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THE DARK SIDE OF DEMOCRATIZATION: “DYSFUNCTIONAL” DEMOCRACIES IN SOUTH AMERICA? [1]

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Este artículo analiza las democracias aparentemente disfuncionales que se han vuelto comunes en América Latina. A pesar de que son democráticos en el sentido de que hay competencia regular para ocupar cargos públicos por medio de elecciones periódicas, estos regímenes también evidencian disfuncionalidades políticas sistemáticas. Con el fin de ilustrar este concepto, el autor evalúa las experiencias de Argentina, Colombia y Venezuela con la democracia. Por su parte, examina las implicaciones comparativas y teóricas de estos tres casos.

Palabras Clave: democracia disfuncional, tipos de régimen democrático, Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela

This article analyzes the apparently dysfunctional democracies that have become common in Latin America. Although democratic in the conventional sense that national leadership is periodically contested and renewed through standardized electoral procedures, such regimes also exhibit systematic political dysfunctionality. The author evaluates experiences with democracy in Argentina, Colombia, and Venezuela in order to illustrate this concept, and examines their comparative and theoretical implications.

Keywords: dysfunctional democracy, democratic regime types, Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela

Introduction

Twenty-five years ago there were only two competitive electoral systems regulating the circulation of political parties in office on the mainland of South America. All the rest were military, apart from the three Guianas (ex-British - a one party regime; ex-Dutch - in the process of breakdown following independence in 1975; and French - still an overseas department of the metropole). Today

1 This text constitutes a research in progress that builds upon the ideas expressed in Whitehead (2002). It has benefited from helpful commentary on earlier drafts that were presented to the international conference on "Diagnosing Democracy" held in Santiago de Chile in April 2003, and on "Turbulent Democracies" held at the Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia in September 2003. Without listing all the colleagues who made thoughtful suggestions, I need to acknowledge in particular the comments provided by Professor Desmond King (among other things he produced the current title).

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there is nowhere on the mainland where the conventional procedural minimum conditions for electoral "democracy" are not observed. In fact competitive electoral systems have prevailed throughout this region for over a decade[3]. There have only been three direct interruptions of the constitutional order at a national level[4] and all of these were quickly reversed and followed by the renewal of political competition in accordance with the pre-established electoral calendar. No other large region of the world can display such a solid and convincing record of transition from authoritarian to constitutional democratic systems for the distribution of office, and at least formal power, at the national level[5].

This is a striking development, certainly as compared to what virtually any observer would have thought possible at the end of the 1970s. In a subcontinent with almost two centuries of unbroken sovereign independence (outside the Guianas) this is the first decade to witness such uniformity of discourse and practice over the correct system of government. While the future remains open to further surprises, it is not unreasonable to suppose that South America's first decade of democratic homogeneity may well prove the first of a series. However, even if that turns out to be so, there is an underside to the story, as recent developments in several of the largest and longest established democracies of the sub-continent have highlighted.

This article attempts to diagnose the dark side of current processes of democratization in South America, using the following procedure. First, it elaborates on a theoretical possibility: a subtype of democratic regime which could persist through time while delivering endemically bad "performance" outputs. The two key criteria for this subtype would be that it can remain in place, despite its deficiencies; and that its failings can be attributed to characteristics internal to the prevailing political regime, rather than to "external shocks" or structural constraints. Having elaborated on this as a theoretical possibility, the text then reviews three contemporary examples, to determine whether they may conform to this sub-type. It is too early to establish with confidence how closely Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela will correspond to this model and the object is certainly not to "shoehorn" them into a box where they may not belong. Instead, this is intended as an exploratory exercise in diagnosis, where a model of what could be wrong is compared with the symptoms on display in the most visibly troubled cases.

The article concludes with a

3 The last two "transitions" were in Guyana and Suriname in 1992.

4 Paraguay in April 1996, Ecuador in January 2000 and Venezuela in April 2002.

5 Post-Communist eastern Europe comes closest to matching this record, but only if the Balkans are excluded and various qualifications about Slovakia and the Baltic republics are overlooked.

very provisional assessment of the utility of this analytical perspective, and the scope for its further development. The whole exercise is extremely tentative, and is no more than an attempt to straddle the gap between theory and experience that seems to be opening up as new democratic regimes proceed along their often erratic trajectories. Subsequent development of this approach will depend both on appraisal of the proposed subtype, and on further assessment of the cases that are presenting themselves for diagnosis.

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"Dysfunctional" Democracies as a Sub-Type of Democratic Regime

A political regime is an ensemble of formal rules and informal procedure for the allocation of political office and for the production of public policies that has sufficient coherence and durability to abstracted from context and modelled, either in a logico-deductive or in an ideal-typical manner. The new competitive electoral regimes of South America all display sufficient structure and permanence to qualify as "regimes" rather than as mere "situations". They correspond to a broader regime type that is extensively analysed in the literature under the rubric of "procedural minimum" democracy. As the term suggests this literature focuses attention on the democratic procedures required for election and decision-making, and thereby directs attention away from outcomes.

In practice, of course, this separation between procedures and outcomes cannot be taken too far (e.g. democratic procedures which generated famine as an outcome would negate the conditions for existence of a procedural minimum democratic regime). But within sensible limits the distinction can deliver analytical clarity. It also highlights powerful regularities that can persist across a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Thus, despite the large variations in income levels, ethnic composition, size, and historical background separating the twelve sovereign republics of South America, it is productive to classify them all as competitive democratic electoral regimes. They are democracies in the conventional sense that national leadership is periodically contested and renewed through standardized electoral procedures that reasonably approximate to the familiar yardsticks.

Alternative parties and their candidates possess the necessary autonomy and resources to offer the voters a structured choice, and the elec-

torate is at least relatively free to express its preferences, including the option of switching to an outsider if the mainstream parties are found waiting. The leaders thus chosen can normally exercise their full political authority as prescribed in the constitution, which can itself be revised or rewritten in accordance with democratic procedures. This article takes as given that background classification, without entering into any of the possible quibbles or qualifications.

A decade of unbroken experience of the prevalence of such regimes has, however, demonstrated that voters and citizens are also very concerned about outcomes, and that they are disposed to judge the relative success (or failure) of these regimes, not just by whether they uphold the minimum standards of procedural correctness, but also by the quality of the public policies they deliver, and by the broader performance (desempeño) of their new leaders and their new institutions. Such demotic judgements tend to blur the distinctions between procedure and outcome that are so finely articulated by the political science profession. In response to these popular expectations - and indeed legitimate demands - concerning the performance of democratic regimes a further academic industry is growing up, focussed on measuring, evaluating, and (if possible) upgrading the "quality" of democracy in new competitive electoral regimes.

