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HOW TO ASSESS DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA?

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Leonardo Morlino

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LUISS School of Government

Via di Villa Emiliani, 14

00197 Rome ITALY

email: sog@luiss.it

web: www.sog.luiss.it



ABSTRACT

Based on an encompassing theoretical definition of democratic quality that includes procedural, substantive and outcome components, this paper offers a comprehensive analytic tool and applies it to the study of the quality of democracy in 15 Latin American countries. The paper's methodological approach combines qualitative and quantitative assessments of the different aspects and characteristics of those polities, complementing and expanding previous research in this area and providing a detailed description of the evolution and current state of democracies in the region. The results emerging from our analysis show a clear democratic pattern in the region, marked by a strong correlation and internal consistency among the different dimensions of democratic quality. In other words, "high quality" democracies in the region (Uruguay, Chile, Costa Rica, and, to a lesser extent, Argentina and Brazil) exhibit high "scores" and successful performances in most of the different components of the democratic quality. Similarly, "low quality" democracies concentrated in Central America (El Salvador, Nicaragua and Venezuela) fare poorly in virtually all these underlying dimensions. Perhaps the only exception to this general trend is Venezuela, where the visible deterioration of most of the procedural and substantive dimensions – and especially rule of law and accountability – has been accompanied by sustained improvements in at least one of the outcome components – equality.

Keywords: Democratic qualities; Latin Americas; Rule of law; Responsiveness; Participation

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Leonardo Morlino is Professor of Political Science, Director of the Research Center on Democracies and Democratizations and Vice-Rector of LUISS, Rome (Italy). He was President of the International Political Science Association, IPSA (2009-12) and currently is the Past President (2012-14). Morlino's most recent books include: *The Quality of Democracy in Latin America* (IDEA, 2014) *Changes for Democracy* (Oxford UP, 2012, tr. it. 2014), *Democracias y Democratizaciones* (CIS, 2008); *Democratization and the European Union: Comparing Central and Eastern European Post-Communist Countries* (Routledge 2010, with Sadurski), and *International Actors, Democratization and the Rule of Law: Anchoring Democracy?* (Routledge 2008, with Magen). He was also one of the three editors of the *International Encyclopedia of Political Science* (8 Volumes, Sage Publications, 2011), awarded of the Honorable Mention of Darthmouth Medal for reference publishing in all domains of knowledge.

Contact Information:

LUISS School of Government,
Via di Villa Emiliani, 14, 00197 Rome - Italy
Tel. +39-06-85225051
Fax +39-06-85225056
Email: morlino@luiss.it
Website: www.sog.luiss.it

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1. A BASIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

If we focus on the existing rich literature on democracies and democratizations, there are at least three main streams of literature to take into account: *a.* the works of scholars who have been working on democratizations, consolidation and crisis included: the need to look behind the façade of establishing institutions meant to address questions about the content and actual working of the more or less recently built democratic institutions; *b.* articles and books of scholars of established democracies, especially those belonging to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, i.e. the UK, Canada and Australia, who conducted research on the so called democratic auditing to assess their democracies; *c.* a number of data banks, such as those of Polity IV, Freedom House, the Economist's Intelligence Unit, World Bank and also the Bertelsmann Index, which provide measures of aspects related to democratic performance, to governance as well as to the quality of democracy.

All three groups of scholars and institutions made and some of them are still making an important contribution to the development of the topic. In the first group we have at least to mention O'Donnell with his notion of 'delegative democracy' (1994 and see below), Lijphart (1999) with his thesis on the superiority of consensual democracy vis-à-vis majoritarian democracies in terms of implementing democratic quality,¹ and Altman and Perez-Liñan (2002), who refer to three aspects that draw on Dahl's concept of poliarchy (civil rights, participation, and competition) (1971). In this group Ringen (2007, esp. 32-47), Roberts (2010, esp. Ch. 2), Levine and Molina (2011) and Alcantara (2012) also deserve a special attention. The first author proposes strength, capacity, security and trust as the four key dimensions to measure democratic quality in twenty-five country (2000) and meritoriously stress that democracies have to be assessed for what they effectively deliver to the citizen.² The second author develops a notion of quality as linkages and analyzes quantitatively and qualitatively a few East European countries along three dimensions: electoral accountability, mandate responsiveness, policy responsiveness (see also below). The work by Levine and Molina can also be mentioned for the procedural definition of democracy they chose and the five qualities they analyze (electoral decision, participation, accountability, responsiveness

¹ Consistent with his notion of consensual democracy, Lijphart includes indicators such as female representation, electoral participation, satisfaction with democracy, and corruption. Once applied, these indicators show how a consensual democracy can have a higher quality.

² See below and Morlino (2011, ch. 8) to check more precisely how those dimensions are included in the qualities, especially in the rule of law sub-dimensions and responsiveness, although with partially different indicators.

and sovereignty).³ Alcantara originally developed a direction of analysis, already mentioned by Juan Linz, but never really developed by none, that is, the quality of politicians, as a relevant possible independent variable to account for the quality of a democracy, but also as way of analyzing a democracy.

In the second group, Weir and Beetham (1999, 4) developed a qualitative analysis they define as ‘democratic auditing’, that is ‘a systematic assessment of institutional performance against agreed criteria and standards, so as to provide a reasonable authoritative judgment as how satisfactory the procedures and arrangements of the given institutions are’. The auditing procedure should follow four steps: to identify appropriate criteria for assessment, to determine standards of good or best practice which provide a benchmark for the assessment, to assemble the relevant evidence from both formal rules and informal practices, to review the evidence in the light of the audit criteria and defined standards to reach a systematic assessment. A number of authors followed Beetham by implementing the proposal of auditing in the United Kingdom and in other countries as well (see, e.g. Beetham, Bracking, Kearton, Weir 2002, Beetham, Byrne, Ngan, and Weir 2002, Sawyer 2001 and 2007; Sawyer, Abjorensen, Larkin 2009; see also Landman 2006).

In the third group there are a number of international institutions, such as World Bank, Bertelsmann Foundation, Economist Intelligence Unit and others that built a number of databases. They are massive efforts to provide scores and rank orders on a large number of countries or in some cases – e.g. Freedom House - of all existing independent countries on key aspects such as rule of law and freedom. These data sets are also very important from a policy perspective for those – for example – who are planning to invest in a country or have to choose where to start an industrial enterprise (see Morlino 2011, esp. ch.8). A meta data set collecting almost all other existing data bases was created by Rothstein, Holmberg and others at University of Gothenburg (*Quality of Government Institute*).⁴ Among these institutions a special position should be acknowledged to POLILAT with its index of democratic development. Since 2002, with the essential financial support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, POLILAT proposed an index of democratic

³Mazucca (2010) suggests a different approach to the conceptualization of quality of democracy, especially if applied in Latin America. In his opinion ‘access to power’ and ‘exercise of power’ should be the critical notions to take into consideration, and the second one refers to the analysis of the quality of democracy with the involvement of state feature. This is a relevant perspective that, however, eventually makes a too strong simplification with the consequence of unnecessarily narrowing the empirical analysis.

⁴The perspective of the quality of government, i.e. of “trustworthy, reliable, impartial, uncorrupted and competent government institutions” is a different one from the analysis developed here. As one could see below, these authors mainly focus on what here we consider rule of law. But the meta data base they built is much broader and encompasses the variables considered here (see below).

development (IDD-Lat) on eighteen Latin American countries. The index is the result of measures on a number of domains (mainly, guarantee of civil and political rights, corruption, party participation in parliament, accountability, governmental stability, implementation of welfare policies and economic efficiency). Most of the data come from other organizations, such as World Bank, Inter-American Bank of Development, the *Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, and others.⁵

In a nutshell, when looking at the literature dealing with this topic, either we find a quantitative analysis, where the reader cannot know what actually lies behind numbers and rank orders, or we find a qualitative analysis that gets lost in details, and often does not provide adequate theoretical justifications. Moreover, in both kinds of analysis, the key function of every scientific enterprise, that is, the explanation is forgotten. The analytic tool proposed here avoids these problems by trying to combine quantitative and qualitative analysis, empirical descriptions and explanations of all the main aspects. Moreover, it takes into account some of the criticisms that have been expressed on the topic.⁶ They include: 1. the dangers of oversimplification; 2. the ambiguous meaning of ‘quality’ as character of something or as a positive dimension; 3. the possible confusion between democraticness and effective governance within this analysis; 4. the necessity of evaluating the quality of democracy with that of the quality of life and other cultural aspects; or, more specifically, 5. the right notion of responsiveness. As will be seen below, while the simplification of reality is unavoidable as everyone who does empirical research knows very well, and the notion of responsiveness will be discussed below, here let’s stress that ‘quality’ is considered a dimension, be it negative or positive; there is no confusion between democraticness and effective governance, and governance for it is considered more relevant is included in the rule of law; the quality of life and other cultural aspects can be considered, but as possible independent variables of democratic qualities and in this sense no confusion is possible.

To present and discuss this tool, we refer to my previous work in *Changes for Democracy* (2011, chs. 7 and 8) where democratic quality is defined and all the empirical qualities singled out. Thus, first, In next sections this analytic tool is applied to a set of 15 Latin American cases (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico,

⁵ For all details and how the different measures complement each other see www.idd-lat.org/cuestiones_metodologicas/n/index.html.

⁶ See among the strongest critiques especially Plattner (2004, 106-10).

Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela).⁷ Here I only sum up some of the key theoretical elements that are helpful to understand the empirical subsequent section.

Thus, first, there are three different meanings of quality: quality is defined by the established procedural aspects associated with each product; a ‘quality’ product is the result of an exact, controlled process carried out according to precise, recurring methods and timing; here the emphasis is on the *procedure*; 2. quality consists in the structural characteristics of a product, be it the design, materials, or functioning of the good, or other details that it features; here, the emphasis is on the *content*; 3. the quality of a product or service is indirectly derived from the satisfaction expressed by the customer, by their repeat request for the same product or service, regardless of either how it is produced or what the actual contents are, or how the consumer goes about acquiring the product or service; according to such a meaning, the quality is simply based on *result*.

