

# Becoming an American Politologist

*by Alfred G. Cuzán*

I was ten years old in January 1959 when Fidel Castro, sporting green fatigues as he would for the next fifty years, atop a tank rode triumphantly into Havana. Speaking at the Presidential Palace a day or two later, someone released a flock of white doves. One landed on his shoulder. For many of us, it was a sign from above, a promise of better things to come.

Within a year the illusion was shattered. Castro's rhetoric grew increasingly menacing. In July the provisional president sought asylum in an embassy. In October one of Castro's *comandantes* whom he had appointed military governor of Camagüey province resigned. Castro had him arrested, tried for treason, and sentenced to twenty years in prison. Another *comandante* disappeared without a trace. Organized mobs demanded *paredón* ("to the wall," i.e., execution by firing squad) for "counter-revolutionaries." In February of 1960, a high-ranking Soviet representative arrived in Havana. The drift of events left no doubt where Castro was headed. An exodus of Cubans began in earnest.

My parents tried to gain admission to the U.S., but the queue around the embassy was so long they never got to the door before the Eisenhower administration broke off relations. An alternative escape route was through Mexico. So just days before the ill-fated expedition of Brigade 2506 hit the beaches at the Bay of Pigs in south-central Cuba, we arrived in Veracruz. Five months later, green cards in hand, we arrived in Miami just as the new school year was starting. In the next several years, not without difficulty, I learned English, graduated from high school, and gained admission to the University of Miami.<sup>1</sup>

At UM three experiences made a deep impression on me. In an introductory economics course, I beheld a graphical representation of the law of supply and demand. It was as if the proverbial light bulb had lit above my head, so mesmerized was I by its beauty and elegance. The second was reading John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* in a seminar taught by Professor Ramon Lemos. The third was a close relationship with two professors in the Department of

Government, Vergil Shipley and Bernie Schechterman. I assisted both on different projects and they in turn welcomed me into their homes, served as character references when I applied to become a U.S. citizen in 1969,<sup>2</sup> and submitted letters in support of my applications to enter a doctoral program. Vergil and Bernie gave me a taste of what an academic life could be like, a wonderful gift.

Several universities accepted me, but it was to Indiana University that I went.<sup>3</sup> I had applied to IU because Bernie had gone there. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the department had on its faculty two political economists, Vincent and Elinor Ostrom. That was an unexpected bonus, given my secondary interests in economics. Through them I encountered the work of Gordon Tullock and other contributors to the Public Choice school. But it was a very different book on Vincent Ostrom's reading list that made perhaps the most lasting impact: W. Ross Ashby's *Design for a Brain*, an inquiry into what makes for a stable system. I do not recall whether I was drawn to it because of my concerns about Latin American instability or the other way around. But reading it prompted an intuition: that Latin American dictatorships suffered from "hidden political instability."

I had no means, let alone sufficient understanding of the phenomenon or ways of going about testing the idea. It is only recently that I was reminded of it when I showed that there appears to be a "law of political gravity" affecting all incumbents, in dictatorships and democracies alike. The moment a competi-

itive election is held in a regime transition, the ruling party invariably sees the artificially high support claimed during the dictatorship plunge, so much so that many are reduced to marginal status or even disappear.<sup>4</sup>

For a dissertation, the same interest led me to compare two Central American countries, Costa Rica, known for its democratic stability, and El Salvador, a typical Latin American specimen of political turbulence. My purpose was to evaluate the idea that to maintain political stability a balance between the structure and the scope of government has to be maintained. If one goes up, the other must fall, otherwise the stress on the system threatens its survival. I imagined that this relationship amounted to something like a law of politics, and thus the title of my prospectus and the dissertation that followed included the phrase "the law of centralization and scope."

As it happens, in *The Politics. A Treatise on Government*, Aristotle discussed the operation of this "law":

[T]he stability of a kingdom will depend upon the power of the king's being kept within moderate bounds; for by how much the less extensive his power is, by so much the longer will his government continue; for he will be less despotic and more upon an equality of condition with those he governs; who, on that account, will envy him the less.

It was on this account that the kingdom of the Molossi continued so long; and the Lacedaemonians from their government's being from the beginning divided into two parts, and also by the moderation introduced into the other parts of it by Theopompus, and his establishment of the ephori; for by taking something from the power he increased

*the duration of the kingdom*, so that in some measure he made it not less, but bigger. (The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Politics*, by Aristotle, Book V, Chapter XI; emphasis added).

In sum, Aristotle said that by reducing the scope and dividing the power, i.e., decentralizing his regime, Theopompus made it more long-lasting, a variant on the kind of relationship I had intuited.