If countries within a single regime type are to be ranked, graded, or clustered according to their "quality" it easily follows that subtypes will emerge, or be proposed, as ways of identifying underlying structural regularities that predispose towards particular levels of quality. But, of course, the quality of public policy, and even the desempeño of public authority, can be determined by factors that are external to the type or subtype of political regime in place. War, natural disaster, international economic developments, initial endowment and even straightforward technical policy errors (or bad bets) can affect regime performance across a broad area. Thus, there should be no automatic assignment of different performance outcomes to different political regime subtypes.

However, if performance varies systematically over long periods of time, or if similar external forces elicit differential responses from different clusters of democracy, then it is reasonable to enquire whether the explanation can be found in features internal to the political regimes in question. For this reason various authors have sketched alternative subtypes of democratic regime that may be systematically associated with various patterns of performance outcome. Consistently bad performance outcomes may suggest a poor quality of regime, thereby prompting a "deficiency" analysis and a negative regime subtype[6].

6 Note that "performance outcome" in this context may refer to semi-procedural questions - such

The subtypes of regimes most relevant to this attempt at "diagnosis" of possible "dysfunctionality" are those that might be associated with output deficiencies. Presidentialism could generate crises that can be averted through parliamentarism, to quote one classic debate in the field. Or majoritarian voting systems that lack "transparency" or "horizontal accountability" may tend to destroy social trust and to facilitate mismanagement of "la cosa pública". "Delegative" democracies could constitute an extreme subtype of centralized majoritarian and unrestrained democratic governance that might reproduce many of the vices associated with authoritarian rule. Or "illiberal" democracies could destabilize property rights and polarize civil society, with the associated adverse political consequences.

"Delegative" democracies could constitute an extreme subtype of centralized majoritarian and unrestrained democratic governance that might reproduce many of the vices associated with authoritarian rule

There is, thus, a fairly extensive arsenal of deficiency analyses based on the identification of negative subtypes within the general democratization framework. A comprehensive study would no doubt review all the available suggestions before attempting to introduce yet another subtype. But given the exploratory nature of this article all that can be attempted here is an outline of the most exaggerated variant of a deficiency subtype. Whereas all the negative possibilities listed above might be associated with underperformance, these adverse consequences are only suggested, not mandated[7]. By contrast, the defining characteristic of a "dysfunctional" sub-type of democratic regime would have to be that it persistently and necessarily generated severe and avoidable underperformance.

To elaborate on this subtype (at least as a theoretical possibility) we need to reflect on what should count as the minimally acceptable "performance" of any democratic regime, and that would lead to some characterization of its normal "functions". From this basis a deficiency analysis can produce a conception of "underperformance" and "dysfunctionality".

Even at the level of theory, however, and most certainly at the level

as the generation of consensus, or the achievement of policy coherence, or the lengthening of time horizons - as well as to strictly external output indicators.

7 Majoritarian voting might also produce some beneficial performance outcomes; "delegative" democracies might overcome policy gridlock; illiberal democracies might broaden participation and thereby create consent, etc.

of case study evidence, we need to set a high threshold before applying such negative characteristics to a democratic regime. All "really existing" democracies (old as well as new) regularly produce disappointing results. As illustrated by the Florida voting process of November 2000, or the weakness of British cabinet control over the more reckless policy decisions of the Blair administration, even the most ancient and self-confident of democracies can fail to satisfy conventional standards of accountable procedure. When the performance criteria are broadened to include outcomes as well as processes, the scope for underperformance become that much greater. It would not be difficult, for example, to mount a case that U.S. democracy has systematically short-changed the "black underclass" over successive generations, both in terms of civil rights and with regard to more substantive benefits.

A similar case could be made concerning the large maghrebien population of France, and for a long time also the women of Switzerland. The point is not to overdramatize these lacunae, but merely to keep them in mind when applying a deficiency analysis to other, newer, and more vulnerable democracies. Expected standards of performance should not be set unreasonably high, and functionalist assumptions about how democratic political systems should operate must not blind us to the far from consistently reliable realities of most democratic governance[8].

That said, it remains at least a theoretical possibility that some subset of regimes could underperform so drastically, so recurrently, and so irredeemably, that they might deserve a separate designation as "dysfunctional" democracies. This possibility has not received much analytical attention in the literature (apart from rather vague references to "frozen" democracies, "low intensity" democracies, or the "political decay" of democratic regimes). Perhaps this is because it may seem inherently impossible to conceptualize, let alone to measure, such a situation. The threshold conditions have to be set at a very high level, and it may be almost impossible, as a matter of empirical demonstration, to establish that any particular case is securely lodged on the other side of that dividing line.

This text argues that (as least in conceptual terms) such a line is worth drawing, and also that (on the empirical level) once it has been drawn this may enable use to submit some critical cases to a more searching critical evaluation. It does not, however, aspire to prove that any particular democratic regime in South America is either unambiguously or irretrievably dys-

8 Indeed, all regimes, and not merely electoral democracies, regularly underperform and operate dysfunctionally, at least by comparison with the theoretical standards that are used to justify their existence.

functional. (Indeed, by the time such a judgement could be "scientifically" established the regime in question would most likely have been brought to an end). So all we are looking for here are threshold criteria that would in theory justify the creation of a subtype of democratic regime, perhaps accompanied by some illustrations of the possibility that the subtype could provide a better account than the alternatives of observable conditions in at least some new democracies for some significant periods of time.

Still at the level of theory, let us then review the three holistic "functions" have sometimes been attributed to all political systems: the aggregation of interests; the production of needed public policies; and the legitimation of the resulting decisions. Under these three very broad and inter-related headings, can we use a deficiency analysis to set a threshold for non-performance of these functions beyond which a political regime (as defined at the beginning of this section) might still persist, yet operating in a "dysfunctional" manner?

The dystopian alternative to the aggregation of interests is the more or less classic "state of nature", or "war of all against all". Is it possible to envisage a procedurally minimal democratic regime presiding over such a situation of social anarchy? In any real situation there is always a certain latent or implicit order, a tacit structure of social authority and hierarchy. The "real world" test would have to be some generalized and uncontrollable state of "praetorianism". Here groups of unequal power would pursue their interests, without restraint, and without any expectation that stable coalitions or larger policy-based alliances could convert their specific objectives into broader projects of collective action. In systems theory terms, there would no effective aggregation of interests.

