FORUM

LASA**2023**

América Latina y el Caribe: Pensar,
Representar y Luchar por los Derechos

IN THIS ISSUE

Carta de la presidenta

por **Margarita López Maya** | Universidad Central de Venezuela

El Congreso de Vancouver se aproxima, y luego de dos años de siembra hemos producido múltiples frutos que están a punto de madurar. El trabajo ha sido continuo e inspirador, una gran aventura académica. En lo personal, presidir una asociación como LASA ha sido un desafío y un honor. Cuando se abra el encuentro en Vancouver todas y todos podrán evaluar lo alcanzado.

El tema "Pensar, representar y luchar por los derechos" guio nuestro trabajo en todas las áreas que corresponden a la presidencia. Seguimos los constantes retrocesos políticos e institucionales, las recurrentes violaciones a los derechos básicos y, en particular, el notorio debilitamiento del derecho a la libertad académica en algunos países. Los retrocesos democráticos también son tendencia mundial. Entre el declive o el colapso de regímenes democráticos, y la diversificación de estrategias autoritarias entre los mandatarios de regímenes híbridos, el panorama se ve complejo y retador. Señala el artículo de Héctor Briceño de este, nuestro último dossier, que de 88 países que transitaron a la democracia en la tercera ola, 31 han regresado al autoritarismo.

La academia y sus miembros no han dejado de producir diagnósticos sobre las causas de este fenómeno y propuestas para revertirlo. En el Congreso tendremos oportunidad de escuchar y leer esta producción, mucha de la cual se coloca en las fronteras del conocimiento abriendo nuevos caminos. En todo momento, tanto en estos LASA Forum, en los LASA Dialogues que organizamos y en mensajes en las redes sociales que hemos impulsado, nuestro propósito fue visibilizar la situación y difundir la producción que intenta dar respuestas, acogiendo toda corriente de pensamiento que respete el pluralismo y los derechos de los otros.

También hemos puesto la mirada en el fortalecimiento de LASA, amenazados sus miembros por un contexto de retrocesos de derechos y crisis económicas, se vienen achicando presupuestos de universidades y centros de investigación. Por ello, este año pusimos a prueba la modalidad *all-access* de registro y membresía, que abarató para muchos el costo de pertenencia a la asociación. Tocará en el corto plazo evaluar su idoneidad. También, nos enfocamos en informar extensamente al Comité Ejecutivo de la situación de las finanzas, de la propiedad en Pittsburgh, donde se inauguraron las nuevas oficinas de la Asociación y el Centro Cultural de América Latina, y revisamos la situación del personal. En este LASA Forum y en el anterior se publican informes de la dirección ejecutiva y de la tesorería sobre estos temas buscando despejar dudas, sembrar confianza y promover transparencia.

Los premios que repartimos cada año, diez en total, ya han sido anunciados. Mi respeto y admiración por estos colegas. Va a ser un honor otorgarles sus merecidos reconocimientos en Vancouver. También está listo y esperando la apertura del Congreso, el festival documental que expondrá virtualmente 66 documentales, 24 de los cuales se podrán ver en sala en el congreso. También están los preparativos en marcha de la Feria de Libros con novedades, clásicos y otras publicaciones.

Como eventos especiales tenemos diez sesiones presidenciales, que se desarrollarán con un formato de mesa redonda. Estamos entusiasmados con traer académicos, activistas y políticos que han tomado el pulso a los problemas de la región. No dejen de asistir, son oportunidades únicas para escuchar lo que pasa, de primera mano. En la carta anterior mencionamos ya varios. Añadamos la sesión dedicada a la conmemoración de los 50 años del derrocamiento en Chile del presidente Salvador Allende, donde participarán su hija, Isabel Allende, y el que fuera dirigente estudiantil de las protestas de 2012, Noam Titelman. Otra, es la mesa sobre negociaciones políticas para la paz, donde intervendrán activistas de larga trayectoria en estos procesos. Este evento, coordinado por Mark Freeman, está copatrocinado entre LASA y el Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT). En otra, se tratará el complejo problema de la desigualdad, discriminación y futuro de los países centroamericanos, coordinado por la profesora Montserrat Sagot del Centro de Investigación en Estudios de la Mujer de Costa Rica. También se desarrollará una sesión conmemorativa de los 40 años de la Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación de Perú, coordinado por la profesora Jo-Marie Burt, nuestra vicepresidenta. Una sesión sobre el estado del arte populista, coordinado por la profesora Yanina Welp, directora de programa de este Congreso. Y no podía faltar, una sesión que revisará los tumultuosos cambios hegemónicos que están ocurriendo en el mundo y qué rol —si es que alguno— juega allí América Latina y el Caribe. Esta sesión está coordinada por el profesor de la Universidad de Lisboa, Andrés Malamud. Adicionalmente, preparamos algunas actividades de socialización y entretenimiento, que anunciaremos más adelante.

El último LASA Forum de mi presidencia, coordinado por Héctor Briceño y Yanina Welp, se titula "El futuro de la democracia" y se dedica a reflexionar sobre las características del retroceso democrático latinoamericano en un escenario global de autocratización. Sin ser ajena a esta tendencia mundial, América Latina la experimenta en el marco de sus propias oscilaciones históricas y con diferencias pronunciadas entre países. Los artículos que se incluyen en el volumen identifican no sólo los elementos que dan cuenta de una crisis sino también aquellos que muestran señales de resiliencia. Se ponen en foco las claves de la erosión de la democracia, entre las que destacan la emergencia de liderazgos autoritarios y la profunda insatisfacción con estados ineficientes y capturados. También se analizan estrategias de la oposición para, con mayor o menor éxito y apego a las reglas, detener los liderazgos abocados a la concentración de poder. Otros aspectos, como el papel jugado por la comunicación digital canalizando el odio y produciendo realidades falsas, la evolución de la cultura política o la emergencia de liderazgos de la derecha radical también son tratados.

Sólo me queda reiterar mi agradecimiento a todas y todos los que contribuyeron este año en hacer realidad las innumerables actividades y gestiones que garantizan la continuidad y el fortalecimiento de LASA. Sus aportes fueron clave del éxito que está por verse en el congreso y posteriormente. Especial gracias a mi equipo en la dirección académica y al tren administrativo de la asociación. Comprometidas con el LASA Forum, Sarah Lickey y Julieta Mortati, mi agradecimiento especial. Y a Milagros Pereyra-Rojas por su profesionalismo, compromiso y solidaridad permanente con LASA y cada gestión académica anual.

Hasta Vancouver,
Margarita López Maya //

El futuro de la democracia

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En la región latinoamericana, "autogolpes" como el que intentó llevar adelante Pedro Castillo en Perú el 7 de diciembre de 2022 o la cooptación de los poderes del Estado observada en El Salvador —desde la llegada de Nayib Bukele al gobierno en 2019— no son nuevos. Aún así, remiten a un pasado que hasta hace poco se consideraba en vías de superación, quizás por una lectura demasiado optimista y lineal de los procesos políticos (con excepciones, Guillermo O'Donnell alertó de forma temprana sobre los déficits de aquellos procesos de democratización).

En cualquier caso, lo que hoy se observa no es un retorno a las dinámicas cívico-militares del siglo XX. La imagen de manifestantes enardecidos asaltando los poderes del Estado para provocar un *golpe* en Brasil (8 de enero de 2023) evidencia la conjugación de viejos legados autoritarios y nuevas dinámicas asociadas a la comunicación digital del siglo XXI.

Que en Perú o Brasil estos intentos disruptivos no hayan tenido éxito es algo a celebrar, sin obviar sus tensiones irresueltas. Perú se ha hundido aún más en la deslegitimación del sistema político en un marco de represión que para marzo de 2023 había dejado decenas de muertos. En Brasil, la polarización afectiva —esa que se moviliza en torno al odio al adversario político devenido en enemigo— deja un país dividido.

Más sombría es la situación en Venezuela, El Salvador, Haití y Nicaragua, donde las instituciones democráticas han colapsado. Pero los autoritarismos con liderazgos visibles no deben ocultar que no solo los intentos de concentrar el poder asedian las democracias latinoamericanas. También lo hace el fortalecimiento de la gobernanza criminal[1] y los déficits de unos estados que se perciben incapaces de dar respuestas adecuadas a una población que sufre las crisis cíclicas de la economía (Guatemala como ejemplo destacado). Esto, agravado por el legado de la pandemia y las consecuencias económicas y geopolíticas de la invasión rusa en Ucrania.

Este dossier especial del LASA Forum se pregunta por el futuro de la democracia. Aquí se presenta una colección de artículos que analizan en un primer bloque cuáles son las novedades de esta nueva ola autocratizante, cuáles son las causas del declive democrático y qué hacen las oposiciones para resistirlo. Héctor Briceño ("¿Qué tan distintos son los nuevos autoritarismos?") señala que la regresión autoritaria reciente en América Latina se da más por la vía electoral que por la violencia, al mismo tiempo que hay una mayor apelación al apoyo popular, lo que no oculta los niveles que alcanza el desmantelamiento institucional.

Javier Corrales ("Democratic Backsliding, Tax Shortfalls, and Information Deficits") pone la mirada sobre las razones del declive, destacando dos factores que responden a movimientos diferenciados pero que se refuerzan mutuamente: la ineficacia estatal y el 'engrandecimiento' del ejecutivo. Entre otros, Corrales llama la atención sobre la mediocridad de las burocracias latinoamericanas: la calidad

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[1] Véase el dossier especial "Criminal governance in Latin America: emerging agendas", de LASA Forum, editado por David Smilde y Camilo Nieto-Matiz, vol. 53 (4), 2022: https://forum.lasaweb.org/past-issues/vol53-issue4.php

de los servicios públicos ha ido en descenso, lo que no es una tendencia mundial sino latinoamericana. Los déficits en la efectividad gubernamental elevan la demanda de soluciones mesiánicas, mientras si alcanzan el poder, estos líderes asumen como prioridad sobrevivir en el puesto, al precio de eliminar el disenso.

Laura Gamboa ("Estrategias de la oposición contra la erosión democrática") estudia las estrategias de las oposiciones. Analiza casos en que la erosión es sútil y no repentina y por tanto deja lugar al desarrollo de estrategias que en el tiempo pueden potenciar o evitar el declive democrático. La autora identifica los objetivos de las oposiciones (radicales o moderadas) y sus estrategias (institucionales y extrainstitucionales). El análisis de los eventos recientes alimenta un debate sobre la característica democrática y el operar de las oposiciones, en especial en los casos de Venezuela y Colombia.

En un segundo bloque, el dossier se ocupa de dos novedades: las dinámicas comunicacionales del siglo XXI y las nuevas derechas radicales. Las redes sociales tienen un papel central configurando dinámicas comunicacionales en las que el odio parece circular con mayor intensidad y velocidad, explican Natalia Aruguete y Ernesto Calvo ("Odiar el Ágora: Formas Digitales de la Recesión Democrática en la era de la Desinformación"). Los autores identifican el uso estratégico de las noticias falsas (fake news) en América Latina y se preguntan sobre la posibilidad de deliberación democrática cuando la confianza en la intención comunicativa de los interlocutores es puesta en entredicho en la esfera pública digital. La derecha radical encuentra allí un caldo de cultivo y consigue adeptos ante la creciente insatisfacción de la ciudadanía con el estado de cosas.

Stephanie Alenda ("The New Radical Right and Dissatisfaction with Democracy: Latin America in Comparative Perspective") señala que no está tan claro que las democracias enfrenten una crisis excepcional e irreversible: ni es tan nuevo, ni hay acuerdo sobre su profundidad

ni sobre cómo debe medirse. Mientras, las precondiciones estructurales que se esperaba previnieran la regresión no fueron capaces de evitar, por ejemplo, el ascenso de Trump. La autora identifica condiciones que permitieron la emergencia de las derivas populistas en Europa y América Latina.

Finalmente, se incluyen dos trabajos sobre cultura política y resiliencia democrática. En su documentada reflexión sobre la relación entre cultura política y democracia, Dinorah Azpuru ("Can Latin Americans' Political Culture Help Save Democracy?") encuentra tendencias complejas, con aspectos positivos y negativos. Por ejemplo, la tolerancia hacia la participación de homosexuales en política ha vivido un ascenso notable en la región, mientras sobresalen las diferencias entre países. La educación emerge como una variable explicativa de la preferencia por la democracia, invitando a pensar en las acciones que se requieren para sostenerla (más inversión estatal en educación, por ejemplo). Lo más preocupante es el crecimiento del apoyo a presidentes fuertes, que concentran poderes sin contrapeso y abonan el terreno a los liderazgos autoritarios.

El vaso puede verse medio lleno o medio vacío: las elecciones siguen funcionando y, aún con síntomas de declive, la mayor parte de la población latinoamericana se decanta por la democracia como el sistema más deseable. Flavia Freidenberg ("And, Despite Everything, they Resist! The Resilience of Latin American Democracies") recuerda que se han realizado más de 220 elecciones nacionales y locales desde 1978 en 18 países de la región, y que los comicios son el principal mecanismo para repartir el poder político. Las reformas han sido constantes y muchas han tenido éxito en ampliar la representación, como por ejemplo las más de 45 reformas detectadas en 17 de 18 países analizados para facilitar que las mujeres compitan de manera más igualitaria con los hombres (datos del Observatorio de Reformas Políticas en América Latina 1991-2022). Freidenberg alerta, sin

embargo, sobre las tendencias que evidencian el retroceso y señala una serie de lineamientos que apuntalan la resiliencia democrática.

Los artículos incluidos en este número no pretenden agotar el debate ni dar explicaciones definitivas a un tema tan importante como complejo, sino contribuir a una conversación informada por la revisión de datos y estudios. El debate queda enmarcado por el acuerdo común en torno a la expectativa normativa de recuperar, sostener y mejorar, las democracias latinoamericanas. **//**

¿Qué tan distintos son los nuevos autoritarismos?

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"[E]s preocupante el hecho de que algunos de los nuevos despotismos presenten signos de estar convirtiéndose en regímenes despóticos altamente resilientes e «iluminados». No sólo se alimentan hábilmente de las disfunciones de las democracias existentes o en transición, y paradójicamente se burlan de sus debilidades e imitan sus mejores cualidades, sino que proclaman ser más inteligentes, más eficientes y eficaces que las democracias. Especialmente llamativo resulta la ultra modernidad de estos regímenes, su propensión al auto–control y la experimentación con las prácticas «democráticas»."

John Keane (2016: 151)

Durante los últimos 20 años se ha producido una extensa literatura politológica que aborda la denominada "crisis de la democracia" dispersa a lo largo de una gran diversidad de problemáticas, tanto nacionales como regionales e internacionales, que convergen en múltiples amenazas al desarrollo democrático en un mundo globalizado.

En este sentido, es posible identificar entre las distintas acepciones del término "crisis de la democracia" al menos 3 grandes fenómenos analíticamente distintos, pero interrelacionados:

En primer lugar, el declive democrático o "episodios de autocratización" (Lührmann y Lindberg 2019). Aquí se agrupan las inquietudes por la erosión que han experimentado democracias consolidadas, tanto en América como en Europa, encabezados en su mayoría por líderes o movimientos populistas. Aunque estos episodios de autocratización no implican el colapso inevitable de las democracias, su dimensión y extensión genera un profundo temor sobre la capacidad de resistencia del sistema político democrático.

En segundo lugar, los quiebres democráticos. Aquí el foco se encuentra en la instalación o retorno de autoritarismos de distinto cuño. La mayoría de estos casos (aunque no todos) provienen de países que se democratizaron durante la tercera ola de transiciones iniciada en 1974 (Huntington 1991). De los 88 países que transitaron durante la tercera ola de democratización, 31 experimentaron regresiones autoritarias, más de la mitad (16) durante la década que transcurrió entre 2007 y 2017 (Mainwaring y Bizzarro 2019).

Un último fenómeno agrupado bajo el término "crisis de la democracia" es la progresiva diversificación y actualización de las estrategias de funcionamiento, lucha y supervivencia de los regímenes autoritarios, los cuales han mostrado una extraordinaria capacidad de resiliencia y expansión, en lo que ha sido identificado como una nueva fase de modernización autoritaria (Brooker, 2000).

En esta última acepción del término crisis de la democracia se incluyen el análisis del desarrollo de complejos mecanismos de cooperación política entre sistemas autoritarios, mecanismos de promoción autoritaria, incluidos los denominados "soft power" (Walker 2016) así como cooperación económica, que les permiten exportar conocimiento y recursos

para fortalecer y fomentar el surgimiento de regímenes no democráticos, así como para debilitar las democracias liberales desde el interior (Kneuer y Demmelhuber 2020). No menos importante es el estudio de la adaptación de instituciones democráticas a las estructuras de funcionamiento de regímenes autoritarios en un intento de mimetización democrática.

Pero ¿qué tan distintos son realmente los nuevos autoritarismos? ¿Cuáles y qué tan novedosas son sus nuevas instituciones? ¿Se insertan los regímenes autoritarios latinoamericanos de la actualidad en esta categoría?

Contraola autocrática

La democracia se expande en oleadas. Grupos de países "transitan de regímenes autoritarios hacia regímenes democráticos en el transcurso de un período de tiempo, durante el cual superan de manera significativa el número de transiciones que ocurren en sentido contrario, de regímenes democráticos hacia regímenes no democráticos" (Huntington 1991, 15). No obstante, aunque la variable de agrupamiento de las olas es el período de tiempo, una ola implica necesariamente una variable explicativa de agrupamiento (Gunitski 2018): difusión de ideas y prácticas democráticas, colapso de poderes autoritarios, promoción internacional de la democracia, entre otras.

Aunque el clásico trabajo de Huntington agrupa las transiciones en tres grandes olas de democratización, otros autores han dividido estos clústeres temporales a partir de variables causales en múltiples olas más pequeñas. Así, Gunitski (2018) identifica al menos 13 olas de democratización, comenzando con la gran ola trasatlántica (1776-1798), las guerras de independencia latinoamericanas (1810-1824), la primera ola constitucional (1820-1821), la ola nacionalista europea (1830-1831), la primavera de los pueblos (1848), la segunda ola constitucional (1905-1912), la primera post guerra (1919-1922), la segunda postguerra (1945-1950), la ola

descolonizadora africana (1956-1968), la ola modernizadora o tercera ola de Huntington (1974-1988), la ola postsoviética (1989-1994), las revoluciones de colores (2000-2007) y la primavera árabe (2011-2012). Si bien no todas las olas identificadas condujeron necesariamente hacia la instalación de sistemas democráticos, todas ellas implicaron un proceso de democratización, entendido como episodios en los que se contribuye en la construcción o avance de los pilares democráticos fundamentales.

El concepto de ola democrática implica también la existencia de contraolas autocráticas (Huntington 1991), en las que el número de regresiones de la democracia hacia regímenes autoritarios supera significativamente el número de democratizaciones. En esta misma dirección, Lührmann y Lindberg proponen una definición de episodios autocratizadores entendidos como "períodos de tiempo en los que se experimenta un deterioro sustancial de los rasgos democráticos[1]" (2019, 6) en un ejercicio que pone de manifiesto que no solo el traspaso de las fronteras que separan la democracia de los autoritarismos (transiciones) se presenta en oleadas. Los episodios autocratizadores no son fenómenos que conducen necesariamente a una ruptura democrática, sin embargo, sí implican el deterioro de los rasgos fundamentales del sistema democrático y por ende una disminución en la calidad de la democracia.

Los episodios de autocratización tampoco son exclusivos de los sistemas democráticos, pudiendo también producirse en sistemas autoritarios, consolidando sus instituciones de dominación. Y a la inversa, sistemas autoritarios también pueden experimentar episodios de democratización que no necesariamente conducen a una transición hacia la democracia, pero sí permiten ampliar las libertades dentro de un régimen autoritario.

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[1] "[A]utocratization episodes [are] connected periods of time with a substantial decline in democratic regime traits" (Lührmann y Lindberg 2019, 6).

Utilizando los datos del proyecto V-Dem[2], Lührmann y Lindberg (2019) analizan los episodios de autocratización y democratización en el mundo desde el año 1900 y llegan a la conclusión de que el mundo experimenta un proceso global de autocratización, al menos desde el año 1994, que hacia finales de 2017 supera significativamente el número de episodios de democratización, convirtiéndolo en una contraola autocrática global, un fenómeno que no ocurría desde la década de los años 30 del siglo pasado (2019, 8-9).

Gráfico 1. Transiciones y regresiones democráticas. 1900-2022
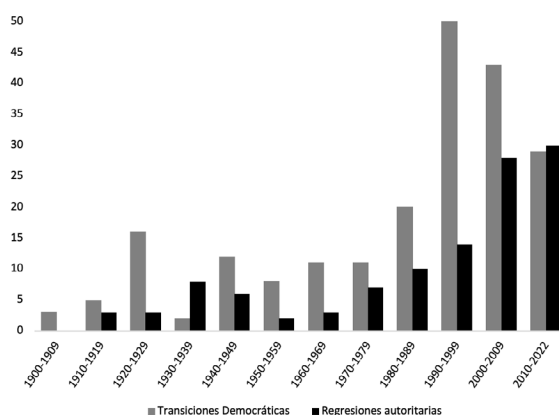
Fuente: Electoral Democracy Index (EDI), datos del proyecto Varieties of democracy V-Dem. Cálculos propios.

En efecto, en el gráfico 1 que ilustra el número de transiciones democráticas y regresiones autoritarias registradas desde inicios del siglo XX, puede apreciarse que luego de alcanzar su cúspide a finales de la década de los 80 e inicios de los 90, especialmente tras la caída del bloque soviético, el número de democratizaciones disminuye progresivamente con el paso del tiempo, mientras que el número de autocratizaciones mantiene una tendencia ascendente desde la década de los 50, hasta superar las democratizaciones en el último período registrado en la serie (2010-2022).

Por su parte, el gráfico 2 refleja el número de episodios de autocratizaciones y democratizaciones ocurridas en Latinoamérica, basados en el concepto de Lührmann y Lindberg (2019) y registradas por el proyecto V-Dem. En el mismo puede observarse una tendencia similar al comportamiento global, pero también algunas diferencias significativas. En primer lugar, resalta que durante las décadas de los 60 y 70 del siglo XX, a diferencia del resto del mundo, los episodios de autocratizaciones superaron los episodios democratizadores. Caracterizado por el militarismo y las revoluciones armadas, estas dos décadas acumulan entre ambas casi un tercio de todos los episodios de autocratizaciones registrados en la región. Es decir, que en Latinoamérica la regresión autoritaria no es un fenómeno tan lejano temporalmente como lo es para el resto del mundo. Pero si esas dos décadas fueron especialmente autoritarias, las dos siguientes, los 80 y 90, fueron especialmente importantes para el desarrollo democrático, un efecto "rebote" que reunió en esos 20 años casi un tercio de todos los episodios democratizadores registrados en toda la serie, junto a una disminución de los episodios de autocratización sin precedentes. Finalmente, la tendencia vuelve a invertirse durante las dos primeras décadas del nuevo siglo, superando en ambos casos los episodios de autocratizaciones a los episodios democratizadores.

Latinoamérica presenta así niveles más altos de volatilidad, al compararlo con el resto del mundo, en cuanto a sus tendencias democratizadoras y autocratizadoras, alternando ciclos de 20 años de dominio de los episodios autocráticos sucedidos por 20 años de dominio de las democratizaciones. Durante las primeras dos décadas del siglo XXI la región se sumerge en la tendencia global, al aumentar el número de autocratizaciones, un proceso que al cierre de 2022 es liderado por El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras,

Nicaragua y Venezuela; mientras que episodios democratizadores se presentaron en Bolivia, Haití, Paraguay, Perú, Colombia, Cuba y Ecuador[3].

