



Partecipazione e CONflitto
** The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*
<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco>
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 10(1) 2017: 1-7
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v10i1p1

Published in March 15, 2017

Work licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non commercial-Share alike 3.0 Italian License

SPECIAL ISSUE/EDITORIAL

QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

Simón Pachano

FLACSO, Ecuador

Manuel Anselmi

University of Perugia

The quality of democracy is one of the main topics of study of comparative politics and analysis of democratization processes on a global scale. It has become of great importance in Latin America since it became clear that the main threat to democracy were not the military coups, which took place in the twentieth century, but rather the results of authoritarian governments that were born through legitimate electoral processes and in scope of regimes that guaranteed freedom and civil and political rights. The birth of authoritarian populism, the manipulation of elections, the restriction of public opinion, control of Communication Media, the gradual exclusion of the opposition, the repression of social protests, are some of the actions that weaken democracy and necessarily causes it to convert to a form of authoritarianism.

As a result, there is a real challenge for theoretical and practical analysis of reality. Not all that isn't democracy is authoritarianism, nor anything that is not authoritarianism can be qualified as full democracy. That also explains the interest placed in the conceptualization and interpretation of the new regimes that are found mostly between classical

democracy and authoritarianism. The delegative democracies, competitive authoritarianism, electoral democracies or hybrid regimes, are only some of these intermediate expressions.

However, the great scientific interest for these expressions is explained through the studies of democracy evaluation, that appears in multiple conceptual and methodological proposals. Ultimately, one can argue that the quality of democracy is currently a field of study clearly differentiated between political science and political sociology.

A decade-long tradition of studies on the quality of democracy exists today and is an essential area of reflection regarding democratic theory and comparative politics studies (Diamond & Morlino, 2005).

Recently, Leonardo Morlino has identified eight dimensions applicable in empirical terms to a valuation paradigm of democracy able to measure its quality. Of these eight, five are procedural and two are substantive (Morlino, Diana, Raniolo, 2013)

Morlino defines procedural the following dimensions; the rule of law, namely the compliance of the law; accountability or the electoral responsibilities; the inter-institutional accountability, namely the responsibility of democratic institutions; participation and competition.

Substantive instead are "full respect of the rights that can be expanded in achieving the different freedoms" and "the progressive realization of a greater economic and social equality".

These dimensions allow us a constant monitoring of the activities of the democratic system and thus makes possible a dynamic evaluation of its parts. Underlying the positive principle of democratic quality are the defense of freedoms and individual rights, pluralism and responsibility of the rulers against the ruled. All things that are lost when a democratic system is transformed, even if minimally, in an authoritarian system.

When considered in light of the dynamic nature and procedure of political regimes, the quality of democracy criteria provide a control mode of the democratization processes taking place, in order to monitor any incompleteness, imbalances, progress and regressions.

In this issue of *Partecipazione e Conflitto* five articles have been gathered that address the topic of the quality of democracy in Latin America from different theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Today, speaking about the quality of democracy in Latin America means to frame the argument in the light of certain conjunctures and significant historical passages that affect the entire sub-continent; the end of the experience of the Left turn; the democratic involution of the greatest populist experiences; the crisis of oil based economies; and the Latin American integration process (Morlino, 2016).

Rise and Decline of the Left Turn. First of all, in last years we are witnessing the return of the neoliberal forces in the whole area. Macri's victory and the return of a centre-right government in Argentina has led to the crisis of the progressive experience which had distinguished the last fifteen years, starting a new period of restoration of the conservative forces. The years Two-thousand were distinguished by the so-called Left turn or *ola Rosa*, that had seen the rise of left wing parties ascending to the government, many of which of populist matrix, or with a strong popular consent, today we are witnessing an inversion (Cameron & Hershberg, 2010). The Socialist experience in Latin America, which began with the first Chavez government, and continued with Lula in Brazil, then with Kirchner in Argentina, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador, is gradually fading, opening to a new neo-liberal wave. What was supposed to be the twenty-first century socialism lasted no more than a decade and has undergone a degeneration made of clientelism, personalism, corruption and instability. Almost paradoxically, if there is a legacy of the Latin American neo-populist experiences, we can find them outside of Latin America, for example in Europe, where movements such as Podemos blossomed, which were inspired by new forms of socialism right from the beginning.

