

Contrasting Democratic Trajectories: A Comparative Analysis of Costa Rica and Nicaragua

Önder Aytaç AFŞAR¹, Karina Veronica VAL SANCHEZ²

Abstract

The main focus of this paper is the democracy process in Central America. It is a case study focuses on Costa Rica and Nicaragua and its respective trajectories towards democracy. Despite their shared historical backgrounds, culture, similar size, and geographical location, Costa Rica has one of the most peaceful and enduring democracies, while Nicaragua has been a tumultuous country with internal conflicts that have directly impacted its democratization. The historical context of colonial exploitation, socio-economic disparities, and political unrest has significantly shaped the contemporary political landscape of the region. This research uses Costa Rica and Nicaragua as examples to highlight the diverse paths of democratic development in Central America. Since 1948, Costa Rica has been a democratic country, while Nicaragua has undergone a dual transition, one through revolution (1984) and the other through democratic elections in 1990. By emphasizing the unique historical peculiarities of the region, valuable insights into the democratization processes are provided. The study uses a historical method to analyze the democratization processes in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. It examines the impact of the conquest period, the role of key factors such as landed oligarchies and military forces, the influence of international economic crises, and the current democratic quality in both countries. The study shows that historical legacies have lasting effects on democracy.

Keywords: *Democracy, Central America, Regime Change, Historical Approach*



1. Assoc. Prof. Dr., Selçuk University,
onder.afsar@selcuk.edu.tr,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1394-3975>

2. PhD(c), Selçuk University,
234129001002@selcuk.edu.tr,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7036-3523>

<https://doi.org/10.30798/makuiibf.1461753>

Article Type

Research Article

Application Date

March 30, 2024

Admission Date

September 25, 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Central American region comprises five nations: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Although Belize and Panama are geographically located in Central America, the region is often defined by these five nations due to their shared colonial and post-colonial heritage. This heritage is distinct from Belize's British colonial past and Panama's historical ties to South America (Booth, 2000). The isthmus countries have drawn attention because of their high rates of poverty, inequality, corruption, violence, and migratory waves. The population of Central America is estimated to reach 57.5 million inhabitants in 2024. Geographically, Central America is in proximity to the United States and has been a geopolitically contested region. The democracies in Central America emerged after the violent overthrow of military regimes.

This paper contributes to the existing literature on regime change in Central America by focusing on two countries in the region: Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Despite being in the same region, sharing borders and a similar history Costa Rica and Nicaragua have become two quite different democratic regimes. Nicaragua, on the one hand, is in the process of de-democratization, while Costa Rica, considered the most stable and old democracy not only in the Central American region but also in the Latin American continent. The comparison between two countries under similar circumstances allows for a deeper and more detailed comparison of their respective democratic developments.

In the context of the comparative study of democracy, the historical approach provides an in-depth perspective on the antecedents that have been significant in the political and social evolution. The historical method allows us to understand how past events, such as colonization, independence and foreign interventions, have influenced democratization. This paper analyzes how these events have shaped the consolidation or weakening of democracy in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. By comparing the democratic trajectories of the two countries, it is possible to identify significant similarities and differences in their political and democratic evolution.

The historical approach challenges the common notion of treating a region as a homogeneous entity. Studies of democratization in Central America are presented within the broad panorama of Latin America, thus obscuring exceptional events that have occurred only in Central America.

With this in mind, this study examines the state of democracy in Central America, focusing on the cases of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The main research question of this study is: How have Costa Rica and Nicaragua developed different democratic trajectories despite their shared historical background and geographic proximity? Related questions include: How did historical events and critical junctures influence democratic development in Costa Rica and Nicaragua? The study relates to existing debates in several ways. First, it contributes to the literature on regime change in Central America by focusing on two contrasting cases within the same region. It employs a historical approach to democratization, aligning with scholars such as Capoccia and Ziblatt who advocate this method in

comparative studies of democracy. Second, the research engages with the concept of the “regional turn” in democratic studies, emphasizing the importance of the regional context in understanding democratization processes. The research provides a comprehensive analysis of the various factors influencing democratization, including colonial legacies, economic reforms, social class dynamics, and international influences, contributing to a more holistic understanding of democratic development in Central America.

The article is divided into five sections. First, this section presents a literature review and historical framework. In the second section a comprehensive analysis of the period of conquest in Central America and its impact on the economic, social, and political configuration of the region is undertaken. The third section is devoted to an examination of the main actors involved in the democratic formulation of the region, with special emphasis on the role of the landed oligarchies and the military forces. The fourth part of the study focuses on analyzing the impact of the international economic crisis on democratic development. Finally, the fifth section assesses the current quality of democracy in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The concluding section presents a synthesis of the most significant findings concerning to the understanding of democracy in Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The historical method is an academic approach that examines and interprets political processes and events throughout history. Capoccia and Ziblatt (2010) suggested the historical approach to deepen the comparative study of democratization. This perspective suggests that history is not always a straight line, but marked by crises and events that shape a country’s political landscape.

Within the historical method, it is essential to consider the concepts of ‘historical juncture’ and ‘critical juncture’. ‘Historical junctures’ refer to events and developments in the past that have a crucial impact on future outcomes, while ‘critical junctures’ are “events and developments in the distant past concentrated in a short period, which have a crucial impact on outcomes later in time” (Capoccia, 2016, p. 89). Path dependence is a concept related to historical and critical junctures. It means that past events and political decisions influence subsequent events and decisions. These concepts are essential to understanding how historical events and critical moments have shaped the political trajectory of countries such as Nicaragua and Costa Rica, influencing their democratic development and the configuration of their current political systems.

While the historical method represents an opportunity to look at democratization processes from a new perspective, its very strength can become a weakness. Møller and Skaaning (2012, p. 79) use a metaphor to illustrate this when he comments that “the view of the forest will blind us as to the contours of the individual trees.” From this perspective, there is an emphasis on analyzing democracy considering the global trend towards its spread, conceptualized as waves of democratization, but the regional level must also be considered. On another occasion, the author emphasizes the limitation of the historical

approach, which does not facilitate the identification of general patterns of democracy and regularities and may overestimate the role of contingency and actors' decisions (Møller, 2012). By acknowledging these critiques, this study aims to provide a more balanced analysis, recognizing both the strengths and weaknesses of the historical approach.

Several studies have used the historical approach to analyze democracy in Central America. For example, James Mahoney (1991, 2001, 2001a) has made a historical analysis of the region, highlighting the importance of the liberal economic reforms of the nineteenth century that have generated divergences in the political trajectories of the countries of the region. Baloyra-Herp (1983) has also carried out a socio-historical analysis to explain the different regimes established in Central America, highlighting that the political divergence in the countries of the region results from dominating of the landowning oligarchy and its subsequent alliance with authoritarian regimes or military leaders to secure their power. On the other hand, Robinson (2003) focuses on the economic development of the Central American region, examining the historical process that took place, transforming an indigenous peasant economy to one based on exploitation and wage labor on coffee and banana farms. Jeffrey (2014) explores the ideological connection between mestizos and Indigenous people, who have come together to organize protests and social demands, becoming the main actors who confronted the established military regimes.