Second, a quality democracy is a ‘good’ democracy, that is, ‘a stable institutional structure that realizes the liberty and equality of citizens through the legitimate and correct functioning of its institutions and mechanisms’ (see Morlino 2011, ch. 2). This means that a good democracy is a broadly legitimated regime that completely satisfies citizens (*quality in terms of result*); is one in which the citizens, associations, and communities of which it is composed enjoy liberty and equality, even in different forms and degrees (*quality in terms of content*); and the citizens themselves have the power to check and evaluate whether the government pursues the objectives of liberty and equality according to the rule of law (*quality in terms of procedure*).

Third, we can now indicate eight possible *dimensions or qualities* on which democracies might vary that should be at the core of the empirical analysis to cover the normative notions of democracy mentioned above. The first five are procedural dimensions. Though also relevant to the contents, these dimensions mainly concern the rules. The first procedural quality is the *rule of law*. The second and third procedural qualities regard the two forms of *accountability (electoral and inter-institutional)*. The fourth and fifth are the classic *participation* and *competition*, which, however, have a special theoretical status (see below). The sixth is the *responsiveness* or correspondence of the system to the desires of the citizens and civil society in general. The seventh and the eight dimensions are substantive in nature. The first is full respect for rights that are expanded through the achievement of a range of *freedoms*. The second is the progressive implementation of greater political, social, and economic *equality*.

⁷ We leave out Honduras, Panama and Dominican Republic and decided to postpone the field research in those countries. In their work, Levine and Molina (2011) analyze Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

Fourth, when we operationalize those eight dimensions, the following more specific aspects should be considered. For the *rule of law*: 1. Individual security and civil order; focus on the right on life, freedom from fear and torture, personal security and right to own property guaranteed and protected through the country. 2. Independent judiciary and a modern justice system; focus on mechanisms establishing an independent, professional and efficient judiciary system that allows equal access to justice, free of the undue pressures and enforcement of decisions. 3. Institutional and administrative capacity to formulate, implement and enforce the law; focus on the governance system (president, government, and parliament) capable to ensure the production of high quality legislation and its implementation through the country of a transparent policy making process allowing for the participation of the civil society, and presence of the professional, neutral, accountable and efficient state bureaucracy. 4. Effective fight against corruption, illegality and abuse of power by state agencies; focus on the existence and implementation of the comprehensive legislative framework to prevent and fight the corruption. 5. Security forces that are respectful of citizen rights and are under civilian control; focus on the mechanisms of the civilian control over security forces as well on efficient, uncorrupted, disciplined police forces respectful for the human and political rights.

For accountability, in general, is the obligation of elected political leaders to answer for their political decisions when asked by citizen-electors or other constitutional bodies (see e.g. Mainwaring 2003, 7, and also others). Schedler (1999, 17) suggests that accountability has three main features: information, justification and punishment/compensation. The first element, information on the political act or series of acts by a politician or political organ (president, cabinet, government, parliament, and so on), is indispensable for attributing responsibility. Justification refers to the reasons furnished by the governing leaders for their actions and decisions. The third, punishment/compensation, is the consequence drawn by the elector or whatever other person or body following an evaluation of the information, justifications and other aspects and interests behind the political action. Accountability can be either electoral or inter-institutional. *Electoral accountability* refers to what electors can demand from their elected official, that the governed can require of the governor in light of certain acts which she/he has executed. This first accountability has a periodic nature, and is dependent on the various national, local, and if they exist, supra-national election dates. The voter decides and either rewards the incumbent candidate or slate of candidates with a vote in their favor, or else punishes them by voting for another candidate, abstaining from the vote, or by nullifying the ballot. The actors involved in electoral accountability are the governor and the governed, and are thus politically unequal. This dimension of democratic quality can become less irregular only if one considers the various electoral occasions at the local,

national, and for European citizens, supra-national levels. *Inter-institutional accountability* is the responsibility governors have to answer to other institutions or collective actors that have the expertise and power to control the behavior of the governors. In contrast to electoral accountability, the actors are for the most part political equals. Inter-institutional accountability is relatively continuous, being formally or substantially formalized by law. In practice, it is usually manifest in the monitoring exercised by the opposition in parliament, by the various judgments and checks made by the court system, if activated, and by constitutional courts, state accounting offices, central banks, and other bodies of a similar purpose that exist in democracies. Political parties outside of representative institutions also exercise this kind of control, as do the media and other intermediary associations, such as unions, employers' associations and the like (see O'Donnell 1999; Schmitter 1999). Hence, this notion of inter-institutional accountability is not a strictly legal one. Even the societal accountability proposed by Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000, 147-58) is part of such a notion, although to make it an autonomous concept add confusion to the empirical analysis.

Participation and competition are qualities that can affect all other dimensions, as shown by the results of research on the topic (see Diamond and Morlino 2005). *Participation* can be defined as the entire set of behaviors, be they conventional or unconventional, legal or borderline vis-à-vis legality, that allows women and men, as individuals or a group, to create, revive or strengthen group identification or to try to influence the recruitment of, and decisions by, political authorities (the representative and/or governmental ones) in order to maintain or change the allocation of existing values. The two basic goals of participation are to achieve or strengthen an identity or to satisfy a specific interest, that is, participation means to be a 'part', to revive or to restate a sense of belonging or identification with a group of a different sort (identity participation) and to try to achieve some goal (instrumental participation). There is a third aspect to take into account (see Elster 1997; Pettit 1997), that is, the simple fact of participating transform the citizens into more informed and involved people by also developing their civic attitudes and making easier communication and social relationships. Citizens become more aware of their rights and duties and develop more structured, conscious political opinions. These aspects help to develop a more effective political behavior (see Verba, Brady e Scholzman 1995). Briefly, participation strengthens itself (see Parry 1972).

As well known, the very notion of *competition* has also different facets. In fact, there is competition within the party system, within the parties as well as within different interest groups in different intercommunicating arenas. But here a key point to clarify is the relationship with democracy, which has been a central issue in democratic theory (see, e.g. Schumpeter 1942 and 1964, Downs 1957, Sartori 1957 and 1987). A way to sum up this issue is: if there is political

competition there is also democracy, but the opposite is not necessarily so: in some cases there could be democracy without competition, as in the cases that Lijphart (1968 and 1999) labels as 'consociational' or 'consensual' democracies as opposed to majoritarian ones. If the basic notion of competition is that of peaceful, non-threatening interaction among individual and groups with the purpose of allocating a recognized value that repeatedly is put at stake (see Bartolini 1999 and 2000), the possibility of competition and the legally unconstrained choice of accommodation and consensus show how competition can be set aside and democracy maintained. This point is now more effectively seen when looking at the more competitive development of Dutch or other typically consensual democracies. At the same time this points out how rule of law and freedom are also conditions of competition, not conditioned by it.

Freedom and *equality* are the two main democratic values, and it is obvious that they are central to a number of normative definitions of democracy (see Morlino 2011, ch. 2). For the most part, those values can be empirically translated into a set of political rights and civil rights for freedom and social rights for equality/solidarity. Political rights include the right to vote, the right for political leaders to compete for electoral support, and the right to be elected to public office (passive electorate). But in a good democracy, the political right *par excellence*, that is, the right to vote, can be strengthened and extended if the electoral mechanisms are such that the voter gains the possibility/right to elect the government either directly (elections for head of state or prime minister who also fills the office of the head of government), or else *de facto* (when the leader of the winning party or coalition in a bi-polar context is elected prime minister). An even richer version of this right is achieved when citizens can influence or choose the electoral candidates in intra-party or primary elections. One problem to resolve on this theme is the extension of political citizenship to adult residents in a given territory so that immigrants can also participate in this part of the political process. Democratic countries demonstrate serious deficiencies in social rights, which are often more precarious than civil or political rights. Therefore, the main prerequisites for the further consolidation of social rights (beyond political will) include enough affluence on the societal level to furnish the means for realizing cohesion policies for less well-to-do individuals, and, at the same time, unified, organized unions that represent a broad range of employees and are capable of obtaining the recognition and eventual expansion of those rights (see Rueschemeyer, Huber-Stephens, and Stephens 1992).

In analyzing democratic quality, it is fairly common to refer to the *responsiveness* of government, that is, the capacity of government of satisfying the governed by executing its policies in a way that corresponds to their demands. This dimension is analytically related to accountability. Indeed, judgments on responsibility imply that there is some awareness of the actual demands, and

that the evaluation of the government's response is related to how its actions either conform to or diverge from the interests of its electors. Responsiveness, therefore, must be treated in connection with accountability. Eulau and Karps (1977) have already demonstrated how responsiveness is a way to see representation 'in action'. The empirical analysis of responsiveness, however, is more complicated as stressed by the overview proposed by Roberts (2010, ch. 5). We add here, the idea that even educated, informed and politically engaged citizens always know their own needs and desires is at best an assumption (see above), especially tenuous in situations where citizens might need specialized knowledge to accurately identify and evaluate those very needs and desires. Simplified, though still satisfactory solutions, are still in order, however. Empirical measures of citizen satisfaction can readily be found in the many surveys that have been regularly conducted for many years, especially in Western Europe, but also, as of late, in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and other countries around the world.⁸ Some scholars have also indirectly obtained a second measure of responsiveness by measuring the distance between the governors and the governed on certain policies, and not just in terms of left/right divisions (see, for example, Lijphart 1999, 286-88)⁹. Perhaps the most effective method for assessing responsiveness is to examine the legitimacy of government, that is, citizens' perception of responsiveness, rather than the reality. Here, the core aspect is that the support for democratic institutions, and the belief that these institutions are the only real guarantors of freedom and equality, is diffuse at every social level from the most restricted elite to the general masses. The diffusion of attitudes favorable to the existing democratic institutions and the approval of their activities would suggest satisfaction and, indirectly, that civil society perceives a certain level of responsiveness. Table 1 sums up dimensions, sub-dimensions, indicators.

⁸ A common question, for example, is "how satisfied are you with the way in which democracy functions in your country?" See Morlino 1998, ch. 7, for more on this regarding Southern Europe.

⁹ There are a number of quantitative studies that analyse this theme, including Eulau and Prewitt (1973), Eulau and Karps (1977), King (1990) and Huber and Powell (1994).

