



# Press Freedom and Economic Development in Latin America 2008

*By Hernán Alberro*

The economy Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen revolutionized the concept of development by referring to it as "human development". This is how liberty became a central element of the process of development. Following this path, today many authors vigorously defend freedom of the press as an elementary base for development.

= Chile leads again the Press Freedom and Economic Development ranking for Latin America in 2008.

↓ Costa Rica suffered a strong decrease in the score but without losing the second position in the regional ranking.

↑ Peru slightly improved its position in the ranking due to the stagnation of Argentina, Brazil and the Dominican Republic.

↓ Argentina and Nicaragua are those who worsen most in their positions as well as in their scores.

= Cuba continues to be the last of the region while it finds itself on global level only above North Korea, on the bottom of the global ranking.

## Methodology

The annual report on Press Freedom and Economic Development in Latin America seeks to disentangle and analyze the relationship between indicators of press freedom, economic liberty and economic development in our region.

Thus, first a brief review is made on the situation of press freedom in Latin American countries using the annual report *Freedom of the Press 2008: A Global Survey of Media Independence* published by Freedom House. This study, one of the most complete and already for a long time existing ones, measures three aspects of press freedom: the legal environment, the political environment and the economic environment, being the second one the most important aspect weighing 40 per cent, while the others receive 30 % each. That's how the degree in which the exercise of journalism can be fully enjoyed is established. Here, freedom of the press is defined according to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers". The scale used by Freedom House ranges from 0 to 100, and the lower the score the better the situation of press freedom in the country during the previous year.

On the other hand, in order to know the level of economic freedom of each country, the annual study by the Heritage Foundation and Wall Street Journal, *Index of Economic Freedom 2008*, is used. In this edition the study continues implementing the changes of the previous edition, but also added some more information about the tax load for the people. Due to this change in the study, for its interannual comparison this report uses the updated data of 2007 with the information included in the 2008 index in order to avoid differences distorting the reality.

Heritage Foundation and Wall Street Journal understand that "the definition of economic freedom therefore encompasses all liberties and rights of production, distribution, or consumption of goods and services. The highest form of economic freedom provides an absolute right of property ownership, fully realized freedoms of movement of labor, capital, and goods, and an absolute absence of coercion or constraint of economic liberty beyond the extent necessary for citizens to protect and maintain liberty itself". This definition of economic freedom led to the modification of the ten components as follows: business freedom, trade freedom, monetary freedom, freedom from government, fiscal freedom, property rights, investment freedom, freedom from corruption, and labor freedom. Those ten aspects are considered of equal weight for the purpose of the index and are now qualified in a 0 to 100 scale where the higher the number, the higher the level of economic liberty.

Moreover, the level of wealth of each population is used as an indicator of economic development. Therefore the per capita power purchase parity (per capital PPP) annually measured by the World Bank is used.

Finally, these indicators are mixed into an indicator of press freedom and economic development in a scale ranging from 0 to 1 where the higher, the better the place occupied by the country in the ranking. Thus, if a country improves or deteriorates its score in any of the indicators, the impact will appear in the final result and can also be compared with the rest of the countries in order to allow a more complete view on the situation of press freedom and development in the region.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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### Press freedom and economic development in a historical perspective

Unfortunately there aren't any statistics allowing an analysis of the relation between the freedom of the press and development in an extended timeframe. But anyway it is very interesting to make a short historical analysis of the relation between those two factors in order to better understand their connection.

The period of the Enlightenment will serve as a starting point as this was the moment when liberties started to achieve a certain importance in the political and social world as well as in the intellectual sphere. So, for liberal authors of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the freedom of opinion was of great importance.

Initially, the idea was that this freedom served to maintain the order. Hence, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778) in *The Social Contract* assigns the role of the “censor” to the public opinion. Basically, its function is to censor the actions of the government with which the “general will” doesn't coincide.

Even before that, it is worth to consider the ideas of John Locke (1632 – 1704) about freedom of the press. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1693) he assumes that the freedom of the press is one of the necessary laws for the social order. And the fundamental importance of this order can be understood taking into consideration that at that time order was said to imply progress. Therefore one could say that the idea was that liberty in the end produced progress. In *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* (1784) Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) wonders about the question how people enlighten. That is where he presents an idea that later on will be broadly analysed by John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873) that “the public should enlighten itself is more likely; indeed, if it is only allowed freedom, enlightenment is almost inevitable”<sup>1</sup>.

