



Ecuador, Argentina, and Paraguay: At Last Immunity to Authoritarian Rule?

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Abstract

Venezuela continues to sink deeper into dictatorship, but in the aftermath of chaos and dictatorship, dramatic democratic developments in Ecuador and Paraguay and the 2015 presidential election in Argentina may finally signal immunity to authoritarian rule in these three South American countries. Puzzled by the political parties and questions of human rights in these multiparty representative democracies, the author spent weeks in Guayaquil, Buenos Aires, and Asunción, where she spoke with remarkable individuals, among them authors, students, workers, professionals, politicians, and civic leaders.

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Ecuador, Willing and Able?

Ecuador, a mestizo nation-state of 17 million people and twenty-four provinces, was the first Latin American country to grant women the right to vote and has been a multiparty democracy since 1979. However, until then Ecuador was known for acute political instability. Presidents were often removed from office before completing their term. Between August 1996 and April 2005, Ecuador had seven presidents. In a single week in early 1997, it had three!

Rafael Correa, who was president from 2007 to 2017, advocated a “Citizens’ Revolution” based on order and stability. He has a doctorate in Economics from the University of Illinois and is an admirer of Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez (1954–2013). Like Chavez’s “Aló Presidente” (Hello Mr. President) a Sunday radio and television talk show, Correa hosted Saturday “sabatinas,” a three-to-four hour long radio and television show, which combined politics and entertainment and was held in different cities or villages every week. Like Chávez in 1999, Correa in 2007 issued a decree calling for a referendum on a constituent assembly to write a new constitution.

Like Chávez leading the “Fifth Republic Movement” political party, Correa brought a new movement Alianza PAIS (AP, Patria Altiva y Soberana) to victory in 2006. For practical purposes, AP is a left-wing social democratic political party.

As a supporter of twenty-first century socialism and an opponent of U.S. imperialism, Correa guided Ecuador into alliances with Cuba and Venezuela. He signed one of the most restrictive media laws in the Americas and in 2008 refused to renew a lease to the U.S. government for the use of an Ecuadorean air base on the Pacific coast from which antidrug missions operated. Correa claimed this to be “a recovery of sovereignty.” Correa became known world-wide for letting WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange take refuge in the Ecuadorean Embassy in London, where he still resides. Despite losing seats in 2017, the AP remains the majority party in Ecuador’s unicameral national assembly. Lenín Moreno, the current president of Ecuador, served as Correa’s vice president from 2007 to 2013, and defeated Guillermo Lasso, the opposition party’s candidate, in 2017. He will be president for three more years.

Certain that Moreno agreed with him, Correa in 2015 had pushed through the legislature a measure which allowed unlimited presidential reelection. Yet on 4 February 2018, in a nationwide referendum called by Moreno, Ecuadoreans voted by a landslide to limit presidents to two terms. Journalist and political thinker Gabriela Calderón says that none of the twenty constitutions Ecuador has had since its founding as an independent nation-state in 1830 allowed indefinite presidential

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reelection. Only the twenty-first—the 444 article-long Montecristi Constitution of 2008, amended by Correa’s AP—would have done so. By contrast Argentina has had five constitutions since 1853 and Paraguay six since 1811. Correa cannot return to power in the foreseeable future, but reelection was not the only issue to prove problematic for the AP. Moreno’s vice president Jorge Glas was sentenced to six years in prison for taking bribes from Odebrecht, the Brazilian construction company. Moreno surprisingly made no attempt to exonerate him. Democracy won; a united AP has collapsed.

Calderón believes however that the Correístas continue to dominate the judiciary. She condemns Correa’s hyper-presidentialism and doubts that Moreno will now favor reforms to strengthen institutions that limit the executive branch, including the judiciary. Enrique Herrería, founder and former director of the Observatory for Human Rights, points to the Public Prosecutor and the Constitutional Court as examples of effective controls. Herrería also does not understand why Moreno, if he stands as alleged for ethical change, has failed to fire obviously corrupt members of the two branches of government that are supposed to check on the executive.