Arguably, this could arise under what might very loosely be classified as the
procedural minimum requirements for democracy[9]. At least in theoretical terms it seem possible to envisage some situation beyond the threshold of routine democratic conflict where we could say that this indispensable functional of a working democracy was no longer being performed.

How about the production of needed public policies? Certainly the literature on comparative politics entertains the possibility that this function could be absent in some non-democratic regimes. That is what terms such as "the predatory state", "kleptocracy", and perhaps even "sultanism" are intended to convey. Can we, therefore, also envisage such a possibility in a procedurally minimal democracy?

9 For example, if we generously follow the Summit of the Americas practice and classify Guatemala and Haiti as democracies, the hypothesis of chronic failures of interest aggregation could help explain how political life is currently structured in those societies.

The extreme case would be where no public policies, however strongly desired or badly needed, can be generated by the political system. This may arise in certain "failed states" (Somalia, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge?). But it is surely too severe a standard to apply in any electoral democracy. After all, the holding of regular competitive elections is itself a public policy achievement of considerable complexity and merit. Moreover, even in the least favorable settings, the telephones usally operate, the lights come on, water is made available to most households, children go to school, hospitals provide some health care.

Is such a theortical possibility ever observable in practice?

However, it would not be unreasonable to argue that for any democratic regime to be meaningful the elected authorities must have the capacity to deliver some incremental public policy benefits desired by their voters over and above this skeletal and residual level of service. Can we, at least in theory, envisage a competitive electoral regime where almost no such capacity exists, or is expected by the citizenry? There are difficult questions of judgment and interpretation here, and it may be almost impossible to specify a clear threshold that can be independently measured or calibrated. But it is not impossible to think of examples of new democracies that lie beyond what most citizens in any democracy would consider a reasonable threshold[10]. On its own this test of dysfunctionality might be too elusive, but in combination with the other two criteria under review, we can arguably construct a category or subtype of regime that can be compared to observable conditions in various parts of South America.

The third and final functional test reviewed in this section is the legitimation of decisions. This, too, is a vast and problematic topic. Most governmental decisions in most regimes are accepted through inertia rather than as a product of active consent. All regimes, including the most democratic, periodically issue individual decisions that are not viewed as legitimate by substantial sectors (even majorities) of their citizens[11]. In addition to the generic problems of determining the legitimacy of government action in all regimes, there is an obvious further impediment to a deficiency analysis when the regime is a democracy.

10 Nicaragua and Nigeria come to mind as possibilities.

11 Many British citizens may actively share my view that our military action in Iraq is not legitimate, but even so, that would hardly justify characterizing British democracy as "dysfunctional" in its totality.

However unacceptable the policy actions of a government may be, in democratic conditions the citizens are presented with periodic and reliable opportunities to express their repudiation, and to force changes of the government personnel they hold responsible. How, then, can we ever qualify the decisions of a democratic regime as not just episodically illegitimate, but as endemically and irredeemably so? The standard for this needs to be set very high, but not perhaps completely beyond the reach of all observable behavior. Suppose that both the elected government and its only available alternative both permanently to abdicate from the tasks of aggregating interests, and formulating and implementing alternative policy packages? In this extreme case, whatever the ensuing decisions over officeholders and their actions, the electorate might be entitled to feel that the political system had failed to offer them any real choice, and citizens could feel free to behave as if the resulting decisions lacked their consent.

Is such a theoretical possibility ever observable in practice? This is more or less what many Venezuelans came to believe about their democratic political system (reproached as a "partidocracia") when they opted for Colonel Hugo Chavez and his "Fifth Republic" at the end of the 1990s. It captures the public mood in Argentina after the December 2001 collapse of the Radical government led by Fernando de la Rua ("Que se vayan todos!"). It was also the feeling that culminated in the protests that outsted Bolivian President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada in September 2003. Admittedly these three examples all refer to what may with hindsight be seen temporary episodes, corrective incidents rather than permanent defections from the main stream of political practice in a democracy. But at a minimum these three upheavals (occurring quite independently of each other, but all within a compressed time span) invite comparative investigation, and challenge standard models of democratic "consolidation". The third section of this paper will therefore revisit the theoretical possibilities of "dysfunctionality" that have been sketched out in this section, in the light of some contemporary and ongoing political experiences.

Three "Dysfunctional" Democracies? Colombia, Venezuela and Argentina

It is not difficult to demonstrate that the electoral democracies of Colombia, Venezuela, and Argentina have recently been functioning poorly, both in terms of their decision-making procedures and with regard to the quality (and legitimacy) of major policy outputs. But more than this would be required to establish their "dysfunctionality" as that term was formulated in the previous section. First, it needs to be shown that endemic underperformance is attributable to political causes lodged in the democratization process itself. Yet Colombia's problems could

be attributed to the narco-guerilla challenge; Venezuela's to the anti-institutional practices of a former coup leader; and Argentina's to the failure of the 1991 Convertibility Plan. In other words, we need to consider in each case whether systemically poor performance is attributable to cases external to the democratic political realm. Second, it also needs to be shown that current failings are in-built and recurrent, not transient and corrigible. It also needs to be established that such failings reach the necessary standard of "dysfunctionality" (i.e. beyond any reasonable threshold for "really existing" democratic shortcomings). This section reviews the three listed experiences from that standpoint. Argentina is left to last, and given the most attention, because the crisis of 2002 comes closest to justifying this classification as a "dysfunctional" democratic regime[12].

The Colombian system of regular competitive elections is unbroken all the way back to 1958, with much earlier origins. As a Schumpeterian system of elite circulation it has been fully operative since the late 1970s. Colombia's traditional political parties are still deeply embedded in the society (in contrast to Venezuela), and in the 1990s serious efforts have been made to reform the Constitution, and to strengthen the democratic character of the "rules of the game". Some important interests have achieved and sustained effective forms of group representation and participation in public decision-making.

Successive Colombian governments have much of the time generated reasonably coherent and appropriate public policies (at least in the key area of economic policy); and the presidential election of 2002 offered the voters a structured choice, and generated a clear-cut outcome (so too did the plebiscite of 2003). And yet the dysfunctional side of the political process has also become increasingly difficult to overlook. These undercurrents can be grouped according to the three main functions of the political system outlined in the previous section.

