

MODERNIZATION AND

BUREAUCRATIC-AUTHORITARIANISM

STUDIES IN SOUTH AMERICAN POLITICS

Guillermo A. O'Donnell

MODERNIZATION AND
BUREAUCRATIC-AUTHORITARIANISM

STUDIES IN SOUTH AMERICAN POLITICS

Guillermo A. O'Donnell

With a 1979 Postscript

and a 1998 Preface



University of California at Berkeley

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

In this Text Edition, the original text has been newly set in a larger, more readable, and more attractive type face. The new edition has been designed to correspond as nearly as possible page-for-page with the original text, so that references based on the original would not differ by more than one or two (or in some instances, three) pages.

International Standard Book Number 0-87725-209-2

Library of Congress Card Number 73-620029

©1973, 1979, 1998 by the Regents of the University of California

Modernization and

Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism

PREFACE

I wrote this work while doing graduate study in political science at Yale University. I returned to Argentina in May 1971, but because of other commitments I was able to make only minor modifications in the manuscript before submitting it for publication. Thus I have not incorporated in my analysis the important events of relevance that have occurred in 1972, or enriched it with the results of my examination of several valuable contributions by other authors which came to my attention too late. However, I feel it is not inappropriate for me to offer this text for the consideration of the reader as it stands. Its basic argument has not been invalidated by the events of the past year; rather, they seem to have been very much in line with the general tendencies perceived in the study.

The main concern from which this work originated is the evidence that (to put it mildly) the manifold changes that South American countries have been undergoing in recent decades do not seem to have increased the probability of the emergence and consolidation of more open political systems, or of collective action that might effectively diminish the conspicuous inequalities and injustices in these societies.

This observation is very much at odds with still widely prevailing conceptions about the interactions of the political, social, and economic dimensions. According to these conceptions, which are discussed in detail in the main text, the "advances" observable in some socio-economic indicators reflect change-processes that should be leading toward more effective political arrangements. On the contrary, it is in those South American countries where modernization has proceeded furthest in the last two decades that there have been the only successful attempts to implant a new type of authoritarian political system, which I have labelled "bureaucratic-authoritarianism."

Before this proposition and some of its more important implications can be evaluated by the reader, several preparatory steps are necessary. First, the sense in which the term "modernization" is being used must be discussed. This involves making explicit some

PREFACE

important dissensions from dominant currents in political science and sociology—a discussion which I am afraid will be quite arid to many readers. The second requirement is a presentation of the analysis and data that support the view that bureaucratic-authoritarianism is a political phenomenon found only in situations of comparatively high modernization. A directly related point is that there are crucial differences between “bureaucratic” authoritarianism and other types (which I label “populist” and “traditional”) that in most of the literature are represented as typical of the South American continent. Delineation of the specific characteristics of bureaucratic-authoritarianism is aided by placing it in a comparative perspective and noting its similarities to systems in other, non-Latin American situations of high modernization.

With the completion of the preliminary steps of defining the concept of “modernization” and providing a typological characterization of “bureaucratic-authoritarianism,” the factors and processes of high modernization that seem to be the most influential in attempts to inaugurate and consolidate bureaucratic-authoritarian political systems can be explored. It is in relation to this dynamic, time-bound part of the historical process that the most important analytical contribution is needed: the explanation of the emergence of the new political forms and of their effects upon the social context. However, several limitations of the study (among them the lack of adequate data) make it impossible to provide such an analysis. The most that can be achieved is to render plausible and open the way for future empirical work to test the hypothesis that—to put it in Weberian terms—there is marked “elective affinity” between contemporary South American situations of high modernization and bureaucratic-authoritarianism.

Thus, this work is only a preliminary exploration, a point of departure for other investigations now in progress or to be undertaken in the future. As I see it, it performs the necessary task of clearing conceptual ground and proposing certain important correspondences between socio-economic and political dimensions. Without the completion of this preliminary step, it would be impossible to work toward developing a strict explanation of these correspondences, to examine in detail their interactions through time, to make reliable predictions concerning the evolution of the new political systems, and to refine distinctions among the units (countries) that previous analysis at a high level of aggregation has classified in the same typological “box.”

