El Presidente Trump: 
Understanding (and Transcending) Populism in the Americas through Latin American Thought
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Introduction: The Double Crisis of Democracy

A minor television star is now the President of the United States of America. The election of President Donald Trump represents a double crisis. On the one hand, it is the result of a relatively low number of people voting in a national election, leading to the choice of a person with no political experience. On the other, political science—in all of its branches—failed to predict, and perhaps even contributed to, the victory of Trump. Mainstream political science showed extreme ineptitude in dealing with a basic question: what the real chances of Trump winning were.

The crisis of US democracy is thus also the crisis of political science. On the eve of the election, most polls predicted a heavy defeat of Trump by Hilary Clinton. Venues such as Five Thirty Eight and the Princeton Election Consortium in fact probably played a role in helping Trump win, as they may have dissuaded many from voting, assuring them that Clinton would be the highly-probable winner. Political theorists must also admit a mea culpa. This guilt is not just in our own inability to predict the outcome, but also, in my view, in the insistence over close to fifty years on trying to generally equate political theory with very limited perspectives.
Political theory is, by some accounts, a very narrow discipline. Understood as the history of political thought, a limited set of canonical writings from, say Plato to Arendt, has been one way to define the discipline. Perhaps some of us got into the field (I know I did) precisely for our love of some of these (mostly European) texts. And to my mind, there is nothing wrong with spending a lifetime trying to understand the *Crito* or *The Prince*. At the same time, an alternative way of doing political theory emerged in 1971 with Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*. While initially a healthy challenge to the bibliophilic approach to political theory, the sheer dominance of Rawlsian approaches to questions of justice, in my view, became too expansive, pushing out other ways of doing political theory.

The result of these two narrow ways of doing political theory (the canonical and the Rawlsian) have led us to the current impasse. From a political theory perspective, we are at a loss to explain the Trump phenomenon. Using purely historical or deontological methodologies, I don’t think we can get very far in understanding the rise and victory of Trump. What I propose is that we must expand the range of what we consider canonical texts if we are to properly understand difficult challenges. This may entail cross-cultural, cross-national, and cross-regional work, which goes beyond the Western canon. Secondly, it should also call into question the idolatry of Western liberal-democratic normativity. Just as we should reject heteronormative phallocratic conceptions that place a “normal” white heterosexual male paradigm as the criterion for what is ‘good,’ ‘standard,’ or ‘natural’ for gender relations, so should we critique the idea that equates Western, liberal, democratic (and generally Rawlsian/US-centric) models with what is ‘good,’ ‘normal,’ or ‘standard’ politics. The reason for this is that this dominant liberal-democratic model hides as many dysfunctional processes in politics as other alternatives. Moreover, it is this very model that led to the election of President Trump. As much as many of us may want to resist it, Trump won ‘fair and square,’ if we take his victory as that of a candidate who won under a set of rules designed by and for a liberal-democratic state.
If this is the case, and we must look outside the Western canon and also be wary of liberal-democratic normativity, where should we look? In this initial intervention, I would like to propose that we use comparative political theory and aesthetic political theory to understand the Trump phenomenon. I believe the resources of Latin American political thought, including its seminal discussions of ‘populism’ are valuable. At the same time, this Latin American perspective ought to be comparative, in the sense that it has linkages to a particular European approach to political theory. The Machiavellian basis of aesthetic political theory, which was taken up by subsequent Latin American theorists, helps us more than a deontological, Rawlsian perspective. Under this double approach, we see that the US is not really the land of “American exceptionalism.” It is one nation-state in the Americas that shares a lot with other states in the region, in many ways much more so than with European nation-states. I will also argue that, while the US has been moving further and further away from democracy since at least 1980, in the same time period Latin America has been one of the few regions in the world that has made significant and solid democratic gains, despite the messiness of democratic politics. The paper concludes that, to remedy the current US crisis of democracy, it ought to look to its neighbors to the South for both constitutional and cultural transformations. In this story, Latino/a immigrants play an important mediating role.

Inadequacies of the ‘Populism’ Terminology

As many students of Comparative Politics will attest, the first word that comes out of many scholars of Latin American politics is ‘populism.’ Compared to the advanced, liberal-democratic states of Europe or Anglo-North America, we have been told for decades that Latin America is the land of dysfunction, dictatorship, corruption, and personalism. Practically every government, regime, and leader in the region has been called ‘populist.’ The North is the land of parties, polyarchy, and
pluralism, while the South has been generally characterized as mired in populism. This terminology was especially common in US political science, so much so that even many Latin American politics scholars came to believe in the near-natural inferiority of Latin American politics vis-à-vis the modernized North. Political figures as different as Juan Domingo Perón, Eva Perón, Getulio Vargas, Velasco Alvarado in Peru, Paz Estenssoro in Bolivia, and more recently Carlos Menem, Alberto Fujimori, Hugo Chávez, Lula, and Evo Morales have been called “populists.” As some commentators have noted, if so many and so varied political leaders and regimes are all ‘populist,’ then the term loses its meaning.

Few concepts have been as widely used yet as deeply under-theorized as ‘populism.’ There is a current upsurge in interest in the concept owing to recent developments in Europe and the US. Still, I think political theory is only slowly awakening to it. There are many problems with the concept, but I do believe it does capture something in real politics. Unfortunately, some of the more important and influential examples of the literature on populism are deeply flawed. In this section, I will discuss one from Comparative Politics and one from political theory.

The work of Cass Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser is an important current example of systematic work done on the phenomenon of populism. An advantage of their perspective is that they bring cross-regional expertise. Mudde is an expert on European populism and Rovira on Latin American forms. The principal flaw in their perspective, in my view, is that they consider populism to be an ideology. Mudde and Rovira compare populism with “other ideologies, such as liberalism, nationalism, or socialism” (Mudde and Rovira 79). In my view, populism does not have strong normative commitments in the way that liberalism, nationalism, or socialism do. The moral centrality of individual autonomy present in liberalism; the moral content of a collective sense of national identity in nationalism; and the working-class egalitarianism of socialism are miles away from the
opportunism, clientelism, and pragmatism of most populist regimes. Thus, from the start, many definitions of populism incorrectly make it analogous to ‘other ideologies.’

