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Democracy is today Latin America's most typical regime: although marred by occasional setbacks and periodic uncertainties, the protection of key political and civil rights is by and large guaranteed and, as a rule, the armed forces have been subjected to civilian control. Not only has democracy spread out, it also endures: since the late seventies, few re-democratized countries have collapsed and turned once more authoritarian. By way of contrast, in the 1945-77 period there were approximately twenty democratic breakdowns. This largely positive picture, however, clashes with the poor social conditions that still characterize the area: in the last years unemployment has increased and the informal sector has expanded. The dramatic socio-economic inequality that troubles the region refuses to go away and has worsened in some cases. Furthermore, poverty levels remain high, as does indigence. The former affects forty Latin Americans out of a hundred, the latter over fifteen (Cepal, 2007).

Acute economic and social grievances are associated to the appearance of violent protest and domestic armed conflict. In the last fifty years, Latin America has witnessed both the flourishing of military governments and numerous internal conflicts and armed guerrilla movements. Dictatorship, weak democracies and unequal societies have facilitated the development of conflict in the region. In fact, the agenda of rebel groups, from the Cuban revolution of the late 1950s, the rural guerrilla movements of the 1960s in various Latin American countries, the Southern Cone urban guerrillas in the early 1970s, the Central American rebel groups in the 1980s and others, often included the redistribution of land and wealth in addition to specific political demands. However, after re-democratization, and in spite of precarious economic conditions, domestic armed conflicts have subsided in most Latin American countries. Although in a few cases the legacy of authoritarianism and state-induced repression, left-wing armed opposition and open civil war is still at work, the constant proliferation of armed violence by a variety of groups, sometimes linked to the state and sometimes linked to the social opposition, has considerably lessened and, by and large, a peaceful political debate has substituted for violent conflict almost everywhere.

In sum, the expectation that the return of democracy would bring about peace and justice has been only partially fulfilled. A cursory look at recent events suggests that democracy has made a difference in securing the basic right to escape the physical violence of domestic warfare and armed conflicts. However, the new regimes have not been as successful in making the life of Latin Americans more dignified and decorous, improving living conditions and reducing poverty and unemployment.

This essay attempts to provide a better understanding of this uneven performance. It argues that the impact of democracy in Latin America has developed at different tempos. Over the last decades, democratic elites were often able to reduce or eliminate armed conflicts in a relatively rapid fashion, by offering a series of political concessions to the opposition, especially communication channels with the government and social and political rewards. The effect of democracy on social policies, on the contrary, is mediated by the existence, and progressive

strengthening, of social organizations and political parties that favor a redistribution of income in society. The emergence of such parties, mostly left-leaning, require, as a rule, longer periods of democratic rule. Thus, in most countries of the area the weakness of the democratic record has acted as an obstacle to the emergence of redistributive social policies and accounts for the permanence of higher levels of poverty and social inequality.

This work is divided into six sections. In the first we define the concept of democracy and "democratic stock" and measure their presence and strength in Latin America. The second section illustrates the development and characteristics of social policies in the subcontinent by way of the means invested and the results that were achieved. Then we associate "democratic stock" with the diverse social policy performances by major Latin American countries and discuss the findings. In the fourth section we review the experience of domestic armed conflicts in the region and subsequently analyze the ways democracy interacts with conflict resolution or its persistence. In the final section we synthesize and comment our major conclusions and assess their significance for the study of the consequences of democracy.

Ways and tempo of democratic impact in Latin America

Time plays a key role in assessing the effects of democratic reforms. One problem is the amount of time required for the expected reforms to make their appearance. The immediate short-term impact of new democracies may be quite different from their long-term, more durable effects (Carbone, 2008). However, full and durable effects may also take place promptly. Accordingly, the tempo of democratic reforms, that is the rapidity, or rate of speed, at which the consequences of democracy occur and become manifest, may vary considerably. This is so, in the first place, because it takes different amounts of time to accomplish different tasks: for instance, it has been observed that it takes a new democracy six month to complete the formal process of constitutional reform; at least six years to stimulate a general sense that things are moving up as a result of economic reform; and over sixty years to provide the social foundations which transform the constitution and the economy from fair-weather institutions to all-weather institutions which can withstand the storms generated within and without (Dahrendorf, 1990: 92). Others believe that at least 20 years of democratic experience may be required for an egalitarian effect to be noticeable (Muller, 1988).

In an attempt to shed some light on these issues, a growing number of scholars have considered not only the presence of a democratic government in any given country, but also its democratic history and its experience with this form of political organization. For them it is the institutional duration of a democracy that matters, more than its current democratic status. In brief, the "stock of democracy", which is the accumulated effects of the historical legacies of democracy, should be of central concern if we wish to understand the causal effects of a regime type on a variety of current outcomes, social, cultural, political and economic. If regimes are historically informed phenomena, rather than contemporary variables, their effects unfold over time,

sometimes a great deal of time, and these temporal effects are cumulative (Gerring et al., 2005: 325). In fact, if sustained, democracy may encourage more participation and voice for underprivileged groups, through political parties, and the spread of civil society and non-governmental organizations (Nelson, 2007).

However, democracies also produce durable short-term effects, which do not require the accumulation of significant amounts of democratic stock. For example, the established channels of communication with the opposition that typically characterize this form of government may contribute to reduce the levels of political warfare and hostility, by facilitating the adoption of political and social agreements. Schmitter and Santiso provide an interpretation of the way democracies may consolidate that is relevant to our observations: "the rhythm […] may depend less on lengthy and complex processes of intergenerational learning and cultural accommodation by mass populations than upon rather immediate and simple effort to trap [….] representatives and rulers into competing with each other according to mutually acceptable rules and in the process rendering themselves accountable to the citizenry at large. Finding rules as quickly as possible that elites will respect and citizens will regard as legitimate becomes the key to success" (1998: 83). If democracies may consolidate quickly, domestic political violence, as a distinct output, may also be quickly put under control and dwindle. Accordingly, Collier and Rohner (2007) find that levels of democracy (independent of past democratic traditions) significantly reduce the scope for governmental repression: except in the poorest countries, this translates, as a rule, into a reduced incidence of political violence.

Our analysis requires that we estimate the existence, or absence, and the relative importance of "democratic stock" in Latin America. We have operationalized the concept by identifying the periods of democratic rule in the major countries of the area from 1900 and 1945, respectively, to our days. Our purpose is to offer an initial, but rigorous, approximation of the weight of democratic past in the area. To this purpose, we have calculated the total number of democratic years, regardless of interruptions, for each country, along with the longest period of uninterrupted democratic rule which, in turn, signifies the continuity or brittleness of the democratic experience. We measured this variable using political data banks, both global (Polity IV[1]) and local (Mainwaring, Brinks and Pérez-Liñan[2]). The definitions of democracy adopted by these empirical indices are, by and large, procedural: for democracy they intend a series of procedures and

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[1] The Polity IV index is bi-dimensional although hypothetically based on three dimensions: executive recruitment; independence of executive authority; and civil liberties. This last dimension is not coded. The data are used to build two scales, one to measure the degree of democracy and the other to measure authoritarianism. The final index, that identifies a political regime's performance, is based on a mathematical formula: the numerical value of the authoritarian scale is subtracted from the value on the corresponding democracy scale. Both values range from 0 to 10. The final classification is thus expressed by a number that varies from -10 (very authoritarian) to + 10 (very democratic).

[2] The index identifies political regimes as democratic, semi-democratic or authoritarian (see Mainwaring, Brinks e Pérez-Líñan, 2001; updated by Mainwaring and Hagopian, 2005). To transform these judgments into numerical values we assigned a score of 0 to authoritarian regimes; 0.5 to semi-democracies; and 1 to democratic governments, respectively.

institutions characterized by political participation of the entire adult population or, at least, by a broadly inclusive franchise, and the existence of an open opposition among political parties, that must be free to organize and compete, politically and electorally, to form a country's government. Electoral freedoms must be supported by civil liberties: of movement, thought and expression. Also, mass media must be free from governmental control and authoritarian enclaves (especially military ones) must be eliminated or severely constrained. In addition, each index also stresses particular features: democracy implies freedom from arbitrary violence, such as governmental or paramilitary campaigns against guerrilla, at least when generalized and affecting a large part of the population (Mainwaring, Brinks and Pérez-Liñan, 2001); and checks and balances must operate to institutionally constrain the decision making power of chief executives (Polity IV). Our results are shown in table 1: taking into account both the long and medium term, we may say that among the Latin American countries with the strongest "democratic stock" are Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela and Uruguay, closely followed by Chile and Ecuador. Paraguay, Mexico and several smaller Central American countries do badly, while Brazil and Bolivia occupy an intermediate position.

