating, but it is not the whole story. A country's political culture is determined by its institutions, its history, its economy, its position in the international order and a range of other factors as well. Political culture changes over time; it varies from place to place and it is usually influ-

enced by realities. Cultural distrust is an interesting finding, but we need to look further. Why are so many Latin Americans as cynical about their democratic institutions as seems to be the case? A plausible answer might be that their institutions operate in such a way as to generate mistrust among reasonable people.

A major attempt to link cultural findings with institutional analysis is provided in the work of Linz and Stepan (1996). These authors seek to provide a list of objective criteria according to which the degree of consolidation can be assessed in any particular case. Linz and Stepan refer to five arenas of democratic consolidation (1996, p. 7). One is civil society, which has to be 'free and lively'. Another is political society, which has to be 'relatively autonomous and valued'. A third is the rule of law, and there needs to be a spirit of constitutionalism. Then there is the state apparatus, which has to be run according to 'Weberian' bureaucratic norms so as to be usable by democratic governments of widely differing persuasions. Finally there is economic society, where there has to be institutionalization of a number of processes that protect property rights, allow markets to work well and achieve economic growth. Democracies in which these conditions are met are likely to consolidate. Deconsolidation is still possible, though Linz and Stepan claim that this is unlikely to happen unless fresh problems emerge that the existing set of institutions cannot resolve. This, though, is an empirical and not a definitional argument.

As some critics have pointed out, this approach can be both very complex and very demanding (for example, Whitehead 2001). This need not be a problem as long as we avoid the supposition that all non-consolidated democracies, or indeed all consolidated democracies, are essentially the same. In fact the evolution of democracy in different parts of the world highlights some diverse experiences and intriguing contrasts (Haynes 2001). However, the whole point of defining consolidation as we have is that consolidated democracy can then be treated as a distinctive form of government where formal rules and procedures dominate informal ones.

It is also reasonable to suppose that successful democratic consolidation must involve some element of rupture with the past. Pre-democratic rules of the game come to be replaced by democratic ones. Empirically, in fact, we can distinguish between some processes of democratization that seem to have marked a genuine rupture with the past, and others (including those in many Latin American countries) where there has been no more than a partial break. Democratization may change political behaviour decisively but need not always do so. Where it does not do so, then we are likely to have non-consolidated democracy and some marked continuity with pre-democratic patterns of

politics. In several Latin American countries, this is actually what we do find. In such cases, historical-institutional and cultural factors evidently do matter, and they may work against democratic consolidation.

This book has a specific regional focus, based as it is on Latin America, and a particular interpretative slant, since it gives particular weight to those historical-institutional factors that have impeded consolidation. Its empirical scope is therefore more limited than Linz and Stepan's, and it should therefore be possible to proceed with a slightly less complex and comprehensive set of 'arenas' than those authors found necessary to introduce in a broader context. The main hypotheses presented in this work in fact draw on Linz and Stepan's five arenas of contestation but also somewhat modify them to cover specific Latin American conditions.

A key explanatory factor suggested here is the existence of conflicting philosophies behind Latin American presidentialism. Full reasoning is given in the next chapter, but the essential point is that presidentialism in many Latin American countries has become a contested hybrid system of government prone to generate conflict and mistrust. It is not inevitable that presidentialism will have this effect, and not every presidential system is alike – not even within Latin America. However, the fact that there are conflicting concepts of presidentialism within particular countries in the region does, as we shall see, make it more likely that high profile political law-breaking will occur, win popular acceptance and succeed. Linz and Stepan (1996, p. 4) do regard what they call 'institutional indeterminacy' as a problem, but later subsume this point under the broader arena of political society. The claim here is that problems of presidentialism are sufficiently important in Latin America to warrant separate treatment.

Public opinion can best defend democratic institutions if the majority of people accept and understand the philosophy underlying them. Nobody supposes that a perfectly coherent institutional philosophy is necessary or even possible. Britain is still a democracy despite its House of Lords and monarchy, and the USA is also a democracy despite its electoral college system. Both of these seem historical oddities rather than essential parts of a democratic process. However, presidentialism is absolutely central to the workings of the political process throughout Latin America and it is a focus of intense conflict. We cannot understand why figures such as Venezuela's Chávez, Peru's Fujimori and Mexico's Salinas have proved so intensely controversial without taking into account real divisions within Latin American public opinion as to what the role of the presidency should be.

