

Building Sustainable Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean: A democratic appraisal of the Escazu Agreement

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In 2018, Latin American and Caribbean states finalized negotiations on the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (the Escazú Agreement). In this paper I analyze the potential of this agreement to contribute to building sustainable democracies in Latin America. I do so in a way that considers the particular theories and practices of democracy in this region, while also connecting these with insights from diverse theories of democracy and the environment. Drawing on the principle of “demodiversity” (Sousa Santos & Avrizer 2007), I argue that to achieve its democratic objectives, the agreement should be implemented in ways that recognize and value democratic diversity. I identify two particular aspects of existing implementation plans that can be designed in ways that recognize and value demodiversity: (1) the earth defenders forum, and (2) the compliance mechanism. My argument charts a course between those who celebrate legally binding access rights as an unequivocal victory for environmental democracy (e.g. Bárcena et al. 2021) and those who argue that the agreement’s focus on access rights is a regressive distraction that will delay effective protection of human rights and the environment (Roa-García y Milena Murcia-Riaño. 2021). There is considerable reason to doubt the commitment and sincerity of ratifying states: cases of cooptation and inconsequential participation abound. The Escazu Agreement might simply reproduce these deeply unjust experiences, but it also presents opportunities for making authorities accountable for cosmetic compliance. Ultimately, the agreement may contribute to existing efforts to build sustainable democracy in Latin America.

Biography

Hayley Stevenson is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, in Buenos Aires. Her research crosses the areas of global governance, environmental politics, green political economy, and democratic theory. She is the author of *Global Environmental Politics: Problems, Policy and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* (with John S. Dryzek, Cambridge University Press, 2014), and *Institutionalizing Unsustainability: The Paradox of Global Climate Governance* (University of California Press, 2013).