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STUDY

The Pragmatic Turn of Democracy in Latin America

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- In recent years, participatory and deliberative experiments have increasingly become an integral part of Latin America`s democratization process. Given the speed with which they have been multiplied and institutionalized, a reassessment of the course of democratization in Latin America is necessary.

- The expansion and incorporation of experimentalist forms of government in a number of Latin American democracies does not aim to destabilize representative institutions, nor to substitute them with alternative, participatory or deliberative ones. Rather, this pragmatic change in Latin American democracies attempts to correct some of the alleged failures of representative institutions as well as to attain social ends that they seem unable to achieve.

- Democracies described as delegative, defective or pseudo democracies, and which emerged in the third wave of democratization are being progressively displaced by pragmatic democracies. This experimental form of governance combines representation, participation and deliberation as means to achieve social ends.

- The escalation of political experimentalism raises important questions on how to evaluate the quality of democracy. New criteria are necessary to account for the democratic experimentation taking place in Latin America. Once the validity of this new, experimental model of democracy is recognized, Latin America could provide new and more creative recipes to enhance the quality of democracy elsewhere.

Content

The new democracies of Latin America that emerged with the third wave of democratization have now completed their transitions and have reached an advanced stage of their consolidation processes, despite some delays caused by clientelism, corruption, populism and the other alleged 'deficiencies' taken as indicative of imperfect institutionalization and inadequate government performance (Diamond, Hartlyn, Linz and Lipset 1999; Merkel 2004). According to the literature, the supposed inability of Latin American governments to promote growth and development, reduce poverty and inequality, and control inflation and crime explain their successive failures (Fox 1994; Mainwaring 1999; Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005) and is a symptom of a poor state performance that affected citizens' trust in political institutions and led to a crisis of representation in the region (Mainwaring 2006).

Although rises in levels of political satisfaction are expected to follow democratic consolidation (Newton and Delhey 2005), over two decades after the acknowledged beginning of the third wave in Latin America in 1978 (Huntington 1991; Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005), attitudinal (low level of political trust and high level of dissatisfaction with democracy among citizens) and behavioural (low electoral turnout and party identification, as well as high electoral volatility) indicators corroborate specialists' diagnoses of a widespread disenchantment with institutions of representative democracy on the continent, in particular political parties and legislatures (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Hagopian 1998; Roberts and Wibbels 1999).

Up to the turn of the century the Latinobarometer, for example, had indicated high levels of public dissatisfaction with democracy in Latin America. Even the percentage of citizens who regarded democracy as the preferred form of government had declined between 1990 and 2000, exactly when most countries should have been consolidating their democracies after the transitions. On the basis of survey data from 1995 and 2001, O'Donnell (2004) acknowledged that, from the standpoint of public opinion, democracy was not doing well in Latin America. This statement came in support of his previous analyses of the region's countries as 'anaemic states', where an 'unrule of law' (O'Donnell 1993) and a 'citizenship of low intensity' (O'Donnell 2001) prevail.

Several other scholars have also tackled the possible relations between poor government performance and low support for democracy in Latin America from various perspectives (Camp 2001; Lagos 2003; Graham and Sukhtankar 2004; Sarsfield and Echegaray 2006). Regardless of the many democratization efforts during the 1980s, until the turn of the century the literature was supported by attitudinal measurements of democratic consolidation in diagnosing a growing gap between formal and liberal democracy in Latin America (Diamond 1997).

Democracy indices relying also on attitudinal data led to constant critical assessments of the quality of democracy in Latin America over the 1990s. Even if the scholarship tends now to agree that transitions are complete and democracy is consolidated in almost all Latin America countries (Cuba and Haiti being the exceptions), disputes concerning how to adequately measure democracy on the continent persist (Altman and Pérez-Liñán 2002; O'Donnell, Vargas Cullel and Iazzetta 2004; Munck 2007; Levine and Molina 2011), as well as the negative diagnoses that only a few countries in the region have »met the challenge of governing both democratically and effectively« (Mainwaring and Scully 2009). Latin America's democracy has been persistently defined as a »pseudo« (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1989), »delegative« (O'Donnel 1993) or »defective« (Merkel 2004) democracy, among other deprecatory adjectives.

This critical assessment of democracy in Latin America, which is emblematic of most of the international scholarship on democratization in the region, has already been deemed flawed for not taking into account the differences across the continent and for being static (Hagopian 2005). Furthermore, efforts to evaluate democratic quality have been considered as insufficient to capture Latin America's cultural diversity and political identities (Van Cott 2006). In particular, forms of participation beyond elections and political parties, and spaces of deliberation beyond legislative bodies escape analysis and are not taken into consideration by the traditional measurements of democracy and its quality. Nevertheless, in recent years it has become more and more acknowledged that participatory designs and deliberative publics spread around the continent are an integral part of Latin America's democratization process (Avritzer 2002). The speed with which participatory innovations are multiplied and institutionalized indicates that they

not only need to be taken into consideration by existing evaluations, but they also require a reassessment of the course of democratization in Latin America in order to account for the political experimentation that increasingly characterizes democracy on the continent.

As I will show in this paper, such political experimentation consists mainly of combining representative, participatory and deliberative forms of government. This arrangement implies, first, certain *political strategies,* such as administrative decentralization and occasional constitutional lawmaking; secondly, some *institutional redesign*, such as the multiplication of deliberative bodies with various decision-making powers and the creation of chains of delegation from state to civil society; and thirdly, a specific *governing method*, characterized by an interplay between *political means* and *social ends*. I call this experimentalist form of government pragmatic democracy. In this paper I claim that *pragmatic democracy* is an apt concept for understanding the political landscape of Latin America today.

I assume that the growing expansion of such experimentalist forms of government indicates that, in the course of their consolidation processes, a number of countries on the continent have taken a turn in their democratization. Such a turn – which can be read also as a *detour* from the course of democratic consolidation expected by third-wave scholars – does not consist of hindering the stabilization of representative institutions by making them fully effective and freed from their alleged »failures«. It also does not imply substituting them for alternative, participatory or deliberative institutions. Rather, what I call the *pragmatic turn* of Latin America's democratization consists in the attempt to *correct* some of the alleged failures of representative institutions with participatory and deliberative innovations.

The pragmatic turn of democratization has been facilitated by the so-called »left turn« in Latin America in recent years. The various newly-elected local and national leftist governments manifest programmatic concerns not only with participation and civil society, but also with equality and redistribution. Not only has the participation of civil society been enhanced through several innovative political means, but the latter have been improving equality and redistribution. Observation of recent governments in countries as diverse as, for example, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela can bring one to the conclusion that participation and deliberation have been used not only as means to correct purported flaws of representative institutions, but also to achieve *social ends* that the latter are assumed to be unable to accomplish.

Experiments such as the community organizations in Bolivia, the national public policy conferences in Brazil and the community councils in Venezuela have, through different arrangements with and within representative institutions, expanded the delivery of public services, increased the distribution of public goods and ensured the enactment of social policies and rights, in addition to strengthening the voice of disadvantaged groups in the political process. This paper will address these and other cases, as examples of attempts to govern through a combination of representation, participation and deliberation that, despite their varying degrees of institutional success, have somehow achieved desirable social ends.

