

**In the Shadow
of the
United States**

**In the Shadow
of the United States:
Democracy
and
Regional Order
in the Latin Caribbean**

Giancarlo Soler Torrijos

Brown Walker Press
Boca Raton

*In the Shadow of the United States:
Democracy and Regional Order in the Latin Caribbean*

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This work is the culmination of a study that started as an interest with explaining political processes in my home country, Panama. Meanwhile, democratic transitions were taking place in Central America, the region to which I have devoted most of my professional life. I became interested in democratisation studies because the local, the regional and the global seemed to converge on the issue of regime transitions but then couldn't quite formulate a way to understand it. Thus all of these issues became part of a research project that took this form, first as a thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the DPhil in International Relations at Oxford University, from where I received the academic training and advice that allowed me to give a coherent shape to these concerns.

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Giancarlo Soler Torrijos

Introduction

Understanding and Explaining Latin Caribbean Regime Transitions

It is now a familiar story that, in the post-Cold War era, transitions to democracy in the Latin Caribbean have progressed well and farther ahead than in many other parts of the world. In the eighties, countries in the area formerly under authoritarian or dictatorial regimes adopted liberal democratic institutions and procedures. At first, beneath the veil of political openings, 'exclusionary democracies' emerged: political competition and the exercise of political rights remained restricted, while (most notably in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala) armed conflicts prevailed. Despite this tormented past, with the end of East-West rivalries these societies took steps towards strengthening their incipient democracies and now seem to be way past that situation. In spite of possible shortcomings, these events provide the basis for claiming that present prospects for democratic consolidation in the sub-region have no parallel in history. How did this happen? How can we explain it? What can we learn from it?

These advances have been taking place in a global setting that has stirred regime changes worldwide. As post-Cold War political developments, we may be tempted to group them together as deferred repercussions of the 1989 revolution, said to be caused by "the collapse of authoritarian alternatives to liberalism and the decline of brutality in both internal and international affairs."¹ To an extent, this is true of regime transitions in the Latin Caribbean, because authoritarian forces lost strength as post-1989 events behind the Iron Curtain and the sub-region unfolded. Yet, democratisation in these states cannot be depicted simply as a process mirroring international trends.² In the eighties, for example,

1. John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 156.

2. Karen L. Remmer, "Democratization in Latin America." In Robert O. Slater, Barry M. Schutz, and Steven R. Dorr (eds.), *Global Transformation and the Third World*, (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers and Adamantine Press, 1993), p. 97.

Right-wing authoritarianism had ceased to be a credible political option elsewhere, while in the area it remained as an alternative.

In contrast to most of Latin America, these transitions are rather late by western world standards. The waves of democratic transitions began in Southern Europe with Portugal's military-led 'Revolution of Carnations' in 1974, followed later by similar developments in Greece, Spain and South America. By the end of the eighties, all South American nations had undergone transitions from authoritarian rule, and most had sworn in a second president-elect. During this interval, however, prevailing conditions in the Latin Caribbean gave way to the belief that the sub-region was far from this achievement. Compared in terms of the nature of the political regimes in place during most of the sixties and seventies, the Latin Caribbean was generally not too different from its South American counterparts. In the seventies, authoritarian regimes throughout Latin America were beleaguered by mass popular movements demanding democracy and human rights. Latin Caribbean political activists, like their South American counterparts, struggled for democratisation.

Then why did the Latin Caribbean not follow the democratising trend of its neighbours to the south? What distinguishes Latin Caribbean regime changes from transitions elsewhere? Relying on both comparative political and international relations perspectives, this book argues that different geo-strategic conditions account for the sub-region's atypical trajectory. There were regime conditions such as the existence of formal democratic institutions and previous or concurrent experiences with pluralism that were country-specific but not totally out of line with Latin America. The book argues that the Latin Caribbean's different trajectory resulted from the continuous exertion of US power that, through time, projected itself and solidified into the political character of these states.

The United States has the oldest democracy in the world, and it has been the world power that has most intervened or influenced Latin American and Caribbean affairs. Why did these influences not translate themselves into earlier or less traumatic democratisations in the Latin Caribbean, compared to other parts of the continent, and the world? If it were for being so close to the United States and for the declared intention of US foreign policies, the Latin Caribbean should have been one of the first and not one of the last regions to democratise. Evidently, US involvement or resolve does not always translate into desired changes, no matter how powerful the regional hegemon is vis-à-vis the states in the area. Witness the direction taken by the Cuban revolution in the sixties, in the midst of the Cold War. Yet, whereas transitions in the Latin Caribbean cannot be explained as direct results of US influence, neither can they be understood without appraising the role of the United States. Throughout the twentieth century, the United States imbued the Latin Caribbean's economical, political and cultural affairs and, as such, it is imperative to incorporate the role of the United States into the explanation: US influence should be seen in the context of the regional construction that historically permeated political change in the area.

This book presents answers to these questions by examining the following comparative hypothesis. First, that the exercise of US power distorted regime transitions, without being sufficient to determine outcomes. But hegemonic patterns are not static. Depending on the sum of local and external circumstances, US influence aided or impaired democratic prospects. Second, domestic actors altered their calculations and strategies to take into account the likely reactions of the hegemon. Having to cope with a regional order structured from without, actors engaged in cost-benefit analysis of regime change based on the opportunities and constraints offered by the external environment. Third, that the set of domestic-international interactions propelling each regime transition is also conditioned by the broader regional order and by the sequence of political events in neighbouring countries.