In addition, this work aligns with the line of studies that advocate for a 'regional turn.' The 'regional turn' within the historical approach stands out as a fundamental perspective in the study of democracy (Bermeo & Yashar, 2016). In this sense, the study of democratization in Central America is unique and requires an assessment that considers global processes of democracy as well as regional examples and individual case studies. This becomes even more evident when considering, for example, the complexity of the regime changes that took place in the region. Booth (2020) proposes for the Central American case nine different types of regimes in the region: military authoritarian, personalistic military, military-transitional, civilian-autocratic, civilian-transitional, civilian-democratic, revolutionary, revolutionary-transitional, and semi-democracy. Under this perspective, it is appreciated that Nicaragua is the only case in the region that has had a personalistic military regime; political control was in the hands of the Somoza family, in alliance with the military and key individuals from the financial sector, and has experienced at least five regime changes between 1970 and 2019. Since 2016, it is considered a civilian-autocratic regime, i.e., “dominated by a single person or narrow coalition (supported by a dominant political party and security institutions subservient to the ruler), limited to no checks or balances to executive power, and uncompetitive elections” (Booth, 2020, p. 30), while Costa Rica has maintained since 1970 a civilian democratic regime, that is, a political stability of more than five decades under this conceptualization, which refers to “having elected, civilian, constitutionally restrained governments, broad ruling coalitions, and political competition open to parties from left to right” (Booth, 2010, p. 29).

The regional perspective challenges the tendency to treat Latin America as a homogeneous entity and underscores the need for specific models due to the differences in historical processes experienced at the regional level. This uniqueness has often been overlooked in the more general academic literature on democratization and political regimes, highlighting the unique and valuable contribution that this Central America-focused study can bring to the field of study of democracy.

The literature that focuses on explaining regime change in Latin and Central America can be divided into three main strands. The first group focuses on regime change with an emphasis on causes, processes, and outcomes. For example, new governments are often shaped by coalitions between the military and middle class. Regimes tend to become more democratic when organized labor or middle-class groups gain enough power to diminish the wealth of established elites (Whitehead et al., 2013). In parallel, explanations that focus on how established regimes interact with the social class structure to influence the formation of new regimes. Moore (1993) and other authors, such as Marini and Sader (1991) and Quijano, Gutiérrez, López, and Wallerstein (1980) argue that the establishment of democracy is intricately linked to the rise of the bourgeoisie. For Moore (1993), the bourgeoisie, with its economic base based on trade and industry, gradually displaces the landed oligarchy, paving the way for democracy. However, a more recent study by Paige (2005) supports Moore's thesis that the landed oligarchy's antidemocratic practices and influences apply to explain the difficult development of democracy in Central America. Whereas Moore's proposal for a transition to democracy 'from above' or through promotion by the bourgeoisie is not feasible as it results from social movements.

The second type of literature emphasizes violence, rebellion, and revolution as catalysts for regime change (Petras & Zeitlin, 1969). Rebellion requires a defined constituency, affected or vulnerable people who organize to change their current situation. Brockett (2019) explains how Central America's agrarian economy, pushed to participate in the global capitalist economy, contributed to widespread poverty and social discontent. This created the conditions for citizens to become motivated and organized to change and attack the regime in power. Tilly (2017) defines rebellion as collective action involving direct confrontation with authority; a revolutionary movement is born out of rebellion. It results from a combination of structural and political factors such as social inequality, political exclusion, lack of institutional channels to give voice to demands, and lack of citizen participation.

A third group of literature on regime change emphasizes the processes of democratization and de-democratization. Within this group of literature, various specific considerations can be identified, such as the quality of democracy. Democratic quality is defined as the degree to which a regime effectively adheres to democratic principles and meets the expectations of its citizens (Diamond & Morlino, 2004). Another way to approach regime change is to analyze when an erosion or regression event occurs, which is referred to as a process of de-democratization, which refers to the process by which a regime previously considered democratic experiences a gradual departure from basic democratic principles, such as respect for civil rights, separation of powers, and citizen participation

(Marti & Serra, 2020). The term de-democratization is used to describe how a political system can move in the opposite direction of democracy.

The Central American region is unique, characterized by the triumph of a revolution in Nicaragua—the second success story in Latin America after Cuba—its status as one of the poorest and most violent regions in the world, and significant U.S. intervention compared to the Southern Cone. These elements require an assessment that considers the fundamental theoretical contributions to a proper understanding of democracy in the region. Various times, the three theoretical currents mentioned above overlap to explain what is happening in the region. Therefore, this paper takes into consideration both an analysis of the past, but also analyzes the present, the quality of democracy in Nicaragua and Costa Rica in the 21st century.

3. CENTRAL AMERICA IN HISTORICAL PROCESS: CONQUEST AND INDEPENDENCE

Spanish rule in the Americas spans over three hundred years of history, from the discovery of the New World in 1492 to the various independence movements culminating around 1821, when several new nation-states became independent. The Spanish conquest had a profound impact and left an indelible mark on the Latin American region (Booth et al., 2020; Goodman, et al., 2019; Walker & Armony, 2000).

Central America includes the territories of countries now known as Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. The Spanish began their conquest of these territories around 1520, with the exception of the area that is now Costa Rica, which resisted invasion and settlement until 1560, and its coastal regions were never fully subjugated to Spanish dominion (Matthew, 2022). Spanish colonization brought with it a system of social stratification based on slavery, exploitation, and forced labor of indigenous populations that took root throughout the region and shaped the initial social structures and political dynamics (Cerdas Cruz, 2019). Indigenous societies in Central America had a well-defined hierarchical structure of leadership and social organization where the chief was a prominent figure of order. This type of structure facilitated the implementation of the *encomienda* system by the Spaniards (Cerdas Cruz, 2019). The *encomienda* system comprised assigning a group of natives to a Spanish colonist, who taught them the Catholic faith, protecting them, and educating them in European ways. However, this system soon developed into a severe form of exploitation, enslavement, and abuse. In addition, the colonizers introduced a fundamental change: race as a determining factor in the social hierarchy (Booth et al., 2020). This transformed the pre-existing social order, placing the Spaniards and their descendants at the pinnacle, while relegating the Indigenous and creole¹ to inferior positions. This redefined social and power structures and had two main consequences: 1) it generated highly stratified societies with deep racial and class divisions (Walker & Armony, 2000); 2) the distribution of economic

resources, political, and social administration was left in the hands of colonial and mestizo families. They monopolized power and, during the period of independence, continued to do so until they became powerful oligarchies that would determine the political future of the region (Goodman et al., 2019).

However, because of its geographical characteristics, Costa Rica experienced the conquest period differently. Unlike other countries in the north, such as Nicaragua, which were rich in natural resources for exploitation, Costa Rica lacked such abundance. As a consequence, there was no extreme accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, nor did it foster extreme social division (Stone & Greenleaf, 1990). Likewise, the conquest of Costa Rica came decades later compared to the other countries in the region. Because of the reduction of the Indigenous population by diseases brought by the colonizers, or their displacement to the central highlands, a racially distinct subaltern class was not established to the same extent in Costa Rica as in other colonies in northern Central America. Rather, locals and settlers forged a system of organization in which different social strata interacted and competed to gain power. In Costa Rica, the absence of a structure based on racial and slave division meant less hierarchical power organizations and, to some extent, more prone to the formation of a more fair and participatory civil society (Walker & Armony, 2000). The experience of the conquest in Costa Rica would have long-term consequences and would be conclusive in differentiating it from the rest of the Central American countries (Booth et al., 2020; Cerdas Cruz, 2019; Stone & Greenleaf, 1990).