Given the referendum on term limits and Glas’s imprisonment, Calderón acknowledges the value of public opinion. A former American ambassador to Ecuador agrees but is skeptical regarding the quality of democracy in Ecuador since a divided opposition could make possible a victory for the AP in 2021. Ecuador after all has seven political parties and numerous political movements. Many therefore wonder whether Ecuadoreans will be both willing and able to liberate themselves from the self-imposed yoke of authoritarian populism known as Correism.

Dollarization, a Woman’s Initiative

In Guayaquil, Ecuador’s main port, largest city, and economic capital, I spoke with Joyce Higgins de Ginatta, an exceptional businesswoman, commercial engineer, author, and civic leader. Dollarization—the exclusive use of the dollar as Ecuador’s currency—which began in 2000 was due to Ginatta’s initiative. Ecuador was the first and even today is the only country in South America to do so. Some argued that “only a woman could be idiotic enough to propose such a measure.” They were wrong, for as *The Economist* recently stated, “Ecuador is not Venezuela, thanks partly to its dollarization....” *The New York Times* noted that Ginatta “is credited with almost single-handedly pushing Ecuadorean leaders...into abandoning the ailing sucre (the former currency) for the dollar. The reform helped to turn around a country that...was afflicted by economic free fall and with protests in the streets.” Ecuador’s dollarization, which remains popular, kept Correa from printing money and saved Ecuador from hyperinflation. Ginatta says she tried to persuade Argentina

to follow Ecuador’s example but failed. Argentina’s economy crashed in 2001, swamped by hyperinflation. Today it still faces major challenges.

Correa more than doubled spending for healthcare and education and borrowed at high rates billions of dollars from China. A formidable result of Correa’s international relations is the Chinese firm Sinohydro Corporation’s \$2 billion hydroelectric plant in Ecuador. For the AP and other Latin American governments, sovereignty seems never to have been an issue vis-à-vis China. Recently Chinese President Xi Jinping and Argentinean President Mauricio Macri agreed to have China National Nuclear Corporation build two nuclear-power plants in Argentina.

Economist and former finance minister, Carlos Julio Emanuel, believes that Correa’s team was not transparent and that these loans were serviced with Ecuadorean oil shipments, putting further strain on the state treasury. “According to the Ministry of Finances, the data are undisclosed,” Emanuel states. He wonders why Correa’s government wished to keep the public debt secret and is suspicious of leaders – whether or not they are economists – who emphasize slogans or labels rather than facts. Renowned and prolific analyst Guillermo Arosemena, now writing on the history of Guayaquil for its bicentennial, is convinced that Correa’s policies have become the costliest in Ecuador’s history. Poverty under Correa decreased dramatically, but Ecuador’s economy did not grow in 2015, and in 2016 contracted by 2.3%. Its national debt has almost doubled from 2014 to 2018.

Ginatta, critical of Correa’s legacy, asserts that populism and neo-populism—whether political or economic—prioritizes demagogic authoritarianism over representative democracy and socialism over neo-liberalism or free trade. Ginatta is right. Generally speaking, populism is a worldwide long-lasting phenomenon, more a political strategy to win votes and remain in power than an ideology. It focuses on equality as an ideal rather than on freedom as an impartial goal. In Latin America populism has usually been intertwined with caudillismo, that is, the cult of personality, favoring charismatic leaders like Juan Perón, Alfredo Stroessner, Hugo Chávez, or Fidel Castro more than the rule of law.

When asked about his vocation, Jaime Nebot, an affable and experienced political leader who has been Guayaquil’s popular mayor since 2000, said, “My only aim is to serve the people. That’s the difference between a statesman and a politician. I am a statesman.” Regarding whether Ecuador’s government qualifies as a hybrid regime, he spontaneously answered, “Yes, it combines democratic and authoritarian elements.” Nebot added, “Correa is not my personal enemy, but I condemn his ideas and his party’s unaccountability and clientelism” – the exchange of favors and loyalties in a typical boss-client relationship.