In this sense also Mill considers that restricting free speech means harming the whole society and not only the person that is restricted individually. “The peculiarity of the evil consisting in preventing the expression of an opinion is that a robbery is committed towards the human race”<sup>2</sup>.

A key author in order to understand the process of installing modern democracies and the feelings and opinions that those aroused in Europe and the Western world is Alexis de Tocqueville (1805 – 1859). Being critical and distrustful towards the prevailing system in the United States, Tocqueville represents an interesting case because he already sees problems in freedom of opinion in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. “I confess that I don't profess to the freedom of the press this complete and instantaneous love that is usually awarded towards those awfully good things by their nature. I love it considering the evil things it avoids, not the good things it realizes”<sup>3</sup>.

Tocqueville represents therefore an opinion that will be very present at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is a fear of the proliferation of the freedom of the press and the press itself, accompanied by the understanding of its vital necessity for the progress.

The appearance of the “penny papers” in the United States and in a certain way also in the whole world caused a great commotion, not only because of its cheap price, but also because of its contents that now were much less sophisticated and more accessible for everybody. But journalists as well as intellectuals did not see this process of democratization of information in a positive way; instead, they perceived the penny papers as a cheap press of low quality that will lead to disorder, groundless discussions and to raising interest in vain questions. Therefore, one can say that with the appearance of the penny papers, i.e. when the press media started to become massive at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this idea that freedom of the press formed part of the order was diluting, as many people were afraid of the chaos which was supposed to be provoked by this freedom.

Nevertheless, even with all those fears that this freedom caused among many intellectuals and even journalists and media owners, a great number of them continued to maintain that anyway this freedom led to progress. “Without an absolute freedom of the press there can not be neither freedom nor progress” said Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811 – 1888), always adding his complaint that “with it the public order can hardly be maintained”<sup>4</sup>.

Now this consolidation of mass journalism that can be clearly observed since the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could be seen as the result of the societies' success of reaching a balance between order, freedom and development. Nevertheless, be this the situation or not, the reality is that this “balance” would not even continue until the middle of the century.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was going to bring a new concern and a new threat towards press freedom. With liberal democracies having been installed in the region and the world without even achieving the desired economic development, people started to consider the hypothesis that it was necessary to reach economic development before reaching a situation enjoying political liberties.

<sup>1</sup> KANT, Immanuel “¿Qué es la ilustración?” en *Filosofía de la Historia*. Ed. Nova. Buenos Aires: 1983.

<sup>2</sup> MILL, John Stuart *Sobre la libertad*. Primera Edición, Alianza Editorial, Buenos Aires: 1993.

<sup>3</sup> TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis de *La democracia en América*. Hyspamerica, Buenos Aires: 1985.

<sup>4</sup> JAKSIC, Iván, ed. *The Political Power of the Word. Press and Oratory in Nineteenth Century Latin America* Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, London: 2002.

At the same time, one should not forget that the strong presence of the Soviet Union and communism in the world with its model of media control and its supposed economic development served as an empiric evidence for those postulates<sup>5</sup>. Hence, during the Cold War, Latin America lived a period of debates and strong sufferings regarding freedom.

The idea behind the establishment of the dictatorships that threw their shadow over the region for a great part of the century was that democracy implied a certain disorder. The democratic political discussion, freedom of the press and the proliferation of different political parties were seen as obstacles for economic development. Consequently, there were strong and terrible dictatorships that transformed our region into a sort of laboratory testing the hypothesis.

Once the Berlin Wall fell down, the Cold War was over and the processes of democratization started in Latin America and some other countries in the world, a second period of freedom and democracy started. Consistent with this process, different intellectuals, thinkers and academics started to reconsider the classical texts of Enlightenment and by liberal authors of past centuries in order to find parallelisms and try to discern the future.

For sure one of the most prominent examples was the Indian economist and winner of the Nobel Prize Amartya Sen. First of all, Sen revolutionized the concept of development by referring to what later on was going to be called “human development”. Hence freedom started to occupy a central position for the process of development. “Development can be seen as an expansion process of real liberties that people enjoy”<sup>6</sup>.