Table 1: Dimensions, Sub-dimensions, Indicators of Democratic Qualities

Dimens.	Sub-dimensions	indicators
Rule of law	Individual security and civil order; Independent judiciary; Institutional and administrative capacity; integrity; Civil control of military.	Physical Integrity Rights; Index Independence of the central judicial organ(s); Government effectiveness; Corruption Perceptions Index; Executive Power over Military Force.
Elec Account	Free fair recurrent elections; Freedom of party organization- related aspects; Presence/ stability of alternatives.	Electoral Process; Freedom of Assembly and Association; effective number of electoral party.
Inst Account	Legislative-Executive relations; Constitutional Court; Ombudsman & Audit Courts; plural/independent information; Modes/extent of decentralization.	Executive Constraints; Constitutional Court; Ombudsman; Specialized courts in the constitution; freedom of the press; resources given to sub-national powers
Competition	Competition among Actors; Effective Alternation.	Opposition Vote Share (%); parcomp (Polity iV-2012)
Participation	Opportunities for Participation; Election Turnout.	Rights of participation; turnout in Parliamentary Election;
Freedom	Personal Dignity; Civil Rights; Political Rights	Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights; Empowerment Rights Index ; Political Rights
Equality	Distribution of Resources; Existence of Economic Discrimination; Social security and cultural rights	Gini Index; Women's Economic Rights; Human Development Index.
Responsiven.	Perceived Legitimacy; Constraints to Responsiveness.	Satisfaction with democracy; Public debt (% GDP).

2. LATIN AMERICA: A GENERAL PICTURE

If on the ground of what is suggested above we consider all countries with every dimensions and sub-dimensions and measure them quantitatively, the existing data allow us to assess the quality of democracy of our 15 countries. Here, dimensions, indicators and data were also built on the ground

of a previous comparative research experience (see Morlino 2011).¹⁰ Looking at the empirical results, Uruguay, Chile and Costa Rica fare better, as expected, but with some surprise we find Brazil and Argentina in a high position thanks to a good score in terms of accountabilities. Brazil is the country with the highest degree of electoral accountability in the region. If, looking at these data, we ask if there are two patterns of democracy: a) liberal democracy and b) neo-populist democracy characterized by high levels of participation, but at the same time by a low level of inter-institutional accountability and political competition, we do not see the second pattern any longer. Ecuador and Guatemala, for example, have low inter-institutional accountability and high participation, but at the same time the competition is fairly high. In other words, as displayed by Table 2, these data suggest the existence of a dominant pattern of democracy that is consistently characterized by low or high values in most of the dimensions. That is, we have low or high quality democracy, but not different democratic patterns that break the consistency among the various dimensions. In this fairly homogeneous picture, only Venezuela and partially Ecuador are exceptions. On which dimensions and why? We will come to this question soon.

Table 2: The Quality of Democracy in Latin America: a summary

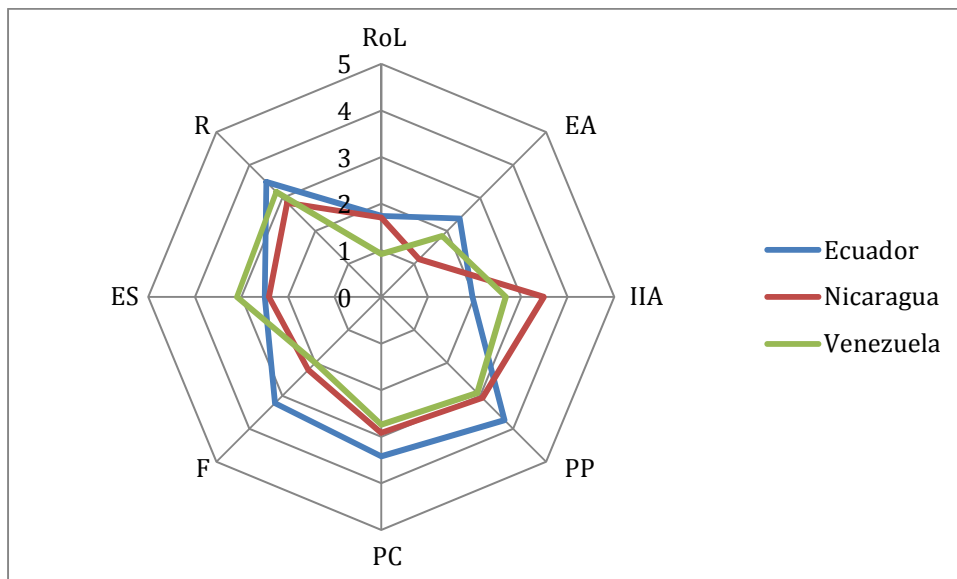
Country	RoL	EA	IIA	PP	PC	F	ES	R	Total
Uruguay	3,44	3,74	3,74	4,75	4,07	4,78	2,65	3,84	3,88
Chile	3,82	4,42	2,69	4,54	3,71	4,78	3	3,84	3,85
Costa Rica	3,63	4,04	2,82	4,07	4,39	4,33	3,37	3,5	3,77
Brazil	2,5	4,86	3,4	4,23	4,28	4,17	2,85	3,16	3,68
Argentina	2,27	3,75	4,34	4,17	3,93	4,17	3,09	3,26	3,62
Peru	2,46	3,07	3,57	4,12	3,89	3,5	2,55	3,03	3,27
El Salvador	2,19	3,77	3,45	3,53	3,67	3,98	2,44	2,98	3,25
Paraguay	1,81	3,7	3,39	3,58	3,54	3,58	2,31	3,23	3,14
Mexico	2,37	3,47	3,25	3,44	3,68	3,11	2,99	2,78	3,14
Bolivia	2,16	3,5	3,38	4,08	2,7	3,48	2,33	2,97	3,08
Guatemala	2,37	3,86	2,27	3,3	3,92	3,37	2,13	2,94	3,02
Colombia	1,77	3,1	3,33	2,66	3,54	3,22	2,31	3,07	2,88
Ecuador	1,74	2,38	1,96	3,74	3,42	3,22	2,5	3,49	2,81
Nicaragua	1,7	1,15	3,49	3,07	2,92	2,21	2,41	2,86	2,48
Venezuela	0,92	1,85	2,67	2,91	2,74	2	3,1	3,19	2,42

Source: see “What Qualities of Democracy in Latin America? A Report for IDEA”, Annex II.

¹⁰ See Morlino 2011 (ch. 8) also for the data that were chosen. In addition, there are other works on Latin America, even published by International IDEA, which could be helpful to integrate into ours, if they would be updated. See, e.g., López Pintor and Gratschew (2002).

Let us, first, address the next related question. Can we trace the so called ‘delegative democracy’ (see O’Donnell, 1994 and above)? Namely, democracy of poor quality in which the citizen casts his/her vote, is subsequently ignored until the next election, is left without any means of controlling corruption and bad government, and there are no other institutions really capable of guaranteeing inter-institutional accountability. The countries that can be labeled as delegative are at the same time those of lower quality: Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. Figure 1 shows the whole profile of the three lowest quality democracies, and, as it can be immediately seen, rule of law, equality and freedom are the worst characteristics and indirectly provide a strong indication of the key aspects that should work in a good democracy.

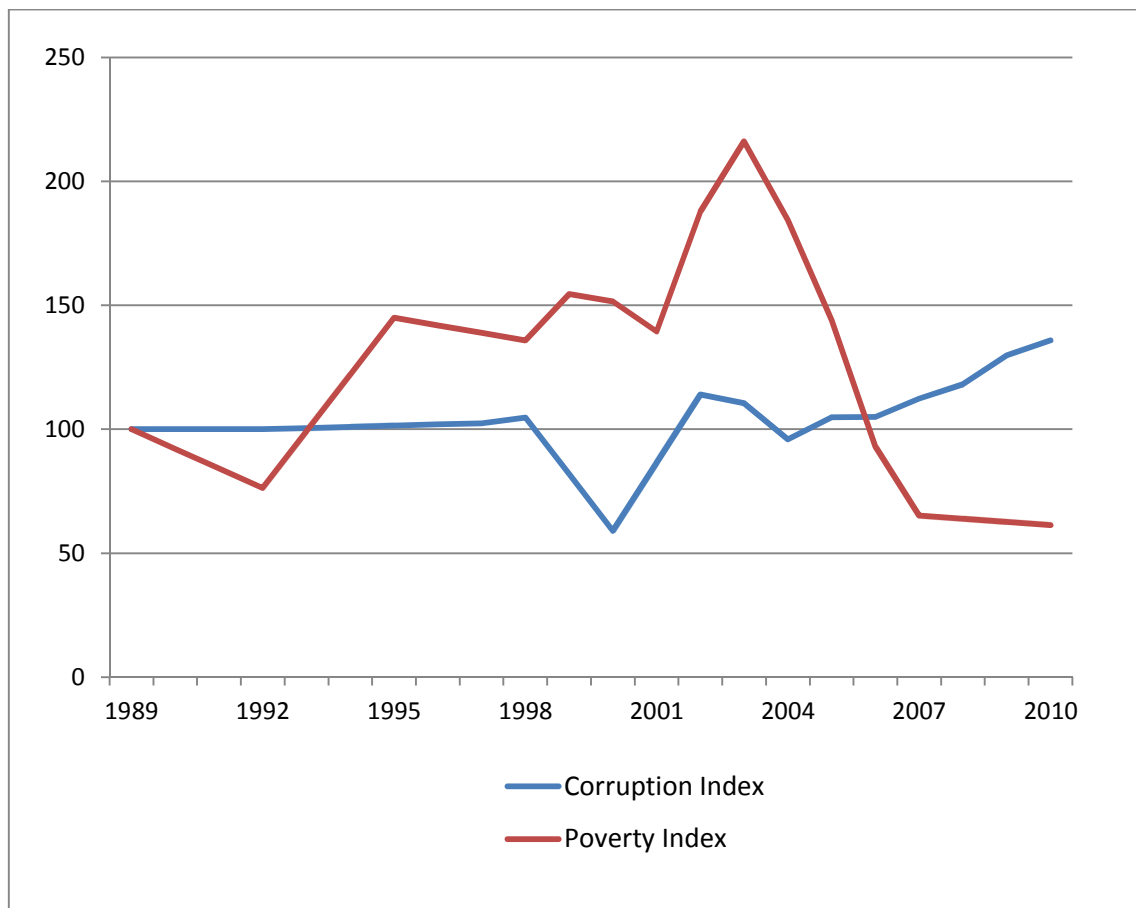
Figure 1: The Lowest Quality Democracies



This analysis shows Venezuela among the lowest quality democracies. This country is considered by some analysts a hybrid regime and Freedom House classifies it as ‘not free’ with regard to press. Moreover, Table 1 shows that Venezuela is the worst on rule of law, the worst except Nicaragua on electoral accountability, the worst except Colombia on participation, the worst except Bolivia (there are other countries at similar low level) on political competition, simply the worst on freedom. But when the attention comes to equality, Venezuela, which had a long old tradition of dominant party elites since end of the 1950s, scores much better. Nicaragua and Ecuador, characterized by very low rule of law, are also considered hybrid regimes by a number of scholars. With an average below 3, these three country belongs to that grey zone, which is labeled ‘hybrid’. The recent third re-election of Correa (2007-2017) as president of Ecuador and the

previous re-election of Daniel Ortega (2007-2016) in Nicaragua show a strong, long lasting grip on power by the incumbent leaders and confirm the democratic limits of those countries.