Concerning the "aggregation of interests", it is particularly apparent in Colombia (although also true in all political systems) that only some interests are included, and that some are heavily over-represented. At what point does this distorted pattern of representation become "dysfunctional"? Clearly there are significant regions of the country, and organized sectors of the society, whose interests are not processed through the democratic political system not at least in any conventional way. The two guerrilla armies and the paramilitary forces constitute palpable evidence of certain omissions. The very high and continuous rates at which journalists and trade union activists are assassinated places Colombia well beyond any "normal" democracy

12 Bolivia is so recently destablised that it may be too soon to make any assessment.

in terms of the physical risks accompanying the pursuit of regular civil society activities. The high proportion of municipalities recorded as, either partially or completely beyond the control of the elected government indicates that not only the insurgent groups, but much wider sectors of the society are routinely unable to promote their interests through the democratic process.

Colombian political system can be classified as beyond any reasonable threshold of "dysfunctionality".

This is a very longstanding state of affairs in rural Colombia, and it also has some urban correlates which may be dated back, for example, to the assassination of Presidential contender Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948. Very high rates of abstention in successive electoral contests reinforces the sense that a large proportion of the Colombian population regularly behave as if excluded from the political process. Tit-for-tat massacres and expulsions have long characterized the Colombian "Violencia", but in recent years the massive numbers of displaced persons has converted this from a peripheral to a central failing of the entire political system. In addition, there is also an abundant literature on the over-inclusion of small illicit groups (the "extraditables", the drug-financed congressmen, the corrupt or easily intimidated judges, etc). Without exhaustively evaluating all this evidence we can sum up by saying that in Colombia the aggregation of interests seems seriously and endemically distorted.

Concerning the production of needed public policies, obviously if inte-rests are poorly aggregated policy choices are also likely to be distorted. This is easy to argue in general, but problematic to demonstrate in any particular case. How can we determine what is a needed public policy, and how can we demonstrate that it is not being produced? In the Colombian case, some minimum standard of support for the rule of law would seem the obvious candidate for consideration. One indicator that this is not just an arbitrary or minor deficiency is the fact that Colombia has recently become accustomed to the existence of over three thousand kidnap victims, held indefinitely and without any a-pparent redress[13].

The murder rate was down 20% on 2002, at only 22,969 homicides, and abductions were down 32%, to only 2,043). This informal system of coercion has become so institutionalized that a specialized radio station has

13 At the beginning of 2004 President Uribe issued official statistics indicating the progress made by his administration in the previous year.

been established to transmit family messages to the detainees. One of the minor candidates in the 2002 presidential election (Ingrid Betancourt) is among the victims, and her family was forced to conduct her campaign in her absence. Two years later she has still not been either released or rescued. No other electoral democracy in the world has resigned itself to such a flagrant and endemic betrayal of the rule of law. Individual kidnappings can be regarded as problems extrinsic to the political system, but when kidnapping reaches this scale and becomes tacitly "institutionalized" this must be regarded as a dysfunction that is politically embedded. Perhaps it would be too much to claim on this basis that the Colombian state has in overall terms failed to fulfill the essential functions of the production of needed public policies, but there is a significant dysfunctionality here, and it appears to be built into the current political system as a whole.

As a result of these two deep-rooted systemic deficiencies, there is also a question mark over the third "function" of the regime - the legitimation of policy outcomes. This was particularly apparent during the recent Samper and Pastrana administrations. Various central aspects of the Samper administration's output were challenged and contested, both internationally and domestically, on the grounds that he had only secured election through illicit funding from the narco sector. It proved almost impossible for his administration to overcome its reputation for corrupt dealing, and policy drifted until the 1998 election provided an opportunity for renewal. Unfortunately the Pastrana administration fared little better.

This time it was perceived weakness in relation to the FARC (which secured a large demilitarized zone where the central authorities withdrew their claims sovereignty without gaining any worthwhile concessions in return) that sapped the credibility of the administration and undermined its claim to legitimacy. Two successive administrations that are unable to win consent for their major policy initiatives begin to suggest the presence of a systemic dysfunction. However, it must be recognized that the 2002 election produced an at least temporary corrective to this tendency. For the time being, the Uribe administration is producing policies which (whatever their other limitations) seem to represent a fairly coherent package of measures that are designed to address underlying societal problems, and that enjoy an apparently reasonable level of legitimation and indeed popular support. So the immediately available evidence does not seem strong enough to justify the conclusion that the entire Colombian political system can be classified as beyond any reasonable threshold of "dysfunctionality". What this brief review indicates is only that Colombian political reality can be located somewhere approaching that broad threshold zone.

The Venezuelan political system has been under-performing for a decade or more, and its dysfunctionality became increasingly evident after the frustrated coup of April 2002. The headline events speak for themselves the detention of the President, a false announcement of his resignation, the closure of Congress all reversed after a day; followed by a general strike intended to force his resignation, which last for about two months and inflicted great economic damage, without changing the administration; international mediation which revolves around a possible revocatory referendum, but which has also not produce on institutional salida. The evidence is unmistakable that this is a severe crises of government, of regime, and potentially also of the state itself. So clearly, in Venezuela, the democratic system is under-performing, or indeed malfunctioning. The main doubt about whether this exemplifies a "dysfunctional democracy" is a doubt about the durability of the existing constitutional order. The prevailing "rules of the game" may have lost their authority.

From the theoretical perspective sketched above we need to look behind the current crisis, and adopt a long-term view. Once again we can review the three inter-related functions discussed above. First, concerning the aggregation of interests, it is evident that Venezuela, like Colombia, has a long history as a constitutional regime with freedom of association and all the usual pre-requisites of pluralism. Accordingly, there is a rich and diverse array of interest groups, civic and communal bodies, voluntary associations and the like. The business federation, FEDECAMARAS, and the trade union confederation, the CTV, are among the best known and most active expressions of this civic culture. However, it must also be recorded that, even before it became a pluralist democracy, Venezuela was already a rentier state.

The public authorities received an oil revenue that vastly exceeded their alternative sources of finance, both in volume and in ease of collection. So the executive branch always possessed an autonomous distributive capacity that could be used to reward supporters and overcome resistance throughout the society. With the coming of democracy these resources were also available to build first the dominant party and later the rival components of the party system, so that most interests became captured or at least penetrated and suborned by the state and its officeholders. This was the so-called "partidocracia" that prevailed in Venezuela for about forty years after 1958. Of course there was a two-way flow within this society, and the parties aggregated interests as well as controlling them. However, it is commonly asserted that over time the system became more sclerotic, and it is apparent that these pluralist mechanisms of interest representation became increasingly ineffective and discredited.