Table 1
Democratic stock in Latin America (periods of uninterrupted democracy)
Mainwaring, Brinks and Pérez-Liñán and Polity IV indices

MBPL (1945-2003)		Polity IV (1900-2007)	
Costa Rica	59 (59)	Costa Rica	105 (105)
Colombia	50 (46)	Colombia	51 (51)
Venezuela	48 (46)	Venezuela	48 (48)
Uruguay	47 (28)	Uruguay	42 (23)
Chile	42 (28)	Rep. Dominicana	29 (16)
Ecuador	42 (25)	Ecuador	28 (28)
Brazil	37 (18)	Argentina	28 (25)
Argentina	36 (21)	Chile	28 (19)
Perù	35 (12)	Bolivia	26 (26)
Rep. Dominicana	34 (26)	Brazil	26 (23)
Bolivia	30 (22)	El Salvador	24 (24)
Panama	29 (14)	Honduras	21 (19)
Honduras	28 (22)	Panama	19 (19)
Guatemala	27 (22)	Perù	19 (7)
El Salvador	20 (20)	Nicaragua	18 (18)
Nicaragua	20 (20)	Paraguay	16 (16)
Mexico	16 (16)	Guatemala	12 (12)
Paraguay	15 (15)	Mexico	11 (11)

Social policies in Latin America: education, health-care and social security

First we reconstruct the characteristics of Latin American social policies: our goal is to verify the existence of a relationship between "democratic stock" and successful social policies. We will consider as successful social policies those prevailing in countries that display comparatively low levels of poverty and inequality and high levels of human capital or, at least, a significant and

sustained movement towards lowering levels of poverty and inequality and improving the human capital base (Huber and Stephens, 2005: 2). The social data in table 2 cover Latin America in the 1970-2001 period: the intensity of poverty is measured by two empirical indicators: the percentage of households living with less than two dollars a day (World Bank) and the percentage of households living below poverty line (CEPAL/ECLAC). Economic inequality and levels of education are also depicted. These variables represent desired policy outcomes and are important to help us differentiate more from less successful social policies.

Table 2
Poverty, inequality and education in Latin America (1970-2001)

	Households living on 2 $ PPP a day		Households living below ECLAC Poverty Line			Estimated Gini			Average Years of Education		
	1981-1990	1991-2001	1970-1980	1981-1990	1991-2001	1970-1980	1981-1990	1991-2001	1970-1980	1981-1990	1991-2001
Argentina	1.4	11.4	8.5	21.6	18.7	40.2	46.5	46.7	6.2	7.2	8.3
Chile	22.9	14.6	17.0	36.0	21.2	50.1	53.1	54.5	5.6	6.2	7.3
Costa Rica	22.1	12.3	24.0	23.7	21.0	48.7	45.9	45.1	4.3	5.4	5.9
Uruguay	3.2	4.3	14.5	13.2	5.6	47.4	43.4	43.2	5.4	6.6	7.1
Media	**12.4**	**10.7**	**16.0**	**23.6**	**16.6**	**46.6**	**47.2**	**47.4**	**5.4**	**6.4**	**7.2**
Brazil	33.2	26.5	44.0	40.5	33.0	61.1	56.4	57.1	2.9	3.6	4.4
Mexico	32.3	28.4	33.0	36.2	37.2	52.2	51.0	53.8	3.4	5.1	6.6
Average	**32.8**	**27.5**	**38.5**	**38.4**	**35.1**	**56.7**	**53.7**	**55.5**	**3.2**	**4.4**	**5.5**
Bolivia	37.7	36.7		55.5	53.0			59.8	3.8	4.5	5.4
Colombia	13.4	19.1	42.0	39.4	47.3	53.2		54.6	3.8	4.5	4.8
Ecuador	3.1	32.5		62.8	60.0		55.1	55.9	4.2	5.8	6.4
Paraguay	26.3	32.6			49.5			56.2	4.2	5.2	5.7
Peru	10.1	32.6	48.0	52.0	42.7	59.1	52.0	51.3	4.5	5.8	7.1
Venezuela	21.3	28.5	25.0	27.7	40.3		44.0	47.5	3.9	5.1	5.5
Average	**18.7**	**30.3**	**38.3**	**47.5**	**48.8**	**56.2**	**50.4**	**54.2**	**4.1**	**5.2**	**5.8**
Dominican Republic	23.1	10.7			29.0	48.6	48.4	49.6	3.3	4.2	5.0
El Salvador	43.0	51.1			45.7	43.6		53.2	2.7	3.6	4.3
Guatemala	66.0	33.5	65.0	65.5	54.0		57.6	56.9	2.0	2.6	3.0
Honduras	61.6	48.3	65.0	72.3	73.5			55.2	2.2	3.6	4.0
Nicaragua		78.9			65.3			55.1	2.5	3.7	4.2
Panama	23.8	18.1	24.5	36.0	29.3	59.6	56.7	57.0	5.2	6.8	7.8
Average	**43.5**	**40.1**	**51.5**	**57.9**	**49.5**	**50.6**	**54.2**	**54.5**	**3.0**	**4.1**	**4.7**

Fonte: Huber and Stephens, 2005, Appendix

It is apparent that nowhere in the area the situation is ideal: poverty, inequality and obstacles to a good education are common and, in some cases, even shocking. Countries' performances, however, vary in level and intensity and are, at times, significantly different. The best results are found in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina. Here, poverty levels are lower that in the rest of the region: in the eighties and nineties, only 12.4 and 10.7 percent of households lived on average with less than two dollars a day, while these figures were 32.8 and 27.7 in Brazil and Mexico, two countries where the struggle against poverty has been doing well, at least by Latin American standards. The performance of these countries is even more favorable if compared to that of Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru, where at the end of the nineties on the average poverty struck more that thirty percent of the households. In Central America, the problem is more pervasive and severe: poverty affects on average forty percent of the households. Results do not

vary much even if we change indicator: in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina the percentage of households below the poverty line set by the Cepal was 16 percent, 23.6 percent and 16.6 percent in the seventies, eighties and nineties respectively, against average values above thirty percent in Brazil and Mexico, forty percent in the Andean countries and fifty percent in Central America.

Economic inequality is expressed through the Gini coefficient[3]. Values are generally high in the entire region and have increased in the last two decades: in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina, however, scores are on average at least five points below those of other country groups. Chile represents a partial exception, with a relatively high value of 54.5 against 45.1 in Costa Rica and 43.2 in Uruguay. Finally, education, is measured by the number of years spent in public school: in the nineties this figure was, on average, 7.2 in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina, as compared to 5.5 in Brazil and Mexico, 5.8 in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela and 4.7 in Central America[4].

In addition to social policy outcomes, however, we should require countries and their governments to make a significant social policy effort, expressed in social spending as a percentage of GDP[5]. Thus, our second indicator of social policy success is central government's public expenditures for education, health and social security. If we look over the 1970-2000 period, we see that good social policies outcomes correspond generally to relatively high levels of public expenditures (Table 3). On average, countries with a better social policy performance spend more on education, health and social security. During the nineties, in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina the overall public expenditure of central governments was equal to 16.4 percent of gross national product, against an average of 10.8 in Brazil, Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela, countries characterized by a respectable social policy performance. The difference is particularly striking for social security and welfare expenditures that, in the three decades under scrutiny, fluctuated between 7 and 9.1 percent in the first group of countries and 3.7 and 4.3 in the second.

These social policies are embedded in different social policy systems that are the product of long and multifarious historical processes and that, in turn, structure the options and opportunities that are available to policy makers in the area. We need to sketch them at least in very general terms. Three general types appear to be common: "stratified universalism" (prevailing in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica); "parallel" or "double" systems (Brazil and Mexico; Peru) and "exclusionary" systems (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Bolivia). In "stratified universalism" the vast majority of the population is covered by means of a social security scheme

[3] This coefficient ranges from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (maximum inequality). A value equal or superior to 55 denotes extreme inequality (CEPAL, 2004).