The interplay between political means (participatory and deliberative devices) and social ends (equality and redistribution), and the political experimentation that results from it is, I will argue, what makes democracy in Latin America today pragmatic. To say that democracy in Latin America is turning pragmatic implies that it is engendering a new pattern of relations between state and civil society, as well as outgrowing liberalism, disrupting the liberal institutions of representation. However, such disruption is taking place *within* the boundaries of representative democracy, by *adapting* its institutions to a post-liberal logic, a logic that assumes democracy to have an intrinsic social meaning. Such a process of adaptation, or *adjustment*, that makes liberal institutions *fit* social ends, is, I hope to show, the core of the new, pragmatic democracies.

1. From Left Turn to Pragmatic Turn

In assessing the context of the pragmatic turn of Latin America's democracies, two enabling conditions seem to be relevant for understanding the wave of political experimentation that combines representation, participation and deliberation, aimed at remedying the supposed failures of liberal representative institutions and delivering more comprehensive social policies. First, the so-called »left turn«, the series of electoral victories

of leftist governments at both local and national levels throughout the continent, starting in 1998. Secondly, the wave of constitution making, which comprises both the enactment of new constitutions and extensive constitutional reforms in numerous Latin American countries at various stages of their transition or consolidation processes. These enabling conditions overlap not only chronologically, but also in terms of what they imply substantively. The first wave of constitution making, when constitutions were rewritten following the transitions, may have facilitated the left turn, since several of the new documents opened the door to decentralization and to political parties to re-enter the electoral arena. In the other hand, the most recent wave of constitution making, from 1999 onwards – when new constitutions were drafted (mainly in the Andes) or extensive constitutional reforms were undertaken during the consolidation process – can be seen as a product of the left turn.

1.1 The Left Turn

The first stage of Latin America's left turn has taken place at the local level. By the turn of the century, left-leaning political parties governed dozens of important cities. As demonstrated by Goldfrank (2011), a combination of political decentralization, urban economic crisis and the parties' own ideological transformation are responsible for the rise of the left at local level in the late 1980s and 1990s. The latter – the left's own ideological transformation – implied a new commitment to democracy, which had strong appeal among disillusioned citizens who until not so long ago did not have the chance to vote, in particular for left-wing parties that, in turn, had also not the opportunity to run for local offices.

It was the strong process of political decentralization that took place in Latin America after the transitions from authoritarianism that made elections at local level a reality. Nearly all countries of the region implemented decentralization reforms after their transitions (Campbell 2003), although their nature varies considerably. Administrative decentralization provided the local level with more autonomy, while political decentralization devolved public authority to civil society, allowing citizens to participate in the political process. Initially circumscribed to voting in elections, such citizen participation has been substantially enlarged by left-leaning municipal governments.

A sequence of electoral victories following Chávez's in 1998 led about two-thirds of the continent's countries to be governed by left-leaning political parties. The »pink tide« brought to power parties with impressive grassroots membership and close ties to labour unions and social organizations, and former union and social movement leaders rose to presidential office. Analysts agree that there is no single »left« and devise numerous typologies to understand their internal variations (Panizza 2005; Castañeda 2006; Weyland 2009). However, the diversity of the various »lefts« seems to converge on at least three points: the parties' programmatic objectives of reducing social and economic inequality, their openness to civil society and their willingness to experiment with politics.

As governments have expanded their redistributive role, they have engaged in an unprecedented policy experimentation that, as accurately put by Levitsky and Roberts (2011), has changed not only who governs in Latin America, but also how they govern. Latin America's left seems indeed to have developed a specific *method of governing*, which consists mainly in devising means to deliver social policies and public goods that go beyond the conventional forms, and therefore overcome the recognized limits of liberal institutions. Several democratic innovations follow from that, not only in the terrain of public administration but especially in what concerns political decision-making. New institutions have been designed within the state and in its interface with civil society, enabling more than simple dialogue between political and social actors.

Deliberative bodies involving the equal participation of government and civil society representatives have acquired consultative or decisional power, in some cases making binding decisions. These bodies have expanded the scope of political representation, as well as its traditional spaces and actors, allowing citizens and CSO leaders representative roles and representative claims. Even when only consultative, these bodies achieve high representativeness by allowing experts and citizens to sit together and deliberate on the design, implementation and evaluation of public policy. Policy councils composed of both government and non-government members at local and national level seem to be a recurrent innovation among Latin America's left-leaning parties, and they have been developed in political and social settings as diverse as Nicaragua, Venezuela and Brazil. In

these countries, too, development councils, for example, are reported to display different degrees of effectiveness with regard to relationships between social and political actors (Zaremberg 2011).

In Brazil, local and national councils bringing together state and civil society representatives at the different stages of the public policy cycle are an important but far from the only example of the new, experimentalist method of governing developed by Latin America's political parties after the left turn. In fact, over the past ten years the Brazilian Workers' Party has been experimenting with so many participatory and deliberative devices within the state's representative structure that the institutionalization of a »national system of social participation« (*sistema nacional de participação social*) articulating all of them has been proposed by the government. After the election of the former metalworker Luis Inácio Lula da Silva in 2002, the Workers' Party started its third consecutive term of federal government in 2011 with President Dilma Rousseff explicitly declaring in a speech before the legislature the intention to continue »to adopt social participation as an important governmental tool for the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies, assuring quality and feasibility to a project of development in the long term« (Brasil 2011). These words are in line with a statement made a few months earlier by one of Lula's ministers, Luiz Dulci, who declared that in Brazil »since 2003 [when Lula first took office] social participation has become a democratic method of governing«.[1] With the left turn, a specific method for governing the new, pragmatic democracies of Latin America was conceived. It remains to be seen, however, how this experimental form of politics and deepening democracy can be sustained.

1.2 The Wave of Constitution Making

The method of using social participation as a means of achieving the party's programmatic objectives and ultimately reducing social and economic inequality has been recently inscribed in the new constitutions of three Latin American countries: Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. Although most of the constitutions enacted or reformed in the 1980s and 1990s in the course of the transition from authoritarianism or democratic consolidation had already expanded the opportunities for political participation in numerous Latin American countries, the new wave of constitution making in the Andes had the clear scope of institutionalizing not only direct, but also participatory, deliberative and also »communal« mechanisms, so as to supersede the liberal institutions of political representation and guarantee the sustainability of the left's new democratic project.

1.2.1 Venezuela's Bolivarian Constitution

Venezuela inaugurated the recent wave of constitution making when right after being elected Chávez fulfilled his campaign's promise and convened a constitutional assembly to rewrite the constitution and subsequently submit it to a referendum. The new constitution was then approved by popular vote in 1999 and institutionalized among its articles direct democracy mechanisms and instruments for social control and popular participation. Article 6 says that Venezuela »is and shall always be democratic, participatory, elective«, thus making explicit the combination of participatory and representative forms of government – the latter made more accountable by Article 72, which institutionalizes the recall of the mandates of all elected offices. Referendums can be called to decide on bills under discussion in the legislature (Article 73) and to decide on laws and presidential decrees (Article 74). In the latter case, the citizen themselves can call the derogatory referendum. Citizens can also call a referendum to propose changes in the constitution and approve constitutional reforms proposed by the legislature (Articles 341 and 344). Citizens are also entitled to propose new legislation (Article 204) and convene a constituent assembly (Article 348).