What pluralists would describe as Venezuela's "civic culture" could

also be analysed under the less flattering designation of a politicized corporatism. This is a complex and disputed history, of course, but what matters for our purposes is simply that the bulk of the Venezuelan electorate came to believe that this partidocracia was irredeemably failing them, and that some very different system of interest intermediation and citizen representation would be needed if their hopes and preferences were to be taken into account by future cohorts of elected leadership.

So, rightly or wrongly, they elected Hugo Chavez as their new President, and they followed his prescriptions for the rewriting of their democratic constitution. The "Fifth Republic" came into existence as an explicit repudiation of the old parties and their systems of interest aggregation. A much more direct and personalized style of rule was introduced (reminiscent of what Guillermo O'Donnell writing avant la lettre, had designated as a "delegative democracy"). The weekly program "Aló Presidente" aptly symbolized the way in which intermediary associations were to be circumvented by a supposedly direct right of appeal from the citizen to his President.

What both partidocracia and presidential populism have confirmed through experience is that neither of these systems can be relied upon to function as an effective way of aggregating interests, inducing coalitions and trade-offs, and therefore converting raw societal demands into higher level more synthetic programs and policy options. In Venezuela the root problem in both cases seems to be the excessive arbitrariness and discretionality enjoyed by both types of elected ruler, given their access to the state's oil rents. The result has been that in this case interest representation has displayed scant tendency to function along anything like the lines postulated in liberal pluralist theory, and still shows no signs of moving in that direction any time soon. Instead, electoral alternation in office can apparently persist in tandem with praetorian conflict, and polarization at the societal level. If indeed the present political regime does not collapse under the weight of these contradictions it will evidently persist in promoting a highly dysfunctional system for the processing of collective demands.

Second, concerning the production of necessary public policies, it would seem to follow that not much of this is to be expected within such a system, however procedurally correct the electoral process may be. The "oil curse" is said to generate a pattern of political decision-making that systematically wastes resources and opportunities, and that systematically postpones less disastrous alternatives into the indefinite future. Actually, this characterization is too sweeping and indiscriminate. In the early years of Venezuela's democracy a range of quite ambitious and arguably positive policy reforms were implemented (e.g. land reforms, some welfare programs, etc.). Where opportunities were missed it

was sometimes because illusions about the viability of easier alternatives (a vice that is in no way confined to Venezuela, or to rentier states). Even in the last decade of the partidocracia it is possible to identify some important initiatives that were plausibly intended to address the country's underlying problems (direct elections of state governors, for example, and perhaps some economic reforms).

The main reason for hesit ating to apply the label "dysfunctional democracy" in these circunstances is uncertainty over whether Venezuela does at present still have a "regime" let alone a "democratic" regime.

So there is room for debate precisely how far the Venezuelan democratic system has shown itself functionally incapable of generating needed public policies. Critics of Chavez would say that his administration has made this problem far worse than it was before. My provisional conclusion is that current Venezuelan politics do appear strikingly dysfunctional in terms of outcomes (not quite the same as policy outputs), but that there is still room for debate whether this severe underperformance is a necessary product of the "Fifth Republic" version of democracy The dysfunctionality could be partly contingent, and only partly inbuilt.

Third, we have the legitimation of policy outcomes. For about the first thirty years of electoral democracy in Venezuela this did not seem to be a major failing of the system. Since the early 1980s the evidence of collective repudio to successive major acts of government has become progressively more unmistakable. The Caracazo of 1989 followed an electoral victory in which the winning candidate immediately proceeded to repudiate all the expectations he had stimulated during the campaign. The failed coup attempt of 1992 built on that disenchantment, and earned Hugo Chavez the popular support he would need to destroy the partidocracia. Following his accession to office in 1998 there were a couple of years in which it seemed that the new constitutional order might command sufficient popular support (in particular from previously marginalized and excluded sectors of society) to neutralize passive resistance and convert itself into "the only game in town"..

Since April 2002, if not before, however, the open evidence of strikes, street protests, and attempts to oust the President from office either by direct action or by revocatory referendum indicate that any proposals or public policy initiatives identified with his administration no longer generate broad consent. In the short run it is hard to see how any political leader, either from the current administration or

from the opposition, can hope to secure legitimate support for whatever policies they may attempt to implement, whether they come to power by electoral means or otherwise. This is the most striking evidence of dysfunctionality in the current Venezuelan political system, and it is hard to see how it can be brought to an end any time soon.

The main reason for hesitating to apply the label "dysfunctional democracy" in these circumstances is uncertainty over whether Venezuela does at present still have a "regime" (in the sense defined previously) let alone a "democratic" regime. De-institutionalization has reached the point where there is now real doubt whether even the most basic rules of the democratic political game command much respect from antagonists caught up in a pre-civil war type confrontation. Moreover, switching back to a longer term historical perspective, it is easier to trace the decay or regression of the Venezuelan democratic regime than to establish that the fundamental causes were rooted within the original political system. At least some of the repudio chronicled above could be attributed instead to the long-term effects of reliance on a limited oil surplus to meet the expectations of a rapidly expanding and urbanizing electorate.

The third of our case studies come closest to exemplifying the characteristics of a "dysfunctional democracy" set out in our proposed regime subtype. For over a year after the forced departure of President de la Rua in December 2001 Argentina seemed to present a remarkably vivid instance of a regime that combined formal democratic characteristics with startling systemic dysfunctions. It is easier in this case than in the cases of Colombia and Venezuela to attribute most of these dysfunctions to the workings of the political system itself. However, even in this apparently paradigmatic instance, a note of caution is warranted. We have specified that for a regime to be classified as "dysfunctional" its failings must also be "inbuilt and recurrent".

Yet anyone who has followed the extreme variations of Argentine's political fortunes over the past generation or more must be aware how quickly one condition can be supplanted by another, each projecting an appearance of durability that proves ephemeral. After an initial burst of collective protest and street violence the absence of open conflict since about mid-2002 is a striking feature of the current situation that disconfirms "praetorian" expectations and requires a fuller analysis. Given this history, it is too soon to conclude that would we can currently observe represents a permanent and final verdict on the sub-type of democracy that has been established in Argentina. All that follows is a provisional assessment pointing in the direction of a "dysfunctional" democracy.

