

Political Learning

Luis Costa Bonino

Uruguay: Democratic Learning and Its Limits

Luis Costa Bonino

INTRODUCTION

On March 1, 1995, a new government was installed in Uruguay, initiating President Julio María Sanguinetti's second term in office. An abrupt increase in political and social violence and the unprecedented tie among the three major parties in November 1994 elections had cast a shadow of consternation over the new administration's stability and capacity to govern. The country had debated at length in the last few years the shortcomings of some of its constitutional "rules of the game". These rules, originally conceived in support of a rigid bipartisan system, were now obsolete in view of the realignments in the political party system. Formally speaking, the worst possible political scenario for Uruguay was the triple tie resulting from the 1994 elections because it signaled an ungovernable situation with a minority ruling party. Moreover, at the time, the traditional parties were fragmented political groupings that had never participated as a coherent whole in government coalitions.

Contrary to widespread predictions, however, the political catastrophe never materialized. Quite the opposite happened: After three years in office, the new administration found support in a solid government coalition that still remained firm. This coalition, which provided parliamentary support for initiatives by the executive, made it possible to enact fundamental legislation, such as social security reform and the reform of the national constitution, which adapted the rules of the game to the realigned political scenario.

What happened within Uruguay's political elite so that circumstances similar to those that had generate polarization, political violence, and a traumatic institutional breakdown were processed calmly this time around through bargaining and compromise, thus self-correcting the very parameters that endangered the country's democratic stability? The key to this "political miracle" was a change in the political elite's behavior through a process of learning.

POLITICAL LEARNING SCENARIO: TWELVE YEARS OF DEMOCRACY IN PERSPECTIVE

Twelve years have elapsed since democracy was restored in Uruguay, allowing us to assess changes in behavior that will affect the future of the country's political democracy. Some of these changes have increased the legitimacy of the system, generated a greater ability to govern, created more fluid and productive interactions among the different actors, reduced ideological confrontations, and promoted further discussion and a new pragmatism. Other behaviors have produced friction and confrontations, polarized society, hampered the possibility of arriving at a consensus, and, as a result, threatened to reduce the legitimacy of the democratic political regime.

Some of the democratically oriented changes of behavior respond to assessments of past experiences that quite often have been traumatic. These assessments have not necessarily been explicit, but in the collective memories of society and of the political elite, there is a thread connecting certain past behaviors with the traumatic experience of military dictatorship. The majority recognize that violence, the ineptitude of politicians, the betrayal of democratic principles, the loss of public liberties, intolerance, and the irresponsible support of military adventurism were all factors that opened the door to the authoritarian regime. This recognition contributed to the changes in behavior observed in recent years, both in society at large and in the political class.

We call this process of reflection and evaluation political learning. We find that in Uruguay, learning from past experiences has resulted in behavioral changes that reinforce the democratic process. Positive learning from new situations has been harder to come by. In particular, some antidemocratic events and behaviors seem to prosper precisely because they go unrecognized and are not assessed in relation to other events of Uruguay's political life, especially events of the pre-dictatorship period.

In this study, we analyze in greater depth the content of political learning and its effects on the functioning of the democratic system. We also point out the limitations of such learning and analyze opposite types of behavior that directly or indirectly generate an antidemocratic inclination. This chapter first synthesizes the main elements that brought about the breakdown of democracy in Uruguay, then examines the content of the elite's political learning with regard to its discourse, its identity, the rules of the game, its relationship with others, and decision making. Finally, this chapter analyzes certain events and behaviors that seem to run counter to the country's democratic learning – behaviors that although not antidemocratic in motivation, quite often tend to develop a logic that lessens the legitimacy of Uruguay's political democracy.

Context of the Breakdown

The breakdown of Uruguayan democracy, marked by the dissolution of Parliament on June 27, 1973, resulted from a complex set of factors, including political violence, guerrilla activity, gradual intervention of the armed forces in civil affairs, conflict between the branches of government, ineptitude or self-discreditation of the political class, and the resulting loss of prestige by political parties and by Parliament. All of this occurred amid an economic crisis perceived by society as serious, for which the democratic political regime seemingly had no solutions. Many of these same factors can be recognized in the breakdown of other democracies on the continent. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the beliefs and behaviors of the vast majority of Uruguay's political actors directly fed the processes leading to the breakdown of their country's democracy.

The macro or structural context that largely determined the breakdown of the Uruguayan democracy was a representational crisis that led to the collapse of the traditional bipartisan system. For more than a century, the political system in Uruguay was grounded on two solid pillars: the National or White Party (Blancos) and the Red Party (Colorados). These parties had been born in the first third of the nineteenth century, at practically the same time the country itself came into being, from large, communal (almost tribal) groups that followed *caudillos* with deep-seated roots in

Uruguayan society. Each of the parties always had a liberal faction and a conservative faction. This peculiar arrangement rendered a history characterized by multiple pacts, sometimes between liberals of diverse parties, sometimes between conservatives. This was called, in Uruguayan terminology, "co-participation". Especially during the twentieth century, the governments of co-participation have afforded the Uruguayan political system a large measure of stability.

The Broad Front (Frente Amplio), a coalition consisting of the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Christian Democrat Party, left-wing organizations, and other factions that had split from both traditional parties, was founded in 1971. At its beginning, this heterogeneous bloc was united by a strong opposition to then President Jorge Pacheco Areco. This broad alliance made it possible to double the number of votes that nontraditional political groups had been able to garner until that time, from 9 percent in 1966 to 18 percent in 1971, and this caused the strong bipartisan system to begin to crumble.

The representational crisis occurred for two reasons: as a result of the threat to the traditional values of co-participation and the harshly repressive regime of President Pacheco and as a result of the discontent spawned by an economic recession that the traditional parties seemed unable to correct.

A system that understood only bipartisan logic thus was unable to process some basic challenges, such as the lack of parliamentary support for the president. During Pacheco's term in office, between 1967 and 1971, this situation came to a head through confrontation. President Pacheco resorted to the so-called Emergency Security Measures, which translated into a state of martial law, allowing him to compensate for his lack of parliamentary support and to govern by decree. The fuel that fed the Emergency Security Measures, however, was the country's internal unrest, which legitimized his actions in the eyes of the public. Nurtured by those in the upper echelons of power, who used them as political tools, violence and repression escalated.

In 1972 and 1973, during Juan María Bordaberry's administration, the situation reached a critical stage because the bipartisan system had, in fact, disintegrated with the founding of the Frente Amplio. During this period, while dealing with the guerrillas, President Bordaberry treated Parliament as if were also a subversive element. The deterioration of the political situation ended in the coup d'état of June 27, 1973.