Autocratización en" Slow motion"

Pero si los procesos de autocratización se han hecho más comunes en las dos últimas décadas en la región, también es cierto que son menos estridentes, y en ocasiones también menos perceptibles. Golpes de Estado, autogolpes y grandes rebeliones armadas son cada vez menos frecuentes. También lo son los grandes fraudes electorales que alteran los resultados durante el día de la elección, desaparecen urnas y detienen los conteos de votos (Bermeo 2016).

La democracia continúa siendo el régimen político que goza de mayor legitimidad a nivel global, hasta el punto que los regímenes más

abiertamente autoritarios intentan simular sus instituciones con el objeto de obtener el reconocimiento y legitimidad que ellas gozan[4] tanto a nivel nacional como internacional.

En este sentido, si un elemento caracteriza la actual contra ola de autocratizaciones es el reconocimiento de la hegemonía democrática, que se manifiesta en un apoyo dominante en las preferencias ciudadanas. Según el Estudio Mundial de Valores[5], el 84,4% de los entrevistados afirmaron, entre 2017 y 2020, que era "Muy bueno" o "Bastante bueno" tener una democracia, mientras que según la Corporación Latinobarómetro el 67,4% de los latinoamericanos declararon, en 2020, estar "Muy de acuerdo" o "De acuerdo" con la frase: "La democracia puede tener problemas, pero es el mejor sistema de gobierno"[6].

Los retos de la democracia no solo continúan, sino que se han actualizado. El moderno lenguaje autoritario se construye sobre el imaginario democrático y la mayoría de las veces, sobre su forma de expresión más crítica: el populismo (Arenas 2023). Los nuevos liderazgos autoritarios ya no compiten abiertamente en contra de la democracia promoviendo un sistema alternativo, en su defecto imitan sus instituciones y prometen perfeccionarla.

Los nuevos autoritarismos también han sustituido la violencia por la competencia electoral como mecanismo de acceso al poder, una arena que les permite aprovechar sus habilidades retóricas para capitalizar el descontento social. Una vez en el poder expanden su poder para cooptar otras instituciones. Así, por ejemplo todos los países que han experimentado episodios de autocratización durante las últimas dos décadas en Latinoamérica, lo hicieron bajo el liderazgo de un presidente electo a través de elecciones

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[3] Ellos se suman a los regímenes autoritarios de Cuba y Haití.

[4] Tómese por ejemplo la publicación del Partido Comunista de China (2021) China: Democracy That Works, en la que se afirma que China "[i]t is a model of socialist democracy that covers all aspects of the democratic process and all sectors of society. It is a true democracy that works".

[5] La encuesta mundial de valores es un estudio de opinión realizado periódicamente en casi 100 países y con representación de casi el 90% de la población mundial. Ficha metodológica y datos del estudio: https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp

[6] Ficha metodológica y datos del estudio: https://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp

competitivas[7], quienes una vez en la silla presidencial, han manipulado estratégicamente procesos electorales *posteriores*, controlado los parlamentos y tribunales para mantenerse en el poder (Bermeo 2016,13).

El gráfico 3 muestra un análisis comparativo entre la calidad de las elecciones en sistemas autoritarios electorales y democracias, mostrando que los primeros registran rangos significativamente menores en todas las etapas del ciclo electoral. Sin embargo, las diferencias no son homogéneas a lo largo del proceso electoral. Las etapas que presentan un peor desempeño en los regímenes autoritarios son aquellas que estructuran y determinan las posibilidades de la competencia electoral, como por ejemplo: el financiamiento de partidos y de campañas electorales, las leyes que regulan la competencia electoral, diseño de circuitos y escaños, la campaña en medios de comunicación, el registro de votantes y la selección de autoridades electorales; mientras que las etapas del ciclo electoral más cercanas al día de la votación

Gráfico 3. Integridad electoral según régimen político promedio 2012 – 2020
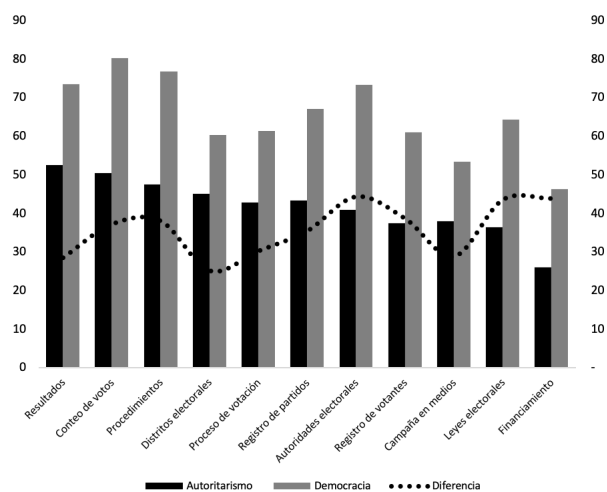
Fuente: Electoral Integrity Project y Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem). Cálculos propios.

Nota: Promedio de todas las elecciones. N= 325. Democracias = 190, Autoritarismos = 135.

presentan un desempeño relativamente mejor, aunque no logren alcanzar los niveles de las elecciones democráticas, entre ellas: los procedimiento de votación y el proceso de conteo y presentación y entrega de resultados.

La manipulación de las fases preelectorales ha demostrado ser sumamente útil para los regímenes autoritarios, pues son menos notorias y, por tanto, más difíciles de descubrir y demostrar, mientras que sus efectos sobre la competencia aún más nocivos para la democracia, permitiendo a los líderes autoritarios aspirar a una mínima legitimidad democrática, sin someterse a la libre voluntad y control del electorado.

La manipulación electoral adopta "una amplia variedad de formas, desde las violaciones de procedimiento a la ley (…) hasta el abierto uso de la violencia para intimidar a los votantes u observadores electorales" (Lehoucq 2007, 27) y si bien el número de formas de manipular los resultados no es infinito, las técnicas son variadas y evolucionan y adaptan continuamente a las nuevas condiciones.

En los nuevos regímenes autoritarios, el proceso de manipulación electoral es gradual y acumulativo (Corrales 2018a), por lo que se producen en el mediano y largo plazo. Implica la conquista progresiva de las instituciones electorales, pero también de sumisión del resto de los poderes públicos al expansivo poder de los ejecutivos, quienes "debilitan uno a uno mecanismos de control político a través de cambios institucionales que impiden que las fuerzas de oposición puedan controlarlo" (Bermeo 2016, 10).

Entre las transformaciones institucionales más importantes promovidas por los nuevos autoritarismos se encuentra la modificación de las normas que impiden la reelección presidencial. En este sentido, un estudio reciente, Horley et al. (2020) encontró que "cerca de un

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[7] Las elecciones en Nicaragua 2006 y Venezuela 1998, cuando Daniel Ortega y Hugo Chávez llegan a la presidencia por primera vez, fueron elecciones competitivas. A partir de entonces las condiciones se deterioraron progresivamente hasta que ambos países se transformaron en claros regímenes autoritarios, Venezuela entre 2016-2017 y Nicaragua entre 2016 y 2021.

tercio de los presidentes intentan sobrepasar los límites de su período constitucional". De ellos, dos tercios logran permanecer más allá del límite constitucional inicial Versteeg et al. (2019, 18). Es decir, más del 20% de los presidentes electos entre los años 2000 y 2019, han logrado permanecer en la presidencia más tiempo del que fueron electos inicialmente.

Pero más llamativo aún es que los mecanismos de transformación institucional implementados para mantenerse en el poder se presentan como promesas de "innovación institucional" e incluso cobijadas por un manto de legalidad democrática. Las principales y más exitosas estrategias para permanecer en el cargo son: 1. Enmendar la constitución y modificar las normas que impiden la reelección, una estrategia que demanda el apoyo de los poderes legislativo y/o judicial; 2. Promover una asamblea constituyente para redactar una nueva constitución, una estrategia que demanda apoyo político y especialmente popular; 3. Retrasar las elecciones, lo que demanda un apoyo político importante; y 4. Delegar el poder en otro líder leal que le permita mantener el control (Horley et al. 2020, 18).

En todos los casos, la evasión de las restricciones constitucionales se edifica sobre la base de la institucionalidad democrática y sus procedimientos, aunque tenga como objetivo final erosionarla desde adentro.

Regresando a Latinoamérica, el dominio de la prohibición de reelección presidencial inmediata que caracterizó el inicio de la tercera ola de democratizaciones a mediados de los 70, ha sido sustituido progresivamente por alguna modalidad de reelección. En la actualidad solo 4 países prohíben la reelección, Guatemala, México, Paraguay y Colombia, quien regresa a la prohibición constitucional luego de un paréntesis de 11 años entre 2004 y 2015. Otros 5 países permiten una reelección diferida, que permite a un expresidente competir por la presidencia luego transcurrido un período constitucional desde su salida de la presidencia. Estos países son: Chile, Costa Rica, Panamá, Perú y Uruguay.

Seis países permiten la postulación inmediata para un segundo período presidencial: Argentina, Brasil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras y República Dominicana. Dos de ellas implementadas a partir de los años 90 (Argentina y Brasil), y el resto implementadas entre 2015 y 2021. Finalmente, otros tres países permiten la reelección consecutiva indefinida: Bolivia, Nicaragua y Venezuela, en todos los casos, a través de modificaciones legales realizadas entre 2009 y 2014.

El mecanismo preferido para legalizar la reelección (en cualquiera de sus modalidades) han sido las reformas constitucionales (7) seguido por las sentencias de los más altos tribunales (4), y, en tercer lugar, aprobarlas al redactar nuevos textos constitucionales (3)[8]. Sin embargo, llama la atención que la intervención del poder judicial a favor de la reelección es un mecanismo característico exclusivo del nuevo siglo, específicamente a partir del año 2003. Anteriormente, el mecanismo por excelencia para promover la reelección eran los parlamentos a través de reformas electorales.

Por su parte, las asambleas constituyentes han sido utilizadas en Bolivia, Ecuador y Venezuela para reiniciar la cuenta desde cero, otorgando a los presidentes que promovieron las constituyentes un bono temporal en el cual los años en la presidencia que anteceden la aprobación de los nuevos textos constitucionales no son contabilizados, más que como un residuo del viejo régimen constitucional (Versteeg et al. 2019).

Los textos redactados por las asambleas constituyentes son, adicionalmente, un reflejo del balance de poder entre las fuerzas de gobierno y opositoras al momento de redactar el nuevo contrato social. La incorporación de la reelección

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[8] Cuatro si incorporamos la constitución venezolana de 1999 que implementó la reelección consecutiva, luego modificada en 2009 a través de una reforma constitucional aprobada en referéndum.

Tabla 1. Reelección presidencial en Latinoamérica

PAÍS	FECHA	REELECCIÓN	MECANISMOS DE IMPLEMENTACIÓN DEL CAMBIO
México	1917	No Reelección	Constitución
Uruguay	1967	Diferida	Constitución
Panamá	1972	Diferida	Constitución
Guatemala	1985	No Reelección	Constitución
Paraguay	1992	No Reelección	Constitución
Argentina	1994	Consecutiva	Reforma Constitucional
Brasil	1997	Consecutiva	Reforma Constitucional
Perú	2000	Diferida	Reforma Constitucional
Costa Rica	2003	Diferida	Sentencia de la Sala Constitucional de la Corte Suprema
Chile	2005	Diferida	Reforma Constitucional
Venezuela	2009	Indefinida	Reforma Constitucional
Nicaragua	2014	Indefinida	Reforma Constitucional
Honduras	2015	Consecutiva	Sentencia Corte Suprema
República Dominicana	2015	Consecutiva	Nueva Constitución
Colombia	2015	No Reelección	Reforma Constitucional
Bolivia	2017	Indefinida	Sentencia del Tribunal Constitucional
Ecuador	2018	Consecutiva	Contrarreforma de una Enmienda Constitucional
El Salvador	2021	Consecutiva	Sentencia del Tribunal Supremo Electoral

Fuente: Sanz y Blasco (2021), adaptado por el autor.

ha sido posible cuando los presidentes que promueven asambleas constituyentes tienen un poder "asimétrico" hegemónico en relación con el resto de los actores políticos, que les permite expandir el poder ejecutivo en la estructura del nuevo texto constitucional, así como debilitar los controles políticos sobre el mismo (Corrales 2018b).

Reflexiones finales

Nos encontramos frente a un proceso de modernización autoritaria que trasciende las fronteras de los propios regímenes autoritarios, impactando incluso a democracias consolidadas. En Latinoamérica las nuevas estrategias e instituciones han servido tanto para erigir nuevos autoritarismos como para debilitar las democracias.

En este sentido, Lührmann y Lindberg (2019) tienen razón al llamar la atención sobre los episodios de autocratización, con independencia del tipo de régimen político inicial o final, pues en la actualidad nos encontramos frente a un fenómeno que trasciende las fronteras de los diversos regímenes políticos. El estudio de la ola de (episodios de) autocratización también pone de manifiesto el mecanismo de expansión y contagio de las prácticas políticas, así como la promoción desde centros autoritarios (Kneuer y Demmelhuber 2020).

El intenso proceso de modernización experimentado por los actores autoritarios ha transformado progresivamente sus mecanismos de lucha, hasta decantarlos por instituciones autoritarias que se ocultan bajo fachadas democráticas.

De acuerdo con el proyecto V-Dem[9], todos los regímenes autoritarios latinoamericanos actuales, salvo Cuba y Haití, comenzaron su trayectoria a inicios del siglo XXI como democracias. Quienes lideraron los episodios de regresión autoritaria fueron líderes que llegaron al poder a través de elecciones democráticas. Todos ellos, incluso gozaron de popularidad al momento que desmontaron el sistema democrático.

Para completar las regresiones autoritarias estos países requirieron como mínimo 5 años continuos de deterioro antes de alcanzar el estatus de autoritarismos electorales[10]. En este sentido, la reelección presidencial juega un rol central al permitir a los líderes implementar una estrategia progresiva de desmantelamiento institucional menos estridente. Aún así, el cambio del paradigma de la reelección presidencial en Latinoamérica parece consolidarse con el paso del tiempo, e incluso en los países que aún mantienen prohibiciones contra la reelección se erigen discursos a favor de la modificación de las normas electorales (Corrales, 2018b). Sin embargo, la gran novedad en la región es la introducción de la reelección a través del poder judicial, una clara muestra de la expansión de los poderes presidenciales, y de que la "anatomía del deterioro democrático" latinoamericano pasa por la cooptación del poder judicial y por las instituciones electorales, y no necesariamente del parlamento como en otras latitudes.

La reelección es el más importante de los obstáculos electorales, pero no el único. Otro de los grandes aprendizajes de los nuevos autoritarismos es que la manipulación de las elecciones es mucho más sencilla al controlar las estructuras que norman la competencia electoral. En este sentido, la regla parece ser que mientras

más lejano el eslabón del sistema electoral respecto al día de la elección, mayor su impacto en la calidad del proceso y en la competitividad. Téngase en cuenta que, por ejemplo, las leyes y las autoridades son decisivas para una elección, y, sin embargo, éstas se definen años antes de los procesos electorales. Adicionalmente, mientras más lejano es el eslabón del día de la elección, más difícil de percibir la manipulación. Así, los nuevos autoritarismos son expertos en la manipulación electoral gradual[11] (Coppedge 2017; Haggard y Kaufman 2021; Matheus 2020).

El carácter electoral de los nuevos autoritarismos los hace depender más de la popularidad del líder y de su capacidad de movilización popular y menos de la represión, que los autoritarismos tradicionales. Pero, aunque la erosión democrática ocurre de forma gradual e incluso menos violenta que en sus antecesores (Lührmann y Lindberg, 2019), ello no impide que el desmantelamiento de la institucionalidad democrática sea tan profundo como en autoritarismos tradicionales[12].

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[9] Ver: V-Dem Institute (2023).

[10] Cuatro países son categorizados a finales de 2022 como autoritarismos electorales: El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua y Venezuela. Adicionalmente, Bolivia y Honduras formaron parte de la misma categoría entre los años 2018-2019 y 2009-2021 respectivamente. Finalmente, el proyecto V-Dem incluye a Cuba y Haití como autoritarismos cerrados, alcanzado durante el siglo XX.

[11] Por ejemplo, las misiones de observación electoral, muy especialmente la observación electoral internacional, pero también las de muchas organizaciones locales, encargadas de evaluar la calidad y apego a los estándares internacionales de los procesos electorales, tienden a concentrarse unas pocas semanas antes del día de las elecciones.

[12] Tomando como referencia el indicador de Democracia Liberal del proyecto V-Dem, para el año 2022 Honduras, Nicaragua y Venezuela se encuentran por debajo del Cuba, el autoritarismo más longevo y estable de la región.

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Democratic Backsliding, Tax Shortfalls, and Information Deficits

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A pernicious feedback loop connecting fiscal incapacity, information declines, and strong-armed rule is hurting democracy in Latin America

At their core, Latin America's current democratic travails are the result of a complex feedback loop involving governance ineffectiveness and executive aggrandizement. A feedback loop is a system in which a portion of the system produces an effect (the output) that cycles back and affects that same portion, often amplifying its dimensions and making it difficult to establish what is causing what. In Latin America, governance ineffectiveness and executive aggrandizement are interacting to hurt democracy. Each phenomenon has separate causes, but each also affects the other, compounding each other's impact. In this essay, I discuss how this feedback loop operates.

Governance Effectiveness and Tax Calamity

The first element in the feedback loop hurting democracy in Latin America is governance effectiveness, or lack thereof. Governance effectiveness refers to the ability of state institutions to deliver goods and services. It is a measure of civil service performance, which may or may not depend on levels of democracy. Some autocracies are bureaucratically competent, and some democracies are bureaucratically incompetent.

Bureaucratic competence in Latin America is mediocre at best and getting worse. This we know from the World Governance Indicators (https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports), one of the most respected

efforts to measure governance internationally. A component of these indicators is an index called "government effectiveness." It measures the quality of public services and the degree of independence of civil service from political pressures. Since 2013, government effectiveness in the region, never high to begin with, has declined, from 58.5 to 50.1.

This decline is not a worldwide trend. It's a Latin American trend. In most other regions, government effectiveness has either held steady, for example, in Europe and Central Asia, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, or has improved, as in East Asia and the Pacific, North America and South Asia. The only other region to experience a notable decline in this period was the Middle East and North Africa (from 45.8 to 42.4), but that decline was by a far smaller percentage than in Latin America. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Government Effectiveness: Regional Averages, Percentage Change from 2013 to 2021
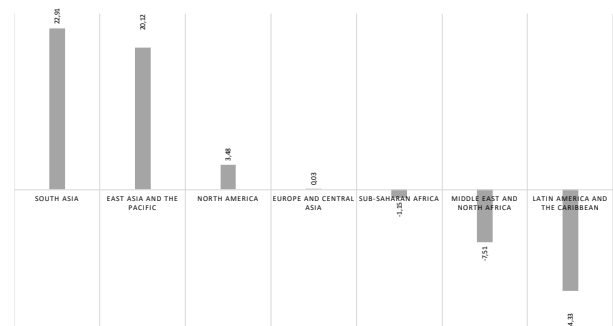
Source: D. Karumann, A. Kraay, and M. Mastruzzi (2010), *The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues.*

What this decline in government effectiveness means is that in the span of a decade, the average citizen in Latin America has experienced a visible decline in the quality of services that the state is supposed to provide: law and order, infrastructure, education, health, environmental standards, corruption controls, labor protections, business facilities, and more. The list is long.

There are independent causes of state incompetence and incapacity in the region. Many are historical. But some stem from more contemporary structural conditions. To me, an understudied contemporary cause of government ineffectiveness is the low collection level and distorted nature of Latin America's tax system (see Flores-Macías 2019; Mahon Jr. forthcoming). The region collects far fewer taxes as a percentage of gross domestic product than do the advanced capitalist economies in the world, where the state collects through taxes an average of 34 percent of the gross product of each country. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the average is 23 percent. In some countries, such as Mexico and Peru, the average is a very low 16 percent. Furthermore, tax evasion is high throughout the region (Oxford Analytica 2017), and the taxes collected come mostly from business groups (which hurts investments and encourages corruption) and consumption (which hurts the poor disproportionately).

To make matters worse, the tax-to-GDP ratio in Latin America seems to have gotten worse during the pandemic. Between 2019 and 2020, the decline in tax revenues exceeded the region's economic contraction in nominal terms (OECD et al. 2022). Tax-to-GDP ratios fell in 20 of Latin America's 26 countries. In the rich economies, the average tax-to-GDP ratio actually rose.

When states are underfunded, they inevitably underperform (Besley and Persson 2014). This is one of Latin America's key developmental challenges. States seldom have enough funds to fully meet the demand for public goods and services originating from an increasingly complex and resource-challenged society.

This state capacity shortfall is a possible reason the region is often besieged by social protests. Protests have spread even to countries where economic growth and democracy are strong or were getting stronger (e.g., Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama). States are fiscally unable to meet the demand for public goods and social services. And ever since the market-oriented reform era of the 1990s, efforts to raise fiscal revenues meet stiff resistance. The poor can't (and shouldn't have to) pay; the middle classes feel they get little in return; and the economic elites use loopholes to keep their tax liabilities low.

In addition to underfunding, another cause of government ineffectiveness in the region is state capturing. State capturing refers to situations in which interest groups that are supposed to be regulated by the state end up eroding the autonomy of regulatory institutions for self-gain. Latin America has a long-standing history of economic elites capturing state institutions: smugglers in the colonial era, traders in the early independence period, *latifundistas* in the agro-export era from the 1870s to the 1930s, industrial conglomerates in the import-substitution era of the 1930s–1980s, drug-connected criminal syndicates since the 1980s, and commodity exporters in the neo-extractivist era since the mid-2000s (see Fernández Milmanda 2019; Trejo and Ley 2020; Mazzuca 2021; Schneider 2021). Each of these groups plays a role in impairing bureaucratic performance. They co-opt and corrupt bureaucrats to obtain the regulatory and enforcement environment that they need rather than the laws and regulations that the country requires.

Whether because of underfunding or overcapturing, Latin American states are unable to provide public goods at the level and quality that society demands. This produces intense displeasure with the status quo. Poll after poll reveals that Latin Americans are disenchanted with governance. Cynicism and radicalism prevail across the electorate.

These reactions are opposite sides of the same coin—disillusionment with state deliverables. Voters either stay disengaged from politics

or engage in politics through increasingly extremist demands. Conditions for unrest and anomie are thus expanding. Support for unproven newcomers or extremists is on the rise. Political parties that historically helped to de-radicalize voters are declining. Moderation is waning. Candidates embracing transgressive speech against the status quo, the institutions, the media, and other politicians are becoming too popular.

Rising Demand for Executive Aggrandizement

A major result of government ineffectiveness is executive aggrandizement or attempts to achieve it. *Executive aggrandizement* describes situations in which a democratically elected president begins to erode the systems of checks and balance, arrogate more powers, erode the independence of other institutions, weaken mechanisms of control, and lessen the rights and resources available for the opposition and civil society to compete politically (Bermeo 2016). Since the 1990s, Latin America has seen some of the most extraordinary cases of executive aggrandizement in the world. Some aggrandizing presidents manage to go far in concentrating power to the point of full autocratization (e.g., Alberto Fujimori in Peru, Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua). Others push hard enough to produce hybrid regimes, in which a heavy dose of authoritarian practices is injected into the political system (e.g., Álvaro Uribe in Colombia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, Alejandro Giammattei in Guatemala, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Juan Orlando Hernández in Honduras, Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico). Other presidents push hard in favor of aggrandizement but end up getting booted out of office (or killed while in office), not without generating chaos in the process (e.g., Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Pedro Castillo in Peru, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Otto Pérez Molina in Guatemala, Jovenel Moïse in Haiti, Manuel Zelaya in Honduras). Overall, the region is fraught with experiments in executive aggrandizement. Some episodes are more forceful and far-reaching than others. Whether they achieve their aim or not,

all cases of completed or attempted executive aggrandizement generate huge stress tests on democratic institutions.