First, then, let us consider the "aggregation of interests" in contemporary Argentina. To begin with it

needs to be recognized that Argentina has long displayed a highly elaborated system of interests group politics, which certainly antedated the return to democracy in 1983, and which in fact contained a hybrid of associations linked to the old landed oligarchy, combined with intensely organized corporatist structures promoted under Peronism, also including many post-Peronist organized interests that were cultivated by successive anti-Peronist governments between 1955 and 1973.

Whereas in democratic Venezuela all such groupings were subjected to sustained pressure and control from the ruling parties, in democratic Argentina these disparate and clashing interests have never been subjected to comparably sustained institutional restraints. To the contrary, they have been accustomed to pressing their sectional demands just as far as their bargaining power would allow, bending the formal and legal institutions wherever necessary, and conducting a war of "all against all" that sometimes expressed itself in the form of hyper-inflation, sometimes in breach of contract, and sometimes in direct action, including both violent protests and dramatic episodes of capital flight. Whereas Colombia and Venezuela relied on competing parties to structure their political conflicts, in Argentina sectional clashes were through what some have referred to as "movimentismo".

Peronism, in particular, was never just a conventional democratic political party. It was a verticalist movement (with strong labor and corporate components) that was accustomed to bidding for dominance through multiple forms of struggle - strikes, direct action, and machine politics quite as much as electoral competition. Movimentismo squeezes out the intermediate buffer that (in a conventional democracy) separate state from society. It respects no institutional constraints, and construes political conflict in "all or nothing" terms. After Peronism was outlawed (in 1955) it had no reason to observe any conventional "ethic of responsibility", or to curb the militancy of its diverse constituent parts.

All this disaggregated interest group politics preceded the return to democracy, and persisted, finding new forms of expression and new ways to evade collective responsibility, throughout the twenty years since 1983. It needs to be added that different interests had different power resources, so that not all are equally responsible for this collective disorder, but over time virtually all participated in it to the extent that they could. It is also true that for a few years in the early 1990s the first Menem administration succeeded in creating the impression that the withdrawal of the state and the wild privatization of the economy might be creating a new system of market disciplines that would restrain "rent seeking" and channel interest group energy away from politics and into competitive economic activities. The predatory and destructive logic of interest

group conflict was disguised by agreement on one unquestionable collective commitment - to maintain the 1991 Convertibility Plan (each peso freely convertible to one dollar).

But this apparent suspension of the potential for praetorian conflict in support of an overarching public good was only achieved by virtue of an equal suspension of normal discussion and reflection about the basis of public policy, and it was only sustainable so long as the rest of the world chose to provide the additional infusions of credit on which it depended. When this external credit ran out (in December 2001) and the illusion was shattered de-institutionalised sectional conflict erupted on what for a traumatic interlude seemed a still more unmanageable scale. Sine the end of 2002 this appearance of anarchy has abated, and the Peronist party has re-emerged with a striking electoral hegemony. But arguably this is not a stable equilibrium, and on the past record all judgment must surely be provisional. It can certainly be argued that under the surface the Argentine political system may be more disarticulated than ever. If the coherent "aggregation of interests" provides a yardstick for evaluating a political system then Argentina's current electoral democracy has recently manifested about as clear an instance of dysfunctionality as one is likely to find in any "really existing" political regime.

From this rather explicit "deficiency" analysis, it follows that all Argentine regimes, including the democracy of the past twenty years, have strikingly and repetitively underperformed on their second function: the production of needed public policies. Of course, the thesis that Argentina's progressive relative decline throughout the twentieth century must have something to do with the nature of its political system (or perhaps more broadly its "political culture") is not new, and is not mainly focussed on identifying flaws within Argentine democracy. Nevertheless, after twenty years of competitive elections, the decline has continued as before, and perhaps even accelerated. The record suggests that something may be radically amiss with the way the country generates its public policies over time, and democracy has not served as a corrective to this deficiency. Colombia and Venezuela also present serious and chronic evidence of under-performance, but in Argentina in contrast to these other two countries it is harder to shift responsibility for these failing to some non-political explanation (like drug-trafficking or oil dependency). In this case it seems that the clear evidence of sustained policy under-performance is at least partially traceable to features of the underlying political process.

A variety of political explanations can be proposed - some of them concerned with aspects of the institutional structures (the perverse workings of the federal system, the verticalist traditions of the Peronist party, the

classical defects of hyper-presidentialism, failings of the party system); and some concerned with extra-institutional factors that may be located in the "political class", or even in the "political culture". In the aftermath of the December 2001 debacle all these analytically separate lines of interpretation tended to be mixed together into an undifferentiated condemnation of the political system as a whole, and an indiscriminate pessimism about its scope for reform, or its capacity to produce any kind of public benefits. This collective outlook, (summed up in the popular slogan of 2002 "que se vayan todos"), is not a firm basis for assigning Argentina to the subtype of a "dysfunctional democracy". It can coexist with survey evidence indicating a continued favorable attitude towards democracy in the abstract, and it does not necessarily signify the imminent demise of the current constitutional regime. But it is datum that needs to be given due weight by external analysts attempting to diagnose the failings of that system.

Any overall diagnosis of Argentine politics has to face the problem of volatility. Observations based on the two years of the de la Rua administration would be drastically superseded by the re-evaluation following its collapse. Observations based on the interim Dunhalde administration are equally likely to be superseded in short order. In face the first nine months of President Kirchner's nearly elected government have apparently disconfirmed many of the negative judgements made at the time of his election. There are scant grounds for believing that this political volatility is about to disappear, so it may well be that present observations will prove as evanescent as their predecessors. Nevertheless, an overall diagnosis cannot be based on disregard for these short-term sequences. So the best course available is to offer a tentative assessment derived from recent experience, qualified by a separate set of observations taking a longer term view.

Consequently the most recent elections were about styles of government rather than about issues or programs. Personalism reins at all levels in the system of representation.

During 2003 a series of electoral contests reinvigorated the Peronist party, marginalized or eliminated its competitors, and demonstrated that the Argentine electorate was still willing to turn out in force, and to choose its political leaders in accordance with more or less standard democratic procedures. The idea that all politicians had been equally tarnished by the events of 2001/2002, and were therefore incapable of eliciting popular support, was shown to be false. Not only did the electoral process relegitimize an apparently discredited politi-

cal class, it also generated a new administration capable of formulating a range of new public policies, many of which seem to enjoy substantial (if possibly temporary) legitimacy. Some of this renewed confidence must simply express a rebound from the climate of demoralization and indeed despair prevailing in 2002, but at least in the short-term there is evidence that the democratic process can serve to restore governability even in the most adverse of settings.

