

Chapter 37 Viewpoint Activity



Though democracy is the ideal of most Latin American countries, making real democracy work has been a problem after years of colonial rule and inequality (textbook pages 950–952). Here, two distinguished Latin American writers—Octavio Paz of Mexico and Mario Vargas Llosa of Peru—give their views on democracy. ♦ *As you read, think about the problems from history each writer cites. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Democracy in Latin America

Octavio Paz

Latin American democracy was a late arrival on the scene, and it has been disfigured and betrayed time and time again. It has been weak, hesitant, rebellious, its own worst enemy, all too eager to worship the demagogue, corrupted by money, riddled with favoritism and nepotism. And yet almost everything good that has been achieved in Latin America in the last century and a half has been accomplished under democratic rule, or, as in Mexico, a rule heading toward democracy.

A great deal still remains to be done. Our countries need changes and reforms, at once radical and in accord with the tradition and the genius of each people. In countries where attempts have been made to change the economic and social structures while at the same time dismantling democratic institutions, injustice, oppression, and inequality have become stronger forces than ever. . . . Without democracy, changes are counterproductive; or, rather, they are not changes at all. . . .

To defend democracy is to defend the possibility of change; in turn, changes alone can strengthen democracy and enable it to be embodied in social life.

Mario Vargas Llosa

Latin America today justifies our cautious optimism. Never before in the history of our nations—that is, since we became independent from Spain and Portugal—has our part of the world had as many governments created by (more or less) free elections. . . .

For the first time, democracy—or, in some cases, incipient democratic forms of government—is being established with clear popular support. Today the anti-democratic alternatives of Marxist revolution or military dictatorship are the monopoly of economic or intellectual elites. The bulk of the populace has expressed overwhelming support for moderate regimes: center-left, center, or center-right—whichever seems to offer the best chance of achieving democracy. . . . Such huge numbers of people have been spurred to turn to democracy by the terrible violence of which they have been the victims.

“To defend
democracy is to
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of change”

Sources: (1) From an essay in *One Earth, Four or Five Worlds*, by Octavio Paz; (2) from a speech by Vargas Llosa in March 1990 (both in *The Democracy Reader*, ed. Diane Ravitch and Abigail Thernstrom, HarperCollins, 1992).

CHAPTER 37

Questions to Discuss

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| <p>1. What does Paz say has been the value of democratic governments in Latin America’s history?</p> <p>2. According to Vargas Llosa, what is the most hopeful sign about current movements</p> | <p>toward democracy?</p> <p>3. Recognizing Ideologies Overall, do you think that these writers are hopeful or pessimistic about Latin America’s future? Why?</p> |
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