Unlike the region's government effectiveness, executive aggrandizement in Latin America is to some extent a reflection of global trends. Since the 1990s, the world has been in a democratic recession (Diamond 2019; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Many democracies worldwide are experiencing democratic backsliding through executive aggrandizement. The West has few policy tools at its disposal to stop this process, and many political parties in the West are becoming illiberal themselves, no longer interested in doing much to contain this global trend. If the world is experiencing a democratic recession, of course Latin America is bound to show signs of it as well. We cannot fault the region for exhibiting a pathology that is global in nature.

That said, it is important to recognize that the penchant for executive aggrandizement in the region, like government ineffectiveness, does have home-grown causes. Some of these are long-standing, such as the region's ancient traditions of centralism and cult of personalities, which date to precolonial times, but others are more contemporary.

In my new book, *Autocracy Rising*, I discuss an important contemporary cause of executive aggrandizement: asymmetrical collapse of the party systems. I argue that this institutional condition can stimulate the rise of illiberal presidents and pave the way for their expansion of power (Corrales 2022).

But it is important to highlight that executive aggrandizement also has a direct connection with governance trends, not just party-related factors. Government (in)effectiveness and executive aggrandizement are interconnected through a feedback loop. The loop works this way: Deficits in government effectiveness raise the demand for messianism. People clamor for leaders who preach that the solution to governance failings is to concentrate more power on the president and degrade the power of "bad" actors. Bad actors get defined, of course, as those

elites who capture the state. They get blamed for keeping the region stuck in poor governance. Presidents and their leaders feel it is acceptable to charge against them.

And so power concentration gets rationalized easily. If the problem is hyperinflation, the solution is to give the president powers to govern by decree (e.g., Carlos Menem in Argentina). If the problem is increasing terrorism, the solution is to expand the president's powers as commander in chief and rewrite the constitution (e.g., Alberto Fujimori in Peru). If the problem is rising poverty, the solution is to expand the powers of the president to expropriate and distribute while forging non transparent trade ties with China (e.g., Hugo Chávez in Venezuela). If the problem is rising protests, the solution is to criminalize dissent and attack the press (e.g., Rafael Correa). If the problem is one's own ineptitude in dealing with a pandemic, the solution is to intensify cultural wars, seek alliances with antipluralist religious sectors, and appoint military figures to government posts as a way to appear legitimate (e.g., Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil). If the problem is gridlock in dealing with congress, the solution is to abolish congress (e.g., Pedro Castillo in Peru, Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela). If the problem is widespread corruption, the solution is to allow the president to allege that the opposition is the origin of corruption (e.g., Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico). If the problem is increasing crime, the solution is to allow the president to first pact with *maras* and, when that fails, conduct arrests en masse (e.g., Nayib Bukele in El Salvador). If the problem is an unfinished agenda, the solution is to allow the president to seek reelection, even indefinitely (e.g., Bukele, Chávez, Correa, Ortega). Polls suggest that in some cases, when governance troubles run high, even proposing a coup or a self-coup can be well received by parts of the population (Zechmeister and Lupu 2019).

Executive Aggrandizement as a Trigger of Governance Ineffectiveness

The problem with executive aggrandizement as a response to governance problems is that it typically makes governance worse (Weyland

2022). This is not a coincidence but a predictable outcome. Executive aggrandizement produces an outcome that always hurts governance: erosion of information. To concentrate power, the president typically restaffs the bureaucracy by replacing experts with loyalists. Another tactic is to silence critics within the state and outside the state, within the ruling party and outside. The displacement of experts and the silencing of dissent produce a general decline of information across the bureaucracy, the ruling party, and the political system. This decline, sooner or later, hurts governance.

It is hard to imagine government effectiveness improving, at least in the medium term, as expertise and information decline or as regulatory instability rises. Perhaps at first, executive aggrandizement allows the president to achieve some signature policy goal (defeating hyperinflation, reducing crime, lowering poverty rates). But in the medium term, governance problems resurface, with a vengeance. New issues emerge, and the state is caught ill-prepared, lacking both the technical expertise and the supply of information to respond effectively.

In addition, executive aggrandizement tends to come with the imposition of radical policy prescriptions rather than incrementalism. Although going for "Big bang" policies allow presidents to convey that things are finally changing in the country, it can also hurt governance. Many cognitive psychologists as well as organization scientists have shown that radical institutional change (e.g., Bukele suddenly adopting bitcoin; Chávez expropriating more than 800 firms in two years) can prove far more disorienting than orienting for the public (Berman and Fox 2023). Drastic changes (when there is no immediate emergency), even if well intentioned, can be difficult for systems to assimilate. In addition, radicalism relative to incrementalism comes with a higher probability of misfire. And it is highly polarizing, which itself also introduces confusion, instability, and political frustration across the electorate.

Speaking of polarization, executive aggrandizement has been shown to produce or exacerbate polarization (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018; Haggard and Kaufman 2021), and polarization hurts government effectiveness. Few moves polarize the electorate more than presidents initiating executive aggrandizement. Executive aggrandizement no doubt elicits wide support among many of the president's supporters (see Svolik 2019), but it also provokes acute forms of opposition, leading to high levels of resistance, protests, denunciations, and mobilizations (Gamboa 2017; Cleary and Öztürk 2020). Executive aggrandizement can easily bring countries to near civil war.

Here, a new feedback loop emerges: the president feels increasing (rather than decreasing) urgency to concentrate more and more power to neutralize the very same opposition that his power grabbing is prompting. Polarization stemming from executive aggrandizement thus risks stimulating more autocratization, in turn leading to more governance-hurting policy choices: replacing career civil servants with loyalists in the bureaucracy, superseding dissenting voices, forging alliances with non pluralist and radical actors.

But the problems for governance stemming from executive-driven polarization go deeper than just creating a self-fulling prophecy. Polarization comes with substantial opportunity costs. A president facing a hypermobilized opposition will necessarily focus less on competent governance than on partisan advancement, less on promoting technical expertise than on politicizing regulation, less on developing effective responses to crises than on developing smart gimmicks to defeat opponents, less on building a résumé based on policy achievements than on creating platforms from which to defame opponents. The priority is to neutralize rising dissent. Competent governance gets de-prioritized.

Conclusion

I argued that a fundamental cause of Latin America's democratic troubles since the 1990s has to do with state capacity (taxes and capturing), power grabs, and information. These factors are connected through a feedback loop.

Without adequate taxation, there are no capable states. Without capable states, state capture is easier. With less capable and more captured states, democracy is jeopardized (Dincecco 2017). Citizens turn anti–status quo. The demand for leaders seeking executive aggrandizement expands.

And yet executive aggrandizement creates a dearth of information both within and outside the state. It also exacerbates polarization and unrest. These by-products feed back onto state competence. Government effectiveness is bound to decline, which is paradoxical, since one of the reasons many voters welcome executive aggrandizement is their longing for governance capacity.

In any such feedback loop, it is hard to ascertain what is causing what. But it is always clear that escaping the loop is hard and that the effects of each portion of the loop are amplified, all because of self-reinforcing connections.

Democratic forces in Latin America are all under siege because of this feedback loop. Authoritarian currents—some from yesteryear and others more contemporary—continue to conspire against democracy. Nowhere in the region is democracy safe. In four countries, democracy has been totally defeated: Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Haiti. In the other countries, democratic forces suffer casualties on an almost daily basis.

It is tempting to think that the assaults against democracy stem from different sides of the ideological spectrum—either the Left is blamed or the Right is. There is some truth to the fact that extreme versions of these ideologies hurt liberal democracies regardless. However, we need to bear in mind that the deeper cause of backsliding stems from governance ineffectiveness and

low taxation, and from the feedback loop that this engenders on executive aggrandizement, information, and polarization. This may very well be Latin America's most insidious political trap.

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Estrategias de la oposición contra la erosión democrática

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En los últimos 20 años, América Latina (y el mundo) ha visto el aumento y profundización de regímenes autoritarios. De acuerdo con datos de V-Dem (2023), en 2001 América Latina tenía dieciocho regímenes mínimamente democráticos. Hoy tiene catorce. La contraola autoritaria ha acabado con democracias longevas como la venezolana y está amenazando democracias más jóvenes como la salvadoreña o la mexicana.

¿Qué se puede hacer para contrarrestar esta ola? Para responder, es necesario analizar no solo los factores que llevan al poder a líderes con tendencias autoritarias, sino también los elementos que les permiten cooptar el Estado, doblegar instituciones democráticas y perpetuarse en la presidencia. En este artículo discuto ambas dimensiones del proceso de erosión democrática, enfatizando la importancia de entender las condiciones económicas, sociales, e institucionales que facilitan la elección de líderes populistas autoritarios y las acciones que se pueden tomar para contrarrestar sus impulsos.

Líderes con tendencias hegemónicas y erosión democrática

La erosión democrática se ha definido de muchas formas (Bermeo 2016; Haggard y Kaufman 2021; Lührmann y Lindberg 2019). Entiendo erosión democrática como un tipo de ruptura democrática que sucede a través del tiempo. Al igual que un golpe de Estado, cuando es exitoso, un proceso de erosión democrática transforma democracias en regímenes autoritarios; diferente a un golpe de Estado, sin embargo, lo hace de manera gradual.

La contraola autoritaria ha estado liderada por ejecutivos con tendencias autoritarias: líderes con agendas radicales dispuestos a destruir el sistema de pesos y contrapesos con tal de lograr sus políticas preferidas. Para conseguir sus objetivos, estos líderes podrían cerrar el congreso y las cortes. En el mundo de hoy, sin embargo, ese tipo de movida autoritaria tan evidente podría tener consecuencias complicadas a nivel doméstico e internacional. Los ciudadanos y la comunidad internacional tienen una preferencia normativa por la democracia (aunque más adelante discuto cambios recientes en esa actitud).[1] Como lo vimos hace poco con el autogolpe de Pedro Castillo en Perú (BBC News Mundo 2022), los ciudadanos y la comunidad internacional reaccionan con fuerza cuando es evidente que principios básicos democráticos se están violando.

Por ello, y para no arriesgar su careta democrática, líderes con aspiraciones hegemónicas usan reformas, referéndums y asambleas constitucionales para cooptar o debilitar lentamente las instituciones de supervisión horizontal (*horizontal accountability*) hasta que, acaban con los mecanismos de supervisión vertical (*vertical accountability*) y con ello el régimen democrático. Democracias que han completado un proceso de erosión democrática se transforman en autoritarismos competitivos.

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[1] Es importante notar, sin embargo, que dicha preferencia es imperfecta. A nivel internacional, está sujeta a otros intereses. A nivel doméstico está atravesada por diferentes concepciones de democracia (Carlin y Singer 2011).

¿Qué lleva a estos líderes con tendencias autoritarias al poder?

Desde 1978, América Latina ha elegido 134 líderes democráticos, 26 de ellos con tendencias autoritarias (Gamboa 2022a)[2]. Este tipo de candidatos suben al poder en condiciones de crisis (Carrión 2022; Handlin 2017). Problemas de gobernabilidad y falta de confianza en las instituciones son las variables que mejor predicen el ascenso de estos candidatos a la presidencia. Cuando el Estado es incapaz de garantizar seguridad, justicia o bienestar social y no hay confianza en la capacidad de las instituciones democráticas (o sus integrantes) para procesar conflictos, la ciudadanía se vuelve menos aversa al riesgo y vota por *outsiders* anti-sistema que prometen reemplazar la estructura existente por una sin intermediarios (aka. "políticos") que sí satisfaga las necesidades de la ciudadanía.

No obstante, las promesas hechas por líderes populistas autoritarios son normalmente espurias, las demandas que las fomentan no lo son. La tercera ola de la democracia alcanzó a la mayor parte de los países de la región, pero fue incapaz de impulsar las transformaciones estructurales e institucionales necesarias para profundizar esas democracias. Consecuentemente, no obstante, las democracias latinoamericanas cumplen las características mínimas de un régimen democrático — elecciones medianamente libres y justas, sufragio universal, control civil sobre las fuerzas armadas y protección de libertades políticas y civiles— son por lo general democracias débiles e incompletas con problemas graves de representación y gobernanza, en las que algunos ciudadanos (sobre todo en zonas urbanas) viven en sistemas relativamente democráticos con bienestar social, mientras otros (sobre todo en zonas rurales) viven en sistemas autoritarios y con niveles muy pobres de bienestar social (Mainwaring y Pérez-Liñán 2023).

Asumir estos problemas de inequidad e ineficiencia es esencial para contrarrestar la ola autoritaria. Es importante visibilizar y responder a esas demandas a tiempo. Hacerlo, no solo disminuye la probabilidad de que líderes con aspiraciones hegemónicas lleguen al poder (Mainwaring, Bejarano, y Pizarro Leongómez 2006; Handlin 2017; Gamboa 2022; Carrión 2022) sino que también disminuye su capacidad para destruir instituciones democráticas si se convierten en presidentes. Una ciudadanía que recibe más de la democracia es una ciudadanía más dispuesta a defenderla.

Estrategias de la oposición

Desafortunadamente, resolver los problemas de gobernanza e inequidad que plagan las democracias latinoamericanas no es fácil. Por ello, además de entender las condiciones que llevan a líderes autoritarios al poder, es importante analizar qué se puede hacer una vez estos se convierten en presidentes.

Los procesos de erosión democrática son dinámicos (Carrión 2022). Como la erosión democrática sucede a través del tiempo, la oposición tiene varias opciones para enfrentar al líder autoritario (Cleary y Öztürk 2020; Gamboa 2022a; 2022b). En respuesta a las reformas antidemocráticas de un presidente con aspiraciones hegemónicas, la oposición puede tener *objetivos radicales* que buscan remover al ejecutivo antes de que se acabe su periodo constitucional, o puede tener *objetivos moderados* y, respetando el periodo presidencial, atacar sus reformas autoritarias más bien. Para lograr cualquiera de estos objetivos, la oposición puede utilizar *estrategias institucionales* (es decir que usan elecciones, cortes o congreso); o *estrategias extrainstitucionales* (repertorios — legales o ilegales— que no usan elecciones, cortes o congreso). Individualmente estos objetivos y estrategias no son particularmente dañinos para

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[2] En mi libro *Resisting Backsliding: Opposition Strategies against the Erosion of Democracy* (2022) identifico 25 líderes con tendencias autoritarias. Añado aquí a Andrés Manuel López Obrador a quien excluí en su momento (2019) por falta de información clara sobre sus actitudes frente a la democracia.

la democracia. En conjunto, sin embargo, tienen fuertes consecuencias para la supervivencia del régimen (Gamboa 2022a).[3]

Tabla 1: Estrategias y objetivos de la oposición

		OBJETIVOS	
		Moderados	Radicales
ESTRATEGIAS	Institucionales	Campaña electoral Actuar en el legislativo Hacer lobby Litigar	Referendo revocatorio Juicio político al presidente
	Extra-Institucionales		Golpes de estado Guerra de guerrilla
		Protestas, Boicots, Huelgas	

Estrategias extrainstitucionales con objetivos radicales —es decir, golpes de estado, guerra de guerrillas, protestas, boicots, huelgas etc. que buscan remover al presidente antes de que se cumpla su mandato— son apuestas muy arriesgadas. Este tipo de tácticas reflejan desdén por los canales existentes para tramitar conflictos y generan una situación de suma-cero. Si son exitosas, las estrategias radicales extrainstitucionales logran frenar al líder con tendencias autoritarias, pero arriesgan romper la democracia y convertir en mártir al autócrata. Si fallan, deslegitiman a la oposición aumentando los incentivos del presidente para reprimir y disminuyendo los costos de hacerlo; no solo le dan al ejecutivo, la habilidad de conseguir apoyo para impulsar reformas más radicales, sino que disminuyen la capacidad de la oposición para combatirlas.

Como señalo en mi libro (Gamboa 2022a, 98–128), en Venezuela, las estrategias extrainstitucionales radicales de la oposición ayudaron a Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) a erosionar la democracia. El golpe de Estado en abril de 2002, la huelga general indefinida de 2002-2003 y el boicot a las elecciones parlamentarias de 2005 le dieron al presidente venezolano excusas para purgar las Fuerzas Armadas y la compañía estatal de petróleo (PDVSA), le garantizaron un congreso casi completamente chavista a partir de 2006 y le dieron argumentos para perseguir a miembros

de la oposición y presionar por reformas antidemocráticas más agresivas. Todo esto sin perder su careta democrática.

La oposición en Venezuela era poderosa. Inclusive después de abusos de poder como la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1999 y las "mega-elecciones" del 2000, los antichavistas tenían aliados en las fuerzas armadas y en PDVSA. También contaban con algo de apoyo en cortes y organismos de control y controlaban una tercera parte de las curules del congreso. En el 2002, el discurso y accionar polarizante de Chávez les había ayudado a ampliar esos recursos. Rupturas en la coalición de gobierno le ganaron a la oposición importantes aliados en el congreso y las cortes, el apoyo de los medios de comunicación y la capacidad de movilizar cientos de venezolanos a la calle.

El uso de estrategias extrainstitucionales con objetivos radicales diezmó estas ventajas. No solo deslegitimó las credenciales democráticas de la oposición, sino que le permitió a Chávez apoderarse de los recursos con los que contaban sus adversarios. El golpe de Estado le dio al presidente venezolano las razones y la información que necesitaba para purgar las fuerzas armadas. La huelga, hizo lo mismo en PDVSA. Usándola como excusa, Chávez logró despedir cerca de 60 por ciento de los empleados de la empresa y reemplazarlos con gente leal al régimen (Corrales y Penfold-Becerra 2015). El boicot tuvo consecuencias similares en el congreso. No le dio argumentos a Chávez para purgar el legislativo, pero —sin oposición— no fue difícil para el presidente conquistar casi todas las curules.

En seis años, la coalición antichavista en Venezuela pasó de ser un adversario formidable a uno débil. Sin apoyo en el congreso, a partir de 2006, el gobierno logró terminar de cooptar cortes y organismos de control, pasar leyes que limitaban la prensa libre y utilizar el aparato de seguridad para reprimir protestas y opositores.

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[3] Aunque hay que ver el trabajo de Cleary y Öztürk (2020) donde se discute una modificación a este argumento en el que se le da prioridad a los objetivos sobre las estrategias.

En 2009, Chávez modificó la constitución para aprobar su reelección indefinida. En 2012, cuando se lanzó para su tercer periodo, era claro que iba a ganar. Las elecciones de 2000, 2005 y 2006 habían sido criticables, pero en general mínimamente libres y justas. Las de 2008 y 2012 no. Chávez aseguró su victoria usando y abusando de recursos del estado, manipulando el tablero electoral y cooptando/desapareciendo medios de comunicación que le permitieran a la oposición diseminar su mensaje.

Estrategias institucionales con objetivos moderados —es decir, tácticas que usan elecciones, congreso o cortes para frenar reformas autoritarias— son, por el contrario, desafíos de bajo impacto. Reflejan la decisión de la oposición de respetar los canales existentes para dirimir conflictos y dejan espacio para negociar. Consecuentemente este tipo de tácticas son, por lo general, una apuesta más segura para proteger la democracia. No solo disminuyen los incentivos del ejecutivo para reprimir y aumentan los costos de dicha represión, sino que también le niegan al presidente la habilidad de reunir suficiente apoyo para introducir reformas más autoritarias. Si logra implementar dichas tácticas con éxito, la oposición consigue frenar la erosión democrática. Si no logra implementarlas con éxito, las reformas continúan sin obstáculos, pero la oposición resguarda recursos para combatir otras jugadas autoritarias más adelante.

Eso es lo que vemos en el caso colombiano (Gamboa 2022a, 129–77). Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) fue un líder con aspiraciones hegemónicas. Durante sus ocho años en el gobierno introdujo leyes que buscaban aumentar los poderes del ejecutivo, disminuir los poderes de cortes y congreso y cooptar organismos de control. Para combatirlo, a diferencia de lo que sucedió en Venezuela, la oposición colombiana utilizó (sobre todo) estrategias moderadas institucionales. A pesar de ser más débil que su contraparte venezolana, la coalición antiuribista logró con estas tácticas proteger los recursos que tenía y eventualmente frenar la erosión democrática.

La oposición a Uribe era menos poderosa que la oposición a Chávez. Tenía algo de apoyo en cortes y organismos de control, pero carecía de soporte en las fuerzas armadas o los grandes medios de comunicación. Si bien ocupaba alrededor de una tercera parte de las curules en el congreso, la coalición antiuribista no contaba con la capacidad de convocatoria que contaba la coalición antichavista en 2002. Teniendo en cuenta la popularidad de Uribe y la debilidad de la democracia colombiana, sus prospectos no eran muy prometedores. Sin embargo, y contrario a lo que sucedió en el vecino país, los grupos que enfrentaron los abusos de poder del presidente colombiano evitaron estrategias radicales extrainstitucionales y utilizaron estrategias moderadas institucionales en llave con estrategias moderadas extrainstitucionales. Con ello no sólo lograron proteger su legitimidad y ganar aliados, sino también evitar la cooptación de cortes y organismos de control y debilitar las reformas autoritarias que el presidente introdujo en el congreso (para más detalles sobre el caso de Alvaro Uribe ver Gamboa 2022, 129–77).

La oposición colombiana hizo un gran esfuerzo por mantener una imagen democrática e institucional. No solo rechazó las jugadas extrainstitucionales radicales de grupos guerrilleros, sino que hizo permanente uso de un discurso institucional. Su objetivo no era acabar con la presidencia de Uribe, sino frenar las reformas que éste estaba introduciendo. La ausencia de estrategias radicales extrainstitucionales protegió a la oposición. Los varios intentos del gobierno de enlodar su imagen cayeron en oídos sordos. La coalición antiuribista no solo logró proteger sus curules y ampliar su coalición, sino también mantener vínculos con aliados internacionales que, en más de una ocasión, intercedieron en su favor.

La oposición colombiana no solo se abstuvo de usar estrategias radicales extrainstitucionales, sino que utilizó estrategias moderadas institucionales. Sus minorías en el congreso usaron el reglamento parlamentario para dilatar, modificar y obstruir los proyectos del gobierno. Si bien dichas tácticas eran insuficientes para evitar la aprobación de las reformas, estas

lograron diluir y retrasar las leyes que salían del legislativo. Tal vez más importante aún, dichas tácticas invitaron a la Corte Constitucional (Botero y Gamboa 2021). La naturaleza de la revisión de constitucionalidad en Colombia exige que las reformas constitucionales se juzguen por su proceso no por su contenido. Creando y registrando vicios procedimentales, los congresistas le dieron a la Corte Constitucional importantes recursos para fallar en contra de reformas tan perjudiciales como el referendo que buscaba aprobar la segunda reelección de Uribe.

Las *estrategias radicales con objetivos moderados* y las *estrategias institucionales con objetivos radicales* tienen un potencial contradictorio. Las estrategias extrainstitucionales con objetivos moderados disminuyen los incentivos para reprimir, pero también los costos de hacerlo. Repertorios como protestas, boicots o huelgas que buscan frenar reformas democráticas pueden ser muy buenos para la protección de la democracia movilizando votantes o visibilizando los abusos del gobierno. Si se vuelven violentas, sin embargo, este tipo de estrategias pueden darle al ejecutivo la excusa perfecta para reprimir y deslegitimar a la oposición. Las estrategias institucionales con objetivos radicales por su lado aumentan los incentivos para reprimir, pero también los costos de hacerlo. Repertorios como referendos revocatorios y juicios políticos al presidente pueden frenar la erosión democrática, pero también pueden acorralar al ejecutivo y darle razones suficientes para reprimir a la oposición.