The parable of progressive neo-populism. The Left Turn period was characterized by populist political formations that came to power. Latin American neo-populism, mostly left wing, in the beginning allowed the political and social inclusion of large sectors of the population which was excluded, then, with the phase of institutionalization, caused an impact on the structures of liberal democracy in which they first appeared. Many of these populisms, as in Venezuela and Bolivia, led to a constitutional reformation and institutional transformation of the state regarding leadership, plebiscite and personalistic issues. These reforms have deeply undermined the foundations of the system of those liberal democracies, producing the functional alterations of the balance between the internal powers typical of the *check and balances* system of democracy. The initial enthusiastic and utopian stage of these progressive populist experiences were followed by a phase of disillusionment and political realism. For many countries, such as Venezuela, we must talk about a post-populistic condition, in which the disappearance of a populist leader leaves, on the one hand, a strongly shaped institutional political system imprinted on personalist leadership, on the other hand, a highly polarized society where the possibility of a democratic dialogue between the opposition and the government is almost completely deleted. The Venezuelan case, in its radicality, explains that the populist experience may constitute a total transformation of the political dimension in an hyper-antagonist key, in which the political polarization between the two sides blocks the functioning of the entire political body and undermines the minimum rights of the citizens. This trend, so apparent in Venezuela, can also be traced down in other countries

that shared a similar experience, such as Bolivia and Ecuador. Therefore, the Latin American neo-populist experience to date has been the attempt to replace the classical liberal democracy with a model of plebiscitary democracy with a socialist and participatory address, where crucial is the direct relationship between the president and the people, and where the intermediate bodies and pluralist dialogue between the parties are almost excluded.

The crisis of the oil based economy. Looking back, it is easy to see that the period which saw the rise of the Left Turn democracies also coincides with the economic period of greater fortune for the oil industry. In the early years of Lula and Chavez's governments, many of the social policies and inclusion programs for the poor were possible thanks to the considerable revenue from oil sales, raw material present in most of the Left Turn nations. The gradual decline in oil prices since 2008 has been the main reason for the economic crisis in the Latin American countries concerned with new processes of democratization. Being mostly oil based economies, meaning they have a mainly single-sector economy and almost totally dependent on oil sales, the impact of the decrease in revenues severely damaged not only the traditional areas of development of the state but sent a blow to the populist welfare created in previous years not only aimed at improving the social conditions of the poorer classes, but also to the maintenance of the unanimous consent.

Latin American Integration. One undoubted success of the progressive political experiences of the Left Turn has been promoting Latin American integration. The idea of a sovereign and sovereignty Latin America, free from USA conditioning, in which all countries cooperate economically and politically, was one of the ideological factors that united the progressive experience and which contributed the most to lay the foundations of a Latin American public opinion. Both on the cultural and communicative level, where there have been significant results such as the creation of a reality like Telesur, and on the strictly political institutional level with the creation of organizations such as Mercosur and Unasur, the leadership of Chavez, of Kirchner and Lula led to an unseen acceleration of the regional integration process. Today, those leaderships have disappeared, those countries have changed their political direction, but above all, the United States have returned to carry out an active policy of influence over Latin America, although in terms of soft power, it appears as a broken path where, however, the groundwork has been laid for a future recovery. Significant as reaction to this is the creation of a free-trade agreement, liberalist and strongly pro-USA, which is the Alianza del Pacifico. A treaty providing the exchange of goods on favourable terms among the main countries that are on the Atlantic coast, such as Chile, Colombia and Mexico. The Alianza del Pacifico is in fact the neoliberal response to the regional integration process that instead of

organizing Latin America in an independent manner, subordinates it back to the USA logics.

Davide Grassi and Vincenzo Memoli analyse the relationship between satisfaction with democracy and perception of corruption in a longitudinal study involving fourteen Latin American countries. The novelty of this article is that, unlike other studies, the authors consider the perception of corruption as a dependent variable consisting in a valuable input to the understanding of one of the most serious problems that threaten Latin American democracies.

Javier Corrales and Manuel Hidalgo deal with the case of Venezuela, which is one of the most controversial from the democratic quality point of view. The authors apply the evaluation proposal developed by Diamond and Morlino (----). From a careful analysis of the eight dimensions expected from this perspective, the two scholars confirm that the government of Hugo Chávez resulted in a decline in democracy, which can be defined as a hybrid regime. They highlight that in many ways it converted into an authoritarian regime and that aspects of that regime that remain democratic demonstrate a low quality of democracy. Nevertheless, they point out that the social democratic tradition, the existence of certain institutional spaces and the presence of some political actors have prevented all the areas to be conditioned by the Presidential socialist model of Chavism.