We spent a year in Costa Rica and five months in El Salvador, returning to Miami in June 1974, where we spent almost two years while I wrote the dissertation under the long-distance direction of David Collier (who soon thereafter left for UC Berkeley), and applied for jobs. Needless to say, the thesis could not accomplish what I had hoped it would do, but it did make a reasonable case for the proposition that Costa Rica's more decentralized political structure relative to El Salvador's had something to do with its superior performance in satisfying public demands. It was approved in 1975.<sup>5</sup>

The following spring I received an offer from New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. My assignment was to contribute to the graduate program in public administration and teach the typical undergraduate courses in American politics. Building on my economics and public choice background, I developed a course in political economy. Also, not having lived in an arid climate before, I became interested in the development of rules for appropriating water in the American West. In that history I saw support for Locke's theory of property in

chapter V of his *Second Treatise*, an idea I developed in "Appropriators vs. Expropriators: The Political Economy of Water in the West."<sup>6</sup>

Relatedly, I attended a workshop on water resources in Austin, Texas, where I met Richard J. Heggen, then an assistant professor of Civil Engineering at the University of New Mexico. That meeting led to an unusual collaboration that has spanned several decades. Our most significant early publications are "A Micro-Political Explanation of the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution"<sup>7</sup> and "A Fiscal Model of Presidential Elections in the United States, 1880-1980."<sup>8</sup> More about our collaboration presently.

Also at NMSU, reading and thinking about anarchy and the state in the libertarian literature, it dawned on me that, as the eponymous phrase in the articles that followed have it, we never really get out of anarchy altogether.<sup>9</sup> There, too, collaborating on two papers with Cal Clark that, as it happened, never made their way to print, I gained a new appreciation of the value of statistics in testing hypotheses about political activity, something I had been unreasonably skeptical about in graduate school. It was at NMSU, too, that I produced a paper on "political profit." I sent it, among other journals, to *The Journal of Economics and Sociology*, edited by Will Lissner. Lissner was a model editor. Expertly, patiently, and with encouragement, he recommended that I, then a green assistant professor starting out, do additional readings to buttress my case, and otherwise guided me into converting

my rough paper into two articles, what became “Political Profit: Taxing and Spending in the Hierarchical State,” and “Political Profit: Taxing and Spending in Democracies and Dictatorships.”<sup>10</sup>

In 1980, I accepted a position at The University of West Florida. Soon after my arrival, I made a fortunate find: Charles “Mike” Bundrick, a mathematician and statistician, who in subsequent years coauthored many of my articles on American presidential elections and Latin American politics until a few years after he retired.<sup>11</sup>

In 2004, I ran into a review of Ray Fair’s *Predicting Presidential Elections and other Things* by J. Scott Armstrong, an expert on forecasting and marketing at the Wharton School. Scott liked the book but lamented that there was no policy variable in Fair’s model. I emailed Scott, attaching one of the articles on the fiscal model, and he responded with a surprising proposition: Let’s create a website to predict the 2004 presidential election by combining forecasts from different sources, including polls, the Iowa Electronic Market, forecasting models by Fair and others by political scientists, and a panel of invited experts on American elections who did not use a forecasting model. I agreed, provided we could interest Randall J. Jones, Jr., whose book, *Who Will Be in the White House* (2001), I had recently read. Randy liked the idea, and we were off.

Thus the PollyVote was born. Among the forecasting models included was the first prospective prediction made with the fiscal model. As it turned out, it was

one of the most accurate that year.<sup>12</sup> For the 2008 election, a fourth member joined the PollyVote team, the German scholar Andreas Graefe. Eventually he assumed responsibility for the website and took the lead in authorship of papers and articles by the foursome, plus a book chapter that followed.<sup>13</sup>

The work on the PollyVote accomplished two purposes. One was to demonstrate the value of combining forecasts for greater accuracy, something that had long been advocated by Armstrong. The other was to promote greater attention to my work on the fiscal model and “laws of politics.” Recall that as early as my undergraduate years I was intrigued by the economic *laws* of supply and demand. Ever since, I wanted to see something similar in political science.

While in Estonia on a Fulbright in 2016, I took a stab at it under the title, “Some Principles of Politics.” Once back home, in August 2016, I searched for a journal that I thought would take it and found *Libertarian Papers*. In November, I heard from the editor, Matthew McCaffrey. The paper had received one-half thumbs up and one down without formal comments. McCaffrey, as good an editor as Will Lissner, thought enough of the paper to encourage me to revise it and respond to the reviewer who believed that it had potential to make a contribution. I worked on it for several months. In July 2017 “Some Principles of Politics” saw the light of day.<sup>14</sup>

By this time, I thought the two lines of work, on “principles” and “laws” of politics, were ready to be enlarged and

deepened into a book-length synthesis. In 2019, an opportunity arose when I was asked to review a book proposal submitted to Routledge. I did so and by return email the editor asked if I or anyone else I knew was interested in working on a book. Indeed, I was. So, during a year-long sabbatical, I spent 2020-21 (the “Year of Covid”), writing, revising, and proofreading what became *Laws of Politics: Their Operations in Democracies and Dictatorships* (Routledge 2022).