Por ejemplo, en Colombia, la estrategia moderada extrainstitucional de boicotear el referendo contra la politiquería introducido por Uribe en agosto de 2002 logró anular el primer abuso de poder del presidente. El referendo buscaba disminuir el tamaño del legislativo y volverlo unicameral, destituir a los congresistas y elegir nuevos legisladores bajo el halo uribista (Gaceta del Congreso 323 de 2002). La coalición antiuribista en el congreso y la Corte Constitucional lograron disminuir el alcance del referendo, pero no lograron frenarlo. Fue en últimas la campaña de

boicot promovida activamente por la oposición la que evitó que se lograra el umbral necesario para pasar las reformas sugeridas en la propuesta.

A pesar de éxitos como estos, las estrategias extrainstitucionales moderadas pueden ser también una táctica arriesgada. Repertorios no-violentos necesitan de organización y entrenamiento (Chenoweth 2020). Si esas condiciones no se cumplen, tácticas que originalmente se pensaron como no-violentas se pueden transformar fácilmente en repertorios violentos, dándole al líder con tendencias autoritarias una ventana de oportunidad para deslegitimar a la oposición e inclusive reprimirla.

Las estrategias radicales institucionales implican un riesgo similar. El referendo revocatorio en Venezuela, por ejemplo, no le dio a la oposición la victoria que quería, pero tampoco la dañó (como sí lo hicieron el golpe, la huelga o el boicot electoral). Le permitió, por el contrario, desarrollar estructuras de movilización electoral que fueron útiles en 2007, 2010, 2013 y 2015. Habiendo dicho eso, los referendos fallidos son altamente polarizantes. En Bolivia, por ejemplo, Evo Morales salió envalentonado del referendo revocatorio de 2008, dispuesto a presionar aún más fuerte por la ratificación unilateral de la nueva constitución.

En conclusión, el hecho de que la erosión democrática se dé a través del tiempo, le permite a la oposición combatir los atentados autoritarios de presidentes con aspiraciones hegemónicas. Dadas las condiciones nacionales e internacionales apropiadas (algo que discuto con más detalle en la siguiente sección), los presidentes con aspiraciones hegemónicas tienen intereses en mantener una careta democrática. Estrategias extrainstitucionales radicales les permiten reprimir a la oposición y avanzar reformas antidemocráticas más radicales, sin perder esa máscara democrática. Estrategias institucionales con objetivos moderados, por el contrario, dificultan la represión y el avance de reformas más radicales sin sacrificar esa apariencia democrática. En ese sentido, estrategias institucionales moderadas son una apuesta más segura para proteger la democracia. La oposición que utiliza dichas

estrategias evita darle al presidente razones "legítimas" que le permitan remover a miembros de la oposición de instituciones estatales o avanzar reformas más agresivas. Por el contrario, estrategias extrainstitucionales radicales son más arriesgadas. Estas tácticas, le dan al presidente razones "legítimas" para remover miembros de la oposición de instituciones estatales y avanzar reformas más agresivas.

La preferencia normativa por la democracia a nivel nacional e internacional es esencial

Vale la pena señalar que la teoría descrita arriba asume audiencias con preferencias normativas por la democracia que aumentan los incentivos del presidente para mantener una careta democrática y los costos de perderla. Sin embargo, el ascenso de Donald Trump (2017-2020) al poder en Estados Unidos, la profundización de regímenes autoritarios en Venezuela y Nicaragua, las victorias electorales de líderes populistas con tendencias autoritarias en México y Brasil y la incapacidad de las democracias latinoamericanas para resolver problemas básicos y urgentes particularmente visibles durante la pandemia, debilitaron dichas preferencias a nivel nacional e internacional.

La rápida erosión democrática en El Salvador es ejemplo de las consecuencias negativas de esta transformación. Nayib Bukele (2019-presente) subió al poder democráticamente con un discurso populista de mano dura. Antes de llegar al poder, el exalcalde de San Salvador tenía todas las trazas de un líder con tendencias autoritarias. Había utilizado la calle para amenazar organismos de control; deslegitimado las autoridades electorales salvadoreñas y demostrado disposición para disminuir libertades civiles (Meléndez-Sánchez 2021). Siguiendo el libreto de otros países latinoamericanos (Carrión 2022), Bukele llegó al poder en medio de una crisis de seguridad y la implosión de los partidos tradicionales salvadoreños, prometiendo refundar el sistema. Diferente a lo sucedido con otros populistas latinoamericanos como Chávez, Uribe o Morales que utilizaron tácticas sutiles para desmantelar la democracia, sin embargo,

Bukele se lanzó en ristre contra las instituciones democráticas de su país. Durante su primer año en el gobierno, el presidente entró por la fuerza al congreso con las fuerzas armadas, utilizó la policía para perseguir a legisladores de la oposición y lanzó una campaña de asedio contra el periódico independiente El Faro (Meléndez-Sánchez 2021). Ninguna de estas acciones generó la reacción nacional o internacional debida.

A nivel nacional, Bukele se benefició de un declive en el apoyo normativo a la democracia en su país. En 1998, 80 por ciento de los salvadoreños creían que la democracia era preferible a otro sistema de gobierno. Veintidós años después, sólo 54 por ciento piensan lo mismo (Latinobarómetro 2020; 1998). No obstante, su agresividad contra cortes y congreso, sus ataques a la prensa, sus violaciones de derechos humanos y los escándalos de corrupción que han rodeado su gobierno (Freedom House 2022), Bukele ha logrado mantener niveles inéditos de popularidad. De acuerdo a la encuestadora Ipsos en Abril de 2021, el presidente gozaba de una aprobación del 78 por ciento; un año más tarde ésta había aumentado a 83 por ciento (Ipsos 2021; 2022).

Más grave aún ha sido la falta de una audiencia internacional con una preferencia normativa por la democracia. A diferencia de la Unión Europea que ha tratado de actualizar protocolos para agilizar su respuesta a violaciones al imperio de la ley (*rule of law*) (Baraggia y Bonelli 2022), los Estados Unidos y la Organización de Estados Americanos han mantenido una actitud ambivalente frente a la erosión democrática. Muy críticos de Venezuela, Nicaragua y Cuba, pero silenciosos frente a países como El Salvador.

Por ejemplo, en febrero de 2020 en medio de un tire y afloje con el congreso, Bukele utilizó a los militares para invadir temporalmente el edificio legislativo y presionar a los legisladores para que le aprobaran recursos para combatir al crimen organizado. Frente a ese despliegue de fuerza bruta, la respuesta de la OEA y EEUU fue tibia y desalentadora (Vivanco 2020). EEUU rechazó la presencia militar en la Asamblea Legislativa, pero usando el lenguaje de Bukele, llamó a

ser "pacientes". La noche anterior, frente a la inminente crisis, Luis Almagro (Secretario General de la OEA) reportó que la ministra de relaciones exteriores de El Salvador había expresado respeto a las instituciones democráticas y compromiso con políticas de seguridad que "habían arrojado resultados positivos" (Luis Almagro [@Almagro_OEA2015] 2020).

La ausencia de una condena clara a este y otros ataques autoritarios envalentonó a Bukele. Sin necesidad de mantener una careta democrática (pues no había consecuencias por comportamientos claramente autoritarios),[4] el presidente se demoró tres años haciendo en El Salvador, lo que Chávez se demoró seis en hacer en Venezuela. Para 2022, Bukele había logrado ganar mayorías en el congreso, cooptar las cortes, limitar la libertad de prensa y aprobar su inconstitucional campaña de reelección, transformando la débil (pero superviviente) democracia salvadoreña en un autoritarismo competitivo.

La falta de apoyo a la democracia en El Salvador es preocupante, pero en un país de bajos recursos en donde la influencia internacional ha sido tradicionalmente esencial para mantener o cambiar regímenes (Mainwaring y Pérez-Liñán 2013) la falta de una defensa contundente a la democracia por parte de la comunidad internacional es tan o más negativa. Una respuesta más clara y oportuna por parte de EEUU, la OEA y otros países de la región probablemente le hubiera generado a Bukele incentivos para mantener su careta democrática. Interesado en mantener dicha imagen, el presidente probablemente hubiera impulsado ataques menos agresivos contra la democracia, dándole tiempo y espacio a la oposición para combatir estos atentados.

Si bien, la actitud frente a Bukele ha cambiado y tanto EEUU como la OEA se han vuelto más críticos del presidente, este cambio es muy tardío. Con el apoyo de una población desesperada por un estado que les cumpliera promesas básicas de bienestar social y aprovechando el silencio de la comunidad internacional, el presidente salvadoreño logró desmantelar las instituciones democráticas y debilitar irreparablemente a la oposición. Hoy por hoy la lucha en El Salvador no es la de evitar la erosión democrática, sino la de transitar de vuelta a la democracia una lucha más complicada con diferentes cálculos para la oposición.

Conclusión

El Salvador no es el único país en donde hemos visto el declive de las preferencias normativas por la democracia. En 1998 cuando Hugo Chávez salió elegido, 65 por ciento de los latinoamericanos decían que la democracia era preferible a cualquier otra forma de gobierno (Latinobarómetro 2020). En 2020 ese número se redujo a 50 por (Latinobarómetro 2020). Dicho declive es preocupante, especialmente cuando está acompañado de un contexto internacional en donde —no obstante recientes mejoras en el apoyo a la democracia en la región— hay preocupaciones más urgentes (i.e. la guerra con Ucrania, immigración etc.) que disminuyen o distorsionan la presión internacional sobre actores autoritarios.

Para contrarrestar la ola antidemocrática es importante mejorar estas condiciones. Las oposiciones a líderes autoritarios tienen importantes oportunidades para combatir reformas autoritarias sí y sólo si aumentamos la presión nacional e internacional a favor de la democracia.

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[4] En septiembre de 2021, de hecho, Bukele cambió su biografía en Twitter dos veces declarándose dictador. En respuesta a una serie de protestas a sus abusos autoritarios, el presidente salvadoreño cambió su biografía el 19 de septiembre de "Presidente de El Salvador" a "Dictador de El Salvador". Unos días después modificó dicha biografía a "El dictador más cool del mundo mundial" (El Tiempo 2021).

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Odiar el ágora: formas digitales de la recesión democrática en la era de la desinformación

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"Democratic elections cease to function properly, for example, when the failure to take seriously the interests of underprivileged nonvoters leads to a vicious circle, or when the infrastructures of public communication disintegrate to such an extent that dulling resentment, instead of well-informed public opinions, gains the upper hand."

Jurgen Habermas, 2018, Oxford Handbook of Political Communication, Page 871.

La tercera ola de democratización en América Latina estuvo acompañada por la construcción de un consenso Rawlsiano en teoría democrática, cuyos pilares fueron la participación ciudadana, la tolerancia política y la deliberación pública. El nuevo ciclo de recesión democrática de la última década está caracterizado por la amenaza a estos pilares. Esa amenaza se expresa en la aceptación, por parte de gran parte de las élites políticas como de los votantes, de limitar la participación ciudadana, ser políticamente intolerantes y ejercer la violencia discursiva en el debate público.

En esta nota discutimos lo que Habermas (2018) definió como la desintegración de la infraestructura para la comunicación pública. Es decir, la desintegración de las precondiciones de un debate democrático tolerante y orientado al consenso comunicativo. Para ello, analizamos el uso estratégico de las noticias falsas (*fake news*) en América Latina y nos preguntamos sobre la posibilidad de la deliberación democrática cuando la confianza en la intención comunicativa de nuestros interlocutores es puesta en entredicho en la esfera pública digital.

Para ejemplificar nuestro argumento, tomamos un camino poco común al mostrar la diferencia en el estado afectivo de encuestados de América Latina cuando se les presenta la corrección de una noticia falsa que miente sobre la eficacia de la vacuna. La reacción afectiva ante lo verdadero y lo falso es indicativa de uno de los mecanismos que, a nuestro juicio, facilita esta "desintegración de la infraestructura para la comunicación pública" a la que alude Habermas.

Las *fake news* enseñan que existe un *enemigo* más que un interlocutor, y que ese enemigo no está dispuesto a mantener un debate democrático. La puesta en duda de la intención comunicativa de este 'otro' es uno de los mecanismos que destruyen el capital de confianza comunicativa requerido para llevar adelante un debate democrático. Luego de presentar un ejemplo de corrección seguido de la reacción afectiva que produce, discutimos nuevos avances sobre la polarización afectiva. Concluimos esta nota con un análisis de las estrategias para reconstruir un consenso comunicativo y una deliberación democrática en un mundo donde existen actores que producen y circulan desinformaciones con fines políticos.

Polarización y la circulación de fake news

¿Cuán razonable es debatir públicamente con nuestros *enemigos* cuando estos mienten estratégicamente y no tienen intención de

llegar a un consenso comunicativo? Ese es el mensaje más importante que la gran mayoría de las y los ciudadanos extraen de las *fake news*. Las *fake news* no solo comunican información falsa, también expresan la intención política de quien las crea y distribuye. La sola existencia de las *fake news* pone en entredicho el valor del debate democrático, dado que existe otro, frente a nosotros, que no está interesado en un entendimiento político.

Visto de esta forma, las *fake news* son el instrumento privilegiado de la desintegración del debate democrático. Supone la existencia de un *otro*, cuyo objetivo es manipular estratégicamente el espacio político, distorsionar el ágora como entidad comunicativa antes que presentar argumentos y llegar a conclusiones. Ante la certeza de que nuestra oponente miente, las burbujas no son una patología sino un espacio de defensa, un control de fronteras ante la invasión estratégica de lo falso. Por tanto, si no existe un acuerdo sobre lo que constituye un dato factual de la realidad, el diálogo político y la democracia deliberativa dejan de ser normativamente importantes.

Tanto la información falsa que no tiene intencionalidad política como aquella que es "weaponizada" —utilizada como arma para producir daño—, disminuyen la creencia en la capacidad comunicativa y en la intencionalidad comunicativa de nuestros interlocutores. Wardle y Derakhshan (2017) enfatizan la intencionalidad política de las operaciones de *fake news* y las distinguen de aquellas noticias que no son validadas o devienen falsedades producto de errores involuntarios [*false news*]. En el caso de los *false news*, el debate con nuestros *enemigos* solo puede ser paternalista, con el objetivo de mostrarles que sus creencias son equivocadas. Con las *fake news*, por otro lado, el debate es inviable, dado que no existe una intención comunicativa orientada al diálogo sino un intento explícito de tornar tóxico el espacio en el cual se desarrolla el diálogo público.

Las estrategias de desinformación no son un fenómeno aislado y tienen mayor asidero en escenarios polarizados. Tal polarización se manifiesta en nuestra percepción de aquello que nos aleja del otro. En algunos países, las élites políticas han buscado explícitamente la distorsión del espacio comunicativo, ya sea como mecanismo de defensa cuando los datos de la realidad "son inconvenientes" para sus ambiciones políticas, y, en otros casos, como mecanismo de construcción de una identidad política del nosotros [in-group] contra el otro [out-group]. Donald Trump Jr. y Jair Bolsonaro nos han dado extensos ejemplos de ambas intenciones comunicativas, cuando desmerecieron la peligrosidad del COVID-19 porque les resultaba políticamente inconveniente y cuando circularon noticias intencionadamente falsas como mecanismo de fidelización de sus electorados.

Odiar el ágora: un experimento con encuadres equivalentes

Nuestro interés en este ensayo no se centra en el proceso de creación de las noticias falsas, intencionadas o no, sino en sus efectos comunicativos. En particular, en la forma en que las *fake news*, la percepción de noticias falsas políticamente malintencionadas, activan formas de intolerancia comunicativa (el enojo, el asco, el estrés), así como la probabilidad de que quienes participan de estos espacios inhiban su intención comunicativa y abandonen el espacio público.

En los últimos tres años, en colaboración con el Banco Inter-Americano de Desarrollo (BID) y con Chequeado Argentina, hemos estudiado la polarización en la comunicación digital de América Latina y, en particular, el efecto de encuadres equivalentes que confirman o refutan contenidos que circulan en las redes sociales. Estos encuadres equivalentes nos otorgan una ventana privilegiada para observar el efecto de las noticias falsas y, a su vez, entender mecanismos que pueden aumentar la circulación de las correcciones y mejorar el diálogo digital.

Con el fin de entender la activación de contenidos en redes sociales de mensajes que corrigen desinformaciones, realizamos alrededor de 40 experimentos, muchos de ellos sobre la eficacia de las vacunas o sobre pronunciamientos de funcionarios públicos, en Argentina, Brasil,

Figura 1.

Nota: Cuatro versiones del fact check en Colombia, con dos encuadres distintos (confirmación o refutación), con y sin etiquetas. Cada encuestado recibió aleatoriamente uno de estos cuatro posibles tratamientos (o con placebo como grupo de control). Luego presentamos una pregunta de comportamiento (gustar, compartir, comentar, ignorar) y una pregunta de sentimiento (enojo, optimismo, asco, alegría, tristeza, estrés).

Chile, Colombia y Estados Unidos. En cada uno de estos países, implementamos experimentos con encuadres equivalentes que presentan un mismo dato de la realidad como confirmación ("es cierto que las vacunas son efectivas") o como refutación ("es falso que las vacunas no son efectivas"). La Figura 1 muestra los tratamientos implementados en Colombia, que comunican información clínicamente correcta sobre la eficacia de la vacuna.

Para entender por qué nos enojamos y en qué casos decidimos compartir nuestros enojos, basamos nuestros experimentos en encuadres equivalentes de confirmaciones ("Es cierto que p") y de refutaciones ("Es falso que no p"), que muestran cómo afecta la comunicación política. Si bien los encuadres equivalentes describen un mismo dato de la realidad, sus efectos comunicacionales difieren. La misma información nos interpela con distinta carga afectiva, y por ende, es compartida con distinta probabilidad.

En nuestro experimento, los encuestados fueron divididos en grupos que reciben uno de los posibles tratamientos. Estos distintos encuadres confirman la información correcta o refutan la información falsa, variando a veces el tipo de vacuna (Moderna, AstraZeneca, Sputnik V), el tipo de etiquetas, y otros detalles de la vacuna. Cada encuestado recibe aleatoriamente uno de los posibles tratamientos (o un placebo como grupo de control). Luego les ofrecemos una pregunta de comportamiento (gustar, compartir, comentar, ignorar) y una pregunta de sentimiento (enojo, optimismo, asco, alegría, tristeza, estrés).

La Tabla 1 presenta las diferencias en la tasa de reacciones y emociones reportadas por 2.420 encuestados en Argentina, obtenidos de la encuesta post-electoral de enero del 2022, luego de la elección intermedia. Los encuestados argentinos compartieron la confirmación sobre la vacuna AstraZeneca un 23% (tasa de 0,23), la vacuna Sputnik V un 24% (0,24) y la vacuna Moderna un 26% (0,26) de las veces. En cambio, la refutación fue solo compartida un 8%, 9% y 9%, respectivamente. La Tabla 1 muestra el mismo resultado para el conjunto de las vacunas, con una tasa de "like" de 24,3% para la *confirmación* (0,243) y un 8,4% para la *refutación* (0,084). La

Tabla 1. Diferencias entre los encuadres qui *confirman y refutan* la eficacia de las vacunas contra COVID-19

	Variable	Encuadre "*Es Falso que no p*"	Encuadre "*Es Verdad que p*"	Diferencia F-V	P <
Reacciones	**Todas las interacciones**	0.192	0.372	0.180***	0.000
	"Like"	0.084	0.243	0.158***	0.000
	Compartió	0.076	0.114	0.038***	0.001
	Comentó	0.041	0.048	0.006	0.450
Emociones	**Enojo**	0.163	0.044	-0.119***	0.000
	Alegría	0.017	0.096	0.079***	0.000
	Asqueado	0.193	0.076	-0.117***	0.000
	Optimista	0.059	0.331	0.272***	0.000
	Estresado	0.126	0.060	-0.066***	0.000
	Triste	0.059	0.024	-0.035***	0.000
	Temeroso	0.045	0.028	-0.017**	0.023
	Indiferente	0.441	0.414	-0.027	0.186

Nota: *Significancia estadística*: *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, p < 0.1. Panel electoral argentino 2021.

diferencia entre la confirmación y la refutación es 24,3%-8,4%=15,8% (una diferencia entre ambas tasas de 0,158). Es decir, las *confirmaciones* fueron "like" (gustadas) casi el triple que las *refutaciones*.

El resto de los resultados muestran que la confirmación fue compartida un 11,4% de las veces mientras que la refutación fue compartida tan sólo un 7,6%, una diferencia de 3,8 puntos. Visto de conjunto, el porcentaje de encuestados que da "like", "comparte" o "comenta" la publicación suma un 37,2% para la confirmación y tan sólo un 19,2% para la refutación. Por tanto, el contenido que confirma la eficacia de las vacunas sería activado en los muros de los contactos de los encuestados con casi el doble de frecuencia que las refutaciones. El primer resultado interesante de este experimento es que la cantidad de información disponible en las redes sociales es mayor cuando utilizamos el encuadre "Es verdad que las vacunas son efectivas" que cuando utilizamos el encuadre "Es falso que las vacunas no son efectivas". Es decir, si una democracia deliberativa incrementa la cantidad de información que circula en las redes sociales, la versión "es cierto que p" será más frecuente que la versión "es falso que no p".

Enojo, alegría y *fact checking:* confianza en la intención comunicativa de nuestros interlocutores

El resultado más importante de la Tabla 1 es que los encuestados que observaron la refutación están más enojados, asqueados, estresados, tristes y temerosos que quienes se toparon con la confirmación. Las diferencias no son menores: los que interactuaron con la refutación se mostraron cuatro veces más enojados (16,3%) que quienes observaron la confirmación (4,4%). La refutación estuvo 2,5 veces más asociada con el asco que la confirmación. La primera alcanzó una frecuencia de 7,6% frente al 19,3% de la refutación. Las diferencias también son significativas frente a emociones positivas. Un 33,1% de los encuestados que leyeron la confirmación reportaron sentirse optimistas comparado con un 5,9% de quienes leyeron la refutación, casi 6 veces más. Alegría

fue 4 veces más alta para quienes leyeron la confirmación respecto de la refutación (9,6% y 1;7%, respectivamente).

En definitiva, la refutación "Es falso que las vacunas no son efectivas" despierta emociones asociadas a la polarización afectiva, mientras que la confirmación "Es cierto que las vacunas son eficaces" se relaciona con rasgos propios del consenso democrático. Esto abre la posibilidad de pensar la democracia deliberativa como un espacio en el cual los acuerdos comunicativos no son sólo cognitivos, sino que tienen consecuencias afectivas.

Aun cuando el contenido de los tratamientos es lógica y semánticamente idéntico, las dos proposiciones presentan distinta probabilidad de ser amplificadas dado que se asocian con el mismo conjunto de emociones. Los encuestados interpretan el contenido de las confirmaciones como una validación de la calidad de las vacunas en tanto que las refutaciones son la demostración de que existen individuos que mienten sobre un tema socialmente relevante. Aquellos que leen el contenido que confirma sus creencias están contentos con el hecho "p" mientras que quienes leen el contenido que rechaza las "creencias de los otros" (rechaza la *fake news*) se muestran enojados, asqueados y estresados con la circulación de contenidos falsos.