Nebot is the founder of the Warrior’s Spirit Movement (Madera de Guerrero), which is affiliated with the center-

right Social Christian Party, for which Nebot was twice an unsuccessful presidential candidate. He explained that the movement's name was inspired by the song, "Guayaquileño, Madera de Guerrero," which praises the courage of Guayaquil's men, and that, given the chaos in Ecuador's political history, movements capture more public attention and votes than traditional political parties. In 2017, seeking to defeat Correa, Nebot endorsed Lasso's movement CREO (Creando Oportunidades) This acronym is also the Spanish word for "I believe."

Despite the results of the February 2018 nationwide referendum and Ecuador's comparative economic stability, the shadow of Correa persists. Last year Argentina and Paraguay joined the 14-member Lima Group of Latin American countries looking for a peaceful solution to the Venezuelan crisis. Ecuador did not. Given that Venezuela, under autocrat Nicolás Maduro, has turned its back on democracy and abuses human rights, Argentina and Paraguay recently voted to suspend Venezuela from the Organization of American States; Ecuador abstained. I left Guayaquil still wondering whether Ecuadoreans are willing and able to develop immunity to authoritarian rule.

The Legacies of Perón and Stroessner in Argentina and Paraguay

Immense federalist Argentina and small landlocked Paraguay, with populations close to 45 million and 7 million respectively, are culturally very different but share a dictatorial heritage. Buenos Aires—once the capital of the Vice-Royalty of Río de la Plata to which Paraguay had been incorporated in 1776—is ethnically a European megametropolis. It is Argentina's autonomous capital city, and the most populous of its 23 provinces. Its wide avenues, packed streets, parks, and obelisk can be overwhelming. By contrast, Paraguay's Asunción is the welcoming capital of an officially bilingual mestizo nation-state with 17 departments. I heard Guaraní and Spanish throughout Asunción but only heard Spanish and saw no Amerindian or mestizos in Buenos Aires. Geography, ethnic distinctiveness, and wars with neighboring Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Bolivia, have often isolated Paraguay. And yet, in 1991, the Treaty of Asunción between Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay established MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market).

Five military coups since 1930—in 1943, 1955, 1962, and 1966—had taken place in Argentina before the one that overthrew Isabelita Perón, Juan Perón's widow, in 1976. Democracy finally returned to Argentina only in 1983, following ten years of both guerrilla and military junta atrocities. It returned to Paraguay in 1989, after Alfredo Stroessner's thirty-five year long dictatorship. In both Argentina and Paraguay today, the political parties founded by or standing

behind Fascist autocrat Perón and anti-Communist dictator Stroessner—both high-ranking military officers in their respective armies—are still strong. In fact, except for the years 1955 to 1973 which Perón spent in exile after being overthrown by an army coup, Argentina's Justicialista (aka Peronista) Party has lost only three presidential elections—in 1983, 1999, and 2015—since its founding in 1947. Paraguay's Colorado Party, to which Stroessner belonged, lost only the election that took place in 2008. The Peronista and the Radical Civic Union Party (RCU)—its members are called Radicals—are Argentina's two principal parties. Ideologically heterogeneous, the RCU is a centrist social-liberal party. The Peronists—left or right-wing, Kirchneristas or not—have become a powerful political movement more than a party.

Argentina's President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Cristina Kirchner) and Paraguay's President Horacio Cartes, like Rafael Correa, favored unlimited presidential re-election. Cristina was elected president in 2007 and reelected in 2011 with a landslide 54% of the vote after her husband Néstor Kirchner (president from 2003 to 2007) had unexpectedly died in 2010 from a heart attack. In 2013 she was not able to amend Argentina's national Constitution to obtain a third term. Nevertheless, elsewhere in Argentina governors often serve more than two terms. For example, in the province of Formosa, Peronist Gildo Insfrán has been governor since 1995. Currently the governor of the Province of Santa Fe, Miguel Lifschitz, a Socialist, favors limiting all electoral public positions to a single term except his own.