To provide the background for that discussion and for the case studies that follow, heretofore this introductory chapter addresses the following propositions. Firstly, whereas the existing comparative literature on democratisation—including that stressing its international aspects—helps us understand the interplay of forces leading the change from one regime to the next, a geo-strategic dimension needs to be incorporated. But geo-strategic conditions are country- and region-specific and this book is dealing with processes that seem to be taking place on a regional basis. Thus, secondly we need to understand what is meant by the Latin Caribbean and why such differentiation matters for the study of regime transitions in the area. The United States has been the sub-region's hegemonic power and has conducted a great deal of its relations with these states under the banner of promoting democracy. Then, thirdly we delve into the US democracy-promotion policies in general and in relation to this sub-region in particular. Fourthly, all this brings us to realise that, to fully comprehend the political evolution of the Latin Caribbean, we must pay attention to the interlocking of regime transitions and regional orders and to the shadow that the US projected. Finally, a section on research methods expands on the complexities of addressing the scope of this study.

Democratisation and its international aspects

So far, research on democratisation has gone through three generations, each of which has attempted to explain what brings forward and sustains democracy. The perception that full democracy existed only in Western (and Westernised) industrial countries conditioned the first generation. The second drew out comparisons from the transitions in Southern Europe and South America. The flourishing third generation, to which this study aims to contribute, strives to incorporate transitions' external environment, as both Eastern and Central Europe manifested at the end of the Cold War.

The first studies on democratisation assumed that some combination of social and economic conditions would steer democratic political transformations. Seen from this perspective, democratisation required a "suitable" distribution of land, wealth and income, high levels of education and economic development, and cultural homogeneity.³ These writings grew out of the generalisation that, since

3. See, primarily, the oft-cited works of Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of

most industrialised, capitalist economies were democracies, the Third World would become democratic only if it increasingly resembled those of the First, socially and culturally. Reality added weight to this belief since, by mid-1970, there were relatively few democracies in the world.

In the social sciences, this perception took ground within the “modernisation school” of political development. It argues that socio-economic development affects the prospects for democracy at all layers of society. At the individual level, a higher level of income, education and social or occupational status would buttress democratic norms, values and behaviours. However, transitions have taken place and are underway despite many setbacks in social and economic indicators. As Remmer has stated regarding Latin America, the sub-region’s political development does not conform to the notion that modernisation promotes democracy. Changes in social status, education and income have not lessened individuals’ propensity to support authoritarianism. At the societal level, democratisation has not mirrored socio-economic development. “The most modernized countries in Latin America have not necessarily been the most democratic, nor have gains in literacy, per capita income, or popular organisational capacity been predictably translated through time into democratisation.” For instance, the democratic advances of the eighties were concurrent with economic crisis, de-industrialization, and abrupt falls in standards of living.⁴

In tracing the causality of political processes, this perspective has given way to explorations of the linkages between economic reform and political change. Research on this topic points out the ways in which economic reforms affect political developments but, contrary to the requisites-of-democracy argument, these are non-deterministic.⁵ As such, it is a step forward towards comprehending the engines of political liberalisation and democratisation.

The second generation of the literature on democratisation does not reject the possible effect that “structural” factors may have in the long term on the prospects for democracy. Rather, it asserts that democratisation is grounded on politi-

Democracy,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, 1959, pp. 69-105; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, expanded edition, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 27-63; Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Centrality of Political Culture,” *Journal of Democracy* 1 (Fall 1990), pp. 88-91; Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 48-188; and Dankart Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy: Towards a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics* 2 (April 1970), pp. 358-361.

4. Karen L. Remmer, “Democratisation in Latin America.” In Slater, Schutz, and Dorr (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.

5. See Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reform in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Laurence Whitehead, *Economic Liberalization and Democratisation: Exploration of the Linkages*, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1993). For an earlier discussion, see George A. Lopez and Michael Stohl (eds.), *Liberalization and Redemocratisation in Latin America*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987). For an analysis of the political impact of the transition to market economies in Socialist societies, see Yanqi Tong, “Economic Reform and Political Change in Reforming Socialist Societies: The Cases of China and Hungary,” Ph.D. Dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1992.

cal choices, not necessarily on social and economic conditions. Works along these lines began with the emergence of democratic transitions in Southern Europe in the seventies, and in South America in the eighties. The emerging democracies triggered comparative and country studies pointing out a number of intervening variables, mostly domestic in nature, which could be identified at distinct conjunctures of the transient period from the breakdown of authoritarianism to the onset of constitutional rule. A fundamental tenet of the second generation is that the sequence of actions/choices is essential for the outcome of transitions. In examining the transitions in Southern Europe and South America, we learned what sparks democratic transitions, that these factors may vary and that they might end in regimes that take different institutional shapes.⁶ Actors of various kinds, in pursuing their interests, coalesce or clash to affect government policies or the composition of regimes. However, outcomes depend on the sequence of choices made at every phase of the process. The probability of later transitional circumstances pushing towards a democratic outcome “rests on earlier transitional choices and events that set the stage for a democratic scenario—a scenario that becomes more progressively difficult to deflect or reverse as it plays itself out.”⁷ As such, it provides a process-driven explanation, for sequences of interactions create scenarios upon which later political activity takes place.