[4] Good part of the education and health services are provided in Latin America by peripheral authorities, provinces and cities, while our data refers only to Central government's expenditures. These data must accordingly be interpreted with caution.

[5] This expenditure must also be allocated in a progressive way. Social spending is progressive if it benefits lower income groups more than higher income groups, in relationship to their incomes (Huber and Stephens, 2005: 2).

and basic health services: the countries where this system prevails provide universal access to primary education, and broadened access to early secondary education, to more than half the population, while many also get into upper high school. The term “stratification” refers to a difference in benefits, access conditions and protection: state workers, professionals, urban services workers and urban manufacturing workers are provided protection and benefits in this order. The quality and access is also stratified following this sequence. “Parallel” regimes are similar to “universal” systems in some aspects, but their social security schemes cover fewer people, reaching about half the size of the population, and their stratification is more marked. “Exclusionary” systems, finally, offer coverage to less than one quarter of their populations and access is restricted even for basic medical care. Basic education is offered, at least in theory, but is of bad quality especially in rural and poorer urban areas (Filgueira, 2005)[6]. This qualitative reconstruction of social policy systems confirms the superior achievements of our set of best social policy performers: in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina social benefits are broader, and a larger part of the population actually enjoys a fuller coverage.

Table 3
Government social spending in Latin America (GDP percentage) (1970-2001)

	Education			Health			Social security and welfare			Total		
	1970-1980	1981-1990	1991-2001	1970-1980	1981-1990	1991-2001	1970-1980	1981-1990	1991-2001	1970-1980	1981-1990	1991-2001
Argentina	1.5	3.4	4.1	0.6	3.0	4.5	4.7	4.7	7.6	6.8	11.1	16.2
Chile	4.4	3.7	3.0	2.4	2.0	2.3	8.5	10.6	6.9	15.3	16.3	12.2
Costa Rica	5.4	4.6	4.3	2.3	5.9	5.2	3.8	3.2	4.1	11.5	13.7	13.6
Uruguay	2.6	2.9	2.7	1.1	2.6	3.1	10.8	12.8	17.8	14.5	18.3	23.6
Average	**3.5**	**3.7**	**3.5**	**1.6**	**3.4**	**3.8**	**7.0**	**7.8**	**9.1**	**12.0**	**14.9**	**16.4**
Brazil	1.1	2.5	3.8	1.6	2.6	3.2	6.4	7.0	10.2	9.1	12.1	17.2
Columbia	2.0	3.0	3.8	2.9	1.2	3.0		2.4	1.4	4.9	6.6	8.2
Mexico	2.7	2.9	3.8	0.7	3.0	3.6	3.3	2.4	3.2	6.7	8.3	10.6
Venezuela	3.9	4.2	3.6	1.5	1.6	1.3	1.4	1.8	2.4	6.8	7.6	7.3
Average	**2.4**	**3.2**	**3.8**	**1.7**	**2.1**	**2.8**	**3.7**	**3.4**	**4.3**	**6.9**	**8.7**	**10.8**

Fonte: Huber and Stephens, 2005, Appendix

Democracy and social policies in Latin America: a preliminary appraisal

A large body of research arguments that, overall, democracies tend to display higher levels of social expenditures than non democracies (Ross, 2006; McGuire, 2006; Stasavage, 2005; Gerring, Thacker and Alfaro, 2005; Tavares and Wacziarg, 2001). These findings apply to Latin

[6] Most authors prefer not to speak of Latin America welfare states, but rather of specific state-adopted (and more or less effective) social policies (Filgueira, 2005: 9). The term welfare refers to a series of material benefits and individual and collective rights. Material benefits (transfers, subsidies and services) are financed by public expenditures. In its broader sense social security comprises social insurance schemes (pensions for old-age, disability and survivors; health care and cash benefits for sickness and maternity as well as work injury; and unemployment compensation), family allowances and social assistance.

America, as well (see, for instance, Avelino, Brown and Hunter, 2005: Brown And Hunter, 2004; Kaufmann and Segura-Ubiergo, 2001)[7]. In addition, most global large-N studies claim that democracy leads to better welfare outcomes (see, for instance, Moon and Dixon, 1985; Dasgupta, 1993; Boone, 1996; Zweifel and Navia, 2000; Przeworski et al., 2000; Lake and Baum, 2001; Siegle, Weinstein and Halperin 2004; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Reuveny and Quan Li, 2003). On the same vein, in a qualitative study that illustrates the introduction of welfare programs for the poor in Costa Rica and Chile, McGuire underlines the virtues of vigorous electoral competition (2001)[8]. These accounts are consistent with the median voter model of the distributional effects of democracy (Meltzer and Richard, 1981). Under universal suffrage it is assumed that the median voter will earn a median income. However, when income is unequally distributed the median income is less that the mean income. The median voter will then receive an income that is below-average, and he will favor a higher tax rate and economic redistribution. Democracy brings more people with below-average incomes to the polls and they collectively force the government to redistribute income downwards (Ross, 2006: 862). Yet, in democratizing countries the median voter hypothesis underestimates the consequences of social and economic power concentration and the effects of hegemony. In fact, although most real world income distribution are markedly skewed to the right, radical redistribution is rather an exception than the norm (Harms and Zinka, 2003). In other words, redistribution does not flow automatically from the introduction of democracy and economic liberalization, but must be targeted specifically (Nel, 2005). This is why left of center political parties play a decisive role.

These conclusions are confirmed by a number of quantitative and qualitative studies. In advanced industrial democracies the strength of left parties was found to have a significant effect on the magnitude of redistribution through the welfare state (Bradley et al., 2003). In Latin America Huber et al. find that democracy has a negative impact on social inequality when controlling for economic development. In addition, when legislative partisan balance is taken into account, under the form of the strength of left or center-left parties, this variable shows to be much stronger in decreasing inequality than economic factors. Their model shows an overall predictive power comprised between 11 and 52 percent of total variation (2006: 958; 2001). A comparative study on the effects of democratization on social welfare in Uruguay and Paraguay suggests that the ideological orientation of parties in power is a crucial factor in explaining social policies and income redistribution in these countries (Grassi, 2008).

[7] However, see also Haggard and Kaufman (1995), for a different position. One cannot assume, however, that more social spending is equal to more effective social policies, and especially to a progressive redistribution of income. In fact, in Latin America social security spending, particularly the larger share that goes to pensions, is generally regressive, mainly because it excludes workers in the sizable informal sector (de Ferranti et al., 2004; Lindert et al., 2005; Huber, Pribble, Nielsen and Stephens, 2006: 950). Education spending, on the other hand, is probably progressive, while health spending is slightly progressive or neutral (Huber, Nielsen, Pribble and Stephens, 2006: 951). Their regressive or progressive character depends on allocation: for instance, spending on primary education is usually more progressive than spending on university education.

[8] Against the positive relationship between democracy and social policy outcomes, see Jackman (1975); Moore and White (2003) and Kohli (2003).

Thus, a relatively sound democratic system extended over a longer period of time should allow for more intense political participation and for the organization of movements and political parties that represent the least privileged: these, once established, tend to favor a robust redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. Democracy promote the political and civil rights that make it legal and safe for such social groups to organize: in order to grow stronger and get established, parties that represent the poor may count only on personal involvement, organizational skills and participation from below, all elements that require a considerable amount of time (Huber, Nielsen, Pribble and Stephens, 2006)[9]. It is relevant that only long lasting democracies are associated to a reduction in social inequality in most Western countries: time permits a better organization of the underprivileged and the development and strengthening of political parties that are committed to redistribution, usually positioned to the left of the center (Huber, Nielsen, Pribble and Stephens, 2006)[10]. Accordingly, left of center parties are expected to favor redistributive policies, indirectly through the level of public expenditures and directly through a left-leaning balance of legislative power and the resulting legislative and administrative measures, such as adjustment of the minimum wage, wage setting for public employees and labor laws. Center parties and a centrist balance of partisan power should not have a significant impact on redistribution, since their appeals are not primarily on a socioeconomic agenda, while right parties and a right-leaning balance of legislative power should increase inequality, because they tend to protect the interests of business and upper income earners (Ibid.: 950)[11].