A convincing way how Sen connected development with political liberties in order to dismiss the previous idea regarding democracy as an obstacle for development was the demonstration that there had never been a substantial famine in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press<sup>7</sup>.

Following this line, there are various authors nowadays defending press freedom tooth and nail as a fundamental element for development. One of the first and most important studies in this sense is the one by the Pippa Norris, researcher of the John F. Kennedy School of government at Harvard University, in *Giving Voice to the Voiceless*<sup>8</sup>. The author sustains that “the broad access to independent media is very closely related with systematic indicators of good governance and human development”.

In this same line and using similar indicators Daniel Kaufman realizes a study about the relation between human rights and development. Among other conclusions he holds up that “the advances regarding human rights of the second generation (socioeconomic rights and rights of economic development, also called “positive liberties”) are found to depend on human rights of the first generation. Consequently, there is not any empiric justification to reduce the priority level over first generation human rights – even if the questions of second generation human rights are seen as equal regarding their implications for general social wealth”<sup>9</sup>. Kaufman thus dismisses the ideas predominant during the seventies.

Nevertheless, one can not say that the balance was reached and that there are no new threats or worrying discourses at the horizon. While there are the cited authors, there are also authors like Ignacio Ramonet, former director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, who sustain that globalisation and with it economic freedom, are leading to an excessive monopolization of the communication media transforming the public debate into a unilateral discourse. As a solution, Ramonet not only proposes to restrict economic liberties and globalisation, but also launches the “great” idea of a worldwide censoring organism aiming at supervising the veracity of the media information. The latter, obviously, is a right of everybody, but it is important to distinguish that this right exists thanks to the existence of certain degrees of freedom of expression without which such an organisation would be impossible. With regard to restricting economic freedom it is fundamental to remember the sentence by Amartya Sen: “The markets are defensible based on the rights of the people (that must be free to make transactions), more than on its effects generating wealth”<sup>10</sup>. In other words, it is difficult to try to separate those liberties. This is the spirit leading this report, deeply understanding the connection between press freedom and development with the aim to better comprehend its behaviour and interrelation without forgetting the intrinsic importance of the first as a fundamental human right.

<sup>5</sup> DE SCHWEINITZ, Karl “Economic Growth, Coercion, and Freedom” en *World Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (Jan., 1957) The Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>6</sup> SEN, Amartya *Development as Freedom*. Anchor Books, New York: 2000.

<sup>7</sup> SEN, Amartya “Democracy as a Universal Value” en *Journal of Democracy* 10.3 (1999) pp. 3-17.

<sup>8</sup> NORRIS, Pippa *Giving Voice to the Voiceless. Good Governance, Human Development & Mass Communications*. Daft Version 2001. Shorenstein Center. John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

<sup>9</sup> KAUFMAN, Daniel *Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement* paper prepared for a conference co-sponsored by the Ethical Globalization Initiative and the NYU Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, New York: 2004. Revised Draft of December, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> SEN, Amartya “Markets and Freedoms: Achievements and Limitations of the Market Mechanism in Promoting Individual Freedoms” *Oxford Economic Papers*, New Series, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Oct., 1993), 519-541.

## Press Freedom

Last year has been characterized by a backward movement regarding the levels of press freedom in the whole world. Not only that, Freedom House also informs that the decreases are double as high as the advances that occurred all over the world. Latin America was not excluded of this sad tendency even though it is important to make clear that it is not the region with the strongest decline either.

Actually, contrary to the past year, this time there are more countries that did not suffer any modifications. This is the case of Ecuador, Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras, Paraguay and Venezuela, even though it could be clarified that this stability in the index does not imply that their had not been attacks towards press freedom, but that the threats towards the exercise of journalism have been maintained and in some cases even increased, but also in some cases like in Brazil where laws or judicial sentences favouring the freedom of expression have been announced.

In an already iterative situation the first three positions of the index of press freedom elaborated by Freedom House have maintained intact, with Chile occupying the first place and Costa Rica and Uruguay sharing the second. But at the top of the ranking there is the first piece of news which is the decline of Bolivia which this year shares the fourth position with Dominican Republic. Taking into consideration the events that lately occurred in the country governed by Evo Morales it is probable that it might be occupying the fifth or even sixth position next year. Next to Bolivia, also Peru suffered a significant decline as it is affected by a trouble threatening several countries of the region: drug trafficking.