During the 1970s, the military dictatorship incarcerated a large number of dissidents. Because of Uruguay's small population, this action resulted in one of the highest proportion of political prisoners in all the Americas. An even greater number of people went into exile. However, the military faced serious problems in legitimizing its permanence in power. In 1980, the military organized a plebiscite to justify its continued role but lost the vote. Between 1980 and 1984, the country slowly moved toward democracy, which was restored in March 1985 when President Sanguinetti took office.

In the subsequent 12 years of democracy, Presidents Sanguinetti and Lacalle took special care to avoid conflicts among the different branches of government and to negotiate parliamentary support. The challenge for democratic learning was to accept the end of the bipartisan system in Uruguay. Even recently, when various options for

reform of the Constitution were being considered, many of the objectives discussed were rooted in a bipartisan system. The intent was for the president to have majority support in Parliament upon his election – a mathematically impossible situation in a system with three parties of equal electoral weight. This objective could be attained only through a radical revision of the proportional representation electoral system, which was politically unfeasible given its historical role in Uruguay.

Although this structural context can help to explain Uruguay's political processes, the analysis of concrete learning is more effective at the micro level. Thus, the following sections analyze the dimensions of political learning among individuals and groups.

POLITICAL DISCOURSE

In general terms, political discourse in Uruguay has become more democratic, in that proposals by political and social organizations are more pragmatic and are based less on ideological or mythological considerations than they were in the past. Politics is characterized by less dramatic, more feasible proposals that specify the means to carry out the proposed courses of action. This has resulted in less confrontation, polarization, and demagoguery within society and in a greater probability that political elites will solve the problems at hand. The downside is that as the number of contrasting ideas and proposals diminishes, interest in politics decreases and participation falls.

Uruguay's political discourse during the last decade basically has run along these lines. Curiously, many feel that the democratization of the political discourse has been more discernible in social organizations and unions than political parties. Among the more apparent changes are the ways demands are expressed and the bargaining styles of unions. Most proposals came with a description of financing mechanisms for the benefits requested. This represents a major change in the practices of these organizations, which traditionally were ideologically driven, relegating the problem of securing the necessary resources for their demands to the business sector or to government officials.

Nevertheless, the democratization of political discourse also has been palpable in the parties. The two mainsprings for this evolution have been: 1) the replacement of ideological components by more pragmatic postures and 2) the moderation of the more demagogic vectors of the traditional political style. The relative diminution of the ideological factor in political discourse has been much more evident in the left wing, for which the use of ideological schemes has lost effectiveness.

For traditional parties, a more "modern", technical style has become the *modus operandi* preferred over the all populists formulas. The crisis of the socialist model has helped traditional parties gain unexpected terrain in a realm that had been practically close to them: the realm of ideas. For many years, the "parties of ideas" in Uruguay were primarily nontraditional parties. It is understandable, therefore, that traditional parties interpret their renaissance of political and economic liberalism as a convenient settling of intellectual accounts.

Ironically, this tendency can be seen as a switching of roles in the use of ideological weapons. For the left, traditional parties have not matched the democratization of its own behavior and discourse. According to Senator Reinaldo Gargano, secretary-general

of the Socialist Party, traditional parties, “have attempted to ride this alleged ideological victory to carry out an in-depth offensive and relentlessly impose their societal model on the country.”¹

The redistribution of roles also reached the flanks of the extreme left. Moderation and, in many cases, the “traditionalizing” of the classic left composed of socialists and ex-communists, generated a compensatory action on the part of the more radical left composed of ex-guerrilla groups. At least for now, this radical sector has abandoned explicit calls for armed confrontations and has focused on filling the ideological niche left vacant by the classic left. In this way, the country has witnessed a shifting toward and a concentration of political discourse and proposals in the center.

Beginning in the 1960s, the left, which later coalesced into the Frente Amplio, and the national labor unions, shared a political platform. For more than 20 years, the identity of the left was characterized by a series of key proposals that included agrarian reform, nationalization of banking and foreign trade, rupture with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and, more recently, refusal to pay the country’s foreign debt. With time, these political ideas started to surface in the Frente Amplio’s programs in a progressively more diluted way, until they virtually disappeared. In general, this process occurred in an implicit, almost undetectable, way. However, the Frente Amplio’s leadership became more explicit about its purposes after the decisive experience of gaining access to power in Montevideo in 1989, which resulted in a reasonable expectation of winning national elections in the medium term. Not only had agrarian reform fallen by the wayside, but left-wing activists also were compelled to accept the ideas that the foreign debt could and should be paid, and that privatization was no longer an abomination but an integral part of the Frente Amplio’s municipal policies.

The failure of the world’s socialist political models and the shift of points of reference internally left many activists with a conspicuous need for ideological structure and security. It is toward this segment of the political spectrum that the extreme left seems to be aiming its discourse. The Eastern Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Revolucionario Oriental – MRO), whose most recent armed ventures dating back to the early 1990s were misinterpreted as street skirmishes and largely ignored, decided a few years ago to recycle its political stance by overhauling the political platform of the traditional left of the 1960s. Another minority sector, the more radical faction of the Frente Amplio organized its discourse around the slogan, “To change the country, no change to the Frente”.

The Tupamaro National Liberation Movement (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Tupamaros – MLN – Tupamaro), legally recycled into political life through the Popular Participation Movement (Movimiento Participación Popular – MPP) has experienced considerable growth within the Frente Amplio under the ideological banner of coherence. Directly opposing Tabaré Vázquez and Montevideo Mayor Mariano Arana, Tupamaro leader Jorge Zabalza, from his seat in the Montevideo municipal council brought about the defeat of the Frente Amplio’s plans to privatize a municipal hotel.

¹

This action, which took place in September 1997, produced good electoral results for Zabalza in the internal consultation of the Frente Amplio at the end of that same month. With the classic left (Socialist Party members, ex-Communist Party members) filling political niches that used to be occupied exclusively by traditional parties, with the old guerrilla groups now using the political repertoire of the classic left and with the low profile of the extremist right, the uruguayan political stage has been sheared off at the ends.

The growing centrism of political discourse has contributed to the democratic stability while diluting the debate over ideas. Although this trend reduces political conflict in the medium term, it does not necessarily protect the system from challenges to the rules of the game, as discussed below. Moreover, the democratization of political discourse is cyclical. During elections, the rules of the game change, demagoguery is accentuated, and ideological shrillness reappears. After elections, political styles go back to normal, and the tendency toward democratization of the political discourse is corroborated.

IDENTITY

The self-perception and identity of various political groups is a factor that determines the style of political life and the way changes are processed within a system. In Uruguay, the problem of identity surfaces in two main areas: in one, groups question themselves in relation to their specific characters and distinctive historical traits; in the other, groups seek their identities in relation to their roles within the system.