The degree to which second-generation works accepted the weight of external actors varied from total non-recognition to acknowledging certain influences that nevertheless remained secondary to understanding democratisation. As in most comparative political studies, the evaluation of regime change grew from the assumption that political processes occur within national boundaries and, as a result, causality must be traced in the domestic realm. Whenever an external aspect was taken into consideration, the norm was to consider it as a one-off input with repercussions limited to the moment in which it intrudes in a country’s political process. Baloyra (1987), for instance, made no room for foreign actors in formulating a framework aimed at identifying the initial stages of transitions.⁸ Similarly, Vanhanen (1990, 1992) mentioned no external linkages to democratisation in an initial comparative study of 147 states, and later in developing a model in which specific domestic strategies determined the success of the struggles for democracy.⁹ Likewise, Diamond imputed political changes to the domestic interplay of political forces, though conceded that domestic politi-

6. The pioneering studies are contained in the four volumes edited by Guillermo O’Donnell, Philip C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986).

7. Giuseppe Di Palma, “The European and the Central American Experience.” In Giuseppe Di Palma and Laurence Whitehead (eds.), *The Central American Impasse*, (London and Sidney: Croom Helm and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 1986), pp. 30-31.

8. Enrique Baloyra, “Democratic Transitions in Comparative Perspective.” In Enrique Baloyra (ed.), *Comparing New Democracies*, (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 9-52.

9. Tatu Vanhanen, *The Process of Democratisation: A Comparative Study of 147 States, 1980-1988*, (Washington, Philadelphia and London: Crane Russak, 1990); and Tatu Vanhanen, “Introduction.” In *Strategies of Democratisation*, (Washington, Philadelphia and London: Crane Russak, 1992), pp. 1-29.

cal structures in the Third World have a substantial foreign component, rooted in colonial legacies.¹⁰

Regional studies followed the same line of thought. In appraising the role of the United States over Latin American transitions, for instance, Lowenthal called US influence “of secondary or tertiary importance.” Lowenthal also noted the exception of rare cases when external influence could “tip the scale,” such as in the Dominican Republic’s elections in 1978, or in highly penetrated countries that are vulnerable to the United States.¹¹ Overall, social scientists agreed that international actors played at best an indirect role, excepting countries occupied by foreign powers.¹²

The largely peaceful changes that took place in the former Communist block in 1989-1990 challenged the assumptions laid out by prior models of democratisation. The only foreign aspect systematically studied thus far was the influence of the European Economic Community, especially in terms of the attractiveness it posed to the élites of its Southern European neighbours.¹³ Transitions to democracy in Southern Europe and the Southern Cone had occurred in peacetime, from regimes of the Right, in developing or newly industrializing countries within the Western alliance system. However, in Central and Eastern Europe they took place from regimes “of the Left,” in countries with command economies and with little historical experience with liberal democracy—factors which were not present in previous cases.

10. Larry Diamond, “Introduction: Persistence, Erosion, Breakdown and Renewal,” in Larry Diamond, Juan Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset. (eds.), *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia*, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), pp. 1-53. In later writings, Diamond incorporated external variables to his theoretical framework.
11. Abraham Lowenthal, “The United States and Latin American Democracy: Learning from History.” In Abraham Lowenthal (ed.), *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 400.
12. Laurence Whitehead, “International Aspects of Democratisation.” In Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (eds.), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives*, Vol. 3, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 45; Philippe Schmitter, “Una introducción a las transiciones desde la dominación autoritaria en Europa meridional: Italia, Grecia, Portugal, España y Turquía.” In Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (eds.), *Transiciones desde un gobierno autoritario: Europa Meridional*, Vol. 1, (Buenos Aires, Barcelona, Mexico: Paidós, 1989 [1986]).
13. See Geoffrey Pridham, “Comparative Perspectives on the New Mediterranean Democracies: A Model of Regime Transition?” In Geoffrey Pridham (ed.), *The New Mediterranean Democracies: Regime Transition in Spain, Greece and Portugal*, (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1984), p. 22. The influence of the EEC was not incorporated systematically in an interpretative framework until the early nineties, when events in Eastern Europe made evident its importance. See, among others, Bassilios Tsingos, “Underwriting Democracy, Not Exporting It.” M.Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1994. See also John Pinder, “The European Community and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.” In Geoffrey Pridham, Eric Herring, and George Sanford (eds.), *Building Democracy? The International Dimension of Democratisation in Eastern Europe*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 119-143; and Susannah Verney, “To be or not to be within the European Community: the party debate and democratic consolidation in Greece.” In Geoffrey Pridham (ed.), *Securing democracy: political parties and democratic consolidation in Southern Europe*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 203-223.

The third generation of the literature on democratisation, an offspring of the second, begins with the assumption that transitions must be studied in relation to the international context. The new international circumstances laid out the impetus for systematising the external environment of democratization processes. The political transformations in Eastern Europe showed the overall importance of the international context, specially the end of the Cold War, but had to be incorporated into the analytical framework. Pridham, for instance, a pioneer in the study of the international aspects of democratisation, in a 1984 study underrated the external environment of Southern European transitions. But the new situation demanded reconsideration, "The international context is the forgotten dimension in the study of democratic transition... whether [it] is secondary to domestic development is less clear-cut than [...] suggested in the theoretical or comparative literature."¹⁴ Previously a few studies had regarded external factors, but they had usually taken it for granted, precisely because -at least in relation to Southern Europe in the 1970's and South America in the 1980's- it "seldom intruded too conspicuously on an essentially domestic drama."¹⁵ The notion that external factors may significantly influence the outcome of regime change has increasingly served as the basis for comparative studies on democratisation.¹⁶

In this sense, the Latin Caribbean's democratic advances—as post 1989 developments—indicate that they have incorporated an 'international dimension.' However, the area's international context has been substantially different from that experienced by states elsewhere. For international politics is played within particular regional contexts, "marked by a distinctive pattern of powers and agen-