Si la "verdad" nos vuelve optimistas y la "mentira" ofende, el mundo en el que circulan las noticias falsas predispone a los usuarios a abandonar el diálogo comunicativo; desintegra la infraestructura para la comunicación pública porque tiñe la intención comunicativa de quien no pertenece a nuestro grupo, y la pone al servicio de la estrategia política más no de la comprensión. El efecto negativo del caso "vacunas" no es explicado simplemente por el contenido falso, sino además por la existencia de quien miente. Las noticias falsas polarizan, aún antes de debatir su contenido, porque ponen de manifiesto que hay un otro que no respeta las condiciones del diálogo democrático. El problema excede la existencia de noticias falsas, porque es actualizado cuando rechazamos "lo falso" en el *fact check* del experimento "vacunas".

Las redes sociales han sido un vector central de la crisis pública desatada por la difusión de noticias falsas referidas a la COVID-19, con efectos negativos sobre la ya erosionada confianza en las instituciones sociales y políticas y, por qué no, en instituciones privadas tales como las plataformas.

Polarización afectiva y violencia virtual

Entre sus rasgos principales, la polarización digital facilita un realineamiento de las divisiones político-partidarias que coinciden con distancias a nivel social y cultural. Esta reducción de distintas dimensiones políticas, sociales y culturales es central en los estudios sobre polarización afectiva. Al igual que en el experimento "vacunas", que mostramos anteriormente, distintos tipos de encuadres comunicacionales nos interpelan no solo cognitiva sino también afectivamente (Iyengar *et al.* 2019; Mason 2018). Aun cuando en los estudios sobre comportamiento político se ha aceptado que la polarización afectiva es clave para entender la creciente animosidad en la esfera pública, así como también para describir el creciente uso de lenguaje tóxico y la violencia discursiva. La discusión sobre las formas que toma la polarización afectiva en la comunicación digital es menos prolífica.

Las reacciones que observamos en redes sociales (compartir, responder, gustar o, incluso, ignorar mensajes) no responden solamente a un alineamiento cognitivo después de interpretar un evento lógicamente. Son, ante todo, una defensa de *nuestras* convicciones frente a los objetivos comunicacionales del *otro*. Más allá de las disquisiciones exhaustivas, la información política nos *hermana*, nos brinda un marco de contención en el plano afectivo, además del ideológico (Calvo y Aruguete 2020). La reacción afectiva de los usuarios hacia los mensajes no es muy distinta cuando observan información que ha sido verificada que si comparten contenidos falsos.

Pandemia y desinformación

La pandemia estuvo plagada de falsedades, que se diferencian en contenido e intencionalidad política. Dos grandes etapas marcaron el signo de la circulación de información. La primera se caracterizó por la necesidad subjetiva de completar vacíos en la información con presunciones —y, en ocasiones, con prejuicios— y así suplir la perplejidad de los momentos iniciales. La segunda, signada por la creciente polarización política e identitaria, fue dando forma a una comprensión dicotómica y facciosa de los eventos sanitarios, políticos y socioeconómicos, con el consecuente aumento de los niveles de intolerancia e incivilidad política, expresadas en violencias y discursos de odio.

El exceso de información sucia, inespecífica, desordenada, excesiva y en permanente cambio —cuya etiqueta "infodemia" resulta insuficiente (Waisbord 2022)— dividió aguas. Por un lado, consolidó y hasta aumentó la distancia entre actores políticos cuando las narrativas se enfocaron en la política pública y el grado de responsabilidad de las autoridades en la proliferación del virus. Por el otro, la respuesta política frente a las desinformaciones sobre asuntos clínicos fue colectiva y tuvo altos niveles de consenso. En la vereda contraria, los intentos por inmiscuirse en tergiversaciones que mezclaran la efectividad de las vacunas con especulaciones geopolíticas tuvieron poco *engagement* y, en algunas sociedades, no perduraron. Aquí es donde la polarización afectiva juega un papel fundamental: lo que nos aleja de otros partidos como de sus dirigentes, por caso, no depende exclusivamente de acuerdos o desacuerdos racionales con sus propuestas; se manifiesta en las emociones que despiertan en nosotros los discursos políticos.

¿Cómo se crean las *fake news*? ¿Quiénes y por qué las viralizan? ¿Cuán efectivas son en el diálogo político virtual? La *motivación direccionada*, propia del razonamiento motivado, impulsa a las personas a procesar información que protege sus identidades preexistentes y generar un compromiso cognitivo considerablemente mayor que las refutaciones

a tales creencias. El razonamiento motivado y las emociones que despiertan ciertas narrativas suelen ser dominantes en el ámbito político, en general, y en la generación, aceptación y propagación de *fake news*, en particular. La motivación direccionada es un recurso cognitivo potente que ocluye la búsqueda de información exhaustiva y genera resistencias cuando la verificación de información falsa refuta nuestras percepciones de los asuntos.

Durante los momentos álgidos de propagación del virus, cuando la respuesta sanitaria se enfocó en las restricciones a la circulación, las estrategias de desinformación contaron con un contexto favorable. Los altos niveles de polarización social no solo se tradujeron en sentimientos de riesgo disímiles acordes con identidades partidarias —riesgo sanitario *versus* riesgo económico— sino que, además, erosionaron la confianza depositada en la campaña de vacunación como solución para reducir la propagación del virus, insuflada por grupos extremistas alineados con los antivacunas.

De allí que las actividades impulsadas por las organizaciones verificadoras y otro tipo de instituciones hayan sido nodales, tanto para disminuir la difusión de falsedades cuanto para aumentar la circulación de información sanitaria consensuada por autoridades sanitarias y asociaciones profesionales. Se trata de un esfuerzo muy cuesta arriba, por varios motivos. En primer lugar, porque la acción de *fact checking* no se orienta solo al contenido falso. Es, además, un mensaje dirigido al interlocutor, a quien se le "advierte" que hizo algo erróneo, equivocado y éticamente reprobable. El hecho de "adjudicar" una calificación —"Verdadero" o "Falso"— que beneficia cognitivamente a un grupo de usuarios y damnifica a otro puede ocasionar costos reputacionales en el *fact checker* y menoscabar la credibilidad del acto de verificación. Ello permite entender las resistencias de muchos ciudadanos a la corrección, como falsa, de una narrativa que habrían percibido como verdadera, aceptable, plausible.

Estas resistencias a compartir el chequeo de datos se ponen más en evidencia en plataformas donde el lenguaje tóxico y el discurso intolerante se condicen con etiquetas que ciñen la complejidad de los mensajes. Twitter y Facebook son ejemplos ilustrativos, donde las desinformaciones y los mensajes falsos circulan más asiduamente por contar con estrategias de integración horizontal que buscan garantizar una propagación amplia. En definitiva, al igual que los mensajes que generan eventos políticos polarizantes, las intervenciones de verificación están atravesadas por el conflicto.

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The New Radical Right and Dissatisfaction with Democracy: Latin America in Comparative Perspective

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Traditional representative institutions are undeniably in crisis in many countries around the world. Despite a lack of consensus as to whether the crisis is irreversible or even exceptional, this global reversal of progress toward greater democratization has given rise to somewhat alarmist interpretations of the institutional disfunctions of regimes in which elites no longer act to guarantee basic democratic norms (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018) or too much economic power is concentrated in their hands (Grayling 2017). The inability of political systems to channel demands and offer concrete solutions to problems of social concern, together with the expansion of critical citizens, has contributed to a radicalization of electorates. The far right has succeeded in "capturing social non-conformism in favor of different anti-progressive political escapes" (Stefanoni 2021, 9). This phenomenon tends to sharpen the perception of a crisis of democracy. The present article explores that perception, the global pattern of the far right, and the reideologization of the political debate.

The Radical Right as a Symptom of the Crisis of Democracy

The crisis of democracy is evident in questionings of the status quo given sharpened perceptions of social inequality; an unprecedented decline of electoral participation; rising distrust of institutions and governing politicians; and electors' willingness to mortgage democratic ideals when they collide with pressing issues such as order and security, the increasing cost of living, or immigration. Even in Finland, one of the world's most advanced democracies, citizens have become willing to trade liberal democratic principles for progress on objectives of more immediate public interest (Saikkonen and Christensen 2022). In Europe generally, the weakening of democracy that has been perceived since the 1980s appears inseparable from the decline of social democratic models (Bandau 2021). In a context of slowing economic growth, social democratic parties have increasingly embraced fiscal orthodoxy and structural reforms.

This weaking of democracy is also fed by the new technological revolution, which has contributed to deregulation of political relations. Immediate access to information encourages individualism and makes citizens feel less need for intermediation. To an ever-increasing extent, the relation between citizens and the state has come to resemble a commercial transaction, weakening the essence of deliberation. Meanwhile, digital media has magnified the visibility of candidates who are in open conflict with liberal democracy.

Although there is a tendency to overestimate the electoral effect of disinformation through social networks (Jungherr and Schroeder 2021), Donald Trump's victory in 2016 set off alarm bells. Three things reinforced pessimism about the future of democracy: the fact that his election occurred in the very cradle of modern democracy; the coincidence with Britain's Brexit vote; and the electoral resurgence of what could be called a "radical" Right that undermines liberal democracy's principles but also, unlike the "extreme" right which « rejects the essence of democracy, that is, popular sovereignty and majority rule» (Mudde 2019, 7). As a sign of the growing normalization of those parties, in the

French presidential elections of 2017, Emmanuel Macron contested the second round against Marine Le Pen, who obtained 34 percent of the vote and then five years later received 42 percent. In 2017, Alternative for Germany came in third in the German federal elections, with the support of some left-wing voters.

Perceptions that the crisis of liberal democracy is sharpening also owe to the radical Right's entry into mainstream politics in Western Europe. In September 2022, Giorgia Meloni was appointed as Italy's new prime minister, the most extremely right-wing administration since the end of World War II. In October 2022, Democrats of Sweden, which remained outside the victorious right-wing bloc, became the parliamentary force with the second greatest number of votes. The ever-clearer normalization of these parties, despite the ongoing danger of their assuming their most radical positions once in power, has distinguished this latest wave of populism.

Various scholars have cast doubt on the notion that we are dealing with an exceptional and irreversible crisis, instead emphasizing the cyclical, contextual, and contingent character of perceived crises of democracy (Przeworski 2022; Zilinsky 2019; Corbett 2020). For starters, this is not a new problem. Since the end of the nineteenth century, many have seen political parties' transformative impact on governments as indicative of a crisis of representation (Manin 1996). In 1975, a report of the Trilateral Commission was published as *The Crisis of Democracy: On the Governability of Democracies*. Since the 1990s, the scholarly literature has cautiously returned to the subject (Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000), coinciding with the rise of the first wave of radical Right parties in Europe in the 1980s (Kitschelt 1995; Mény and Surel 2000).

Moreover, the magnitude and depth of the crisis that observers pretend to explain is unclear. The "deconsolidation" of democracy that Mounk and Foa (2016, 2017) sought to demonstrate by studying the perceptions of European youth, for example, was refuted by Zilinsky (2019), who showed that young people were actually not

dissatisfied with democracy. His study also tied democratic legitimacy to governments' economic and political performance.

And how to measure democracies' deconsolidation? The Democracy Index, published annually by the *Economist*, uses four classic political-scientific categories for classifying regimes: hybrid (Karl 1995), authoritarian (Linz 2000), defective (Merkel 2004), and full. Countries' location in one category or another appears highly sensitive to contingent political factors. The end of restrictions tied to the pandemic is thus the main explanation for Chile, France, and Spain again figuring as full democracies and no longer defective ones. In Chile, currently among the ten top-rated countries in terms of democracy, the way the constitutional reforms were handled also heavily affected the country's score. Despite this positive result, Chilean politics is not immune to populism and radicalism from either side of the political spectrum.

To all appearances, the structural preconditions (Carothers 2002) that democratization theorists have identified as possible safeguards against the deterioration of democracy (e.g., economic welfare, existence of a civic culture, absence of major social divisions, institutionalized party systems) are not enough to thwart populism in the United States or Europe. Economic growth does not prevent inequality from generating high levels of disaffection; broad consensus on the values of liberal democracy does not allow countries to avoid the emergence of "illiberal" leaders; the institutionalization of party systems does not guarantee that traditional elites continue fulfilling their role as guardians of democratic norms. In short, the supposed preconditions do not suffice for averting democratic recession. As Corbett (2020, 186) notes, this outcome suggests that democracy is a "much more contingent form of regime" than transition theorists assumed, one moreover characterized by variable paths.

These preconditions aside, three principal structural factors contribute to explaining the democratic recession and drifts toward populism. First, parties' programmatic linkages with

society have weakened in the wake of economic and sociocultural changes (Katz and Mair 1995). Second, digital technology has modified the structure of the public arena, eliminating parties' formerly privileged role as channels of information and intermediation (Jungherr and Schroeder 2021). Third, traditional elites in many cases have contributed to empowering their most radical opponents. In effect, the decline of center-left and center-right parties is correlated with the rise of the radical Right (Gidron and Ziblatt 2019).

Critical attitudes toward democracies considered incapable of satisfying citizens' social expectations are another, much more contingent, factor relevant to explaining support for disruptive and extreme political offerings. Do the high rates of dissatisfaction with democracy also registered in Italy, Spain, and France constitute a common pattern for explaining the global rise and consolidation of radical Right political tendencies? What has been different about such rights in Latin America?

Regime Types and Dissatisfaction with Democracy

The crisis of democracy does not have the same magnitude or implications in all contexts. Latin America has four authoritarian regimes (Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Haiti). According to the 2022 Democracy Index, autocratic tendencies also constitute a risk for various countries in the region. Four countries ranked hybrid regimes —three governed by leftist populists (Mexico, Bolivia, and Peru) and one by a right-wing populist (El Salvador)—have registered setbacks. One of the worst performers is El Salvador, under the presidency of Nayib Bukele. Since March 2022, the Central American country has been under a state of exception imposed to fight gangs. Although this war has turned Bukele into the most popular leader in Latin American (greater than 80 percent), it has been accompanied by flagrant, generalized violations of human rights and has weakened the political system's internal checks and balances as well as freedom of the press. Over the past decades, Latin American democracy has thus experienced its greatest

setback, even though its average democracy score is the third highest after North America and Western Europe. Its relatively high overall position reflects the presence of three established democracies in the region: Uruguay, Chile, and Costa Rica (Democracy Index).

Grading countries on each of the five dimensions considered by the index—the electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation, and political culture—ensures consideration of disparate political-institutional conditions on which the magnitude of the crisis of democratic representation and the probability of leaders uncommitted to liberal democratic norms being hailed as "saviors" depend. In Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica, several historical conditions for the institutionalization of party systems (Mainwaring and Scully 1995) continue to be met, despite traditional parties' weakened social and territorial connections , a worldwide occurrence. Parties have not become mere electoral vehicles of personalist leaders in these three countries, as has occurred in other contexts where the political system is structured around single-party hegemonies of a populist and personalist stripe or is weak and malleable (Cavarozzi and Casullo 2002).

Certainly, however, this does not mean that these countries are immune from right-wing radicalism. In 2021, José Antonio Kast, leader of Chile's ultraconservative and libertarian-right Republican Party, founded in 2019, reached the second round of the presidential election, facing off against the ultimately victorious leftist candidate, Gabriel Boric. The Republican Party won fourteen seats in the lower house and one in the senate in the 2021 parliamentary elections, succeeding in positioning its project within the national political arena in little time and growing alongside the country's center-right Chile Vamos coalition. Chile also has another populist party of relatively recent creation: Partido de la Gente, or Party of the People, founded in 2019. It succeeded in placing third in the last presidential elections and is currently the largest party in the country. In Uruguay, the radical Right Open Town Hall (Cabildo Abierto) party, founded in 2019, is part of

the governing coalition. Like Party of the People, it avoids championing a discernible ideology on the left-right axis, instead emphasizing a message of "solving people's real problems" in an effort to attract voters from across the political spectrum. In Costa Rica, Minister of Security Jorge Torres asked his government to follow in Bukele's footsteps in light of the broad support that Bukele's success against organized crime has elicited across the region.

Beyond the weakening of parties' programmatic ties, various studies show that attitudes toward democracy help explain the rise of the populist right. In effect, an increasingly negative evaluation of the democratic performance of the countries of Latin America as a whole has been observed, although this does not necessarily signify a questioning of the regime types as such. In 2020, discontent with Latin American democracy reached 70 percent, up from 51 percent in 2013 (Latinobarómetro 2021, 38). In El Salvador, Perelló and Navia (2022) show that the key variable explaining the vote for Bukele was not so much parties' programmatic inconsistency as it was dissatisfaction with democracy.

Before the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, Brazilians also registered the region's lowest approval rating of their government (6 percent) and the least satisfaction with democracy (9 percent). Only two in every five citizens declared a preference for democracy over authoritarianism (Doctor 2019, 23). In 2013, the Lava Jato operation began to affect the whole political class, particularly the government of Dilma Rousseff, who was impeached and removed from office in 2016. Economic slowdown was inauspicious for attempts of the Workers' Party to implement its "neo-developmentalist" model, and the country became polarized ideologically. In that context, in 2018, 80 to 90 percent of middle-class voters supported the candidate explicitly defending dictatorship, torture, machismo, and homophobia while legitimating his positions by claiming they reflected the will of the people. Bolsonaro also succeeded in capturing an important segment of Lula's former electorate: those disenchanted with politics (Goldstein 2019).

Although the political-institutional conditions of Chile certainly differ from those of El Salvador and Brazil, satisfaction with democracy has been dropping there as well, falling 15 percent between 1995 and 2020 (from 33 to just 18 percent) (Latinobarómetro 2020). Since late 2019, the Republican Party has proved able to take advantage of a fluid context in which public opinion has become increasingly concerned with the decline of public order and increasing violence, as well as skeptical of the ability of Chile's constitutional assembly to solve citizens' problems. In that context, Kast successfully instilled a counter hegemonic narrative about the social uprising of 2019 and the writing of a new constitution.

In all three countries, albeit in varying ways, parties and traditional elites have been unable to contain the rise of populisms from the right: in El Salvador, because of the party system's weak consolidation, which allowed an outsider to break through; in Brazil, because of the deconsolidation of the party system that preceded Bolsonaro's coming to power (Goldstein 2019); and in Chile, because of the loss of a distinctive profile on the part of the center-right, whose programmatic moderation signified abandonment of the values of its traditional electorate. This programmatic weakening has followed a pattern similar to that of European right-wing parties in relation to their extreme pole (Bale and Rovira 2021).

The third factor that contributes to explaining the consolidation of the radical Right, albeit indirectly, is the affinity between populism and digital media. Populist leaders have amply demonstrated that they know how to take advantage of these new technologies, and better (and more) than traditional parties. The most emblematic case is that of Bukele. With nearly 5 million followers on Twitter, he usually announces new social policies through that channel. His messianic tone has paid off thanks to digital media in a regional context marked by the growth of evangelical churches. In Brazil, Bolsonaro launched his candidacy for reelection in 2022 under the slogan "Freedom, Truth, and Faith," again with the evangelical churches' strong backing. In both cases, the use of these

new technologies has been accompanied by reduced freedom of the press and prohibitions against moderating social media content, giving free reign to disinformation.

The communications of Kast's presidential campaign also included strategic utilization of social media. However, his campaign's use of populist rhetoric, in the sense of "challenge of the legitimate authority of the establishment" (Norris and Inglehart 2019, 4), was more limited to a particular political conjuncture: the social and political crisis of late 2019. Kast counterposed "the politicians" to "the silent majority" that neither "marched" nor opted for "violence." He presented himself as the representative of the true values and principles of the right in the face of a governing center-right coalition so willing to make concessions that it ended up signing the agreement allowing for a new constitution. In addition to invoking a dichotomy between a "pure people" and a "corrupt elite," the modus operandi of such formations consists of activating major social divisions—of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion—in contexts where they do not appear to have played a decisive role in electoral decisions before such leaders emphasized them (this is what Layton and colleagues [2021] show to have happened in Brazil).

The idea that absence of major social divisions is a necessary precondition for democratic consolidation is worth revisiting here: the radical Right does not spring from already-existing social cleavages; instead, it politicizes certain lines of division. In that sense, the definition of populism as a "thin ideology" (Mudde 2019, 7) fails to capture movements and parties that use a direct and polarizing style of communication, but to defend "thick" values and principles.

Cultural Backlash 2.0 and Growing Normalization

The latest waves of the radical Right share two characteristics: a growing tendency toward demarginalization and normalization, and an understanding of themselves as part of a global "counterrevolution"—in the words of Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán—against the return of communism through "cultural Marxism." These political formations have arisen as a reaction to the latest phase of the "silent revolution" analyzed by Norris and Inglehart (2019), one marked by societies' increasing liberalization. That dynamic has been expressed through the "wokeism" that began as a movement to denounce discrimination toward minorities and came to encompass social inequalities more broadly, including those linked to gender and sexual orientation. This activist consciousness intensified from 2017 onward with movements like #MeToo and the resurgence of feminist struggles. It is in response to those mobilizations that the radical Right seeks to foment an identity-based, nationalist, and nativist counterproject. In Europe, various leaders fill their rhetoric with past national grandeur: from the millenarian Hungary of Orbán to the Iberosphere of Vox that winks at the memory of the Spanish Empire. Their civilizational anxieties are revealed, too, through the racist conspiratorial theory of the "great replacement" of the European population and "its" civilization by other, nonwhite groups, especially Arab Muslims.

In a context of economic and political crisis accompanied by growing security concerns, the radical Right of Chile, Brazil, and El Salvador has advanced ideas of national restoration and even national salvation with a theological tinge, echoing Trump's call to "Make America Great Again."

In the discourse of the leaders of the Latin American radical Right, such "restoration" has also taken an antiemancipatory turn in response to the advances of progressive causes. Bolsonaro has not missed the opportunity to attack LGBTQ+ and feminist movements, proposing a bill banning what he called "gender ideology" and announcing that references to feminism, same-sex relationships, violence against women, and Marxism would be removed from school textbooks. Vox proposed the same in Spain. For his part in Chile, since April 2022, Republican Party founder José Antonio Kast has headed the Political Network for Values, which seeks to halt the advance of minority rights. Its 2017 program also proposed overturning the current abortion

law, which has depenalized interruption of pregnancy only in cases of rape, danger to the life of the mother, and fetal unviability.

Through anticommunist international organizations such as the Madrid Forum, the Political Network for Values seeks to establish itself as a counterweight to progressive enclaves like the São Paulo Forum or the Grupo de Puebla, impeding "cultural Marxism" around the world. Thanks to the radical Right's global connections, ideological projects have acquired a certain unity and coherence, transcending cultural and institutional nuance. The main issues on which the discourse centers are immigration, security, corruption, and foreign policy (Mudde 2019), in Europe as well as in Latin America. Within that global network, narratives concerning foreign policy have played a key ideological role, spreading conspiratorial theories that tend to simplify reality by targeting the enemy: above all, international agencies, leftist governments, and the authoritarian regimes of China and Cuba. This new ideological framing thereby blames globalism for its imposition of cultural Marxism (Guimarães 2023).

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The principal characteristic of this last wave of the radical Right has been its growing normalization (Mudde 2019, 20). That normalization has contributed to sharpening perceptions of democracy in crisis. First, several leaders have succeeded in tilting public opinion to the far right, coming to power or enjoying substantial electoral gains in Europe and the United States. Second, in Europe, those political formations have leaned more toward the Left economically, defending a "chauvinist welfare state," and distancing themselves from their initial neoliberal orientation (Forti 2021). Third, they have adopted more centrist positions on values issues, to the point of appearing "gay friendly." This normalization, and the fact that radical Rights have increasingly decided to play on democratic terrain, makes alliances with the mainstream right more probable and publicly accepted.

