

**The Strengthening of Political Parties within a Countercyclical Analytical Framework in Latin America.**

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## Abstract

*The article shows that in Latin America traditional within-countries heterogeneity has been followed by a silent but staggering growth in between-countries economic differences. This process ran parallel to the third democratic wave through which an almost universal homogeneity in procedural democratic political systems in Latin American countries was reached. Notwithstanding the democratic reforms, the shortfalls in governance delivery with the backdrop of massive poverty and very high inequality and violence has contributed to the creation in Latin American countries of a new within-countries political heterogeneity in which pre-modern, modern and sophisticated political realities come face to face with political systems in which political parties, showing high polarization, volatility and weak institutionalization, are severely criticized by public opinion. The article suggests new possibilities for political parties faced with this situation including a political countercyclical focus that implies a new role, tools and challenges for them.*

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## **1. Heterogeneity in Latin America.**

### **a. Latin America traditional within-countries structural heterogeneity.**

During the 60's the so-called Latin American structural heterogeneity theory gained relevance. Its main tenet was the coexistence in Latin America's production and employment structures, and thus in its distribution and consumption systems, of elements from different historic configurations: some quite modern, some archaic, some capitalist and some pre-capitalist.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of productive structures, it is said that the structural heterogeneity has its origins in the existence in each country of sectors of high or medium productivity equipped with updated technology and sectors in which the productivity is much lower due to the absence of updated technology and pre-modern structures. In terms of employment there were workers with normal or high productivity and workers with very low productivity and thus precarious jobs and wages. Traditional within-countries structural heterogeneity in Latin America underlined in these sectors a widespread underemployment phenomenon in the different countries of the region. In the face of this very serious phenomenon, developmental theories tried to explain that the "unrestricted" labor supply in the low productivity sectors facilitates expansion of manufacturing due to limited salary expectations of new workers explained by the practically unlimited labor supply in traditional sectors in which large amounts of the labor force were concentrated. It was expected that within-countries structural heterogeneity would recede once the pre-modern productive sectors with lower productivity were surpassed and gradually absorbed by the modern sectors. In the employment market urban salaries would begin to increase organically, especially when the rural laborer found new, better-remunerated employment in the growing sectors of the modern productive branches.

Latin America presents a mosaic of different types of structural heterogeneity evolution with countries that reduced their unemployment and underemployment levels as well as their poverty rates and even showed some degree of convergence with income levels of developed economies; countries that achieved the former without converging with developed countries' income; and finally Latin American economies that still show enormous amounts of underemployment linked to a persistent and expanded informality with massive poverty indicators that not only do not converge, but whose huge income differences with developed economies are widening.

### **b. New between-countries structural heterogeneity in Latin America.**

Even before Latin American countries had overcome the challenges and restrictions implied by the Latin American within-countries structural heterogeneity, new dimensions of heterogeneity seemed to be appearing. In fact, the traditional structural heterogeneity theory was built taking into account internal differences within each Latin American

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<sup>1</sup> While already considered by Raul Prebisch in the late 40s, Latin America Structural Heterogeneity, was developed by Anibal Pinto, a Chilean economist working for ECLAC in Santiago, through different articles during the 60s and early 70s.

countries. But it is clear that differences among countries in the Latin America region have without comment but conspicuously increased during the last fifty years. In that sense it could be said that structural heterogeneity has shifted from within to between countries as levels of economic activity, income and productivity between Latin American countries have increased remarkably over the last fifty years.

In fact, if we take as a proxy for economic activity, income and productivity, the levels of the Gross Domestic Product-GDP, the per capita GDP and the Exports of goods and services of each country and we compare the aggregated GDP of the three countries with the lowest GDP in Latin America, with the aggregated GDP of the countries with the highest GDP in the region, it can be seen that the GDP at constant, market prices of Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua, the three countries with the lowest GDP in the region, in 1950 represented 2.2% of the GDP of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, the countries with the highest GDP in the region. This ratio decreased over the five decades until 2000 when the GDP of the three countries with the lowest GDP represented only 0.8% of the GDP of the three countries with the highest GDP in the region. So in five decades, the absolute difference in economic terms between the three largest countries in the region and the three smallest countries, which in this case are the same six countries at the beginning and at the end of the fifty year period, has increased staggeringly from 45 times in 1950 to 120 times in 2000.<sup>2</sup>