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14. Geoffrey Pridham, "International Influences and Democratic Transition: Problems of Theory and Practice in Linkage Politics." In Geoffrey Pridham (ed.), *Encouraging Democracy: The International Context of Regime Transition in Southern Europe*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1991), pp. 1, 26. This is a reversal from Pridham, "Comparative Perspectives on the New Mediterranean Democracies: A Model of Regime Transition?," pp. 1-29.
15. Whitehead, "International Aspects of Democratisation," p. 5. Other pioneering works in this aspect are: Alfred Tovas (1984), "The International Context of Democratic Transition." In Pridham, *The New Mediterranean Democracies*, pp. 158-171; and Terry Karl, "Imposing Consent? Electoralism vs. Democratisation in El Salvador." In Paul W. Drake and Eduardo Silva (eds.), *Elections and Democratisation in Latin America, 1980-1985*, (San Diego, California: University of California, San Diego, 1986), pp. 9-36.
16. See Laurence Whitehead, "The Imposition of Democracy." In Abraham Lowenthal (ed.), *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 356-382; a revision of the transitions in Southern Europe to consider the external aspects is in Pridham, "International Influences and Democratic Transition: Problems of Theory and Practice in Linkage Politics;" on Eastern Europe, see Geoffrey Pridham and Tatu Vanhanen (eds.), *Democratisation in Eastern Europe: Domestic and International Perspectives*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), and the volume edited by Pridham, Herring, and Sanford, *Building Democracy? The International Dimension of Democratisation in Eastern Europe*; Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), an ambitious attempt to cover the history of democratic development as a by-product of American influence in the world. The most comprehensive work on this subject to date is Laurence Whitehead (ed.), *The international dimension of democratisation: Europe and the Americas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

da of concerns.”¹⁷ South America and Mediterranean Europe are regions located in the outer layers of the US-dominated system of alliances. The Latin Caribbean is located within the innermost layer of the US sphere-of-influence.¹⁸ This variation denoted the Western hegemonic power’s lesser involvement and commitment in the democratisation processes of Southern Europe and South America in the seventies and eighties; transitions in those regions went on with a large degree of autonomy from the international environment and took place without forceful foreign pressures. Excepting, briefly, Portugal’s military-led ‘Carnation Revolution’ in 1974, overall their transitions did not threaten the world’s balance of power.

The external dimension of regime change in the Latin Caribbean may have long been apparent, as decades of US involvement in the sub-region’s conflicts attest. Yet, the extent to which geo-strategic circumstances influence the outcome of transitions has until recently been not been incorporated into the analytical framework of democratisation, though so far it has concentrated on Eastern Europe. Post-Cold War studies on the Eastern European transitions naturally take into account the impact of geo-strategic conditions: the effect of the Soviet Union’s effective withdrawal from Eastern European affairs in 1989 and the stabilizing force of European democracies. As such, they could not have occurred the way they did without the Soviet Union’s lifting of its “veto power” over the sub-region’s political developments.¹⁹ East-Central European states experienced, however, a different form of ‘subordination’: they went from a Moscow-based, direct form of domination, to a more loose relationship with multi-centred European powers.²⁰ The Latin Caribbean has intermittently experienced both direct and indirect forms of hegemonic control by Washington, but under a substantially more relaxed atmosphere than that of the monolithic Soviet Union, an environment pertaining to the complexities of American political institutions and culture. Latin Caribbean political developments evidence that there is a geo-strategic dimension at play. Yet, the analytical framework of democratisation has not adequately dealt with the extent to which regional circumstances have conditioned democratic transitions in this area of the world.²¹

17. Robert H. Jackson and Alan James, “The Character of Independent Statehood.” In Robert Jackson and Alan James (eds.), *States in a Changing World: A Contemporary Analysis*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 12.

18. Similar considerations regarding this subregion are in Thomas G. Weiss and James G. Blight (ed.), *The suffering grass: Superpowers and regional conflict in Southern Africa and the Caribbean*, (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992).

19. Laurence Whitehead, “East-Central Europe in Comparative Perspective.” In Pridham, Her- ring, and Sanford (eds.), *Building Democracy? The International Dimension of Democratisation in Eastern Europe*, pp. 32–59. See also Gary Goertz and Jon Solem, “Eastern Europe, 1945–1989.” In Gary Goertz, *Contexts of International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 137–170; Laurence Whitehead, “Geography and democratic destiny,” *Journal of Democracy*, (January 1999), pp. 74.

20. For a plausible comparison between the USSR and the United States vis-à-vis their respective spheres-of-influence, see Jan Triska (ed.), *Dominant Powers and Subordinate States: The United States in Latin America and the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe*, (Durnham: Duke University Press, 1986).

21. On Central America, two works deal with the notion of an hegemonic impediment to democratisation: One, briefly, by Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies*, (Berkeley,

Geo-strategic conditions are relevant because political-geographic circumstances influence a state's political configuration and foreign relations.²² The condition of vicinity entails intense interactions with adjacent political, economic and cultural influences. As geographically-based entities, states can hardly renounce having relations with their neighbours. Despite a Head of State's will to isolate his nation from outside influences (as was the case of Albania under Enver Hoxha) or another's attempt to isolate a pariah state (as the United States and Cuba under Fidel Castro), it is practically impossible to avoid the totality of interactions with the surroundings.

