Preface

Latin America stands at a historical watershed. As the decade of the 1990s began, the last of the military regimes that rose to power in the 1960s and 1970s were replaced by civilian governments. Such transformations, along with similar movements toward democracy in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and even the Middle East, made democratization—or redemocratization—a topic with which even the proverbial man in the street was at least noddingly acquainted. But nodding acquaintance is insufficient for scholars, policymakers, and informed citizens, because the issue of consolidating democracy is one of immediate urgency.

This book explores a significant aspect of that issue in Latin America: civil-military relations. The five countries upon which this study focuses—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay—provide good instances of the internal dynamics of civil-military relations in the region. Because of their size or remoteness from the United States, their civil-military politics have been influenced primarily by internal factors rather than direct foreign pressure. In toto, the five contain a majority of Latin America’s population and account for the lion’s share of Latin America’s long-duration military governments over the past several decades. In addition, the armed forces of each country have retained significant influence after the transition to democracy.

Comparative and suggestive rather than definitive analyses of any particular country, the chapters in this book are organized around key issues and problems. I have used case studies to illustrate some of the dynamics inherent in the various areas of civil-military conflict. The book cannot provide a detailed road map to Latin America’s future, but civil-military relations in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay constitute a potentially important piece of the practical and theoretical puzzles posed by the imperative of consolidating democracy.

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