Also, if we compare the average of the per capita GDP of the three countries with the lowest per capita GDP in Latin America, Haiti, Honduras and Dominican Republic in 1950, with the average per capita GDP of the countries with the highest per capita GDP in the region, Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela in 1950; it can be noted that the average per capita GDP at constant, market prices of the three countries with the lowest per capita GDP, in 1950 represented 16% of the per capita GDP of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, the countries with the highest GDP in the region. This ratio, with some variations during the period, was even lower in 2000, in which the average per capita GDP of Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua, the three countries with the lowest per capita GDP in the region in 2000, represented only 9% of the average per capita GDP of Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, the three countries with the highest per capita GDP in the region in 2000. So in five decades, the difference between the three countries with the highest and the lowest per capita GDP has increased from 6 to 11 times, also an extraordinary increase in the widening gap between countries.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, if we compare the aggregated Exports of Goods and Services of the three countries with the lowest levels of Exports in 1950, with the aggregated Exports of goods and services of the three countries with the highest levels of Exports in 1950, it shows that the Exports at constant, market prices of Haiti, Nicaragua and Paraguay, the three countries with the lowest magnitude of Exports of Goods and Services in the region, in 1950 represented 4% of the Exports of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, the countries with

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<sup>2</sup> Data, based on ECLAC 2008, CEPALSTAT, *Economic Statistics since 1950*, Santiago, Chile. The relationships were obtained by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Data, based on ECLAC 2008, CEPALSTAT, *Economic Statistics since 1950*, Santiago, Chile. The relationships were obtained by the author.

the highest Exports of goods and services in the region in 1950. In 2000 the ratio of the aggregated Exports of goods and services of Haiti, Nicaragua and Paraguay, the three countries with the lowest levels of Exports in 2000, with the aggregated Exports of goods and services of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, the three countries with the highest levels of Exports in 2000 decreased to 1%. So in five decades, the absolute difference between the Exports of the three largest exporting countries of the region and the Exports of the three smallest exporting countries in Latin America has increased staggeringly from 27 times in 1950 to 93 times in 2000.<sup>4</sup>

### **c. Latin America's emerging within-countries political heterogeneity.**

Until the early years of this century, the diminishing performance of Latin America in the global economy tended to overshadow a substantial achievement in political terms: Latin America, one of the players in the so-called third wave of democratization, became one of the regions in the world in which electoral democratic regimes are the rule, with at present only one exception.

Even in the midst of the growing political differentiation between countries that tends to be acknowledged in the region, the procedural political homogeneity as elected governments became the norm in Latin America cannot be erased.

On the other hand, Latin America is recognized as one of the regions in the world with the worst indicators of inequality. In addition, several countries show high and very high levels of poverty. Finally, and probably not coincidentally, a number of Latin American countries suffer some of the highest levels of crime and insecurity in the world.

The joint presence of massive poverty, huge inequality and very high crime indicators as the environment in which widespread democratic political systems have developed, probably explains the emergence of what can be called the within-countries political heterogeneity in Latin America.

In Latin America structural heterogeneity theory, the multinational corporation with a highly organized work force, updated technology and downstream and upstream linkages was the clearest representation of the modern sector, as was the high productivity worker in the energy/oil or industrial sectors vis-à-vis the low productivity worker in the traditional agriculture sector. In the present political structures of Latin American countries it could be said that the highly organized electoral administering bodies, which must oversee the contemporary rules on which political competition is based, tend to represent the “modern” sector of Latin American political structures. On the other hand – with few exceptions that may confirm the generalization – the very weak political party systems on which electoral competition is based in fragile party structures, where it is common to find the strong domination of caudillos in political party life, and high turnover and very low party loyalty among party affiliates, as well as in several cases

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<sup>4</sup> Data, based on ECLAC 2008, CEPALSTAT, *Economic Statistics since 1950*, Santiago, Chile. The relationships were obtained by the author.

absence of programmatic proposals, are elements which generally indicate still rigid and pre-modern political structures and landscape.

In some Latin American countries, it is necessary to mention also as part of the political heterogeneity, the existence of stateless regions where pre-capitalist labor and other type of pre-modern relations, including political relations, are present.

Also part of the contemporary political heterogeneity are those market structures in which sophisticated media channels and survey capabilities can detect and tailor the desired political *product*, which correctly managed would probably be among the winners in electoral competitions; competitions where media access and financing rules are weakly legislated or in practical terms, not regulated.

