

## Adios, Mr. President

“Latin American Presidencies Interrupted” by Arturo Valenzuela, in *Journal of Democracy* (Oct. 2004), 1101 15th St., N.W., Ste. 800, Washington, D.C. 20005.

In Latin America, where dictatorship was the norm not so long ago, elected governments now rule in all but two (Cuba and Haiti) of its 37 countries. That’s the good news, but here’s the bad: Popular enthusiasm for democracy is waning. Many elected presidents have proven ineffectual, and 14 presidencies have ended in impeachment or forced resignation since 1985. Valenzuela, director of the Center for Latin American Studies at Georgetown University, warns that “democracy’s future now hangs in the balance across a huge swath of the Western Hemisphere.”

Four of the presidential departures came under unusual circumstances involving fraud and corruption: Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti (1991 and 2004), Alberto Fujimori in Peru (2000), and Joaquín Balaguer in the Dominican Republic (1996). In the other 10 cases, the early exits came “amid severe economic, political, and social turmoil,” though there still were some positive signs. In Guatemala, for example, the military joined other groups in forcing out Jorge Serrano in 1993 when he began subverting democracy, but then stepped aside to let another democratic leader assume command—a far cry from the bad old days.

In several cases, protests against economic austerity measures were a major factor. In oil-rich Venezuela, which was hard hit by declining oil prices, President Carlos Andrés Pérez

was impeached after he pushed fuel-price increases and other unpopular measures approved by the International Monetary Fund, then imposed martial law to quell the resulting violence. But refusing to grasp the economic nettle can also be fatal: Five “stand pat” presidents were also shown the door.

“Although the citizenry expects a head of state to resolve deep-seated problems,” says Valenzuela, “Latin American democratic presidents are for the most part extraordinarily weak,” with feeble or fragmented parties and, consequently, with little support in the legislatures. In only three of the cases Valenzuela studied did chief executives take office after winning an absolute majority in a single round of voting. Only two commanded legislative majorities. Frustrated presidents face a powerful temptation to attack the legislative branch and bypass it with decrees, and many succumb, giving voters even more reason to become disaffected with democratic politics.

A parliamentary system, in which the prime minister serves at the pleasure of a legislative majority and legislators hold responsible cabinet positions, would do much better, in Valenzuela’s view. Most of Europe’s new democracies have chosen some form of parliamentary government. Unfortunately, most Latin Americans, living in “the continent of presidentialism par excellence,” are plainly opposed to a switch.

## A New Indonesia

“Indonesia’s Quiet Revolution” by Lex Rieffel, in *Foreign Affairs* (Sept.–Oct. 2004), 58 E. 58th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Terrorism has drawn the world’s attention to Indonesia in recent years—the 2002 bombing by Muslim extremists that killed 202 people in Bali, and the bombing a year later at the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta that killed 12. Meanwhile, hardly anybody has noticed that the world’s largest Muslim-majority nation (population: 235 million) has also been carrying out a democratic transfor-

mation of the political system: *Reformasi*.

The change began in 1998, when huge protests drove President Suharto from office after more than three decades of iron rule. The next year, a new 550-member national parliament (the DPR) was chosen, in the first openly contested elections since 1955. A central element of *Reformasi* was a constitutional amendment calling for direct election of the

president beginning in 2004. This past September, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a retired army general, defeated incumbent president Megawati Sukarnoputri (the daughter of Indonesia's first president, Sukarno) in a landslide vote, and a smooth transition to a new government followed. That was "a major achievement," says Rieffel, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

When Indonesia declared its independence from the Netherlands in 1945, its new constitution rested on a strong presidency. But the president was chosen by a People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) that included members of parliament and rep-

resentatives of "functional" groups, such as the military—all controlled by Suharto during his reign.

After his removal, the MPR began to introduce "critical checks and balances" through constitutional amendments. The "functional" representatives and groups in the MPR were replaced with a senate composed of 128 directly elected, nonpartisan members from the country's 32 provinces. Today, the MPR is much reduced in power and more democratic: Its only components are the senate and parliament. Only the parliament can enact laws, though the president must concur.

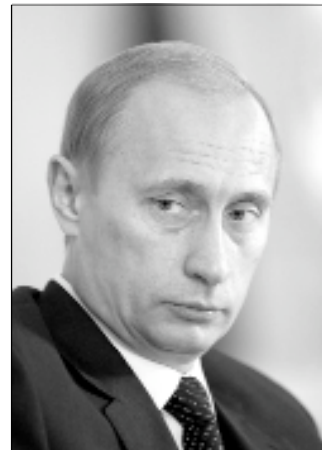
The Indonesian military continues to cast

