



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on May 10, 2019

Democracy Losing Street Cred as Latin Americans Lose Prosperity

“Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others,” as the [saying goes](#). But those undefined “others” are precisely what Latin Americans may get, as their faith in “democracy” is waning along with their economies. Yet if people say they’re dissatisfied with representative government, isn’t it just another way of saying they’re dissatisfied with themselves (or with most everyone else)?



Reporting on the matter and citing Latin America’s two biggest nations, Bloomberg [writes](#):

Elections in Brazil and Mexico last year saw anti-establishment leaders surge to power as voters turned against the status quo. Stagnant economies played a part in the revolt — and the prospect of a quick revival under new governments is fading. Instead, economists have been slashing growth forecasts for both.

It’s early days for Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right former army captain, and Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a leftist who got elected in Mexico at his third attempt. But their teething troubles point to a wider problem. Over the past five years, Latin American economies have lagged emerging-market peers. It’s the only region where living standards actually declined.

Bloomberg provides a chart illustrating the phenomenon. Showing change in per capita GDP since 2013, the greatest disparity is between “emerging Asia” (+31.6 percent) and Latin America (-2.3 percent). The latter truly is anomalous. For as even left-wing *Think Progress* [reported](#) in 2013, the standard of living worldwide is history’s highest — thanks to the spread of the market-economy meritocratic system.

Bloomberg also mentions Argentina, where for more than two decades “power has swung between pro-business and populist governments — while the economy has endured repeated slumps under both,” the site writes.

Moreover, while increasing skepticism about “democracy” is a global phenomenon, it’s especially acute in the aforementioned nations. Support for democracy “fell to 34 percent in Brazil last year, from 48 percent two decades earlier,” reports Bloomberg, citing a study. “There were similar-sized declines in



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Argentina (from a higher starting point) and Mexico.”

Of course, if people were rejecting “democracy” in the pure (direct) sense, it would make sense, but at issue here is representative government in general. Yet insofar as such a system is *of*, *by*, and *for* the people — and considering Joseph de Maistre’s statement, “Every nation gets the government it deserves” — what are the people complaining about but themselves?

Answer: perhaps everyone else (it’s always the other guy, right?). I sometimes quip, “I understand and accept that people get the government they deserve; my gripe is that *I’m* going to get the government they deserve.” The issue, however, is that the alternative to “democracy” is autocracy.

This isn’t to say the rep-government skepticism is entirely irrational. As our second president, John Adams, pointed out in 1798 echoing many great thinkers, our governmental system was made “only for a moral and religious people.” For without a good measure of virtue in the citizenry, rep-government can sometimes just be the people making, slowly and inefficiently, the bad decisions that a dictator could make with the stroke of a pen.

A good example, from Latin America, is how in 1970 the Chileans made Salvador Allende the world’s first democratically elected Marxist leader. Apropos to this, *American Thinker* [wrote just yesterday](#) that Venezuelans (who made a fatal mistake themselves: electing socialist Hugo Chavez) need their own Augusto Pinochet, the man who took power sometime after Allende was ousted in a 1973 coup. Embracing many of famed economist Milton Friedman’s ideas, Pinochet would transform the Chilean economy from zero to hero.

Of course, trumping misguided popular will could yield a Pinochet — or a Castro or Mao. It all depends on who’s doing the trumping. Note here that since the Chilean coup was backed by the United States, its results could have to an extent reflected American virtue (cue leftist heads exploding, 3-2-1...).

Yet human virtue — which includes prudence (wisdom) — is in general quite lacking, which explains why good government is so elusive. Example: The short Bloomberg article previously cited contains the term *swung/swing* three times, as in “power has swung between _____” (two disparate entities). This brings to mind a profound passage from G.K. Chesterton’s 1911 book *Alarms and Discursions*:

The whole curse of the last century has been what is called the Swing of the Pendulum; that is, the idea that Man must go alternately from one extreme to the other. It is a shameful and even shocking fancy; it is the denial of the whole dignity of mankind. When Man is alive he stands still. It is only when he is dead that he swings. But whenever one meets modern thinkers (as one often does) progressing towards a madhouse, one always finds, on inquiry, that they have just had a splendid escape from another madhouse. Thus, hundreds of people become Socialists, not because they have tried Socialism and found it nice, but because they have tried Individualism and found it particularly nasty. Thus, many embrace Christian Science solely because they are quite sick of heathen science; they are so tired of believing that everything is matter that they will even take refuge in the revolting fable that everything is mind. Man ought to march somewhere. But modern man (in his sick reaction) is ready to march nowhere — so long as it is the Other End of Nowhere.

And so today we have the “swing voter,” who gives us Democrats one election and Republicans the next, economic-freedom proponents one year and socialists four years later. I’ve met people who voted for Ronald Reagan in 1984 because they “liked” him and then voted for quite antithetical Bill Clinton eight years later because they “liked” him.



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It makes no sense, of course, except insofar as it accords with the phenomenon of human emotionalism. For good economic principles — limited regulation, low taxation, encouraging productivity, and the government basically staying out of the economy’s way — remain the same no matter the year. They remain the same, and valid, even if the economy happens to take a downturn while they’re in force, in just the same way that the principles of proper nutrition remain valid even if (for some reason) one suffers some health problems while adhering to them.

I don’t know if, for instance, President Bolsonaro’s policies will remedy Brazil’s economic woes. What’s for certain is that expecting “a quick revival” and perhaps glomming onto some demagogue when it doesn’t transpire is childish. Things worth having take work and often time to attain.

Yet too many voters are like a bad patient who, even when having a good doctor prescribing necessary medicine, refuses to take it long enough to achieve results and then falls for some slick snake-oil salesman’s pitch. Or they’re like a guy who’s never happy in marriage and who, ever the swinger, goes from one woman to the next, not realizing the problem is the man in the mirror.

The moral of this story is that we should not swing but learn and discern and be faithful — to Truth.

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