PREFACE

Two additional remarks are in order here. First, insofar as it was possible, for the static part of my analysis I have preferred to use data from the late 1950s and early 1960s, because those were the years that immediately preceded the attempts to inaugurate the bureaucratic-authoritarian political systems on which this study largely concentrates. Second, the empirical referent for this study is the set of *South* American countries. Middle American countries have been excluded because, except for geographical continuity and a hazily defined common culture (both of poorly mapped political consequences), there do not seem to be compelling reasons for including all Latin American countries in the same universe of discourse. Rather, until more is known, it would seem that much is to be gained if, at a chosen level of analysis, the empirical reference is delimited to units whose relevant common contextual features can be unambiguously defined. For the purpose of this study, this delimitation is the set of South American countries.¹

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I was fortunate to spend three years (1968-1971) at Yale University's Department of Political Science, which in many ways provided the most helpful and congenial milieu possible for my work. Several scholars there offered me criticism and suggestions that have greatly improved this study. In particular, William Ascher, Natalio Botana, Ronald Brunner, Robert Dahl, John Fitch, Carlos Floria, Alfred Stepan, and Joseph Tulchin were very generous with their time and patience, criticizing in great detail earlier versions of the entire manuscript. I also had the privilege of being in very close contact with the work and person of David Apter, who at all stages of this work provided advice, criticism, stimulation, and encouragement that I most gratefully acknowledge. Paul Gilchrist undertook, with talent equalled only by his patience, the colossal task of editing

¹However, to be faithful to other authors' concepts, I will use the term "Latin America(n)" when referring to works that use that term.

PREFACE

my Spanglish. The first period of my study in political science was supported by the Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires and by Yale University. This monograph is an early result of research in progress generously funded by the Danforth Foundation. However, none of these persons or institutions should be blamed for the consequences of their support and criticism.

G. A. O.

*Universidad del Salvador
Escuela de Ciencia Política*

*Centro de Investigaciones en Administración Pública,
Instituto Torcuato di Tella*

Buenos Aires, Argentina

PREFACE: 1998

- I -

It is indeed strange to revisit a text one wrote twenty-seven years ago. Of course, many things have changed since 1971, when I finished work on this book, and perhaps even more since 1979, when, at the peak of bureaucratic-authoritarian domination, I wrote the Postscript to this book (pp. 203–9). There is, however, a constant in my work: my “main concern” (p. xiii) with what I call the “continuing counterpoint between the themes of democracy and authoritarianism” (p. 205). I have pursued this concern out of a normative preference for “a political democracy open to the demands of all political actors” (p. 200). This is the recurring theme of this book and my subsequent work. Against some quite unfair (or perhaps misinformed) remarks about a “faddish” or swiftly changing character of the literature on Latin American politics, this kind of concern is also evinced, although of course with different nuances and from various theoretical approaches, in the works of a number of Latin American sociologists and political scientists roughly belonging to my own generation, such as Atilio Borón, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Marcelo Cavarozzi, Julio Cotler, Manuel Antonio Garretón, Luis González, Norbert Lechner, José Nun, and Francisco Weffort, and U.S.-based Latinoamericanists such as David Collier, Robert Kaufman, Philippe Schmitter, and Alfred Stepan, to name just a few and to omit several others from this and younger cohorts.