In addition to the institutionalization of these instruments of direct democracy, Venezuela's new constitution also paved the way for truly participatory democracy. Article 70 extends popular participation to »open forums and meetings of citizens whose decisions shall be binding among others«. Article 184 asserts that »open and flexible mechanisms shall be created by law to make states and municipalities decentralize and transfer services to communities and organized neighbourhood groups«. That should include »the transfer of services in the areas of health, education, housing, sports, culture, social

1. See: http://www.secretariageral.gov.br/noticias/ultimas_noticias/2010/08/20-08-2010-nota-a-imprensa-resposta-do-ministro-luiz-dulci-as-declaracoes-de-jose-serra (last checked in 21/04/13).

programs, environment, industry and urbanism«, facilitating the communities and organized neighbourhood groups to »elaborate work projects and provide public services« (Article 184, 1). Communities and citizens are also entitled, through neighbourhood associations and non-governmental organizations, to formulate investment proposals to be presented to municipal and state authorities, as well as to »participate in the execution, evaluation and control of works projects, social programs and public services within their jurisdiction« (Article 184.2).

The highly participatory government designed by Article 184 of Venezuela's constitution has been ultimately delineated in 2006 with the enactment of the Law on Community Councils. Both legal documents paved the way not only for the full operation of community councils, but also for the activity of the missions, the Bolivarian circles, the numerous committees, as well as other devices for social participation. Nevertheless, the direct and participatory democracy designed by Venezuela's new Constitution cannot be said to undermine representative institutions. According to Article 70, »voting to fill public offices« is the first manifestation of the »participation and involvement of people in the exercise of their sovereignty in political affairs«. All formal political rights and representative institutions have been preserved in the Constitution, and an Electoral Power (Articles 292 to 298) stands besides a Citizen Power (Articles 273 to 291), in addition to the traditional state branches (legislative, executive and judicial powers). All that makes Venezuela a case of pragmatic democracy: participation is not simply strengthened, and it is not strengthened to weaken representation; rather, participation is a means to make representation more legitimate, accountable and responsive – and therefore, more democratic.

1.2.2 Bolivia and Ecuador

The latter statement is also true for the other constitutions recently enacted in the Andes. The new Constitution of Bolivia, approved in early 2009 through a referendum called by President Evo Morales and his Movement toward Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, or MAS), proclaims in its Article 11 that the country has adopted a »participatory, representative and communitarian form of democratic governance«. Democracy is »direct and participatory, by means of referendum, popular initiative, recall, assembly (*asamblea*), native council (*cabildo*) and previous consultation (*consulta previa*)«; it is also »representative, by means of elections of representatives through universal suffrage and secret and direct voting«; and, finally, democracy in Bolivia is »communitarian, by means of election, designation or nomination of authorities and representatives according to the norms and procedures of the indigenous nations and indigenous rural groups«. The political experimentation that must result from such a mixture is clear, especially when the constitution adds that the »assembly« and the »native council« have a deliberative character.

In Ecuador, constitution making procedures and outcomes were quite similar to those in Venezuela and Bolivia. Rafael Correa took office as President in 2007 after promising in his campaign to convene a Constitutional Assembly. The latter drafted the country's twentieth constitution, which was later approved in a popular referendum. As extensive as the Constitution itself (which amounts 444 articles, plus dozens of transitory provisions) is its declaration of rights, in particular the rights to participation, which alone comprise a full chapter. In addition to that, an entire title containing 142 articles is devoted to the »participation and organization of power«, the first of them defining what is called the principle of participation: »citizens, individually and collectively, shall participate as leading players in decision making, planning and management of public affairs and in the people's monitoring of State institutions and society and their representatives in an ongoing process of building citizen power«. Next, the constitution makes clear that »the participation of citizens in all matters of public interest is a right, which shall be exercised by means of mechanisms of representative, direct and community democracy« (Article 95).

The constitutionalization of mechanisms of representative, direct and community democracy results in a highly experimental and pragmatic government in Ecuador. Grassroots legal and regulatory initiatives (Article 103), referendums (Article 104) and recall (Article 105) coexist with monitoring government actions (Articles 129 to 131), national equality councils (Articles 156 and 157), judicial and indigenous justice branch of government (Article 171), transparency and social control branch of government (Articles 204 to 206) and the Council for Public Participation and Social Control (Articles 207 to

210). The latter »shall promote and encourage the exercise of the rights involving public participation and shall promote and set up social control mechanisms in matters of general welfare« (Article 207). Among its duties and attributions, the Council for Public Participation and Social Control should »promote public participation, encourage public deliberation processes and foster citizenship training, values, transparency, and the fight against corruption« (Article 208). Direct and participatory mechanisms should also be combined with communal democracy: Ecuador's decentralized autonomous governments »shall have political, administrative and financial autonomy and shall be governed by the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, inter-territorial equity, integration and public participation« (Article 238). The inclusion of historically marginalized groups and the expansion of social and economic rights are the main ends to be achieved by this pragmatic combination of innovative and experimental political means.

1.2.3 A Revolution without Revolution?

At least in the Andes, the Latin American left can be said to be pursuing its agenda through constitution making; countries are changing their basic legal structure and avoiding revolt, violence or revolution (Cameron and Sharpe 2010: 65). The appeal to constituent power by the Latin American left reflects the aspiration to create direct mechanisms of democracy and provide more participation and less political exclusion. But more than that, there is a purpose to »re-found« the political system, making room for an entirely new model of democracy intended to include traditionally unrepresented groups in the decision-making process and therewith extend to them access to social rights and public goods. There is a confessed revolutionary intent in this, which recalls the »revolution without revolution« or »revolution-restoration« and a »transformation as a real historical document«, to use Gramsci's (1949) definitions of what he called a passive revolution. As a member of the Bolivia's constitutional assembly Carlos Romero once declared, »we are trying to resolve historical contradictions«.[2]

Whether historical contradictions will be overcome and whether Latin America's »document-driven revolutions« (Partlow 2009) will go beyond the constitutions' paper and outlive the parties and presidents that sponsored them remain to be seen. The depth of the institutional reforms undertaken in Latin America in recent years is to a great extent the product of parties and presidents. As the latter have, with one hand, granted disadvantaged groups social and economic rights in an unprecedented way and, with the other hand, awarded the executive branch considerable power, critics are quick to assume the new constitutions to be a product of populism. Some scholars believe the main challenge of the new Latin American constitutions to be the compatibility of a strong presidential system with a robust scheme of popular participation (Gargarella 2008; Cameron and Sharpe 2010). It is indeed an open question whether a strong executive encourages or discourages popular participation in the long term.