In fact, in Latin America our best social policy performers are among the countries with the strongest “democratic stock”, in particular Costa Rica and Uruguay. Chile and Argentina follow at a short distance. In the first three countries left-leaning political parties bent on redistribution did

[9] Yet, democracies proved unable or unwilling to eliminate many established privileges from the past in favor of particularly advantaged social groups. These privileges included in most cases better replacement rates, earlier ages of retirement, and broader coverage of personal and family risks, provided by state resources beyond contribution or by private state endowed tariffs for services (independent professionals). For instance, in Uruguay this system especially favored the Armed Forces, bank employees, notaries and state Universities, while in Mexico it helped civil servants and oil company workers.

[10] In Latin America, left parties have been identified through expert surveys on the basis of their socioeconomic agenda, as expressed in partisan appeals and policy initiatives. See Huber et al. (2006) for details.

[11] We must remember, however, that some of the parties that have historically promoted a progressive redistribution of income have occasionally, or more systematically, turned against it, and at times favored a wealth redistribution that benefited the upper classes. The Radical Party in Argentina, under the leadership of Saul Menem (1989-1999), and Acción Democrática in Venezuela with President Andrés Pérez (1988-1993) provide good examples. In addition, the least privileged strata not always identify themselves as income deprived individuals or groups, and not always promote and support a straightforward redistribution of wealth from the rich and economically well to do: their collective action is at times targeted at the recognition of different identities and interests as, for instance, with the mobilization of indigenous groups in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador or Guatemala. Although in these countries indigenous people are often among the poorest, their action has not always been exclusively, or mainly, aimed at income redistribution, but also at getting a more complete recognition of political and social rights, including a better protection of language and traditions, a strengthening of ethnic organizations and a more effective protection of social and political communal institutions. In the course of mobilization, they have at times extracted income from rival, and equally poor, ethnic or social strata.

emerge, while in Argentina social policies were first introduced and later defended by a populist and semi-authoritarian political movement. A very concise exposition of a few key historical facts will help to illustrate our argument: in Costa Rica, the National Liberation Party dominated the legislature in 1961, when a constitutional amendment for the universalization of social security was passed (Rosenberg, 1979). In Uruguay in the 1910s, the Colorados inspired by reformist President Batlle (1903-1907 and 1911-1916) dominated when the social security system was first established (Filgueira, 1995), and in the 1948-1954 period, when it was expanded and reorganized (Papadopoulos, 1992). In Chile, the origins of the social security system for blue collar workers are to be set in the period of turmoil in 1925, when military intervention terminated the stalemate between reformist President Alessandri and a conservative Congress, but significant efforts to expand coverage came in the 1960s and early 1970s, in the competition between the Christian democrats and the left and under pressure from the unions (Borzutzky, 2002: 48, 97-120, 139-145). Argentina illustrates an alternative path to a social security system with wide coverage via populist authoritarianism. Here the social security system was established by Perón, as part of his popular mobilization and support building strategy, began in 1944 while Minister of Labor under the military government and extended through his democratic and then authoritarian periods as President. However, under democracy the Peronist party and the unions did become the key defenders of the system, at least until very recently.

Colombia confirms our hypothesis as well, since its robust “democratic stock” was not accompanied by the emergence of a left-leaning redistributive party. In fact, in this country, from 1931 to 1994, left and left of center parties have been marginal: their best electoral result being, by far, the 12.4 percent of vote gathered in the Lower-Chamber elections of 1991 by *Alianza democrática-M19* (Coppedge, 1997). Likewise, Ecuador may count on better than average “democratic stock”, but not on the presence of influential left or left-leaning political parties: since 1945 and until 2001 only once a social-democratic government was in power, in 1988 with President Rodrigo Borja. Venezuela is a more challenging case: here the left has been dominant and a considerable “democratic stock” was in fact built. However, in this country, at least until the early nineties, when a disastrous financial crisis hit the country, social policy performance has been comparable to that of Chile and Costa Rica. The operation of parties in this country, furthermore, has been singularly marked by the adverse influence of oil, which corrodes the foundations of democracy by spreading corruption and clientelism, alternative ways to redistribute income, often to the advantage of the better off in society.

On the other hand, other countries, where the presence of the left has been more remarkable, did not accumulate enough “democratic stock” to be able to match the social policy outcomes of our best performers, see for instance the cases of Nicaragua and Peru. We should bear in mind, in addition, that the impact of democracy on social policies varies over time: it is clearer until 1970 than during the last democratization wave. Not only during earlier periods were social policies introduced in some countries for the first time, but, as a rule, they also applied to a large part of the population and granted generous benefits. Later on, the reform of the systems often reduced both coverage and benefits, especially with regard to social security. The impact of

political parties is itself mediated by other factors that vary over time. First by the slowing down of the economy and the expanding of the informal sector: the new democratic governments had to reform, under conditions of economic duress, welfare systems that were not longer viable. The existing social policy systems were sometimes inefficient, expensive, unfair and rigid. Often they did not reach those truly in need, were characterized by excessive administrative costs and were unfairly stratified in coverage, range and equality of social services and transfers. Moreover, the population was rapidly aging, which implied that fewer people were working to support an increasing number of pensioners and that health-care expenditures would be on the rise.

On the other hand, the growing fiscal debt imposed a stricter control of social expenditures: multilateral lending agencies were subjecting new and much needed financial aid to the privatization of welfare (Filgueira, 2005: 35-36). In sum, in Latin America, the impact of these parties has been different in different historical periods: "…. [O]ver the medium and long term, [these parties] have had some impact on the construction of basic social safety nets in the form of noncontributory, tax- financed transfers to the working-age poor with children and the elderly poor. However, for newly emerging left-wing parties generating new resources through tax reform has been as politically difficult, as has restructuring of the old inegalitarian social security systems. Privileged groups have a political advantage not only under authoritarianism, but also under democracy. The difference lies in the opportunity for left-center parties to emerge and challenge privilege (Huber et al., 2006: 961).

In addition, the legacies of former authoritarian regimes also matter. Authoritarian regimes often attempted to break existing welfare systems and strived to compel a regressive income distribution. In 1980-1981 Chile pioneered a radical structural reform of its social insurance pensions and health care systems, driven by neoliberal ideology and based on privatization. Due to the economic crisis of the eighties and the general repudiation of the Pinochet dictatorship, the reform influenced other Latin American countries only in the nineties, when World Bank policies and conditions attached to structural adjustment loans greatly favored its adoption. By 2000 ten Latin American countries had followed the Chilean tracks and enacted pension reforms[12]. Once enacted these reforms create powerful vested interests in the new system that made changes more difficult: in Chile and Peru, for instance, once the system was privatized, new actors appeared to defend the status quo, such as private insurance companies that vied for a slice in the

[12] Three different models of reform have been adopted. The "substitutive model" (for instance Bolivia, 1997; Mexico, 1997; El Salvador, 1998 and Nicaragua, 2001) is the most similar to the Chilean prototype and it is based on the elimination of the old public system, which is replaced by a new, fully funded and privately administered scheme, based on definite contributions and un-definite benefits (determined by the success of the insured account at the time of retirement). In the "parallel system" (Peru, 1993; Colombia, 1994) the public arrangement is not closed, but reformed, and a private system is created, which is similar to the Chilean model, and managed by privates or by a mixed system, private and public. In the "mixed alternative" (Argentina, 1994; Uruguay, 1996 and Costa Rica, 2001) the public system becomes one of the two integrated mandatory components of the new structure. The public component is based on pay as you go (PAYG) and definite benefits and pays a basic pension, the new is fully funded (FF) and works with defined contributions, it is administered by multiple institutions and pays a supplementary pension (Mesa-Lago, 2002: 8-9).

newly created market for private retirements plans[13]. Besides, Latin American democracies often proved unable to eliminate the privileges accruing to beneficiaries from the old social state. Among them were those who have power over, run or possess the coercive means of control of the state. More generally, the old state constituencies were able to hang on to most of their privileges, while private workers were moved to the capitalization funds[14]. These developments made it more arduous for the new democratic governments, and for left leaning parties, to enact social policies in favor of a more progressive income redistribution.