This concern led me in the present book to discuss themes that I further developed later on: the ambivalent consequences of the multiple tensions of high modernization under conditions of dependent and unequal development; the imposing facade and the huge social costs of bureaucratic-authoritarian domination, and, at the same time, its inherent weaknesses; democracy (or, more precisely, political democracy or polyarchy) as the only outcome that might make possible, even though it did not guarantee, “a more humane social life” (p. 208); the need to fully accept the rules of the democratic game if we ever wanted to achieve something less precarious than semi-democracies such as the ones discussed below in Chapters 3 and 4; the hope that the traumatic

events that this book discusses (and those that, to my intellectual satisfaction and deep normative chagrin, it largely anticipated) would lead to positive, pro-democratic learning by a sufficient set of political actors; and the insistence on the importance of further investigating themes related to the reciprocal relations between, on one hand, various aspects of socioeconomic structure and change and, on the other, the probability of the emergence and persistence of various kinds of political regimes. A point I want to stress here is that characteristic of the present book, as is true of most of the work of the authors I have mentioned, to an extent that is absent in the study of other regions, is the explicit, at times passionate, commitment to a specific set of values. It is, basically, a literature about democracy, written during periods of authoritarian rule and under conditions that for the Latin Americans often included repression and exile.

At issue was not only the criticism of the various types of authoritarian domination that had long existed in Latin America and which had perversely perfected their scope and cruelty in the 1960s and 1970s, but also the postulation of political democracy as the only way out that would not be inconsistent with the values that inspired the critique of authoritarianism. This position, in this book and in my subsequent work, as well as in the works of many of the authors I have mentioned, also included the view that this democracy should not only be such in terms of the (immensely important) freedoms it establishes in the political realm, but also that it would be helpful in overcoming the egregious inequities and inequalities existing in our societies. This is today our main pending matter, to which I shall return.

- II -

This stubborn search—whether dealing head on with democracy or taking an indirect view of it through the perspectives provided by the critical examination of themes such as militarism, corporatism, clientelism, populism, and (more recently and positively) the study of transitions from authoritarianism, social movements, gender, the rule of law, and related themes—somewhat reflects the peculiar condition of Latin America. We are part of the same occidental world that in its Northwestern quadrant has generated a historically unusual combination of democracy and economic development; as part of that world, even if distorted by the accidents of our social and cultural geography, the lights of its mirrors have long influenced and fascinated us. In particular, almost two centuries ago, already the first among our long series of constitutions and legal

frameworks were inspired by the canonical authors of the Northwest and were adapted from, if not mimicking, those that had been enacted there. Democratic aspirations, jointly with less vigorous liberal and republican ones, even if often betrayed, resonated in our countries (very early universal male suffrage included) almost at the same time as in the Northwest and, with few exceptions, much before they did in the rest of the world.

On the other hand, we have generated (for reasons that in part I discuss in Chapter 2 of this book and that are too complex to further analyze here) countries that are profoundly unequal. Furthermore, since the democratization of these countries, as well as in the increasingly shaky endurance of Colombia and Venezuela, the only South American democracies that have survived the latest authoritarian wave, there is little that could make us reasonably optimistic that their inequality may be reversed or even significantly ameliorated in the foreseeable future. Looking at the past three decades from the standpoint of the end of the millennium, we can say that yes, with much struggle and suffering we won the immensely important victory of attaining democracy, but we have advanced very little, if at all, in terms of equity. As I have argued in recent works, this situation is first and foremost troublesome in itself, in the many lives that it cruelly truncates; it is also troublesome in that it breeds all sorts of authoritarian social relations and an at best intermittent rule of law, both of which greatly hinder the workings of our democratic regimes.

Although India stands as proof that it is not necessarily incompatible, this mix of political democracy, on one hand, and deep and persistent inequality, on the other, is historically odd and, for most theories of democracy, unexpected and barely dealt with. I do believe that the historical specificity of bureaucratic authoritarianism made it worth categorizing as a particular type of rule and, on this basis, studying its impact and likely patterns of change; as the numerous works and discussions that the present book elicited attest, this was an interesting and ultimately useful endeavor. By the same token, today I see it as a major challenge to categorize the odd combination of democracy cum deep inequality that we have generated in Latin America and which also is emerging in other parts of the world. As it was in relation to bureaucratic-authoritarianism, I see this challenge not only from the angle of the advancement of knowledge, but also that such knowledge may help overcome troublesome problems. The difference, of course, is that if before we made a democratic critique of bureaucratic-authoritarian rule and we aimed at its termination, now we face the intellectually even more challenging task

of making a democratic critique of the very imperfect democracies we have attained, not for their termination but for their expansion.