The Kirchner story is reminiscent of Juan and Eva Perón's domination in the late 1940s and early 50s and of Perón being reelected for a third time in 1974, after he returned to Argentina with his third wife Isabelita as vice presidential candidate. The tradition of populism, nepotism, and spousal favoritism has had a lasting impact in Argentina. Like Correa's Alianza PAIS, the Kirchner agenda focused on nationalism and social welfare spending, and also attacked freedom of the press and judicial independence. In 2003, it even reopened trials for crimes against humanity committed during the 1976–1983 dictatorship. According to journalist and human rights activist Jacobo Timerman (1923–1999), the military ultimately "killed thirty-five thousand people in their war against the subversive terrorists." Timerman pointed out that "the armed forces of Argentina *created* what ...Jorge Luis Borges described as the terrorism of the state." Currently, 278 people sentenced for human rights crimes committed during the military dictatorship are still in prison in Argentina.

Terrorism and Crimes against Humanity

"Terrorism" targets individuals or groups for ideological or sociopolitical reasons. Whether international or domestic, state or private, and regardless of the identity of perpetrators

and victims, terrorism involves crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, torture, kidnapping, forced disappearances, as well as destruction of property. Acts against terrorists can also constitute terrorism. Do such anti-terrorists—alleged or convicted—deserve human rights?

Attorney María Elena García, president of the NGO “Defense of the Human Rights of Persons Deprived of Freedom and Access to Justice in Argentina,” believes they do. At length she recalled how during Isabelita Perón’s presidency urban guerrillas—left-wing Montoneros and the ERP, Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People’s Revolutionary Army)—committed terrorist acts. So did right-wing death squads, for example, the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance (Triple A). García’s organization works to secure due process and humanitarian treatment for Argentines—whether members of the armed forces or police corps—who confronted guerrilla terrorism and are now in prison for life.

The 1976 military coup that deposed Isabelita ushered in an atrocious period of crimes against humanity, generally known as the Dirty War, which ended in 1983 following the Argentine war against Great Britain over control of the Falkland Islands. Throughout this period, during the Cold War (1946–1989), the USA and the Soviet Union through Cuba competed for military influence in Latin America. In this era, the ends that justified the means, no matter how horrid, were Communism for some, liberty and free-trade for others. For example, the Argentine juntas and the Stroessner regime participated in Operation Condor, the internationally coordinated intelligence web through which the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay practiced state terrorism. The Operation’s Archive of Terror, found in Asunción in 1992, shows that the U.S. government played a key role, fully supporting these military dictatorships. According to the Paraguayan Truth and Justice Commission, the Stroessner tyranny left a total of more than 400 missing, more than 18,000 tortured, and more than 20,000 exiles. The exact total number of the tens of thousands killed or disappeared, as a result of Operation Condor, remains unknown.

Upon learning that I planned to visit the Museums of Memory in Buenos Aires and Rosario, and the Museo de las Memorias (Museum of Memories) in Asunción, García exhorted me to be aware that these museums are historically incomplete since they focused only on the victims of state terrorism and not on the victims of urban guerrillas or those who had fought the guerrillas to protect the general population. García especially recommended the documentary “Venganza Será!” (Revenge It Will Be!), directed by Andrés Paternostro and produced by the Center for Studies in History, Politics, and Human Rights of the province of Salta.

Garret Edwards, Director of Legal Research at Fundación Libertad, says that this film describes the incarceration of members of the armed forces who have been accused of committing crimes against humanity and whose rights and due

process were violated under the Kirchners. Thus, the film is considered in certain circles to be “pro-dictatorship” or “politically incorrect.” Says Edwards, “Argentina should objectively see itself in the mirror. Even though its financial and economic problems are grave, human rights remain crucial.”

