Further Thoughts

Election Monitoring in Paraguay

A Personal Story of Globalization and Public Institutions

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Aside from many relevant experiences in my teaching career of some five decades, I have had one encounter that lasted ten minutes but that nevertheless reflects the convergence of globalization, public institutions, and fairness. Indeed, it proved to be a classic instance of my long-held contention that the boundary between international and domestic affairs has become even more porous!

The encounter occurred at 5:20 p.m. on May 9, 1993, in Asuncion, Paraguay. I was a member of a team led by former president Jimmy Carter to monitor the first open election in Paraguay’s history. We arrived a few days before the election and were immediately photographed for the purpose of giving us identification badges that certified we were official International Election Monitors.

On the day of the election, May 9, the members of the team were split up and given a variety of monitoring tasks around the country. My unit’s assignments were in Asuncion and included being present at a school at 5:00 p.m. to observe the opening of the balloting boxes and the counting of the ballots. But our driver got lost, and we did not get to the school until 5:20 p.m. The gate to the school had been closed and was under the guard of a large soldier with a gun dangling from his hip. With some trepidation I approached the gate and waved the ID badge hanging from my shirt pocket at the guard. He squinted at the card and then swung the gate open, at which point I crossed the boundary between international and domestic jurisdictions and entered the school.

It was an experience that has always lingered and was reinforced by the thought that here was globalization at its best in the sense that it compelled an authoritarian regime to accept external election monitors. Moreover, the monitoring process was administered by a public institution, namely the Organization of American States (OAS), as well as the Carter Center and numerous other transnational NGOs. No less important, it was an expression of fairness in the sense that it involved people who had never previously voted in an open election. They patiently stood in the very hot sun for hours to vote. It was obviously an important moment for them even though the polling places were not air conditioned. But the hot sun was hardly a negative dimension of this exhilarating and beneficial experience. It was not even a trade-off: no one has said that fairness has to occur under tolerable weather condition.
Notes


4. These data are from the National Geographic Society, *Millennium in Maps: Cultures* (Washington, DC, June 1999).


7. Ibid., 1.


11. To be sure, the benefits of the information revolution have been enjoyed by only a small proportion of the world’s population, thus resulting in a huge gap between those who are rich and poor with respect to their access to information. However, there are reasons to anticipate that the gap will slowly narrow with the passage of time. New technologies will enable poorer countries to leapfrog some of the communications stages experienced by more advanced societies. To cite but one example, in 1999 China had nine million Internet addresses, and in 2000 the figure had grown roughly to twenty million. See William Jefferson Clinton, “China’s Opportunities, And Ours,” *New York Times*, September 24, 2000, section 4, 15.


18. Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by President Clinton,” 2.


23. Given the diversity and multiplicity of collectivities in the multicentric world, it would be logical to describe the emergent structure as an n-furcation rather than a bifurcation (with the “n” representing any number). However, I continue to use the bifurcation label in order not to unduly downplay the importance of the state-centric world.


29. These processes of proliferating spheres of authority are probed at length in Rosenau, *Distant Proximities*, chap. 13.