

# Democracy in Latin America Update of the Fitzgibbon Survey

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## Background

In 1945 UCLA political science professor Russell H. Fitzgibbon initiated a survey to determine the extent of democracy among the twenty Latin American countries, requesting ten distinguished Latinamericanist scholars to rank the republics according to fifteen criteria he believed would best assess the national strengths of democracy. His criteria of democracy included:

- 1) Educational level
- 2) Standard of living
- 3) Internal unity
- 4) Political maturity
- 5) Freedom from foreign domination
- 6) Freedom of press, etc.
- 7) Free elections
- 8) Party organization
- 9) Judiciary
- 10) Governmental Funds
- 11) Social Legislation
- 12) Civilian Supremacy
- 13) Ecclesiastical domination
- 14) Government Administration
- 15) Local Government

Panelists rated each of the republics separately according to the fifteen criteria (definitions of criteria accompanied the survey instrument) and the results were later tallied in ordinal and interval levels of measurement.

At five-year intervals, the original democracy format has continued to this date, now extending through fifty-five years (1945-2000) and numbering twelve surveys (see Table One for rankings of each of the twelve canvasses). Over the years of the poll, Costa Rica and Uruguay held the cumulative highest assessment of democracy and Paraguay and Haiti the lowest. One hundred and three panelists contributed to the 2000 survey (see the Appendix for a listing of these individuals). All three project directors, Fitzgibbon, Kenneth Johnson, and Phil Kelly,

experimented with the poll in various ways, but the survey has largely remained without significant adjustment.

## Analysis of the 2000 Survey

Table Two shows country comparisons of the 2000 survey, with Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina and Brazil rated most highly in democracy and Honduras, Paraguay, Peru, Guatemala, and Haiti being the least democratic. For the first time the 2000 canvass added thirteen newly-independent Caribbean countries, first displayed separately (Table Three) and then four of these countries integrated into the twenty states in Table Three (Table Four).

Kelly assembled an array of independent variables (taken from G. Kurian 1979) to test for possible statistical associations, with the 1945-2000 cumulative democracy rankings (Table One) as the dependent variable. Enlisting a stepwise regression procedure, he located two variables (newspaper circulation per capita and tractors per hectare) as representing the strongest predictor model of democracy in Latin America, as per the Fitzgibbon survey approach.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the Fitzgibbon democracy survey is its longevity, now spanning a period of fifty-five years of Latin American politics. In addition, the use of the panel method is unique, and the survey technique facilitates procedural adjustments and replication by others.

Latin America during the past several decades has experienced an upswing in democratic governments, and much more academic and governmental interest has turned to this phenomena. The participants of the Fitzgibbon survey of democracy in Latin American hope the data contained in this research note will assist in furthering this interest. (For those wanting to participate in the 2005 Fitzgibbon survey, please contact the author <kellyphi@emporia.edu>).

TABLE ONE

FITZGIBBON-JOHNSON INDEX: SPECIALISTS' VIEW OF  
DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA, 1945-2000

COUNTRY	RANK 1945	RANK 1950	RANK 1955	RANK 1960	RANK 1965	RANK 1970	RANK 1975	RANK 1980	RANK 1985	RANK 1991	RANK 1995	RANK 2000	RANK TOTALS
ARGENTINA	5	8	8	4	6	7	5	11	3	5	4	4	5
BOLIVIA	18	17	15	16	17	18	17	18	16	14	14	14	18
BRAZIL	11	5	5	7	8	10	9	12	9	6	6	5	8
CHILE	3	2	3	3	3	2	11	14	14	4	3	3	3.5
COLOMBIA	4	6	6	6	7	6	4	4	5	8	7	12	7
COSTA RICA	2	3	2	2	1**	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
CUBA	6	4	7	15	18	13	7	6	10	12	16	15	10.5
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	9	19	19	18	14	14	13	8	13	11	13	9	15
ECUADOR	14	9	10	10	12	9	14	9	11	9	9	13	10.5
EL SALVADOR	13	14	11	12	11	8	10	16	17	19	17	10	13
GUATEMALA	12	10	14	13	13	13	15	17	19	18	19	19	16
HAITI	16	18	17	19	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
HONDURAS	17	15	12	14	15	16	16	15	15	17	18	16	17
MEXICO	7	7	4	5	4	5	3	3	6	7	8	6	3.5
NICARAGUA	15	16	18	17	16	17	18	7	12	10	11	11	14
PANAMA	8	11	9	11	10	11**	12	10	9	15	10	8	9
PARAGUAY	20	20	20	20	19	19	19	19	18	16	15	17	19
PERU	10	13	16	9	9	11**	8	5	8	13	12	18	12
URUGUAY	1	1	1	1	1**	3	6	13	4	3	2	2	2
VENEZUELA	9	12	13	8	5	4	2	2	2	2	5	7	6