Despite achieving independence in 1821, the event was overshadowed by the persistence of socio-economic practices and dynamics inherited from the colonial period, which transformed into new forms of exploitation (Cerdas Cruz, 2019). By that time, the economic and political elites of Central America had already entrenched themselves, concentrating on land ownership. This situation led to the formation of a landowning oligarchy whose power extended beyond land ownership to the exploitation of natural resources and the coercive use of labor, often Indigenous or mestizo. The landowning elite relied on the state to extend their control over land through two main mechanisms: first, land reform, where the state privatized large tracts of land, ensuring the elite's access to the best quality land; second, the provision of cheap labor through systems of debt peonage, insecure labor contracts, and the allocation of land to Indigenous families in exchange for labor for elite landowners (Millett, 2019). These practices not only consolidated elite control over agricultural resources but also perpetuated structures of inequality and labor exploitation, facilitating the spread of anti-democratic regimes. The landowning elite significantly impacted the quality of democratic regimes established in the region by using their influence to reject popular demands for land reform, better working conditions, civil and political rights, autonomy and protection for Indigenous communities, and access to education and social services (Booth et al., 2010). The partnership between the state and the wealthy landowners strengthened their control over society through mutual dependence. Subsequently, the armed forces would also assume a significant role. At first, the military functioned as protectors of the elite,

responsible for preserving social order and using violence to suppress rebellions. As a result, they had public authority and direct control over government administration and security forces (Millett, 2019).

As previously mentioned, Nicaragua experienced the formation of oligarchic groups and military alliances. The region saw the emergence of two opposing political forces: the conservative elites and the liberal elites (Walker, 2000). Conservatives supported a centralized and authoritarian government with strong ties to the Catholic Church and defended the colonial social and economic status quo, while liberals sought decentralized government, representative democracy, and the separation of church and state to break with traditional structures and pave the way for modernization. The two factions in Nicaragua were not divided ideologically, but rather by regional rivalries and power struggles among landed elites. Each faction focused on seeking regional alliances with local caudillos, who mobilized peasants to work the land or support the corresponding faction (Cerdas Cruz, 2019). It should be noted, however, that Costa Rica's situation was peculiar. Under authoritarian leaders such as Braulio Carrillo (1835-1842) and Tomás Guardia (1870-1882), the country avoided the formation of an oligarchy. These leaders pursued progressive policies, such as distributing land to small farmers and confiscating land from landowners for redistribution (Walker & Armony, 2000). The absence of landless laborers hindered the expansion of labor-intensive agriculture and prevented extreme concentration of land and power. This combination of factors prevented the emergence of landowning oligarchies in Costa Rica (Baloyra-Herp, 1983).

4. MILITARY, OLIGARCHY, AND POLITICAL DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL AMERICA

The relationship between the landed oligarchy and the military forces grew stronger after the colonial era, impacting the democratic development of the region.

During the colonial period, the military forces were weak, but they gained prominence in the period of independence. Not only did the armed forces play a crucial part in the struggle for independence, but they also became the primary institution responsible for defining the identity and political framework of the new countries (Millett, 2019). The army shaped the formation of the new nation-states and became more relevant in the absence or weakness of state institutions. Initially, military power was exercised by individuals acting as leaders of armed groups, known as caudillos, or by members of organized armed forces. These warlords often emerged as charismatic figures whose influence was based on personal loyalty and the control they exercised over armed groups. The pre-eminence of military forces and in some contexts by a military figure as a political actor was reinforced by the political and social instability characteristic of the early post-colonial years, where armies often intervened to fill power vacuum, to protect certain political or economic interests. Political influence and infighting varied in the region, which would determine the development and role of each nation's military. For example, since 1838, Nicaragua experienced eleven U.S. interventions. This extensive experience notably influenced the development and training of its armed forces (Perez & Pestana, 2022).

Foreign forces played a crucial role in shaping the military's role in the Central American region (Goodman, 2019). During the Cold War period, U.S. influence grew significantly in the region (Chavez, 2022). To halt and prevent the spread of communism in the region, the United States often supported authoritarian governments that aligned with its geopolitical interests rather than promoting democratic systems and social reforms (Booth et al., 2020). The long duration of the military regime (1936 to 1979) in Nicaragua is because of U.S. support for Somoza (Perez & Pestana, 2022), through the National Guard, a military group that operated under U.S. orders to maintain political stability in the country (Munro, 1933). Social and political mobilizations led by left-wing intellectuals, peasants, and middle-class reformists were repressed violently by the army.

The democratization process in Central America was mediated by the army, which controlled and limited the transition process in three ways: 1) It limited political participation to opposition parties and organizations that promoted socioeconomic structural changes that threatened its interests. 2) It favored partial and temporary reforms of the political system rather than broad and definitive changes, such as the holding of elections for a constituent assembly, the election of an interim president, and a new constitution, but not the election of a new president or parliament. 3) It sought to maintain the autonomy and absolution of the military, meaning that it limited the control that democratically elected civilian regimes could exercise over the military, such as avoiding accountability for human rights violations committed by the military, not investigating cases of corruption, and keeping control of the military budget in the hands of the military (Blachman & Sharpe, 2019).

The advent of democracy in the region was not driven by a genuine commitment to democratic principles; rather, it was driven by strategic considerations and the perception of potential benefits. Faced with the growing rise of social and armed insurgent movements calling for greater individual rights and guarantees, the elite and military groups adopted a form of pseudo-democratic electoral politics from 1980 and early 1990, where a semblance of democracy was maintained, but with limited participation and accountability (Blachman & Sharpe, 2019). Comparably, authoritarian regimes in the region recognized that, in order to take advantage of U.S. economic aid and secure their power, it was necessary to simulate certain political changes and social reforms (Gobat, 2022). This pragmatic approach reveals how power structures in Central America maneuvered within a changing political framework, seeking to preserve their interests while adapting to internal and external pressures.

Costa Rica stands out from neighboring countries by avoiding the formation of a dominant landowning oligarchy and eliminating the army for social stability. Early independence years saw the rise of agrarian capitalism, notably with coffee cultivation driving the economy (Molina, 2022). Unlike Nicaragua, Costa Rica had unpopulated regions suitable for cultivation, facilitating land acquisition from cooperatives and demanding fair wages to keep workers, thus preventing oligarchic formation (Booth, 2000). Power alternated between military and civilian governments, marked by occasional coups, yet indirect elections and constitutional promulgations were upheld. Notably, Braulio Carrillo's

government in the 1830s introduced voting rights for men and literacy requirements in 1840 to expand the electorate (Booth et al., 2010). By the 20th century, Costa Rica boasted higher literacy rates and a robust coffee industry (Walker & Armony 2000; Molina 2022) The 1940s saw the rise of workers' unions, including communist-leaning factions, culminating in the 1948 Civil War (Booth, 2000). José Figueres's victory led to the National Liberation Party's dominance, which nationalized banks, granted voting rights to women and Afro-descendants, and abolished the army in the 1949 constitution (Molina 2022). Since then, political alternation has prevailed, with the National Liberation Party governing for thirteen terms. In 2022, the Social Democratic Progress Party won the elections, offering a fresh alternative to the National Liberation Party rule (Guevara, 2023a).