Without a doubt, the political left has been the sector exhibiting the greatest identity problems during this period. The collapsed of traditional socialist regimes brought a profound ideological crisis to the uruguayan left, with ramifications in the labor sector as well. Leftist groups found themselves in search of a niche in the political system. To redefine their positions and motivated by the prospect of gaining access to government the parties that had grouped together in the Frente Amplio abandoned their past radical postures, somewhat blurring their profiles. The main cost for democratization of their behavior and for their full participation within the democratic system's rules of the game has been that they have become more like the traditional parties (excessively so, according to the radical sectors).

The identity crisis has not affected the left wing exclusively. Traditional parties also have a changing definition of their own identities, having shifted, for example, from social democratic to liberal messages. There are also generational differences. The question of identity is most accentuated among the young, who cannot recognize themselves in profiles shaped by history or by long track records. Many politicians of the second generation (including Juan Raúl Ferreira, Rafael Michelini and Washington Abdala) coincide in characterizing the new generation of parliamentarians as agents of consensus. In the late 1980s, members of this new generation for example, formed *cortes transversales*- interparty groups to discuss legislative initiatives.

The constitutional reform enacted in 1996 has also generated new identity problems for traditional parties, which were formed in communities defined by affective relations and traditional loyalties. In this sense, these political entities are more similar to clans, mega families or tribes than to political parties defined as associative groups based on a common philosophy, ideology or line of action. This party "tribes" preceded the

Uruguayan state; each tribe comprised its own party system, including a liberal and a conservative wing; democratic and authoritarian tendencies; an identifiable leftist, centrist, and rightist factions. However, traditional loyalties predominated over ideologies and impeded the foundation of “pure” liberal or conservative parties. This process explains the chronic fractionalization of Uruguayan traditional parties. Thus, the true “parties” party factions or *sublemas*.

This peculiarity of multipartism in a “bitribal” system generated its own adaptability in the introduction of the double simultaneous vote in 1918, which permitted voters to express their traditional and affective identities while choosing the candidate and ideology of their choice. The double simultaneous vote allows multiple party lists and presidential candidates to be represented by a single party, with total party votes calculated to determine the winning party. In presidential election, for example, the party (or *lema*) winning the most total votes wins the presidency, and the person (and party faction, or *sublema*) winning the most votes within that party takes office. In this way, the double simultaneous vote combines a primary and a general election in one election. Similarly, legislative lists are presented by each party faction and are voted on by proportional representation.

The problem of governability became particularly critical after the breakdown of the traditional two-party system in Uruguay. This breakdown, which started in 1971 with the founding of the Frente Amplio, was consolidated in the 1980s. The system of presidential elections by simple majority, which guaranteed a majority in Parliament for the winning party, ceased to work when the number of parties increased. In addition, this problem was aggravated by the fact that the ideological distance separating the Frente Amplio from other parties was so great that its participation in government coalitions became untenable.

One of the learning experiences of the political elite during the past two decades has been that the existence of governments with a chronic lack of parliamentary support makes democracy infeasible over the medium or long run. The hardest task has been to arrive at concrete, systematic measures to solve this problem. The clearest consolidation of this learning was the December 1996 passage by plebiscite of a new Constitution that modifies the electoral system by mandating single candidacies per party and two rounds in presidential election.

Along with its search for formulas to make the system more governable, the Uruguayan political elite has sought to regulate the action of political parties. There is a general feeling in the country that although they are located at the very axis of the political system, the parties still constitute its weakest link. During the last phase of the military regime, rules were put in place to regulate the internal functioning of political parties. Once democracy was restored, however, the rules were repealed because they were opposed by the military but not because of opposition to their content. The 1996 constitutional reforms returned to these ideas by requiring candidates to be chosen in party primaries based on the national voters list.

The new reality may even push voters with traditional party affiliations to define themselves according to “ideological families”, to use an expression of President Sanguinetti cited in the press repeatedly during the constitutional reform discussions.

The results of the 1999 elections will show whether ideological identity is truly stronger than communal roots.

RULES OF THE GAME

One of the most important lessons learning in Uruguay's democratic political life in recent years is, without a doubt, the general consensus about accepting the political rules of the game. In the 12 years of restored democracy in Uruguay, some extremely controversial issues, including the law of amnesty for the military involved in human rights violations, have been resolved. The amnesty law was challenged, and a referendum was held in 1989 by popular initiative with the intent of repealing it; instead, the law was ratified by the popular vote. Thus, despite the emotional overload of such issues, differences were resolved by resorting to constitutional procedures. The results were respected, and the issues were resolved.

Compliance with the rules of the game is not something that is verified solely ex post facto; it can be observed in daily activities and in political discourses. The change is particularly noticeable in groups with a history of challenging the rules - particularly the political left. This sector has rediscovered the instrumental advantages of democratic norms and has become a legitimizing force in the traditionally most brittle spot in the system.

Some argued that the new democratic thrust of the left is simply temporal, if not, outright opportunistic, based on the downfall of dictatorships and the circumstantial rise of democratic forms. Although this maybe true for some of the more staunchly authoritarian groups, it is not true for the majority of the left. The logic behind the left wing's compliance with the democratic rules, is rational, based on its interests and political objectives. One of the two main elements of this logic was a radical change in the political scenario between the 1960s and the 1990s; in the 1960s scenario, the left could not win by means of the democratic rules, whereas in the 1990s, it could. Secondly, strictly in terms of learning, the experience of the military dictatorship proved to the left that there was too much to lose and too little to gain by obliterating the democratic rule of law.

In Senator Gargano's words "We thought that formal democracy not only did not 'do it all', but to a certain degree was the pretext used by the dominant classes to maintain their hegemony...I believe the left has reconsidered the importance of the mechanisms of formal democracies, in the sense that the functioning of the democratic institutions in and of itself is extremely important because these institutions are the only available to the marginalized sectors of society for solving their problems, and they can in fact contribute to solving social conflicts".

During the 1960s, the left had not yet surpassed the 10 – percent threshold of the total vote in any election. With such a scale of political impotence, this sector was reluctant to support rules perceived as preordaining defeat and exclusion. In other words, the left appeared to support the view that democracy was but a mere artifice enabling traditional parties to remain in power.

With the reformation of the Frente Amplio in 1971, the left was able to break the 20 – percent threshold of the vote, and in the 1994 elections it reached 30 percent. Initially,

this increase was due to the breaking away of the liberal left wing of the traditional parties and its incorporation into the Frente Amplio during the polarized years of the early 1970s. Elections were becoming truly competitive and were perceived as the only route for the left's access to power. Obviously, it is easier to support rules with which it is possible to win than to support a game in which it is possible only to lose.