Enrique Peruzzotti analyses the phenomenon of Kirchnerism in Argentina. The author presents an alternative view from Laclau, who treats it as a deepening of democracy and from O'Donnell, who instead sees it as Argentina's demonstration of the inability to get out of the delegative democracy cycle (understood as a degraded form of democracy). Peruzzotti argues that none of the models seem appropriate to capture Kirchnerism as a political phenomenon. Opposing them leads to a relatively similar conclusion, although based on other criteria than that offered by Corrales and Hidalgo. The author suggests that both the political system as well as the people have developed antidotes that make populism like Laclau theorizes unlikely, and that perhaps they have established clear limits to presidential aspirations to perpetuate a delegative cycle.

The articles by Rocío Duarte on Paraguay and Davide Carbonai, Alfredo Alejandro Gugliano and Sergio Camiz on Brazil, focus on more detailed aspects of the democratic process. Rocío Duarte evaluates the quality of Paraguayan democracy only regarding electoral accountability, understood below as a parameter developed by Leonardo Morlino. The author stresses the difference between the democratic principles that guide the institutional design and its practical application. This last point emphasizes the existence of barriers preventing access to large sections of the population to the request for political competition and participation, while favouring the traditional political parties and groups of interest. Her conclusion is that, since the conditions of equity for the political

participation of all social sectors didn't take place, in practice the Paraguayan system is not constituted as totally representative.

Davide Carbonai, Aldredo Alejandro Gugliano and Sergio Camiz take into account the experience of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil to assess the quality of democracy. They do this through *presupuesto participativo* (participatory budgeting), seen as one of the tools that can offer more options than those of the electoral participation of the population. The involvement of citizens in the definition of participatory budgeting and advisory processes related to it, can be considered, according to the authors, as "a democratic school" which tends to raise its quality.

All articles collected in this issue of *Partecipazione e Conflitto* offer a good balance between conceptual and empirical research analysis. The cases treated serve to support the discussion on the proposal of assessing the quality of democracy, as well as to deepen their knowledge of the case studies. No doubt, all these articles contribute to the debate on one of the most exciting and important themes regarding political science and political sociology.

References

- Cameron, M. A. & Hershberg, E. (eds), (2010). *Latin America's Left Turns: Politics, Policies, and Trajectories of Change*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Pub.
- Diamond, L. J. and Morlino, L. (eds), (2005). *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Morlino, L., Piana, D., Raniolo F., (eds), (2013). *La qualità della democrazia in Italia*. Bologna: Mulino.
- Morlino, L., (2016), *The Quality of Democracies in Latin America. A Report for IDEA*. Stockholm: International IDEA.

Papers published in this Special Issue

- Carbonai D., A. Alejandro Gugliano, and S. Camiz (2017), "The State Participatory Budgeting in Rio Grande do Sul. Some Evidences from Pampas", *Partecipazione e conflitto*, 10(1): 8-24.
- Corrales J., M. Hidalgo (2017), "The Quality of the Venezuelan Democracy under Hugo Chavez (1999-2013)", *Partecipazione e conflitto*, 10(1): 89-118.

Simón Pachano, Manuel Anselmi, *Quality of democracy in Latin America*

Grassi D., V. Memoli (2017), "Democracy, Support for Democracy and Corruption. A Longitudinal Study of Latin American Countries", *Partecipazione e conflitto*, 10(1): 25-46.

Peruzzotti E. (2017), "Conceptualizing Kirchnerismo", *Partecipazione e conflitto*, 10(1): 47-64.

Rocío Duarte-Recalde L. (2017), "Democracy and Representation in Paraguay", *Partecipazione e conflitto*, 10(1): 65-88.

AUTHORS' INFORMATION:

Manuel Anselmi is Assistant Professor of Political Sociology at University of Perugia and Coordinator of Latin American Department of International Centre of Democracy and Democratization at Luiss University of Rome. His research focuses on populism, Venezuelan Politics and Latin American Politics.

Simón Pachano, Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Salamanca. Author of several books and numerous articles on democracy, political, parties and elections. He was a Visiting Fellow at the Kellogg Institute of the University of Notre Dame and professor at universities in Latin America and Spain.