This flaw is made more evident when we see that most cases of European so-called populism are of the far-right kind, whereas recent cases of those called populists in Latin America are on the far left. If populism is an ideology, it does not make sense for two of its branches to uphold diametrically opposed programs or principles. For instance, Hungary’s Viktor Orbán cannot be said to share, ideologically, almost anything in common with Bolivia’s Evo Morales. Morales’ explicitly socialist political principles have included nationalization of industries such as gas, the promotion of open migration regimes, and the inclusion of multiple ethnic groups into government, not just one; whereas Orbán presides over an ethno-nationalistic, exclusionary movement that is deeply antithetical to any socialist remnants from the past.

Mudde and Rovira also posit a model of populism that is almost all-encompassing. Populist leaders can be “outsiders, insider-outsiders, and insiders” (Mudde and Rovira 74). This three-sided schema is too broad, for almost anyone can thus become a populist leader. Moreover, their ‘democratization’ process model (87) also assumes that liberal democracy is the ‘normal’ or normatively desirable state of affairs, without recognizing any of its flaws (e.g., possible tendency to foster atomism, individualism, oligarchies, economic power over politics, a limited two-party system, possessive individualism, etc.) This model is reminiscent of the modernization take-off theory of economic development that has a clear teleological definition and normative content. We know, however, from the US as well as the Latin American experience that liberal and neo-liberal processes also contain institutional, political, and moral complications; they are far from normal or perfect.

In the field of political theory, few accounts of populism have been as pioneering as that of Ernesto Laclau. Laclau had been writing about populism decades before it became an incandescent
topic in the last few years. Laclau's theoretical argument is well expressed by Muddle and Rovira. They see Laclau as positing a view of populism as “the only true form of democracy” because it fosters a “democratization of democracy” and an “aggregation of demands of excluded sectors” (Mudde and Rovira 79).

The principal problem with Laclau’s argument is only visible if we understand the context of his original interest in the topic. It is in the space of Argentinian Peronism that Laclau’s theories on populism must be located. In sometimes opaque language, his theory is nevertheless useful because it takes populism seriously. It helps us see that it is indeed in Latin America, and specifically in Argentina, where populism really emerges historically as a phenomenon and as a concept (despite antecedents in the US, Turkey, and elsewhere). For this reason, we must examine that particular context carefully to understand the austral origins of the phenomenon and of the concept.

The weakness in Laclau’s theory of populism is that it while it appears prima facie opposed to an ideological approach, it is in fact also fundamentally conceived as ideological. Laclau approvingly cites Peter Worsley. Populism is not “an ideology to be compared with other types such as liberalism, conservatism, communism, or socialism,” but is a “a dimension of political culture which can be present in movements of quite different ideological sign” (Laclau, On Populist Reason 14). Laclau is correct that typological attempts to classify regimes as populist based on their ideological content is misguided; they tend to lead to broad, all-encompassing and all-too-extensive definitions. Laclau goes on to argue that most analysts of the phenomenon do not believe populist movements have internal logic or rationality. It is for this reason that they do not attempt to understand them as such, but rather merely attempt to describe the social realities that populism applies to. The crucial move by Laclau is to argue that, in fact, crowds (the masses, the people) do indeed possess inherent, immanent rationality, and that we ought to attempt to understand it. This strong epistemic and moral
commitment to be on the side of ‘the crowd’ is what makes Laclau’s position ultimately an ideological one. It is a position attached firmly to the idea that collectivist and mass-oriented rationality is the stuff of modern politics and it should supersede atomistic individualism.

Having rejected what he considers ideology-based critiques of populism, Laclau wants to restore its analytical and moral value. He rejects attempts to see populism as “mere rhetoric” (18). He wants to make it central to social science attempts to understand the modern world. He pushes back against those who have “denigrated” it or seen it only as “pathological” (19). He then launches into an analysis of Gustave Le Bon’s book The Crowd (1895). In that book, the French sociologist provides a theory of mass psychology. At first glance, it seems to argue strongly against ‘the crowd’: impulsiveness, an incapacity to reason, and a kind of hypnosis characterize a member of the crowd. But Laclau wants to rescue something from this argument. Fundamentally, it is that indeed crowds possess a logic that is quite distinct from that of the individual. It is grounded on images, evoked by particular words, even if they are independent of their signification.

In other words, the crowd or the masses develop a distinctive language that makes sense to its members, irrespective of how terms or words had been used heretofore. There is a plurality of meanings that can be evoked or developed by in-crowd communication. Laclau likens Le Bon to Machiavelli, by stating that Le Bon shows how politicians can re-christen old words with new, more popular meanings, in order to develop their own brand of communication and argumentation to convince members of the crowd of a particular, new way of seeing things. In this, Laclau is on target: he is correct to see the Machiavellian core of the rhetorical project of the populist leader. For Laclau, Le Bon is aware of the “illusions” that a crowd comes to embrace owing to the rhetoric of a modern prince.
But Laclau does not take the next step that might seem natural to many. He does not decry the very process of reformulation of words and invention of languages that Le Bon discusses. For Le Bon, these lead to false illusions, but for Laclau, this formation and development of new forms of communication express the immanent needs, interests, and worldviews of individuals *qua* crowd.

Referring us back to classical rhetoric, which was recovered in Machiavelli’s Florence, Laclau recalls the elements of rhetoric: affirmation, repetition, and contagion. These rhetorical components, part of the standard Renaissance education of forensic argumentation, are indeed part and parcel of the Machiavellian rhetorical enterprise of persuasion. For Machiavelli, these techniques are cardinal to the political project of a prince, ruler, or *capo* in his or her attempts to give shape to the people or the masses. For Laclau, they represent the fluidity of language: there is no fixed content to terms or words. What matters is how words are associated with each other in particular social contexts. Saussure, for Laclau, usefully pushes aside the idea that words have purely denotative meanings.

This is where Laclau’s full-fledged attempt to rehabilitate the rationality of the crowd takes place. For him, this communicative phenomenon is not merely linguistic or grammatical. It is also symbolic. Words become signs or symbols of something else. There is no “‘true’ meaning of a term” (26). Laclau argues that the re-presentations of words or terms is not a process of perversion. The logic of the crowd, for him, is grounded in images and illusions, and it is not a degenerate form of the healthy rationality of the individual. Here he comes full circle and rejects the ultimately negative judgment that Le Bon makes of the crowd’s reason as “inferior” (28). For Laclau, the contagion of a new idea is not pathological, it is “a common feature shared by a group of people… expressed by some form of symbolic representation.” (28).