Gramsci (1949) defined a »passive revolution« as a situation in which »a state substitutes the local social groups in the direction of a struggle for renewal (…) going through a series of reforms (…) without going through a radical-Jacobin style of political revolution«. During such a revolution »under a certain political enclosure the fundamental social relations change and new political forces rise and develop, indirectly influencing the official forces, with a slow and incoercible pressure, making them change without realizing it«. The left turn and the recent constitution making in Latin America may fit the description of such a »revolution without revolution«, which brings about »molecular transformations« carried out by facts, despite clearly having people as protagonists. As Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said to his Latin American counterparts in 2009, »what we have achieved in these last years was, in truth, the result of the deaths of many people, many young people, who decided to take up arms to bring down the authoritarian regimes in Chile, in Argentina, in Uruguay, in Brazil, in almost all the countries. They died, and we are doing what they dreamed of doing – and we have won this by democratic means.«[3]

2. See: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/16/AR2009021601468.html (last checked in 23/04/2013).

3. See: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/16/AR2009021601468_2.html (last checked in 24/04/2013).

2. From Political Disaffection to Political Experimentalism

After decades of struggle for democracy, Latin America seems to have learned that undemocratic political means are not conducive to democratic ends. Latin America's left seems also to have learned that undemocratic political means are not required to achieve radical social ends. Chávez's »Bolivarian Revolution« has relied mainly on a constitution and his »Socialism of the Twenty-First Century« has drawn greatly on liberal institutions, such as fair and free elections, competitive political parties, separation of powers, rule of law and equal protection of rights. Notwithstanding the disputes concerning the populist or even authoritarian character of Chávez's government (Diamond 2008; Hawkins 2010; Corrales and Penfold 2011) and the charges against his dismantling of the previous party system (Mainwaring 2012), one must concede that representative institutions were preserved during the long period he ruled Venezuela. And this observation can be extended to other Latin America countries: all left-wing governments have maintained the basic institutions of representative democracy (Madrid, Hunter and Weyland 2011: 141). Nevertheless, in addition to the latter, direct democracy mechanisms and participatory innovations have been designed, aimed at expanding the scope of democracy and attaining the social ends it is believed to serve.

That representative democracy has limits is a fact recognized even by its most avid advocates. Przeworski (2010) acknowledges that among the main limits of representative institutions is their incapacity to generate more social and economic equality, as well as their inability to make political participation more effective. Fervent critics of participatory democracy also admit that »representative democracy does not easily or automatically satisfy some deep human desires, such as participation and social and political recognition, that is, the right to be treated decently and enjoy full citizenship. These limitations are intrinsic to representative democracy« (Mainwaring 2012: 961). The acknowledgement of the empirical limitations of representative democracy to deliver the normative principles and values upon which it is grounded has led contemporary democratic theory to embrace participatory and deliberative accounts of democracy (Pateman 1970; Mansbridge 1980; Barber 1984; Fishkin 1991; Habermas 1992; Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Bohman 1996; Dryzek 2000; Fung 2004), and advocate a more comprehensive idea of political representation that makes room for the claims that cannot be fulfilled by liberal institutions (Castiglione and Warren 2006; Disch 2011; Mansbridge 2003; Urbinati 2006; Saward 2008). Latin America seems today to be the main laboratory where those concepts and theories are being put to the test (Fung 2011, Pateman 2012).

Latin American governments seem to be aware of representative democracy's lack of means to achieve its purported ends. What they have been endeavouring, especially since the left turn, consists precisely in creating more effective means of political participation as a way to generate more political, social and economic equality. Citizens' opportunities to participate in the political process have been extended beyond elections, and participatory innovations allow citizens to deliberate and often even decide on the management of public services, the allocation of state resources and the distribution of public goods. And that has been pursued without undermining the institutions of representative democracy, but rather by making them stronger.

By *expanding democracy's means*, participatory innovations have proved themselves able to correct some of representative democracy's limits: some have shown themselves able to overcome deficiencies such as clientelism, while others seem to make the legislature more responsive and have positive effects in the party system. In the aggregate they seem to be restoring political trust and satisfaction with democracy on the continent. By making political participation more effective, Latin American governments have been proving themselves able to *achieve democracy's ends:* participatory innovations have been shown to enhance the redistribution of public goods, include minorities and disadvantaged groups in the political process, make sure policies and rights address the latter's needs, and in the aggregate they seem to be contributing to the generation of more social and economic equality on the continent. If this is all true, then political experimentalism is a remedy for political disaffection, and the pragmatic method of governing an antidote for discontent towards democracy.

2.1 Expanding Democracy's Means

In order to make political participation more effective, the constitutions of the new Latin American democracies made sure that their governments provide means beyond the electoral ones. The new constitution of Venezuela asserts that »all citizens have the right to participate freely in public affairs, either directly or through their elected representatives« (Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Article 62). Even before the »left turn« took place in Latin America, other countries inscribed a similar precept in their constitutions. The Constitution of Brazil, for example, enacted in 1988, right after the country's transition, states in its very first article that »all power emanates from the people, who exercise it by means of elected representatives or directly, as provided by this constitution« (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Brazil, Article 1). The constitution goes further and indeed provides those direct means, specifying that »the sovereignty of the people shall be exercised by universal suffrage and by direct and secret voting, with equal value for all, and, according to the law, by means of plebiscite, referendum and popular initiative« (Article 14).

2.1.1 Combining Representation and Direct Democracy

The first form of political experimentation tried in the new democracies of Latin America was a combination of representative and direct democracy mechanisms. Both constitutions exemplified above clearly differentiate between *electoral* participation and *direct* participation. In addition to electing representatives to act in their place, citizens can vote or give their opinions on relevant issues in referendums and plebiscites, propose meaningful legislation through popular initiatives and, where the recall is also institutionalized besides or within the usual three means of direct democracy, terminate the mandates of their representatives. Mechanisms of direct democracy can be mandatory or facultative (whether regulated by law/constitution), binding or consultative (whether the resolution is absolute), proactive or reactive (whether attempting to alter or sustain the status quo), and top-down or bottom-up (whether initiated by the government or the citizens).[4] What they all have in common, however, is that all of them involve voting. That is why they are definitely »not intended to supplant representative democracy but rather to serve as intermittent safety valves against perverse or unresponsive behaviour of representative institutions and politicians« (Altman 2011: 2).

Mechanisms of direct democracy have been used in Latin America since before the process of constitutional reforms associated with the third wave of democratization (Altman 2011). Only five countries on the continent have never used one of the direct democracy mechanisms: Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua. Altman (2011) shows that from the beginning of the third wave (1978) until 2009, Latin America saw 55 occurrences of direct democracy, with 112 direct votes. Most of those uses of direct democracy mechanisms were initiated by governments (85 per cent), and only four countries in the region have so far experienced citizen-initiated forms of direct democracy (Bolivia, Colombia, Uruguay and Venezuela). Uruguay has by far the largest experience with the mechanisms of direct democracy, totalizing 18 direct votes in the period analysed by Altman (6 mandatory plebiscites, 5 popular initiatives and 7 referendums). It is followed by Ecuador, which in its nine instances of direct democracy mechanisms has put 39 issues under direct vote (two mandatory plebiscites, 19 consultative facultative plebiscites and 18 binding facultative plebiscites). The other Latin American countries cannot be said to have made much use of direct democracy mechanisms in the past 30 years of democratic history: Venezuela have had six instances; Panama, Colombia, Bolivia and Chile four each; Peru, Guatemala and Brazil two each; and Argentina and Costa Rica have each employed direct democracy mechanisms only once.

