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Poli 423 Paper DRAFT

Title

\*Note: due the surplus my papers due this week I ran out of time to compare to other data sets, but I will for the final draft.\*

Democracy in Central America has shifted immensely in the past few decades. “1990, for the first time in their collective history, all five Central American countries were governed by civilian presidents who had assumed office as the result of elections. One of the main data errors that occur when testing the validity and reliability of this is called “data induced measurement error.” This kind of error occurs when analysts incorrectly code cases because of limitations in the underlying data on which they rely as description of empirical reality.” (Bowman, 2005, 940) “Neo Liberal economic reforms have placed significant pressure on traditional industrial relations systems throughout Latin America.” (Cook, 2002, 311) What is notable about Central America is that they underwent political regime change around the 1980s shifting from authoritarian regime rule to democracy. As such, with democratic structures set up, the region spearheaded economic development. The region of Latin America classified the development as “neo-liberal economic policies,” to appeal to greater amount of economic exports. (Cook, 2002, 312) Moreover, a pattern was noticed by political scientists. While the pattern of democratic changes was relatively similar through Central America- the adoption of economic policies varied from region. In other words, the reforms in labor laws shifted in each nation, and some adopted stricter or more lenient labor laws. In this paper, I will focus on the region of Central America, consisting of Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. As such, in this paper I will compare the *Freedom House* 2012/ 2013 dataset in focus; in comparison to the ratings given by *Coppedge-Reinecke* data set.

According to the Freedom House Dataset for 2012 Guatemala has remained “Partly Free” based on their measurements and has maintained a range of 3.5 out of 7 on their scale of Freedom. Partly Free, to freedom house is measured as “where there is a limited respect for political rights and civil liberties. Partly Free states frequently suffer from an environment of corruption, weak rule of law, ethnic and religious strife, and a political landscape in which a single party enjoys dominance

despite a certain degree of pluralism.” (Puddington, 2013, 4) Guatemala was established in 1839 and endured a history of dictatorship, foreign intervention, military coups, and guerrilla insurgencies.”(Freedom House) As previously, Guatemala shifted to civilian leadership around the 1980s in 1985. Guatemala has been classified as an electoral democracy. Since the adoption of democratic tendencies freedom house has stated their elections remain rather free and fair. Moreover, However, Guatemala remains one of the most violent countries in Latin America. Over 5,600 people were murdered during 2011, which actually represents a 5 percent decrease from 2010. Guatemala has improved in their political right from a rating of a 4 to a 3 in 2011. This is due to the “UN International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, which has aided in decreasing corruption, violence and organized crime.” (Freedom House)

Costa Rica on the other hand has a significant different rating that Guatemala. Similarly, Guatemala and Costa Rica are not far from each other on the point scale- there remains a significant difference of exercised freedom that exists in Costa Rica. As such, Costa Rica is argued as the example for the Central American region. Freedom House has distributed a fairly stable rating of 1 out of 7 in terms of political freedom, and has measured Costa Rica to be “Free” for several years. Costa Rica has a free press and free civil liberties of a rating of 1 as well. As well as Guatemala, Costa Rica exercises an electoral democracy- however, according to Freedom House; it is much more “Free” than Guatemala’s system. Moreover, Costa Rica has made new Democratic initiatives, including reform policies to include women’s participation political parties. Similarly, in for In 2010, Costa Rica made immense democratic progress by electing their first female President, Laura Chinchilla. However, “while the quality of life in Costa Rica is relatively high for the region, economic growth is hampered by the national debt, inflation, and cost-of-living increases.” (Freedom House) Moreover, Chinchilla has made economic strides in order to stabilize the economy. “Chinchilla signed free trade agreements with China in 2011, and Singapore in April 2010 in an effort to increase foreign investment and reverse the trend of growing poverty.” (Freedom House)