Laclau posits a view of modernity in which the crowd or the mass becomes more analytically central than the individual if we are trying to understand rationality. For him, Freud convincingly
refuted the idea that the individual is rational, and the crowd is irrational. He also thinks Le Bon showed that indeed, the mass can have its own language and its own reason. For Le Bon, it is a perverted form of reason. For Laclau it is not. It is the way that the crowd can express itself in a manner that rejects the old ones, and can develop its own speech, as it were.

Laclau is on the right track to the extent that he seeks to locate the logic of populism in forms of communication. He does not posit a structural, socio-economic definition. He ultimately goes back to the Machiavellian concern with rhetoric and is correct to reminds us that rhetoric is never ‘mere’ rhetoric. Further, Laclau points in the direction of the populist leader’s relationship with the mass as one that takes place in language, symbols, semantics, and signs. But Laclau does not examine the centrality of the Machiavellian ‘prince’ in this relationship. Moreover, he displaces individual rationality almost entirely, to argue that the modern age is about the crowd and its internal languages. Just as Locke and Hobbes developed a conception of atomistic, possessive individualism as C.B. Macpherson pointed out a long time ago, so does Laclau have a principled, robust commitment, but this time in favor of the crowd over the individual. It is for this reason that his conception of populism is ultimately ideological. It emerges and is developed in the world-view and system of the masses and concludes with a normative commitment to accept populist reason, understand it, and promote it.

There is another, more historical way to see what Laclau is up to. We can do this by contextualizing his ideas in the realm of his own country’s politics, that of Argentina. This allows us to see that Laclau largely conflates, albeit implicitly, populism with Peronism. In the context of Argentinian politics of the postwar, Peronism has been generally seen (erroneously) among left-leaning Argentinian commentators, as part of the traditional left and its progressive, poor-oriented policies. This assessment is incorrect when Argentina is placed alongside its South American neighbors, especially Chile and Bolivia. Compared to those countries, Argentina lacks strong, explicitly socialist
or Communist political lineages. Whereas Salvador Allende and his brand of democratic socialism had a pervasive Marxist-inflected set of principles, and Bolivia has had a wide variety of far-left traditions ranging from the Trotskyist Partido Obrero Revolucionario of Guillermo Lora, or Ernesto Guevara’s legacy among student groups at UMSA and other universities, in Argentina the personalistic predominance of Peronism was most influential. To this day, many progressive Argentinian academics argue that Peronism is part of the left. However, the fact remains, as Peter Waldmann shows, that Peronism borrowed heavily from far-right movements such as Fascism, was virulently anti-Communist, and did not aim to radically restructure the mode of production of Argentinian society. Thus, it borrowed from left and right, was rooted in Perón’s military career, and persecuted far-left groups. As Laclau admits, Perón tried not to make pronouncements over his long exile in order to be accepted by a wide gamut of political organizations. He also compared himself to a Pope, as the central, authoritative figure (Laclau, La Razón populista 269).

Towards an Alternative Conception of Populism

Conceptualizing populism as merely the incorporation or empowering of ‘the masses’ is not sufficient as a definition of the phenomenon. If this were the case, all democratic politics would be populist in some sense, as modern democracy entails mass societies and extensive adult suffrage. Moreover, the notion of empowerment entails a normatively positive tinge, for it seems to assume that it is normatively desirable to empower the masses. Again, this comes too close to the way that democracy is understood at present, as something normatively desirable because it allows the people or the masses to be empowered. If populism is a phenomenon that is not merely a kind of democratic politics, then we must look for a different definition.
Instead of relying on ideology-rooted definitions of populism, we ought to think of populism as a phenomenon of political appeal to ‘the people’ that is non-ideological. It can take the form of quasi-left or -right wing ideological platforms, or something in-between. At the same time, while the elite-mass distinction is crucial to most definitions of populism (see Mudde and Rovira 68), I want to proffer an alternative. Considering the Latin American context of the phenomenon as well as the concept of populism, which recurs throughout the history of Latin American politics and Latin American thought, we can point to some salient themes, motifs, and dynamics in this trajectory (even if in distinct moments) that, taken together, explain populism.

I believe that while the elite-mass distinction is relevant, what is more significant is the relationship between the people and the one leader, or caudillo. To understand this relationship, I call on a comparative political theory lens to see this more clearly. While rooted in and in some way most salient in the Latin American context, the populist phenomenon requires a particular European lens as well, that of Machiavellian thought. The emphasis on rhetoric, aesthetics, and spectacle that we see recur in canonical Latin American political thought is emblematized by the Machiavellian approach to politics, which underscores reason, emotion, and form over deontological rationality.

Combining these two perspectives, I would define populism as a non-ideological mode or order of political power that relies fundamentally on the spectacle and rhetorical demagoguery of a princely personage.

From the European canonical tradition, Machiavellian terminology is useful to understand populism, but especially in the Americas, where a ‘princely’ leader is central to politics. (European politics that are often termed populist now, in my view, generally fall under larger right-wing ideological umbrellas. These include Fascism, especially, but also Christian-religious neoconservatism,
xenophobia, and ethno-nationalism. Thinking comparatively in terms of European/Americas cases of populism may help, but in general they seem essentially different).

Populism can be a mode or an order. As a mode, it is closer to a social movement. As an order, it is an established form of governance. For Machiavelli, a mode represents a modern technique of wielding power to mobilize subjects. An order is set up and affirmed by political leaders. Thus, populism can take the form of either a nascent, fluid social movement or a well-established form of rule. The object of populism is power: its sole aim is to achieve, expand, and remain in power. This is true for all politics, but other forms of politics generally aim for something more. Thus, I would argue that all politics contains an element of populism because they aim to retain power; but it is especially modern, mass-democratic societies that are more likely to evince populism owing to the importance of demagoguery to attain popular support.

One central reason why a Machiavellian-inflected conception of populism is different from others is that, while there is certainly attention paid to the elite-mass distinction, the crucial dyad is that of the ‘prince’ and the ‘people.’ The single, uno solo personage seeks an unmediated, post-institutional rapport with the many. Sometimes the prince may seek to denigrate elites in order to appeal to the many; but this is not always the case. It is in this context that the use of rhetoric, another central concern of Machiavelli, is necessary to understand populism. The prince ‘talks’ directly to the people, or at least aims to. Persuasion unmediated by institutions, elites, or parties is what the princely populist seeks to attain. What makes rhetoric populist is its demagogic nature: the prince will utter what he thinks will resonate most with the people. It is thus unconstrained by ideology.

