PANEL

Security for Americas discussed

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An international panel of three speakers discussed the new focus of security in a post Sept. 11, 2001, world on Friday in a presentation at the Vanderbilt Law School.

"Law is no longer insular," said Professor Vera Kutzinski, who introduced the panel. "We are part of a larger global community and law should encompass that view. We need to partner with others to establish a better world order."

Kutzinski, who is the director of the Vanderbilt Center for the Americas, also provided a brief history of the security debate in the Americas.

Speaker Mauricio Hernando Sacasa, a Norwich attorney and diplomat, described the new model for security, which focuses on cooperation among the Central American states and democracy as key components of security.

This redefinition of security shifts the focus away from military security to what is called "human security," which highlights democracy as a necessary prerequisite to security. This new, multidimensional approach has many factors that one would not consider traditional "security" issues.

"The main points of human security," Sacasa said, speaking in Spanish, "are human rights, education, alleviation of poverty, social and judicial equality, participation in the global market, democratization and even preservation of the environment."

Parallels Dinesh Agarwa, an assistant professor of political science as well as research coordinator of the Latin American Popular Opinion Project, explained that the goal of LAPOP was to find survey-based explanations for the many setbacks to democratization that have occurred in the past 10 years.

"In the last 20 years the problems that Latin America has had include executive coup d'etat, existence of elected presidents and election of former authoritarian leaders."

We want to find out why this has happened," Agarwa said.

"LAPOP randomly sampled approximately 10 percent of the population of several Latin American countries and found several correlations that can help pinpoint why democratization has been so difficult in Latin America." The reasons include: lack of support for democracy, conflict between the institutions of government and the movement for social and education.

"People in Latin America are disenchanted by democracy," Agarwa said. "The people have to cooperate for democracy to work. It's what the point of having elections, for example, if people don't vote?"

The final speaker, Elizabeth Vivas, a Salvadoran attorney and international law advisor to the Supreme Court of El Salvador, spoke on the devastating effect of corruption on democracy and described several new enforcement mechanisms to fight it.

"Corruption is not just a local phenomenon," Vivas said, speaking in Spanish. "It transcends barriers. It affects the very organization that should be promoting democracy — the government."

The panel was sponsored by the Latin American Law Society, the Law School Office of Student Affairs and Vanderbilt's Center for the Americas, which studies all regions of America and brings together scholars whose work is of shared interest to the people of the Americas.

The event was organized by Gloria Gutierrez, a Nicaragua attorney and Vanderbilt law student, and was free and open to the public.