Belize is also considered free as Costa Rica in the Freedom Houses dataset. Belize has received a rating of “Free” for 2013, and its status has not changed much for many years. Belize has a different background, only gaining freedom and independence from Great Britain in 1981. Freedom House states that Belize has a rating of 1.5 out of 7. As such, the head of state is still the British Monarch, but exhibits a democratic electoral system. However one of the main problems that has existed within Belize is Government corruption, in particular Belize’s government has failed to accound for millions of dollars of national budgets. “Belize is the only country in Central America that is not a party to the UN Convention against Corruption.” (Freedom House) Belize has a free press, however if the press questions the government on their corrupted misuse of money, then journalists could spend time in jail. How is this free then according to Freedom House? Because this law hasn’t been used in recent years, Freedom House doesn’t see this as applicable though the law still exists. Citizens have the right of religion, academics and civil liberties with a rating of 2 out of 7. However, violent crime, money laundering, gang violence, and drug trafficking continued to be serious concerns in 2011. Belize now has the sixth highest homicide rate in the world. As such, violence towards women and children are of great concern, so then arugbly how come the civil liberties receive such a low rating?

In comparison to free countries of the region, Honduras is measured as “Partly Free” by Freedom House. Honduras received an overall rating of 4, which means it is in the middle of the measurement grade (3.0-5.0) of countries classified as “Partly Free.” Arguably, the years prior to 2009 had a slightly higher overall rating of 3. In 2009 Honduras suffered from a coup which decreased the rating to 4. Honduras attempted to regain its democratic institutions in 2011 after the initial chaos of the coup. However Honduras still “continued to suffer from human rights violations, impunity, and corruption, and crime rates increased dramatically, it one of the most violent countries in the world.” (Freedom House) The military has had significant domination in the government, and only until 1999 did the first president of Honduras elect officials other than the military. Comparatively, Honduras is not an electorial democracy, a president is elected for a single 4 year term. As such, in the June 2009 coup, the elections they took place in a climate of severely compromised civil liberties and press freedoms, which compromised its status as an electoral democracy. Political violence occurs at escalating rates during and after elections. The freedom of the Press has been considered free. “However, since the 2009 coup, authorities have systematically violated the constitution’s press freedom guarantees.” (Freedom House) As such, government officials of Honduras have been found to be part of the illegal drug trade, confirming that corruption is happening at a political governmental level. We can see this in their weak and unstable Judiciary, Police and the Ministry of Human Rights and Justice institutions. Honduras is considered to have one of the highest murder rates in the world.

Nicaragua, in 2012 decreased in the Political Rights rating from a 4 to a 5, hovering on the border of Political Rights in Nicaragua being considered as “Not Free.” However, Freedom House declares that Nicaragua is an overall “Partly Free” country of the region with an overall rating of 4.5. Since its establishment of 1838 Nicaragua has been plagued by dictatorships until 1979 when “Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), a leftist rebel group, overthrew the authoritarian regime of the Somoza family.” (Freedom House) Even though this part of the region is slightly less free than Honduras; Nicaragua has implemented a successful electoral democracy. “Nicaragua’s political rights rating declined from 4 to 5 in 2012 and 2013 due to shortcomings regarding the constitutionality of Daniel Ortega’s presidential candidacy.” There have been reports of irregularities, and absences of transparency throughout the electoral process.” (Freedom House) One of the reasons why the Political and Civil Liberties ratings are so low lead to the notion of the escalating amount of human trafficking that goes on in Nicaragua. The government attempts to contain this through their 2010 law to include human trafficking as organized crime- thus trying to contain the illegality. Moreover the constitution calls for a free press but “allows some censorship and privatization of broadcasting.” “Journalists have received death threats, and some have been killed in recent years.” (Freedom House) Arguably, this effect does not rely on an ability to exercise of the rights to free press, and classify media as “free.”

Panama is classified as “Free” by Freedom House and is comparable to the rating also given to Costa Rica. Panama was part of Columbia until 1903. Since then, there have been internal struggles to implement democracy. Costa Rica has struggled with military rule. Furthermore, 1968 marked the end of the civilian led government. Interrupting this was a military coup. Moreover, internal struggles reoccurred in 2011 when the Alliance for Change Coalition collapsed. As such, Panama is considered a comparable electoral democracy as well. Furthermore, though Panama is considered free, the Civil Liberties, freedom of the press is considered to be not as free on the scale rating it a 2 out of 7. Freedom of the press continued to be infringed after 2011, because most media outlets for the country are privately owned. Another problem is that like other Central American countries in this region study, Panama's police system remains internally corrupt, and the threat of military rule still remains as a threat.