On the longer term view, however, the chronic "under performance" of the political system will not be easy to correct. Most of the procedural characteristics that were identified as key flaws of the political regime seem likely to persist (and may even become intensified) in the present and the near future. For example, the PJ has not once sine 1983 managed to conduct a party convention or leadership election without manipulating the rules to serve the interests of whoever happens to be in charge at the time[14]. Consequently the most recent elections (like those that preceded them) were about styles of government rather than about issues or programs. Personalism reins at all levels in the system of representation. This makes it very difficult to agree on orderly or consensual procedures for negotiating either the distribution of posts, or the division of labor between the executive, the Congress, the parties, and the provincial governors. Impartial rules are no more likely to restrain the scramble for advantage in the future than they did in the past. Politicians operating within this framework have no incentive to contemplate any for of self-criticism. This makes it very difficult to seriously analyze in public the grave problems and policy dilemmas confronting the country, and in the absence of realistic public debate it is hard to produce a collective capacity to steer away from future disasters. Citizens therefore understand their misfortunes in terms of the untrustworthiness and corruption of their political leaders, which in turn undermines the legitimation of most public policy choices.

Thus the problems of legitimation that were so visible during the Alfonsín administrations, but that were masked by consensus on the Convertibility Plan during the 1990s, re-emerged with such force under de la Rua that he was driven from office, and the country went through five Presidents in a single week. The street protests have subsequently subsided, and for the time being at least the specter of violent conflict and on official resort to repression has been conjured away. But if we switch the focus of analysis from explicit manifestations of repudio to the procedures that in most regimes generate at least tacit

14 That is why the Peronists ended up in 2003 with three rival candidates, none of whom were properly endorsed by the party they claimed to lead.

consent, it appears to many observers that in Argentina these routines are more fragile than ever, especially since it appears that the old political class remains intact and unrepentant.

Standing back from the immediate present, therefore, Argentina still presents the strongest available evidence from South America tending to confirm the potential utility of "dysfunctional democracy" as a regime subtype. We have identified some real and recurrent political phenomena that correspond fairly well to the specifications of this heuristic category. Since we are dealing with an "ideal type" it is not necessary to establish a perfect identity between the empirical case material and the properties of the theoretical model. We need to guard against over-interpreting an immediate and still relatively fluid situation in terms of a "reified" abstraction. Nevertheless, both theory and experience point in a similar direction. The concluding section considers the implications of this result.

Conclusion: A Tentative Evaluation of this Regime Subtype

Is "dysfunctional" democracy a viable subtype in our classification of democratic regimes, and if so, does it help or mislead when we evaluate contemporary South American democracies? This article is tentative and exploratory on both points. The first section tried to specify the restrictive conditions under which the term could be applied, and to show how it differs from the various alternative formulations that also carry the implication of deficiency or incompleteness. As a theoretical construct it may be better delimited than, say, "delegative" or "unconsolidated" democracy. It fills a space in the spectrum of possibilities, and it has explanatory potential. But the space it occupies is not large, and it is unlikely to contain many clear-cut exemplars. Thus the subtype might still be worth having for heuristic purposes even if empirical examples are a rarity. Much depends upon whether the space it occupies is in practice so constrained that nothing durable can lodge there.

We can only refer to a dysfunctional political regime if we can demonstrate that this is a durable condition, with a systematic tendency to reproduce itself. Discussions of shortterm or currently ongoing episodes of very poor performance are therefore not sufficient to confirm the empirical existence of such a subtype. It therefore needs to be demonstrated that recent failings to aggregate interests, generate needed public policies, and legitimate outcomes are not just temporary lapses that can be readily corrected through the next round of democratic decision-making. These failings have to be both severe, systemic, and endemic. Therefore they must be traceable back throughout the democratization process, and some account must be given of how they are reproduced over time, and why corrective learning processes do not tend to develop.

Unless these demanding standards can be met the theoretical possibility of a "dysfunctional" democracy will remain just an empty box.

The second section attempted to clarify that by reviewing the three contemporary South American experiences that come closest to matching my specifications for a "dysfunctional" regime. In the case of Venezuela the dysfunctionality of the Chavez administration and its Fifth Republic model of governance was clearly established. But its durability is very much in question, and if it does survive it may well be by abandoning its residual claims as a democracy. In the case of Colombia experience may not match the subtype for the opposite reason. Despite all the problems of weakness and uneven coverage that have long been endemic to Colombian democracy, the regime never completely lost its capacity to react and rebuild itself. Arguably it was always both functioning and functional (though besieged), and perhaps the election of 2002 signaled a restoration of its faltering capacities.

Colombia seems likely to continue to operate as at least a procedurally minimal electoral regime, but if so its democratic credentials and its institutional resilience may enable it to row back from a condition of endemic dysfunctionality. So that leaves Argentina as the best available candidate to exemplify the proposed subtype. The President and the Vice-President both abdicated in mid-term, the subsequent elections were brought forward because the interim president lacked a mandate to take necessary tough decisions, and the rules of the game remain subject to extraordinary uncertainty. Still, it remains plausible to classify Argentina as a procedurally minimal democracy, and to anticipate that public office will continue to rotate in the accordance with the outcome of periodic competitive elections. Between elections, however, the aggregation of interests, the production of needed public policies, and the legitimation of decisions have all fallen very far short of conventional standards for at least the past twenty years, and seem likely to continue to do so. Severe and endemic underperformance can reasonably be anticipated, with the failings of the political system as a root cause, and with the system's capacity to react and rebuild itself as a conspicuous absence. One might speculate eventually that this state of affairs must be unstable. Either the democratic regime should start functioning a little better, or something else must in due course take its place. But Argentine experience suggests that this desenlace can be repeatedly postponed.

These three sketch case studies - and especially the Argentine case - provide some empirical foundation for the attempt to construct a new subtype of democratic regime, that is durable but with severe built-in deficiencies. However, neither the built-in nature of the deficiencies, not the durability of this type of regime, has been established in this article. What are the poli-

tical foundations that could generate a "dysfunctional" subtype of a democratic regime in South America? One possibility would be that certain characteristics of the "political class" might be identified as recurrent and structural sources of vulnerability in the way some of these regimes operate. In the Argentine case, for example, this stratum of specialist political operatives had to be constituted after fifty years of strong participation by the military, and in the wake of the "dirty war", which severely crippled a generation o political activists.