The process is performative. As opposed to a political movement driven by duties, reason, deliberation, or justice, the populist is attentive to how things appear. The prince is concerned with images, impressions, visuals, and ‘optics.’ In other words, with representation, understood as an
aesthetic phenomenon. Particularly in the modern age, where it is impossible to have a ‘dialogue’ amongst thousands if not millions of co-citizens, emotion becomes more central. Through rhetoric, it replaces rational deliberation.

More fundamentally, it lays bare a larger truth. That is that political philosophy is an oxymoron. The reason for this is that politics and the philosophical enterprise have entirely different objects. For politics, the aim is power. For philosophy, it is truth. The attempt to understand politics through rationalistic, logos-centered, deontological methods is an idealized schema that may work under very stringent conditions. By way of illustration, we can try to see how a Rawlsian perspective might shed light on the phenomenon of populism. It is unclear how, if at all, that model is helpful. Just to think of the two main principles in Rawlsian deontological theory, we can try to apply them to a theoretical populist regime. Under the difference principle, the worst-off (the poorest) might actually benefit from populist policies, therefore a populist regime would be normatively acceptable. Secondly, under a populist schema most citizens might have a chance of becoming political leaders, therefore a populist schema might also be acceptable on grounds of equal opportunity to access certain public offices. Beyond these general tests, a Rawlsian model does not seem illuminating.

**Latin American Model of Performative Populism**

The performative populism model emerges most clearly through the lineages of Latin American political thought. It can be seen over four principal moments of its development. These entail the dynamics of racialism; caudillismo; ‘civilization vs. barbarism;’ and sex/gender machismo.

Standard accounts of what is the subject of European political theory tell us that it is about ‘justice.’ Other perspectives emphasize the rise of liberal-democratic ideas in European thought. As I point out above, it is principally the Machiavellian tradition the one that helps us understand what we
consider the phenomenon of populism in its own terms, not as merely a dysfunctional or ‘disfigured’ form of democratic politics (Urbinati 2014). Just as the outcomes of entirely democratic processes are not always necessarily normatively valuable or desirable, so are some of the outcomes of populist regimes sometimes valuable, sometimes not. There is no clear reason to posit a mechanistic, simple equations of ‘democracy is good, populism is bad.’ We must first try to understand what that phenomenon is.

Grounded on the lexicon of Machiavellian politics as I describe above, the performative populist model emphasizes appearances and spectacle. But more important for the American (broadly understood, as in Western Hemisphere) is the fact that the Machiavellian method reaches its limit when it encounters the contexts of the Americas. Principally, the social makeup of American societies (from Tierra del Fuego all the way to Newfoundland) is composed of multi-ethnic, multiracial groups. While there is some reference to ethnic groups in the work of Machiavelli, this topic is not a salient feature of the Florentine’s intellectual enterprise. But the phenomena associated with American populism are very much grounded on postcolonial, multi-racial, color-conscious societies.

For this reason, I would posit that we can take up the Machiavellian tradition in the Americas, but only as adapted to the American context of rich racial variegation. Populism entails the attempt to define what or who the people are. For postcolonial societies (including the US), ethnic cleavages make this task very complicated. In the Latin American context, the first moment is with Simón Bolívar, whose thought must be explored to see how he contributes to the populist imagination. There is a moment where he confronts race directly. The more pointed element is his significance as a caudillo. There is no exact translation for this term in English. What is important about it is that represents the singular leader or head (the term originates in the Latin caput, head) of a movement or government. The term lacks the Old Continent whiff of nobility that the Machiavellian term ‘prince’ has. In other
words, while the Machiavellian single man of great will is implicitly a person of noble origins or blood, in the context of the Americas this no longer applies. It is precisely the debates in South America about *pureza de sangre* (blood purity) around the time of Bolívar’s birth that called into question the very idea blood lineage ought to determine political power. While most have tried to portray Bolívar as a *criollo* (creole, of ‘pure’ Spanish blood born in the Americas), there is a contention to this day about the possibility that he had African blood. Moreover, he grew up as a child on the streets of Caracas, playing with children of many races. He did not live an ensconced, isolated life. What this means is that once the idea of the ‘prince’ is transplanted to the Americas, it takes on a life of its own even within the “people” itself, almost in a ‘plebeian’ sense.

The first moment is thus the centrality of race and racialism, present in the thought of many seminal figures, including Bolívar. In effect, race becomes, at least as far back as with Bolívar’s political ideas, cardinal to the political task of the leader.\(^\text{11}\) This is a new development in the history of political thought. Bolívar became a princely republican. As head or leader of the independence forces in what was to be Venezuela, one of his principal concerns was to balance the interests of the popular sectors (the *pardos*, or mixed-race peoples) with those of the elites (the creoles). Fear of *pardocracia* was one of his ruling passions. Thus, the emergence of the theory and practice of the caudillo, which was to eventually become central to populism, takes place in the context of a) racial divides b) racial admixture and c) racial conflict. To the extent that Europe is thought of as relatively racially homogenous and its political thinkers do not problematize the issue of race within European societies, modern populism cannot be understood through entirely European methods.

In the period of Bolívar’s rise, the fear that the uneducated, unwashed masses would take over the republic was racialized. *Pardo* would be a term that was used for almost anyone with at least some non-white blood, but especially African. Pardo rule was anathema to educated elites. In effect,
Bolívar’s political theory was to update Machiavellian republicanism, which balances elites and masses, for modern, multiracial societies. But in this schema, it is not merely institutional mechanisms that are necessary. One single, strong, forceful leader is also necessary to establish peace and order. This aspect of republicanism is often ignored by accounts of republican theory that do not pay heed to the Machiavellian emphasis on the *uno solo* figure. Moreover, they ignore the martial origins of Machiavellian republicanism. A prince must always think of war, for the Florentine. It is for this reason that Machiavellian republicanism is not just about elites and popular sectors, but also strong leaders (*capità*), and soldiers. The military origins of Machiavellian republicanism must be unearthed to properly understand populism.

Bolívar was a military leader. He advanced the interests of the people of Gran Colombia through force. He was ruthless, was responsible for the killing of many, and did not hesitate to execute traitors, enemies, or competing groups. Thus, the populist caudillo is born from the struggles of war.\(^{12}\) There is an intimate relationship between the bellicose and the populist. The populist is not a mere demagogue or technocratic ruler. He or she is a person that is at home in war, and will most likely have a military background or allies. This is the second moment of caudillismo.