The case that is becoming paradigmatic concerning the harassment of journalists by the organized crime linked with drug trafficking is Mexico. This country nowadays holds the sad title of being the country with the strongest decline in the region losing three points in the hands of those gangs. This causes that Mexico is the country in which most journalists die because of their work. The loss of score could be even worse if their had not been a legislative modification deleting all press crimes from its federal penal code.

On the other hand the greatest improvement took place in Haiti which was able to overcome Guatemala and Colombia in the ranking thanks to the investigations and trials against murderers of journalists in previous years and an improvement of institutional conditions. Unfortunately, the country governed by Alvaro Uribe broke its positive trend of the last years. This is not only related to FARC and paramilitaries but also to the verbal attacks of the Colombian president against those journalists writing or reporting not in a favourable way about the government, a custom that has become a fashion transcending borders and political colours.

The two countries that continue to occupy the last positions with quite some distance to the rest of the squad are Cuba and Venezuela. Nevertheless, the Caribbean island experienced a slight improvement thanks to the growing number of blogs that provide a certain space for free expression in Cuba. Anyway, Cuba continues to be the biggest prison for journalists in the region and the only country of the continent that expressively forbids the free practice of journalism. For its part, in the country governed by Hugo Chávez the closing of the TV channel RCTV and the bolivarian's efforts to control the press did not take away vigor of the communication media that far away from showing fear seem to encourage themselves, probably driven by the defeat suffered by Chávez in the referendum to modify the constitution: a reform that would have harshly reduced the freedom of expression.

An improvement equal to Cuba's was also lived by Argentina that - even if the president Néstor Kirchner, who handed over his position to his wife Cristina Fernández in December, never gave a press conference and did not hide his efforts to punish the opposition media by taking public ads away from them - advanced two points thanks to a juridical decision against these policies and a quite open policy giving licences to non-commercial community media. Hopefully this year after the press conferences given by the current president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner the country might improve a bit more although it is obvious that to the detriment of this improvement one could list the Observatory of

Press Freedom in Latin America according to Freedom House		
Country	2007	2008
Costa Rica	20	19
Chile	30	30
Uruguay	30	30
Bolivia	37	39
Dominican Rep.	40	39
Ecuador	41	41
Brazil	42	42
El Salvador	42	42
Nicaragua	42	43
Peru	42	44
Panama	43	44
Argentina	49	47
Mexico	48	51
Honduras	51	51
Haiti	59	56
Guatemala	59	58
Colombia	57	59
Paraguay	60	60
Venezuela	74	74
Cuba	96	94

Countries with less freedom of the press	6
Countries with more freedom of the press	6
Countries unchanged	8

Negative percentual variations	-24,63
Positive percentual variations	20,44

Discrimination in the Media that seemed to aim at pointing out media coverage not appreciated by the executive power. On the other hand, the probable treatment of a new law about radio and TV will also be important for the country's evaluation next year.

### Economic liberty

For Latin America, as well as for the rest of the world, the Index of Economic Freedom published by Heritage Foundation and Wall Street Journal stagnated. The number of countries who have improved regarding the liberty to realize economic operations equals the number of those that deteriorated in the region. But taking into consideration the extent of this decline one notices that the decline was more noticeable than the advances.

Outstanding is the case of Chile which apart from being the only Latin American country among the ten freest countries of the world achieved a slight improvement which is not easy as it already almost reached an 80 % of economic freedom. An opposite case is Cuba which even though it already has a percentage of less than 30 of economic freedom still continues to decline.

Even more worrying is the situation in Venezuela and Haiti. The country governed by Hugo Chávez with its expropriations and the increase of regulations is one of the countries who declined most in the region and the world. The case of Haiti, the poorest country of the world, is sadly famous. It is basically a failed state and therefore the freedom of trade and foreign investment are made difficult and corruption is abundant.

Much more pleasant are the cases of Colombia and Paraguay, the two countries with the greatest improvement in the region. In the first case it is about an administration who is still in the middle of negotiations in order to sign a free trade agreement with the United States and who has made great progress regarding economic opening, outstanding also for its ease to open companies and the flow of capital. Regarding Paraguay one can say that it showed great progress concerning freedom of trade, property rights and the reduction of corruption. Now, after the change of government and the end of the Colorado Party's hegemony, one has to wait to see which will be the advances or reverses that the new administration of Fernando Lugo will realize.