After being political outsiders during the 1960s and following the virtually complete political disarticulation that took place during the years of military dictatorship, the left underwent a process of rediscovering its identity and political capabilities with the return of democracy during the 1980s and 1990s. From distrust and merely ritual compliance with the old rules, the left has evolved in recent years toward a truly professional handling of constitutional provisions, fully using the possibilities these rules offer to exert influence and to gain access to power.

Use of the Referendum

Some new threats to the functioning of democracy in Uruguay, such as the proliferation of use of the referendum, occur partly because of the late discovery of democratic rules as tools for political action. This problem would seem to become comparatively minor as a threat to democratic stability, but use of the referendum as a central component of the left wing's repertoire for political action has changed the scenario threatening in some sensitive areas.

Three basic problems have been generated in Uruguay by the use of referendum: 1) the polarization of society, 2) the blocking of government work, and 3) the devaluation of Parliament. Two of the referenda held in recent years – one in 1989 that ratified the 1987 amnesty law passed by Parliament for military personnel accused of human rights violations during the authoritarian period and one in 1992 that partially vacated the 1991 privatization law – led to a marked polarization of society and to significant fissures within the political elite. In addition, the bargaining, agreements, coalitions, and all the political processes required for passing those laws in Parliament were challenged and in one case were repealed, as a result of political moves by the groups that lost in the parliamentary arena. In a country such as Uruguay, in which the most vulnerable components of the democratic legitimacy traditionally have been low political productivity and political gridlock, these difficulties seem particularly alarming.

Finally, the use of the referendum as a constant platform for political action threatens to depreciate the specific functions of Parliament by perpetuating the myth of direct democracy and the idea that it is better to legislate through the electorate than through representatives. This aspect of the issue is by no means unidirectional. Excessive use of the referendum does in fact take away from the political function of Parliament. It is also true, however, that the political space ceded by Parliament and the emergence of civil society also have been instrumental in generalizing this political tool that was conceived constitutionally as an exceptional course of action.

Important figures of different parties concur in this appraisal of the situation. For Senator Walter Santoro of the National Party, society has “the possibility of achieving

its goals without the need for Parliament” because power “is now distributed in different way, with an important presence of social groups”.²

For Senator Luis Hierro López of the Colorado Party, it is clear that between 1985 and the present there has been “a restoration of community-based organizations, foundations, and NGOs, “and it is also clear that Parliament “has not interfaced with civil society”.³ Along the same lines, Senator Danilo Astori of the Frente Amplio recognizes an estrangement of sorts between Parliament and “the way the people see the country and how they perceive the frustrations of the past...There seems to be a growing disaffection. People live their lives thinking about certain things, and the Parliament goes about its business dealing with other things. The trend toward direct popular consultation, which has been increasing in the country and has become a problem, has a lot to do with that disaffection and finds in that disaffection an important mainspring”.⁴

The political dynamic induced by systematic use of the referendum has shown itself at its worst around general election times. In the 1994 election year, several initiatives were held for referendum. One was an amendment modifying the electoral system; another abrogated newly legislated provisions regarding social security; and a third was a proposal by the Frente Amplio and labor unions to earmark a fixed percentage of 27 percent of the national budget for education. The latter two proposals were clearly inappropriate in the eyes of the majority of leaders of all the parties. And yet, prompted by the fear of losing electoral votes among social sectors supporting such measures, very few leaders formulated a clear and unequivocal posture with regard to these issues. The political debate became almost a festival of double discourse, with one position being defended in public while the opposite was defended in private.

The referenda defeated electoral reform, supported abrogation of the new social security laws, and rejected the education budget earmark. Within this context, the results of the referenda were incorrectly interpreted as “punishments” by the electorate of the (public) positions of political leaders.

Traditional parties were placed in a particularly uncomfortable position by this distortion in the political game. The Frente Amplio, with no national political responsibilities, was best able to play this game of irresponsible behavior and reaping of short-run benefits. As the main sponsor of these referenda, however, the Frente Amplio became more cautious about letting things go too far once the initial political benefits were won. This political sector now has ambitions to win national office and seems to realize the uncontrolled use of the referendum can threaten its own medium-term plans.

More recent caution in using this political tool was evident in the events that followed the passage of the law of Reform of the Social Security System at the beginning of President Sanguinetti’s second administration in 1995. The reform was approved despite opposition by the Frente Amplio and the labor unions. However, the Frente Amplio’s opposition was not uniform, and initiatives to repeal the law by means of a referendum were swiftly discouraged. Thus, after first learning how to use this democratic tool to its own advantage for political opposition, the Frente now is learning the implications of this same tool for the party actually in office.

The Antidemocratic Challengers

Certain pockets of authoritarianism, on both the left and the right, still exist. On the left, the most notorious of these are groups close to the ex-Tupamaro guerrillas; and on the right, some extremist military groups. What interests us most is to observe the reactions of the political class as a whole to the challenges posed by those groups, rather than to study the behavior of the groups themselves.

In the midst of the political unrest and polarization generated by the referendum on the Law of State Reform (privatization) held during Presidente Luis Alberto Lacalle's administration, the more authoritarian groups abandoned their low profile and started harassing the perceived weakest link of the political system: the president. The objective apparently was to denigrate the image of the president; and for that purpose, both the Tupamaros and a well-known retired military commander resorted to a variety of insults.

From the Tupamaro perspective, the strategy was this: If the president did not react to the insults, the dignity of the position would be belittled. If he reacted as expected by sending them to jail, it would also be a victory from their perspective because there would be talk about political prisoners, and democratic legitimacy would be blemished.

None of this came to pass, because President Lacalle consigned the problem to the judiciary power. The political class also ignored the issue, and the insults by the Tupamaros and by the ex-military commander were dealt with by way of contempt charges that were prosecuted in court without much fanfare. Nobody went to jail, and these challenges by antidemocratic factions were largely ignored by the majority of the population.

Of greater concern was the behavior of certain political sectors regarding another problem related to military groups. In 1993, a shadowy affair cropped up, revealing ties between the military intelligence services of Uruguay and Chile. As this incident unfolded, the authority of the president as commander in chief of the armed forces seriously came into question. When President Lacalle tried to denounce the commander of the army (among others), one of the main opposition factions, led by former President Sanguinetti, refused to support the action. This attitude by the majority faction of the Colorado Party put President Lacalle in a very delicate situation, severely injuring the supremacy of civilian power and the efficacy and legitimacy of the democratic political regime.