Also, that year I published a related article, “The First Two Laws of Politics: Nannestad and Paldam’s ‘Cost of Ruling’ Revisited.”<sup>15</sup> In 2022 and into 2023, Richard and I were hard at work again. Following our work revisiting the fiscal model that Cal Clark invited us to contribute to what turned out to be his last book, Richard took an interest in the election data I had accumulated. Already, our renewed collaboration has yielded three publications.<sup>16</sup>

Thinking back, I see that my breakthroughs in publishing occurred with editors willing to take risks, who either made their decisions on their own or who did not feel bound head and foot by nay-saying reviewers: Murray Rothbard (*Journal of Libertarian Studies*), Will Lissner (*American Journal of Economics and Sociology*), Gordon Tullock (*Public Choice*), John Baden (special issue, *Western Political Quarterly*), R. Gordon Hoxie (*Presidential Studies Quarterly*), M. J. Peterson (*Polity*), Arturo Valenzuela (*Latin American Research Review*), Jaime Suchlicki (*Cuban Affairs*), Matthew McCaffrey (*Libertarian Papers*).

This is not to say that I didn’t have troubles with editors, the absolute worst being an episode with Irving Louis Horowitz, editor of *Society*. In the summer of 1992, on an NEH fellowship, I had written a long critique of the political resolutions of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) for a seminar for college teachers directed by Joel Best at Southern Illinois University.<sup>17</sup> I sent the paper to various people I thought would be interested. Horowitz responded positively, not to say enthusiastically, encouraging me to submit an abridged version for publication in the journal. So I did.

Shortly after that, I got a letter from him that was rather perplexing. He said he was sending the article for review, which was fair enough, but his words and tone gave me the impression that he was having second thoughts. I gave him a call to see what was going on, and the impression was reinforced. In comparison with his first letter, he seemed to have taken a 180-degree turn. But this was nothing compared to the review and Horowitz’ cover letter. Both were outrageous. I did a slow burn and set about to rebut it all point by point.<sup>18</sup> The story has a happy ending, however. Horowitz made one helpful suggestion, namely that I submit the article to *Academic Questions*. Which I did. But not without sending a copy to Paul Hollander,<sup>19</sup> with whom I had corresponded in the past, mentioning in passing that I had submitted it to AQ, which published it.<sup>20</sup>

I think he in turn took it upon himself to recommend the article, which if true was very kind of him. But that was not all. Some time later, I received a letter from the first reviewer apologizing profusely for his review and saying he had changed his mind, that he now thought the article should be published. I have a vague memory that we may have crossed paths subsequently at a conference, at which time he said some more nice things to me, but I can't say for sure. (A coda: I published another critique of LASA, this time focusing on its resolutions on Castro's Cuba.<sup>21</sup> The editor of the monograph series, Adolfo Leyva, innocent of my history with Horowitz, sent him a copy. Horowitz called it a "major statement.")

I am often asked if I have visited Cuba. No, I have not. I refuse to grant the dictatorship authority over me and subject myself to their power. The Castro dynasty is a criminal syndicate, a corrupt and cruel gerontocracy that has made life miserable for millions of people, and not just in the island. They have divided families, driven more than two million Cubans from their homeland, executed tens of thousands, run hundreds of thousands through their prison and forced labor camps, squandered the country's wealth and patrimony, and made themselves rich and famous while running the country's economy into the ground. "But it wouldn't be dangerous for you, would it?" I was asked recently by a friend, also a fellow Fulbrighter whose appointment in Tartu coincided with mine. "It depends how seriously they take some of my writings," I replied.

A few years ago, one of our graduate students, who was being wined and dined at several universities trying to recruit him for their doctorate programs, related that in one of those visits someone remarked that I deserved credit for being so clear-eyed about the Castro regime. But it did not take any special talent to diagnose the true nature of the dictatorship. It more likely had something to do with the willing blindness and complicity of silence on the part of many academics, including some very accomplished ones, in the face of so much falsehood and wishful thinking spread by committed leftists, presumably for fear of being blacklisted by the powers that be at foundations, conferences, and journals.<sup>22</sup>

One reason I decided to pursue a doctorate in political science was because of my belief that the discipline was undeveloped relative to economics, and I wanted to see what I could do to move it forward. I think that my publications during the last decade, solo or with Richard Heggen, already cited, may well constitute a modest step in that direction. I want to continue pursuing that path for what is left of my working years, without neglecting opportunities, for the sake of truth and justice, of doing my bit to expose the Castro regime for what it is.<sup>23</sup>