As players in the international arena, states find constraints derived from the world system's (and its regional counterpart's) distribution of power. For less developed countries and, therefore, subordinate players in the international arena, geo-strategic circumstances mean that their actions are constrained by rules and norms established by dominant hegemons. Latin Caribbean states' proximity to the United States was often viewed in Washington as possible sources of threat to its national security while their weakness was interpreted as a justification to dictate them rules and control their behaviour. For more developed and, consequently, dominant players, it means that their world-wide exertion of authority is not homogeneous. Considerations about their relations with each region are also influenced by their geographical proximity (the closer states within these regions are, the greater the potential danger to its national security) and by their power capabilities (the weaker the states within these regions are, the easier it may be to dictate rules and force behaviour). In this sense, though America's sphere-of-influence extends to the whole Western Hemisphere—if not beyond—weaker states located within its 'shadow'—as in the Caribbean Basin—have endured substantial and greater US tutelage over their affairs.

Costa Rica's 'exceptionality' throws light into the framework proposed here.²³ The Cold War had been launched with the enunciation of the Truman 'doctrine' in 1947 but, by 1948, as the Costa Rican Revolution started, Washington had not yet overturned its aim of promoting democracy in the Americas. For example, at this point in time, Washington had not yet fully come to terms with Nicaragua's dictator Anastasio Somoza García who, as head of the National Guard, had deposed the President, breaking the constitutional scheme fostered by the

Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), p. 192; and the other also by Giuseppe Di Palma "The Central American and the European Experience." In Giuseppe Di Palma and Laurence Whitehead (eds.), *The Central American Impasse*, (London and Sydney: Croom Helm and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 1986), pp. 3031.

22. This argument is developed thoroughly in Jackson and James, "The Character of Independent Statehood," *Op. cit.*
23. Most of the keys to Costa Rican exceptionalism have been searched for in the domestic realm. See Kirk S. Bowman, "New scholarship on Costa Rican Exceptionalism," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 41, no. 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 123–130. The fact that the post-revolution governments implemented foreign policies aimed at maintaining a close relationship with the United States has been found to have contributed to the consolidation of Costa Rican democracy. See Cynthia Chalker Franklyn, "Riding the wave: the domestic and international sources of Costa Rican democracy," PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1998, p. 195.

State Department at the end of the War. The new and subsequent Costa Rican regimes' adaptive behaviour—banning Communist party activity (made easier by the latter's active participation in the defeated government) and allying with Washington, though pursuing left-of-centre government policies—allowed the country to evolve into democratic consolidation, because it did not endure US influences contrary to this outcome.²⁴

Guatemala's transition (1944–1954), despite taking place at similar historical conjunctures, followed a dissimilar path. It seems to have ended differently because of Washington's greater opposition to leftist influence in the government of Col. Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in the first half of the fifties than to that in San Jose (whose Communists opposed and fought against Costa Rica's Revolution). Guatemala faced US hostility: by 1954, McCarthyist paranoia at home and zero-sum Cold War logic abroad propelled Washington to overturn Guatemala's brief democratic trajectory, destroying what might have been the second (though historically it would have been the first) pillar of democracy in the Latin Caribbean.²⁵

The Latin Caribbean

The Caribbean is traditionally known as the area made up by the heterogeneous group of the smallest states in the Americas with coasts in the Caribbean Sea; these states share a variety of cultural and climatic elements, and maybe similar problems, in view of their dual condition as being lesser-developed and the most vulnerable states. Those states bordering the Caribbean whose formation as nation-states led them on a different course—due to their size, strength, history or ties to other Latin American countries—are not normally deemed part of this sub-region. Among them are the United States, Mexico, Panama (whose sub-regional identity is pending), Venezuela and Colombia (the latter two have stronger ties to the Andean region). Due to historical and geographic circumstances, Central American states have developed few links with the Caribbean, and one of them, El Salvador, borders only the Pacific Ocean. In this picture, the Caribbean is formed by the island-states in the Caribbean Sea and the mainland countries (Guyana, Surinam and Belize) that belong to the Caribbean Economic Community (CARICOM), plus Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Non-sovereign entities such as the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are excluded, though their actors sometimes partake in the sub-region's cultural and political interactions.

As a politically constructed sub-region, the definition of the Caribbean is undergoing change. The United States, with its geo-strategic vision of the area, has continually referred to the region as the Caribbean Basin, to include the Central American States and Panama in this aggregation. Given its condition as a transit route for a significant portion of its trade, differences in culture, history or any other condition separating the countries in the area has mattered little for

24. US attitudes toward the Costa Rican revolution are in Jacobo Shifter, *Costa Rica, 1948: Análisis de documentos confidenciales del Departamento de Estado*, (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1982).

25. This story is best narrated by Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hopes: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1954*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

the US vision of the Caribbean. Nonetheless, since the nineties, political actors from within the area have sought to set up their own definition and put it into practice. These formed the Association of Caribbean States (ACE) to foster the integration of its members, in aspects such as transportation and the environment, among others. ACE includes the countries of Central America, the member states of CARICOM, Panama, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela. In this regard, since the mid-nineties CARICOM and Central America have increased their contacts through periodical bi-regional meetings.