A third moment in the development of performative populism in Latin America, which follows from the Bolivarian legacy, is the antinomy of civilization versus barbarism. This idea is exemplified by another classic author of Latin American political thought, this time more to the South. The father of Argentina, Domingo Sarmiento, wrote *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* in 1845. Ostensibly, this widely-read book is an objective, quasi-positivist account of how the Argentine nation emerged. In fact, is a narrative of the nation as myth, grounded on a largely imagined conquest of barbarians by the forces of civilization. Sarmiento’s book examines the age of caudillos in Argentina, with special attention to Juan de Rosas and Facundo Quiroga.
It is important to go beyond the apparent meaning of the text. Sarmiento appears to criticize and assail these two caudillos as representative of forces that go against civilization. For Sarmiento, civilization means European culture. He saw Argentina as the nascent extension of Europe in the Americas. It was the mission of people like him (creole, educated, and law-abiding) to bring a republican form of government to a land that was lawless or ruled by violent caudillos, and occupied by what he saw as ignorant, restive Indians. As such, *Facundo* is often read in Argentina as a founding text of how a civilized nation of laws was forged out of land ruled by violent and uneducated caudillos and Indians. However, Sarmiento often has admiring words about the type of men that Rosas and Facundo were. In particular, he admired the figure of the Argentine gaucho, a type of cowboy. He presents the gaucho as a mestizo (mixed-race) man who is fearless, skilled in battle, and representative of the Argentine spirit. Civilization against barbarism entails a cultural struggle.

Three important elements must be noted from this narrative. One is that the gaucho, the ‘true’ soul of the Argentine nation, is a man of the people. He is not someone like Sarmiento himself: erudite, studious, and discreet. The gaucho, as portrayed by Sarmiento, comes from the rabble, may seem deplorable, but in fact represents the true valor of the Argentine nation. Secondly, Sarmiento locates the birth of the nation out of the struggle between ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarism.’ The civilized is the European and his or her descendants in Argentina. The barbarian is the indigenous or African inhabitant of the Americas who resists being civilized in his own land. Thirdly, for Sarmiento the only solution, short of physical extermination of the indigenous, is more European immigration to the Americas. Thus, the founder of the Argentine nation does not really do away with caudillismo. He accepts much of what he considers its virtues. At the same time, like Bolívar, he racializes politics through and through. For him, politics is not merely a choice between policies or laws, but entire ways of life that are written onto the genealogies of particular ethno-racial groups.
The fourth moment in the shaping of Latin American performative populism is most visible through some works of fiction. Much of value in twentieth-century Latin American political thought was written as works of fiction or literature for a variety of reasons. One is persecution: as Leo Strauss has told us, the art of political writing thrives under political persecution (Strauss 1952). Conversely, it suffers under leisure or comfort. One novel that captures some key elements of the performative populist imagination is Mario Vargas Llosa’s *The Feast of the Goat* (2000). This is where the centrality of machismo to populism becomes visible.

Llosa, who ran for president of Peru against Alberto Fujimori in 1990 and lost, puts his finger on two important parts of the populist puzzle. In his fictional account of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic, Llosa tells the story of Urania Cabral, a New York City-based lawyer who fled her native island in her youth. Her father had been an important ally of Trujillo in the nineteen-sixties. By choosing this schema, Llosa underscores a) the nexus of sex-gender that is at the heart of populism, and b) the linkage of family and personalism that replaces political institutions under populist regimes. In the novel, Trujillo uses his office as a way to demand women from his underlings. Ultimately, Urania is offered to him by her own father, and Trujillo, in his old age, is not able to perform. In effect, he uses the nation for his own personal gratification, for no other reason than to use and abuse others. His aptly-named sons Ramfis and Rhadamés lead lavish lives and are protected by their father’s political and military cronies.

The significance of this moment in the history of Latin American political thought to populism is that it captures the essence of a particular dynamic is necessary to understand the phenomenon. The ruler is in it for his or her benefit, primarily. In other words, there is something dictatorial or arbitrary about the populist leader. It is exemplified by the metaphor of gender/sex that is present in the novel: the pursuit of satisfaction, the use and abuse of others, the display of machismo, and the setting up of
a network or system of power built to benefit a particular family or individual. Clientelism and co-optation are thus part of this dynamic, which is at the core of the populist regime.

**Trump as a case of Performative Populism**

The archetype of Latin American populism is generally considered Juan Domingo Perón. Even more representative, however, is the Juan Perón-Eva Perón binomial regime, as they capture different elements of the phenomenon. Before we see how Donald Trump fits the mold of the Latin American performative populist, we can give a brief overview of why the Perons, taken together, are *the* populists par excellence.

Juan Perón was not a career politician; he came from a military background. Importantly, he opposed far-left, socialist political positions. He was charismatic, authoritarian, and did not align himself to either left or right. In Eva Perón, his second wife, we see the other side of the populist coin. Some obvious points must be underscored: she was a female and related to Perón. In what sense did it matter that Evita was female? There are many possible ways to interpret this. One is that the Machiavellian emphasis on male virtù may be misguided, and there is no necessity to have only males as capi. I would underscore the idea that the two Perón’s formed a kind of ideal ‘national family,’ of archetypal male-female roles. The image of an ideal couple in which each person has a distinct role, but which complement each other was part of the popular appeal. But once Eva Perón was alone in power, the spectacle became no longer binomial, but singular. Her political acumen perhaps superseded that of her husband Perón, as she was able to manage her appearance, image, and theatricality better than he did.

Given what has been said above about the Latin American model of performative populism, where does Trump fit?
As I mention above, the canonical European or US political theory literature does not seem to provide much that can help make sense of populism or populist leaders as such, besides categorizing them as abnormal, dysfunctional, or aberrant. Before Trump, other US politicians had shown the value of appeal to image, spectacle, charisma, and the aesthetics of power. Perhaps it begins with JFK and the image of Camelot. It appeared again in the guise of Ronald Reagan, a charismatic, avuncular actor who harnessed a broad popular appeal. And it recently resurfaced with another image-conscious politician, Barack Obama. Thus, the populist dynamic is present in many types of politicians, not just those that we may not like or want to denigrate. But it is with Trump that the full logic of aesthetic, performative politics has been reached.17

For those of us old enough to remember, Trump emerged in the 1980s. He is a product of a particular image of what the US was like, especially in New York City, at the time of the Reagan presidency. Brash, bombastic, apparently self-made (even if not entirely true), and coming from Queens, a hardscrabble part of the city, Trump fashioned a unique image and persona. From that time, his name was associated with extreme, almost decadent wealth, a symbol of the supposedly booming decade under Reagan’s neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state.