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1. I wrote about the early years in Miami, including my difficulties with learning English and other matters that overlap with the present narrative, in "Bridging Two Cultures and Two Disciplines," in Howard J. Wiarda (Ed.), *Policy Passages. Career Policies for Policy Wonks* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002): 185-193.
2. To do so I renounced Cuban citizenship. I do not approve of "dual citizenship" or of automatic citizenship by virtue of birth.
3. A few days after arriving on campus I met Linda Mary née Cipolla. We were married two years later. Paraphrasing what President Calvin Coolidge said about his own wife, for more than half a century she has borne with my infirmities while I have rejoiced in her graces.
4. "Five Laws of Politics," and "Five Laws of Politics: A Follow-Up," both in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, respectively, 48, no. 3 (2015): 415-419 and, 52 no. 3 (2019): 457-64, and the aforementioned 2022 book.
5. The dissertation committee consisted of David Collier (chairman), Alfred Diamant, John Gillespie, and the economist James Witte. All but Collier have passed away. Out of this publication came my first academic publication, *A Tale of Two Sites: Political Structure and Policy Performance in Costa Rica and El Salvador*. Technical Papers Series, No. 12, Austin: University of Texas, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1977.
6. In Terry Anderson, (Ed.), *Water Resources: Bureaucracy, Property Rights and the Environment*. Ballinger Press, 1983, Chapter 1.
7. *Latin American Research Review*, 17 (2) (1982): 156-170.
8. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 16, no. 1 (1984): 98-108.
9. "Do We Ever Really Get Out of Anarchy?" *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 3, no. 2 (1979): 151-158. Three decades later a new editor invited me to revisit it: "Revisiting 'Do We Ever Really Get Out of Anarchy?'" *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 22, no. 1 (2010): 3-21.
10. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, respectively, 40, no. 3 (1981): 265-275 and 40, no. 4 (1981): 329-340.
11. Among them the following stand out: "Presidential Popularity in Central America: Parallels with the United States," *Political Research Quarterly*, 50, no. 4 (1997): 833-849, and "Deconstructing the 2004 Presidential Election Forecasts: The Fiscal Model and the Campbell Collection Compared," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 38, no. 2 (2005): 255-262.
12. Although the model accounts for 80 percent of re-elections and defeats over more than a century of elections, its record at forecasting the actual vote the incumbent receives is not impressive. See "The Campbell Collection of Presidential Election Forecasts, 1984-2016: A Review," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 54, no. 1 (2021): 99-103.
13. I formally "retired" from the PollyVote in 2020, and Scott and Randy have passed away. Andreas has developed it much further than the original version.
14. *Libertarian Papers. A Journal of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics*, 9, no. 2 (2017): 161-204.
15. *Acta Politica*, 57 (2022): 420-430
16. Richard J. Heggen and Alfred G. Cuzán, "Incumbent Party Reelection in Australia, Canada, and the United States: An Exponential Decay Model," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 55, no. 3 (2022): 490-496. Richard J. Heggen and Alfred G. Cuzán, "A Geometric Model of Elections in Five Federal Democracies" *Statistics, Politics and Policy*, 15, no. 3 (2024): 273-86. Alfred G. Cuzán and Richard J. Heggen, "A Cruise and Crash Model of the Cost of Ruling," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion, and Parties*, (2023): 1-16.
17. The prior decade I had published a series of articles and essays on the Sandinistas of Nicaragua, their counterparts in El Salvador, and their fellow travelers among Latin Americanists and the media. A few are available on my webpage.
18. The complete correspondence is available electronically at the Penn State University Library Digital Collection of Horowitz Transaction Publishers Archives, <https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/transaction/search/searchterm/cuzan>.
19. His *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928-1978* (Oxford University Press, 1981) I greatly admired.
20. "The Latin American Studies Association vs. The

United States: The Verdict of History," *Academic Questions*, 7, no. 3 (1994): 40-55.

21. *Dictatorships and Double-Standards: The Latin American Studies Association on Cuba*, Miami, FL: Endowment for Cuban American Studies, The CubanAmerican National Foundation, Paper No. 13, 1995.
22. The publication of "Revolutionary' Fascism: A Review of Jorge Edwards' *Persona Non Grata*" (*Libertarian Forum*, January/February 1980) led one academic to say that he did not wish to be "associated" with it and, by implication, with me. Three decades later I returned to Edward's book in "Totalitarianism in the Tropics. Cuba's 'Padilla Case' Revisited."
23. The Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE), which meets in Miami every summer, has been a favorite forum.