Figure 2: Evolution of corruption and poverty in Venezuela, 1989 – 2010

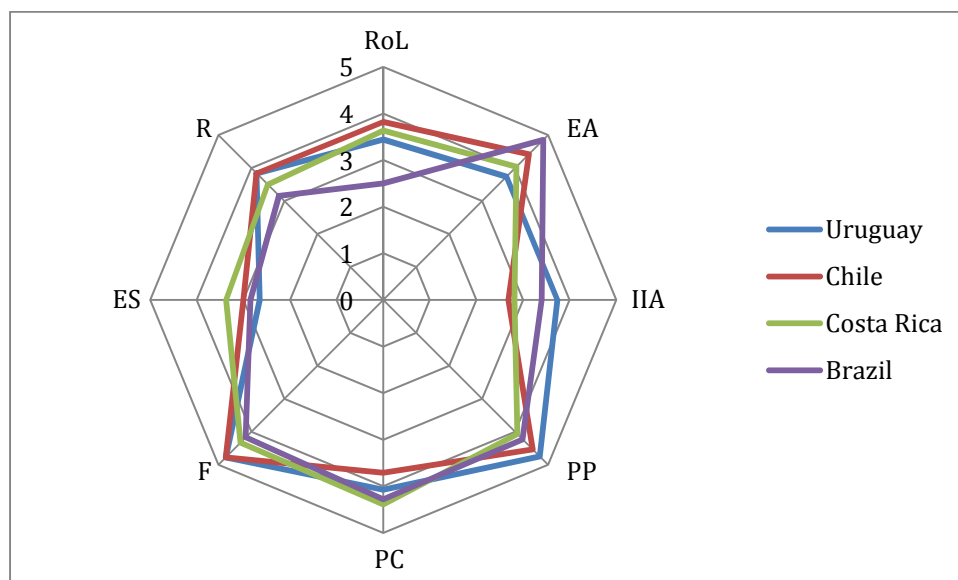


As suggested in Katz and Morlino (2012), Venezuela experienced a substantial decrease in poverty and income inequality over the last 10 years, despite the historically limited satisfaction of basic economic needs among the poorest sectors, the insufficient public provision of health services, the low number of doctors and the fairly high infant mortality. This is not the right place where to discuss the policies implemented by Chavez and neither to recall all the fair criticisms made to him, but the fact is that a growing corruption is complemented by strong policies in favor of equality and the reduction of poverty, as illustrated in Figure 2.

When the opposite question is addressed, that is, not only what are the best democracies, but also on what dimensions they fare better, Figure 3 gives a clear-cut reply that complements the finding on the low quality democracies. Brazil is relatively the worst country on equality, scoring poorly also on rule of law, while the best qualities are electoral accountability, participation,

political competition, and freedom. As can easily be seen, the resulting profiles are squeezed diagonally. How to explain this finding? If we try to streamline and focus our analysis, two qualities are the worst ones: inter-institutional accountability (partial exception being Uruguay) and equality. About participation, the low levels of political participation in Latin America have already been shown in previous research (see e.g. Levine and Molina, 2011), but this does not conform with these recent data. But here we would like to stress the connection between participation and equality. That is, a higher participation can imply or even brings about a higher equality, as it is also shown by Morlino (2011, ch.8). But if there is an inconsistency, between participation and equality, then the discontent is present and latent until possibly it bursts out.

Figure 3: The Highest Quality Democracies

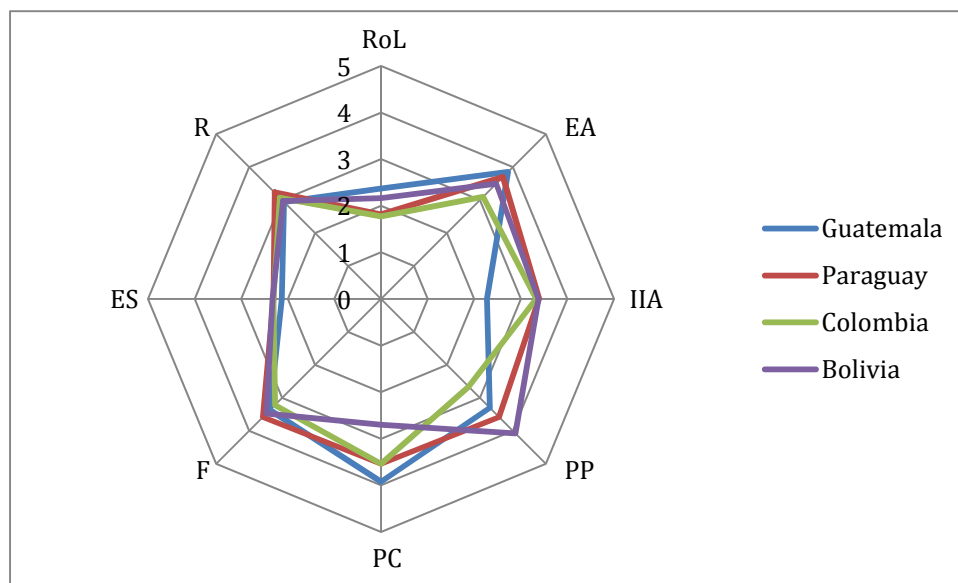


Here we confirm this finding, and show that in a changed context of democratic legitimation where radical, violent participation has sharply declined, a different kind of even non-conventional participation that witnesses the presence of a lively civil society may push toward a stronger equality. In this perspective, Latin American countries do not need Chavez, Morales, Uribe, Correa, another Simon Bolivar or a savior of his country. An active society even only at local level seems a democratically safer path.

These last observations bring us to discuss the findings on equality. In fact, if we ask about what are the most unequal countries the result is revealing: the countries that are the worst ones on the other dimensions are also the most unequal ones (see Figure 4). This finding, however, suggests

two considerations that are not fully consistent with the previous ones. First, if the most unequal countries are also those with the lowest levels on all other dimensions (see Figure 1), then all dimensions are strongly related and strengthen each other. This also confirms a similar finding when countries of different areas of the world are included (see Morlino 2011, ch. 8). But if so, the privileged connection between equality and participation is much less relevant than suggested above. Our hypothesis, to be additionally confirmed, is that pushing toward non-violent participation is a path to improve equality, but that path also implies the presence of rule of law, which is very problematic in the unequal countries (see Figure 4), as well as of the other qualities. That is, the two propositions are not in contradiction with one another. What our analysis underscores is the fact that collective action is needed to increase equality. However, there is an obvious temporal gap between the moment in which participation takes place and the resulting increase in equality.

Figure 4: The most unequal democracies



The second consideration: in Figure 4 Bolivia is also present. Why? From Table 1, we can easily see how Bolivia is at the same time very low on equality, but in a relatively intermediate position on participation as well as on other dimensions. But this contradicts previous statements regarding the consistency among all dimensions as well as about the connection between participation and equality. Let us go only a little bit into details on this issue. If we analyze equality in Bolivia, the results are neat: more than half of the population is below the poverty line, and such a percentage is higher in rural areas; discrimination against the indigenous population is structural, i.e. it is present throughout the country's history; racist manifestations are present in the economic

and political life as well as in the public discourse, etc. At the same time, with regard to political participation: binding referenda and citizen initiatives at all levels were introduced in the Constitution in 2004; turnout in national elections had a marked increase in the last decade, from 72% in 2002 to almost 95% in 2009, and the same phenomenon is observed in referenda; about 70% of the population participates in civil associations; strikes have lost relevance since the 1990s relative to other forms of political protest; new social movements have gained ground in the political scene; and even the number and influence of various forms of deliberative democracy has increased substantially over the last decade, both at the local and national level. All this means that, when taking a closer look, the hypothesis on the connection between equality and participation is not contradicted, but actually strongly confirmed by our analysis precisely in the way we developed it above (see Katz and Morlino 2012). The key aspect is not that the government of Evo Morales has set the fight against discrimination and racism as one of its priorities, but that there is a gap and there are policies being implemented and those policies, still without evident effects, have been accompanied by a strong popular democratic mobilization. In the next years we will see if and how such mobilization affects inequality. At the moment, there is an apparent contradiction coming out of previous low level of participation, still relatively present a local elections level. We cannot go more into details of this analysis. But one point we think is crystal clear: in comparative politics, there is no good analysis that be only quantitative. Quantitative analysis has to be complemented by qualitative one when dealing with a small number of cases as we do here.

