

Las Honduras abiertas de América Latina*

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde**



Tomas Bravo/Reuters

Supporters of ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya protesting.

Once again we are the world's bad news. In Honduras, gorilla regimes and populist messianism put their seal on the democratic process and a democratically elected political leader. President Manuel Zelaya was deposed, and the countries in the hemisphere and the world came out against this tired, very characteristic way that some

underdeveloped sectors of our Latin American political class have of acceding to power. The international community demanded he be reinstated, that the temporary occupant of his office, Roberto Micheletti, leave and that there be a return to legality —although not so much to constitutional order, since members of the community of nations have their criticisms of this, which in Honduras includes surprising anomalies that are not relevant for the discussion at hand.

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* The author is making an allusion to Eduardo Galeano's book *The Open Veins of Latin America*, plus a play on words with the Spanish word for "depths," which is the same as the name of the country Honduras. The title would translate "The Open Depths of Latin America" but the reference to Honduras is not conveyed in English. [Translator's Note.]

** Director of CISAN. jlvaldes@servidor.unam.mx.

We are faced with a regional conflict that offers us lessons on several fronts. Aside from the very justified criticism of the military's illegal involvement in politics, we are again faced with an unfortunate process that has its origins in what has been termed the temptation of the lifelong presidency, which has characterized Presidents Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa and, to a certain extent, Daniel Ortega and Álvaro Uribe.

which has characterized Presidents Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa and, to a certain extent, Daniel Ortega and Álvaro Uribe. It happens that our political leaders try to use the democratic process to satisfy their undisguised desire to stay in power, and from the beginning of their terms, expressly do everything they can to achieve their goal. Zelaya is no exception, and to a great extent, this led to the crisis that has exposed the primitivism of his country's institutionals as well as those of some others (Venezuela is the most conspicuous case). Confusing democracy with the guarantee of perpetual popularity, they hold on to power and both symbolically and in reality become indispensable, untouchable leaders. They forget how important alternation and the dynamic play of the imagination are for the efficacy and effectiveness of democracy, the basis and obligation for any participant and player in public power. Their democratic legitimacy is, at bottom, demagogic messianism and, in some cases more than others, simulated authoritarianism. Parallel to constitutional reform, they also discipline and standardize the forces of order, mainly the militia—something Zelaya failed fatally at. They tame the judiciary and legislature. And, along the way, they condemn civil society to new eras of abandonment that thrust it into a-critical skepticism, blind subordination and—as we now see—coups d'état inspired in the idea of privileged superiority that could return us to the ignoble authoritarian past that made our hemisphere famous for decades.

I should say, however, that this context of fragile democracies I am describing has also been fertile ground that some have taken full advantage of for deepening this disarray of democracy and demagogically legitimizing their yearnings for eternity. Quite the opposite of benefitting our young democracies, all of this has poisoned the atmosphere and, once again, flooded the

democratic process with ideology. This is mainly the case when we hear the vacuous discourse of the hemisphere's fake democratic left, represented, with the exception of Colombia, by the aforementioned countries.

We will see what happens to Zelaya's attempted return to the Honduran presidency. For now, we can summarize this political operetta in which so many actors have already participated: Barack Obama has managed to demonstrate—successfully up until now—that Washington is no longer the same; that not only is it no longer behind the coup as in the past but that it is on the side of democratic legality, although with the requisite reservations expressed by Hillary Clinton when she stated that there should be no external interference (read Venezuela et al.). The Organization of America States, headed by Insulza, has also shown that it can act effectively to neutralize the democratic retreat and finally be faithful to the democratic mission it has repeatedly betrayed in the past. And, Mexico and other players—Brazil's absence is surprising—have acted with aplomb and firmness in their condemnation of the coup. The question is whether after the unfortunate events, all the actors inside and outside Honduras will recognize and accept these noteworthy changes. If they do, we will have learned the lesson of our history, which more than ever should put the interference and demagogic impertinence of the Group of Four, headed by Chávez, in their place. On every occasion like this, they see an opportunity to play at a little banana-republic war of regional geopolitics with the United States of today! Hopefully, if Zelaya returns to office, he will learn the lesson and reform and reactivate parts of his country's Constitution to perfect its democracy and give him real legitimacy, and not bury it even more in the regrettable condition in which he and his compatriots have subjected it. **MM**