Finally, the relationship between democracy and social welfare, in Latin America as elsewhere, is powerfully mediated by the overall evolution of the economy. During periods of intense economic crises social welfare severely weakened and social protection dramatically reduced coverage and benefits. Even in countries where social policies have been especially successful and the welfare system more robust, such as Uruguay, the contraction of the economy between 1998 and 2002 has produced more poverty, unemployment and a significant increase in inequality. In short, the fit between economic performance and the success of social policies, as defined above, is substantial. However, wealth levels and economic performance are not, by and of themselves, necessary nor sufficient to account for the failures and successes of social welfare. The case of Costa Rica is telling: in the nineties the country's social performance has been one of strongest in the subcontinent, both in relation to social policy outcomes and to determined welfare effort. Still, Costa Rica was not as wealthy as the other top social policy performers: its income per capita was similar to that of Colombia and its income growth was inferior to that of Mexico (Table 4). Nor a good economic performance and the government's desire to spend on social issues are, by themselves, sufficient to craft social policies that are beneficial to all and, especially, to the least privileged. One of the best examples is provided by Argentina in the nineties: economic growth was accompanied by high unemployment, a larger and growing informal sector and unstable employment with a dramatic increase in inequality[15].

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[13] In principle, a private (fully funded) system leads to a neutral effect in income distribution, because pensions are directly related to salaries and contributions. However, where the percentage of the labor force covered is small, the fiscal costs of the transition should have a regressive effect because the state subsidizes the insured middle-income minority usually through sales taxes paid by the uninsured majority (Mesa-Lago, 2000c).

[14] We must not idealize democracy in this context: the process by which, in some Latin American countries, social policy schemes and institution were constructed through parliamentary and social alliances has less to do with clearly defined ideological positions or political programs based on social justice, than with power seeking elites articulating clientelistic, pluralist, yet organized exchange systems between parties, employers, and workers. The Chilean system, for instance, expanded through layers and layers of social security schemes that were born of this logic (Filgueira, 2005: 18).

[15] The reasons behind this perverse outcome are many. As already mentioned, social expenditures in Latin America are often regressive and may contribute to aggravate, rather than to reduce, social inequality, poverty, literacy and health problems. Contrary to the experience of advanced industrial countries, where the size of the welfare state is strongly associated with the reduction of inequality (Bradley et al., 2003), in Latin America the picture is more complex. Social security is generally regressive, since the large informal sector of the economy is usually excluded from its provisions. The chances of being covered by social security are higher for those with higher earnings and for the more educated (Ross, 2006: 871).

Table 4
GDP and Growth in selected Latin American countries (1970-2001)

	GDP per capita			Growth of GDP per capita		
	1970-1980	1981-1990	1991-2001	1970-1980	1981-1990	1991-2001
Argentina	9,876	8,773	10,372	1.5	-3.6	4.5
Chile	4,846	5,320	8,530	1.5	1.5	5.0
Costa Rica	4,907	4,756	5,329	2.6	-0.8	1.8
Uruguay	6,654	7,027	9,058	2.8	-0.8	2.9
Average	**6,571**	**6,469**	**8,322**	**2.1**	**-0.9**	**3.6**
Brazil	5,111	6,194	6,663	5.9	-0.2	1.5
Columbia	3,739	4,502	5,349	3.2	1.4	0.9
Mexico	6,449	7,495	7,673	3.3	-0.4	1.9
Venezuela	8,800	7,112	6,996	-2.7	-1.3	-0.7
Average	**6,025**	**6,326**	**6,670**	**2.4**	**-0.1**	**0.9**

Fonte: Huber and Stephens, 2005, Appendix

All things considered, however, we maintain that politics still play a crucial role, since there is still room for significant variations in the welfare measures promoted by different political parties and coalitions in each country. In spite of severe international and domestic obstacles, in some cases local governments were able to construct or maintain reasonably efficient welfare systems and to promote compelling redistributive policies. Also in the countries where a democratic stock has accumulated, the reforms of social welfare have been milder and less adverse to the interests of the least privileged, as in Uruguay. In this country citizens have been able to better defend themselves because democratic participation was stronger and democratic institutions more solid. Pensions were reformed first in 1989: by way of a popular referendum, which prompted a Constitutional amendment, pensioners demanded the indexing of pensions to the mean wage and adjustment timings linked to raises for state officials. The measure allowed a strong recovery in pensions' real value, between 1989 and 2000. Between 1990 and 1994 three reform proposals, tailored along market oriented lines, were rejected: two by Congress and the third in another referendum called by pensioners. In 1995, eventually, the traditional public pensions system, managed by the state, gave way to a mixed system that included private companies and a complementary capitalization arrangement for the upper income sectors. The reform increased the years of contribution required to retire, making it very difficult for many younger workers to be able to effectively do so, at least at a reasonable age. Also informal sector workers continued to be excluded by the system, while powerful social groups, such as the military, maintained an especially privileged condition. Although the reform shows a clear departure from the old system, it remained mostly statist and committed to some objectives abandoned by other countries, where governments have abdicated their social responsibilities.

Political violence in Latin America: some literature and preliminary evidence

Let us turn now to political violence. This form of violence is not a uniform, specific phenomenon and may take various forms. In Latin America, in the second half of the XX century, it has included civil wars, guerrilla movements, military interventions, *golpes*, terrorism and other

forms of violent confrontation. In this article we discuss the case of internal armed conflicts, often between regular armies and rebel, ethnic or revolutionary groups, which are related to conflicting political agendas of competing factions that cannot be solved by pacific means, due to the failures of conflict management institutions. Terrorism is another form of political violence, led by rebel organizations or revolutionary movements or by the state both as a response to "revolutionary violence" and also as a way for dominant elites to consolidate power (Feldmann and Perälä, 2004, for an overview in the region). Conflict involves regular armies and rebel groups and the scale of operations are much larger than in terrorism. Yet it is difficult to clearly distinguish the two, since the tactics of the belligerent sides in a conflict many times include some form of terrorist activity such as kidnappings for political purposes, bombing, torture and the like (Solimano, 2004: 9).

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), which monitors and records armed conflicts in the world, in most Latin American countries the level of domestic political violence decreased after 1978 (Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Eriksson, Sollenberg, and Strand, 2002; updated by Harbom, Högbladh and Wallensteen, 2006)[16]. This happened, for instance, in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. In other countries, such as Costa Rica, Bolivia and the Dominican republic, there were no major episodes of internal armed conflict in the last four decades. The same holds true for Brazil, Ecuador and Honduras where, in the entire post-World War period, political violence never reached the critical threshold of 25 battle-related deaths in any single year. On the contrary, violence was particularly pronounced in a relatively limited number of cases. In three Central American countries, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, domestic conflict escalated to systematic and long-lasting civil wars, especially crude and enduring in the last instance. In Colombia and Peru, finally, conflict levels reached a zenith and assumed the form of prolonged internal wars, although in the latter country violence drastically declined after 1999[17].

It is immediately apparent that our best social policy performers and stronger democracies (Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina) are among the countries where domestic conflict has been less intense. This is so, generally speaking, because political violence is often related to protest and dissatisfaction caused by poverty, lack of political rights and social exclusion. Armed conflict is frequently the result of economic and social polarization, on the one hand, and the failure of formal and informal institutions in channeling conflict through the political system, on the other. These explanations are based on the so called grievance theories of armed conflict. These maintain that grievance is the main causal factor: people engage in violent conflict when

[16] The UCDP dataset codes two different intensity levels: minor armed conflicts and wars. A conflict is minor when there are between 25 and 999 battle-related deaths in any given year; it is coded as a war when at least 1000 battle-related deaths are observed in any given year (UCDP/PRIO, 2006).

[17] The progressive weakening of political violence has been accompanied by a veritable explosion of "common" violence and crime, which has led to a drastic increase in the numbers of homicides, robberies, kidnappings burglaries and the like. Many are the causes of this phenomenon, but the harsh economic crises that hit the region in the eighties and early twentieth century certainly played a key role, together with the spreading of poverty and social inequality that followed.

grievances are sufficiently acute. High inequality, a lack of political rights, ethnic or religious exclusion in society motivate violent protest.