5. ECONOMIC CRISIS AND CURRENT SITUATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

The democratic structure in Central America is strengthened by considering the economic crises of the 80s. The democratic trajectory of the Central American region has been affected by economic conditions as social discontent grew and put pressure on the authoritarian regimes that dominated the political system. The stability of Nicaragua and Costa Rica was influenced by global economic dynamics.

The interdependence of political and economic changes in the region was clear during the significant global economic crisis of 1979, which coincided with the democratization phase of Central America. Booth et al. (2010) argue that the Central American region has historically been susceptible to global dynamics, particularly neoliberalism and globalization. Neoliberalism is characterized by limited state intervention in the economy and a preference for the free market. It promotes privatization and foreign investment while discouraging tariffs and trade barriers (Vilas, 2000). The Central American countries' engagement in the global economy revolves around product exports and attracting foreign investment (Klak, 2014). From the early years of independence to the period between 1840 and 1930, the economy was controlled by established elite groups, limiting the region's economic autonomy (Williams, 2022). This dependence on external markets led to Central America accepting prices dictated by stronger economies, restricting profit margins, and emphasizing cost reduction. The region's economy relied primarily on providing cheap labor, perpetuating authoritarian regimes that ensured low labor costs (Vilas, 2000).

Amidst years of mismanagement and exacerbated by economic crises, authoritarian regimes in the region faced escalating social pressures, prompting the adoption of new economic models to address unrest and calls for change (Williams, 2022). This transition to electoral democracy coincided with introducing neoliberal reforms, offering legitimacy to the emerging democracies, and aiming to tackle economic challenges. During the Cold War era, the United States actively intervened to suppress revolutionary movements and counter communist influence, aligning with democratic regimes (Chavez, 2022). The economic crisis of the 1980s was decisive for the future of democracy and the economy in

the region. As the region was highly dependent on exports and the flow of foreign capital, the economic crisis forced it to rely heavily on international aid. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was responsible for distributing financial and technical aid in the region (Harrison, 1984). Of the five countries in the region, all received economic aid except for Nicaragua. In 1979, the Sandinista revolution triumphed over the dictatorship of the Somoza family (Vilas, 2000).

Nicaragua began its transition to democracy with the overthrow of Somoza's dictatorship by the Sandinistas in 1979 (Booth, 2000). Drawing on the experience of the Cuban revolution, the FSLN sought to avoid similar mistakes and establish a regime that responded to Nicaragua's domestic and international realities (Booth et al., 2020). This included upholding civil and political rights, avoiding the cult of the political leader, maintaining political and diplomatic relations with all nations willing to engage with Nicaragua, and implementing a mixed economy regulated by the state (Booth et al., 2020).

The Sandinista Period lasted ten years and can be divided into two distinct phases (Booth, 2000b). The first phase was the transitional Government of National Reconstruction, during which the main objectives were to reactivate the economy and achieve social stability after "fifty thousand dead, one hundred thousand injured, and one hundred thousand orphaned" (Charlip, 2022, p. 580). The Sandinistas' efforts led to a reduction in illiteracy, vaccination campaigns, and the elimination of education costs. Despite the economic crisis and recession due to oil prices and the Vietnam War, the economy grew considerably (Booth, 2000). However, international dynamics had an adverse impact on the nation; President Reagan's administration categorized Nicaragua alongside Iran and promised to return them to their zone of influence (Godoy Reyes, 2019).

The second phase, known as the Contra Wars, involved opposition forces, including Somoza sympathizers and former members of the National Guard, who sought U.S. support to overthrow the SFNL (Frances and Alegria, 1983). Various armed groups such as the Nicaraguan Democratic Front and the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance emerged, trained and funded by the CIA (Charlip, 2022). Although these groups never managed to control any territory, they were brutal enough to destroy villages, clinics, and schools, and to torture civilians. Additionally, the U.S. imposed a trade embargo in 1985 (Booth et al., 2020). The Sandinistas had to allocate resources to the military to combat the Contras, neglecting social programs and other essential services.

The 1984 elections are noteworthy. Although the Sandinistas had won the revolution, they legitimized their regime through democratic elections, transitioning to a constitutional government (Walker and Armony, 2000). These elections utilized a Swiss-designed voting system, provided media access to all candidates and parties, and featured three opposition parties, making them technically competitive (Charlip, 2022). Sandinista candidate Daniel Ortega won, and a new constitution was promulgated in 1987.

By the end of 1989, the Nicaraguan economy and society were suffocated by violence, poverty, and instability. The Sandinista regime, having faced various pressures over the past decade, was unable to consolidate its power (LeoGrande, 2019). In accordance with the constitution, new elections were scheduled for the following year, presenting a prime opportunity for U.S. intervention. The U.S. strategy for the 1990 Nicaraguan elections involved either denouncing the electoral laws and conditions to invalidate a potential Sandinista victory or working to ensure a win for Violeta Chamorro, who was nominated by a coalition of 14 micro-political parties. The U.S. assured that the war against the Contra groups and the embargo would end with the opposition's victory, represented by Violeta Chamorro (Charlip, 2022). Daniel Ortega ran again but only received 41% of the vote, while Chamorro secured 55%, thus winning the election.

Under Chamorro's administration, social and economic conditions deteriorated further. Chamorro adopted a neoliberal approach, starting with an agreement with the IMF to secure financing in exchange for implementing structural reforms (Klak, 2014). Government-owned properties were privatized, the agricultural export economy was revived, and both violence and unemployment increased (Booth, 2000). The 1990s elections are crucial for understanding the current state of democratic erosion in Nicaragua (Martí and Serra, 2020). The Sandinistas' defeat at the polls led to factions within the FSLN party and the emergence of the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) party. However, Daniel Ortega remained with the FSLN as secretary general and a perpetual candidate in the next two elections, which he lost to Arnoldo Alemán and Enrique Bolaños. In 2006, Ortega finally returned to power (Charlip, 2022). Changes to electoral legislation in 2010 eliminated the two-term limit for re-election, allowing Ortega to run again in 2011 and win. Ortega was re-elected as president of Nicaragua in the 2021 elections, with his wife Rosario Murillo serving as vice president.

In the 1980s, Costa Rica implemented several structural changes to receive financial support from USAID and other financial organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB): reform the banking system to give greater participation to private banking institutions, avoid the acquisition of state-owned firms to cooperatives and non-intervention of national banks in the free repatriation of foreign funds and private corporate funding (Vilas, 2000). Faced with the financial pressure in which Costa Rica found itself, it accepted the conditions imposed by these organizations. In addition, the creation of the Coalition and Initiatives for Development (CINDE) played an important role in the privatization and internationalization of the Costa Rican economy (Molina, 2022).