### A crocodile that falls asleep...

The complete ranking of Press Freedom and Economic Development 2008 in Latin America, so to say including press freedom, economic freedom and the per capita PPP, is again headed by Chile. The other country that could seem the great star of this year is Peru, adding this indicator to so many others who consider the strong and decisive progress towards development undertaken by the government of Alan García. Still, this is not totally accurate.

Even though it is true that Peru obtained a slight improvement in the ranking, the three positions it advanced compared with last year are not the merit of its achievements, but of the stagnation suffered by Argentina, Brazil and the Dominican Republic who definitely gave way to the Andean country. So, it is proven that in this area the popular proverb is valid that "the crocodile that falls asleep, is a handbag".

Economic Freedom in Latin America according to Heritage Foundation and Wall Street Journal	
Country	2008
Chile	79,8
El Salvador	69,2
Uruguay	68,1
Mexico	66,4
Costa Rica	64,8
Panama	64,7
Peru	63,5
Colombia	61,9
Guatemala	60,5
Paraguay	60,5
Honduras	60,2
Nicaragua	60,0
Dominican Rep.	58,5
Brazil	55,9
Ecuador	55,8
Argentina	55,1
Bolivia	53,2
Haiti	48,9
Venezuela	45,0
Cuba	27,5

Ranking of Press Freedom and Economic Development in Latin America				
Variación	Posición	País	2007	2008
=	1	Chile	0,558	0,563
=	2	Costa Rica	0,554	0,528
=	3	Uruguay	0,527	0,516
=	4	Mexico	0,457	0,448
=	5	El Salvador	0,456	0,447
=	6	Panama	0,452	0,444
↑3	7	Peru	0,433	0,434
=	8	Brazil	0,445	0,427
↓2	9	Argentina	0,450	0,426
↓1	10	Dominican R.	0,435	0,423
↑2	11	Ecuador	0,403	0,416
=	12	Bolivia	0,406	0,401
↓2	13	Nicaragua	0,422	0,399
=	14	Honduras	0,381	0,379
↓1	15	Colombia	0,387	0,376
=	16	Guatemala	0,365	0,361
=	17	Paraguay	0,349	0,356
=	18	Haiti	0,316	0,314
=	19	Venezuela	0,286	0,297
=	20	Cuba	0,122	0,149

But that is not the only reason why it is not that interesting to analyze the situation of Peru. The case of Peru is probably paradigmatic for a country in transition. It is about a country looking for consolidating its democracy after getting out of an authoritarian government that was considered to be market friendly less than one decade ago. The triumph of the market friendly Alan García and the defeat of Ollanta Humala marked a period of expectations as nobody knew what this president who had already governed the country between 1985 and 1990 with not at all encouraging results was going to do. Still, until this moment García has shown that he learned his lessons and tries to put Peru onto the same path as Chile in the region.

But as it is a country in transition one could expect that this process of changing entails strong pressure of interests that will not be costless. Unfortunately, in countries with weak institutions press freedom usually is one of the losers of those pressures of transition. So, also Peru experienced a decline in this aspect and one has to fear that this decline might be repeated next year. Those pressures very often imply demonstrations, protests and manifestations where very often the press is attacked, be it by the government forces or by demonstrators. Anyway, one could expect that the current president will put an end to the libel laws that are still in vigor in Peru and that damage so much the free practice of journalism, in the same way as he signed the Chapultepec Declaration promoted by the Inter-American Press Association.

On the other hand and as an evidence of this transition process, regarding economic freedom, the country governed by Alan García is one of those that showed a substantial improvement. And it is worth noting that the closure of the index by the Heritage Foundation was before the signing of the free trade agreement between Peru and the United States and of course also before the Andean country was awarded the Investment Grade by different international risk assessment companies.