#### **d. Political and governance challenges and growing regime type questioning.**

The emergence of the described political heterogeneity within Latin American countries creates completely new political challenges as the responsibility for guaranteeing minority rights, while at the same time majority rights are still not universally executed due to institutional weaknesses. This contributes to the growth of traditional and new governance problems in which, for example, regulatory norms in sectors with natural monopolies or based on high tech, must be applied contemporaneously with considerations regarding the validity of community norms and habits that include unanimity votes in electoral competitions or whipping as an accepted form of punishment.

In addition, as surveys indicate, in some Latin American countries there is a correlation between governance problems and higher levels of support for democratic systems. This peculiar correlation could indicate a reinforcement of regime type questioning.

## **2. State and Civil Society dynamics and expansion of Rights.**

### **a. Diminished Scope, Increased Strength and Uncertain Capacity of the Public Sector in Latin American countries.**

It is commonly affirmed that in the face of the present pro-State wave, the States in Latin American countries have been dismantled and the public sector severely weakened. This assertion could in some aspects be a misrepresentation. There is no doubt that under the orientation of the so-called Washington consensus, the scope of – the range of activities covered by- the States in Latin American countries has been reduced in each of the countries of the region. This was achieved mainly by extensive privatizations of state-owned enterprises, by financial sector liberalization and by the substantial reduction in protectionist barriers to international trade.

On the other hand, if we assume public expenditure capacity as one indicator of State Strength, it is clear that in Latin American countries the reduction in State Scope was not accompanied by a reduction in State Strength. In fact, even within a framework of

increased fiscal discipline, the ratio of Total Public Spending to Gross National Product did not diminish as one should expect on the grounds of state weakening of so-called neo liberalism. On the contrary, for Latin American countries, the simple average ratio of Total Public Spending to Gross National Product was 24 per cent in 1990-1991, which increased to 25.1% in 1994-1995 and to 26.4% in 2000-2001. It was slightly lower in 2004-2005: 26%.<sup>5</sup> The increased share of public expenditure in GDP was accompanied by an expansion of social investment. Total Public Spending for Latin America as a simple average in 1990-1991 was equivalent to 9.7 per cent of the Gross National Product; in 1994-1995 it stood at 11.1% and in 2004-2005, it reached 12.6%.<sup>6</sup>

Has the reduced scope and increased strength of the public sector in Latin American countries been translated into a greater capacity of the State in those countries? The response naturally depends on what we understand by State capacity. If we assume the reduction of volatility levels in economic growth as one indicator of increased State capacity, it seems that little can be achieved as

“...developing countries are both “business-cycle *takers*” and “policy *takers*”...There is, therefore, a very profound sense in which the financial and macroeconomic asymmetries that affect developing countries are inescapable...<sup>7</sup>.”

Nevertheless, the fact that Latin American countries appear better equipped, or less affected, than countries in some other regions in terms of national capacities to face the restrictions posed by the 2008 global financial crisis and the generalized growth reduction, also indicates that the advancements in terms of achieving macro-economic equilibrium are capable of navigating with less volatility amidst difficult circumstances in Latin American countries.

In addition, when we talk about the strengthening of the State in Latin American countries it is necessary to consider elements that contemporarily point toward a different geometry of State Powers. In that sense for example the electoral institutions are perceived as constituting a new State Power. The new Ecuadorian constitution instead of three State Powers recognizes five Constitutional *Functions*: Legislative, Executive, Judiciary and Indigenous Justice, Transparency and Social Control and finally Electoral.<sup>8</sup> In that way the present trend of state strengthening hardly represents a return to old-state structures.

### **b. Different perspectives in the analysis of Civil Society in Latin American Countries**

Civil societies in Latin American countries have been perceived and analyzed from different perspectives. The class-type analyses, common in the 50's and 60's, were later replaced by assessments from, in several aspects, the opposite side - consumer studies -

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<sup>5</sup> ECLAC, 2007, *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2007*, Santiago, Chile.

<sup>6</sup> IBID.

<sup>7</sup> Ocampo, Jose Antonio (2005), *A Broad View of Macroeconomic Stability*, DESA Working paper # 1.

<sup>8</sup> Gaceta Constituyente, 2008, *Constitución 2008. Dejemos el pasado atrás*, Aristos, Quito, Ecuador.

and in recent years social movement dynamics predominated in the study and analysis of civil societies in Latin American countries.