Costa Rica's economy did not collapse during the economic crisis of 1979 because of the great support of USAID. Furthermore, during the 1980s, it emerged as the country receiving the second-highest level of economic assistance globally, following only Israel (Vilas, 2000). Costa Rica's pro-American stance during the Contra War and other social movements rendered it a strategic ally in the region, thereby making it a consistent recipient of U.S. funds and economic support (Booth, 2000). The

resources received were strategically invested in the development of social security, education, and health sectors. This internal stability, combined with an active network of cooperatives, unions, and civic organizations, was further bolstered by significant savings on military expenditures, as Costa Rica does not have an army. These factors enabled Costa Rica to mold external and domestic pressures through robust institutional and social frameworks. Consequently, a stable economy with a strong emphasis on social welfare facilitated Costa Rica's political and social consolidation within the region, while other nations, particularly Nicaragua, struggled to maintain stability.

6. THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY IN NICARAGUA AND COSTA RICA

After a review of their historical trajectories, it is now imperative to assess the current state of these two nations. This section analyzes the democratic quality and current performance of democracy in Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

Democratic quality refers to the extent to which a regime effectively upholds democratic principles and fulfills the expectations of its citizens (Diamond & Morlino, 2004). The weaknesses of democracies in Central America are twofold: first, weaknesses in the mechanisms that pause access to political power and second, in the mechanisms that control political power (Barreda, 2011; Mainwaring, 2003). For this reason, the analysis of democratic quality focuses on the following five characteristics: political rights and civil liberties, government responsiveness, citizen participation, accountability, and the rule of law. The first three dimensions evaluate the mechanisms that pause access to political power, while the last two evaluate mechanisms of political control. These five dimensions are theoretically and empirically interrelated. In order to evaluate each dimension, qualitative and quantitative indicators are analyzed that allow us to appreciate such a complex reality as democratic quality, following the precedents of previous works conducted in Latin America and Central America (Altman and Pérez-Liñán, 2002; Barreda, 2011; Corbetta and Pérez-Liñán, 2001; Levine and Molina, 2007). While not exhaustive, this framework offers a comprehensive evaluation of democracy quality within a polyarchic framework (Dahl, 1971).

Political Rights and Civil Liberties: This dimension focuses on respecting and safeguarding political rights and civil liberties. These are crucial for citizens to exercise their right to vote for their candidates and freely express their political preferences in public spaces. In this sense, data from Freedom House (FH) on the guarantee of political rights and the guarantee of civil liberties in Nicaragua show that although elections are formally held, the abolition of presidential term limits and the enactment of laws such as the Sovereignty Law, which relaxes judicial grounds for detention, have provided the government of Daniel Ortega with the legal tools to arbitrarily detain and exclude the opposition from electoral processes and political affairs (Freedom House, 2023b). These actions represent a significant deterioration regarding essential political rights.

The legitimacy of the 2021 elections in Nicaragua is called into question. The Organization of American States (OAS) shows the lack of conditions for the holding of free and fair elections (Martí et al., 2022). Repression of independent media has intensified, and freedom of expression has been restricted, with media closures and attacks on journalists.

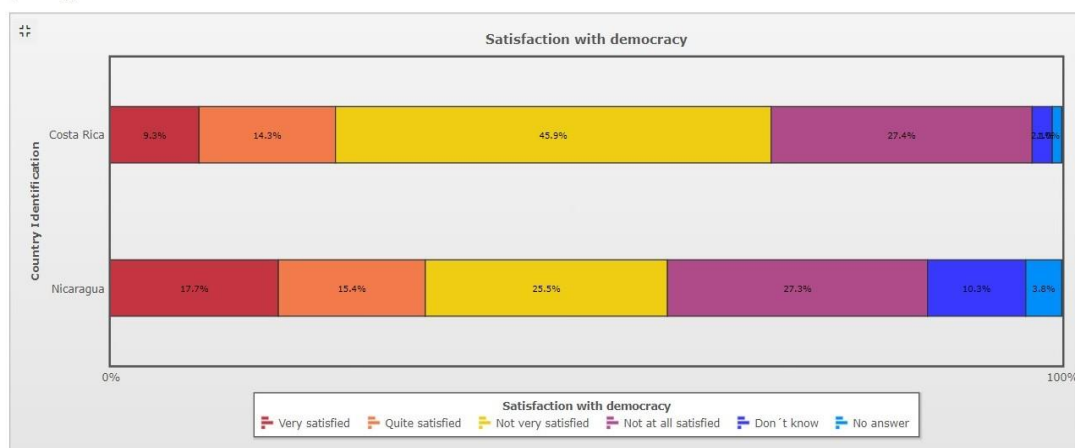
For its part, Costa Rica reaffirms its commitment to democracy, evidenced in the 2022 elections, considered free and fair by an independent Supreme Electoral Tribunal that guarantees fairness in the electoral process (Redondo, 2023). Although the creation of the Presidential Data Analysis Unit (UPAD) raised concerns about state surveillance and improper handling of personal data, its decree was promptly repealed, and civil liberties such as freedom of the press and academic autonomy were institutionalized, highlighting Costa Rica's democratic strength (Freedom House, 2023a).

Both Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans have a perception that addressing their country's problems would have negative personal consequences, Costa Ricans 52.5%, and Nicaraguans 63%, however, Costa Ricans are more certain that there will be no consequences with 44.1% and only 26.5% of Nicaraguans believe that there will be no consequences.

Government responsiveness implies the government's competence to recognize and address citizens' desire and preferences (Powell, 2004). It assesses whether government actions align with citizens' expectations by implementing policies that address their needs (Diamond & Morlino, 2004). To evaluate citizen satisfaction with democratic performance, data from Latinobarometro (2020) surveys are used, capturing satisfaction levels categorized as "very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied."

Graphic 1. Satisfaction with Democracy

In general, would you say you are very satisfied, quite satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the working of the democracy in (country)?



Latinobarómetro 2020 Costa Rica, Nicaragua
Correlation $r = -0.213$

Source: (Latinobarometro, 2020)

Examining the results of the survey, there is a variety of satisfaction with democracy among citizens of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, reflecting different political and social realities in each country.

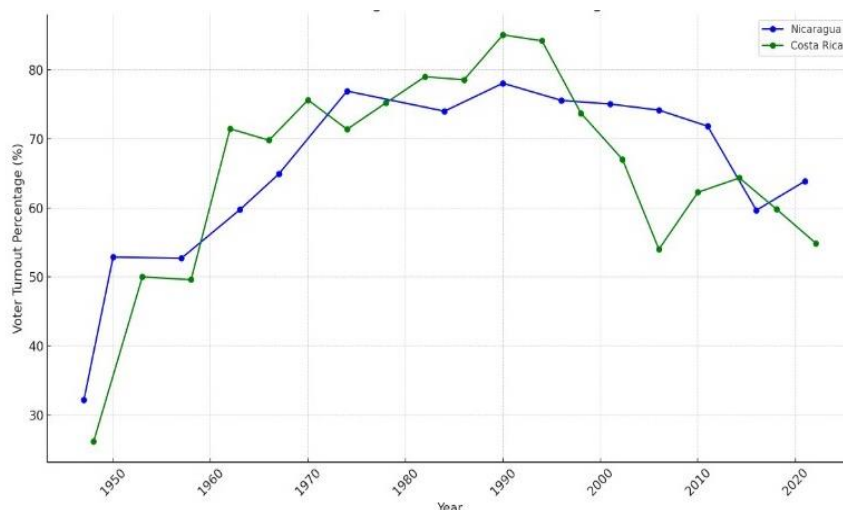
In Costa Rica, 45.9% of respondents say they are "not very satisfied" with the performance of democracy, while 9.3% are "very satisfied." These numbers suggest a moderate level of approval towards democratic institutions and their functioning. However, the 27.4% of the population that is "not at all satisfied" points to a significant sector of society that perceives shortcomings or deficiencies in the democratic system. This contrast might show challenges in areas such as political representation, government effectiveness, or equity in the distribution of democratic benefits. Considering another result of the survey, the above is even more clarifying, since 64.8% of the citizens believe that Costa Rica is governed for a few powerful groups in their own interest, and 49.5% do not trust the government and 60.7% do not trust the political parties. Finally, in 2020 at least 66.7% of the citizens believe that democracy is the preferable regime to any other regime, while in 2023 this confidence decreases to 55.9% and from 2020 to 2023 citizens hold the idea that an authoritarian regime is preferable to a democracy under certain circumstances or even that the regime does not matter.

