

March 15, 2005  
McShain Lounge Large  
McCarthy Hall, Southwest Quadrangle  
5:30 pm-7:00 pm

Virginia M. Bouvier

Introductory Remarks for Panel on “Security and Democratic Governability:  
Addressing Challenges in Latin America.”

Co-sponsored by Women in International Security and the Center for Latina American Studies at Georgetown University.

Coordinator: Meaghan Keeler-Pettigrew.

Speakers: Stephen Monblatt; Amb. Beatriz Ramacciotti; Dr. Cynthia Watson

Latin American has made tremendous advances toward democracy in recent years. Only one generation ago, much of Latin America was governed by military regimes or entrenched ruling parties. Today, after decades of dictatorial rule, nearly all of Latin America (minus Cuba) is nominally democratic. Following a wave of transitions to civilian rule that began in the 1970s, many countries of the region entered a period of democratic consolidation characterized by greater respect for human rights and more opportunities for civic participation on the part of formerly marginalized sectors of the population in both the nongovernmental sector and within government.

These political rights have enabled the citizenry to make demands upon their governments, yet it is proving difficult for democracy to deliver on these demands for deeply felt needs for reform—poverty reduction, agrarian reform, social reforms in the health, education sectors, jobs, and

measures that would reduce the gap between the region's richest and poorest citizens.

Socio-economic rights continue to lag behind political rights in most Latin American and Caribbean countries. The region is marked by tremendous poverty, discrimination, and some of the widest disparities of wealth in the world. ECLAC reports that in 1990, 200 million people (48.3%) of the region lived in poverty, with 93 million (22.5%) living in extreme poverty. By 2002, close to 220 million (43.4%) inhabitants of the region were poor with 95 million (18.8%) living in extreme poverty. While the overall percentages of poverty have declined, there are 20 million more Latin Americans living in poverty in 2003 than there were in 1997.

Yet, as a UNDP report on democracy in Latin America released last year has found, "The first generation of Latin Americans to come of age in functioning democracies has experienced virtually no per capita income growth and widening, world-record disparities in the distribution of national income; in 2003, 225 million Latin Americans had incomes below the poverty line."

Such indicators provide the backdrop for a sense that we are on the cusp of a crisis of democracy in the region. The aforementioned UNDP report warned that Latin American democracies are suffering from a deep crisis of confidence after 25 years of progress toward civilian government. The authors found that "more than half of all Latin Americans-54.7 percent-say they would support an "authoritarian" regime over "democratic" government if authoritarianism rule could "resolve" their economic problems."

With basic human needs unmet for vast numbers of the region, the privatization of goods and services, the reduction of state subsidies for basic foodstuffs and oil, and rising costs have made it increasingly difficult for governments to address such social inequalities. Furthermore, a range of structural factors—the disproportionate power of the executive in some countries; the demands of international investors; and conditionality requirements of multilateral development banks, international financial institutions or organizations such as the World Trade Organization—undermine the power of elected and other government officials to respond to demands for social reforms or to enact measures that might benefit the region’s poorest sectors (Heyzer 2004).

Such failures have raised questions in some sectors about the nature and desirability of democracy itself, and about the extent to which these growing expectations for equality and equity can be met. Democratic politics has largely failed to deliver on the critical needs for justice, security, and economic stability for most Latin Americans (Inter-American Dialogue 2004). Since 2000, newly enfranchised or empowered citizens, fed up with the failure of democracy to deliver on the critical economic needs of the region, have mobilized to force five elected South American presidents from office.

The institutionalization of democratic structures, the increased capacity for mobilization (particularly given advances in technology and communications), and the achievement of global accords committing governments to promote equity and universal rights, including the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism, have occurred in a context where competition for declining state resources is greater than ever.

Likewise, we have a new environment with increased demands based on threats to security—stemming from ongoing threats relating to increased urban crime in many countries; threats to security from terrorist groups, drug traffickers, criminals or corrupt officials; or inadequate food, jobs, healthcare, and education.

Here today to discuss the implications of this context of challenges to security and democratization are three speakers who will address different aspects of governability: Steven Monblatt, who will speak on “Terrorism in the Americas and the OAS Response,” Ambassador Beatriz Ramaciotti, who will discuss “Democracy and Multidimensional Security—the Rising Need for Citizen Security in Latin America,” and Dr. Cynthia Watson, who will analyze new Chinese patterns of investment in Latin America and their implications for security and governance. I’ve asked each of the panelists to speak for ten minutes and then we will open the floor for questions, comments, and discussion.