This discussion is also very much concerned with the non-impartial – let us call it biased – character of the state. Two of the Linz and Stepan

arenas are apposite here. One of them is that respect for the rule of law is relatively weak, both at ordinary societal level and at the level of high politics. There is lacking, at both elite and popular level, any spirit of constitutionalism, in the sense of over-riding respect for impartial law enforcement. The other is that Latin American bureaucracies are typically (not exclusively) based on patronage to an extent that is comparatively unusual within the democratic world. While the USA is sometimes held out as an example of a patronage bureaucracy (Peters 1989), there is relatively speaking far more patronage in Latin America. Moreover the USA does have a strong culture of law enforcement, which somewhat reduces the importance of patronage to bureaucratic behaviour. The US bureaucracy, moreover, is responsible to congress as well as the presidency in a way that is not commonly the case in Latin America. The typical Latin American bureaucracy has literally thousands of presidential appointees at the top, is not usually responsible to congress and is constrained by law only if there are political reasons for this.

To sum up this part of the argument, this work accepts that there is such a thing as democratic consolidation and claims that most Latin American countries have not achieved it. It also accepts the Linz and Stepan argument that we can put forward sensible criteria measuring consolidation and broadly accepts their five arenas – albeit with minor modifications aimed to fit the Latin American context better. Democratic consolidation is more likely to occur if there is a coherent concept of governance that is domestically legitimate and given tangible (not necessarily perfect) expression in the way that political institutions actually work. It is also more likely to occur if there is an effective system of law enforcement – run with impartiality, competence and genuine teeth – to protect political institutions from corruption and the excesses of partisan contestation. It should also be facilitated by a principle of bureaucratic impartiality – called Weberian here for reasons of conciseness – because it is important that the general public, including those who voted for losing candidates in previous elections, broadly trust the state. It probably also requires a reasonable economic performance because severe economic setback can be politically destabilizing (on which see Przeworski et al., 1997).

Bounding non-consolidated democracy

Empirically it is fairly clear that these criteria for democratic consolidation have not generally been met in Latin America. A more difficult

question has to do with the way in which the region's non-consolidated systems might be expected to evolve. We cannot be sure what their future political dynamic is likely to be, but we do now have considerable experience of democratic non-consolidation and some widely expected outcomes have not occurred. As we have seen, an evolutionary 'stages of democracy' theory does not fit the Latin American facts. Perhaps less easy to explain is why these apparently precarious systems of democracy have not completely broken down. The question of why some flagrant violations of institutional rules have not so far led to the total breakdown of democracy is certainly worth asking. On the face of it, one might suppose that non-consolidated systems might produce increasing returns to power or unsustainable levels of political polarization and therefore undermine democracy altogether. As a preliminary conclusion that will receive more elaboration in the text, there seem to be several factors that have so far prevented this from happening.

Public opinion is one of them. As we have seen, public opinion is not always pro-constitution in Latin America, but it genuinely is pro-democracy – or has been up to now. The point at which the majority of the people may come to feel that a constitution-breaking president has gone 'too far' may be unpredictable, but there may be such a point nevertheless. 'The people as monarch' seem, in Latin America at least, to be more tolerant of rule-breaking in a popular cause than of outright rejection of democracy. This popular attitude is probably not a sufficient explanation for the boundedness of non-consolidated democracy but it is surely part of the explanation.

Another factor is international. At the very beginning of the 1980s, neither the US government nor the European Community much cared whether a Latin American republic was a democracy or not. By the mid-1980s Washington had made clear its preference for democratic government. Even so the Mexican authorities received no serious rebuke from Washington for violating the principle of electoral transparency in 1988, and Fujimori faced no more than minor problems after closing the Peruvian congress in 1992. More recently, neither the USA nor Britain objected at all to the short-lived Carmona coup in Venezuela in April 2002. Overall, the international community was – and possibly remains – more tolerant of non-consolidated democracy than it is of outright non-democracy. International approval or disapproval has implications for the economic prospects of the country in question, and therefore for the preferences of business interests and, indeed, the citizenry as a whole.

Thirdly there is the nature of presidential governance. While this has its problems, it does allow a political flexibility that parliamentary

systems might lack. The complex coalition-building that is necessary in a parliamentary setting is much less necessary to a presidential system. A presidential system can continue in place even when the party system has virtually broken down altogether – as happened in Peru in the 1990s. The role of presidentialism in bounding non-consolidated democracy is therefore quite complex. It may make it harder for systems to consolidate, while at the same time making it less likely that non-consolidated systems will break down altogether.

Finally, there seems to be a particular kind of political learning that has taken place in some countries. Because the rules themselves offer no guarantee of political security, there will always be a tendency for some political organizations and actors to export the risks of uncertainty to others – to seek, as it were, to get their retaliation in first. Authoritarian presidentialism is feared by potential losers, who seem to have become increasingly adept at resisting it. The intense quality of political partisanship in the region has often tended to weaken executive power rather than to strengthen it. This is not at all what some earlier scholars of hyper-presidentialism (notably O'Donnell 1994) once expected.