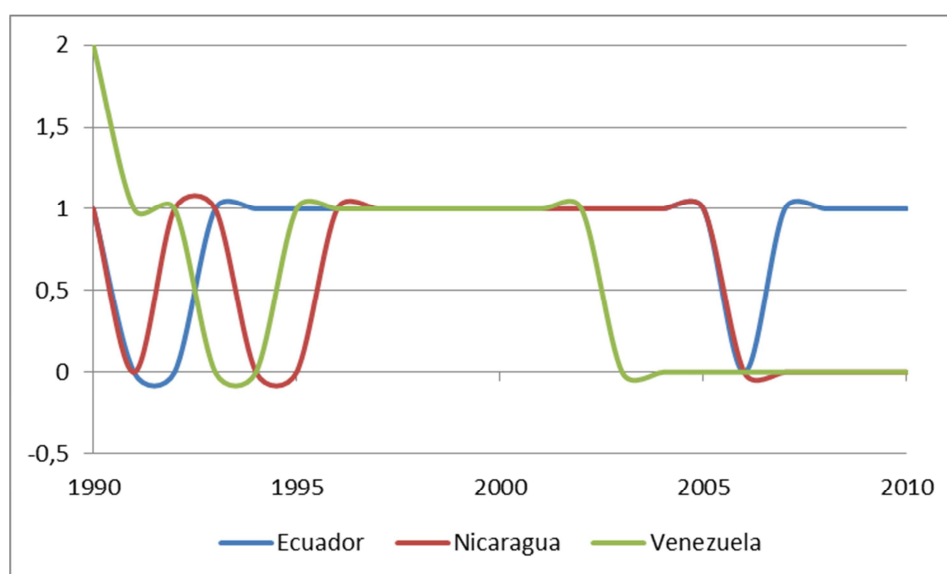
This discussion has also brought our substantive attention to the effects of the rule of law and its connections with the other dimensions. Thus, let us discuss the dimension. The first relevant consideration, which is immediately evident, is the inconsistency among those sub-dimensions, that is – let it be remembered – contradicted by the consistency among the dimensions. For a more effective analysis, (see Table 3), we set up a rank order of un-rule of law, that is, from the worst score to the best one. Besides Venezuela and Nicaragua (see above), the first, additional alarming consideration concerns Paraguay. This country is scoring second – i.e., very badly - in three sub-dimensions with a low independence of judiciary, corruption and greater openness to military, police, or security forces influence in the civil and political life. Moreover, if we assume that judiciary is the most important sub-dimension and, as such, it pulls all others - as it is suggested by research conducted in other areas of the world (see e.g. Magen and Morlino 2009) - such assumption seems to be confirmed: the weakest countries with regard to judiciary ,Venezuela and Nicaragua, are also the worst in terms of rule of law as a whole. Let be added that Guatemala displays some inconsistency among its sub-dimensions with a poor institutional and administrative capacity.

Table 3: Un-Rule of Law: the rank order of sub-dimensions

Country	Ind. security and civil order	Ind. Judiciary and modern justice	Institut. & admin. Capacity	Integrity	Security forces under civilian control	Average Score
Venezuela	2	1	1	1	1	0,92
Nicaragua	4	2	2	3	6	1,70
Ecuador	7	4	5	3	2	1,74
Colombia	1	11	11	9	4	1,77
Paraguay	13	2	3	2	2	1,81
Bolivia	7	9	6	5	6	2,16
El Salvador	7	8	9	11	5	2,19
Argentina	4	5	7	6	11	2,27
Mexico	3	10	12	7	11	2,37
Guatemala	11	6	4	8	8	2,37
Peru	7	6	8	9	11	2,46
Brazil	4	12	10	12	8	2,50
Uruguay	11	14	14	14	8	3,44
Costa Rica	13	13	13	13	15	3,63
Chile	13	15	15	15	11	3,82

In addition to these data, we take a dynamic perspective and adopt Cingranelli and Richard's (2008) broad classification of justice systems as not independent (coded as 0), partially independent (coded as 1) and generally independent (coded as 2). If we do so, a clearer and more disturbing picture emerges from Figure 5: the three countries with the lowest rule of law score – Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela – have experienced a sustained decrease in the independence of their judiciary systems over the last two decades. This deterioration of the judiciary institutions is more marked for Nicaragua and Venezuela in the last 5 years, under the governments of Ortega and Chavez, respectively and less in Ecuador where the situation seems to have improved after 2006.

Figure 5: Independence of the judiciary, 1990 – 2010



If we switch our analysis to two dimensions that have been defined as the ‘engines of democratic quality’, participation and competition (see Diamond and Morlino 2005), the surprise comes not from the whole picture, but from the exceptions. In fact, the high connection between competition and participation has been already shown by other works (see e.g. Morlino 2011, ch. 8), although of course without the possibility of affirming if competition takes precedence on participation or vice versa. There are only two cases where the divergence is higher: Bolivia and Guatemala. Here, the two countries seem to be affected by two different syndromes: in Bolivia we find an intermediate level of participation and a low competition, while in Guatemala we find low participation and a higher level of competition.

Again the qualitative analysis of a few aspects (see Morlino 2013) immediately singles out what is the problem, which is also a key element in other countries around the world: unconstrained party fragmentation and radicalization led by elites make those democracies hard places where to live for the citizens, who consequently develop additional alienation attitudes with regard to politics (see here Guatemala). In fact, alternation in power has characterized all elections following the return to democracy in Guatemala and low citizen participation and unstructured fragile party system are common features of Guatemala’s political life, fragmentation dominates among leftist parties, electoral volatility undermines governability and political decision-making, and in general the party system is marked by substantive fragility and pervasive floor-crossing. In Bolivia, authorities were elected by popular vote for the first time in 2005; binding referenda and citizen initiatives at all levels were introduced in the Constitution only in 2004; turnout in national

elections had a marked increase in the last decade, but it is much lower at local level; participation within parties is very marginal. With regard to competition the effective number of parties has fluctuated between 2 and 6 in the last 2 decades, but the success of Evo Morales and his party put an end to a period of high electoral volatility and marked a drastic change in the political landscape. The main cleavage structuring party competition today is stable and based around ethnic/cultural cleavages. Moreover, public funding for political parties was eliminated in 2008. No wonder that the competition is so low.

The analysis of the two substantive dimensions of democracy, freedom and equality, reveals some patterns that are in line with previous findings on democratic quality in other parts of the world (Morlino, 2011), but also some characteristics that are specific of the Latin American continent. First of all, the strong consistency between freedom and equality has been already shown by prior work (see esp. Morlino 2011, ch. 8). The two higher quality democracies –Chile and Costa Rica - score higher in both dimensions, but Uruguay is lower than Brazil and Argentina, showing in this way a relevant characterizing aspect. Among lower quality democracies, Paraguay, Mexico and Venezuela should be considered for different reasons (see Morlino 2013).

The performance of Paraguay on the first substantive dimension (freedom) is much better than on the second one (equality). As noted above, Paraguay's economic indicators – in particular, poverty and income inequality – are among the worst ones in the continent, and this is reflected in the position the country occupies on the “equality” dimension. Its position on the freedom dimension, on the other hand, reflects the country's efforts or achievements in the protection of personal dignity, civil and political rights. The gap between the protection of individual rights on paper and in practice, however, is still considerable, and the situation is far from ideal. Episodes of torture and physical violence on the part of the security forces are still not uncommon.

In contrast to Paraguay, Mexico and above all Venezuela score considerably better on the equality than on the freedom dimension. As mentioned before, in Venezuela the economic measures adopted by Chavez's government have substantially improved the living conditions of the lower classes: the proportion of Venezuelan households living under extreme and moderate poverty declined by 10.1 and 17.2 percentage points since 1998, respectively – the reduction in per capita poverty was even more marked - and the Gini coefficient dropped by almost 10 percentage points. Even though our definition of “equality” encompasses non-material aspects such as the prevalence of discrimination and the equitable access to social and cultural resources, the successful redistributive policies and the advances in the economic well-being of the poorest segments of the population explain Venezuela's high score on this dimension. At the same time, the growing polarization between pro- and anti-Chavez groups has led to an escalation of political conflicts in

the Venezuelan society, including severe episodes of violence, torture and abuses of power by members of the security forces - and even extra-judicial executions. Harassment of political and social activists and members of the opposition have become quite common and their political and civic rights curtailed, while political pressures and intimidation have drastically undermined press freedom as well.

The analysis of participation and competition in connection with the two substantive dimensions (freedom and equality) singles out other key elements of Latin American democracies. Let it be recalled that if a democracy works effectively from a procedural point of view, this has important consequences for a more effective implementation of the two most relevant democratic values, freedom and equality. If on the contrary, it does not perform properly within a procedural perspective then the substantive dimensions should be poorly implemented. In other words, there has to be a strong consistency between those two procedural dimensions and the two substantive ones.

When, with this hypothesis in mind, we analyze Latin American countries, we can see whether and to what extent a democracy works more effectively or not with an ironical resulting equi-finality. Table 4 shows how high is the consistency between the procedural dimensions and the substantive ones for both good and bad democracies. In fact, we find a limited difference in rank order for Uruguay, Costa Rica, Brazil, Argentina as well as for Paraguay, Colombia, Nicaragua, Venezuela. The only case of distinctive inconsistency is Guatemala, where the procedural dimensions are better than the substantive ones. Although one should be aware that this is not a sophisticated, highly reliable way to measure the actual capacity of a democracy of transferring in policies and related results (output) the input processes guided by participation and competition, there are few doubts that this is an aspect to cope with and to scrutinize in greater detail. This means that we should monitor closely the policies in Guatemala, and even the possibility that people starts perceiving this inconsistency, participating more (see above) and protesting.

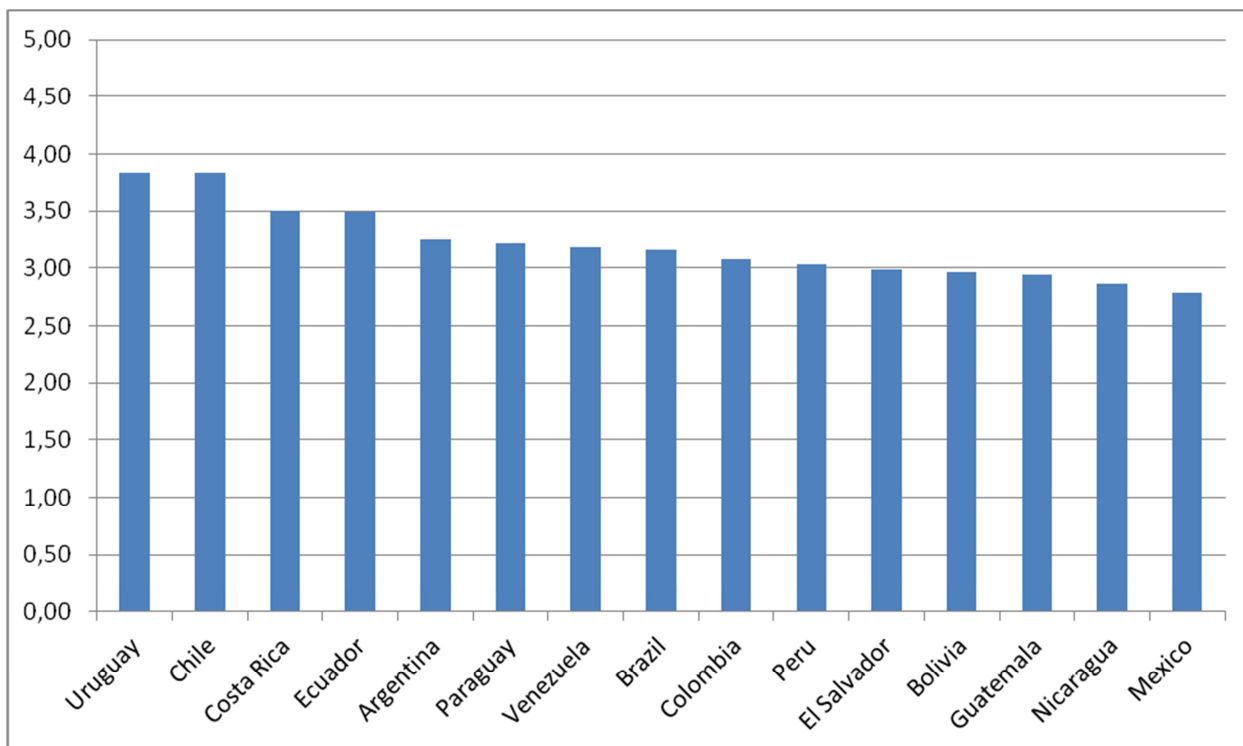
Table 4: Participation and Competition vis-à-vis Freedom and Equality: the rank order