**Table Two**  
**2000 Survey Rankings of the Original Twenty Latin American Republics\***

1. Costa Rica	2,344	11. Nicaragua	4,470
2. Uruguay	2,722	12. Colombia	4,514
3. Chile	2,774	13. Ecuador	4,608
4. Argentina	3,079	14. Bolivia	4,667
5. Brazil	3,460	15. Cuba	4,676
6. Mexico	3,502	16. Honduras	4,739
7. Venezuela	3,975	17. Paraguay	4,797
8. Panama	4,005	18. Peru	5,019
9. Dominican Republic	4,304	19. Guatemala	5,028
10. El Salvador	4,435	20. Haiti	6,151

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 \* Total ranking responses of the 103 survey participants

**Table Three**  
**2000 Survey Rankings of the Newly-Independent Caribbean Countries\***

1. Barbados	27.65	8. St. Lucia	37.66
2. Bahamas	31.20	9. St. Vincent-Grenadines	37.80
3. Trinidad-Tobago	32.80	10. St. Kitts-Nevis	38.20
4. Jamaica	35.11	11. Grenada	38.94
5. Belize	35.50	12. Guyana	43.08
6. Dominica	36.43	13. Suriname	44.34
7. Antigua-Barbudo	36.60		

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 \* Average of ranking responses of 39 survey participants

**Table Four**  
**2000 Survey Rankings of Twenty Original Republics plus Four Caribbean States\***

1. Costa Rica	22.75	13. El Salvador	43.05
2. Uruguay	26.42	14. Nicaragua	43.39
3. Chile	26.93	15. Colombia	43.82
4. Barbados	27.65	16. Suriname	44.34
5. Argentina	29.89	17. Ecuador	44.73
6. Brazil	33.59	18. Bolivia	45.31
7. Mexico	34.00	19. Cuba	45.39
8. Jamaica	35.11	20. Honduras	46.00
9. Belize	35.50	21. Paraguay	46.57
10. Venezuela	38.59	22. Peru	48.72
11. Panama	38.88	23. Guatemala	48.81
12. Dominican Republic	41.78	24. Haiti	59.71

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 \*Average of ranking responses