But Trump would not have been possible without the Barack Obama presidency. Trump would have remained a footnote of the 1980s had he not emerged as the apparent foil of the first black US president. Thus, crucial to the rise of Trump is the racially-charged politics of the reaction against Obama. Just like in Latin America, race is central to the (US) American political landscape. In Europe, racism generally goes through religion, especially through an attack on Islam. People as ethnically or racially different as Pakistanis, Nigerians, Turks, or Syrians are assailed in Europe because of their religion. In the Americas, I would argue there is a more visceral reaction to the aesthetics of color, largely independent of religion. The case of Obama eventually was tied to purported Islamic
affiliation, something that Trump mobilized on early in the Obama administration. (It will be important to do further work on the relative boundaries between religion and race that exists in the emergence of populism.)

The crucial component to Trump’s spectacular ascent was his involvement in television. I want to underscore what I have called elsewhere “aesthetic political theory.” Rather than deontological, rational deliberation, the dynamics of politics center on representation, emotion, and form. In “The Apprentice,” Trump parlayed his ability to make a caricature of himself into a political asset: the image of a successful white man who can fire at will and is a straight shooter. As sociologist Jeffrey Alexander has shown (The Performance of Politics, 2010), Obama was also a careful actor on the political stage. A similar line of reasoning can be found in Ari Adut’s Reign of Appearances (2018). The Turkish sociologist explains how the public sphere is one of images, not of rational deliberation.

On the campaign to the presidency, Trump also used the eros of politics for maximal benefit. Harking back to his playboy days in New York City in the 1980s, his demeaning references to women occurred repeatedly. The language he used in the ‘Access Hollywood’ tapes are reminiscent of the way that Vargas Llosa describes references to women by Trujillo in The Feast of the Goat. It is an image of a voracious, animalistic, and amoral being who is there principally to consume things and others. Melania Trump is another important element of this image of Trump’s machismo and bravura. The role she portrays is very different from that carried out by Michele Obama or Hilary Clinton when they were the First Lady. More than ever, political science ought to start to pay attention to more than just numbers, but to images, physical postures, and what sociologist Erving Goffman called the presentation of self in everyday life, but on the political arena (Goffman 1956).

While Trump himself does not come from a military background, he has surrounded himself by military men, such as John Kelly, H.R. McMaster, and James Mattis. In a sense, his government is
similar to a junta. This has allowed him to achieve an image of a caudillo, despite not having had military experience. The “style” of governance that he employs is similar to that of Juan Perón. As Waldmann points out, the populist leader uses personalism, authoritarianism, pitting different government organizations against each other, and a “technique of inconsequence:” policies are often in reality not effective or consequential. Moreover, the populist leader manufactures crises so that he is then seen as the solution to them (Waldmann 108-124).

The language of civilization and barbarism that we saw in Sarmiento is replicated in Trump’s lexicon. The most infamous example is perhaps when he called Mexican immigrants “rapists.” On June 16, 2015, Trump set up a dichotomy of ‘us vs. them,’ in which he categorized most Latino immigrants as ‘not-good people’ by saying that “some…are good people.” Similar statements related to the travel ban from mostly Muslim countries, in January 2017.

Taken together, the four elements of racialism, caudillismo, ‘civilization vs. barbarism,’ and gender/sex dynamics that recur in the history of Latin American political thought thus explain the phenomena associated with the rise of Trump’s populist appeal in (North) America.

Transcending Trumpian Populism: Contemporary Plurinational State Models

In the preceding pages, I have tried to show that we ought to try to understand the rise of Donald Trump as such, not to merely classify it as an anomaly or aberration. At the same time, I have argued that the term ‘populist’ has generally been used more as an epithet, rather than being theorized more fully. I do not think that standard European political theory or American (US-based) political thought methods are enough to understand the phenomenon. I have argued that there are elements in Latin American political thought that give us a fuller comprehension of the type of political leader that Trump is, and how he has achieved power. Using elements of Machiavellian aesthetic political
theory and Latin American canonical thought, I propose the model of ‘performative populism’ to understand Trump’s rise. In other words, we need Comparative Political Theory.

In these closing sections, I want to bring up the notion that if one wanted to counter-act the conditions that give rise to performative populism and also its effects, we must again look to the South. There are two main reasons for this. One has to do with recent American (again, understood as Western Hemisphere-wide) history and the other with the contemporary scene of constitutional reform in some South American states (which are often, and in my view, erroneously, called ‘populist’).

We often hear of a current crisis of democracy throughout the world. Far-right, neo-Fascist governments have arisen in places such as Hungary and Poland. Anti-immigrant, anti-refugee sentiment has flourished in Britain, France, and parts of Germany. The Middle East has very few democracies, and the Arab Spring did not come to fruition. China is ruled by a one-party state, and demagoguery has swept over the US. The US only allowed full civil rights to most of its citizens in 1965, but in the early 1980s the Reagan administration rolled back the welfare state and began an increase in economic inequality that persisted even through the Obama years.

But we forget that one region of the world used to be largely under dictatorship for decades, but is now going into its fourth decade of mostly democratic rule. It is a region that has transitioned from repressive military regimes, to initially unstable democratic order. Through the 1990s, multi-party systems were consolidated, and by the early 2000s, the incorporation of women in government was second only to that in Scandinavia.\(^2^2\) Sixteen of eighteen Latin American countries have implemented affirmative action for women’s participation in legislatures. Of these, five have approved gender parity (Bolivia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Mexico). Bolivia, Ecuador, and Costa Rica are the leaders in expanding women’s participation.\(^2^3\) Subsequently, indigenous groups, in some cases
the majority of certain countries, gained more political rights. In others, ethnic minorities have been recognized.

To be sure, these are messy, fraught processes. But the democratic landscape in Latin America now is vastly more promising than when juntas started to disappear in the early 1980s. Only Cuba and Venezuela are non-democratic. There is a wide spectrum of degrees of democratic rule or competitive authoritarianism, but the region is now the site of competitive elections and increased citizen participation. At the same time, it is an area that is free of radical religious politics that exist in other parts of the world. It is surprising that Latin America is often ignored when it comes to the study of democratization or democratic theory.  