The issues put to direct vote can also be said to be less important. According to Altman, almost two-thirds of all uses of direct democracy mechanisms on the continent have dealt with questions of institutional design or contingent politics (for example, extension of mandates, presidential re-election, type of presidential election, legal status of parties, the formation of constitutional assemblies, among others). Direct votes on substantial matters implying decisions on specific policy issues have been more rare. Only 20 times have Latin American citizens had the opportunity to use direct democracy mechanisms to express their opinions or decide on a basic service tradition-

4. This typology follows Altman (2011).

ally provided by the state, such as pensions, education, telecommunications, infrastructure, water, electricity and health. Nine out of these 20 episodes have taken place in Uruguay. The rest have occurred in only four countries: Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia and Panama (Altman 2011: 115).

Even if the frequency of their use and the topics they cover are not so impressive, most new Latin America democracies have expanded the scope of direct democracy mechanisms in their constitutions. Providing citizens with constitutional means to check their governments through popular votes seems to have been a trend among the post-transitional democracies. But beyond political fashion, Altman believes that »the reasons behind the use of direct democracy in most of Latin America obscure a significant deterioration of those critical intermediate institutions that must exist in a given representative regime – namely, political parties and party systems« (2011: 112). His claim is that weak representative institutions open the door to the use of direct democracy mechanisms »because of the lack of check and balances characteristic of representative democracies« (2011: 111).

Political disaffection would then be a reason for the massive institutionalization of direct democracy mechanisms in Latin America, and their use would reflect an attempt to correct the institutional deficiencies of representative democracy. The extensive use of direct democracy mechanisms for dealing with questions of institutional re-design (mandates, elections, parties, constitutional assemblies) seem to be indicative of that. Interestingly, the country that has experimented most extensively with direct democracy mechanisms, Uruguay, is precisely the one that is reputed to have the stronger representative system and the best quality of democracy in the entire continent. Evidence of how direct democracy mechanisms have strengthened representative institutions in Uruguay gives food for thought. Lissidini (2011), for example, shows that political parties have always retained centrality throughout Uruguay's history of direct votes. The parties' support would have been crucial for the propositions to reach a direct vote, and initiatives not backed by at least one party have not made it to the ballot. As a result of the experience with direct democracy mechanisms, Lissidini argues, new party identities have been generated in Uruguay (2011: 174). The first form of political experimentation put forward by Latin America does not aim at social ends; its aspiration is to expand popular sovereignty beyond electoral means. And its outcome is to render representative democracy stronger, correcting some of its institutional insufficiencies.

Mechanisms of direct democracy are termed »direct« because theoretically they involve voting directly on policy issues (or directly proposing issues to be voted on). Citizens would then avoid the indirect decision, that is, simply voting on the representatives who would then vote on substantive policy issues. However, although they can potentially make representative democracy more democratic by enlarging citizens' opportunities for political participation, direct democracy mechanisms do not really encompass a form of political participation that goes beyond the main electoral means, that is, voting. Voting is a sine qua non characteristic of all mechanisms of direct democracy (Altman 2011: 7). Therefore, direct democracy mechanisms are susceptible to all fallibilities found in methods for preference aggregation and charged against the majority principle: no voting procedure can guarantee that a decision reflects the will of the majority, not to mention popular sovereignty (Riker 1972). In order to arrive at decisions that respond to the real preferences of citizens, governments had to expand the means of democracy even further.

2.1.2 Furthering Citizens' Engagement

In order to become even more effective, political participation has been expanded beyond election of representatives and beyond direct votes on political issues. The forms of social mobilization and engagement aimed at political ends that have been advanced by the quite resilient Latin America's civil society after the transitions have been attempts to further participation beyond the ballot and many times have been motivated precisely by discontent with decisions reached in ballots. Demonstrations, protests, marches, vigils, occupations, pickets, rallies, strikes, sit-ins and petitions – all these forms of participation have been very relevant in Latin America's democratization process and several events have played pivotal roles and led to important political consequences (one among several examples is the protests of the so-called »painted faces«, *caras pintadas*, considered critical in the process that led to the impeachment of Brazilian President Fernando Collor de Mello in 1992). Nonetheless, no matter how important they are, those forms of social

mobilization and engagement result mostly in pressure on politics; they do not provide a real form of participation in it.

Movements such as the *Piqueteros* in Argentina, the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) in Mexico and the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* (MST) in Brazil are more organized, however, and carry on demands that go beyond contingent politics. Those movements became quite visible in the 1990s and bring about clear social demands connected to demands for a deeper change in politics. While the *Piqueteros* demand more jobs and the *Sem Terra* more land, both echo the *Zapatistas* in their demand for more structural transformations in the political system and a more inclusive and participatory democracy. The World Social Forum, organized for the first time in 2001 in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre and reuniting hundreds of non-governmental organizations and social movements from all over the continent, showed that Latin America's civil society expected from democratic consolidation more than stable representative institutions could offer. Citizens wanted social equality, real political inclusion and cultural recognition. For that, they wanted to *take part* in government, *deliberate* on policies and *decide* on administrative matters.

In Latin America, as elsewhere, political disaffection leads to the intensification of citizens' demands. The consolidation of democracy also contributes to the development of more critical citizens (Norris 1999). Widespread dissatisfaction with the democratic performance of representative institutions seems to have encouraged civil society organizations and political parties to align and jointly search for innovative forms of solving local problems and have the desired policies delivered. After decades of experience in the long struggle for democracy and against authoritarianism, Latin America's civil society was ready to take a step further. Instead of participating against their governments, they would have the chance to participate *with* their governments, and somehow *within* them.

2.1.3 Combining Representation with Participation and Deliberation

The second form of political experimentation put forward by the new democracies of Latin America combines representation with participation and deliberation. Along with civil society, governments design innovative institutions envisaging really effective means of participation. Beginning with participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre in Brazil, participatory innovations now include a wide range of local and national-level experiments that allow citizens to play a larger role in politics. Citizens have been gradually involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policy. Throughout the stages of the policy cycle, citizens deliberate on policy preferences, set priorities together with government representatives and manage local resources, effectively taking part in the decision-making process.

A broad range of participatory innovations have been put to work in Latin America in recent years: local and national policy councils, community councils, advisory councils, national policy conferences, municipal development councils, participatory urban planning, and a long list of less institutionalized practices, not to mention the hundreds of participatory budgeting initiatives that have spread all over the continent. The wide spectrum of activities performed by citizens and civil society organizations imply much more than mere social control. They take part in the drafting of policies, have a role in the planning of their cities, decide on the allocation of municipal budgets, manage the provision of public services, administer access to public goods, deliberate on governments' policy priorities and make proposals and recommendations to policymakers, among other activities comprised by democratic innovations. The means of democracy have never been so manifold and political participation so effective.