From the point of view of the Caribbean's history of foreign relations, there is a sub-region differentiated from the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America: the Latin Caribbean. The political evolution of the states in this area have endured the constant intervention of the United States and are characterised by their subordinate relationship with the northern hegemon; they have developed a political configuration that differentiates them from the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America. This definition leaves out Belize and the Anglo-Dutch Caribbean, as well as Guyana and Surinam, which for historical circumstances evolved under the umbrella of European powers even after their independence. Though these countries have not been free from US intervention (as the 1983 US invasion of Grenada suggests), the exercise of US influence took into consideration Europe's ascendancy over them, for which reason its impact was less overwhelming. Due to their distinct history (not free from US intervention, but with stronger institutions that allowed them to overcome it), Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia are not part of this area. The five Central American countries, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, thus make up the Latin Caribbean. Cuba before the revolution in 1959 and Puerto Rico before it acquired the Commonwealth status could be included in this definition and, if the criteria that have set them apart from their neighbours changes (as could be the case for Cuba), in the future they might be included.

The different pattern of foreign relations between the United States and Mexico, on the one hand, and the United States and Latin Caribbean states, on the other, illustrates the importance of location, power and history in the construction of this asymmetric relationship. At the same time that the United States has forcefully intervened, occupied or otherwise attempted to exert control over matters of smaller states in the Latin Caribbean, towards post-revolutionary Mexico the US government has not only abstained from intervening to any significant degree, but has generally refrained from expressing statements that might awake suspicions of interventionism in its southern neighbour. To put it another way: while post-revolutionary Mexican political evolution enjoyed a fair degree of stability and evolved with a substantial degree of autonomy from external influences, hardly any regime change in Latin Caribbean states has occurred without a substantial degree of US involvement.

What is so different between Mexico and the Latin Caribbean states? Being in the shadow of the United States does not carry the same meaning for each of the states in the area. One dissimilarity lies in its larger size, which has generally meant a larger capacity of the Mexican government to dispose of resources to

defend its relative autonomy in international affairs. This condition also made it difficult for foreign powers to attempt direct control over its entire territory. Another is that Mexico—aside the 1910 Revolution and its aftermath—has generally enjoyed greater political stability than its Latin Caribbean neighbours, precisely a condition which allowed the United States to immerse itself in their domestic affairs. It must also be noted the regrouping effect that, since the nineteenth century, foreign interventions had on Mexican national consciousness.

Seen from a power-political point of view, the Latin Caribbean is composed of the states whose political trajectory was for many decades carefully observed by the United States. The subordinate relationship with Washington and what this condition implied for their domestic political development (they were not colonies, but neither were they completely sovereign nor did enjoy any benefits from this condition) can also be applied to states such as Liberia in Africa and the Philippines in the Pacific. Nonetheless, it is a *sine-qua-non* stipulation for this definition that they are close to each other and to the United States. This last peculiarity, as explained later in this chapter, has had important implications for the political evolution of the states in this sub-region.

The Caribbean Basin represents the most important international environment for the states of the Latin Caribbean. This sub-region is made of mainly small states whose history of unfinished state formation led them to develop poor institutional foundations and become easier prey of foreign pressures. As the largest and most powerful state in the area, the United States cast an unavoidable shadow that pervaded the Latin Caribbean economically, culturally and politically. Once it became a world power, the US took advantage of this asymmetry to secure the sub-region's capabilities and make sure that it did not become the site for other power's encroachments. This fact of political geography meant that throughout their independent history, but most importantly, since the late nineteenth century, the United States was the Latin Caribbean states' most important source of external influence. Other international or regional powers did try to exert their ascendancy in the area, such as France, Great Britain and Mexico, but particularly after the Spanish-American War and the construction of the Panama Canal, their reach was never so profound and their impact was not so continuous and overwhelming.

The huge asymmetries between the United States and Latin Caribbean states created the conditions for the latter to establish a subordinate relationship with the regional hegemon.²⁶ First, there has been a large degree of interaction between them, usually across a broad range of issue areas of concern to one or both. Second, this interaction has had historical roots and functional breadth. Patterns of action and reaction, of the exercise and the receipt of influence, may be discernible over the history of United States-Latin Caribbean relations. Third, interaction between the dominant one and subordinates has been more significant for the latter. Customarily, the larger effect has occurred on the domestic and

26. David B. Abernethy, "Dominant-Subordinate Relationships: How Shall We Define Them? How Shall We Compare Them?" In Triska, *Dominant Powers and Subordinate States*, pp. 103–123.

foreign policies of the subordinate states. Fourth, the United States, as the dominant power, has had many more objectively measured, mutually acknowledged and mutually valued attributes of power than have had Latin Caribbean nations. The United States not only possesses the capacity to gain compliance from the subordinate states, it has also displayed the will to gain compliance. Fifth, the capacity for autonomous action of Latin Caribbean countries, the subordinate states, has been severely limited by the sheer fact of the dominant state's existence. Seventh, representatives of institutions based in the United States sometimes have penetrated the territory of the subordinate states, playing a direct and visible role as domestic actors in the latter's political life.²⁷

Facing a regional order structured from without, the Caribbean Basin became the most important environment for Latin Caribbean leaders; in it, they found most of the opportunities and constraints for their political activity. To confront domestic or external dangers, imminent or potential, actors have struggled to influence policy in Washington.²⁸ To take advantage of or avert situations found within the sub-region, actors form coalitions with other actors in the area or in the United States. Their interaction generates the environment in which they must live. Accordingly, the behaviour of any one of them has been an obligatory factor in the calculation of others. In this scenario, the nature of the regime and the domestic struggles to change them also alter the regional environment. This has had circularity implications, for not only the regional order has affected regime transitions, but also regime transitions have altered the cohesiveness and unity of the regional order. Political processes within it partake in the strengthening or challenging of the sub region's construction as the US inner sphere-of-influence. In this sense, they have 'forward effects': Episodes such as the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, the negotiations for new treaties regarding the ownership and sovereignty over the Panama Canal and, fundamentally, regime transitions themselves, altered the face of the regional order.