For instance, Collier (2003) finds that poor countries, the lack of economic growth and dependence on primary commodity exports, all increase the chances of domestic armed conflict. For the World Bank (2003) armed conflicts develop and persist in the "most marginalized" countries, where average growth has been negative over the last twenty years[18]. None of our "best political performers" fits this profile. Democracy, at least above certain minimum levels of income, is associated to a lessening of domestic conflict and to lower chances of using arms, since it improves political participation and facilitates a peaceful resolution of domestic disputes[19]. If the least privileged, the poor and the socially excluded succeed in organizing in a political party or in a movement, they may struggle to reach their preferred goals through peaceful political participation. This interpretation is fairly clear-cut: under an authoritarian government grievances and dissatisfaction, when reaching a critical level, may be expressed only through violent confrontation, while in a democracy participation and dialogue usually prevail. Dealing with ethnic minorities rebellions in Latin America, Cleary notes: "Rebellion is a high-risk strategy. Accordingly, if regimes are open to dissent and have institutional channels through which grievances can be addressed, political actors will be more likely to press their claims from within the system. If regimes are responsive, the ability to cauterize potential rebellions increases. In general, democratic governments are more likely to be responsive and open to dissent than are nondemocracies. Therefore, democratic regimes should be less susceptible to rebellion"[20]. A statistical analysis of the relationship between regime type and an ethnic rebellion indicator shows an inverted relationship between degrees of "democraticness" and the rebellion indicator: more democracy lowers the chances of violent ethnic rebellion (Cleary, 2000: 1145; Gurr 1996). In short, "[i]n Latin America, at least, democratic states suffer from very little ethnic violence, whereas nondemocratic regimes are saddled with some level of violence in almost every case"[21].

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[18] The role of inequality appears more complex: an unequal distribution of income is not, by itself, associated to a higher risk of civil war (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

[19] In a recent study (2007), Collier and Rohner find that the impact of democracy over rebellion also depends on national income levels: below a certain threshold ($ 2,750) democracy increases the chances of domestic violence. Such income threshold, however, is lower than in our set of "best performers" and, indeed, in most Latin American countries: as a consequence, in this region we should expect democracy to reduce political violence systematically.

[20] These conclusions do not necessarily apply only to indigenous ethnic groups, or only to Latin America. Booth's (1991) study of democracy and rebellion in Central America suggests that democracy plays a role in restricting the possibilities for rebellion. The lack of rebellion in the democratic countries of the industrialized West also implies that democracy has a similar impact elsewhere.

[21] For Hegre et al. (2001), the relationship between democratic levels and the incidence of civil strife over time takes an inverted U shape. Democracy favors domestic peace by keeping the avenues of participation open and dictatorship prevents grievances from exploding through intense repression. Semi-democracies appear to be more prone to civil strife: in these regimes the combination of both grievances and the opportunity to rebel is at its peak. See also Østby (2007: 7-8). From an empirical point of view this theory should imply a strong negative correlation between political violence and both strong democratic and authoritarian traditions.

Democracy and political violence in Latin America: a preliminary appraisal

Reviewing the history of domestic political violence in our set of best social policy and democracy performers will help us to illustrate our argument. In Costa Rica the last episode of domestic warfare dates back to 1948. A civil war was fought between a populist progressive leader, allied with the Communist party and the Catholic church, on the one hand, and an equally exotic coalition of oligarchic coffee growers and young idealistic Social-democrats, on the other. After a month of fighting the latter alliance defeated the Communist partisans and an ineffective national Army. In the aftermath of the brief civil war, which caused approximately 2000 casualties, the new 1949 Constitution mandated the abolition of the Armed forces, which to a great extent accounted for the absence of military *golpes* in the small central America country and the strengthening of democratic practices. Since then, Costa Rica has held 12 presidential elections, the latest being in 2006. All of them have been widely regarded by the international community as peaceful, transparent, and relatively smooth transitions. In Uruguay, the armed opposition started in 1965, when a movement of national liberation, the *tupamaros* (named after the Inca Chief *Tupac Amaru*) began to rob banks and kidnap people to distribute ransoms and spoils in the poorest *barrios*. Their activity escalated in the early seventies, aggravated by the operations of right wing death squads: the climax was reached in 1972 with the intervention of the Army in an attempt to quell dissent. After the 1973 military coup over 100 people died in Uruguayan jails and about 140 other disappeared. Democracy was restored in 1985 and political life has been since free of major episodes of violence.

In 1973, the domestic tensions following the Presidential election of Socialist Salvador Allende provoked another military coup in Chile. Parliament was disbanded, the Constitution was suspended, political parties were prohibited, and mass media were put under military control. More than 3,000 people were eventually assassinated by the army in the following campaign of political repression, and many thousands disappeared at the hands of the sinister DINA, the national intelligence direction. Again, with the return of democracy in 1989 armed conflicts over the control of government disappeared. Finally, in Argentina, between 1973 and 1976, the military and numerous guerrilla groups fought a bloody and vicious battle that reached its most intense moments between 1975 and 1977, during the short semi-democratic interlude that saw the return of Perón to the country and the initial period of ruthless military rule. The major guerrilla groups, the Left Revolutionary Workers Party (ERP) and the Peronist Montoneros engaged in a series of attacks, kidnappings and assassinations of major political, union and business leaders. The army replied by executing more than 6,000 people and putting into jail 15,000 more. During the dictatorship, finally, at least 10,000 people “disappeared”, cruelly assassinated by the military junta. After the return to democracy, in 1983, and in spite of the periodic explosion of severe economic and social crises, political violence of this scale has not come back to Argentinean politics.

These developments point to a possible relation between relatively consolidated democracies (countries with stronger democratic traditions) and lower levels of political violence.

Yet, the same positive relationship holds true for far less democratic countries[22]. A cursory look at table 5 shows that political violence has been minimal not only in Brazil, Bolivia, Panama and Ecuador, but also in Mexico, Paraguay and Honduras. In Colombia, on the other hand, where the strength of democracy has been considerable, the levels of political violence have been the most intense in the area. Some other mechanisms must be at work. A first clue, in this sense, is given by an analysis of some Central America countries.

Table 5
Armed conflicts in Latin America 1970-2005

	War			Intermediate			Minor			Total		
	70-80	81-90	91-05	70-80	81-90	91-05	70-80	81-90	91-05	70-80	81-90	91-05
ARG	3	0	0	4	0	0	2	0	0	9	0	0
BOL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BRA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CHI	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
COL	0	6	27	22	16	12	0	0	0	22	22	39
CR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
DR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ECU	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ES	0	30	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	2	30	2
GUA	36	21	0	0	6	10	0	0	0	36	27	10
HAI	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	2	4
HON	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MEX	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
NIC	6	18	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	6	24	0
PAN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
PAR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
PER	0	24	9	0	4	12	0	0	0	0	28	21
URU	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
VEN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1

Source: Nils Petter Gleditsch, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg & Håvard Strand (2002). 'Armed Conflict 1946–2001: A New Dataset', *Journal of Peace Research* 39(5): 615-637. The latest version of this document: http://www.prio.no/cwp/armedconflict/
Note: War episodes are coded 3. Intermediate armed conflicts are coded 2 and minor armed conflicts are coded 1.
Minor armed conflict: at least 25 battle-related deaths in that year and fewer than 1,000 battle-related deaths during the course of conflict. Intermediate armed conflict: at least 25, but fewer than 1,000 battle-related deaths in that year and an accumulated total of at least 1,000 deaths. War: at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in that year. Names of the opposition organizations are given in the local language, if available, and in English Note that the intensity category Intermediate has been removed (see codebook for discussion). However, it is still possible to determine which conflicts have reached a total of at least 1000 battle-related deaths since it started. This is indicated by * in the intensity column.