For some political leaders, such as ex-legislator and Ambassador Juan Raúl Ferreira of the National Party, Sanguinetti's behavior was not a disloyal act to the democratic regime, but rather a political move to show that President Lacalle was an amateur in military issues. Nonetheless, according to Senator Rafael Michelini of the New Space (Nuevo Espacio) Party, with this attitude Sanguinetti was entering a "danger zone".⁵

Although Sanguinetti's behavior was surprising for its ambiguities, no less surprising was the solid and unanimous support the president received from the leftist rank and file during this crisis. Upon analyzing the logic behind this behavior, Socialist Senator Gargano clarified that this support was not directed to the person of the president but was intended to sustain a matter of principle. According to Gargano, Sanguinetti's attitude was patterned after Colorado tradition – which Gargano considers unacceptable – of trying to enlist the army in the party and cash in later on loyalties. From the Frente Amplio's point of view, the principle of respect for the president by military, regardless of party affiliation, should be vigilantly safeguarded since the problems a National Party president faces today may be the same problems a Frente Amplio president will face tomorrow.⁶

LEARNING VERSUS ELECTORAL REFLEXES

Street Violence and Resistance to the Extradition of Basque Terrorists

On August 24, 1994, there were three serious clashes between demonstrators and the police in the vicinity of a hospital where three Basque militants (Euzkadi Ta Azkatasuna – ETA) who were about to be extradited to Spain were detained. The demonstrators, mainly from radical left-wing groups tied to the Tupamaros, tried to impede the extradition of the Basque militants and were harshly repressed by the police.

Given the identity of the actors, this sudden burst of violence once again conjured up the dreaded specters of the past. Many felt that this episode heralded the reactivation of armed confrontations. The stern intervention of the police induced the left to draw parallels with the particularly repressive 1968-1971 administration of Jorge Pacheco Areco.

Paradoxically, however, the fear and grave concern following these incidents offered certain guarantees that the chain of events that led to the breakdown of democracy in 1973 would not reoccur. The general disapproval inspired by both the demonstrators' attitude and the excesses of the police reinforced the primary social learning of democracy, and condemnation of violence remained intact in Uruguay.

Nevertheless, it is important to analyze what other lessons supposedly already learned by the political elite were forgotten or obscured by other agendas, thus allowing these incidents to take place. Clearly, the key fact that legitimized the demonstrators' actions was the presence of Frente Amplio presidential candidate Tabaré Vázquez at the scene of the incidents. It may be hard to understand the presence of a well-respected, left-wing political personality at a demonstration against a court decision made in compliance with current international treaties with regard to three Spanish subjects charged with homicide and terrorism. The traditional antidemocratic elements of small, radical ultra-leftist groups received an unexpected legitimization from the "establishment" of the left through the appearance of its main leader.

Our explanation of this destabilizing political behavior is the following: This leader acted in that way because, as part of his coalition's strategy to win the national government, he had leaned too much toward the center, thus risking a rupture with the

left. His presence at this demonstration responded to the interest of maintaining unity within the movement by making symbolic concessions at the weakest point of the coalition.

Without this intra-organizational interest by the Frente Amplio, no doubt things would have worked out quite differently. The bonds between the ETA and the Tupamaros fully justified solidarity among their militants, but the demonstrations themselves would not have gone beyond semi-clandestine levels were it not for the appearance of this well-known personality of the left. His very appearance escalated resistance to the court decision, generating an unprecedented and very dangerous situation. The Uruguayan National Labor Confederation (Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores – Convención Nacional de Trabajadores – PIT-CNT) added its support, encouraged by Frente Amplio's endorsement.

Another factor stemming from the electoral campaign highlighted the distance between the official resolutions of the coalition and those of presidential candidate Tabaré Vázquez. Events developed as if there were a tacit policy of "reserved domain" in electoral issues, which authorized Vázquez to pursue his own strategies for securing votes. Vázquez, a trained medical doctor with little experience in the complex art of politics, unleashed a series of political events evidently without a clear idea of their sometimes dangerous possible consequences. The Frente Amplio's success in marginalizing extreme left groups and antidemocratic effects on the system was shattered by an electoral reflex lacking deliberation or political assessment.

This unexpected turn of events predetermined the response by the national government. After almost 10 years of democracy, the political spaces and the dynamics of the different sectors (including the ex-guerrilla factions) were fairly well defined. Their courses of action, which were reasonably predictable, were under control and in relative tranquillity. Suddenly, surprising even the left wing's main political actors, some of the most prominent political leaders of the Frente Amplio bestowed a powerful legitimacy upon the extreme left as a result of a combination of electoral strategy, naivete, and irresponsibility – and the Tupamaros took full advantage of it. At once the guerrilla leaders of old saw themselves spearheading a movement that dragged along with it a whole party representing one-third of the electorate plus the powerful labor confederation. All this took place amid violent acts, including Molotov cocktails, rock-throwing, and, in all likelihood, the use of firearms.

This violent mutation of the political rules of the game put the government and the armed forces in a state of extreme alert. When the time came, repressive forces pounded on the demonstrators with a degree of violence that upset the Uruguayan people. However, the government had limited options and definitely could not show weakness in defending a court decision when jolted by actions bordering on political subversion. One omission, one localized victory of the Tupamaro movement, and the government would have been in a position of blatant ineffectiveness, leaving a power vacuum that the military would not tolerate.

Structural Threat to the Rules: Ideologized Marginality?

The above incidents, known as the Hospital Filtro events, inaugurated a new and dangerous mode of violence: ideologizing, activating, and mobilizing marginalized

social sectors in the urban subproletariat around the violent premises of the ex-Tupamaro guerrillas. Electoral analysis has demonstrated that the Frente Amplio was starting to filter into the marginalized urban sectors. Traditionally, these segments of society had been the bastions of ex-Colorado President Pacheco. More recently, the radical faction of the Frente, centered around the MPP, has been recruiting from this populace as voters have shifted from the extreme right to the extreme left, both of which are characterized by authoritarianism, violence, and disaffection with the democratic rules of co-participation.

The MPP achieved this shift in allegiances through strategies that included moving some of its most prominent leaders (most notoriously, Tupamaro chief Jorge Zabalza) to the slums of Montevideo, into the precarious housing of illegal settlements surrounding the city. In addition to ideology, the MPP gave its socially marginalized militants a dignified identity. In Frente Amplio demonstrations, these sectors are quite visible as a class of tattered warriors driving horse-drawn carts and styled after the movie character Mad Max – a bizarre synthesis of revolutionary riders and nocturnal garbage rummagers.

Winning over the poorest urban sectors allowed the Frente Amplio to increase its electoral constituency to the point that it almost tied with the front-runners of the 1994 elections. But this created new concerns for its leadership. The radical wing, supported by marginalized social sectors, was ungovernable. On the very night of the 1994 elections, these groups generated such disorderliness in downtown Montevideo that they blocked all traffic, not just cars belonging to triumphant Colorado Party members.