## APPENDIX

### 2000 Fitzgibbon Democracy Survey Panel Participants

Juan del **Águila**, Emory University  
Marvin **Alisky**, Arizona State University  
José **Álvarez**, University of Georgia  
Christopher **Anderson**, University of Kansas  
Craig **Auchter**, Butler University  
John **Bailey**, Georgetown University  
Steven **Barracca**, University of Texas-El Paso  
Lorraine **Bayard de Volo**, University of Kansas  
Marc **Becker**, Truman State University  
Robert **Biles**, Sam Houston State University  
Jan **Knippers Black**, Monterey Inst of International Studies  
Alvaro **Félix Bolaños**, University of Florida;  
Dallas **Browne**, Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville  
Winfield **Burggraaff**, University of Missouri  
David **Bushnell**, University of Florida  
Damarys **Canache**, Florida State University  
Henry **Carey**, Georgia State University  
John **Carey**, Washington University  
Jack **Child**, American University  
Richard **Clinton**, Oregon State University  
Michael **Coppedge**, University of Notre Dame  
Irasema **Coronado**, University of Texas-El Paso  
Brian **Crisp**, University of Arizona  
Alfred **Cuzán**, University of West Florida  
Lee **Daniel**, Texas Christian University  
David **Dent**, Towson University  
Henry **Dietz**, University of Texas  
Gary **Elbow**, Texas Tech University  
Julio **Fernández**, State University of New York at Cortland  
Cornelia **Butler Flora**, Iowa State University  
David **Foster**, Arizona State University  
Bill **Furlong**, Utah State University  
Connie **García-Blanchard**, Fort Lewis College  
John **Garganigo**, Washington University  
Michael **Gold-Biss**, Saint Cloud State University  
Louis **Goodman**, American University  
Yvon **Grenier**, St. Francis Xavier University  
Claudio **Grossman**, American University  
John **Hart**, University of Houston  
Richard **Hillman**, St. John Fisher College  
Kathryn **Hochstetler**, Colorado State University  
Jamie **Elizabeth Jacobs**, West Virginia University  
Mark **Jones**, Michigan State University  
Phil **Kelly**, Emporia State University  
Harvey **Kline**, University of Alabama  
Michael **Kryzanek**, Bridgewater State College  
William **LeoGrande**, American University  
Tom **Leonard**, University of North Florida  
Todd **Lutes**, University of Arizona South;  
Don **Mabry**, Mississippi State University  
Scott **Mainwaring**, University of Notre Dame  
Christian **Maisch**, American University  
Gabriel **Marcella**, U.S. Army War College  
Jennifer **McCoy**, Carter Center  
Terry **McCoy**, University of Florida  
Ron **McDonald**, Syracuse University  
J. Michael **McGuire**, University of the Incarnate Word  
Frank O. **Mora**, Rhodes College;  
Stephen **Mumme**, Colorado State University  
David **Myers**, Pennsylvania State University  
Fred **Nunn**, Portland State University  
Harley **Oberhelman**, Texas Tech University  
Guillermo **O'Donnell**, University of Notre Dame  
Salvador **Oropesa**, Kansas State University  
David **Scott Palmer**, Boston University  
John **Passé-Smith**, University of Central Arkansas  
Neale **Pearson**, Texas Tech University  
John **Peeler**, Bucknell University  
Orlando **Pérez**, Central Michigan University  
Anibal **Pérez-Liñan**, University of Notre Dame  
Robert **Peterson**, University of Texas-El Paso  
David **Pion-Berlin**, University of California-Riverside  
Guy **Postras**, Trinity University  
Nancy **Powers**, Florida State University  
Gary **Reich**, University of Kansas  
Steve **Ropp**, University of Wyoming  
Mark **Ruhl**, Dickinson College  
Henry **Schmidt**, Texas A&M University  
Cathy **Schneider**, American University  
Friedrich **Schuler**, Portland State University  
Mitchell **Seligson**, University of Pittsburgh  
Eduardo **Silva**, University of Missouri-St. Louis  
Shawn **Smallman**, Portland State University  
Paul **Sondrol**, University of Colorado-Colorado Springs;  
Charles **Stansifer**, University of Kansas  
Dale **Story**, University of Texas-Arlington  
Dean **Talbott**, University of Northern Iowa  
Robert **Tomasek**, University of Kansas  
John **Tuman**, Texas Tech University  
Roberto **Villarreal**, University of Texas-El Paso  
Richard **Walter**, Washington University  
Christopher **Welna**, University of Notre Dame  
Joseph **Werna**, Southeast Missouri State University  
Howard **Wiarda**, University of Massachusetts  
Marvin **Will**, University of Tulsa  
Edward **Williams**, University of Arizona  
Miles **Williams**, Central Missouri State University  
Philip **Williams**, University of Florida  
Larman **Wilson**, American University  
Ralph Lee **Woodward**, Texas Christian University  
Eduardo **Zayas-Bazán**, Middle Tennessee State University  
Daniel **Zirker**, Montana State University  
Clarence **Zuvekas**, Annandale, Virginia.