Each of the mentioned perspectives seemed to address a societal trait or perceived mass aspiration and at the same time to lack the adequate consideration of other relevant elements.

In fact class-type studies probably explained and enforced the radicalism of certain worker organizations such as miners in Bolivia, Chile and Peru or industrial workers in Argentina and Brazil or the power of specially qualified public employees such as teachers in several countries in the region and so on. But the highly schematic class-type analyses were unable to explain interclass national political agreements such as those prevailing in Colombia and Venezuela or the successful experiences of multiclass political movements in Bolivia, Brazil and Peru. The theories were even more limited when trying to explain the failure of those multiclass collisions as expressions of weak class conscience, when these collisions were replaced by regimes even further ahead of the class analysis expected behavior, as with the military-indigenous alliances forged under authoritarian and ruthless governments in Bolivia and Guatemala.

The limitations of class-type analyses and the lack of new paradigms in the context of the expansion of urban societies and mercantile relations contributed to the expansion of consumer analysis. As the representation of Latin American citizens as consumers was gaining growing diffusion under economic operators, civil society in Latin American countries began to show unexpected dynamism under both inclusive and rejectionist broad social movements.

The social movements in Latin American countries presented themselves as inclusive because they see themselves as the participatory vehicles of excluded citizens be it for reasons of age, economic, ethnic, gender, political, religious, sexual identity or other social reasons. At the same time they are rejectionist, because the regionally and globally very well-connected social movements in Latin American condemned neo-liberal globalization as well as the national political systems and parties involved in what they defined as unsustainable social and environmental exploitation.

### **c. Pluralistic reaffirmation of Identities and expansion of Rights.**

The dynamics of states and civil societies in Latin American countries are being processed against a backdrop of an increased demand for identity recognition. This world-wide phenomenon has been related to the fact that globalization is accompanied by localization. In the case of Latin American countries, this trend has fortified the aspiration for new identities. In addition to national identities there is the powerful, and in some case polarizing, emergence of ethnic identities which in turn are accompanied by cultural identities. And naturally there is the gender identity that has been promoted in the region with various positive discrimination mechanisms aimed at attaining gender equity. Also, as far as sexual orientation diversity is recognized – not necessarily as an *option* – sexual identity is also beginning to be recognized.

One of the characteristics of identities is that the recognition of one identity is usually established through the recognition or adoption of related Rights. So there could be a correlation between the growing plurality of recognized identities and the growing specification of rights in the new constitutional arrangements, especially present in the newly-approved Bolivian and Ecuadorian Constitutions.

### **3. The Flagging of Political Parties.**

#### **a. A public good perceived as a sectarian curse.**

Political parties were important actors in the different processes through which Latin American countries reconstructed their democratic systems in the so-called third wave of democratization initiated in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador in 1979. In fact: “While parties and their leaders were the principal protagonists of the first stage of the transition to democracy, [later on]...one of the main problems facing the process of democratization in Latin America was the crisis of parties, a crisis that continues today”<sup>9</sup>

After thirty years of expansion, democracy enjoys – with important caveats, differentiated in time and geography - a clear majority public opinion support in Latin American countries. In that sense, the view is that “democracy is not dependent on certain cultural conditions – it is part of the human condition. While the practice of democracy differs across countries and cultures, that the principles are universal”<sup>10</sup> must be underlined.

If democracy is still seen as the worst form of government except for all the others and in addition, political parties defined as “all the organizations that compete for the exercise of political power through elections”<sup>11</sup> are, as far as they go, necessary instruments of democratic competition, it is logical to consider the existence and functioning of political parties as a public good. Nevertheless, Latin Americans have quite a different opinion. They rank political parties among the institutions with the lowest approval levels. A very well-respected study refers to information corresponding to the period 1996 and 2004 obtained from respondents in 17 countries in the region that rank political parties as the institution in which there is the least confidence among nine types of institutions in Latin America. According to this study, only 19 per cent of the respondents express confidence in political parties.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rial, J. and Zovatto, D. comps. 1998, *Urnas y desencanto político: Elecciones y democracia en América Latina, 1992-1996*, Inter-american Institute of Human Rights, San José, Costa Rica.

<sup>10</sup> Van Ardenne-van der Hoeven, Agnes, 2007, *Development Starts at the Ballot Box*, in Berendsen, Bernard Editor, 2007, *Democracy and Development*, KIT Publishers-Amsterdam.