There is something of a paradox here. When I and others wrote (as I did this book and its Postscript) during the emergence and the aegis of bureaucratic-authoritarian rule, democracy seemed almost a mirage. But we tended to believe that, once attained, it would entail, through the active presence of the social sectors and the political forces that bureaucratic-authoritarianism excluded, a concentration of political power sufficient for dealing, with reasonable effectiveness, with existing inequalities. On the other hand, now that we have achieved that democracy, we must come to terms with the sober fact that perhaps these socially beneficial changes are the real mirages, the ones farther away and more difficult to attain.

- III -

In the present book I make an effort to carefully distinguish political from socioeconomic factors. This is the analytical axis of this work, in which I state that I have looked basically at only one side of the matter—the impact of socioeconomic factors over political ones—and left understudied, for want of time and data, the probably more important and interesting task: studying the impact that in turn the political factors, especially in the shape of various kinds of regimes, may have on social and economic factors and structures (pp. xiv, 205). The need for these—I must admit, in itself rather obvious—distinctions seemed to me particularly acute when writing in and about countries where all sorts of boundaries, not only between politics and economics, are thinner than in the highly developed world. This is also true of the boundaries between politics and academia, especially during the period when I wrote this book and its Postscript.

As a consequence, these pages, as well as others I wrote in subsequent years, had a subtext that it might be interesting to make explicit now. These works have, quite obviously, a main critical target and antagonists: bureaucratic-authoritarian rule and its correlates and the many voices that argued that this kind of domination was an unavoidable, ultimately beneficial, and enduring one. Thus in the present book I study the reasons for the likely but not unavoidable emergence of bureaucratic-authoritarianism under the lens of the Weberian idea of “elective affinity.” This standpoint also accounts for the detail with which, with the data available at that time, I discussed the political, social, and economic exclusion that bureau-

cratic-authoritarianism perpetrated against large segments of the population, as well as fissures within it and tensions with the sectors it attempted to exclude. However, in the context of my present remarks, more significant is my insistence (particularly explicit in the Postscript, written at the peak of the very bureaucratic-authoritarian rule that the text of 1971 had seen looming in the horizon) that, first, in spite of their imposing facade, these were fragile types of domination and, second and again, the proper way out of them could only be in the direction of democracy (pp. 207–8).

Among politicized readers in Latin America, these latter observations were well understood as pointing to a second front of criticism, which contained antagonists that at times were almost as sharp as those who supported bureaucratic-authoritarianism. I refer to those who advocated a violent revolutionary takeover that would produce some kind of “socialism.” This “ultraism” (p. 209) was premised on arguments that were in various senses the opposite of the ones that organize the present book: the conflation of democracy with substantive socioeconomic equality; the dismissal of political democracy as just a protective shell for the legitimation of class exploitation; and the denial of the historical specificity of bureaucratic-authoritarianism. In this view these were simply “fascist” or “fascist colonial” states that (as the corollary of a rather convoluted argument that I need not recapitulate here) could only be terminated by a violent revolution that would immediately propel our countries into socialism, thus avoiding the trap of “bourgeois democracy.” The argument about the specificity of bureaucratic-authoritarianism and its intrinsic fragility led, in contrast, toward peaceful but active forms of resistance and, as noted, to democracy, a democracy which, as any other regime based on a capitalist society, would give ample room to the representation of the dominant classes and sectors but at the same time would not be the mere bourgeois trap feared by the revolutionary left.