The degree of variation found among those forms of participation is very high. Not all participatory innovations involve deliberation. Not all of those that do involve deliberation result in decision making; some consist simply of consultation. Not all decisions reached in participatory innovations that involve deliberation and decision making are binding; some consist simply of policy recommendations. Some participatory innovations have reached the national level, but most of them take place only at local level. Not all participatory innovations are initiated by the government, and not all of those initiated by civil society are supported by governments. Not all participatory innovations are also the product of left-leaning governments. The initial success of participatory budgeting seems to have persuaded centre and right parties – as well as multilateral aid agencies such as the World

Bank – that participatory innovations are useful means for delivering efficient public services and providing better governance (Avritzer 2009, Hawkins 2010, Goldfrank 2011). All these are likewise facets of the political experimentalism that characterizes democracy in Latin America today.

Participatory innovations also vary in their impact and level of success. Even the most successful, participatory budgeting, varies enormously, has different results and has achieved different degrees of success in the different cities and periods in which it has taken place (Wampler 2007; Avritzer 2009; Peruzzotti 2009; Goldfrank 2011). In certain cases, a participatory institution may not achieve the exact goal it was expected to, but happens to bring about positive impacts on democracy. In particular, the latter are cases in which, despite the level of success of the experiment itself, the outcomes display the potential of participatory innovations to correct purported malfunctions of representative democracies or simply make representative institutions stronger.

2.1.4 Strengthening Representation through Participation

In Mexico, participatory innovations are reported to have created new channels between citizens and elected representatives, constituting an alternative to clientelism (Selee 2009). The flourishing of participatory efforts in local government throughout Mexico, beginning in the late 1990s, resulted in varied experiences with different degrees of success. However, several have reduced clientelism and constructed more public and transparent channels for citizen's voices in local affairs. Selee shows how in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl and Tijuana, for example, elected neighbourhood communities and participatory planning bodies helped to generate new forms of interaction between citizens and the state. In Tijuana, the planning system also produced extensive public deliberation on municipal priorities and brought citizens and government officials closer. New patterns of leadership selection have been engendered, and citizens who undertook an active role in participatory institutions eventually became part of the public administration (2009: 62–83). What this experience shows is that the success of participatory innovations in Mexico depended largely on including parties and party-affiliated groups in the process, and not bypassing them. Sellee's conclusion is very clear, showing how the combination between representation and participation can strengthen democracy: »participatory innovation empowers citizens, not by bypassing political parties, but by bringing them closer to citizens and forcing them to compete for public support« (2009: 83). In a highly party-centric political system that for an incredibly long time has been ruled by a single party, such an outcome indicates significant potential on the part of participatory innovations to correct deficiencies of the representative system.

Evidence of the positive impact of participatory innovations on political parties and on the party system is also found in Bolivia and Ecuador. Van Cott (2008) found that experiences of indigenous parties promoting institutional innovation in local government in those countries help mayors to establish personal bonds of loyalty and trust with voters. Establishing participatory and deliberative innovations, indigenous-movement-based political parties achieved greater community control over elected authorities and greater transparency with respect to budgeting and spending (2008: 13). The institutional innovations implemented by the Andean indigenous parties following their own cultural traditions includes regular, frequent and open assemblies, where public spending preferences are freely exposed and jointly prioritized. Committees and working groups reuniting municipal government officials and representatives of civil society also take responsibility for decision making, oversight and implementation (2008:22). One of Van Cott's main findings is that those participatory innovations help to generate new sources of authority for weak local political institutions in the ethnically divided and politically unstable Andean countries (2008: 225).

A third type of evidence of democratic innovations that by combining representation and participation bring about stronger representative institutions is found in Brazil. The National Public Policy Conferences (NPPC), a national-level experiment promoted by the federal Executive, along with civil society organizations, gather together ordinary citizens, civil society organizations, private entrepreneurs and elected representatives from all three levels of government to deliberate together and agree on a common policy agenda for the country. Although the NPPCs have a longer existence, they are reported to have a significant impact on policymaking and lawmaking, especially since the Workers' Party took over the federal government in 2003. Pogrebinschi

and Santos (2011) found that about 20 per cent of all legislative bills under discussion in the Brazilian federal legislature in 2009 resulted from policy recommendations of NPPCs held in the previous years. In addition, Pogrebinschi found that about 48 per cent of all constitutional amendments enacted by the Brazilian Parliament after the country's redemocratization dealt with specific policy issues deliberated and recommended by the national policy conferences (Pogrebinschi 2012). The positive impact of such a participatory institution that combines representation, participation and deliberation cannot be said to depend on or to be circumscribed by the Workers' Party government: Pogrebinschi and Samuels (forthcoming) found evidence of the impact of the NPPCs on national politics during the preceding government (when the Brazilian Social Democratic Party, PSDB, the main opposition party to the Workers' Party was in power), which indicates that the acknowledged success of the democratic experiment may rely more on its institutional design features than on other contingent variables.

2.1.5 Can Participation Remedy Political Disaffection?

If this wave of political experimentalism in Latin America has been engendered by the long-standing political disaffection on the continent, could it help to remedy it? In other words, have democratic innovations the potential to restore political trust and satisfaction with democracy on the continent? This is an empirical question that only the coming years will be able to answer. However, the evidence discussed above and a few other indications already make room for speculation.

A first set of indications would be the increasing volume of citizens engaging in participatory innovations and the increasing volume of the latter in Latin America in recent years. If, on one hand, electoral volatility seems to remain high and electoral turnout to remain low in Latin America, making scholars worry that »citizens believe that they are not well represented« (Mainwaring 2006:15), on the other hand, over 2,000 cities on the continent as a whole have adopted a form of participatory budgeting by 2007 (Goldfrank 2007), 33,000 community councils were active in Venezuela by late 2007 with more than 8 million citizens participating (Hawkins 2010), 5,000 health councils were reported to engage 100,000 people in 2004 in Brazil (Coelho 2004), and 13,000 community organizations were enabled by the Law of Popular Participation in Bolivia to monitor local spending and public works management by 2006 (Van Cott 2006). Altogether, these democratic innovations have mobilized millions of citizens on the continent. And these are just some examples. In Brazil alone, 7 million people are reported to have participated in 82 national public policy conferences that took place between 2003 and 2011 (Pogrebinschi 2013). While the number of Latin American citizens who vote in elections or identify with a political party is decreasing, the number of participatory innovations and the volume of citizens engaging in them seem to have increased extensively and rapidly over the past few years.

A second set of indications comes from democracy indices. As governments turn left, Latin America's democracy turns pragmatic, and survey data begin to show an accelerated increase in levels of political trust and satisfaction with democracy. According to the Latinobarómetro, in 2003, 19 per cent of Latin American citizens were said to trust their governments, while seven years later, in 2010, this proportion had jumped to 45 per cent. The level of trust in parliaments and political parties has also increased steeply in Latin America in recent years: in 2003, 17 per cent of citizens trusted their national parliaments, while by 2010 that figure has doubled to 34 per cent. Trust in political parties increased from 11 per cent to 23 per cent over the same seven-year period, exhibiting very impressive growth. Considering that the third wave of democratization started in Latin America over three decades ago, the significant and rapid rise in trust levels in the past few years may not be explained entirely by the consolidation of political institutions, as anticipated by third-wave scholars. If political experimentalism is proved to remedy political disaffection, then the pragmatic turn of Latin America's democracy is an explanation that deserves to be considered further.