For the purposes of addressing the rising challenge of the type of performative populism that is represented by Trump, I would suggest that one important lesson can be derived from recent Latin American cases. One central tenet of standard definitions of populism is that the populist leader seeks to create an image of a unified, uniform people. The leader claims to speak for “the People,” against corrupt elites, according to this narrative. Latin America is often cited as an example of where this takes place. But two recent cases of countries that are often classed as populist complicate this story.

The central idea is that a new model of a ‘plurinational state’ has emerged in South America. Rather than posit the people as a single, unified entity for which a populist leader speaks, the opposite has occurred. A recognition that the people is fragmented, divided, and fundamentally composed of distinctive groups is at the core of the plurinational model. This model is the result of what we can call the post-republican turn in Latin American citizenship theory. Latin America is leaving behind the language of liberté, égalité, et fraternité. Le citoyen is being replaced by ‘communities’ and ‘nationalities.’

In the words of the Council for the Development of Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador, 2011, “a new subject is exploding the basic tenets of the modern nation-state, and with it the discourse
and practice of rights grounded in the legacy of the French Revolution.”25 Similar terms are used in the Preamble of the New Political Constitution of Bolivia, 2009: “We have left in the past the colonial, republican, and neoliberal state. Let us take on the challenge of building, collectively, a Unitary Social State of Plurinational and Communal Right.”

These words are emblematic of a new stage of thinking about the state in Latin America. Both Bolivia and Ecuador have moved beyond the republican paradigm for similar reasons. In the case of Bolivia, a large majority of indigenous people—in other words, the vast majority of Bolivians—were marginalized for over a hundred and fifty years from the formal processes of politics.26 In Ecuador, a variety of indigenous groups had similarly been excluded from active voice and participation in politics. After the collapse of the neo-liberal, free-market period of the 1990s, both countries veered towards new models of political organization.

Some critics of the post-liberal period, such as Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa, have sought to paint all of the emerging leaders of the 2000s with the same disapproving brush of ‘populism.’ From Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, to Lula in Brazil, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina, Fernando Lugo in Paraguay, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador, among others, these post-liberal leaders were branded as ‘populists.’ The fact is that each leader emerged under very different contexts, conditions, and circumstances, coming from widely varying ideological traditions.27 It is precisely for this reason that they all fared differently. Many fell under the weight of heavy corruption. Others abandoned redistributive policies in favor of clientelism and party favoritism. There is wide variation in terms of success, economic stability, and democratization among the so-called ‘twenty-first century socialism’ experiments.

What is notable from the political theory perspective about the Bolivian and Ecuadorean cases is the development of ‘plurinational state’ models in explicit opposition to both the republican and the
liberal tradition. While they have not been entirely successful in practical terms, the critique and attempted transcendence of republicanism is an important theoretical development not just in the region, but I would also argue from a global perspective. Both experiments posit that the republican system failed to engage with race/ethnicity adequately and must be replaced.

The Ecuadorian and Bolivian cases have in common the same origin in terms of the attempt to refound the state. The ideas of “Buen Vivir” (more commonly used in Ecuador) and “Vivir Bien” (more common in Bolivia) are rooted in the two principal indigenous groups of the Andes, the Aymara and the Quechua. Both of these groups were exploited, marginalized, and denigrated for centuries in the region. Through both historical recovery of ideas as well as their reshaping and redefinition in contemporary terms, these concepts are used as touchstones for the new, post-republican and plurinational state. In English, they would translate as “to live well,” or as a noun, “the proper or good life.” In essence they describe a way of life that is grounded in balance and harmony.

The Aymara term is “suma qamaña,” while the Quechua is “sumak kawsay.” They are both tied to the cosmology of pre-Columbian cultures. The Aymara cosmology of “jaqiaru” means “voice of the people.” Thus, it contains a democratic basis. In both, the terms “suma” and “sumak” refer to a worldview containing the concepts of plenitude, sublimity, excellence, magnificence and beauty. A life well lived is one of balance, in which an aesthetic sense of equilibrium is merged with what could be called virtue understood as excellence. Thus, there are aesthetic elements that are connected to ethical ones.

What is important to underscore is that the philosophical groundwork of the Ecuadorian and Bolivian post-republican models are situated as antithetical to the Western, republican, liberal account of the state. While much of the nascent literature on “Buen Vivir” is highly political and biased towards particular political projects, there are significant theoretical elements that ought to be of interest to
political theory as it grapples with new forms of political thinking, especially those that challenge Western paradigms. The new literature does not entirely do away with Occidental influences, for it accepts the fact that markets, globalization, and international institutions do shape the international and domestic arenas.

One noteworthy example of this recognition are the pronouncements of Bolivia’s president Evo Morales. In recent years, Morales has made important political missteps, which have undermined the democratic legitimacy of his initial election in 2005. Among these, there has been a narrowing of perspectives in the media; persecution of political opponents through semi-legal but dubious corruption accusations; incorporation of former right-wing military members into the ruling party apparatus; lack of transparency in government contracts; minimal development of younger leadership within the party; and opaque corruption investigations. Moreover, he sought re-election in a referendum that he lost in 2016. More recently, the government is mired in a debate over the construction of a highway that would run through the TIPNIS protected national forest.

Nonetheless, few would contest the assertion that Morales and his vice-president Álvaro García Linera have drastically changed the course of Bolivian politics. According to Morales, the first indigenous ruler in the country’s history, the republican model never fully worked in Bolivia. In a country where the indigenous population is over sixty-five percent of the total, the vast majority was not actively involved in the institutional political apparatuses for most of the country’s history.

In a recent interview in the daily *La Razón*, Morales put it this way:

**Q**: What is the substantive difference between the Republic and the Plurinational State?

**A**: The Republic was a state without nations. If it did have some sense of nation, it was for small oligarchical groups. It was a fraudulent regime. In economic terms, the republican model led to poverty and external domination. There was never
an attempt, during the republican period (1825 to 2006) to provide economic development, national integration, or the eradication of poverty. During the republican period, dominant groups prevailed, whose main concern was to benefit their own group. The mestizos [mixed-race, Spanish-Indian] and the criollos [creoles; of mainly Spanish blood] did not recognize indigenous groups or movements.

During the Republic, what was the US doctrine towards the Bolivian armed forces? It was that the principal enemy were the social movements, especially the indigenous movements. During the Republic, there was talk of trade-union independence; in other words, that unions should not engage in political activity. During the Republic, natural resources were despoiled. During the Republic, civilian and military governments were under the domination of the US Empire.