One way or the other, the fact is that this second front of criticism did not help to make our life easier. To say the least, in those times to advocate democracy certainly was not in vogue in our countries. We should remember that in 1971, when I wrote this book, guerrilla movements were in the ascendancy in Argentina and Uruguay (although they had already been defeated in Brazil), the Unidad Popular government in Chile seemed to be advancing firmly toward socialism, and the military-based experiment of Velasco Alvarado in Peru was producing profound transformations in that country. Instead, in 1979, at the time of the Postscript, the guerrillas had been crushed, Pinochet was firmly in power, and various military and civilian governments were busy undoing the changes produced by the Velasco Alvarado regime. Of course, these were times when the in-

cumbents and supporters of bureaucratic-authoritarianism triumphantly insisted on its achievements and strengths. On the opposite side of the struggle, the extreme left, the very triumphs of bureaucratic-authoritarianism seemed to ratify their diagnosis as fascisms that could only be overthrown by some kind of revolution, and only a few had begun to self-criticize their own violent mistakes.

– IV –

All this is reflected in the mood of my 1979 Postscript, even though in it I again insisted on the need to study “the conditions that can make possible the achievement of political democracy—understood not only as a type of political regime but also as a more civilized form of social life . . . [that] must include substantial progress toward social, economic, and cultural democratization” (p. 205). Shortly thereafter—as I recall, as early as 1980—I began to discuss with some friends and colleagues—Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Philippe Schmitter, and Abraham Lowenthal—the launching of a project at the Program for Latin American Studies at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, of which Lowenthal was director. This project would be about “Transitions from Authoritarian Rule,” and it would have an explicit preference for a democratic outcome. This project generated the four volumes that, under the editorship of Philippe Schmitter, Laurence Whitehead, and myself, were published in 1986 by the John Hopkins Press under that same title.

I have recently told this story in another text. Following the thread of my present story, here I want to mention that originally this idea was received with skepticism by many, who argued that, given the existence and apparent strength of the existing bureaucratic-authoritarianisms, this project was no more than an exercise in wishful thinking by marginalized intellectuals. In one of these discussions, Philippe Schmitter had the felicitous idea of responding that the project was, rather, an exercise in “thoughtful wishing,” an expression that we kept as the motto of the above-mentioned volumes. That numerous transitions have since occurred and innumerable works have been devoted to their study is a measure of the hallucinatory speed of the times in which we live and indeed of the (even for us) unexpected realism of our illusions.

Perhaps it has all along been, in my work and in the work of others who have approached Latin America with a commitment to democracy and social equity, an exercise in both wishful thinking

and thoughtful wishing. With the characteristics that spring from this commitment, and with those that result from the restrictions of working under repressive rule or from the pain of exile, as well as from the already noted peculiar location of Latin America in the Western world, most of this literature has also tried to meet the high standards of scholarship. It was mobilized by the democratic critique of authoritarian rule, including the study of the fissures and tensions, internal and external to this kind of rule, that hinted at opportunities of effective opposition and, consequently, allowed for the hope of its termination. It was, as noted, a fight on two fronts, both of which were persuaded that politics is ultimately a series of deadly confrontations.

Although the democracies we have achieved are so blatantly imperfect and nothing guarantees that they will endure, this struggle against bureaucratic-authoritarianism has been won. Instead, the other huge issue, that of achieving significantly less unequal societies, will continue to require a lot of wishful thinking and, especially, thoughtful wishing. Good, empirically grounded, and normatively committed social science will continue to be helpful.

G. A. O.

Buenos Aires
January 1998

Chapter I

ASSUMPTIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
PREFACE	xiii
Acknowledgments	xv
PREFACE: 1998	xvii
I. ASSUMPTIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS	1
On Recent Studies	1
Latin American Studies: Ranks and Classifications	8
Data and Averages	15
Intra-Country Heterogeneity	22
Definitions and Indicators	26
Approximations to Actual Values	33
Size	33
Industrialization	36
Roles and Stratification	39
Innovation	43
Communications	43
Preliminary Recapitulation	46
II. TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF SOUTH AMERICAN POLITICS	51
Argentina and Brazil: From Incorporation to Exclusion	53
The Period of Populism and Horizontal Industrialization	53
The End of Argentine and Brazilian Expansion	57
Political Actors in Argentina and Brazil after Populism	67
Technocratic Roles	76