In this area, violence erupts in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian cases while the democratic outcome is often related to the end of violence. In the eighties and nineties, in countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, comprehensive peace agreements were reached between the military, governments and revolutionary movements in coincidence with pacted transitions to democracy. In El Salvador democracy or semi-democracy took hold between 1982

[22] Also, political violence exploded in democratic periods in Uruguay and Chile, which, at the time, were considered among the most consolidated democracies in the area.

and 1984: between 1991 and 1992 a series of agreements were signed between the *Frente de Liberación Nacional Farabundo Martí* (FLNFM), a group of left guerrilla organizations, and the government headed by President Cristiani. The parties agreed to transform the guerrilla group in a legal party, which eventually joined the domestic political life. In Guatemala, leftist rebels finally united under the umbrella of the *Unión Revolucionaria Nacional de Guatemala* (URNG) in 1982. From 1969 to 1987 they developed a domestic war against military or military-dominated governments: after the partial re-democratization of 1986, in 1990 formal negotiations between the rebels and government produced a first agreement, signed by the URNG, political parties and a National Reconciliation Commission. The pact that put an end to the war was finally endorsed in 1995, although political violence continued to cause victims for some years to come. In Nicaragua, after the overthrow of the Somoza family by the Sandinistas, new violence was triggered by a few discontented former guerrillas and Somoza guards, which organized in a fighting unit, the “Contras”, to combat the new government with the decisive support of the United States. A series of semi-democratic elections, held by the Sandinistas once in power, led in 1990 to the victory of opposition candidate Violeta Chamorro. Before the elections, the Sandinistas and Chamorro had already arranged a transition protocol that obtained the disarming of the Contras and activated the withdrawal of the Sandinstas from the Army.

In this context, it may be worth recalling that the political parties that oversaw the peace agreements were characterized by diverse ideological orientations. In Guatemala, formal peace negotiations were sponsored by the Vinicio Cerezo administration and his center-right Christian Democratic party, holding a majority of seats in Congress. The peace agreements were signed between 1994 and 1995 by Ramiro De León, an independent politician and former Human Rights Ombudsman, who was elected President by Congress after his predecessor fled the country in the wake of an unsuccessful *autogolpe*. The treaty was endorsed by the following administration led by Álvaro Arzú of the conservative PAN party[23]. In El Salvador, the 1992 peace settlement was stipulated by President Alfredo Cristiani, leader of the secular right party ARENA, which dominated the country’s political life along with the Christian right party Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC)[24]. Finally, in Nicaragua the peace covenant (Acuerdo Político) was signed in August 1989 by the ruling left Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) and by an opposition coalition, the Unión Nacional Opositora (UNO), made up of very diverse groups, but especially of secular center and right parties[25].

[23] In Guatemala political violence dates back to the forties and reaches its zenith between 1969 and 1987. In this period political history was dominated by the military: the brief civilian interlude by Méndez Montenegro (1966-1970) is an example of façade democracy, since the political situation remained fully under the control of the armed forces and inspired by the doctrine of national security (Alcántara, 1999, II: 182).

[24] In El Salvador political violence intensifies in 1979-80, under military rule, and climaxes between 1981 and 1990 during the process of political opening. Here, as well, the process remains mostly under the control of the military, which maintains a substantial autonomy vis-à-vis the new democratic government (Alcantara, 1999, II: 140).

[25] Political violence in Nicaragua intensifies in 1978-79, with the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship and again in 1983-88 under the Sandinista regime, whose nature (democratic, partially democratic or authoritarian) is hotly debated in the literature.

The mechanism by which democracy prevents or mitigates violent confrontations operates especially through the provision of better channels for communicating grievances. A better communication frequently implies more responsiveness to basic economic and social needs, through comprehensive policies or specific measures that alleviate discontent and pacify social needs. In a democracy, the accountability of political leaders explains why they restrain from the use of brutal means to repress and quell political protest. Their openness was at times merely symbolic. In Costa Rica, for instance, one is struck by the modesty of the reforms and the redistributive measures that purchased stability through the mid-1980s. The government did not perform radical redistributive surgery, but did shift small amounts of wealth towards the poor and arranged a recovery of working-class wages. It also restrained from brutally repressing the aggrieved. Authoritarian governments have usually been insensitive to these demands and have often resorted to crush violent opposition: still the choice to engage in a dialogue with the opposition, or at least to concede to some of its requests, has been open to these regimes, as well and in some rare cases this course of action was, in fact, undertaken.

The case of Ecuador, a country where the existence of extreme poverty and inequality did not result in an armed conflict after re-democratization (1979) further illustrates our point. Many of the commonly cited causes of rebellion were present in the Ecuadorian case: political discrimination, economic marginalization, land grievances, a strong political organization with a mobilized base, access to resources through its own population and through international agencies, and political opportunity. To explain the absence of rebellion, Cleary (2000) points at the relatively responsive nature of Ecuador’s democratic regime. In the eighties, the government was faced with a violent insurgency: a group known as the *Alfaro Vive, Carajo!* (AVC), apparently inspired by Peru’s *Sendero Luminoso*, had been waging a small-scale terrorist campaign, along with other marginal groups (Baratta, 1987). Also in 1990 indigenous protests exploded and indigenous people occupied government offices, withheld produce from markets, blocked roads, and demonstrated in cities (Zamosc, 1994, p. 37). The *levantamiento*, or uprising, lasted for a full week and was called off only when President Borja agreed to address indigenous grievances, mainly involving “the economic situation” and land rights. Indigenous protests have persisted throughout the 1990s, with major protests in 1992 and 1994. All of the subsequent events resemble the *levantamiento* with respect to the lack of violence and relative receptiveness of the government (Sawyer, 1997). The key in explaining the lack of violent rebellion lies in the state receptiveness to social and indigenous mobilization[26]. Although episodes of violence against leaders of the movement are documented, and the claim of government indifference to grievances and demands

[26] Each of the three major protests in the 1990s concluded with a meeting between the government administration and protest leaders, and each had conciliatory results. For example, after the 1990 protest, President Borja agreed to “open a dialogue” with the protesting groups, and the 1992 protest was followed by the concession of communal tilting over more than one million hectares of land in the Amazon (Sawyer, 1997, pp. 66-67; Zamosc, 1994, p. 38). Selverston (1994: 145) notes that “while the dialogues were inconsistent and in many ways not productive, they provided a specific arena for direct debate between government officials and CONAIE indigenous leaders”. Clearly, the institutional ability of government to maintain a dialogue with aggrieved groups has helped to channel indigenous political activity toward peaceful forms of expression.

is common, lines of communication were relatively open, and dialogue between the indigenous organizations and government was frequent. In a similar way, in the seventies and eighties in Costa Rica real wages were allowed to recover, at least partially, through labor disputes and union action. When violent civil disturbances occurred, they were met with modest official force that produced very few casualties[27].

Apparently, the tolerant attitude by Ecuadorian governments was not related to a specific ideological orientation. In Ecuador, political parties are often weak, fragmented and based more on charismatic personalities than on coherent programs. They are plagued by clientelism and the weight of a strong populist tradition. In this case as in other Latin American countries, however, it is possible to sketch, at least in a preliminary fashion, a left-right continuum over which to place the major political groupings. In 1990, executive power was held by President Borja, head of Izquierda Democrática (ID), a party with a center-left leaning. The next President was a conservative Christian, Sixto Durán-Ballén, leader of the Partido de Unidad Republicana (PUR). In addition, the recent political history of the country is characterized by frequent alternation in power by political parties of different nature, ranging from right to center-left.

Yet generalizations remain problematic. If a long-standing and relatively sound democracy often helps to reduce or control domestic political violence, it is not by itself sufficient to ensure domestic peace, as the case of Colombia clearly illustrates. Nor the absence of democracy or of a democratic tradition necessarily prevents the flourishing of domestic peace, as in Honduras, a country ruled by a military junta during the seventies and eighties, where political violence has been relatively mild. In this respect, Colombia is perhaps the most puzzling case, since there violence erupted and endured for decades in a relatively robust democratic context. It may help to recall that in this country violence is rooted in history and has ravaged society for a long time. From 1830 until the beginning of the twentieth century, the country went through nine civil and fourteen local wars. The *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) appeared in 1964. The following years were marked by ferocious struggles between the regular army and the guerrilla, and by occasional efforts by the warring parties to reach a peace agreement. In 1991, the representatives of the government met with the guerrilla groups in the hope to strengthen the process of national reconciliation. Ten years later a similar attempt failed on the eve of the 2002 elections. These episodes were routinely followed by new bloody confrontations in an apparently endless cycle of domestic wars.