The Frente Amplio's extreme left and the marginalized, ideologized and mobilized social sectors are, without a doubt, the main challenges to the democratic rules of the game. Up to this point, these groups have been a source of problems for the Frente Amplio itself, which has had more difficulties with its own internal discord than with its political adversaries. However, these adversaries could turn into a risk factor for democratic stability at any moment, especially in a hypothetical future Frente Amplio government.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

The relationships among the members of the political elite have changed. The identity of each of the actors and the ideological models supporting their positions have varied, or, on the left, have suffered a serious crisis. The traditional styles of interaction, particularly confrontation, are no longer profitable in political terms. These changes have created new scenarios in which interactions between groups have become more frequent and less contentious. As a result, the universe of possible partners for certain political pursuits – in particular, for coalitions- has broadened. The reasons behind these changes are many, but they generally redefine the actors and endow them with political acceptability.

Discreditation

The two decades preceding the institutional breakdown were characterized by “cannibalistic” behavior on the part of the political class. By this we mean a type of behavior in which different political groups discredited other sectors of the political elite, principally in moral terms. Accusations primarily centered around corruption or

political catering to a foreign power. This contributed to a widespread belief that the political class as a whole was immoral and corrupt. Even though actual corruption in Uruguay was quite low compared with other countries, society's perception of corruption was quite real. In 1972 and 1973, at the outset of its ascent to power, the military found its objective of delegitimizing civil power already well advanced by the political elite itself.

After democracy was restored, the link between personal-attack tactics and the weakening of democracy did not go unnoticed by the majority of people, nor by members of the political class. Although old grudges lived on, the desire to avoid a repetition of the past moderated the behavior of politicians. Thus, the first administration of the restored democracy (1985-1989) was characterized by implicitly clean rules of the game that contained political conflict within certain boundaries. Senator Germán Araujo's unpublicized expulsion from Parliament for systematically generating conflict and personally attacking legislators evidenced the resolve of the political class as a whole not to tolerate major transgressions in interactions and debates among parties.

During the second democratic term (1990 – 1994), these tacit guidelines were not contested. Political leaders who deviated from the norms were sanctioned by political segregation from their peers. However, disqualification tactics have not played well in public opinion, which is why, in the words of Senator Rafael Michelini, the majority of the political class shares in the opinion that such tactics do not pay.⁷

The first half of President Sanguinetti's second administration, between 1995 and 1997 saw several charges of corruption and mismanagement of public affairs, mainly leveled against individuals of the Lacalle administration, but also against officials of the current administration and, more recently, against individuals affiliated with the Frente Amplio municipal administration. These charges were processed by the judicial system, and two people were given prison sentences. The fear of a renewed dynamic of politically inspired accusations of corruption so far has not materialized, however, because: 1) levels of corruption are significantly lower than in the rest of Latin America, 2) the offenses did not go unpunished, and 3) those leveling false accusations have been punished. This was the case with Frente Amplio representative Leonardo Nicolini, who was suspended from his functions for six months for presenting false evidence against certain government officials.

The relationships among political leaders clearly are closer and friendlier now than they were in the past. This is particularly noticeable with two of the main leaders of the coalition: President Sanguinetti and Alberto Volonté. Their political affinity, out of which a personal friendship has evolved, could be interpreted as a somewhat late discovery of the common ground uniting Blancos and Colorados in opposition to the Frente Amplio as a third political force. Volonté and Vázquez have been equally generous in their demonstrations of mutual regard. Perhaps this is due to recent learning of more civilized behaviors or because the new political dynamic of the second round in presidential contests call for more respect toward adversaries since the votes to win the second round in all likelihood will come from their rank and file.

Alongside these and other assessments by the political class about the adverse effect of discreditation on the democratic process, the disappearance of certain ideological macro-references also helps explain the shift in behavior. The disqualifying style of the 1960s was patterned to a large extent after the world confrontation between superpowers. In the 1990s, no international context could legitimize the disqualification of a political adversary using the argument that the person was catering to a foreign power. Conversely, world changes have generated, at least among members of the left, great doubts about the left's tenets, contributing to a noticeable moderation of political postures.⁸

Broadening of the Universe of Possible Political Partners

The same factors that eliminated discreditation have been at work broadening the universe of possible political partners in the formation of coalitions. This tendency has also been reinforced by a belief shared by the vast majority of the Uruguayan political elite: Good performance is necessary to consolidate democracy, and performance and good governance are achieved by reaching parliamentary majorities. From this perspective, a central component of the Uruguayan political parties' strategies is to preserve an openness toward the others.

Until the 1990s, the universe of possible political partners for government coalitions did not go beyond the confines of the traditional parties. Perhaps the only exception was the small Unión Cívica – which, for many practical observers of Uruguayan politics, was no more than a group of Colorado Catholics frightened away by the slogan of anticlericalism in the pro-Batlle discourse. But groups that in some way sympathized with the ideological universe of the left were excluded in practice from all participation in government. This is why it was such an auspicious beginning when, during Lacalle's administration, a government position was offered to the moderate left Party for the Government of the People (Partido por el Gobierno del Pueblo – PGP). Although the PGP's participation in government never materialized, the offer symbolically pointed out an openness toward potential partners who previously had been excluded.⁹

In this regard, the party scenario during the 1994 electoral year was particularly eloquent. Hugo Batalla's PGP had formalized an electoral alliance with Julio María Sanguinetti of the Colorado Party, whereas the Frente Amplio had made an agreement with ex-mayor Rodolfo Nin Novoa of the National Party, creating the political grouping called Encuentro Progresista. These political movements set the pattern for a progressive weakening of interpartisan boundaries and for a change in the way others were perceived. This allowed for the possible universe of coalitions to broaden considerably.

This broadening of the eligibility of political groups to form government coalitions has been gradual and, according to some observers, preconditioned. Although the ideological threshold of acceptance of the different actors has expanded, distrust still persists, quite often passing from the political onto the social stage. In an interview conducted for the purposes of this research, Senator Reinaldo Gargano, a front-line leader of the Frente Amplio, was of the opinion that for some conservative sectors, the

⁸

left was not eligible for government coalitions for social reasons; according to this point of view, politics is basically an occupation for the upper classes.¹⁰

DECISIONMAKING

An important long-term outcome of learning is a change in the decision-making styles of the presidents. From 1967 to 1997, Uruguay had five democratically elected presidents. Before 1967, the executive's responsibility was not unipersonal but was shared among a collegial presidency. From 1973 to 1984, the country endured a military dictatorship. The first president in this series, General Oscar Gestido, died nine months after taking office; so we will use as points of reference the two last presidents of the pre-authoritarian period, Jorge Pacheco Areco (1967-1972), and Juan María Bordaberry (1972-1973), and the two presidents of the post-dictatorship period, Julio María Sanguinetti (1985-1990 and 1995-2000) and Luis Alberto Lacalle (1990-1995).