	Participation/Competition	Freedom/Equality	Difference
Uruguay	1	3	2
Brazil	2	5	3
Costa Rica	3	2	1
Chile	4	1	3
Argentina	5	4	1
Peru	6	8	2
Guatemala	7	13	6
El Salvador	8	6	2
Ecuador	9	11	2
Paraguay	10	9	1
Mexico	10	7	3
Bolivia	12	10	2
Colombia	13	12	1
Nicaragua	14	15	1
Venezuela	15	14	1

In this perspective we do not think that the analysis of responsiveness (see Figure 5) can really add an important aspect to this first conclusion that we achieved about the actual meaning of the consistency and inconsistency among the two key procedural dimensions and the substantive ones and how it is necessary to fine tune the assessment of that measure. However, we can see how especially Brazil scores much worse and Ecuador and Paraguay better than expected. For Brazil this emphasizes high expectations among those citizens and, consequently, possibility of non-conventional participation, which converges with the similar result on participation shown in Figure 3. Ecuador shows the highest responsiveness among the lowest quality democracy (see also Figure 1) and consequently shows a key aspect of Correa and his political success: this leader, reelected in 2013, is able to convince Ecuadorian that they are well, or at least better than earlier. A similar reasoning can be done for Paraguay, a country among the most unequal ones in the whole area (see Figure 4), but only after Argentina with regard to responsiveness. Mexico is the worst one on this dimension, ranking below other countries with lower democratic quality. The lack of importance

responsiveness has in the minds of political elites of all those countries might carry dangerous consequences. At the same time the bad, hybrid Venezuela shows a very salient consistency between responsiveness and equality.

Figure 6: Responsiveness Compared



3. DEEPENING ON SUB-DIMENSIONS?

Moving to the analysis of the more disaggregated– i.e., the sub-dimension level – data, we find the same broad pattern noted before: overall, countries tend to perform consistently well or badly across most of the different components of each dimension. However, there are marked differences across dimensions: the within-dimension variation between countries is highest for freedom, and lowest for political participation.

The three highest quality democracies – Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay – score relatively high in each of the 5 sub-dimensions: individual security and civil order; independent judiciary and modern justice system; institutional and administrative capacity; integrity and effective fight against corruption; and security forces respectful of citizens’ rights, under civilian control. Still, the figure

reveals some differences between these three countries: while Chile's scores are consistently high in each of these sub-dimensions, Costa Rica's and Uruguay's scores are more spread out. In particular, Costa Rica fares worse than Chile in terms of the quality of their bureaucracy and of the policies/mechanisms in place to fight corruption. A second group of countries – Argentina, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Peru– shows considerable variation across sub-dimensions, performing on-par with the three highest quality democracies in some respects, but less successfully in others. In particular, the four countries perform particularly badly in the fight against corruption, while they perform almost as well as the high quality democracies in the sub-dimension measuring civilian control over the security forces. A third group of countries, comprising Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Venezuela, exhibit uniformly low scores in all the sub-dimensions.

As expected, this group includes two of the lowest-quality democracies plus Colombia and Mexico, which are two countries with high incidence of organized crime associated with drug trafficking and where the security forces have been frequently involved in illicit activities (see below) and Paraguay, which scores low on all sub-dimensions exception made for individual security and civil order. Brazil, which is closer to the first group, and El Salvador and Bolivia, closer to the third one, are, however, in a more ambiguous, intermediate position.

The situation is quite different when analyzing the electoral accountability. Comparing figures 7 and 8, it is evident that, for virtually every country under analysis, variations across sub-dimensions of electoral accountability are less marked than across the sub-dimensions of the rule of law. In particular, 12 out of the 15 Latin American democracies under study score rather high (3 or more) on *elections*, *Freedom of party organization* and *Presence and stability of existing political (party) alternatives*. Although the highest quality democracies do score better than the rest in each of these sub-dimensions - especially, the stability and institutionalization of party systems is considerably greater in Brazil and Chile than in the rest of the continent - these differences are definitely less important than those observed in the rule of law. That is, elections throughout the continent tend to be clean and fair overall, and there are no major restrictions undermining freedom of party organization. The only exceptions to this general picture are Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela. In the former, the influence of violent groups (e.g., guerilla, paramilitary organizations) often distorts the normal development of elections in some areas of the country, and political violence stemming from the internal conflict undermines freedom of party organization – as reflected, for instance, in pressures, physical threats or even assassination of politicians. In Venezuela serious constraints placed on the freedom and fairness of elections have become more manifest since Chavez's rise to power, as reflected in the fact that the election authority is dominated by loyal government nominees and in several practices limiting freedom of party

organization (e.g., constraints on opposition demonstrations, threats against public servants joining organizations critical of the government).

The situation for the sub-dimensions of inter-institutional accountability also follows a similar pattern, with Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica and the high quality democracies, performing better than the rest across all sub-dimensions, although Chile and Uruguay score lower as far as the Ombudsman and the decentralization sub-dimensions are concerned. The main exception to this pattern, however, is represented by Colombia, a country that ranks towards the bottom on virtually all the dimensions of democratic quality, yet fares very well on the *Constitutional or Supreme* and *Ombudsman and Audit Courts* sub-dimensions due to the professionalization of these institutions and the availability of resources at their disposal in the Caribbean country. The institution of the Ombudsman also works relatively well in another low-quality democracy like Bolivia and in Peru, a medium-quality democracy.

Moving now to the two “engines” of democratic quality, a joint analysis of each country’s score in each of the sub-dimensions of political participation (*opportunities for participation, elections and referenda*) with the additional help of qualitative evidence reveals a more complex pattern, although the distinction between high and low-quality democracy seems to hold true. As a matter of fact, the highest quality democracies (i.e. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay) exhibit a higher score in political participation, although it should be highlighted that Argentina and Costa Rica distinguish themselves in displaying little room for deliberative democracy, while other forms of participation are important. A second group of countries, namely Colombia, El Salvador and Mexico, scores low on conventional participation due to lower election turnout, with Colombia distinguishing itself for a significant increase in social protest during the 2000s. A third group, comprising Guatemala, Nicaragua and Venezuela, scores low in terms of opportunities for participation, although Nicaragua is somewhat different in that it is recently experiencing an increase in non-conventional (sometimes also violent) forms of participation. Finally, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru are in an intermediate position, with relatively higher consistency between the sub-dimensions of political participation. Non-conventional political participation (with indigenous groups in Ecuador, peasant movements in Paraguay, and new social movements in Bolivia and Peru exerting a growing influence) is particularly salient in these countries.

In the case of political competition, the distinction between high quality democracies and the remaining one is more clear-cut: the former allow for a more fluid competition both between and within political parties than the latter. In addition, there is a second relevant difference in terms of

the output side, distinguishing between democracies that have witnessed frequent alternation in power and those that have not.

4. CRITICAL ISSUES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

We can now move to an in-depth analysis of the main limitations and threats to democratic quality in each of the countries under study, categorizing these challenges in terms of the different dimensions and sub-dimensions outlined in our theoretical framework. To begin with, it is worth considering some common problems that hinder improvements in the quality of democracy throughout the continent.

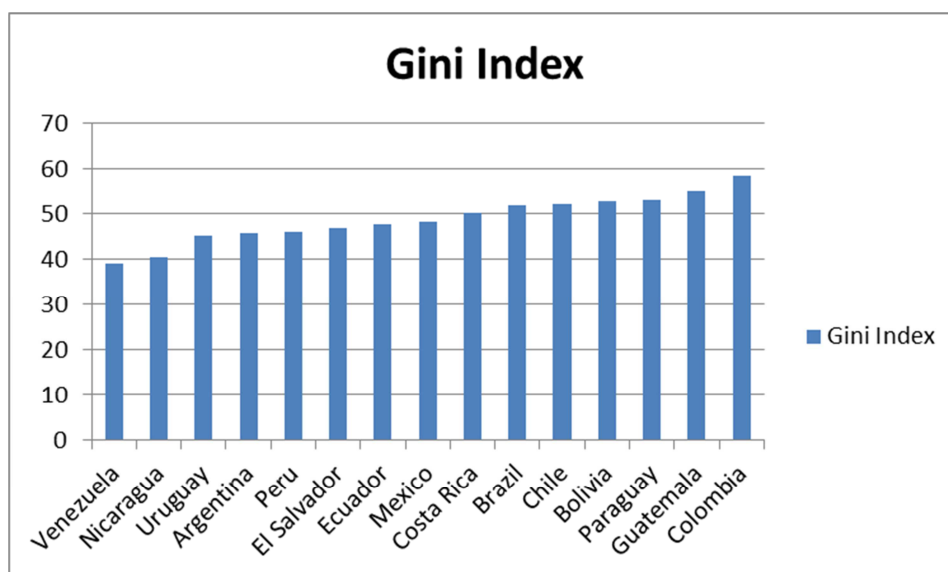
Turning first to the rule of law, the extent and persistence of corruption is notorious among low quality democracies like Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela. However, also in countries with average, above average or even high levels of democracy like Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico corruption is perceived to be a key and – in some cases – an endemic problem. Even among high quality democracies, like Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay, where it has been traditionally low (at least when compared to the regional average), concerns about corruption are becoming increasingly present in the public opinion. In fact, our evidence, based on mass surveys and expert opinions, reveals that the only countries where corruption does not rank among the most important problems are Uruguay, El Salvador and Mexico - although in the latter two cases this is actually better explained by the salience of more pressing security issues (see below).