Thus, during the Republic, it wasn’t Bolivians who decided on things, it was foreigners. Policies were imported, social programs were imported. Some NGO’s resisted, but some were also part of foreign domination plans. That was the Republic. Now, finally, Bolivians decide our own future.³⁰

To be sure, there is plenty of rhetoric, hyperbole, and provocation in Morales’ words. But to anyone familiar with the basic tenets of republican theory, these words represent a complete subversion of the intended purpose of republicanism. What Morales is saying is that the effective result of the republican period amounted to exactly the opposite of the intended aim.

Rather than a theory of non-domination, republicanism, in this account, became a practice of wholesale subordination. Bolivia was not independent. Bolivia was ruled by foreigners who colluded with some Bolivian elites in order to benefit external powers and internal oligarchies. These oligarchies were largely white (creole) or mestizo; in other words, descendants of the original founders of the Bolivian nation in 1825. The intended universalism of republican citizenship, independent of ethnicity, in fact failed to understand the centrality of ethnic membership and identity. Finally, there was no real concern with the overall economic development of the nation and trade unions were not to be integral components of republican self-rule.

If republicanism did indeed ultimately fail in some parts of the Americas, should we think of these failures as distant from us and foreign to our contemporary experience in the North of the
Americas? I doubt it. We in present-day US are mired in myriad political ills precisely due to the insufficiency of the republican paradigm in addressing the tensions that exist in multi-ethnic, multi-racial states. The daily injustices suffered by many African American citizens of the US and by irregular migrants who come from the global South, for example, are not likely to disappear if we are unwilling to transform or even reject a political system such as the republican one that is built on the idea of color-blindness. Its myopia, contemporary thinkers in the Andes would say, is caused by its insistence on the use of a Procrustean bed that seeks to make a single demos out of many peoples or even nationalities within a single state.

The lesson to be learned from the South, in dealing with the rise of Latin American-style populism in the North, is to examine and perhaps emulate these developments around the idea of a plurinational state. Recognizing that the US is made up of ethnic groups with vastly different histories and degrees of power might be a reason to call for constitutional reforms akin to those that have taken place in Ecuador and Bolivia. They confront the problem of race directly. They reject the idea of a single, unified, monolithic “The People.” Caudillismo has not been entirely superseded. But important gains against the ‘civilization vs. barbarism’ dichotomy, racism/racialism, and the gendered dynamics of power are being made. These have been consolidated through constitutional reforms, which could be a path for the US as well. These ideas from the South ought to be brought to the North by Latin American immigrants in order to reform and reshape the US polity and remind us that we are part of the Americas writ large.
Bibliography


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4 In this respect, I agree with Joshua Simon’s view of the Americas as sharing fundamental traits.

5 A similar reference is made by Licastro and Pelizza 2012 (p. 45).

6 See Mansfield on virtú and the multitude (364-365).

7 For example, see Ben Plotkin, 60.

8 Waldmann, a German sociologist, provides an objective view from the outside to examine the techniques of power utilized by Perón to remain in control of the Argentine state (Waldmann, 109-126).

9 Trujillo was known to ‘hypnotize’ his audience (Vargas Llosa, 120). Trump’s use of Twitter is an example of obviating institutions in order to reach the people directly.

10 Machiavelli recognizes this phenomenon of the prince-people dyad. He is ultimately against it, hence his stance to establish republican institutional means to manage it.

11 I understand ideology as a coherent set of principles or ideas that undergird and seek to justify a political programme. I do not see Simón Bolívar, a profoundly Machiavellian thinker, as someone concerned by the problem of justification. Rather his project is one of acquisition, maintenance, and expansion of power *tout court*.

12 ‘We are not Europeans; we are not Indians. We are a mixed species of aborigines and Spaniards’ (Bolívar, *Angostura Discourse*, in Fitzgerald, 48).

13 Andrés de Santa Cruz was another paragon of caudillismo (Sobrevilla, 221-222).

14 Sarmiento, 39-41.

15 ‘The colonel of the workers’ is how Rouquié describes him (Rouquié, 23).

16 For the references to the female body in relation to Eva Perón, see Claudia Soria, *Los cuerpos de Eva*.

17 The long-lasting aesthetic and spectacular dimensions of the Perón rule are analyzed by Anahí Ballent in Soria et al 2010 (pp. 213-224). See also the idea of ‘the fiction I performed’ in *Santa Evita* (Eloy Martínez 303).

18 For Urbinati, plebiscitary democracy overvalues the aesthetic. I would argue the aesthetic permeates all politics, democratic and non-democratic. A plebiscite on aesthetic valuation of a political act rarely occurs.

19 von Vacano 2006 Ch. 5.

20 The ‘celebrity metaphor’ is a central idea in this view (Alexander, 163).
Trump’s recent exposure of the Nunes memo to discredit the FBI is an example of the effort to sow conflict among intra-state agencies.


The recent conference on Democracy in Crisis at Yale University in January 2018 is an example.

Construyendo el Estado Plurinacional, 18.

See Choquehuanca 55.

For instance, Chávez came from a military tradition; Lula from trade-unionism; Morales from coca-growers’ syndicalism; Kirchner from Peronism, Lugo from liberation theology, Correa was educated in the US, etc.

It is interesting to note that Peru is excluded from this project, due to unique political traits.

See Farthing and Kohl, 99. See also Huanacuni in Arkonada 2012 (p. 127-150).

La Razón, August 6, 2017.

Another area from which the US can learn is that of the notion of continental citizenship. The Latin American perspective on more open migration regimes contrasts with that of the US. It draws on thinkers that go back all the way to the 19th century. These include Bolívar, but also These include Juan Egaña, Juan Martínez de Rozas and Bernardo O’Higgins in Chile, Francisco de Miranda in Venezuela, José Cecilio Díaz Del Valle in Central America, and Bernardo Monteagudo and José San Martín in Perú and Argentina. They saw migration not just as a matter of distributive justice, but about as a matter of making the demos more porous and expansive.

In comparative terms, the case of Turkey might seem even more problematic for the prospects of republicanism. The Ottoman Empire and the rule of Ataturk made “Turks” out of a wide array of pre-existing ethnic groups. Ataturk’s strongman rule (and now that of Erdogan) would seem antithetical to republican egalitarianism, and the recent resurgence of religious sentiment in the country would not conform to the secularism of the republican tradition.

Caudillismo is on the decline in Latin America but persists to some degree. Ecuador transitioned to the rule of Lenin Moreno, while Evo Morales seeks to perpetuate his hold on power.