Unlike comparable formations in Europe, those in Latin America have been distinguished by their ultraconservatism on values issues and libertarian economic positions, as well as a specifically Latin American, antidemocratic defense of the region's past military dictatorships. For this new radical Right, the adjective *populist* fails to capture the ideologization of political debate inherent to a crusade against alleged cultural Marxism.

All in all, the program of reducing the state and rolling back rights for minorities resonates little with popular demands and does not fundamentally explain the recent rise of several leaders on the right. Their pro-order agenda played a much more decisive role in the electoral success of Bolsonaro and Bukele, and in the Republican Party's consolidation in Chile. In Argentina, the right's radicalization around the current president of the party Republican Proposal, Patricia Bullrich, shows that the current context remains propitious to the emergence of leaderships offering "heavy-handed" security positions (Luna and Rovira 2021). To avoid ceding terrain to them, we need a "democratic praxis" (Petersen 2022) that is capable of capturing and canalizing commonsense demands without skipping over the times or rules of representative democracy.

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Can Latin American Political Culture Help Save Democracy?

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In early 2023, Latin American democracies are either stagnant or eroding, while some have devolved into full authoritarianism. According to Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2023), there are three major reasons for this democratic erosion: coercive actors that remain from the authoritarian era, poor governance results, and hybrid states that fail to provide services and are often captured by powerful groups that do not wish to strengthen the rule of law or deepen democracy. These factors are indeed relevant and largely explain the underlying fault lines of the region's democracies. Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2023, 157) also indicate that the three factors have "weakened citizens' commitment to democracy." This statement seems to suggest that in the earlier stages of the third wave of democratization, Latin American citizens had a stronger commitment to democracy. However, was that really the case?

Using survey data from the AmericasBarometer,[1] this article examines key components of the political culture of Latin American citizens and assesses the extent to which democratic political culture has taken hold in the region. Recent events in the Americas, such as the recurring support for authoritarian populists and citizens' storming of Congress and other government offices in the United States and Brazil, are reminders that not all citizens embrace democratic norms. Ultimately, the goal is to assess whether the current political culture of citizens can bolster or hinder democracy as it faces growing challenges in the postpandemic era.[2]

Different from the institutional and structural approaches, the political culture perspective examines the orientations (behavior, values, and attitudes) that citizens of any given country have toward the political system in which they live and the attitudes toward the role they play in the system (Denk, Christensen, and Bergh 2015). A twofold typology distinguishing between a democratic political culture from an authoritarian political culture is more common nowadays (Azpuru 2018) than the original threefold typology of Almond and Verba (1963), the pioneers of political culture research.[3]

Political Culture and Democracy

Robert Dahl (1998, 157), one of the most prominent political scientists of the 20th century, stated that the prospects for a stable democracy in a country are improved if its citizens and leaders strongly support democratic ideals,

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[2]   In this article I refer to democracy in general, not 'liberal democracy' because only three countries were considered liberal democracies in the region by the V-Dem 2023 Report (Papada et al 2023): Costa Rica, Chile, and Uruguay. Eleven countries were deemed as electoral democracies: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru. Five countries were considered electoral autocracies: El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela, while Cuba is classified as a closed autocracy. In its February 2023 report, the *Economist*'s 2023 Index of Democracy categorized three countries as full democracies (Costa Rica, Chile, and Uruguay), five as flawed democracies (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, and Panama), eight as hybrid regimes (Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru), and four as authoritarian regimes (Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela).

[3]   In their 1963 study, Almond and Verba identified three types of political culture: parochial, subject, and participant.

values, and practices: "The most reliable support comes when these beliefs and predispositions are embedded in the country's culture and are transmitted, in large part, from one generation to the next. In other words, the country possesses a democratic political culture." He recounts that during severe and prolonged crises, the chances increase that democracy will be overturned by an authoritarian leader who promises to end the crisis and ends up dismantling the institutions of democracy (156); using examples from the 20th century, Dahl indicates that countries where democratic political culture prevailed were able to weather those crises and avoid the breakdown of democracy.

The argument that political culture alone can explain democratic development in any country has been disputed, and there is still an ongoing debate as to whether a democratic political culture precedes democracy or develops after the institutionalization of democracy (Hadenius and Teorell 2005; Przeworski, Cheibub and Limongi 2004). Nonetheless, the importance of a democratic political culture in old and in new democracies has been demonstrated by a wide range of scholars (e.g., Booth and Seligson 2009; Booth and Bayer Richard 2015; Claassen 2020; Dalton 2004; Diamond 1993; Inglehart and García-Pardo 1988; Inglehart 2003; Norris 2011; Pye 1991; Rose and Mishler 1996; Rose 1997; Seligson 2002; Welzel 2007).

Before examining relevant components of political culture in Latin American countries, it is important to make some clarifications. First, while the percentages vary from country to country, ideally a large percentage of the voting-age population in any country should have a democratic political culture. Second, democratic political culture goes far beyond voting in elections, or for what party people vote (any democracy needs at least one strong opposition party). Third, democratic political

culture is not related to ideology: citizens on any side of the ideological spectrum can have a democratic political culture or an authoritarian political culture. Finally, political culture is not automatic: political culture is acquired through the political socialization process, which begins within the family but is mostly learned throughout the different levels of schooling and lifelong interactions with other individuals or social groupings. Creating a democratic political culture is particularly difficult in countries with a long history of authoritarian rule, such as those in Latin America.

As indicated earlier, political culture can be broadly divided into two categories: democratic and authoritarian. There are four dimensions through which the contrast between both types of political culture can be clearly observed: adhesion to democracy and its principles, integration into the political process, knowledge of the political system, and respect for other citizens' rights. Table 1 shows the details for each of those dimensions.

The Dimensions of Political Culture in Latin America

Survey data can help assess how citizens of specific countries fit the dimensions displayed in Table 1. For the assessment of political culture in Latin America, this article uses one of the main regional surveys, the AmericasBarometer, which is part of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), based at Vanderbilt University. The AmericasBarometer surveys have been conducted every two years throughout Latin America since 2004.[4]

Adhesion to the Democratic Regime

Supporting democracy as a broad concept—as opposed to supporting authoritarianism—is an essential feature of individuals with a democratic

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[4] The survey is also administered in the United States, Canada, and several Caribbean countries. But this article includes only 17 Latin American countries in the analysis. Venezuela and Haiti are not part of the analysis because data for those countries is not available in recent years. Neither the AmericasBarometer nor the other major regional survey, the Latinobarómetro, include Cuba because of the limitations of conducting a reliable survey under an authoritarian regime. The AmericasBarometer is a scientifically rigorous comparative survey. More information on the AmericasBarometer and its methodology can be found at the website "About the AmericasBarometer," https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/about-americasbarometer.php.

Table 1. Democratic vs. Authoritarian Political Culture

CITIZENS WITH A DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL CULTURE	CITIZENS WITH AN AUTHORITARIAN POLITICAL CULTURE
Adhesion to a democratic regime ➤ Give legitimacy to the principles and practices of democracy. ➤ Give legitimacy to democratic institutions and leaders.	**Inclination or sympathy towards authoritarian practices and leaders** ➤ Show support for regimes or leaders that violate democratic rules. ➤ Contempt for democratic institutions.
Integration in political processes ➤ Have interest in active participation to try to influence the decision-making process. ➤ Show behavior linked to democratic rules. ➤ Channel discrepancies with the elected authorities through democratic methods.	**Disaffection or low interest in political processes** ➤ Show little interest in participating in political processes. ➤ Disregard for the rules of democracy. ➤ Channel discrepancies with the incumbent authorities through undemocratic methods (which can include violence or intimidation).
Knowledge of the political system ➤ Citizens are aware of their political rights but also of their political obligations. ➤ Understand the functioning of the democratic regime.	**Little or weak knowledge about the political system** ➤ Low awareness of the rights and obligations of a citizen in a democracy. ➤ Little understanding of how the political system functions.
Respect towards the rights and beliefs of other citizens ➤ Show tolerance towards other people or groups that may have political ideas that are different. ➤ Consider the political rights of other citizens even if they disagree with them.	**Priority to self-rights, without taking other citizens into account** ➤ Intolerance towards other people or groups with different ideas. ➤ No consideration about the political rights of other fellow citizens.

political culture. Based on David Easton's (1965 and 1975) theory, it is now commonly acknowledged that there are at least three levels of support for the political system: the more diffuse (abstract) level, which refers to the support (or legitimacy) of democracy as an idea, which is contrasted with the more specific support for democratic institutions and the even more specific support for incumbent authorities.
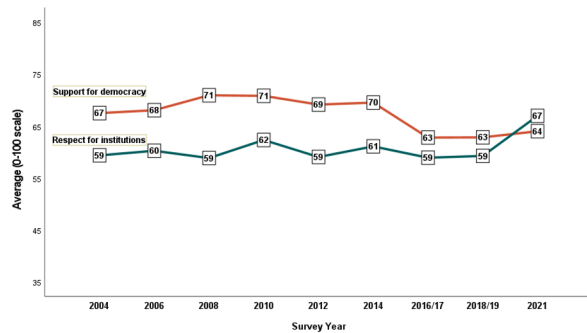
The standard question asked in surveys around the world to measure diffuse support for democracy has been dubbed the Churchillian question: "Changing the subject again, democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?" Figure 1 shows the results for Latin America between 2004 and 2021. In that figure and others here, respondents' answers have been recoded to a 0–100 scale for better understanding of the results. As observed in Figure 1, average support for democracy in the region was 64 points in 2021, having decreased 7 points since 2014; however, the drop is not as steep as it is sometimes portrayed in the media. In the breakdown by country, there is wide variation in the levels of support for democracy as a diffuse concept: Uruguay scores much higher than other countries (average of 77 points), whereas Honduras, Peru, and Paraguay score

under 55 points. But overall, the average support for democracy is still over the midpoint of the scale (the Appendix contains a table with the breakdown of results by country in 2021, for this and other measures used in this article).

Figure 1 also includes the results of a question that asks about the diffuse respect for political institutions: "To what extent do you respect the political institutions of (country)?" It is noteworthy that respect for political institutions was lower than the support for democracy between 2004 and 2014, but the gap narrowed in 2016, and respect for political institutions actually slightly surpassed the support for democracy in 2021 (67 points versus 64 points).

It is important to note that the assessment of political culture does not include satisfaction with democracy, which is a measure often highlighted by the media. Satisfaction with democracy is not a good measure because it is closely linked to presidential approval. In fact, there is a strong, positive correlation between satisfaction with democracy and support for populist presidents in Latin America in recent years, for example, Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa, and Nayib Bukele among others (Azpuru forthcoming).
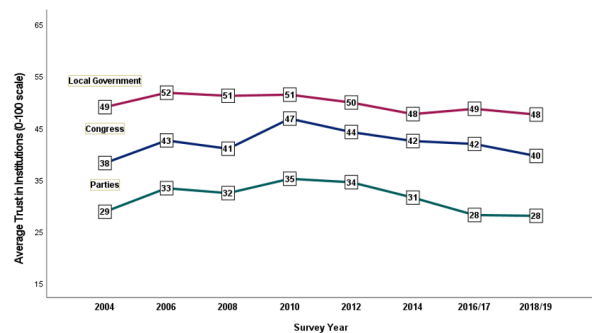
Figure 1. Diffuse Support for Democracy in Latin America, 2004–2021

AmericasBarometer data. Cases weighted by country.

Figure 2. Support for the Institutions of Representative Democracy in Latin America, 2004–2019

AmericasBarometer data. Cases weighted by country

The next level of support for the political system is more specific and refers to the actual institutions that sustain representative democracy. In political science it is common to measure the legitimacy of institutions by assessing the levels of trust that citizens have in them. Figure 2 shows the trust in three fundamental institutions of representative democracy: Congress, political parties, and respondent's local government.[5] The allotted space for this article limits the possibility of doing an in-depth analysis, but three takeaways are worth mentioning: (1) over the years, the local government obtains higher levels of trust than Congress and parties; (2) there was a slight decline in the trust in all three institutions after 2010; and (3) there was an 8-point gap between local government and Congress in 2019, but a 12-point gap between Congress and political parties. Examining specific results for the countries of the region (see Appendix) shows that in 2019, Peru had the lowest confidence in Congress, with 21 points, followed by Panama with 28. Colombia, Honduras, Paraguay, and Chile scored in the 30-point range. Most countries scored in the 40-point range, and Mexico in the 50-point range.

Whereas a democratic political culture does not necessarily require high levels of trust in institutions, it is worrisome for any democratic regime if its institutions fail to generate trust in the population. In contrast, there are some questions in the survey that clearly indicate a propensity to hold authoritarian values (a.k.a. an authoritarian political culture). One of those questions asks respondents the following: "Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to close the Congress and govern without it?" This question gives the respondent two options, yes or no. A positive answer denotes support for unchecked presidential power and goes against the one of the main principles of democracy.

Figure 3 shows the results of this question in Latin America. Average support for unchecked presidential power increased 15 points between 2012 and 2021. Although average support was still fairly low, with 30 out of 100 points, it is still a worrisome outcome for democracy in the region. To contrast this result, Figure 3 also includes the trust in elections, an important feature in any democracy; it can be observed that trust in elections has decreased slightly since 2012 (4 points), but the gap with support for unchecked presidential power became narrower in 2021. The specific-country analysis shows variation

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[5] The question asks, "To what extent do you trust (institution)?" In 2021, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AmericasBarometer was conducted on the phone instead of face-to-face. For that reason, a shorter questionnaire was employed, and several regular questions were not asked, including those referring to trust in institutions. Therefore, the results are available only up to the 2018/2019 survey.

in levels of support for unchecked presidential power (table in Appendix): citizens in El Salvador showed high levels of support for unchecked presidential power in 2021 (51 points), followed by Peru (44 points). At the other extreme, Chile, Argentina and Uruguay scored below 20 points. This suggests that citizens in El Salvador and Peru are more likely to have pockets of authoritarian political culture vis-à-vis other countries in the region.

Figure 3. Support for Unchecked Presidential Power (and Contrast with Trust in Elections), 2012–2021

AmericasBarometer data. Cases weighted by country.
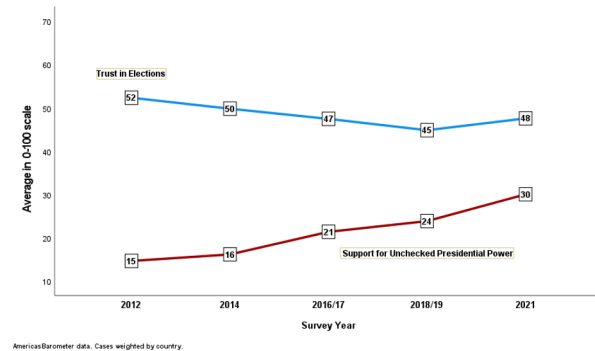
Another noteworthy finding is that the armed forces have been and continue to be, the institution that generates the highest levels of trust among Latin Americans. In the 2019 survey, average trust in the army was 58 points on the 0–100 scale, higher than any institution of representative democracy. In some countries, average trust in the armed forces was much higher: 71 points in Ecuador and in the 60-point range in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Brazil. Overall, trust in the army did not fall below 50 points in any country of the region. Although the army is not an institution of representative democracy and is less subject to criticism because it is not often in the news, the history of repressive military governments in the region during the 20th century makes this a concerning result.

Integration into Political Processes

Voting in an election is the typical way to assess whether a citizen is integrated into the political process, but as noted earlier, a democratic political culture is much more than voting. Surveys ask if a citizen has voted in an election, but the results vary from country to country, often influenced by other factors, such as whether voting is compulsory. In the 2019 AmericasBarometer survey, 73 percent of respondents in the Latin American region indicated that they voted in the previous presidential election in their respective country, but there is variation: over 80 percent of respondents said yes in five countries, while only 58 percent in Chile and 52 percent in Nicaragua answered positively.

Beyond voting, scholars have also used level of interest in politics to measure integration into the political process (Denk, Christensen, and Bergh 2015). In the AmericasBarometer survey, citizens are asked, "How much interest do you have in politics: a lot, some, little or none?" Another way to gauge on the integration into the political process is to ask whether respondents identify with a political party. Last, participating in peaceful protests is a political right and a way to show integration into the political process. Figure 4 shows the percentage of Latin Americans who between 2010 and 2019 (these questions were not included in 2021) reported having a lot or some interest in politics, that they feel affinity for a political party, and that they participated in a protest.

Interest in politics and affinity for a political party went hand in hand in the region between 2010 and 2014; between 31 percent and 36 percent of citizens in the region reported interest in politics and affinity for a political party. Starting in 2016, however, although the levels of political interest remained stable, affinity for political parties declined 10 points. By 2019, only 25 percent of Latin Americans indicated that they identified with a particular political party. There are differences between countries (see Appendix): citizens in Costa Rica, Uruguay, and Argentina expressed much higher levels of interest in politics (in the 40 percent range); at the other extreme, less than 25 percent of Guatemalans and Nicaraguans revealed interest. In terms of affinity for political parties, only Uruguayans passed the 40 percent mark (48 percent), and in contrast, in Peru and Guatemala fewer than

11 percent reported that they identified with a party. For participation in protests, regionally it has been stable but low, although it increased 2 percent in 2017 and 2019, reaching 10 percent.

Figure 4. Measures of Integration into the Political Process, 2010–2019

AmericasBarometer data. Cases weighted by country.
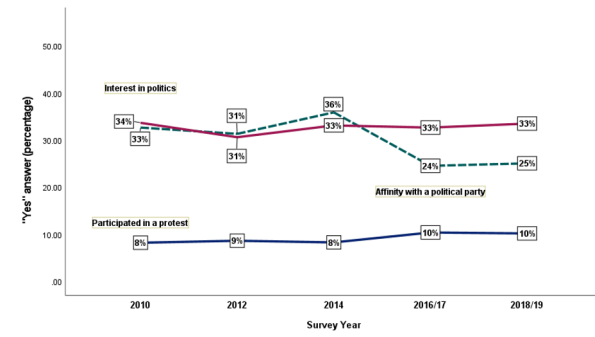
Knowledge of the Political System

There are few comparative questions that gauge citizens' knowledge of their political system because issues tend to be country specific. However, there is a more general question that surveys use to measure citizens' perception of their role in the political system (internal efficacy). More specifically, "You feel that you understand the most important political issues of this country. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?" Figure 5 shows the results from the AmericasBarometer survey in Latin America between 2008 and 2019 (question was not asked in 2021). There has been a notable increase in citizens' perception that they understand the main political issues in the region. While in 2008 around 39 percent of respondents reported that they felt they understood the issues, around 46 percent indicated this in 2019. In this question, there is not great variation between countries in the region; in most countries, over 40 percent of citizens reported that they felt they understood the issues. Only citizens in two countries scored under 40 percent (Guatemala and Paraguay).

Figure 5. Internal Efficacy in Latin America, 2008–2019

AmericasBarometer data. Cases weighted by country.
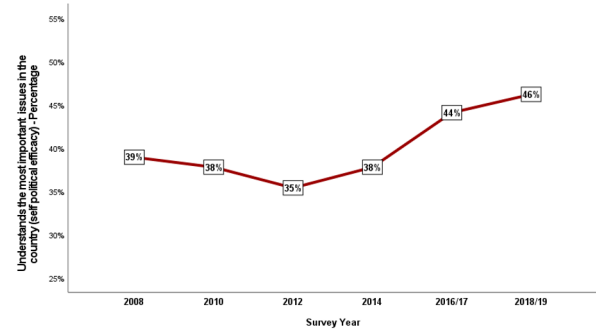
Respect toward the Rights of Others

The final dimension that can help measure the political culture of Latin American citizens is the tolerance they show toward the political rights of other citizens, especially those whom they disagree with. The AmericasBarometer includes a series of questions that ask the following: "There are people who only say bad things about (this country) form of government, not just the current (incumbent) government but the system of government. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people's: right to vote? conducting peaceful demonstrations in order to express their views? and running for office?" Figure 6 shows the results for that question between 2004 and 2019. Figure 6 also includes the results of a more specific question: "And now, changing the topic and thinking of "homosexuals", how strongly do you approve or disapprove of "such people" being permitted to run for public office?"

There is limited space to analyze in detail the results of Figure 6, but there are three major takeaways. First, Latin Americans are more open to agree with the right to protest than with the right to vote or run for office. Second, average tolerance toward others' participation in protests and voting remained fairly stable between 2004 and 2014 but increased in 2016 and 2019; on the contrary, tolerance for the right to run for office decreased after 2014 and recovered slightly by 2019. Third, it is notable that citizens are more willing to tolerate the right to vote than the right to run for office.

In terms of tolerance for the participation of gay or lesbian individuals as candidates, there is a clear positive trend in the region; acceptance climbed from 27 points (on the 0–100 scale) in 2004 to 48 points in 2019. Nonetheless, there are stark differences between countries: most Central American countries, Dominican Republic, and Paraguay have much lower tolerance toward the political rights of gay and lesbian candidates (they score in the 30-point range, while most countries score in the 50 or 60-point range. Uruguay has the highest score, with 74 points).

**Figure 6. Respect for the Rights of Others in Latin America, 2004–2019**
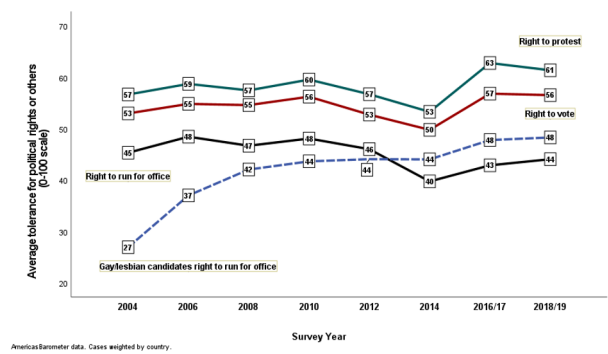
AmericasBarometer data. Cases weighted by country.

What Explains the Differences in Political Culture in Latin America?

A series of regression analyses on the different dimensions presented here show that in 2019, several variables were associated with variation in the type of political culture that citizens of Latin America display. Among the sociodemographic variables that help explain those differences, education stands out, as observed in Figure 7. Consistently, more education is correlated with higher diffuse support for democracy, higher perception of internal efficacy, higher tolerance for others, and higher integration in the political system.

Moreover, citizens with more education are also less likely to support unchecked presidential power: 30 percent of Latin Americans with no education agree with the statement that the president can close Congress when there is a crisis, 25 percent of those with full or some primary education or secondary education agree with that statement, but only 20 percent of those with full or some college or technical education agree. The differences between groups are statistically significant.[6]

Figure 7. Education and Political Culture in Latin America, 2019
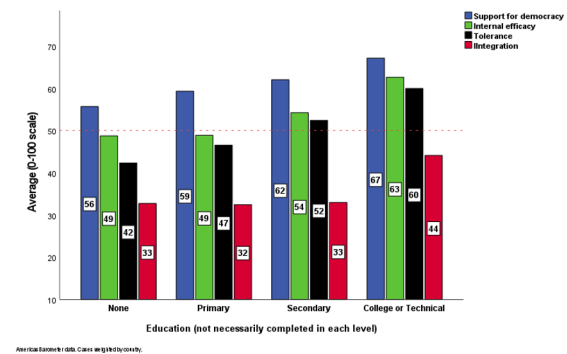
AmericasBarometer data. Cases weighted by country.

Conclusion: Can Political Culture in Latin America Save Democracy?