A Son Named Juan Bautista

Early one morning I walked down the impressive 9 de Julio Avenue, and later was joined by Diego Armesto, professor of constitutional law and human rights law in Buenos Aires. We enjoyed espresso at La Biela café, close to a wax sculpture of writer Jorge Luis Borges. We spoke at length about political parties, constitutions, and human rights. Says Armesto, “Equilibrium in Argentina’s political party system is nonexistent and inexplicable. The Peronist movement is divided and lacks coherence...” With the current Constitution of the Argentine Nation in hand, which Armesto himself had helped revise in 1994, he showed detailed familiarity with the U.S. Constitution and compared the preambles. We discussed the text of Article 38 in the Argentine Charter: “Political parties are fundamental institutions of the democratic system. Their creation and the exercise of their activities are free, so long as they respect this Constitution.” This is ironic, given the chaotic record of political parties in Argentina. There is no mention of political parties in the American Constitution.

We recalled that under Perón, Argentina’s Constitution of 1949 aimed to modernize democracy by including “social rights,” such as better working conditions and the right to education. It also permitted the indefinite reelection of the president. The revised constitution of 1957 abolished this practice. The 1994 revisions under Peronist president Carlos Menem still include a summary of Perón’s social rights program in Article 14bis but establish a one-term presidential reelection limit and no longer require that the president or vice president be Roman Catholic.

Armesto, a member of the RCU Party, admires President Raúl Alfonsín (1927–2009) and calls him a true statesman, echoing Jaime Nebot’s definition. He told me about “Nunca Más” (Never Again), the 50,000-page report on crimes against humanity under the military dictatorship, put together by CONADEP (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons), which recorded the forced disappearance of many and prompted Alfonsín to start the trials of the military in 1984. However, Alfonsín brought an end to the trials in 1986, arguing that the country needed to look to the future and not the past. Alfonsín favored laws granting amnesty for crimes committed during the Dirty War, which were later overturned in 2003 by Congress and in 2005 declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

Armesto and I strolled to La Recoleta cemetery in silence to honor the memory of Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810–1884),

father of the Argentine Constitution (1853), a document modeled after the U.S. Constitution. I learned with surprise that Armesto had named his son “Juan Bautista” after Juan Bautista Alberdi.

Cambiemos

Federal prosecutor Alberto Nisman was murdered in January 2015, the day before he was to present in Congress a report alleging that then-President Cristina Kirchner had conspired with Iran to curtail his investigation into the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. The bombing killed 85 people and was the deadliest attack of its kind in the country’s history. Argentina’s Jewish community of 300,000 people is the largest in Latin America.

In November of that very same year—the first election in more than a decade without a Kirchner on the ballot—wealthy businessman and former Buenos Aires mayor Mauricio Macri, head of the center-right coalition “Cambiemos” (Let’s Change), became the first president since 1946 not to be a Peronist or a Radical. Macri promoted consensus, promising to heal the social and economic “grieta” (division, gap, or fracture) caused by Kirchnerismo. He had been president of Boca Juniors, Argentina’s most popular football club from 1995 to 2007. Peronism had performed well throughout the country except in Buenos Aires. Despite the fall of the Argentine peso, high inflation, budget deficits, and frequent corruption scandals during the Kirchner years, Ricardo Raúl Benedetti, Coordinator at Argentina’s Federal System of Public Media, believes that Macri will be able to steer away from corruption and hyper-presidentialism. That’s indeed a huge challenge.

A Legislative Palace Ablaze in Paraguay

The conservative Colorado Party (Asociación Radical Republicana), the center-left Authentic Radical Liberal Party (aka Liberals), and the left-wing electoral alliance Frente Guasú (Guasú Front—Guasú means “large” or “great” in Guaraní) are the principal parties in Paraguay. The country’s current Constitution (1992) forbids presidents from serving more than one five-year term. All other Latin American multiparty democracies allow two consecutive or non-consecutive presidential terms. Paraguay does not—only one term and no run-offs in Paraguay. Obviously, the Paraguayan charter targets hyper-presidentialism.