To be sure, a number of concurrent factors have certainly contributed to the sudden rise in levels of political trust and satisfaction with democracy on the continent. Economic growth, control of inflation, better economic performance associated with effective redistributive policies, significant decreases in poverty and inequality levels, the rise and expansion of a vigorous middle class, and minor but perceptible progress in law enforcement,

rights protection, crime control and corruption reduction have possibly played a role. The recent institutionalization of the new political means that combine representation, participation and deliberation are definitely not the single causal explanation. However, if they prove to be successful in achieving their expected social ends, then the concept of pragmatic democracy can offer at least a valid new analytical perspective from which to study Latin America's recent political history.

2.2 Achieving Democracy's Ends

The political experimentalism described in the previous pages embodies attempts to expand political means in order to fulfil democracy's social ends. One important consequence of the left turn is to ascribe a clear social intent to democracy in Latin America. But even before the successive election of left-leaning parties on the continent, democracy has been inscribed in post-transitional Latin American constitutions as aiming at social equality. Brazil's 1988 Constitution, for example, enumerates among the country's fundamental objectives that of »eradicating poverty and marginalization, and reducing social and regional equalities« (Article 3, III). To restore order, establish representative institutions and reassure civil and political rights was not enough. Democracy could not be achieved in Latin America without social justice.

Lack of social justice implies lack of citizenship – a critical component of Latin America's democratization process, if not one of its main obstacles, if one endorses a more robust definition of democratization, such as the one advocated by Guillermo O'Donnell. As he once put it, »various forms of discrimination and extensive poverty and their correlate, extreme disparity in the distribution of (not only economic) resources, go hand in hand with low-intensity citizenship« (O'Donnell 1993: 1361). O'Donnell pointed out better than anyone else that not only political conditions, but also social conditions are necessary for the exercise of citizenship – when citizens, among other things, »receive fair treatment« and »obtain from state agencies services to which they are entitled« (1993: 1361). O'Donnell knew that the »brown areas« of the new democracies could not be addressed simply with liberal rights. Several Latin America's constitutional assemblies were also aware of this and have protected in the new constitutions social, economic and, more recently, cultural rights, besides the classical civil and political rights. The search for social equality on the continent is not simply a search for increased income and redistribution; it is also a search for *inclusion*.

Along with the constitutionalization of social, economic and cultural rights came the perception that, in order to make them more than fine words on a piece of paper, it was necessary to involve civil society in their attainment. With the extensive decentralization undergone by most of the continent, the delivery of basic social goods, such as health, have in several countries been devolved to the municipalities, where new participatory institutions began to engage state and civil society actors in the task of converting rights into reality. Municipal councils, notwithstanding important variations in design, seemed in the first instance the preferred institutional option of many governments. Empowering the citizens and letting them play a role in the solution of their own problems proved a valid method to further develop citizenship and an effective means of implementing social policies on a local basis. In few years thousands of health councils were installed across Brazil and community councils opened throughout Venezuela. Participatory innovations started to prove themselves suitable means to achieve inclusion.

Whether providing redistribution of public goods (social inclusion), improving the life conditions of disadvantaged groups (economic inclusion), increasing levels of participation among the less educated and lower-income citizens (political inclusion), or extending rights to minorities and reintegrating historically underrepresented groups in the political process (cultural inclusion), participatory innovations have been increasingly used by Latin American governments as means to include citizens and groups, and therefore achieve social equality. The extent to which those means achieve their ends is contested and the level of success of participatory innovations varies across countries and even within single countries. However, a few initial indications already suggest some cause for optimism.

The impact of citizens' participation in Latin America is reported to be already manifest in public expenditure prioritizing, reallocation of budgetary provisions, management of local resources, policy planning, design and implementation of local development projects and reforms, and also in the drafting and enactment of laws

and public policies (Cameron, Hershberg and Sharpe 2012; Selee and Peruzzotti 2009). But to what extent does the expansion of political participation entail the expansion of social and economic equality? In other words, what is the potential of participatory innovations to provide inclusion? In what follows I will answer these questions by discussing some examples of participatory innovations considered to address social and economic problems.

Participatory budgeting is usually deemed the most successful participatory innovation precisely because of its demonstrated ability to generate greater equality through a more equitable redistribution of public goods and to increase the levels of participation among disadvantaged groups, the less educated and lower-income citizens. Studies on participatory budgeting across Brazil and in numerous Latin American cities abound, although not all evidence supports its presumed positive impact on social equality. Nevertheless, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos has put it, »the redistributive efficacy of participatory budgeting has been fully confirmed«; the initial achievements of Porto Alegre – where between 1989 and 1996 participatory budgeting is considered to have doubled the number of children enrolled in schools and increased from 49 per cent to 98 per cent the number of households with access to water – would suffice to show that participatory budgeting is the »embryo of a redistributive democracy« (1998: 484). Avritzer (2009), however, found that, depending on specific configurations of civil and political society, in some cities – such as São Paulo – the participatory budgeting displayed weaker distributive effects than in Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, where it benefited the cities as a whole. In all cases, however, the poor neighbourhoods are those that have benefited the most, which confirms participatory budgeting's potential to favour the most disadvantaged and lower-income citizens. This finding is also endorsed by Baiocchi (2001), who shows that the poor and uneducated are well represented in what he considers an efficient and redistributive decision-making procedure.

Local participatory initiatives are also reported to have improved the economic well being of the average citizens in Bolivia. Laserna (2009) shows that initiatives such as the popular participation law, the administrative decentralization law, the national dialogue law, the indigenous territories and environmental and forestry laws, as well as reforms in the electoral system have resulted in a proliferation of channels and mechanisms for participation, creating more opportunities for the representation of citizens and their political empowerment. He found that the poorest and more depressed areas have been favoured with more resources and that previously ignored geographical areas have received increased public spending (2009: 143). Moreover, the coverage of basic services has been expanded nationally and in rural areas, improving living conditions at a faster pace than before participatory innovations were introduced (2009:148).

The community councils (*consejos communales*) in Venezuela are part of a larger participatory system designed by Hugo Chávez, which involves several initiatives (among others, the missions and Boliviarian circles) designed to combat poverty and deliver social policies. Institutionalized by a law enacted by Venezuela's National Assembly in 2006, the community councils – reported to number 40,000 in 2011 (McCarthy 2011) – are »instances of participation, articulation and integration of the diverse community organizations, social groups and citizens, which permit the organized people to directly manage public policies and projects aimed at responding to the needs and aspirations of communities in the construction of equality and social justice« (Ley Orgánica de los Consejos Comunales, Art. 2). Community councils can be formed by up to 400 families whose members – organized in a fairly representative structure that includes an assembly, an elected executive, a credit cooperative and a social control unit – share responsibilities in working committees concerned with several social and economic policies, such as health, urban land, habitation, communal economy, security and defence, food and consumer protection, water, energy and gas, education, culture and citizen development, protection of children and adolescents, people with disabilities, family and gender equality, among other policies that the community perceive as necessary (Ley Orgánica de los Consejos Comunales, Art. 28). Extraordinary revenues are transferred by the government to the community councils, which should then deliberate on needs and priorities, draft projects to address them, implement and monitor the desired measures and manage the resources obtained. The autonomy and self-management model of the community councils divide scholars, who offer a growing number of contested interpretations. Despite pertinent critiques concerning especially community councils' political use and institutional design failures, comprehensive empirical investigations assessing their

impact on social equality are scarce. In any event, the community councils certainly play a role in some of Venezuela's recent achievements: poverty decreased from 49.4% in 1999 to 27.6 per cent in 2009,[5] social spending doubled from 11.3 per cent of GDP in 1998 to 22.8 per cent in 2011,[6] and in 2010 80.4 per cent of Venezuelans believed that »democracy solves problems« and 86.5 per cent that »democracy is preferable to any other form of government«, in contrast to 52.8 per cent and 63.5 per cent, respectively, in 1995.[7]