This article has shown that political culture in Latin America is a mixed bag, with some positive and some negative features. On the positive side, there is a higher percentage of citizens who indicate that they understand the main issues in their country (internal efficacy). Another positive finding is that the support for the political rights of some minorities has continuously and substantially increased since 2004, when the question on gay and lesbian candidates was originally asked.

Other features of political culture evaluated in this article are neutral (neither positive nor negative). In some of them there has not been much change over the years, or the downward

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[6] For information on the methodology used, please contact the author. Other variables were included in the multiple regression model. Gender was not associated to any of the dimensions of political culture, but other sociodemographic variables and variables such as perception of the national economy or perception of corruption among public officials also turned out to be correlated in some cases.

trend is marked but not steep. The support for democracy as a diffuse concept has been on the decline in recent years, but the downward trend has stabilized since 2017.[7] With respect to levels of trust in the institutions of representative democracy, the integration in political processes (interest in politics or participation in protests), and the tolerance for the rights of others, the results have remained on the lower end of the 0–100 scale across time, and in some cases there has been some decline, but it has not been steep.

However, some of the findings discussed here are concerning. The increase in support for unchecked presidential power alongside the decline of trust in political parties and the decrease in the percentage of citizens who identify with specific parties are major red flags for the future of representative democracy that also open the door for populists who, using democratic means, end up undermining democracy.

It is important to note that, aside from the regional analysis, the overall results are particularly concerning in some countries where there are more negative than positive trends in the development of political culture. In other words, from the political culture perspective, democracy is at higher risk in some countries, even if it that is not the case regionally.

Finally, a silver lining from the analysis is that education can help strengthen democratic political culture and thus benefit democracy. Beyond increasing access to general education in the region, it is important to revisit specific programs of democratic education in the different countries of Latin America, so that when crises arrive, citizens seek solutions within the democratic framework rather than falling prey to the hypnotism of populists or the false claims of authoritarian leaders.

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[7] Using the same Churchillian question, the reports published by the AmericasBarometer (Lupu et al) in 2021 and by Latinobarómetro in 2020, coincide in their assessment of the decline in support for democracy in the region in recent years, but LAPOP shows stabilization since 2016. This is because both surveys use a different measuring scale to arrive at conclusions, and therefore their results on the percentage of citizens who support democracy are not the same. It is also noteworthy that, here, I use average support rather than percentages to arrive to conclusions about the Churchillian measure of support for democracy. In addition to the Churchillian question, Latinobarómetro uses another question to assess support for democracy.

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Appendix

Dimensions of Political Culture in Latin America by Country (2019-2021)

Country	Adhesion to Democratic Regime							Integration in Political Process			Knowledge of Political System	Respect for Rights of Others			
	Support for democracy	Respect for institutions	Trust in congress *	Trust in political parties *	Trust in local govern. *	Trust in elections	Executive justified to close congress	Interest in politics *	Affinity with a political party *	Particip. in protests *	Internal efficacy *	Right to vote *	Right to protest *	Right to run for office *	Right of gay / lesbian to run for office*
	(Average 0-100 scale)							*(Percentage)*				*(Average 0-100 scale)*			
Mexico	63.12	67.51	52.65	33.17	51.71	47.32	32.15	36.78	19.77	7.11	47.76	56.88	61.03	40.21	59.34
Guatemala	56.47	68.89	40.00	26.83	47.46	39.94	37.95	24.86	10.26	10.29	38.60	54.09	58.13	43.73	34.09
El Salvador	69.21	80.26	41.27	28.80	59.28	64.18	50.76	32.40	36.09	3.45	54.23	55.63	60.78	43.28	37.87
Honduras	52.98	61.88	34.56	24.84	54.77	28.34	26.46	24.68	27.08	8.06	42.04	56.29	62.27	44.85	35.76
Nicaragua	63.66	60.95	43.00	33.30	47.84	45.67	30.95	28.01	27.03	11.46	50.49	56.97	63.23	43.46	40.84
Costa Rica	68.07	76.82	41.36	27.77	54.79	56.73	32.16	42.52	19.93	10.21	54.17	62.17	66.87	43.96	55.63
Panama	60.78	69.20	28.32	22.38	36.09	48.84	32.15	29.94	31.56	9.20	50.00	54.22	61.80	42.66	31.68
Colombia	56.76	63.32	37.45	27.54	43.25	31.83	34.17	33.78	26.06	11.14	45.28	50.68	57.66	41.65	49.17
Ecuador	62.99	71.36	43.73	32.35	47.44	48.25	33.64	31.70	22.89	7.66	46.49	54.53	61.63	41.24	45.24
Bolivia	59.75	66.45	46.24	27.71	44.14	48.32	33.69	34.19	18.74	16.67	41.36	50.76	56.41	43.08	41.70
Peru	54.66	60.44	20.87	21.20	39.75	42.88	44.62	29.16	10.79	14.28	44.63	54.74	61.47	41.80	42.63
Paraguay	54.89	54.41	39.75	31.95	50.44	36.04	37.42	35.49	35.42	36.90	48.94	56.00	61.27	47.11	32.56
Chile	65.84	60.62	33.45	23.58	51.83	56.72	18.21	28.91	10.72	9.71	48.94	59.81	62.51	44.94	66.61
Uruguay	76.74	79.25	48.81	35.13	52.14	78.18	10.70	46.65	47.75	11.01	51.29	60.54	62.33	46.68	73.98
Brazil	65.53	57.05	39.39	22.85	41.36	37.93	25.39	28.19	23.37	10.62	40.48	60.02	61.84	47.38	66.32
Argentina	68.65	68.39	41.96	27.52	45.95	50.90	16.24	43.71	22.96	13.69	46.57	57.52	57.33	41.95	67.23
Dominican Republic	62.97	71.57	40.96	28.37	44.20	44.92	28.32	35.28	36.22	8.07	n/a	57.39	62.27	46.39	34.88
Regional Mean	*63.59*	*67.02*	*39.58*	*27.95*	*47.77*	*47.58*	*30.01*	*33.45*	*24.96*	*10.12*	*46.19*	*56.32*	*61.07*	*43.77*	*48.06*

*2019 AmericasBarometer survey. Other results are from the 2021 survey. //

And, Despite Everything, They Resist! The Resilience of Latin American Democracies

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Democracy is in danger today in Latin America and the Caribbean, yet it resists. Despite its institutional fatigue, failures, incapacities, and the internal and external threats of powerful opportunists—who use its rules and institutions to gain access to power and then make them implode—democracy survives. Undoubtedly, like any human creation, it is perfectible, but demonizing its weaknesses or focusing only on what is wrong fuels those who want to impose their illiberal rules and procedures as if they were democratic.

The recent electoral experience has been very successful in at least two ways. First, electoral procedures work. The more than 220 national and local elections held since 1978 in 18 countries in the region have made it possible for citizens to decide on public affairs, to remove from power—and send home—those they want removed. The elections also allowed for political groups to manage their conflicts and for peaceful coexistence in diverse and plural societies.[1] Putting democracies into operation meant dusting off (or drafting from scratch) constitutional frameworks that ensured rights and guarantees, such as living in freedom, participating, exercising a public voice, controlling power, and rejecting violence. Hence, it was possible to establish what Przeworski (2019:) has called democracy, that is, that "political system that guarantees certainty in rules and uncertainty in outcomes."

Second, elections are the agreed-upon mechanism for sharing political power. This powerful idea underpinned the fundamental compromises between historically antagonistic groups on making decisions and defining who governs. It is what shaped and guided the processes of (re)establishing democracies in at least 15 Latin American countries under the framework of the "third wave of democratization" (Huntington 1991). The state and the elites created an institutional structure—rules, procedures, routines, and symbols—to ensure that every citizen could express themselves and participate. And this effort, in itself, has been fundamental to Latin American democracies.

However, in recent years, many democracies have been eroding, or backsliding, under citizen approval (e.g., Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Nicaragua in North and Central America; Hungary and Poland in Europe), electing leaders and parties that seek to change the rules of the game from within the system, protected by the legitimacy of the ballot box but affecting plural and democratic coexistence. Through free and competitive elections, people vote for leaders—and tolerate decisions and behaviors—explicitly seeking to deteriorate democracy. Unlike in previous decades, with violent coups d'état or systematic human rights violations, some countries are experiencing setbacks through other, more subtle ways of limiting rights and freedoms.

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[1] According to data from the Observatory of Political Reforms in Latin America (1977–2022).

For example, in Venezuela, Hugo Chávez since 1998 and Nicolás Maduro since 2013 dismantled democratic scaffolding, leading to irreconcilable polarization and causing Venezuelans to leave the country. In Ecuador, during the decade of Rafael Correa's government, the levels of political pluralism declined. In Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, before the 2021 presidential elections, imprisoned, disqualified, or pushed into exile 19 precandidates and, on February 9, 2023, deported more than 222 political prisoners who had been held in conditions that violated their human rights. In Mexico, the government approved an electoral reform in February 2023 that seeks to dismantle, remove autonomy from, and financially stifle the electoral umpire. In Peru, Pedro Castillo tried to dissolve Congress in 2022. In Guatemala, the registration of candidates aspiring to compete in next year's presidential elections has been banned.

These democracies in crisis have within themselves their enemies, and even so, they resist. If it were not democracy, they could not be elected, and of course, critical and plural debates would be impossible. Democracies are battered, but still, for the moment, they survive (Levitsky and Way 2015; Bermeo 2016; Freidenberg and Saavedra 2020).

The Institutionalization of Electoral Democracy as an Antidote to Authoritarianism

The holding of competitive, free, fair, accurate elections with uncertain results is the sine qua non of a democratic system, which is why the continuity of these processes is fundamental for democracy's survival. Data from the electoral democracy index applied to 18 Latin American countries gives an account of how electoral processes have been institutionalized in the region (Coppedge et al. 2022). With a range of 0 to 1, the average location is close to 0.75. According

to calculations made by the Observatorio de Reformas Políticas en América Latina (1977–2022), party systems have become increasingly competitive and pluralistic.[2] Moreover, their level of fragmentation has increased in the past four decades, with the effective number of parties (NEP) at the national legislative level increasing from 2 to 4.5, making the political offering more diverse and inclusive.

Constitutional and electoral reforms in political rights have allowed more people to access more rights, particularly historically underrepresented groups. Through various affirmative action measures or adoption of the constitutional principle of gender parity, the entry of underrepresented and excluded groups into candidacy and decision-making processes has strengthened institutions. For example, in 17 of 18 countries analyzed in the past three decades, more than 45 reforms to the gender electoral regime have been promoted to enable women to compete more equally with men.[3] These changes have brought about a powerful transformation in the descriptive representation of national congresses, where women reach a regional average of about 35 percentage points (ECLAC 2022), the highest number in the region's constitutional history.

The comparative experience points to a series of lessons learned. First, holding elections is valuable, but they must meet a series of demands and requirements to be considered democratic. It is a matter of holding elections and how they are held. Second, holding elections implies that citizens should be able to exercise their rights fully, not that rights are dead letter. It is imperative to move from formal to substantive equality. Third, having competitive, organized, and strong parties is a good idea and much better than not having parties. Fourth, it matters a great deal who votes, but also important are who can be a candidate and who finally gets

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[2] See the Observatorio de Reformas Políticas en América Latina, 1977–2022, Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, UNAM y Organización de los Estados Americanos, 2022.

[3] Observatorio de Reformas Políticas en América Latina, 1977–2022. Only Guatemala has not promoted changes in the rules of the electoral gender regime, being the only country of the 18 analyzed that has not approved quotas or gender parity in registering candidacies.

to vote (it is about greater competitiveness and inclusion). Fifth, democracy costs money, so it is necessary to invest in efficient public financing and oversight systems to level the playing field. And finally, strong institutions—with autonomy, professionalism, and resources—are needed to ensure accountability.

Although political dynamics have posed significant challenges, the critical actors in the political system have learned to do their homework: electoral bodies to count votes, citizens to vote, and parties to compete, to lose, and even, in most cases, to accept the results.

The Erosion of the Liberal Dimension of Democracy

Although competitive elections are a primary condition for a system to be democratic, they do not cover all the dimensions of democracy. This political system is much more than that, although without competitive, free, and fair elections, it is impossible to achieve full democracy. In recent decades, the powerful idea that competitive elections are a tool to protect against authoritarianism has been cracking. Democratic political systems are under pressure.[4] The evaluation of democracy shows that there are still pending agendas for democratization.

The indexes that analyze the liberal, participatory, deliberative, or egalitarian dimension (Coppedge et al. 2022) warn about these difficulties, given that they have regressed or hardly advanced in recent decades. And this is not a minor issue. Although electoral democracy is the most institutionalized of all (>0.5), the liberal dimension has been increasingly eroded in recent decades, going from more than 0.5 to 0.3, in a range from 0 to 1, according to the liberal democracy index applied to 18 countries in the region (Coppedge et al. 2022). In practice, respect for individual and minority rights has weakened; conditions for the free exercise of freedom of expression, the rule of

law, and the loss of autonomy of the judiciary and other autonomous bodies have been limited. As a result, opposition minorities in the legislature have been marginalized, the effective exercise of checks and balances has been diminished, and power has been personalized in the executive.[5]

The liberal dimension has been abandoned. The leading detractors of the values, rights, and practices implied by the liberal exercise of democracy come from the public authorities, opposition groups, and even sectors of the citizenry. Not only is there less political pluralism, but there are no longer civic spaces where those who think differently coincide. The citizens themselves promote this reductionism. The civic space has shrunk. Some people prefer not to talk about politics with those who do not know what they think. Nor do they want to argue with their friends or their families. People censor themselves, silence their voices, and speak among tiny bubbles of like-minded people.

What Threatens Latin American Democracies?

The road to democracy is neither linear nor direct. Threats have always been present, and the commitment of leaders and citizens to them has not been unconditional. These processes of deteriorating democracies manifest in very different ways. The loss of competitive conditions and rights is gradual. Many of the measures promoted by those in power do not necessarily entail serious democratic violations, but in practice, they slowly and subtly erode the legitimacy of institutions to strengthen the control of those in power.

The threats are different. First is the disloyalty of part of the elites—and the citizenry—to the fundamental commitments of electoral and liberal democracy. Even when the "norms of courtesy" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018) had not settled (as in Honduras with the 2009 coup

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[4] As of February 2023, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba cannot be considered democracies.

[5] In some formerly democratic political systems, this weakening has been dramatic in recent years, as in Brazil, El Salvador and Mexico (for substantive empirical evidence in this regard, see the data in Coppedge et al. 2022).

d'état, the chronic instability of Peru with the fall of several presidents, or the attacks on Gustavo Petro when mayor of Bogotá), the moods have become increasingly polarized—disregarding the other as a legitimate interlocutor—and disrupting practices regarding what is allowed and what is not in the democratic game. This decline is sustained within the framework of a new narrative regarding the content of what democracy is for them, as I have described in my book *The Populist Temptation* (2007).

Second is the use of democratic elections to vote for autocratic leaders. People seek leaders with a novel and irreverent antipolitical discourse that will save them from "the usual politicians." Hence, populism is an alternative identity choice within a democracy (Casullo 2019). People delegate to "healers" (Przeworski 2019); they trust what they choose even when promised magical solutions to solve their structural problems and feed and enhance preexisting divisions that distance individuals from each other and radicalize positions. The rhetoric of "us" against "them" is stoked. As Zacaría (1997) showed years ago, Latin Americans use elections for public decision-making, even if they prefer leaders with values contrary to democracy.

Third is the absence of sound economic and social results of democratic governments aimed at generating well-being and dignity for most people. The governments of both ideologies have been unable or unwilling to be efficient and equitably redistribute symbolic and material public resources (e.g., education, health, salaries, welfare). This has resulted from the wrong policies of governments elected in democracy; an insistence on the use of privileges that usually benefit an exclusionary, individualistic and arrogant political class that has little empathy for social problems; and corrupt and clientelist practices that have colonized the state, transforming it into a space of dispute for a few owners of power.

Even when policies are the responsibility of governments, the attribution of responsibility is transferred—directly or indirectly—to the political system. People blame poor performance on democracy. Citizens support democracy less and less, and they are less satisfied with the political regime. Even in 2022, this satisfaction showed its most significant drop over previous periods. Levels of trust in institutions (government, congress, judiciary) and political actors (parties and armed forces) have been declining since the 1990s (Freidenberg and Saavedra 2020).[6] Without government efficiency, there is no legitimacy.

Fourth is the change in the rituals and meanings of doing politics democratically. The new ways of relating politically involve the rejection of the other as a political equal, the abandonment of fundamental commitments to human rights as well as the electoral process, the rigged interpretation of the Constitution, animosity against the referee (who time and again is accused of fraud even without evidence), the questioning of electoral results and their excessive judicialization as a strategy to maximize options for power, the misuse of data and false information, and the denial of empirical evidence and disinformation as part of the daily way of understanding and doing politics.

Fifth is the strategic manipulation of formal rules (rule changes, control of time, procedures, and deadlines). Data from the Observatory of Political Reforms in Latin America (1977–2022) show that the rules have been adjusted to ensure that those who govern retain their positions of power. Although there are differences between countries, some 297 reforms have been made in 18 countries in the past four decades to more than 11 critical dimensions of electoral systems. The reformist hyperactivity of several countries (Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Dominican Republic) generates uncertainty in the game's rules and undermines the contest's fairness.

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[6] See also the website of Latinobarómetro (Santiago de Chile), https://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp.

Sixth is control of the narrative regarding what a true democracy is under the supposed division between "good" and "bad" people. The dispute is political, discursive, and symbolic. This debate is not new, but it forgets what democracy is not: a system only for a few, in which a leader—or a small elite—determines who can and cannot participate and in which validity results only when "I" win, under the rules I want. Calling systems that allow such practices democracy is a conceptual and political confusion that misleads and confuses about the meaning and essence of democracy.

Seventh is the lack of alternatives in the opposition and the problems of representation in traditional political parties, which still do not understand that they do not understand and cannot connect with the citizenry. It seems more like a systemic crisis of the traditional "responsible party" linkage model, which unfortunately never really took root in Latin American politics (Freidenberg and Levitsky 2007). These problems are evidence of a disconnection between the old politics and the citizenry, even though the latter usually elect politicians who appear to be new but who, in practice, do nothing more than repeat the old methods and tricks of politics as usual.

Eighth is the strategic use of disinformation by antidemocratic actors, including to influence public opinion by disseminating false news through social networks and the press, manipulation of official statistics, and denial of the results of implementing public policies—this also poses threats to democracy. In addition to misleading the population, this manipulation is a considerable challenge for those trying to enforce evidence-based policies, as they can generate strategic alteration of data, which hinders political control over rulers and evaluation of the results of their policies, and also conditions people's voting decisions.

The Virtuous Circle and the Resilience of Democracies

Democracies urgently need to be reset. I propose that we bet on promoting a virtuous circle that contributes to strengthening their resilience.[7] This idea of resilience is essential. It would help to see the glass as fuller than it seems. Resilience has to do with the ability to respond to the needs and demands of the citizenry, always respectful of liberal values and rights. Also, it links to adapting to crises, to continue complying with the requirements of procedural and liberal democracy, to have the tools to respond to the contextual and systemic problems and long-term change they face, and to deepen the democratization of other dimensions (e.g., participatory, deliberative).[8]

The virtuous circle involves three axes. First is the institutional shielding of elections, electoral governance, and the actors of representation. The attacks against democracy have nothing to do with holding elections but instead with how they are organized and the guarantees they generate. Autocratic leaders want to continue holding elections but to organize them with their own rules and institutions. Competitive elections are an antidote to authoritarian practices. They imply a series of virtues, such as allowing to enter into the discussion who governs at any given time; respecting the rights of the majority while protecting the voice and interests of minorities; facilitating political control, renewal of ideas, and accountability; and as Przeworski (2019) points out, carrying out "the emotional feat of throwing out the rascals."

Institutional armoring also implies state capacities, adequate respect for political rights and civil liberties, and state control over territory. It is impossible to have electoral governance and democratic institutions where there are no state or sufficient security guarantees for candidates.

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[7] The virtuous circle is inspired by the plenary table "The Resilience of Democracy in Latin America," at the Third International Seminar "Reforms to Political Representation in Latin America," organized in Mexico City on September 28, 2022, with the participation of Francisco Valdés Ugalde, Delia Ferreira Rubio, Margarita López Maya, and Eduardo Núñez.

[8] As Boese and her team (2021: 886) point out, resilience implies having "the ability to avoid a substantial regression in the quality of democratic institutions and practices."

Countries such as Mexico, Paraguay, and Brazil no longer count on the state's being able to guarantee the legitimate monopoly on the use of violence in many municipalities, where even narco-politics functions as a new state. Electoral democracy must operate under the rules of law. Without them, it is impossible to speak of democracy.

In this equation, the strengthening of the parties is also vital. As Welp (2022) argues, "without parties, there is no democracy, but with these parties, there is no democracy either." Latin American experiences have been clear about the damage that the personalization of politics, the absence of intermediaries, and strong programmatic links have wrought for political processes. It is a lie that there can be democracies without strong parties. Peru is an excellent example. The focus there continues to be on demanding better parties that genuinely function as "guardians of democracy" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 31), as actors capable of reflecting the genuine diversity of interests in today's society.

The second axis is the equitable distribution of universal public goods to all citizens. This strategy for strengthening democracies implies a strong commitment to policies that generate well-being and dignity for citizens with material and symbolic resources, innovative ideas, and courageous actions. How can people be asked to commit to a political system that does not help them live better? It is impossible for people to love democracy if it does not contribute to improving their living conditions. Democracies, through governments, must be able to provide material and symbolic benefits to citizens.

Third, active strategies for civic education require time, collective intelligence, and resources to promote training programs that improve citizens' capacity for agency, tolerance, critical thinking, respect, moderation, cooperation, and collaboration. This task implies the recovery, or the creation, of civic spaces where people who think differently can meet and engage in dialogue. Hence, the fight against autocracy can

be fought only by the citizens themselves, who, convinced of their power, ensure that no one limit their rights.

And, Despite Everything, They Resist

Democratic politics must peacefully manage conflicts over ideas, resources, identities, and policies. The answer to the problems of democracy is more democracy. If fists, bullets, or stones replace votes, then democracy is in crisis (Przeworski 2022). This must be avoided. It is not enough to vote and be elected; rules, institutions, and rights must be respected. It seems a paradox, but those same democracies that cost so much to routinize are intensely questioned by sectors that do not quite fit into the liberal logic of democracy.

That system, which guarantees the possibility of expressing different ideas, is the one that allows those who do not like it to delegitimize it and seek to overthrow it from within. Many actors criticize the system from power after winning elections and with the legitimacy given to them by citizen support. The democratic regression is not only the responsibility of autocrats; other leaders are also responsible. The political, social, economic, and media elites must urgently engage in an exercise of self-criticism. But so must the citizenry. People should rethink how to make the struggle for democratic values and peaceful coexistence the only possible game in the city.

Being able to say all these things—without fear of something happening to you—gives democracy its advantages. That ability to select some to govern and to remove them when they no longer represent us makes democracies. That ability to rotate power and renew leadership is fundamental. That key Mexican idea of "effective suffrage, no reelection" makes much more sense in this context. The novelty is that now it is the people themselves who can elect someone who does the opposite and, in doing so, put democracy itself at risk. However, despite all these evils, for now, democracies are holding their own.