We add immediately that, at least for some, Colombia's recent political performance has been rather semi-authoritarian than democratic (Mainwaring, Brinks and Pérez-Liñan, 2001). In fact, the beginning of the operations by leftist rebel groups dates back to the mid-sixties, in the wake of the protests raised by the signing of a pact that excluded, as in neighboring Venezuela, important political forces from the democratic scenario. At any rate, to account for the endurance of guerrilla warfare we must consider the existence of a series of powerful opportunities available to

[27] Ryan (1994: 29) also finds democracies to be resistant to rebellions: "To date, no revolutionary movement has succeeded in overthrowing a democratically elected government in Latin America".

its leaders, such as the ready availability of natural resources (coca leaves), that could easily be transformed into financial resources to keep the conflict running. In a more theoretical language, violent conflict might be explained by atypical opportunities for building a rebel organization. Opportunity is determined by access to finance, such as the scope for extortion of natural resources, donations from a diaspora population and the like. Opportunity may also depend upon factors such as geography: mountains and forests may be needed to incubate rebellion. In sum, such rebellions are motivated by greed, which is presumably sufficiently common that profitable opportunities for rebellion will not be passed up (Collier and Hoeffler, 2001)[28].

Honduras, a poor country that has been mostly authoritarian from 1945 to 1981, shows that the government's reaction plays a key role in encouraging or defusing political violence. Here social grievances caused vast political mobilization in the form of agrarian, labor, neighborhood, community self-help and opposition party organizations, as well as reformist demands on the state and protests against public policy, but domestic violence levels have been modest. Violent regime repression of opponents remained moderate by Central American standards. Meanwhile between 1975 and 1979 the government distributed more than one hundred seventy thousand hectares to roughly 10 percent of landless and land-poor *campesino* families. Since 1980 peasants organizations, facilitated by legislation passed in the seventies, have invaded much additional land (Booth, 1991: 53-55).

In brief, whenever economic and social conditions appeared to be favorable to the beginning of an armed insurrection, the responsive attitude of the government in power was often able to diffuse protest and channel discontent through more or less established forms of political dialogue and intercourse. This response ranged from favorable welfare policies to more specific measures, such as one time wage raises, and sometimes it implied the recognition of an organization representing the dissenters' interests and identities and the beginning of a more or less structured dialogue with the opposition. This positive reaction is possible, and a few times has been practiced even under authoritarian regimes, but it is far more common under democracy, because it arises from the democratic institutional make up itself: established channels of communication with society, from associations to political parties, allow these voices to be heard regularly and more effectively, while accountability guarantees that politicians will try their best to satisfy citizens' claims and to avoid any form of direct political repression.

[28] The case of Peru is equally atypical. Fighting erupted in 1980, especially at the hands of the Sendero Luminoso guerrilla group. The decision by Sendero to take up arms was made on the eve of a power transfer from a military to a democratic government and the most severe violence lasted through 1993, virtually ending with the capture of Abimael Guzman, founder and leader of Sendero, by authoritarian President Fujimori, who was elected to power democratically in 1989, but then resorted to a Presidential "autogolpe" to exercise full political control over the country. Thus, an alternative, or complementary, explanation is in order: the survival of senderistas where coca production is more florid points to opportunity theories of rebellion. Also, the choice of the armed struggle may have been a strategy to survive by radicalizing the organization's structure and ideology, leading to outbursts of political violence (Tarrow, 1998). Finally, the context is also crucial. For McClintock, for instance, the perception of economic devastation to the poor (the rebels refer to it as "economic genocide") was the primary ideological force in the movement, but the teachers' and students' truncated economic prospects help explain its radicalism (1998).

These events suggest that in Latin America, at least during the third democratic wave, the elimination or substantial decline of political violence does not appear to depend on previous democratic traditions, nor on the particular ideological inclinations of the parties in power during democratic transitions. Both parties on the right and the left of the political spectrum, secular as well as Christian, were willing to engage in peace talks and to sign peace treaties whenever democracy was reintroduced after a military interlude, even when exacting concessions had to be granted to political opponents[29]. This outcome has not always been immediate but, as a rule, it has followed rather quickly a period of democratic strengthening. Likewise, when democracy was already in place, both right-leaning and left-leaning governments have often acted to diffuse the prospect of armed confrontations with opposition groups, setting up talks and consultations with the discontented and attempting to comply with their demands. This finding contrasts with the redistributive impact of democracy on social welfare and socioeconomic equality, which was related to the policy orientations of governing parties more than to the reintroduction of democracy itself, and that took, as a rule, much longer periods of time to carry out its effect, through the appearance of organizations and especially parties that represent the less advantaged in society and that were eventually able to win elections and directly influence policy-making.

Concluding remarks

The recent strides of democracy in Latin America have been associated to conflicting outcomes. The expectations that democracy would bring about peace and prosperity have been only partly satisfied. While political violence has been by and large eradicated from the sub-continent, poverty and social injustice still prevail and hold sway. Our study argues that democracy matters for inequality through the growing strength of center left and left parties and by making political leaders in general more responsive to the underprivileged. Furthermore, although the pension reforms recently enacted in the region generated overall regressive outcomes on income distribution, democratic countries still benefit from their political past: where democratic tradition was stronger, such outcomes have been milder. Democratic tradition is even now a crucial element and it keeps shaping social policies and entitlements affecting millions of Latin Americans.

Our analysis also suggests that, although domestic peace has been more common in democratic countries, democratic tradition and the specific ideological connotations of the parties in power do not play an equally crucial role in securing lower levels of political violence: in Latin America, during the last wave of democratizations, domestic peace was rather an outcome of

[29] Among the factors that explain the propensity of Latin American élites to compromise during the Third Wave it is essential the new international situation determined by the end of the Cold War and the Fall of the Berlin Wall. The role of different phases needs to be further emphasized. The second and third waves of democratization respond partly to different domestic and international conditions. As for the latter, we have briefly recalled the impact of the end of the Cold War, the tendency by militaries to intervene in politics and the moderation of social programs submitted by parties of the Left. The impact of such changes should not be underestimated and our argument must be understood within the context of these shifting frameworks.

political and social concessions to those in distress. The circle of domestic political violence may be broken both by introducing and strengthening democracy and by using brutal violence to suffocate all attempts at insurrection. However, whenever severe repression loosens up, unless political participation broadens considerably, violence may again erupt. Democracy provides a better equilibrium point, insofar as it curbs violence and satisfies the needs of the least privileged without resorting to the costly, and ethically repulsive, strategy of repression. Together with other factors and especially economic ones, the reason why recent democratizations have provided domestic peace in most cases, but have been unable so far to solve the problem of poverty and inequality, is that democratic traditions in the subcontinent have been relatively weak and, more specifically, that this weakness has undermined the growth of left and progressive parties, acting as an obstacle to redistribution. Such weakness, on the other hand, has not prevented the drastic reduction of domestic political violence, since in this case what mattered was a combination of symbolic or material concessions and political agreements among powerful élites and counter-élites.

In addition, we argue that the consequences of democracy on various social and economic dimensions vary with respect to tempo. In the case of domestic political violence democracy unfolds its effects through institutionalized channels of political communication between those in government and the opposition, and a structure of incentives that facilitate political restraint and more generous social policies. This development may require a certain amount of time: the creation of a climate of mutual trust, the conviction that violence cannot be tolerated and the promise not to make use of it, as well as the offer by the democratic regime of material and symbolic compensations that facilitate the decision to abandon the armed struggle. However, the recent Latin America experience indicates that such phases have been relatively rapid, if compared to the times that took redistributive social policies to emerge and get established. These policies, in turn, represent an outcome of democratic politics that rely on the appearance and strengthening of political parties devoted to defend the interests of the least advantaged in society. Although not the only way to redistribute income, in Latin America this political model has been relatively common. In this case it was not the agreements among the élites that mattered directly, so much as the specific outcomes of particular historical processes, by which the lower classes organized themselves politically and were able to defend their social and economic interests. Such processes have been slower and more complex than in the recent instance of “democratic peace-making”.

As a final point we contend that our study is hopeful because it shows that democracy seems particularly fit to prevent domestic political violence and that democratic tradition ensures better (i.e. progressive) social policies to its citizens. These conclusions confirm important contributions in the existing social science literature. The impact of democracy on diverse social and economic dimensions, on the other hand, has been less studied: we believe that a better knowledge of the mechanisms and tempo through which democracy operates and unfolds its effects may open new and interesting perspectives in the inquiry over the consequences of the recent diffusion of this form of government in the entire world.

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