Updated 2023 data from the Latinobarometro (2020) survey of satisfaction with democracy in Costa Rica, shows a change in the perception of citizens. A notable increase in the proportion of citizens who feel "very satisfied" with democracy, reaching 18.9%, and a majority 40.2% who feel "somewhat satisfied", indicates a positive trend in satisfaction with democracy. In addition, the reduction in the percentage of dissatisfied citizens to 15.3% in 2023, compared to 2020 data, reinforces this observation.

On the other hand, in Nicaragua, the situation is more critical. Although 17.7% of respondents are "very satisfied" with democracy, 27.3% are not satisfied at all. The latter percentage, similar to that of Costa Rica, is accompanied by a lower proportion of satisfaction. Between 2018 and 2020, there was a meaningful change in overall satisfaction with democracy. Specifically, 6.2% of respondents were very satisfied, while 13.4% were somewhat satisfied. Both metrics showed an increase compared to previous years, as shown in the 2020 graph. On the contrary, the percentage of respondents who reported being not at all satisfied decreased from 42.1% to 27.9%. Additionally, at least 44.4% of respondents believe that, despite its problems, democracy is the best system of government, with 11.7% strongly agreeing. Notably, Nicaraguans expressed much more confidence in their government (22.6%) than Costa Ricans did (2.8%).

Citizen Participation: This dimension is crucial to measure the quality of a democracy. Active and extensive citizen participation increases the likelihood that government decisions will reflect the interests of a broader spectrum of the population. The two primary goals of participation are to form a democratic identity and collectively pursue specific interests (Morlino, 2014). One way to evaluate participation is by using the 'voter turnout' indicator. This metric reflects the percentage of eligible citizens who participate in an election and provides valuable insights into the level of civic engagement and trust in the political system.

Graphic 2. Voter Turnout Percentage in Costa Rica and Nicaragua over time



Source: The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

Analyzing data from The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's (IDEA) Voter Turnout, trends in voter turnout in Nicaragua and Costa Rica unveil intriguing patterns that mirror the evolution of voter participation in both nations. In Costa Rica, voter turnout has remained consistently high, suggesting a stable and engaged democracy.

In Nicaragua, the increase in voter turnout from 1950 to the early 1990s can be interpreted as a period of growing civic engagement, possibly driven by significant political and social transformations, including the Sandinista revolution and subsequent efforts to establish democratic structures (Booth and Richard, 2006). However, after 1990, voter turnout decreased, showing a potential decline in civic engagement and democratic participation. The decline and fluctuations in voter turnout may be related to political disillusionment, especially after the long period of internal armed conflict and the increase in economic problems during the Chamorro presidency. Recently, questions about electoral integrity, changes in electoral legislation, and political crises of representation may have contributed to a decline in citizen trust and participation (Martí et al., 2022).

In Costa Rica, the upward trend in voter turnout until the 2000s reflects democratic consolidation and robust voter participation. Costa Rica is recognized for its democratic stability and effective institutions. However, since 2000, there has been a sharp decline in voter turnout, which may be attributed to a growing disenchantment with the political system. This decline could be because of factors such as perceived corruption, government inefficiency, or a lack of representation in political options (Guevara, 2023).

Accountability refers to the mechanisms that prevent the abuse of power and ensure that no one is above the law (O'Donnell, 2001) Both the government and political representatives are subject to these control mechanisms. These mechanisms include vertical accountability through electoral processes, horizontal accountability through other state institutions, and social accountability through

civil society and individual citizens (Breuer, 2007). Accountability is crucial for effective functioning of a democratic system (Schedler et al., 1999).

In Latin American presidential systems, a widespread practice is the adoption of anti-democratic measures to perpetuate themselves in power (Munck, 2023). A clear example is Nicaragua under President Ortega. This country reflects a significant breakdown in accountability. In 2021, Ortega was re-elected in elections widely considered fraudulent by the international community (Martí et al., 2022). Recent amendments to Nicaragua's Constitution, which have removed the restriction on re-election, have made it easier for President Ortega to assume a fourth term in 2021, continuing his leadership since 2006.

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index shows a negative trend in Nicaragua, which ranked 167 out of 180 in 2022, with a transparency index of just 19 points, pointing to high corruption (Transparency International, 2022b). It is also critical to consider Freedom House's Press Freedom Index to assess social accountability. Since Ortega assumed the presidency in 2006, freedom of expression in general has deteriorated, independent media, journalists, and reporters face threats, censorship, and arrests (Freedom House, 2023b). Similarly, academic institutions have not been immune to government repression. There has been a bias in educational material in favor of Ortega's party, academic censorship, university closures, and, since 2022, a reduction in university autonomy.

Furthermore, individuals are restricted in their freedom of expression. Criticisms expressed on social media have led to arrests, resulting in a rising number of political prisoners. It is suspected that the government is using surveillance technology to intercept private communications on mobile devices, which may explain the rise in the identification and detention of opponents of the regime (Freedom House, 2023b).

In contrast to Nicaragua, Costa Rica presents a different political scenario. Rodrigo Chaves, of the Social Democratic Progress Party (PPSD), won the presidential election, defeating José Figueres of the National Liberation Party (PLN). This event marked a free and transparent election, as well as a competitive transition to an opposition party (Freedom House, 2023a).

Costa Rica ranks 48th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2022, with a transparency index of 54 points. This indicates an increase of corruption compared to 2021, when it had 58 points (Transparency International, 2022a). Corruption is a significant issue in Costa Rica and poses a threat to the country's democracy. It is common for candidates and presidents to be investigated for corruption or for receiving improper funds.

The dimension of the rule of law evaluates the quality of democracy based on the existence of a solid legal system that guarantees political rights (Diamond & Morlino, 2004). The rule of law encompasses various sub-dimensions, such as individual security, civil order, efficient policing, and

areas free from the control of organized crime. It also includes freedom from fear and the right to life (Morlino, 2014).

The World Bank provides a Legal Rights Strength Index, which evaluates categories such as the independence of the judiciary, protecting human rights, and freedom of expression. The index also assesses government transparency and accountability, as well as respect for civil and political rights. The index is scored from 0 to 12, with 12 being the highest score. In 2019, Nicaragua scored 2, while Costa Rica scored 10 in the same year's index. Costa Rica has a strong rule of law, with a clear separation of powers and effective judicial independence, which is superior to that of Nicaragua and the global average by 6 points (The World Bank, 2019).