The civilian political specialists who have operated the democratic system since 1983 are a very distinctive social category much marked by the long-standing prevalence of Peronist styles of recruitment, socialization, and interaction. It should be possible to develop this observation into an empi-rically grounded account of how the main "actors" shaping Argentina's democratization have interpreted their roles, and how those interpretations might generate recurrently dysfunctional outcomes. This would obviously require extensive elaboration, and would also need to be demonstrated in comparative terms (e.g. by comparing an contrasting the Argentine and Chilean, or the Argentine and Uruguayan) political classes.

The chronic persistence of severe dysfunctionality over time probably requires a broad enquiry into the ways in which both political operatives and citizens respond to recurrently bad outcomes

Moreover, it would not suffice merely to demonstrate that the starting point was unfavorable. The deficiency analysis of a regime requires identifying the mechanisms that reproduce its failings over time, and that screen out the emergence of more effective and successful alternatives, in the Argentine case, for example, it would be necessary to explain how failed or discredited leaders (such as Alfonsín and Menem) have been able to retain their pivotal roles and block the rise of potentially more functional alternatives. Of course this is not just a question of personal leadership, but needs to be studied in the broader context of recruitment, socialization and rotation within the "political class" as a whole.

Since we are also dealing with procedurally democratic regimes the analysis would also need to explain why periodic competitive elections do not serve as a more effective corrective to chronic underperformance. It is, of course, well known that some types of electoral process are more likely than others to produce gridlock (e.g., the frustration or fragmentation of citizen demands). In addition, to specific rules

of the electoral process it may also be necessary to consider broader features of the system of representation (e.g., the role of state patronage and illicit finance) and of the party system. Indeed, the chronic persistence of severe dysfunctionality over time probably requires a broad enquiry into the (presumably perverse) ways in which both political operatives and citizens respond to recurrently bad outcomes. Some kind of "negative learning" mechanism must be involved.

This text originated as a conference paper attempting to account for the "turbulence" and indeed malfunctioning of various new democratic regimes in South America since the late 1990s. It has attempted a holistic view, and it proceeded inductively. As a result the interpretations presented here have been quite tentative and provisional (subject to revision as new evidence emerges, for example in Bolivia or Peru). Theoretical reflection indicates the possible utility of a new regime subtype - but so far this is only an exploratory exercise, not least because the three case studies are in important respects divergent, and in any case may not fully validate the typology.

In discussion this approach has elicited at least two useful lines of criticism. The first asserts that the chronic underperformance characterizing most of these regimes is mainly attributable to a set of causes that are common to the region but external to its political institutions. Economic liberalization, globalization, the dismantling of inward-looking models of economic organization etc. have drastically reduced the scope for the political allocation of resources and values in all these societies precisely at the same time that democratization has been attempted. From this standpoint the inability to aggregate interests, or to formulate and legitimize adequate public policies, is rooted in the new economic model, rather than in supposed failings of the "political class" or their "rules of the game". A strong version of this thesis asserts that for most citizens most of the time democratic political processes are not so much "dysfunctional" as "irrelevant". They simply do not have much bearing on the issues of most concern to the medium voter. A small stratum of professional politicians (and academic analysts) may be deeply absorbed with the intricacies of legislative procedure, the circulation of electoral elites, and the refinements of successive political reforms, but none of this affects the broader community of interests. For this reason democratic procedures can continue indefinitely despite their poor outcomes, sine they serve a minority interest and are disregarded (or circumvented) by majority opinion.

This argument has a certain plausibility and can be supported by some significant evidence and examples. However, at least with reference to the three case studies considered here it is not tenable to dismiss national political processes as "irrelevant" to most of the population. The polarized

partisan conflict in Venezuela; the issue of peace or war in Colombia; and the structure of public policy alternatives in Argentina; all these national political controversies carry profound implications for the stability and direction of the societies in question. Politics matters, in such conditions, and citizens concerned with their own interests can hardly be indifferent to the choices made on their beliefs by their respective governments.

The second line of criticism concerns the emphasis on holistic assessments of "national" regimes. It is also possible to explore the hypothesis of "dysfunctionality" at a more disaggregated level. For example, an analysis of Argentine political processes and outcomes at the provincial level might generate stronger and more sustained evidence of dysfunctionality than at the national considered here. Recruitment and socialization of political operatives in the localities may provide more evidence for the "political class" interpretation then when national leadership is considered in vacuo. Similarly, in order to explain the failings of Venezuelan partidocracia, or Colombian institutional weakness, the most relevant level of analysis may be more disaggregated. It certainly makes sense to picture South American political processes in terms of a succession of overlapping (and often poorly integrated) "partial" regimes, some of which can be more dysfunctional than others[15].

This line of criticism offers a promising way to develop the hypothesis of "dysfunctionalism" presented here. In defense of the "holistic" standpoint of this article it is not necessary to reject the idea of partial, fragmented, and overlapping regimes within any given national political system. The only qualification would be that such local regimes are only relevant to the analysis if they do indeed affect overall political performance. Purely local variants of clientelism or interest group capture are to be expected in even the most effective and legitimate of "really existing" democracies.

Summing up, the provisional verdict of these three case studies is rather mixed. The heuristic category of a "dysfunctional" subtype within the spectrum of democratic regimes has both a defensible rationale, and some empirical referents. But in theory the category is restricted and perhaps unstable. In practice there is as yet no solid and durable confirmation of its applicability. This text concludes with two arguments that the exercise is nevertheless worth pursuing. First, every ideal type is an abstraction from more hybrid experiences. This subtype isolates and highlights interconnected features of observable experience that are

15 Thus, for example, central banks and tax agencies can be geared up to a high level of functional effectiveness, but without delivering the anticipated outcomes, if the justice system, the municipalities, the interest associations etc. remain invertebrate or captive to sectional obstructionism.

not given enough attention under alternative formulations. Second, the best test of a model is not whether it completely encapsulates a single experience, but whether it partially captures regularities that are more widely present.
Of the twelve electoral democracies in contemporary South America this analysis has focused on three of the best candidates for designation as dysfunctional democracies. But in fact only three (Brazil, Chile and perhaps Uruguay) are currently operating more or less normally. For the time being, at least, these democratic regimes are delivering relatively coherent procedures and outcomes notwithstanding the need to operate within the constraints arising from economic openness. The remaining six display at least some of the tendencies highlighted by the subtype proposed in this article. So, at least certain elements of "dysfunctionality" can be detected in a majority of South America's current procedurally democratic republics.

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