This book argues that being in the 'shadow' of the United States has been crucial for the political trajectory of Latin Caribbean states. This location implied that the sub-region experienced a form of external involvement different from that experienced by neighbouring countries. For practical purposes the world's—and the region's—distribution of power is fixed; that is, the United States is and has been the power with the willingness and capacity to influence the destinies

27. This situation fits Rosenau's definition of 'penetrated systems.' See James Rosenau, "Pre-theories and theories of foreign policy." In R. B. Farrell (ed.), *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*, (Evanston, Illinois Northwestern University Press, 1966), pp. 65. See also James N. Rosenau, "Toward the Study of National-International Linkages." In James Rosenau (ed.), *Linkage Politics: Essays on the Convergence of National and International Systems*, (New York and London: The Free Press and Collier-Macmillan, 1969), pp. 44–63.

28. On the effect these small nations have had on the formulation of policy in the United States, see Robert A. Pastor, "The United States and Central America Interlocking Debates." In Peter B. Evans, Harold K. Jacobson, and Robert Putnam (eds.), *Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 303. On the Panamanian case see also Robert A. Pastor, "The Lessons and the Legacy of Omar Torrijos." In *Whirlpool: US Foreign Policy Towards Latin America and the Caribbean*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

of the states in its orbit, even when other powers of lesser status, such as Mexico and Venezuela, did attempt to exert their ascendancy in the area. The exercise of power is laden with meaning. Due to historical circumstances—European state's self-perception as having a 'civilised' role in world affairs emerging from their history as colonial powers—European governments and the United States have differed in their perception of threats from abroad, and have not had the same availability of means or the national will to engage overtly or covertly in activities to promote specific political arrangements overseas. Washington has been less reluctant to use military force in this sub-region, because it could do so with little defiance from other powers. The United States has paid more attention to the regime break-down phases of transitions because of their underlying uncertainties and potential for realignments. On the other hand, Europe has placed a major emphasis on political and economic instruments in dealing with nations undergoing regime change. When they did make efforts at fostering democratic institutions, European powers usually did it while they were extricating themselves as colonial powers but also to make sure that the new institutions took root before they left. The result of these two emphases is self-evident: Those Caribbean states maintaining ties with their former English and Dutch metropolis have undergone different forms of influence and have experienced a more favourable environment for democratisation.²⁹ The stability of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago's democracies, while their Latin sisters in the Caribbean Basin evolved under autocratic or dictatorial rule, illustrates the point.

The United States and the promotion of democracy

The primary purpose of any country's foreign policy is the establishment of a favourable international environment. Unlike other powers in that quest, the United States has frequently endeavoured to alter the political regimes of other nations. Depending on the means at its disposal, perceptions of threats from the international order and Washington's willingness to engage in that transformation, the United States has oscillated between bolstering client regimes and forcing them to change the premises upon which they base their relations with the governed. During the Cold War, Washington often aided non-democratic governments or groups in procuring to avoid losses or to provoke them in the camp of an adversary with which it had engaged in a zero-sum game worldwide. More often than not, however, Washington went beyond the minimum efforts for a stable order, fostering political, social and economic changes in the nations to which it committed itself.

The call to protect and promote democracy is a persistent feature of the history of American foreign relations. During the course of the twentieth century, authorities in Washington often encouraged and expected other nations to become democratic and invoked the cause of democracy when pursuing its rela-

29. See Jorge I. Domínguez, "The Caribbean Question: Why Has Liberal Democracy (Surprisingly) Flourished?" In Jorge I. Domínguez, Robert A. Pastor, and R. De Lisle Worrell (eds.), *Democracy in the Caribbean: Political, Economic and Social Perspectives*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 1–25.

tions with the rest of the world. The process whereby the United States emerged and consolidated itself as a world power in the international arena was accompanied by attempts to formulate policies consistent with conceptions of its national interests. In that process, promoting democracy took the shape of a policy objective implemented with varying combinations of military, economic and political resources, along with other aims that sometimes took precedence over the first.

Why would the United States want other nations to become democratic and commit political, military and economic resources to that end? How can we best understand the impact Washington has had over the nature and characteristics of the political regimes of the countries to which it has directed its policies? An explanation to the former question is not an answer to the latter, but the second cannot be understood without having an answer to the first. To be sure, the relationship between the two is more complex than that between desiring and being able to encourage democracy, because both impinge upon factors pertaining to US domestic politics, the nature of the international order, and the characteristics of the regimes and societies with which Washington gets involved. It could be argued that the answer to the first lies in the realm of foreign policy analysis and the second in the realm of comparative politics. But, inasmuch as each of these factors affect specific features of the policy and its ability to induce regime change, they must be studied together, that is, as an aspect of the international relations field. To answer the first I will explore the sources of US foreign policy and their influence on the policy to protect and promote democracy. To answer the second, I present a model that builds upon previous inquiries into the history of US foreign relations and incorporates new elements of analysis.