Together, these findings suggest that corruption is one of the most extended challenges to democratic quality in the region, common to the vast majority of Latin American countries. Further, the fact that (perceived) corruption has been historically high and entrenched in many of these societies underscores both the importance, but also the difficulty of successfully dealing with this problem. In this direction, even though several countries have recently strengthened anti-corruption legislation or established specialized agencies in charge of fighting corruption, the effectiveness of these measures has been rather limited so far (e.g., Brazil, El Salvador, Nicaragua) . We additionally observe a non-strong connection between effective fight against corruption and other dimensions of the rule of law, and between the former and the overall democratic quality score. This indicates that corruption is not necessarily one of the key determinants of democratic quality in Latin America, and therefore that measures aimed at improving other, more easily “manageable”

dimensions and/or sub-dimensions are more likely to be effective in boosting the quality of democracy in the short- and medium term.

Still within the rule of law sub-dimensions, the influence of criminality and of related threats to individual security and civil order is another common obstacle to democratic quality in the continent. Criminality rates are very high in Central American countries (especially El Salvador and Guatemala) as well as in Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela. Even in countries where criminality was historically not a central concern like Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica or Uruguay, crime indicators or perceptions have been worsening consistently over the last 15 years. In many nations (Bolivia, Central America, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela), the preponderance and/or rise in criminality is directly linked to drug trafficking, although drug-related criminal activity is actually seen as a growing danger in the vast majority of the democracies under study. In fact, in Colombia, Central America or Mexico, drug-related violence has become a major source of political and social instability, generating internal conflicts involving guerrillas (Colombia), gangs (“maras”, in Central America) or narco-armies (Mexico) that actually challenge the states’ monopoly on force and can occasionally spill over to neighboring countries and cause international tensions (as illustrated by diplomatic and political altercations between Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela in the last decade). In other countries (e.g., Brazil, Chile and Ecuador), the erosion of the rule of law is also linked to domestic and gender violence, while episodes of ethnic violence are not uncommon in Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru.

Figure 7: Gini Index in the analyzed countries



Source: CIA Factbook (last available data for each country)

More generally, the inability of many of the countries in the region to guarantee their citizens' individual rights and to satisfactorily preserve civil order cannot be dissociated from the socio-economic conditions in the continent - specifically, the high levels of poverty and unequal income distribution, more marked in Latin America than in any other region of the world. The allocation of economic, cultural and social resources is especially skewed in Bolivia, Paraguay, Guatemala and Colombia (see Morlino 2013).¹¹ In the case of Brazil, however, the Gini Index has fallen steadily in the last decade, and it is one of the countries – along with Ecuador, El Salvador and above all Venezuela - where progress in this area has been more consistent over the last two decades. Nonetheless, income inequality in the South American giant still remains among the highest in the continent.

Ethnic, gender and racial discrimination is another fairly widespread problem faced by Latin American democracies. As in the case of corruption, the discrimination faced by these groups in the cultural, economic, political and social realms is structural, affecting individuals in countries at all levels of democratic quality. Even in high-quality democracies like Argentina, Costa Rica and Chile, indigenous populations suffer from economic and political discrimination and sometimes physical aggressions despite the fact that measures were adopted and legislation passed explicitly aimed at guaranteeing and protecting their rights in the last two decades. In the case of Chile, criminalization of *Mapuche* social movements and protests are some of the most visible faces of these discriminatory practices. Moreover, Native Latin-Americans have been disproportionately victimized in the internal conflicts in Colombia, Peru and Central America. Similarly, Afro-Latin Americans suffer discrimination in the labor market, the education and justice system and the political life in low-quality democracies like Venezuela and Ecuador but also in Brazil, Costa Rica and Uruguay. The same can be said about the discrimination suffered by women, not only in the educational system, the labor market (i.e., “glass ceiling” effect) and the political life but also, as noted above, as victims of domestic violence.

There is also a series of more “localized” difficulties, i.e., faced especially by certain nations or groups of nations in Latin America. Among these, it is worth mentioning the inefficiencies and irregularities in the recruitment, functioning and stability of the public administration and bureaucracy, a problem characterizing mainly low- and middle-quality democracies. In countries like Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Venezuela, budget constraints, political pressures, and job insecurity/instability - or the lack of a clearly structured career-track - undermine

¹¹ As noted in the text, income inequality – as measured by the Gini Index and reported in Figure 7 – constitutes a useful indicator, but not a perfect measure of “equality”, as defined and used in this report.

the professionalization and independence of the state bureaucracy. In the same direction, the justice system in some of these countries – e.g., Paraguay and Guatemala - is quite inefficient and the judiciary tends to be closely tied to political parties; the same can be said about election authorities in Nicaragua and Venezuela. A related shortcoming is the scarcity of publicly available information regarding the operation of political actors and public bureaucrats; in particular, the citizens and the press have limited access to information about expenditures, recruitment mechanisms and administrative procedures. On the other hand, the examples of Brazil, Chile or even Colombia, countries where recruitment procedures, training schemes and high information and technology standards applied to public administration have improved institutional and administrative capacity, illustrate how appropriate selection and personnel management mechanisms can be introduced despite strained public finances. Some of these practices are currently being implemented in other, lower or middle quality democracies like Bolivia, Peru or Mexico.

Also, the relationship between the political establishment and the security forces continues to be problematic in some of the democracies under study. In El Salvador and Guatemala, security forces - especially the army - retained considerable power after the pacification processes of the 1980s and 1990s, and still today retain close ties with political parties. In Colombia and Mexico, state security forces have been repeatedly involved in illicit activities (e.g., extortive kidnappings, drug-trafficking), sometimes in collaboration with the powerful local drug cartels. Given Latin America's troubled past, ensuring civilian control over the security forces and guaranteeing that that police forces are respectful of human and political rights is of paramount importance to enhance democratic quality in these countries.

In addition, certain limitations to inter-institutional accountability persist in some of the countries examined due either to political conjunctures or flawed institutional designs. For instance, in Peru, the Constitutional Court is perceived to be strongly dependent on the political power – and, in particular, on the President. The autonomy of the Constitutional Court was decidedly undermined during the Fujimori government (1990 – 2000), and although later governments tried to reinforce the legitimacy of the judiciary, the prevailing view among Peruvian citizens and academics is that the judges of the Constitutional Court still operate as government - rather than as public - officials. The same phenomenon is observed – and more evident - in Venezuela, where the growing concentration of power in Chavez' hands has drastically limited the autonomy the Supreme and Audit Courts as well as of the Ombudsman. In Bolivia, where the last constitutional reform determined that members of the Supreme Court must be elected by popular vote among the set of candidates pre-selected by Congress, the lack of political consensus about the nominees has hindered the effective functioning of the Court. In Chile, a country with professionalized,

autonomous and strong Constitutional and Audit Courts, there is still no Ombudsman despite various attempts to introduce this figure since the democratic restoration in 1990. And both in Chile and El Salvador, the most important regional and sub-national authorities are designated by the President, which in practice reduces their autonomy and their ability to monitor or control the central government.

The oligopolistic structure of the media is another feature common to several democracies throughout the continent. In Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, mass media ownership is highly concentrated in a few economic and/or family groups. What is more, in some of these polities (e.g., Chile, El Salvador, Paraguay, Mexico, Uruguay) these groups have traditionally maintained close ties with specific parties. While the concentrated ownership and the political affiliations of the mainstream media do not necessarily mean that there is no press freedom in these countries, it potentially restricts citizens' access to plural and independent information. If we also take into account the frequent political pressures exerted over the media in Argentina, Ecuador and Venezuela in the last years, as well as the physical threats (and crimes) routinely experienced in some areas of Colombia and Mexico, it is clear that the configuration of the media landscape in Latin America is not particularly well suited for satisfying the key role of providing the information citizens and organizations need to hold representatives accountable for their actions in office.

As regards the two “engines” of democratic quality, political competition and participation, the most conspicuous feature stemming from our analysis is the fact that, in a regional context characterized by gradually increasing intra-party democracy, party structures especially in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Venezuela remain fairly closed, with little to no mechanisms for internal democracy and virtual monopoly of party leaders or machines in the selection of candidates. Further, in El Salvador, Guatemala and Paraguay, these restrictions to the citizens' participation in the internal party life are exacerbated by the lack of forms of deliberative democracy and the scarcity of mechanisms for popular participation in the decision-making process.

Moving to the outcome and especially to the perceived lack of legitimacy of democracy in our sample countries, the 2009 and 2010 data of Latino Barometer show that 65,2% of respondents support democracy and only 16,2% would justify an authoritarian regime under given conditions. When the average of last 20 years is considered, in some cases we still have around 60% of support for democracy and 20% of preference for authoritarianism. More specifically, this is a relevant issue in Guatemala and Paraguay where roughly only 1 out of 2 citizens supports democracy. Budgetary and fiscal constraints thwarting the states' capacity to improve peoples' lives, citizens' discontent with the economic situation, a political culture in which – as noted above in the case of Paraguay –

democratic responsiveness is not deemed particularly relevant by political elites – or even by voters– and the idealization of the extended authoritarian rule in certain segments of the citizenry, all contribute to undermine the perceived legitimacy of democracy. Differently, it should be stressed that there are cases, such as Venezuela and Ecuador, which cannot be considered “high quality” democracies, where most recent surveys conducted by Latino Barometer on the satisfaction about democracy show a high percentage of citizens who are very satisfied or rather satisfied with democracy.

It is very difficult not to link this result – consistently drawn from mass surveys over the last decade - to the recent experience of Peruvians under Fujimori’s government which, despite the systematic violation of constitutional and legal norms and procedures, was credited with uprooting *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) and thus with reducing the political violence and terrorism that was wrecking the country (Burt 2009).