One point of comparison in decision-making styles is the relationship between the legitimacy of mandates and the degree of use of constitutional emergency measures. The legitimacy of the last two presidents before the dictatorship, Pacheco and Bordaberry, was questioned on several accounts. President Pacheco assumed power not by direct popular vote but after the death of General Oscar Gestido, who had been elected president. Up to that moment, Vice President Pacheco had gone practically unnoticed, in part because of his lack of a relevant background and in part because of the scant attention paid to the office of vice president until then.

As president, however, Pacheco was able to overcome his initial lackluster image and become a central figure in Uruguayan politics and a true leader, albeit at the expense of an extreme polarization of society. The broad sectors opposing President Pacheco reluctantly acknowledged his legitimacy as president but loathed his brazenly authoritarian style. His years in office were characterized by a chronic lack of support in Parliament, for which he compensated by consistently resorting to emergency measures and governing by decree.

This problematic combination of limited legitimacy and abuse of power, which characterized the Pacheco administration, became critical during the presidency of Juan María Bordaberry. Charges electoral fraud diminished the legitimacy of his mandate. In addition, the climate of internal unrest and lack of political support caused Bordaberry's government to drift into the coup d'état of June 1973.

During the years of the dictatorship, the learning of the political class, whether conscious or intuitive, caused post-military leaders to avoid using emergency measures and to provide political support to protect democratic legitimacy. When Sanguinetti was elected president after a difficult transition, the main opposition candidate, Wilson Ferreira Aldunate, still incarcerated, took special care to support Sanguinetti so that he would not lack political support or legitimacy in office. President Luis Alberto Lacalle, although no longer assailed by formal legitimacy problems, followed in the footsteps of his predecessor by taking special care to carry out his policies without major confrontations and without resorting to emergency measures.

Today, there seems to be a tacit rule of political cohabitation, according to which democratic legitimacy is not eroded and emergency measures are no longer included in the president's political tool kit. This new style adopted by the presidents of the restored democracy is grasped with all its nuances by the political class as a whole. For ex – Senator and National Party representative Juan Raúl Ferreira, the Uruguayan ambassador to Argentina, “Before the coup d'état, the President of the Republic was the leader of a political sector...Now there is a sense of nation underlying the dignity of certain offices, which was previously nonexistent...”¹¹

The scope of action of the government's policies has clearly expanded in recent years. The president's styles are more open and acquiescent than in the 1960s and 1970s, and perhaps the only “reserved domain” of the president is control over economic policies. The economy is handled with a sort of technocratic pretension that seeks to remove itself as much as possible from sectarian pressures. Nevertheless, the decision-making style of the last decade is one of bargaining and consultation, much more than one of imposition.

This tendency has been even more apparent in President Sanguinetti's second administration (1995-1999). The singular circumstances that came out of the “triple tie” in the 1994 elections and the formation of the government coalition have generated a much more open and consultative style, to the point of forming a sort of “virtual government council” that harks back to times when the executive was collegiate in nature. This practice has obvious democratic advantages, because decisionmaking is done from the ground up on the basis of a great deal of consensus and legitimacy. It also has its disadvantages, because the search for agreement and consensus is basically processed outside the scope of Parliament. Adding referenda to this “virtual collegiate system” threatens the political role of Parliament in sensitive areas.

This new decision-making style has had some important achievements, such as passage of the 1995 Social Security Reform Law and the 1996 Constitutional Reform. In the latter, the above-described partnership agreements were decisive.

One of the major difficulties for reforming the constitution – be it the current one or others- is the perception by different parties of the electoral advantages or disadvantages of modifying the rules. In this case, the Colorado Party perceived its own interest, based on the current political situation, to lie in shifting from a system of accumulation of votes among multiple candidates for each party to a single-candidate –per-party system. President Sanguinetti himself had competed as a single candidate-in the absence of other Colorado candidates-and was not interested in giving the traditional adversary, the National Party, any advantages.

It is harder to understand why the National Party agreed to modify an electoral system that favored it, seeing that it had at least three good candidates who would have competed effectively. Perhaps it was because the dynamics of the coalition government supplanted party interests with the personal political interests of the participants of that restricted club. As the National Party leader with the greatest control over the structure and mechanisms of the party, Luis Alberto Lacalle was interested in adopting a primary system of internal elections such as the one proposed. His control over the structure

gave him tremendous odds of winning his party's internal elections, which had been much less likely with the previous system. For Volonte's, the leader of another faction of the party, reform did not offer any electoral advantages, but it was to his advantage to come to a political agreement with his powerful coalition partner, President Sanguinetti.

On the other hand, another proposal to introduce the ballotage (or second round) system was perceived by the left as an artifice to bar the Frente Amplio's entrance to the 1999 elections, so the majority of its supporters voted "No" in the December 8, 1996, plebiscite. Nevertheless, the reforms passed with the minimum votes necessary.

ATTITUDES OF SOCIETY

Societal attitudes toward a political regime will increase the chances of success of either a democratic or an autocratic ruler. Each country's political culture largely determines its long-term tendencies, and Uruguay seems to corroborate this thesis firmly. Public attitudes clearly are supportive of democratic institutions and may contribute as much to democratic consolidation as does elite learning.

A comparative survey implemented throughout Latin America about the attitude of the different societies toward democratic principles, rules, and institutions shows that the Uruguayan society, in principle, is satisfied with the functioning of democracy, as expressed by a majority of 69 percent of its citizens.¹² More surprisingly, there is also a 59 percent majority that supports Parliament. These rosy data, however, are tainted with the distrust political parties engender in 64 percent of the population. The last result, which is positive, shows that 73 percent of the people interviewed trust the electoral rules of the game.

These data indicate that Uruguayan democracy overall remains firm on its principles and rules but that political parties are its Achilles' heel. The political elite is aware of this problem, and the number-one item on its political agenda is to draft a law for political parties that will render these structures more efficient.

CONCLUSION

Some time ago, a humorist adapted a famous phrase for an article published in a Montevideo newspaper, "People who forget their past are doomed to make the same mistakes, and people who do not forget it are doomed to make new mistakes". This play on words candidly describes the Uruguayan current reality. It would be impossible to deny important learning experiences with regard to past events, both for the elite and for society at large, which point toward the strengthening of democracy. It would be equally nonsensical to pretend that antidemocratic pockets in society and in the political elite do not exist. The specific goal of this research is to focus on the set of mistakes that are not being repeated because the past has not been forgotten. But it is also interesting to describe the "new mistakes" committed by the elite in a democratic environment. These "new" antidemocratic behaviors illustrate the limits of democratic learning.

The "Triple Tie" and the Ability to Govern

The results of the 1994 elections immediately brought forth bleak predictions regarding the governability of the country. Separating the winning party, the Colorados, and the party that came in third, the Frente Amplio, were a mere 30,000 votes. The country's historical precedents were certainly worrisome. The disastrous effect of a divided government in the 1960s and 1970s was still fresh in the memories of Uruguayans over 40. The new reality of a tripartite system was even more difficult. Contrary to all predictions, the installation of President Sanguinetti's new administration encountered fewer obstacles than anticipated, and political stability does not seem threatened.