Nevertheless, in the spring of 2017, Paraguay’s President Horacio Cartes attempted to do what Argentina’s Kirchner had tried in 2013 and Ecuador’s Correa in 2015. His goal was a constitutional amendment in order to run for reelection in 2018. When the Senate approved this bill, protesters set part

of Asunción’s bicameral Congress building ablaze. Mounted officers fired tear-gas. Police arrested 211 people, and allegedly tortured some. The amendment ultimately was not ratified. Some Senators from Cartes’s own Colorado Party as well as others, including Frente Guasú leader Fernando Lugo, favored the constitutional amendment. The protesters and incendiaries did not.

Cartes, a wealthy businessman and president of Paraguay’s football Club Libertad from 2001 until 2012, had never held elected office until he won the presidency in 2013. In the 1980s, he had been accused of currency fraud and had been a fugitive. After spending months in prison, he had been cleared of the charges. Most voters trusting his experience in business, banks, and finance and longing for prosperity, were not seriously concerned about his past. Realizing that he could not be a presidential candidate again in 2018, Cartes decided to run for a Senate seat, even though Paraguay’s Constitution stipulates that at the end of the 5-year term, every president becomes a senator for life with a voice but without a vote. His desire to be an elected active senator then became a constitutional controversy. The Supreme Court ruled in his favor, and he was elected for the 2018–2023 term as a voting member of the Senate. In fact, before his presidential term ended, Cartes asked Alicia Pucheta—one of the Supreme Court justices who had sided with him both on the reelection amendment and on his running as a candidate for the Senate—to be vice president. This again caused surprise and dismay. If Cartes resigned, Pucheta could serve, for a couple of months, as Paraguay’s first female president. Congress confirmed the nomination, and Pucheta accepted. One of her first acts as vice president was to ask for forgiveness for crimes committed under Stroessner, as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights required in *Goiburú et al v. Paraguay* (2006).

Paraguay’s congressional Palacio Legislativo is indeed a twenty-first century palace on the shores of the Paraguay River. Looking forward to meeting with Senators Fernando Lugo and Blanca Ovelar, I climbed the high steps to its main entrance, remembering the fire that had threatened its walls. The big plaque that welcomes visitors says that the building dates from 2003 and “was constructed with the fraternal contribution of the people and the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan), to whom the people of Paraguay are grateful.” Paraguay is the only country in South America to recognize Taiwan. This precludes having the same relationship with the People’s Republic of China. Nonetheless, Paraguay, the world’s fourth largest exporter of soybeans, sells soybeans to China. Since these soybeans go through Uruguay, China registers them as Uruguayan, not Paraguayan, exports. Exceptional once again, in 2018 the Paraguayan embassy moved to Jerusalem, becoming the only country in South America to recognize the city as the capital of Israel.

An Exceptional Head of State

Left-wing Fernando Lugo, former bishop, former president and now President of the Senate, welcomed me to his office. Lugo was the first ex-bishop ever to run for the presidency in the Western Hemisphere. Lugo won. He thus peacefully ended 61 years of uninterrupted Colorado presidential victories, although congress remained under Colorado control. Lugo founded in 2007 the Patriotic Alliance for Change (PAC), made up of several center-left political parties, and backed by the Liberals. Until 2010, the PAC was, like the Guasú Front today, an electoral alliance advocating social justice, agrarian reform, and socioeconomic transparency. Lugo heads it, believing—as he always has—in consensus rather than confrontation. He told me that 10 parties make up the Guasú Front. In 2018, the Grand National Renovating Alliance (GANAR, To Win), a last-minute alliance between Liberals and the Guasú Front, was the main challenge to the Colorado Party.

Lugo underlined his concern for Paraguay's Amerindians. In fact, when he became president he was the first Paraguayan president to deliver half of his acceptance speech in Guaraní. Hugo Chávez joined Lugo at the ceremony, along with Taiwan's Ma Ying-jeou, Crown Prince Felipe of Spain, and other heads of state. Lugo told me that representatives of 19 Paraguayan indigenous peoples have recently formed the Movimiento Político Indígena Plurinacional del Paraguay (Paraguayan Political Plurinational Movement (MPIPP)), which aims to become a political party.