EXCERPT

## *The New Putin*

*Everything has changed at the outset of President Putin's second term. He has defeated all his adversaries: oligarchs, regional governors, Communists, liberal parties, the parliament as such, and even the apparatus of the Council of Ministers. His concentration of power is excessive, provoking a power vacuum. Initially, two forces have come to the fore to fill this vacuum. The first power can be traced to President Putin's old KGB friends from St. Petersburg and the second . . . to the managers of the remaining state enterprises. Despite Russia's impressive growth and oil prices at levels approaching \$50 per barrel, one large state enterprise after another reports declining profits, suggesting that their masters are robbing them blind. After toying with the successful Anglo-American model of competing private enterprises in the resource industries under Yeltsin, Russia now seems on the course of adopting the failed OPEC model of state-owned monopoly enterprises in its energy sector.*

*Reform successes are often achieved when a leader is trying to consolidate his power. He then has to appeal to broad constituencies and pursue attractive policies. After consolidating power, he can focus on implementing all the bad things he may really want to see in place. Considering that Russia has become structurally quite similar to Latin America, analogies with Carlos Menem of Argentina and Alberto Fujimori of Peru may be quite relevant. They were viewed as shining successes during their first terms, just as they are now excoriated as miserable failures in their second. Similarly, we should be careful about assuming that Putin's policies in his second term will resemble those in his first, because the nature of Russian policymaking and his power base have completely changed.*



**Vladimir Putin**

—Anders Åslund, director of the Russian and Eurasian Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in *Eurasian Geography and Economics* (Vol. 46, No. 6, 2004)

## Periodicals

“a long shadow” over the country’s political life, says Rieffel, but its influence is much diminished. Though retired military officers appeared as candidates and supporters in the 2004 election campaigns, they were scattered among 24 political parties.

Yudhyono’s Democratic Party is secular, and last year’s elections “reaffirmed the

strength of moderate Islam in Indonesia,” notes Rieffel. But most Indonesians—long accustomed to violence against innocent civilians from various sources (including the military)—do not regard fighting terrorism as a high priority. Far more important to them are the fights against chronic corruption and unemployment.

# Chicken Economics

“Cheap Chickens: Feeding Africa’s Poor” by G. Pascal Zachary, in *World Policy Journal* (Summer 2004), World Policy Institute, New School Univ., 66 Fifth Ave., 9th fl., New York, N.Y. 10011.

Why did the chicken cross the ocean? Answer: to get from Brazil to Ghana, where it sells for half the price of a local bird. Brazilian chickens aren’t the only imports that compete with Ghanaian foods—incredibly, so do Thai rice, Italian tomatoes, even Indonesian chocolate bars, though Ghana is the world’s second-largest producer of cocoa beans.

Ghana’s 20 million people, especially urbanites, eat a wider range of foods than ever before. But these food imports, while pleasing to the palates and pocketbooks of consumers, hurt the country’s food producers, notes author and journalist Zachary.

Since the 1960s, Africa’s share of world agricultural exports has shrunk from eight percent to two percent, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute. Over that same period, the sub-Saharan region—with some of the world’s poorest farmers—has switched from being a net food exporter to a net food importer. Yet foreign-aid donors and African governments are spending less on African agriculture than they did 20 years ago.

The “green revolution” didn’t transform Africa the way it did parts of Latin America in the 1950s and, later, India, China, and other Asian countries. A number of factors worked against Africa: poor soil quality, new crop varieties unsuitable to Africa’s climate, and civil wars. But even after overcoming these obstacles, productive sub-Saharan farmers are often doomed to frustration by inadequate food-processing capacity and transport infrastructure.

Pineapples and coconuts, both plentiful in Ghana, illustrate the story there. Virtually no unprocessed pineapples are exported. One do-

mestic bottler makes pineapple juice, but only for domestic consumption, and better-off locals prefer imported pasteurized juice. The roads are so bad and gasoline so expensive that it’s hard to get the crops to Ghana’s cities. About 40 percent of the pineapple crop rots before it can be sold. Coconuts sell for a pittance in the streets of Ghana’s capital, but Ghana has no coconut juice bottler or processor, and thus no juice exports. Years of government meddling and mismanagement led Ghana to its current state.

Kenya, however, provides a hopeful model. There, fruit and vegetable growers export 30 varieties of fruit and 27 different vegetables, mainly to Europe. The real value of the country’s farm exports has quadrupled in the past 30 years. Kenya succeeds for several reasons: It has a long history of specialty agriculture, and in 1967, after the nation gained independence, Kenya’s new government had formed an agency to coordinate the industry and improve farm output and exports. But it adopted a hands-off approach to the market. Foreign investment by international companies, tourism, and increased coordination between suppliers and European supermarkets also boosted exports.

Zachary thinks there are a few things poor countries like Ghana can do. Among them: ensure that neglected farming regions get a share of new and improved roads to remedy transport problems; reform land ownership rules so that, over time, farmers gain title to land now owned by rural tribal authorities; and support effective farm-assistance organizations so that farmers who want to improve their methods have somewhere to turn.