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Intermittent Democracy in Central America: Reflections and Recommendations*

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◆ Presentation

According to the Index of Electoral Development (IDE) published by UNDP in 2004, Central America was identified electorally as the most democratic sub-region in the region in 2002, marking the progress of the tendency of the entire region since 2000. Whilst Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama were the countries with the highest rates of voters (77.9%, 72.3% and 68.8%, respectively) and valid votes (73.7%, 68.2% and 66.5%, respectively), Guatemala

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◆ KEYWORDS

- Central America

- Democracy

- State

- Government

- Civil Society

and El Salvador had the lowest voter registrations (36.2% and 38.7%, respectively) and of valid votes (31.5% and 36.6%, respectively).

It is clear, however, to review the economic and social indicators (social inequality, poverty, unemployment, etc.). The purely procedural level expressed in suffrage prevails in the region and the lack of direct social and economic benefits in society. This research aims to characterize, through a geo-historical review, the development of heterogeneous democratic cycle in Central America, opened in the early 1980s, identifying the processes of transition and institution of electoral democracies, democratic developments experienced in the last three decades and scenarios of democratic consolidation in the first decade of the century. Specifically, it has been considered critically to analyze the horizons of democratic consolidation in the last decade (2000-2010/12), through the study of the experiences of Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, based on the review of various macro-indicators.

By identifying particular areas of human development index, stresses that the general government expenditure on education and health has been minimal. In the case of El Salvador increased only from 3.6% to 4.3% of GDP on health, and from 2.5% to 3.2% of GDP on education between 2000 and 2010, defence spending declined just 1.3% to 1.1% in the same period, but the payment of the debt represented an increase of 2.8% to 5%. In Nicaragua



spending between 2000 and 2010 in health ranged 3.7% to 4.9% of GDP in education prevailed about 4%, and defence spending increased from 0.7% to 0.8% of GDP; while spending on debt ranged from 7.3% to 7.9%, which represents a very high share in general government expenditure, which varied in the same period from 12.2% to 10.1%. Meanwhile, government spending in Guatemala in health between 2000 and 2010 ranged from 2.2% to 2.5% of GDP on education in 2010 reached 3.2% of GDP, defence spending fell from 0.8% to 0.4% and Total debt service increased from 2% to 3.8% of GDP in the same period.

According to IDD, democratic development in Central America experienced a decline in the second half of the 2000s. Especially, for the period continues the reading provided by the IDE, while the IDD poses a less optimistic outlook. This is expressed in the decline of democratic development experiencing by El Salvador since 2003, the abrupt experience of Guatemala in 2005 and 2011, and the fickle trends of Nicaragua. Looking at the experience of all of Central America, the IDD indicates that the downward trend of democratic development is also experienced in Costa Rica and Panama.

In this regard, the Report on The State of Human Development in the region of Central America, said the disturbing lack of social spending of the States, the increase in risky budgets for almost regular army and internal se-



curity tasks renewal, without even having an assessment of the proportion of the control they have armed private security forces. In terms of income distribution, the development of per capita GDP during the first decade of the century shows an increase in the case of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, but very limited levels. The variation of the average 1980-1989 and 2008-2012 in Nicaragua is only 2.4% in Guatemala variation was 26.8 % and in El Salvador was 65.4% (CEPAL, 2013: 78). The stagnation of these economies, including that of Honduras, are related to fluctuations in the prices of oil and coffee, the reduction of international aid, frail production structures and poor domestic markets.

✦ Political analysis

One of the key considerations of democratic transition in the region has been the subordination of military power to the civilian, one of the greatest achievements after the peace accords and the historical Authoritarianism turn of the Central America's northern region (C4). However, in the Report of the State of the Region (PEN, 2008), indicates an important point that challenges of the contention role that the militia played in the sub-region. Indicators show that after drastic cuts in budgets, personnel and weapons that were reported in the nineties, in the period 2002-2007 the trend stabilized and even reversed

in the experience of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua and only continued in El Salvador.

Alarming, on the other hand, is the trend toward privatization of public security, which has been identified (in the case of the northern triangle: Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) as the most violent region of the isthmus, which more than 200,000 people participate as active security forces responding to private corporations, a total of more than 300,000 troops throughout Central America, with an annual growth of 8% of the companies in this Sector (FPE, 2013). The increased power of organized crime, exacerbated by the war waged against drug trafficking in Mexico and the retreat of the State has resulted in the overflow of common crime, a space that has been left to private corporations. According to figures from the Pan American Federation of Private Security (2013), in Guatemala security guards quadrupled in number to the 24,000 members of the security forces, while in Honduras doubled to 29,000 police officers. Even in Costa Rica, which has lower crime rates, private guards also doubled in number to the 13,000 State troopers.

The region has become in recent years the most violent country in Latin America. Among the imaginary construction of power and reality, the figures between 2009 and 2010 indicate, however, that the regional homicide rate per 100,000 populations stood above 40. This rate increases over the past decade in all countries, with a particular concentration in the Northern Triangle: 'Hondur-



ras, with a rate of 92 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, making it the country with no more war 'dangerous' in the world, followed by El Salvador, with a rate of 69 and Guatemala with 39' (PEN, 2011).

In this sense, the paradox of democratic security paradigms are not only acute defragmentation of the core functions of the State and its annulment as guarantor of sovereignty and self-determination, on which any democratic development is guaranteed regardless of their adjectives or even ideological priority (beyond the dilemma freedom-equality) but the proposed criminalization of society itself. Therefore, not only un-politicize and conditions the institutional and social development of democracy, but overturn it sharpening de-citizenization.

The economic system that brought the third neoliberal democratic wave, signified a change in the exports structure (indeed, collapsed in the case of countries engaged in terrible internal conflicts) that made agriculture displace traditional products — coffee, cane sugar and bananas — for non-traditional ones — vegetables, flowers and fruits — and an increase in the installation of 'maquilas'. However, stresses 'the dominance model export labour'. In 2003, at the height of 'sustained electoral development' (UNDP, 2004) negotiations of the Free Trade Agreement between the U.S. and Central America began (CAFTA-DR, after the incorporation of Dominican Republic) which



came into force in 2006. This structure of trade has meant the intensification model that determines the behaviour of the economies in the region: increased maquiladora industry under conditions of labour exploitation and flex-exponential, increase in migration flows and remittances in all regions, with the exception of Costa Rica, and has become the main source of foreign exchange.

* Proposals

- ◆ The priority is to analyze the relationship between democracy and economic development, which requires an adjustment in social spending priorities of governments, mainly in health, education and employment generation. The priority of social spending increased demands a presence of Social State and a budget reduction of the external debt payment services.

- ◆ It is essential to build mechanisms of control and regulation on businesses and private security corporations in the region. Such instances have gradually replaced the State in public security tasks, which becomes deeply vulnerable citizens and undermining the rule of law.

- ◆ It is essential to redefine the internal security strategy



of the countries in the region experienced a sharp rate of violence and crime. To made it possible from joint strategies at the regional level, but defined and appropriate for the very societies and with a sovereign perspective; by limiting the order of major projects such as the Merida Initiative, the Initiative for Central American Regional Security (CARSI).

◆ It is essential to build and strengthen legal institutions guaranteeing human rights and limit the systematic criminalization of society through job placement programs, and autonomous management of cooperatives that activate social micro-economies (neighbourhoods and other regions) scale to limit the great circuits of the criminal economy.

◆ Priority support the revival of the local-national economy through agricultural recovery projects (distribution and access to financing for activation), to shovel the dramatic Diaspora population and limit the social and food vulnerability experiencing high levels of risk in the region.

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