For those engaged in the domestic roots of American foreign relations, the answer to the first question springs out of the specificities of the American political system. The school of historical interpretation known as “American Exceptionalism” points out that the United States experienced a different development path that affected the way its population perceived itself in relation to the rest of the world. Alexis de Tocqueville, nineteenth-century French student of American democracy, stated that Americans “arrived at a state of democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution... [they] are born equal, instead of becoming so.” Founded by immigrants who fled class and religious conflicts in Europe, American society was embedded with ideas of equality of opportunity and individual liberty. These ideas took form in a political system designed to defuse power rather than accumulate it. The observation of the nation’s uniqueness justified a foreign policy aimed at maintaining an external environment advantageous to the durability and prosperity of the nation’s domestic institutions. Throughout the nineteenth century, this aim brought about an isolationist foreign policy meant to take advantage of its geographic position—far from Europe’s perennial quarrels and close to lands which would nurture its territorial expansion—to channel the national stamina toward the construction of a homeland. “As the Union does not meddle in the affairs of Europe it has, so to say, no external interests at stake, for as yet it has no powerful

neighbors in America.”³⁰ The United States believed itself to possess exemplary political standards and regard the rest of the world as corrupt, for which it would extend its ways of life to the rest of the world. Under the philosophy of Manifest Destiny, the United States extended itself westwards, reaching California, and southwards, incorporating the area from Texas to Florida. Once its natural frontiers reached its limits and it got stronger, the United States took small but firm steps toward becoming an international power. Washington’s isolationism gradually gave place to an active foreign policy often wrapped around the defence of democracy.

The first area in which it projected its power abroad was precisely the Caribbean Basin where, after defeating Spain in 1898, the US took over the island of Puerto Rico and established itself to arbitrate political developments in the Caribbean. US uniqueness was also interpreted as a mandate whereby the US could not totally overrule the sovereignty of these countries, as had European powers. Thus Washington adopted hybrid methods for exerting its power: Caribbean nations that became object of US interests remained nominally independent, yet they were forced to adopt Constitutional amendments sanctioning US rights to intervene in their internal affairs—as Cuba in 1902 and Panama in 1904. Before the Russian Revolution and the onset of the Cold War, the United States frequently intervened in the area to foster political stability, exclude the encroachment of foreign powers and teach Caribbean leaders, including Mexicans, to “elect good men” and establish constitutional rule.

Yet the relationship between the American domestic political structure and its commitment to the democratisation of other countries is partial at best. There is no necessary causality between a democratic domestic structure and a foreign policy aiming to enhance democracy. In fact, it can be the case that a democratic nation engages in actions threatening the democratic governance of another nation or in actions causing the overthrow of a democratic regime. Through direct and indirect means, for example, the US government provoked the overthrow of democratically elected governments in Guatemala in 1954 and in Chile in 1973, and often helped to polarize political conditions in countries undergoing regime transitions. The opposite can also take place. The record of the Soviet Union regarding the states under its sphere of influence in Northern and Eastern Europe between the end of World War II and the enunciation of the Truman doctrine in 1947, shows that a nation with a dictatorial political system may tolerate and establish working relationships with democratic governments.

The domestic structure issue may not respond to the question but it does explain why democracy is so central to the discourse of American foreign relations. It helps explain why American policymakers often recur to democratic values when promoting their decisions—ranging from intervening militarily in a Third World country or signing arm sales agreements with non-democratic nations—to the public. The theme ‘democracy’ appeals to the basic emotions of Americans who see their country as a force for good in the world. This implies that US ex-

30. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 228.

ecutives “cannot totally dismiss for very long periods the humanitarian values in foreign policy without provoking adverse reactions from various important domestic governmental and non-governmental sectors.”³¹ The oscillation between active and passive postures in the world may be due, in large part, to Washington’s attempts to close the gaps between aspects of the American ideology and its participation in foreign affairs. In this sense, the underlying ideology that accompanies the American domestic political structure could thus account for specific features of US foreign policy. The Carter administration’s human rights policy, for instance, originated in the belief by Congress and wide segments of the public that the massive human rights violations in Latin America were caused by regimes the United States buttressed with military aid. Similarly, the Reagan administration’s move to support the establishment of constitutional regimes in Central America—partially shying away from the bolstering approach—can be understood as a way to lessen public opinion and Congressional opposition to his policies in support of the Contras in Nicaragua and in support of its allies in this area.³²

To be sure, though not a determinant of a foreign policy in support of democracy, the domestic political environment does affect specific features of the policy.³³ Public Opinion, Congressional-Executive relations, bureaucratic politics and the beliefs of the foreign policy elite act together or in isolation to influence targets, means and ends of American foreign relations. For an effective foreign policy, the Executive requires support from the public and Congress, as well as a consensus among the relevant bureaucratic structures of the administration that a chosen policy is the most suitable for the established ends. Public opinion—through the power of the vote—and Congress—through the power of the purse—may alter Washington’s foreign policy means and objectives. American ideology—the universal web in which public leaders are entangled—and specific beliefs held by policymakers in Washington also affect what and how a given objective is persecuted and implemented. Domestic political patterns, such as a new administration viewing the previous administration’s performance as having failed, influences the way in which Washington executes a particular foreign policy. This recurrently occurs every four or eight years when, following US constitutional practices, a new President gets into or is re-elected to the White House.

In these terms, domestic variables do elucidate why Washington maintains an interest in promoting democracy, but it does not fully explain why it gets involved in the transformation of other nations’ regimes. Establishing the promo-

31. Heraldo Muñoz, “Chile: The Limits of Success,” in Abraham Lowenthal (ed.), *Exporting Democracy: The US and Latin America*, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 152.

32. This period is examined by Thomas Carothers, *In the Name of Democracy: US Policy toward Latin America in the Reagan years*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1991).

33. According to Mark Peceny, *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1999), p. 45, reviewing six case studies, realist concerns account for the initial decisions to intervene of US Presidents, while Congressional partisan dynamics explain their final choices.