We therefore need to beware simple 'slippery slope' arguments suggesting that non-consolidated democracy will necessarily evolve in the direction either of renewed authoritarianism or of anarchy. Politics in non-consolidated systems can involve quite complex relationships between rule observance and rule-breaking, and these may, in turn, lead to some potentially stable if informal balances. For example, much of the popularly accepted rule-breaking that occurs is likely to require some rule observance for it to happen at all. Thus, a successful military coup will require military discipline among the participants. It may also be the case that some informalities (i.e., predictable breaches of the rules) are based on the observance of 'unwritten rules' that are not so very difficult to detect. There is of course an extent to which non-consolidated democracy cannot be understood in terms of any single set of rules. However, it can sometimes be understood, in part, as the outcome of clashing ideas about institutions within a given political system. Organizations can cohere around their own rules, even when the overall rules of the system are lacking in both teeth and popular support. This means that ambitious political leaders who live by rule-breaking may still have to observe some rules and be able to break others only under some rather specific circumstances.

Another reason why non-consolidation can involve complex balances is that the formal rules may not have been designed to be obeyed in the first place. There are areas of public administration in Latin America in which attempts to follow procedures to the letter may lead to hopeless 'red tape' kinds of problem (on Mexico, see Moctezuma

Barragán and Roemer 2001). Alternatively (or additionally) there may be a collective action problem at the centre of the political system. An actor who obeys formal rules may end up losing a prisoner's dilemma game if he or she makes the false assumption that others will obey the formal rules as well. In fact, nobody really trusts anybody else to obey all of the formal rules, which is why some rule-breaking may come to be seen as inevitable.

At one extreme, non-consolidated democracy can define a situation in which the formal rules are largely fictitious in the sense that they are not enforced while informal rules are. An army officer from the Dominican Republic provided a concise definition of this when answering a question about the constitution from the American political scientist Abraham Lowenthal. 'The Constitution is one thing. In the military we are something different' (quoted in Lowenthal 1976). However, at other times the formal rules may be widely observed and appear binding on all parties until there is a crisis. This is then resolved on the basis of some kind of partisan ascendancy without much relationship to the spirit of the law or the formalities of the constitutional process. Good examples of the way in which periods of what seemed to be reasonably stable government gave way to sudden crises occurred in Venezuela after 1989 and in Argentina after 1999.

Non-consolidation and path dependency

As noted, this work claims that problems with democratic consolidation in Latin America have a historical-institutional dimension. They are, in part, the result of inheritances from previous authoritarianism. Pre-democratic modes of political behaviour can survive democratization, and have done in practice. The fact that regular and contested elections have changed the formal rules of the game has not always prevented pre-democratic means of organizing power from putting on 'alternative shows in town'. Authors from an earlier generation have produced observations about Latin American politics that remain illuminating to this day. For example, in a work on Latin America published in 1967, Anderson claimed that 'Latin American government is based on a flexible coalition of diverse power contenders which is subject to revision at any time if the terms under which the original government was formed are deemed violated' (Anderson 1967). This account almost perfectly describes post-1992 Venezuela.

What is more interesting still, some pre-democratic practices have chameleon characteristics so that they are capable of penetrating

systems that may look as though they are fully consolidated democratic polyarchies (i.e., legitimate pluralist systems bounded by law) but which turn out not to have been genuinely consolidated at all. Venezuela's Punto Fijo system is a case in point here, and a similar point has been made about Brazilian patrimonialism, which somehow re-emerged at a relatively late stage of the democratization process (Hagopian 1996; Weyland 1997).

One means of transmitting political practices from pre-democratic to democratic systems exists within the internal working of organizations. This kind of transmission is particularly likely in systems with strong organizations and relatively weak over-arching institutions. Another means of transmission lies in cultural preference, which in Latin America sometimes translates into popular support for powerful political personalities. One of the characteristics of some Latin American politics is that it is governed by men (sometimes women) rather than laws. Mexico between 1982 and (at least) 1994 would be an example here, as would the last few years of the Fujimori administration in Peru.

However, efforts to provide a coherent account of how non-consolidated democracy works in practice are inevitably difficult and not only because of different national circumstances. The whole point about democratic non-consolidation is that it actually is difficult to theorize beyond a certain point because of the uncertainties that are inherent to the way it works. This is a point to which we shall return in the concluding chapter.