Extraordinary Paraguay is the only Spanish colony to become a sovereign nation-state (1811) without a war of independence. Lugo further reflected on Paraguay having been in the early nineteenth century one of the most prosperous countries in the Western Hemisphere. For example, it established the first railroad system and, in the Paraguay-Paraná waterway, the first merchant fleet. However, under the leadership of commander-in-chief and authoritarian president Francisco Solano López (1826–70), Paraguay lost approximately 70–90% of its adult male population, 65% of its 450,000 total population, and one quarter of its territory in the War of the Triple Alliance (1865–1870) against Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. That war was so catastrophic that Colombian novelist Jorge Isaacs is on record for saying that all Paraguayans who survived should be granted citizenship in Colombia. Lugo recalled that unprecedented and disastrous war in order to explain why he believes that heroism is the Paraguayan people's crucial virtue. Says Lugo, "Paraguayans rebound from every loss and every heartbreak. They resurrect."

Solano López was not Paraguay's first autocrat. His father, Carlos Antonio López, and previously José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia had been formidable despots. Well-educated Francia, for example, spoke five languages and held doctorates in both theology and law. In 1814, he issued a decree

forbidding marriages between white men and white women. Men were allowed to marry only indigenous, mestizo or black Paraguayan women. Francia is the protagonist in *Yo el Supremo* by Augusto Roa Bastos (1917–2005), Paraguay's best known contemporary author. Roa Bastos himself fought in the Chaco War (1932–1935), where Paraguay defeated Bolivia.

I asked Lugo to comment on Cartes's failed attempt to amend the constitution. He responded that to be reelected—or "rekutu," the term for reelection in Guaraní, as he pointed out—required that a constitutional amendment be enacted by a Constitutional Assembly. He still favors the amendment and believes that Paraguay is now immune to authoritarianism. After all, his election marked the first time that a ruling party peacefully surrendered power to another party in Paraguay's 207 years of independence. Despite the controversial impeachment against him in 2012, which some considered "an institutional coup," Lugo could look forward to running for the presidency in 2023. Political thinker Diego Abente believes that the future of left-wing politics in Paraguay depends on Lugo. Nonetheless Abente recognizes that widespread corruption compromises the effectiveness of governmental institutions.

The Daughter of a Cobbler from the Department of Concepción

The Colorado Party's Blanca Ovelar—like Lugo tall and articulate—could also look forward to running for the presidency in 2023. In 2008, she was Paraguay's first female presidential candidate. Along with Lugo and Cartes, she is a recently reelected senator. At the start of our conversation, she described the sense of relief and sadness upon seeing how her office smelled and looked after the fire of 2017. Ovelar always opposed President Cartes's reelection amendment but was not surprised to learn that Lugo still favors amending the Constitution with that goal in mind. For the very same reason—unconstitutionality—she was again against Cartes running for the senate and then wishing to resign before his presidential term ended. Cartes's close friendship with still fugitive Brazilian businessman Dario Messer, charged with international money-laundering, further contributed to her opposition. I asked Ovelar why is she a Colorado. She pointed out that there are internal debates in the Colorado Party. For example, Colorado Senator and now Paraguayan President, Mario Abdo ("Marito") also opposed Cartes's proposed amendment. Abdo's father was Stroessner's personal secretary.

Ovelar deplores the closed list proportional representation system by which senators and deputies are elected. In Paraguay, as in Ecuador and Argentina, voters elect presidents directly but choose legislators by proportional representation,

a system that favors political parties rather than individual candidates. In choosing Ovelar they would also be voting for other senatorial Colorado candidates according to the order in which their names appear on the party's list. Ovelar favors the system of majoritarian representation, as in the United States for all candidates, not only for those running for the presidency. Many recall that Ovelar served as Minister of Education from 2002 to 2007 and, aware that she believes in constitutional checks and balances and representative democracy, envision her as a head of state.