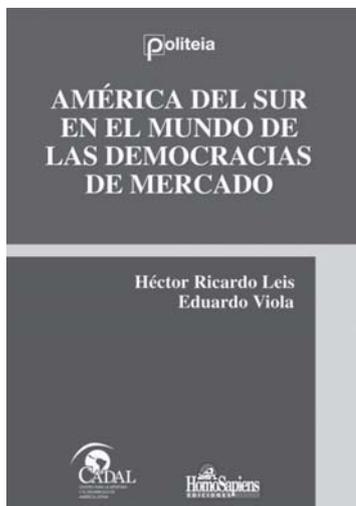
A case that could turn out more worrying is the one of Argentina who together with Nicaragua are those who declined the most in the ranking concerning its positions as well as in the score. As was already said, Argentina clearly stagnated. It improved slightly regarding its economic and press freedom after some years of permanent decline and there was a clear slowdown in the growth of its power purchase parity; that's why it seems to be left out in comparison with other countries.

Nicaragua, on its part, declined in all indicators, serving in a certain way as a paradigm for the hypothesis of this report that press freedom, economic freedom and economic development are strongly linked to each other.

Another interesting data that is revealed by the ranking of Press Freedom and Economic Development in Latin America is linked to the cases of the three countries that most improved their scores: Ecuador, Venezuela and Cuba. At first sight this result could attract attention as those three countries declined or maintained their position regarding press freedom as well as economic freedom. The positive final results are mainly due to the increase in oil price that allowed Venezuela and Ecuador to enjoy an important improvement in its indicators of wealth. This permitted Ecuador to advance positions in the ranking while it was not sufficient to improve Venezuela's position as it is only behind Haiti. The case of Cuba is a little more complex as its indicator of wealth is estimated and therefore quite dubious as there are no measurements of power purchase parity because of the low reliability of the statistics of the last remaining dictatorship in Latin America. In any case, according to official numbers, the country lived a period of economic growth surely with the known help of the government of Hugo Chávez who from Venezuela gives dozens of thousands of barrels of oil. This growth, together with the fact that the growth of the population almost equaled zero as indicated by the CEPAL, have a positive impact on the power purchase parity. This explains the improvement in the score of the ranking of Press Freedom and Economic Development. Nevertheless, Cuba continues to be the last of the region while it finds itself on global level only above North Korea, on the bottom of the ranking.

A similar but reverse case is Costa Rica who suffered a strong decline in the score without losing the second position in the regional ranking. Costa Rica improved as well in press as economic freedom, but suffered a strong decline in its power purchase parity, for sure due to the increase of the price of oil and commodities.

Those cases are clearly exceptional and for sure will not continue. Actually, one has to expect that the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian economy, and therefore also the Cuban, will strongly deteriorate this year if there is no new upturn oil prices.



## South America in a World of Market Democracies

Héctor Ricardo Leis and Eduardo Viola

“Eduardo Viola and Héctor Ricardo Leis took hands in. Analyzing the contemporary global system and the dominant position occupied in it by market democracies, would have been a beautiful job already. But they did more than this. Based on Brazilian, Argentine and Latin American experience, they showed how socio-political internal processes and anachronistic ideologies have repeatedly complicated an effective and realistic insertion in the international system”.

*Bolívar Lamounier,*

*Political Scientist , Director of AUGURIUM in San Pablo, Brazil,*

**Price: AR\$38**



## Fragile Latin American Democracies

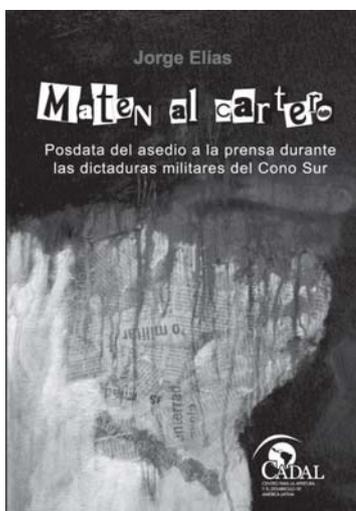
Angel Soto and Paula Schmidt (editores)

“In times full of social difficulties, this book is an invitation to consolidate democracies and market economies in Latin America, and to prevent from populisms that have rebirth strongly in the region. During its pages, one can read the pains of so many unfulfilled promises, a kind view on current times, and also a proposal for the future, with the hope of better possible times, that require conviction and work in favor of economic and political freedom”.

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*Universidad Católica de Chile*

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Jorge Elías

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*From the prologue by José Ignacio García Hamilton*

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