Popular potential support for military rule is also not negligible in Chile (24.4%) and even higher in Argentina (27.9%).¹² In the first country, Pinochet’s regime is associated with traits like efficiency, good management and low criminality in the minds of a sizeable proportion of the citizens. Interestingly, unlike in the vast majority of the other countries in Latin America, disenchantment with democracy in Chile does not seem to – and, objectively, should not - be related to macroeconomic performance or limited state responsiveness due to fiscal constraints. Instead, political stalemates hindering the implementation of public policies or the inability to represent certain segments/interest in the electorate may have more to do with popular dissatisfaction with democracy. In addition, it is also worth noting that the democratic-authoritarian cleavage has structured party competition in Chile during much of the 1990s (Alvarez and Katz, 2009), so that (lack of) support for democracy may also be perceived as an expression of partisan attachments.

Moreover, the protection of personal dignity and basic civil rights is particularly weak in Colombia, Nicaragua and Venezuela (see table 2). In El Salvador, death penalty still exists in military courts, and security forces have been known to incur in torture/physical violence rather frequently, more often than not escaping prosecution, sanction or even investigation by the justice system. Moreover, the legal definition of torture is unnecessarily vague and restrictive, and has been subject to criticism by various international organizations. Fundamental civil rights can be suspended or limited under certain circumstances (e.g., fight against youth gangs), and practices like the protracted retention of individuals who are on remand are prevalent. A similar situation is observed in Guatemala and Nicaragua, where torture and abuses of power by the security forces and

¹² This is the average percentage (1995-2010) of respondents who declared they would support military rule if the situation got very bad (source: Latinobarómetro).

arbitrary/unlawful imprisonments are not uncommon. Additionally, in the case of Nicaragua, several reports also mention the existence of female domestic workers in slave-like labor conditions and the persistence of imprisonment for debts. The poor record of the three countries in the freedom dimension must be understood, at least in part, against the background of the brutal and prolonged civil wars that devastated Central America (Dunkerley 1993; Lafeber, 1993) and the ensuing demilitarization and pacification process which, as noted before, allowed the security forces to retain considerable import in the political and social life.

As an illustration, investigation and prosecution of human rights' violations during the civil conflict is still pretty much pending in El Salvador and Guatemala, and in fact Guatemala has still not signed important international agreements on torture and human rights violations. In the same direction, the *de facto* disenfranchisement of potential – especially indigenous - voters in rural areas of Guatemala due to the difficulties they face to show up at the polls can also be understood in light of the experience and role of the Mayan indigenous people and poor peasants during the civil war (Lafeber, 1993).

In Colombia, another country marred by domestic conflict, serious violations of personal, civic and political rights are also verified. Citizens caught in the middle of the fight between the military, para-military organizations and terrorist groups are commonly subject to intimidation, physical violence (including torture, kidnapping and murder), intimidation and forced migration. Also in Venezuela, the escalation of political clashes and polarization between pro- and anti-Chavez factions in the last decade has led to systematic harassment of political and social activists and members of the opposition, as well as to episodes of violence, torture – which is not typified as a criminal offense in the country's legal system - and abuses of power by members of the security forces, including extra-judicial executions.

Finally, weak protection of economic and social rights is notorious in low-quality democracies. While the welfare state in Latin America has been dismantled due to persistent fiscal imbalances and the acceleration of liberal economic reforms in the 1990s, high quality democracies like Argentina, Costa Rica, Uruguay and even Brazil and Chile have managed to maintain or set up programs, policies and legislation aimed at safeguarding the basic economic and social rights of their citizens. In contrast, in Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua public and social policies are scarce and very ineffective – even compared to other countries in the region – and social safety nets are extremely weak. Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru occupy an intermediate position in this regard, although it is worth mentioning the important advances in social legislation and programs introduced in Bolivia since Morales' rise to power.

As a way to summarize the preceding discussion, Table 5 below highlights the most relevant difficulties faced by each the 15 countries considered in this report. These are the issues that, according to the authors' opinion, pose more immediate and/or important obstacles to democratic quality in these countries. Directly addressing these problems, we believe, would decidedly help improve democratic life in the region.

Table 5: Main threats to democratic quality faced by each of the countries

Procedural +Freedom issues	Procedural + Equality issues	Procedural + Freedom + Equality issues
Venezuela	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Chile Costa Rica Mexico Paraguay Uruguay	Colombia Ecuador El Salvador Guatemala Nicaragua Peru

To sum up the critical points that have been singled out up to now on the different countries, the first policy recommendation to make concerns the decision and implementation of *policies against corruption*. Although to a different degree, this is an aspect that affects all Latin American democracies (see above). Consequently, policies to fight corruption should have the priority for every government of the area. The problems and possible flaws of those policies are very obvious: fighting corruption by a government if also it is corrupt or very easy to be influenced on such an issue by interested corrupt people is a waste of time, and a way of showing rhetoric without content. Consequently, the problem here is how to find a way out, an effective tool for fighting corruption. On the ground of the research experience of the authors and of results of research in other areas, there are two effective ways of fighting corruption, and they are interconnected. On the one hand, relying on the efforts of specialized international agencies that will likely to be able to find alliances and broader supports in the organized and non-organized civil society in each interested country. On the other hand, a program, still backed by international organizations, to strengthen and make much more independent the magistracy, prosecutors included, in different directions. One of them should be the development of an efficient management of justice. If the conclusions on the so-called convergence mechanisms (see Morlino, 2011, ch. 8) are correct, the joint efforts and the combination of these policies will lay the bases for improvement in all other democratic domains.

When looking more into details to other aspects, there is another sub-dimension of the rule

of law that immediately comes to fore. This is the *administrative capacity*. This aspect is directly and strongly relevant in quite a few countries throughout the region. But before discussing this point let, first of all, disentangle institutional capacity from administrative capacity. In fact, at this point we can take for granted the peculiar constitutional arrangements in Latin America - with the presidential institution complementing the parliamentary proportional representation - that found ways to be basically effective. With some exceptions (see esp. Bolivia), during the past decade and more, all problems and fears of democratic instability suggested by Linz and Valenzuela (1994) have been overcome. We can affirm that a basic functional alternative where institutional accommodations and routines have been developed in most of cases (again with some exception such as Venezuela and others) has been achieved.

Thus, in these years it is the lack of administrative capacity, at local level included, that is limiting and preventing an effective working democracy. The key element to recall concerns the capacity of a professional, neutral bureaucracy to implement and enforce the law and a transparent policy making process allowing for the participation of the civil society. With regard to policy recommendations, this implies the proposal and implementation of programs for developing a professional bureaucracy, again a challenge that has been confronted by other countries in the world during these years. On this, let it be remembered that this kind of programs, as the previous ones, take time to be implemented and to actually work. In a different perspective, this shows how Latin American democracies are in a second step in their democratic development, where the democratic façade has to become more consistent with the substantial one: informal rules should be consistent with the formal ones. Actually, what is at stake in this moment - and in some countries the success of neo-populist leaders underlines this - is the transformation from democratic institutions where still powerful elites are behind the decision-making process to a set of neutral institutions where policies fostering of freedom and equality can be effectively carried out.

The third and final set of recommendations concerns some countries, but not others. Here, we refer to the problem of individual security, which is so relevant in different areas of Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru - that is, in at least five countries out of fifteen. Delivering individual security and maintaining civil order with a focus on the right on life, freedom from fear and torture, and right to own property guaranteed and protected through the country, is a minimal requisite for every political regime, even authoritarian or hybrid regimes. Here, the main problems may come from the organized crime, enormously strengthened by drug trafficking, and again the solution can only come from the international collaboration with police organizations of other countries. Individual security, on the other hand, can be an actual possibility by domestic incumbent authorities who set this goal as a priority.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on an encompassing theoretical definition of democratic quality (or qualities) that includes procedural, substantive and outcome components, this report offers a comprehensive analytic tool and applies it to the study of the quality of democracy in 15 Latin American countries. Our methodological approach combines qualitative and quantitative assessments of the different aspects and characteristics of those polities, complementing and expanding previous research in this area and providing a detailed description of the evolution and current state of democracies in the region.

The results emerging from our analysis show a clear democratic pattern in the region, marked by a strong correlation and internal consistency among the different dimensions of democratic quality. In other words, “high quality” democracies in the region (Uruguay, Chile, Costa Rica, and, to a lesser extent, Argentina and Brazil) exhibit high “scores” and successful performances in most of the different components of the democratic quality. Similarly, “low quality” democracies concentrated in Central America (El Salvador, Nicaragua and Venezuela) fare poorly in virtually all these underlying dimensions. Perhaps the only exception to this general trend is Venezuela, where the visible deterioration of most of the procedural and substantive dimensions – and especially rule of law and accountability – has been accompanied by sustained improvements in at least one of the outcome components – equality, and more precisely, the economic sub-dimension of equality. Still, because democratic quality is a complex, multifarious concept, success in this single dimension is not enough to pull the country out of the group of low-ranked countries.

More importantly, policy recommendations are essential to ensure that 30 years after the beginning of the third wave of democratization, the vast majority of Latin Americans can actually enjoy the benefits of better democracies. As the examples of the Central American countries and Paraguay suggest, a continuously underperforming democracy runs the risk of alienating the citizens, rendering them dangerously disillusioned about the value of democracy itself, and even potentially undermining its stability or survival. Even in the case of a successful democracy like Chile, popular disappointment about the way some of the aspects of democracy work in practice may undermine trust in and support for democratic institutions. Hence, measures – economic, but also political – aimed at enhancing the quality of democracy and its component dimensions seems vital to ensure the continuation and strengthening of democratic life in Latin America. As suggested in the previous section, the policy recommendations to take into account affect at least three domains, policies against corruption, improving administrative capacity, consolidating personal

security. All Latin American countries will be much better democracies if one or more of these aspects are even only partially improved.

Our analysis also opens important avenues for future work. First, as mentioned throughout the report, the results presented here are the most relevant ones, and for some aspects they also are essentially preliminary. It could be done much more with regard to the fine tuning of indicators and measures. Other more sophisticated empirical methods and deeper theoretical reflections are needed to better understand the main determinants of the evolution of the quality of democracy in the region. In particular, a more careful consideration of the dynamics of democratic quality and of the empirical changes which have been taking place during last twenty years are still needed. Specific additional country analyses would also help in developing our knowledge of the topic. All this will allow a better analysis and explanation of democracies in the area as well as of being more precise and effective in the policy recommendations.

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