The dilemma of governance in Latin America

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Abstract

The last decades of the 20th century have seen the institutions of governance in Latin American countries affected by small macroeconomic achievements and reduced economic growth, and the development of an extremely fragile democracy. The implanting of the new model of neoliberal state consolidation has come at high cost, and has not produced either the expected strengthening in the political, economic and social spheres, or the expected gains in efficiency, equity and freedom. This so-called economic liberalization has generated institutional instability in the structure and functions of the state, limiting the reaches of democracy and legality, and ensuring that the effects of the associated managerial orientation which has transformed public administration are largely negative. Looking forward into the 21st century, a pessimistic prediction is that these tendencies will continue, producing similar unstable mixes of democratic populism and oligarchic pragmatism. More optimistically, the Latin American states may come to see that genuine social development is necessary for sustained economic growth, and introduce policies to achieve that outcome.