What new factors came to play in these political circumstances to moderate the tripartite results and the minority government? In my opinion, there are three decisive elements: 1) learning by the political elite, in the strict sense that it has tended to avoid the problems that stemmed from similar situations in the past, 2) individual learning by President Sanguinetti, which has generated a political authority in many regards the exact opposite of the type of legitimization and leadership exercised by ex-President Jorge Pacheco Areco almost three decades ago, which caused serious institutional problems; and 3) the Frente Amplio's political ambitions, which have created a perceived need to pass a vocational test of sorts in order to substantiate and legitimize its democratic principles and to allow it to be perceived as qualified to govern the country.

1. Learning by the political elite. The political elite's learning can be ascertained clearly in the care given by practically all sectors to defining their political relationship with the president. Generally speaking, there has been a broad support for issues that were crucial to the president's ability to govern. The parties or sectors that became aligned with the opposition made explicit their allegiance and role as a loyal opposition. In this way, the negative predictions stemming from the election results worked as an alarm system that activated the democratic and self-preservation reflexes of the political actors. The fear that Parliament would lock horns with the executive or that the executive would resort to emergency measures and govern by decree (as in the past) to compensate for its lack of support in Parliament set off one of the crucial reflexes for the survival of a democracy: the idea that democracy must be taken care of, nurtured, and protected. Without a doubt, this impulse improved things even as the prognosis was looking somber and the ability to govern seemed threatened.
2. Individual learning by President Sanguinetti. The personal factor, President Sanguinetti's authority, is another fundamental, positive factor coming out of the post-electoral situation. A savvy politician, President Sanguinetti recognized that the style required by the circumstances was one of low profile, of building bridges to other parties, and of seeking a consensus in government. The president's level-headedness and open disposition yielded positive results. Based on agreements mainly with the National Party, he chose a cabinet with several ministers outside his party. This procedure assured him of parliamentary support for passing certain laws essential for the accomplishment of his government objectives.

Without question, the presidential style has had a positive effect on democratic stability. The relationship between use of constitutional powers and personal legitimacy, which

had dire results in the Pacheco and Bordaberry administrations more than two decades ago, is currently at its most beneficial combination. This relationship is basically minimum authoritarianism and maximum authority, steaming from a low-profile, consensus-seeking style, supplemented by strong democratic legitimacy and a well-earned reputation for being a skilled manager of political transitions.

This summary portrayal of President Sanguinetti during his second administration is practically the complete opposite of the 1967-1973 Pacheco and Bordaberry administrations referred to elsewhere in this chapter. The relationship between authoritarianism and personal authority at that time reached record extremes.

3. The Frente Amplio's political ambitions. The ideological crisis of the left, the failure of "real socialism", and the absence of utopias and models have led the militants of old to realign themselves with different projects. There are at least two alternatives for the Uruguayan left today. The first is an option based not on ideology, but rather on open bargaining and pragmatism among various sectors mainly form the Frente Amplio, which has explicitly revalued democracy and is hoping to gain power in the upcoming 1999 elections. The second alternative reflects the need for an ideological identity and purpose, which has intensified the militancy of the more radical antidemocratic groups, for example, those most averse to negotiation with other groups, even within the Frente Amplio. At the same time, a great number of people form marginalized social sectors have joined the ranks of the more radical groups, which will probably have turbulent implications for the social and political peace of the country. A lumpen proletariat that traditionally had voted with the ultra-right swung to the other extreme of the political spectrum in the 1994 elections, and it did so without abandoning its authoritarian and violent reflexes.

Signals from the political left, then, are ambiguous. The strong electoral performance of the Asamblea Uruguay movement led by Senator Danilo Astori, which is clearly the most open and democratic faction of the Frente Amplio, sent out positive signals concerning democratization of the political debate. However, the fact that the Frente Amplio gave greater priority to militant legitimacy than to democratic legitimacy gradually eroded Astori's leadership, buttressing his internal adversary, Tabaré Vázquez, and more radical sectors.

The radical sectors no longer have Vázquez's blessing. After he consolidated his leadership following a long tug-of-war with Astori, Vázquez began to distance himself from his old partners of convenience. During the last quarter of 1997, the extreme left destroyed plan for privatization put forth by the Montevideo mayoralty, generating a crisis that culminated with Tabaré Vázquez's resignation from the presidency of Frente Amplio. As he expressed repeatedly to the press, he remains hopeful that he will be able to lay a new foundation for the Frente Amplio, which in political language means not to lose his strength and to wait to return with all the power.

This chapter has presented a series of actions and behaviors by Uruguay's political and social actors, which have resulted, we contend, from a process of learning from past experiences. This learning has been heterogeneous, both in its nature and in its impact on Uruguay's political system and democratic regime. Significant changes have occurred in the political discourse of different persuasions, which has become less

demagogic and more pragmatic. There is a progressive and almost unanimous acceptance of the democratic rules of the game, and the relationships among actors have become less antagonistic. In addition, the universe of possible coalition partners has broadened, which should increase governability. Political styles and even the way decisions are made have adapted to a context of greater tolerance and consultation. After the country's political problems were analyzed by the political elite, a constitutional reform was passed. Finally, Uruguayan society is committed to the principles and institutions of a democracy.

This long list leads to optimism. Uruguay has moved forward, and the conscious linking of these new behaviors and past experiences enables us to conclude that, to a great extent, both the political elite and society at large have learned from past crises and mistakes. However, this confirmation does not end the discussion. It is true that there has been learning, but this learning does not unquestionably guarantee the consolidation of democracy or even the ability to govern. This learning only allows us to predict that if Uruguayan democracy falls into crisis again, it will not travel down the same road that led to its breakdown more than 20 years ago. This is the case because certain past actions have brought about learning, and current political behavior explicitly avoids repeating them. The antidemocratic potential of other actions, however, seems to go undetected simply because such behavior has no precedent and cannot be measured against any past experiences. The military dictatorship is still recent enough that certain deeds will not be repeated, but it is also sufficiently removed to decrease the perceived need to evaluate possible antidemocratic consequences of new behaviors.

In more precise terms, there is a definite consensus on formal curbing of antidemocratic behaviors, but there are no qualms about using the political assets of democracy in an antidemocratic manner. In the name of direct democracy, the role of Parliament is being eroded; and in the name of economic democracy, the basis of political democracy is shifting. Democracy stands to win when past mistakes are avoided, but it stands to lose when antidemocratic behaviors are legitimized as vestiges of ancient Greek democracy.