The national public policy conferences in Brazil have ensured the political and cultural inclusion of minority groups by promoting rights and developing corresponding policies to address matters of gender, race, ethnicity and other cultural minority issues. Pogrebinschi (2012) found that the number of federal policies (counted by presidential decrees) addressing minority and human rights increased from 12 to 224 between 2003 and 2010, a growth of almost 200 per cent. Extensive national policy plans have been enacted in this same period delivering specific policies to minority groups, such as women, the elderly, people with disabilities and racial and ethic minorities, as a result of the demands voiced by them in the NPPCs. Pogrebinschi and Samuels (forthcoming) found that the NPPCs on food and nutritional security supported the enactment of Brazil's first comprehensive policy in this area, the Food and Nutritional Security National Plan (PLANSAN), which has been translated into specific actions and programmes impacting the lives of millions of Brazilians. One example is the Food Acquisition Programme (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* – PAA), which »provides food for malnourished people and promotes social and economic inclusion in rural areas through improvements in family agriculture«. In 2011 alone, the PAA attended to the needs of 19,728,731 families, using about US$233 million in budgetary funding.

Although 71 per cent of Latin Americans were satisfied with their lives in 2010 in contrast with 41 per cent in 2000, according to the Latinobarómetro, it is still too early to evaluate whether the new means of democracy in Latin America contribute to achieving its purported social end. It is very difficult to measure the redistributive impact of specific participatory innovations in the short term. The correlation between the widespread political experimentalism and the improving political and social indicators on the continent must be properly investigated, however. Although several explanations concur, scholars must take seriously the connection between participatory innovations and the delivery of social policies in order to find out whether there is any causality in the fact that the recent improvement of political and social indices in Latin America takes place when governments experiment with representation, participation and deliberation.

The few existing indications should not be ignored. Not only have levels of political trust and satisfaction with democracy increased on the continent in the past decade, as I have shown, but the political leaders or political parties of the most experimentalist governments – or the most pragmatic democracies – have been re-elected. Left-leaning presidents or parties – which explicitly attempt to use participatory innovations as a means to achieve social equality – have been in recent years re-elected in at least seven countries: Venezuela, Chile, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Uruguay and Argentina. With the exception of Argentina and Chile, the other five are precisely those in which democratic experimentation is strongest, as the examples given in this paper have made clear. In Brazil, the country with the longest and more widespread experimentation with participatory innovations, the Workers' Party (PT) has been elected three successive times, entering its tenth year in 2013 with a 79 per cent approval rating for its president, Dilma Rousseff.[8] Poverty in Brazil fell by 54 per cent between 2003, the first year of PT's government, and 2011. In 2011 alone, poverty fell 7.9 per cent in a period of twelve months.[9] The government's many social programmes cannot be dissociated from its commitment to govern together with civil society, advancing social participation as a »democratic method of governing«, a »tool for the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies«, as I argued earlier in this paper.

5. Data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2010.

6. Data from SISOV, Sistema Integrado de Indicadores Sociales de Venezuela, available at: http://www.cepr.net/index.php/blogs/the-americas-blog/venezuelan-economic-and-social-performance-under-hugo-chavez-in-graphs (last accessed in 29/04/2013).

7. Data from the Latinobarómetro.

8. See: http://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2013/03/19/dilma-cni-ibope.htm (last checked in 29/04/2013).

9. See: http://revistaepoca.globo.com/Negocios-e-carreira/noticia/2012/03/pobreza-no-brasil-diminui-79-em-2011.html (last accessed in 29/04/2013).

3. Towards a New Model of Democracy?

The »democracies with adjectives« (Collier and Levitsky 1997) that emerged in the third wave of democratization are being progressively displaced. The »delegative« (O'Donnell 1993), »defective« (Merkel 2004) or »pseudo« (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1989) democracies of Latin America seem gradually to be giving way to *pragmatic democracy*, a new, experimental form of governance that combines representation, participation and deliberation as means to achieve social ends. Whether this form of governance will prove sustainable and outlive the left-leaning governments that are associated with it, only the future will show.

In any event, the increasing institutionalization of participatory innovations within the institutions of representative democracy seems to indicate that, three decades after the purported beginning of the third-wave of democracy, Latin America may never conform to the liberal model. As I hope to have shown in this paper, Latin America has taken a turn in its democratization process, and the role of participatory innovations cannot be neglected in assessments of the performance of representative institutions. The numerous democratic experimentations also need to be considered in public opinion surveys conducted in Latin American countries, as a first step for future evaluations of how they really impact on levels of political trust and satisfaction with democracy on the continent.[10]

Indeed, the escalation of political experimentalism in Latin America raises important questions about assessments of the quality of democracy. The known measures and indices not only fail to capture the institutional changes that are taking place in Latin America with the increasing adoption of participatory innovations, but they also do not make room for the recognition that new forms of democracy can still be forged and that not all democracies should follow the liberal paradigm. New criteria are necessary to account for the democratic experimentation taking place in Latin America and to evaluate it in accordance with its own principles and values, in the context of its own process of democratization and not in accordance with standards developed in other contexts and other times.

The use of measurements based on the procedural mechanisms of liberal democracy to evaluate Latin America is increasingly being contested, as is the view that liberal democracy is a universal aspiration (Van Cott 2008; Buxton 2011). As López Maia and Lander assert with regard to the Venezuelan case, democracy is understood »not only as the enjoyment of civil liberties and the exercise of political rights but also, in a very emphatic way, as social justice and social equality« (2011: 63). To dismiss the political experimentalism that has been taking place in Latin America in recent years »is to deny plurality in democratic forms and also the legitimacy of endogenous democratic models« (Buxton 2011).

Only a proper appraisal of Latin America's experimentalism with participation and deliberation and its interfaces with representative institutions may explain why the latter have supposedly constantly failed. Scholarship on democratization in Latin America must be expanded to encompass new possibilities, such as the pragmatic turn described in this paper. If the liberal paradigm is put to one side and the validity of this new, experimental model of democracy is recognized, Latin America could provide new and more creative recipes to enhance the quality of democracy elsewhere, too.

10. An important first step has been made by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), which has started to include questions about popular participation in surveys carried out in, for example, Venezuela. Apart from that, most public opinion surveys still have questions only about direct democracy mechanisms, and still consider participation to involve mainly petitioning, demonstrating and associating, failing to capture participation in institutional innovation.

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