Both countries face challenges to the rule of law and citizen security due to the increase in violence, voluntary homicides, and the presence of organized crime. In 2021, both countries recorded 11 intentional homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (The World Bank, 2021). Costa Rica, a historically peaceful nation without an army, has experienced an increase in violence. This has put pressure on the public forces and control over migratory flows and organize crime. Between 2018 and 2022, an estimated 4% of Nicaragua's population left the country due to political persecution and limited opportunities (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated the democratization process in Central America, focusing on a comparative analysis between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Through a detailed examination of key historical stages, significant similarities and differences have been identified in the political and democratic trajectories of both countries.

From a historical perspective, some observe how events such as colonization and independence have had a substantial impact on the political and social development of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The importance of considering concepts such as "historical junctures" and the influence of factors such as the landed oligarchy and military forces on the democratic process has been highlighted. These historical junctures have been decisive in the democratic trajectories of both countries, with Costa Rica being recognized as the longest-lived and most stable democracy in the region.

During the colonial and independence period, landed oligarchies emerged in Nicaragua that exerted a strong influence on the political configuration of the country, culminating in a prolonged military dictatorship that ended with the Sandinista Revolution. Despite facing opposition, this revolution generated economic, social and internal political instability, leading to elections in 1990. Those who took part in the revolution are now the main political players, highlighting the intricate and non-linear nature of Nicaragua's democratic process, which is currently in crisis.

In contrast, Costa Rica was more resistant to colonization and avoided a marked class structure because of its scarcity of natural resources. Early economic reforms and land redistribution created a

fairer society with an emphasis on education from its beginnings as an independent nation. The abolition of the army also prevented military authoritarianism, allowing greater citizen participation in the political arena.

Throughout their history, both nations have maintained a dichotomous relationship with the United States that is important to emphasize. While the U.S. supported Nicaragua against communism during the Somoza dictatorship, they provided no support after the dictatorship ended. Costa Rica emerged as the primary U.S ally in the region, receiving significant economic support.

The historical approach employed reveals how past events have shaped democracy in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The results underline the complexity of political and social processes in Central America, highlighting the importance of addressing regional particularities for a thorough understanding of democratic evolution. It highlights unique challenges such as foreign interventions, economic crises, and social tensions that have impacted democratic quality and political stability.

This study emphasized the need to adopt a region-specific approach to strengthening democracy and addressing social inequalities in Central America, considering the historical lessons and unique contexts of each country.

The study does not necessitate Ethics Committee permission.

The study has been crafted in adherence to the principles of research and publication ethics.

The authors declare that there exists no financial conflict of interest involving any institution, organization, or individual(s) associated with the article. Furthermore, there are no conflicts of interest among the authors themselves.

The authors contributed equally to the entire process of the research.

REFERENCES

- Altman, D., & Pérez-Liñán, A. (2002). Assessing the quality of democracy: freedom, competitiveness and participation in eighteen Latin American countries. *Democratization*, 9(2), 85-100.
- Baloyra-Herp, E. A. (1983). Reactionary despotism in Central America. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 15(2), 295-319. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X00000730>
- Barreda, M. (2011). La calidad de la democracia: Un análisis comparado de América Latina. *Política y Gobierno*, 18(2), 265-295.
- Bermeo, N., & Yashar, D. J. (2016). *Parties, movements, and democracy in the developing world*. Cambridge University Press.
- Blachman, M. J., & Sharpe, K. E. (2019). The transitions to “electoral” and democratic politics in Central America: Assessing the role of political parties. In L. W. Goodman, W. M. LeoGrande, J. M. Forman, & K. Sharpe (Eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Central America* (pp.33-52). Routledge.
- Booth, J. A. (2000). Costa Rica: Buffeted democracy. In Walker, T. W., & Armony, A. C., (Eds.) *Repression, resistance, and democratic transition in Central America* (pp. 89-110). Rowman & Littlefield.

- Booth, J. A., & Richard, P. B. (2006). Revolution's legacy: Residual effects on Nicaraguan participation and attitudes in comparative context. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 48(2), 117-140.
- Booth, J. A., Wade, C. J., & Walker, T. W. (2010). *Understanding Central America: Global forces and political change* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Booth, J. A., Wade, C. J., & Walker, T. W. (2020). *Understanding Central America: Global forces and political change* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Breuer, A. (2007). Institutions of direct democracy and accountability in Latin America's presidential democracies. *Democratization*, 14(4), 554-579. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340701398287>
- Brockett, C. D. (2019). *Land, power, and poverty: Agrarian transformation and political conflict in Central America*. Routledge.
- Capoccia, G. (2016). Critical Junctures. In O. Fioretos, T. G. Falleti, & A. Sheingate (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism* (pp. 89-106). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199662814.013.5>
- Capoccia, G., & Ziblatt, D. (2010). The historical turn in democratization studies: A new research agenda for Europe and beyond. *Comparative Political Studies*, 43(8-9), 931-968. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414010370431>
- Cerdas Cruz, R. (2019). Colonial Heritage, External Domination, and Political Systems in Central America. In L. W. Goodman, W. M. LeoGrande, J. M. Forman, & K. Sharpe (Eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Central America*. Routledge.
- Chavez, J. M. (2022). The Cold War: Authoritarianism, Empire, and Social Revolution. In R. Holden (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Central American History* (pp. 335-358). Oxford University Press.
- Charlip, J. (2022). Nicaragua. In R. Holden (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Central American History* (pp. 567-590). Oxford University Press.
- Corbetta, J., & Pérez-Liñán, A. (2001). Calidad de la democracia: Un análisis de la trayectoria argentina. *Instituciones y Desarrollo*, 10(3), 149-169.
- Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. Yale University Press.
- Diamond, L., & Morlino, L. (2004). The quality of democracy: An overview. *Journal of Democracy*, 15(4), pp. 20-31. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0060>
- Frances, H., & Alegria, C. (1983). The war of terror against Nicaragua. *The Black Scholar*, 14(2), 2-16.
- Freedom House. (2023a, January 12). *Costa Rica*. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/costa-rica/freedom-world/2023>
- Freedom House. (2023b, January 12). *Nicaragua*. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nicaragua/freedom-world/2023#PR>
- Gobat, M. (2022). Central America and the United States. In R. Holden (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Central American History* (pp. 309-334). Oxford University Press.
- Godoy Reyes, V. (2019). Nicaragua 1944-84: Political parties and electoral processes. In L. W. Goodman, W. M. LeoGrande, J. M. Forman, & K. Sharpe (Eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Central America*. Routledge.
- Goodman, L. (2019). Political parties and the political systems of Central America. In L. W. Goodman, W. M. LeoGrande, J. M. Forman, & K. Sharpe (Eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Central America*. Routledge.
- Goodman, L. W., LeoGrande, W. M., Forman, J. M., & Sharpe, K. (2019). *Political parties and democracy in Central America*. Routledge.
- Guevara, E. (2023a). Costa Rica 2022: Una alternancia política en medio de una crisis partidista. *Les études du CERI*, 264-265, 54-56.
- Guevara, T. (2023, Dec 5). *Presidente de Costa Rica denuncia penalmente al diario La Nación por difundir audios "confidenciales"*. Voz de America. <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/presidente-chaves-denuncia-penalmente-a-la-naci%C3%B3n-en-costa-rica-por-difundir-audios-confidenciales/7385544.html>

