

Mediocre economic performance is only part of the problem, Hakim says. Few of the democratic governments “are governing well.” In most countries, basic democratic institutions—courts, legislatures, political parties, even the presidency—are weak, and in some cases, “barely work at all.” Education is neglected: Only one in three Latin American children attends secondary school. Virtually every city “is far more violent and dangerous than it was a dozen years ago,” Hakim says. The region’s homicide rate—300 murders per one million people—is twice the world average. In Guatemala, Colombia, and El Salvador, the murder rates exceed 1,000 per million.

Tired of all this, “ordinary citizens are losing faith in democracy,” Hakim writes. In Latinobarómetro surveys conducted in South America and Mexico in 1997 and 1998, more than 60 percent expressed dissatisfaction with democracy, and nearly one in three indicated that they favored or did not oppose authoritarian rule. Peruvians and Venezuelans already have turned to more authoritarian leadership.

The Latin American picture is not all bleak, Hakim notes. Chile in the last decade

has achieved six percent annual growth, slashed the poverty rate, and improved government services, and its democratic institutions “are growing stronger and more effective.” Argentina [which last October elected a nominal socialist, Fernando de la Ruá of the centrist Radical Party, president] also “has made impressive economic and political advances since democratic rule was restored in 1983,” Hakim says. Uruguay and Costa Rica have strong democratic heritages. Mexico’s economic prospects are good, though its political ones are hindered by its inexperience with democracy, deep political divisions, and extensive drug traffic, criminal violence, and corruption. Brazil, with almost one-third of Latin America’s population and economic activity, “is the wild card,” Hakim says, with much depending on “the political skills and luck” of President Fernando Cardoso and his advisers.

Hakim is moderately hopeful. He expects that most of Latin America “will avoid disaster. . . . Most of the region’s political leaders and financial managers are betting on democratic politics and market economics and are struggling to make them work.”

A Swedish Imperfection

“Gender Equality in ‘the Most Equal Country in the World’? Money and Marriage in Sweden” by Charlott Nyman, in *The Sociological Review* (Nov. 1999), Keele Univ., Keele, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG, England.

In Sweden, where equality between the sexes is the official ideal, husband and wife are obliged by law to “share” their incomes, with each having a legal right to the same standard of living as the other. Yet after interviews with 10 married couples, Nyman, a doctoral student in sociology at Umeo University, in northern Sweden, is persuaded that even in what is supposedly “the most equal country in the world,” perfect equality remains elusive.

The couples, each with dual incomes and a seven-year-old child, lived in an unidentified white-collar town. All the husbands and wives initially insisted in interviews that they not only believed in equal economic sharing but practiced it.

Yet in all 10 families, Nyman found, “the woman had primary responsibility” for buy-

ing groceries, clothes for the children, and other everyday items for the home, while the men usually handled such “bigger” matters as bank loans and kept track of long-term investments and savings. Because the women had the daily burden of making ends meet, says Nyman, they often wound up drawing on their personal budgets to meet unanticipated family needs, worrying more than their husbands about the family having enough money, and spending less on themselves than their husbands did.

Though the women “seemed to subordinate their own needs to those of other family members,” Nyman notes, they saw their behavior not as “sacrifice” but as “an expression of love.” Comments Nyman: Even in Sweden, “old traditions, attitudes, and behaviors die hard.”