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Biographical Statement

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I am honored to be the recipient of LASA's 2023 Kalman Silvert Award. Silvert, whom I had the pleasure to know, was LASA's first president. When working at the Ford Foundation, he labored to deepen democracy and promote human rights in Latin America.[1]

The award gives me an opportunity to reflect on what I see as my lifetime contributions to Latin American studies, both scholarly and institution building, and on how much I have learned from Latin America and Latin Americans. If my writings have been insightful, then much of the credit goes to the people I met in the region when doing research.[2]

My Personal-Intellectual Journey

My interest in Latin America began at age ten, when my parents took me to Mexico on a family trip. The lives of Indigenous Mexicans, so different from those of white middle class Americans in whose midst I grew up, captured my imagination: women market vendors whose children patiently accompanied them for hours in their stalls, as American children would not; families who produced beautiful textiles and pottery, including children younger than me; festivities honoring village saints; a UNESCO job-training program for people with little formal education in Janitzio, a small island in Lake Pátzcuaro. Today, any skills the people of Janitzio had have been brushed aside as the island has been developed into an

"exotic" tourist destination. These and other eye-opening experiences triggered my lifelong interest in the region.

Not surprisingly, I decided to write my PhD dissertation on Mexico. I focused on urban poverty. At the time, Latin America cities in general and Mexico City in particular were experiencing soaring migration from the countryside as governments in the region focused on import substitution which limited opportunities in rural areas in favor of the cities. Unable to afford conventional housing, migrants imaginatively pursued their own solutions to their housing needs, individually and collectively. They formed squatter settlements and organized to pressure politicians to allow them to stay; to build roads, schools, and markets; and to bring in electricity, piped water, and public transportation so that they could get to work, wherever in the city that might be.

How to understand the experiences of the urban poor? Conventional social science "wisdom" at the time—such as Edward Banfield's amoral familism and Oscar Lewis's culture of poverty, both of which posited that the values of the poor, their individualism and fatalism, kept them from improving their lot in life, and modernization theory, which posited that economic mobility rested on adoption of Western values— missed the mark and left much unexplained. Marxists who posited that immiseration fuels

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[1] Chapters in the book *Kalman Silvert: Engaging Latin America, Building Democracy*, edited by Abraham Lowenthal and Martin Weinstein, highlight Silvert's influence on Latin American studies and his commitment to advancing human rights. LARC, LASA's publisher, published it in Spanish, in 2021 and you can read it online as well (https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.larcommons.net/site/books/e/10.25154/book7/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1678363767261898&usg=AOvVaw0AF6rnQnMrokMKLcoz55oD).

[2] For wonderful descriptions of how Lars Schoultz and Wayne Cornelius underwent fairly similar journeys as political scientists, see their essays in *LASA Forum* when they were recipients of the Silvert Award. They both provided helpful comments on an earlier draft of my essay.

mobilizations for radical change were no more enlightening. Few of the poor supported parties of the Left.

Although I was trained in sociology at Columbia University to be "scientific" and theoretical, the Mexicans I got to know when doing fieldwork in a squatter settlement and inner-city slum convinced me to dispense with the conceptual frameworks in which I had been schooled because they blinded me from understanding the lives of the poor. I turned instead to a more historically grounded structural frame of analysis. I was fortunate that my thesis adviser, Juan Linz, urged me to focus on people in positions of authority, not only on the rank and file. My new analytic lenses led me to understand how poor people's lives were embedded in broader institutions and processes that limited their economic opportunities and contained their political demands: this is all detailed in my first book, *The Poverty of Revolution: The State and Urban Poor in Mexico*.

Following an earthquake in 1987 that devastated the inner-city slum on which the book had focused, I decided to do a follow-up study. The earthquake had led the "slum dwellers" to defy co-optation and to form vibrant social movements, including one that demanded the reconstruction of their neighborhood rather than permit its demolition for commercial development. Fatalists and amoral familists the "slum dwellers" were not. Impressed by their activism, I proceeded not only to write a lengthy epilogue for a new edition of *The Poverty of Revolution* but also to edit a book, *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, with chapters on social movements throughout the hemisphere. The book has had a long shelf life. It highlights the vibrancy of civil society—among women, Indigenous peoples, workers, and others—and in so doing, it demonstrates the need to bring ordinary people into our understanding of Latin America in the context of broader institutions and cultural forces.

Although I remained interested in Latin American urban poverty and social movements over the years, my days spent among Mexico's poor led me

to question what impact social revolutions have. Mexico had an extremely bloody revolution in the early twentieth century. Given the huge upheaval, why was there as much poverty and inequality in contemporary Mexico as in other countries, such as Brazil, that never had a revolution? To address this question, I coauthored an article with Peter Evans, a Brazilianist. Further questioning revolutions, I went on to study the impacts of other twentieth-century social revolutions in Latin America, in Bolivia and, especially, Cuba. In my book *Back from the Future: Cuba under Castro*, I analyze developments in Cuba since its 1959 revolution. I showed that much (though certainly not all) of what transpired in the country was driven by "underlying" state institutional interests and not merely or mainly by ideology, as conventional wisdom and official proclamations suggested.

Meanwhile, Latin American immigration to the United States was soaring, including from Cuba, both despite and because of the country's revolution. Rates of urbanization in the region approached those in the United States, even though Latin American cities offered far fewer economic opportunities. Under the circumstances, Latin Americans came to view moving to the United States as their best option— and I followed their footsteps. In *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland*, I showed the conventional paradigm in immigration studies—that key differences in immigrant adaptation and socioeconomic mobility hinge on whether people are US born or foreign born—to leave unexplained important differences among first-generation immigrants who uprooted at different points in time with different lived experiences. Cubans who immigrated in the early days of the revolution and in the post-Soviet era experienced very different Cubas and, as a result, adapted differently to the United States and related differently to Cuba once resettled in the United States.

In the course of uncovering ways that Cuban immigrants spurred changes in Cuba, I became interested in deepening the understanding of economic, political, social, and cultural transformations that immigrants around the

world have unleashed in their homelands. This led me to coedit the book *How Immigrants Impact Their Homelands*. Whereas immigration studies focused primarily on immigrants' new-country adaptation, this book addresses the much-less-understood changes that immigrants have unleashed in their countries of origin.

Most recently, my intellectual journey led me to explore US immigration policies determining which foreign-born individuals can enter with authorization and with what entitlements. Once again, I focused on Cubans, but this time comparing their experiences with those of Haitians. In *Cuban Privilege: The Making of Immigrant Inequality in America*, I document how inequitably Washington treats immigrants from different countries. I detail the multiplicity of entitlements extended to Cubans at the same time that Haitians were detained, deported, and denied citizenship and other rights. I hope the book, and other work of mine, will contribute to greater immigrant equity and equality.

Next on my agenda? I hope to build on my expertise to convince Washington policy makers to improve treatment of immigrants. I am open to your suggestions!

My Work for LASA

The Silvert Award is intended to honor contributions to Latin American studies above and beyond pure scholarship. I served as president of LASA and was a member of LASA's Executive Council for ten years. As president I pursued several goals that I believe have contributed to making LASA the vibrant association so dear to many of us.

First, I reorganized LASA to allow for the formation of sections. With LASA members free to form and join sections, I then sought to make the association more inclusionary and responsive to members' concerns, and to enable members with specific country or other substantive interests to communicate, to deepen their ties, and to organize around their shared interests. I

also envisioned the sections as offering leadership opportunities. It did not take long for sections to contribute to the vitality of LASA.

Second, as president I negotiated with Oxfam America the Martin Diskin Memorial Lectureship, which annually honors a scholar-activist committed to advancing human rights in the region. The awardees serve as models for all of us to try in our own humble ways to deepen democracy in Latin America.

Third, building on work of LASA presidents who preceded me, especially Lars Schoultz, Carmen Diana Deere, and Maryssa Navarro, I convinced the Ford Foundation to contribute $2 million to a LASA endowment that has contributed to the transnationalization of LASA. The endowment has played a central role in transforming LASA into a "borderless" association. The endowment primarily enables Latin Americans to attend LASA meetings wherever they are held. It also finances collaborative projects involving LASA members across the Americas. Initially, LASA was a white men's association. I believe I was the first woman to participate in a LASA panel—but by default! I was asked to take the place of a man who in the last minute could not attend the congress. Today, if you walk the corridors of a congress, it is hard to tell what country you are in, and women are at least as active as men.

One of my goals as president, however, had a short shelf life. Together with my wonderful and wise program chair, the late Timothy Wickham-Crowley, we edited two books, *What Justice? Whose Justice? Fighting for Fairness in Latin America* and *Struggles for Social Rights in Latin America*. The books chapters comprise papers presented at the LASA congress the year we oversaw it. I had hoped to establish a yearly precedent so that work of our congress participants would routinely reach a broader audience. The idea, however, did not take hold. Perhaps future presidents will revisit the initiative.

It goes without saying that none of the work of LASA would be possible without the dedicated work of the Secretariat. Under Milagros (Mili) Pereyra-Rojas's stewardship, the Secretariat

has become more professional, creative, and proactive, simultaneously responding to members' wants and concerns. We have all benefited from her work—as well as that of Ghiselle Blanco and others at the Secretariat. It has been a pleasure to work with them over the years. **//**

Report from the Personnel Subcommittee

Jennifer Pribble, treasurer and chair of the Personnel Subcommittee

To increase transparency about the allocation of resources, LASA's Personnel Subcommittee conducted a comparative analysis of expenditures on staff salaries and benefits. The study draws on data from association websites, as well as the most recent Form 990 tax reports for LASA, the American Political Science Association (APSA), the American Sociological Association (ASA), and the American Anthropological Association (AAA). The findings reveal that LASA has a small staff compared to peer organizations and that salaries paid to LASA staff are, on average, lower than those paid by other associations.

LASA is a large organization, with 11,217 members as of 2021. As Table 1 shows, APSA is of similar size, with 11,000 members, and the ASA and AAA are slightly smaller. LASA employs far fewer staff members than APSA, the ASA, and the AAA. As a result, the staff-to-member ratio at LASA is 1,020, compared to 275 at APSA, 363 at ASA, and 348 at AAA. This means that, on average, the LASA staff faces a heavier work load than staff at comparable academic organizations.

Table 1: Staff-to-Member Ratio at LASA and Similarly Sized Academic Organizations

	APSA	ASA	AAA	LASA
Members	11,000	9,438	9,400	11,217
Staff	40	26	27	11
Staff / Member ratio	275	363	348	1,020

Source: Data from association websites.

The salaries and benefits of LASA's staff are, on average, 24 percent lower than similarly sized academic organizations, even after controlling for cost of living in Pittsburgh. Table 2 reports the average salaries of the executive director, deputy executive director, director of finance and administration, and other directors at APSA, the ASA, and the AAA. All three organizations are housed in Washington, DC, where the cost of living is higher than in Pittsburgh. The subcommittee, therefore, adjusted those salaries for cost of living; Table 2 also reports what the equivalent salary would be in Pittsburgh. The subcommittee then compared that number to actual salaries of LASA staff. To maintain confidentiality, we do not report those numbers in this report, but the analysis reveals that LASA staff salaries are, on average, 24 percent lower than APSA, the ASA, and the AAA.

Table 2: LASA Staff Salaries Compared to Those at Other Associations

	Washington, DC	Cost of Living Adj. to Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh, PA
	Average (APSA, AAA, ASA)	CNN Money	LASA Salaries
Positions			
Executive Director	$ 247,001.33	$ 161,041.00	
Deputy Executive Director (pending hire)	$ 181,157.33	$ 115,950.00	
Director of Finance and Administration	$ 166,733.00	$ 109,058.00	
Other Directors	$ 131,104.33	$ 83,741.00	
		Average	-24%

Source: IRS Form 990s.

Salaries and benefits constitute a slightly larger share of LASA's overall budget than at similarly sized academic organizations, but that is explained by the fact that the LASA budget is small in comparison. In fiscal year 2020–2021, LASA spent 39 percent of its budget on salaries and 13 percent on benefits. However, as Table 3 shows, APSA's annual expenditure in 2020–2021 was nearly $7.4 million, while the ASA spent $6.7 million and the AAA, $5.2 million. LASA, in contrast, spent $1.9 million during that same fiscal year. Given the small size of LASA's budget, a larger share of overall spending is required to cover the cost of salaries and benefits.

Table 3: Overall Expenditure and Salary and Benefits as a Share of the Total Budget

EXPENDITURES	APSA	ASA	AAA	LASA
	$ 7,385,296.00	$ 6,724,789.00	$ 5,198,947.00	$ 1,941,121.00
Salaries	36%	31%	41%	39%
Benefits	6%	6%	8%	13%

Source: IRS Form 990s, calculations by committee.

The results of the Personnel Subcommittee's report reveal that LASA staff carry a heavier workload than the staff of peer organizations because of the high staff-to-member ratio. Moreover, the LASA staff is, on average, paid less for that work. However, given LASA's small budget, those expenses account for a slightly larger share of overall spending. **//**

In Remembrance of Kevin J. Middlebrook

by **Cynthia McClintock** | George Washington University | mcclin@gwu.edu

Our dear colleague Kevin J. Middlebrook passed away on November 20, 2022. Although Kevin was born and raised in Iowa farm country and his family had no ties to academia or to Latin America, he became profoundly committed to the advancement of understanding of the hemisphere. His outstanding contributions came from his own thoughtful, rigorous research and from his extraordinary service to the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). At the time of Kevin's death, he was only seventy-two years old, and he had much more still to give to the study of Latin American politics, and to LASA, but he was struck down by complications from Addison's disease.

It was my honor to know Kevin for almost fifty years. We first got to know each other in 1974, when he was a PhD candidate at Harvard University and I was a PhD candidate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. We had both just returned from research in Peru, and we enjoyed many conversations about the concept of corporatism and its application to Peru's military government. It was clear to me that he was passionate about Latin American politics as well as extraordinarily insightful and diligent. And he had a wonderful sense of humor. Subsequently, Kevin went on to research in Mexico and then professorships at Indiana University, the University of California at San Diego, and, since 2012, University College London, but we always enjoyed getting together at LASA Congresses and, between them, conversing on the phone about Peruvian politics, Mexican politics, and of course our families and friends.

At times, Kevin's wife, Helga Baitenmann, of Mexican origin and herself a scholar, also attended LASA, and it was a joy for me to get to know her and, through the years, follow the magnificent growth of their daughter, Mariel, and her many achievements. In one of my last conversations with Kevin, in early 2022, he highlighted his pride in Mariel and his joy that she was marrying Isaac Klimasmith.

Kevin's scholarship stood out not only for its thoroughness and rigor but also for its concern for social justice. As he delved into the politics of labor in Mexico, his hopes for workers' political voice and economic betterment shone through. These multiple commitments are very evident in his *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), in his coedited volume on the maquiladora industry in Mexico (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana of Mexico City, 2006), in his coauthored *Organized Labour and Politics in Mexico: Changes, Continuities, and Contradictions* (Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2012), and in his forthcoming book.

Kevin's forthcoming book, tentatively titled *The International Defense of Labor Rights: The North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation in Comparative Context*, is to be published by Columbia University Press and is likely to be his crowning achievement. I believe that Kevin's assessment of the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) is the most significant contribution to date to the intense controversies about labor rights provisions in free trade agreements. To assess the successes and failures of the NAALC, Kevin evaluates the timing, framing, and results of 39 grievance cases filed between 1994 and 2016. He considers in particular the tension between state sovereignty and internationally recognized labor rights and the implications of the NAALC institutional design

for the success or failure of grievance cases. And Kevin contributes a comparative perspective—consideration not only of the NAALC but also of alternative arenas for the protection of labor rights, such as cross-border labor solidarity campaigns, international norms agencies, generalized system of preferences agreements, regional economic institutions, and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Kevin has made major scholarly contributions beyond the politics of labor in Mexico. His edited volume *Dilemmas of Political Change in Mexico* (Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of London and the Center for US-Mexican Studies at the University of California at San Diego, 2004) and his coauthored *Mexico since 1980* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) are seminal texts. His coedited book *The United States and Latin America in the 1980s: Contending Perspectives on a Decade of Crisis* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986) and his edited volume *Conservative Parties, the Right, and Democracy in Latin America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) were pathbreaking empirically and conceptually; both were widely cited and used in the classroom.

Kevin's service to the profession was boundless and invaluable. He cared tremendously about his colleagues, about his students, and about LASA as an institution. At the University College London's website for tributes to Kevin, among the colleagues contributing condolences are former LASA president Eric Hershberg, LASA members Steve Levitsky and David Mares, and such prominent analysts of Mexican politics as Víctor Manuel Durand and John Womack. An immense number of former students wrote both of Kevin's knowledge and of his kindness and generosity with his time.

Kevin cared deeply about LASA and worked hard and well to advance the association. Kevin's contribution to LASA's financial health was especially significant. Among his many areas of expertise, he was knowledgeable about finance, and as treasurer from 2006 to 2010, he did a great deal to build LASA's investment portfolio (always with concern for social responsibility). In addition,

both Kevin and I served for many years on LASA's Development Committee, and we won a Special Recognition Award for our fundraising efforts (in particular for life memberships) in 2014.

Further, Kevin was intensely dedicated to the principles of democracy and human rights, and he strove ceaselessly to build respect for those principles. Kevin was at the forefront of the establishment of LASA's Guillermo O'Donnell Democracy Award and Lectureship, which stands out for many of us as a highlight of each year's Congress. Previously, from 1994 to 1997, he cochaired LASA's Human Rights and Academic Freedom Section. Also, in 2009, he cofounded LASA's Mexico Section and then cochaired it until 2012.

It will be with great sadness that in Vancouver at the Congress, I will not be able to have my traditional dinner with Kevin; it was always a highlight for me. But I also look forward to sharing memories of Kevin with my many friends and colleagues who will also be sorely missing him. We will be thinking of Helga and Mariel and wishing we could express our condolences in person. And we will be highlighting Kevin's enduring legacies—his immeasurable contributions to the understanding of Latin American politics, to his students, and to LASA. **//**

Latin America Research Commons (LARC)

Latin America Research Commons (LARC) es la editorial de acceso abierto de la Asociación de Estudios Latinoamericanos (LASA) fundada en Pittsburgh en 2018 con el objetivo de tender puentes entre ámbitos académicos y contribuir a la difusión del conocimiento a través de la publicación de libros inéditos en español y portugués y de traducciones en todas las disciplinas relacionadas a los estudios latinoamericanos. Los libros son aprobados por un comité editorial de prestigio basado en las Américas y lleva nueve libros publicados en cuatro colecciones.
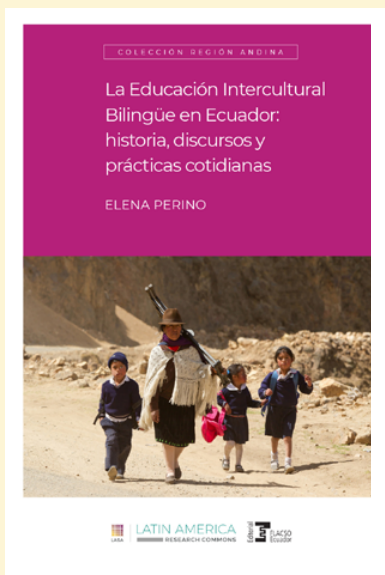
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La educación intercultural bilingüe en Ecuador: historia, discursos y prácticas cotidianas,
de Elena Perino

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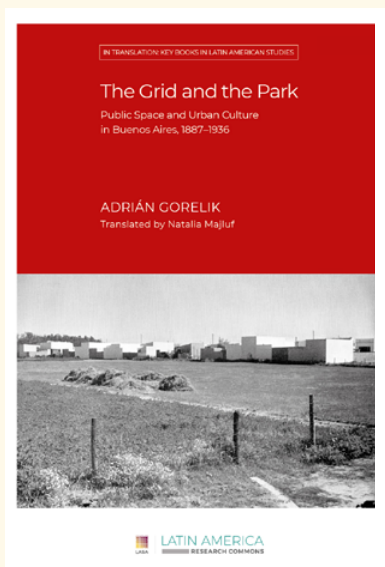
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de Adrián Gorelik

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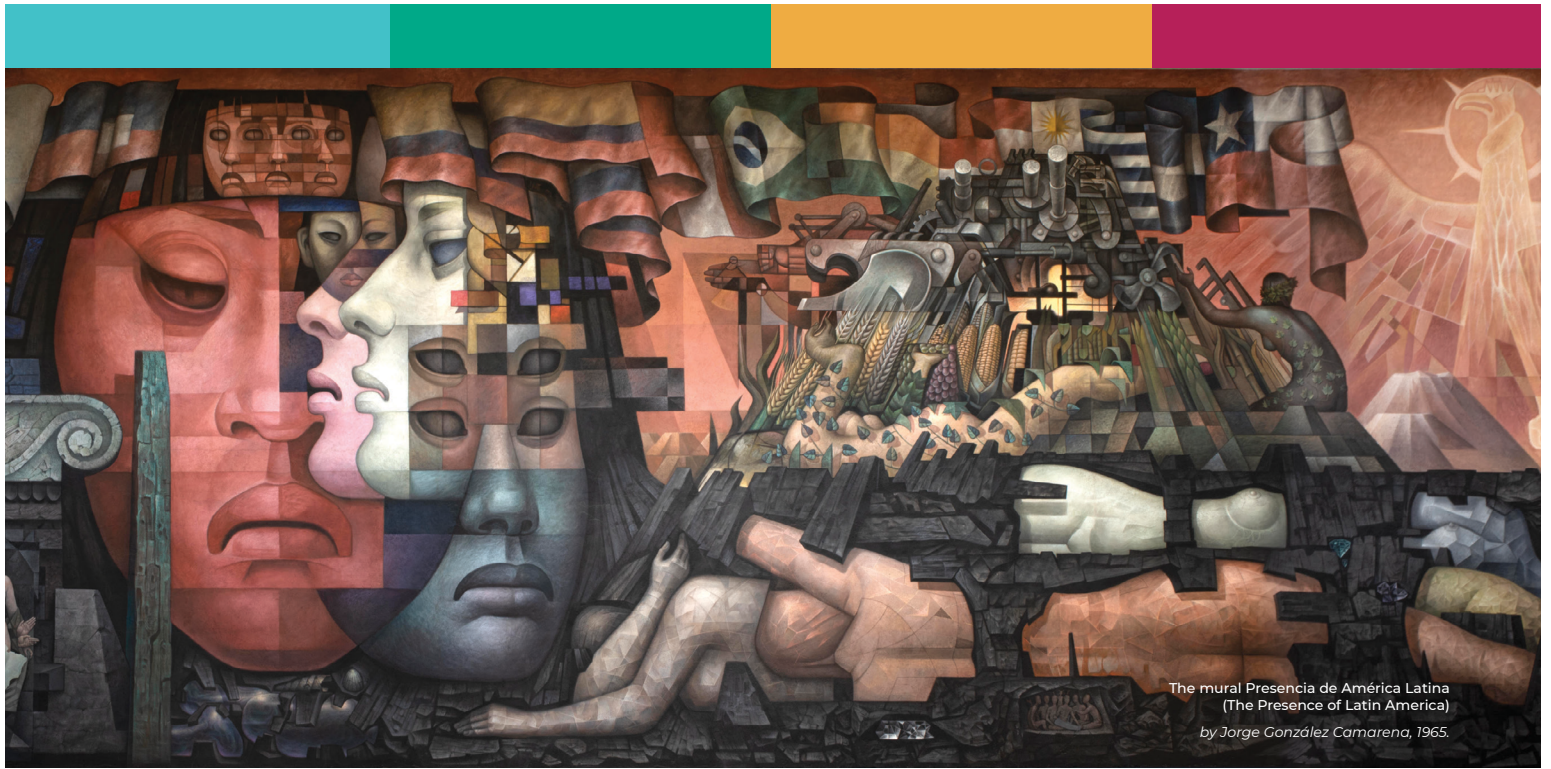
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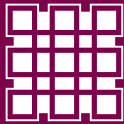

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