- Harrison, L. E. (1984). US Economic Aid Policy in Central America. *The Fletcher Forum*, 8(1), 33-44.
- Human Rights Watch. (2023, 2023a, January 13). *Nicaragua*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/nicaragua>
- Jeffrey L., G. (2014). Indigenista dictators and the problematic origins of democracy in Central America. In P. Drinot & A. Knight (Eds.), *The Great Depression in Latin America* (pp. 188-212). Duke University Press.
- Klak, T. (2014). Globalization, neoliberalism and economic change in Central America and the Caribbean. In R. N. Gwynne & K. Cristobal (Eds.), *Latin America Transformed: Globalization and Modernity* (pp. 67-92). Routledge.
- Latinobarómetro. (2020, March). *Encuesta de Opinión Pública de América Latina*. <https://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>
- Latinobarómetro. (2023, July 21). *Encuesta de Opinión Pública de América Latina*. <https://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>
- LeoGrande, W. M. (2019). Political parties and postrevolutionary politics in Nicaragua. In L. W. Goodman, W. M. LeoGrande, J. M. Forman, & K. Sharpe (Eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Central America* (pp. 164-174). Routledge.
- Levine, D. H., & Molina, J. E. (2007). La calidad de la democracia en América Latina: una visión comparada. *América Latina Hoy*, 45, 17-46.
- Mahoney, J. (2001). *The legacies of liberalism: Path dependence and political regimes in Central America*. The JHU Press.
- Mahoney, J. (2001). Path-dependent explanations of regime change: Central America in comparative perspective. *Studies in comparative international development*, 36, 111-141. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02687587>
- Mahoney, J., & Snyder, R. (1999). Rethinking agency and structure in the study of regime change. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 34, 3-32. <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1007/BF02687620>
- Mainwaring, S. (2003). Introduction: Democratic accountability in Latin America. In S. Mainwaring & C. Welna (Eds.), *Democratic Accountability in Latin America* (pp. 3-33). Oxford University Press.
- Marini, R. M., & Sader, E. (1991). *Dialéctica de la dependencia*. Era México
- Martí, I. P., Rodríguez-Suárez, D., & Serra, M. (2022). Nicaragua 2020-2022: el cierre autoritario. *Revista de ciencia política (Santiago)*, 42(2), 383-406.
- Martí, I. P., & Serra, M. (2020). Nicaragua: De-democratization and regime crisis. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 62(2), 117-136. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2019.64>
- Matthew, L. E. (2022). The Spanish Conquest? In R. Holden (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Central American History* (pp. 141-166). Oxford University Press.
- Millett, R. L. (2019). Politicized Warriors: The military and Central American politics. In L. W. Goodman, W. M. LeoGrande, J. M. Forman, & K. Sharpe (Eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Central America*. Routledge.
- Møller, J. (2012). When one might not see the wood for the trees: the 'historical turn' in democratization studies, critical junctures, and cross-case comparisons. *Democratization*, 20(4), 693-715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2012.659023>
- Møller, J., & Skaaning, S. E. (2012). *Democracy and Democratization in Comparative Perspective: Conceptions, Conjunctures, Causes, and Consequences* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203083994>
- Molina, I. (2022). Costa Rica. In R. Holden (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Central American History* (pp. 591-614). Oxford University Press.
- Moore, B. (1993). *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: Lord and peasant in the making of the modern world*. Beacon Press.
- Morlino, L. (2014). *La calidad de las democracias en América Latina: informe para IDEA*. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

- Munck, G. L. (2023). The state as a determinant of democracy: durable poor-quality democracies in contemporary Latin America. *Democratization*, 1-25.
<https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2267992>
- Munro, D. G. (1933). The Establishment of Peace in Nicaragua. *Foreign Affairs*, 11(4), pp. 696-705.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/20030547>
- O'Donnell. (2001). Democracy, law, and comparative politics. *Studies in comparative international development*, 36, 7-36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02687583>
- Paige, J. M. (2005). Coffee, revolution, and democracy in Central America. In P. S. Ciccantell, Smith, D.A. and Seidman, G (Ed.), *Nature, Raw Materials, and Political Economy* (pp. 333-352). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1057-1922\(05\)10015-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1057-1922(05)10015-8)
- Perez, O., & Pestana, R. (2022). The rise and retreat of the armed forces. In R. Holden (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Central American History* (pp. 379-402). Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199811755.001.0001>
- Petras, J., & Zeitlin, M. (1969). Latin America: Reform or Revolution? *Science and Society*, 33(1), 90-96.
- Powell Jr., G. B. (2004). The chain of responsiveness. *Journal of Democracy*, 15(4), 91-105.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0070>
- Quijano, A., Gutiérrez, G., López, S., & Wallerstein, I. (1980). Los usos de la democracia burguesa. *Sociedad y Política* (10), 7-15.
- Redondo, A. R. (2023). Elecciones 2022 en Costa Rica: resultado sorpresivo que no altera las frágiles condiciones para gobernar. *Revista Uruguaya de Ciencia Política*, 32(1), 169-187.
<https://doi.org/10.26851/rucp.32.1.8>
- Robinson, W. I. (2003). *Transnational conflicts: Central America, social change, and globalization*. Verso.
- Rojas Bolaños, M. (1995). Consolidar la democracia en Centroamérica: una ardua tarea. In K. Tangermann (Ed.), *Ilusiones y dilemas. La democracia en Centroamérica* (pp. 99-156). FLACSO.
- Schedler, A., Diamond, L. J., & Plattner, M. F. (1999). *The Self-Restraining State: Power And Accountability in New Democracies*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Stone, S. Z., & Greenleaf, R. E. (1990). *The heritage of the conquistadors: Ruling classes in Central America from the conquest to the Sandinistas*. University of Nebraska Press Lincoln.
- Tilly, C. (2017). From Mobilization to Revolution. In E. Castañeda & C. Schneider (Eds.), *Collective Violence, Contentious Politics, and Social Change* (pp. 39–100). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315205021>
- The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2024). *Costa Rica*
<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-overview?country=54>
- The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2024). *Nicaragua*
<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-overview?country=161>
- The World Bank. (2019, January 14). *Strength of legal rights index*
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IC.LGL.CRED.XQ?locations=NI-CR-1W&view=chart>
- The World Bank. (2021, January 12). *Intentional homicides (per 100,000 people) - Nicaragua, Costa Rica*.
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5?end=2021&locations=NI-CR&start=1990&view=char>
- Transparency International. (2022a, January 14). *Costa Rica*. <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/costa-rica>
- Transparency International. (2022b, January 14). *Nicaragua*.
<https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/nicaragua>
- Vilas, C. (2000). Neoliberalism in Central America. In J. A. Booth (Ed.), *Repression, Resistance, and Democratic Transition in Central America* (pp. 211-232). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Walker, T. W., & Armony, A. C. (2000). *Repression, Resistance, and Democratic Transition in Central America*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Whitehead, L., Schmitter, P. C., & O'Donnell, G. (2013). *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Latin America*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Williams, R. G. (2022). The Political Economy. In R. Holden (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Central American History* (pp. 253-284). Oxford University Press.