Ovelar movingly told me that her father, a cobbler, was a political prisoner who was tortured under Stroessner. Says she, "Despite sociopolitical horrors, the Stroessner regime brought national economic stability to Paraguay. Growing up in rural Concepción, I soon realized that inequality was the cradle of poverty, and therefore studied to become a teacher." She explained that the Colorado Party was founded (1887) not long after the War of the Triple Alliance, and that it had begun as a nationalist association. It turned out that the Colorados were the political party behind Stroessner. When she accepted the Progressive Colorado Party faction's nomination to the presidency, Ovelar asked her mother how her father would have reacted. Her mother responded, "Blanca, he would celebrate. The Colorado Party promotes change from within." In the recent general election of 2018—the seventh since Paraguay's transition to democracy—the Colorado Party and GANAR (the Liberal-Frente Guasú alliance), as expected, scored the highest number of votes, with Mario Abdo and Efraín Alegre as presidential candidates respectively.

Never Subject to Distress

Outside the Palacio Legislativo, there were demonstrations by people whose homes were damaged by inundations or, according to some, by public policies. I quietly crossed the street and by chance, at Paraguay's Cultural Center in the nearby Cabildo (Town Hall), found Paraguay's National Congress Symphony Orchestra rehearsing Brahms. One of the musicians later told me that they also play guaranias and other Paraguayan compositions. He explained that in Mexico there are seven different types of harp but only one in Paraguay. Built in 1844, the Cabildo once housed the executive and legislative branches of Paraguay's government. Indeed until 2003 it was the home of the National Congress. Since 2016, it is the home of the Museo de los Inmigrantes (Immigrants' Museum), which honors the legacy of peoples—from anywhere in the world who throughout the country's history settled in Paraguay—among them are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Mennonites, and others.

At the Cabildo, I also discovered the poetry of 103-year-old Paraguayan Carlos Federico Abente who believes in "planting

poems" everywhere. Looking for his poems in Spanish, since I don't read Guaraní, took me to three wonderful bookstores in Asunción's Plaza Uruguay. There, close to the statue of Uruguay's liberator José Artigas, I shared time with two students and heard one of Abente's poems, which ends, "Soy lo que soy... jamás supeditado al desaliento" (I am who I am... never subject to distress). Best-selling author Aníbal Romero applauds Abente's poetry but wishes in prose to go further by encouraging readers to avoid indifference and passivity in order to undermine corruption and dishonesty.

Camilo Filártiga, professor of political science and law, is aware that voter turnout was lower than usual in the election of 2018 and acknowledges that overall voters' confidence has been declining. However, he himself voted with hope. Filártiga is the director of the Public Policy Center (PPC) at the Catholic University in Asunción. As PPC director, he promotes interaction—debates, seminars, conferences—among government officials, civil society, and academics.

Filártiga is also an active participant in the Open Government Partnership (OGP, Alianza de Gobierno Abierto), an international initiative which since 2011 fights corruption and promotes political participation. Says Filártiga, "Corrupt politicians ruin nations. In order to obtain votes, Paraguayan parties present substantively empty platforms. That, and the weakness of our institutions, especially the judicial branch, leads to disappointment and negativism." Recently, he let OGP fellow members know about laws and judicial decisions that open doors to transparency and accountability in Paraguay. Most important was the establishment in 2012 of a National Anticorruption Secretariat to combat drug trafficking and white collar crime and the enactment of a law guaranteeing citizens free access to public information, which now counts as a fundamental human right in Paraguay. This law requires public institution and officials to provide information requested by citizens, such as salaries, official trips and contracts, among other data that are not defined as secret. Filártiga emphasizes that he knows first hand that the principal presidential candidates—especially Mario Abdo—were informed about these concerns and realities.

Lifetime Immunity

The military no longer controls Ecuador, Argentina, and Paraguay. It is therefore especially valuable to recognize that individual voices can be heard. Civilians will determine Ecuador's, Argentina's, and Paraguay's respective immunity to authoritarian rule. Troubling and often bloody historical experiences may have already begun sufficient inoculation. These three countries' numerous political movements and parties could throw off the yoke of left-wing or right-wing populist rule and systemic corruption. Lifetime immunity to authoritarian rule is not inevitable.

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