<sup>11</sup> Roncaglio, Rafael, 2007, *Los Partidos Andinos: entre la crisis y el cambio*, en Roncagliolo, R. y Meléndez, C., editores, 2007, *La agenda pendiente: los partidos andinos entre la crisis y el cambio*, Agora Democrática, Transparencia, IDEA International, Lima, Perú.

<sup>12</sup> Payne, M., Zovatto, D. and Mateo Diaz, M. et al, 2007, *Democracies in Development. Politics and Reform in Latin America*, Inter American Development Bank, International Institute for Democracy and

This low public opinion of political parties is related, probably both as cause and effect, to three observed weaknesses of Latin American Parties: a. *stability*, the parties' permanence over time, b. *rootedness*, the citizens' identification with parties, c. *legitimacy*, the well-founded nature and acceptability of parties and electoral processes - and as result of these limitations with the generalized incomplete and fragile *institutionalization* of political parties in countries in the region.<sup>13</sup>

**b. De-monopolization efforts, direct democracy mechanisms and further weakening of political parties.**

In Latin American countries there was through the third wave of democratization a widespread need to establish or update a comprehensive legal framework for the functioning of political parties. The efforts made in this respect have some common features. The first one is the de-monopolization of citizen representation and participation in electoral competition by political parties. The new constitutional arrangements and political and electoral norms approved in Latin American countries establish that not only political parties but other types of organizations such as civic associations and political committees have the right to represent citizens in electoral competition especially so in provincial/regional and local/municipal in legislative and municipal electoral contests.

These de-monopolization rules regarding political parties were approved in Latin American countries in accordance with expressions of their civil societies in which there was a growing demand for increased citizen inclusion and participation. These demands were often accompanied and stimulated by some simplistic contrapositions of representative and participative democracy. In these complex scenarios, mechanisms and instruments of direct democracy were approved, including referendums, plebiscites, citizen consultations, legislative initiatives and mandate repeals.<sup>14</sup>

Those are not isolated reforms. In fact,

“Over the past two decades constitutional and legal reforms had led to the creation of ombudsman and attorney's general offices in many countries...Reforms has also sought to root these institutions more firmly in the democratic system and to develop their independence and capabilities.”<sup>15</sup>

De-monopolization reforms and direct democracy mechanisms are logically perceived as elements that tend to increase the participative aspects of democracy, but these reforms

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Electoral Assistance, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>13</sup> Achard, D. and Gonzáles, L.E. et al, 2005, A Challenge for Democracy, Political Parties in Central America, Panama and Dominican Republic, IDB, IDEA, OAS, UNDP, San José, Costa Rica.

<sup>14</sup> Lissidini, A., Welp, Y. and Zovatto, D., 2008, *Democracia directa en Latinoamérica*, C2D, IDEA Internacional, UNSAM, Prometeo libros.

<sup>15</sup> Payne, M., Zovatto, D. and Mateo Diaz, M. et al, 2007, *Democracies in Development. Politics and Reform in Latin America*, Inter American Development Bank, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, Washington D.C.

were enacted while at the same time as the powers of the President were being increased, and in some cases, limiting those of the legislative branch, creating a situation in which these reforms tend implicitly to please citizens preferences in the sense that for example in Central American in 2003, an average 66 per cent of the population – ranging from 80 per cent in Nicaragua and 78 per cent in Honduras to 39 per cent in Guatemala – supported the criteria that “More than parties and Congress, there is a need for a decisive leader who will solve problems”.<sup>16</sup> These reforms and beliefs could have contributed to the emergence of hyper-presidentialism that for some analysts is a Latin American trait that also shows the weakness of political parties’.

#### **4. Long experience in preparing the responses and looming need to transform the questions.**

##### **a. Extent of the crisis of political parties.**

The dire situation of political parties is illustrated by the fact that citizens believe that “politics and parties have lost credibility...” and because a significant proportion of the population believes this, credibility will not be recovered. In fact, in the case of Central America, 43 percent of the population believes “[political parties] have lost [credibility] and cannot recover it”<sup>17</sup> ...Affinity or sympathy with parties has also fallen: 14 percent of Central Americans felt “close” or “very close” to some party in 1996-1997; by 2003 that figure had fallen to 9 percent.”<sup>18</sup>

As was mentioned before, in Latin America as a whole, the least accepted institutions are political parties:

“Confidence in institutions in Latin America, considering share of respondents expressing confidence in mentioned institution (in percentage) Church: 73, Television: 44, Armed Forces: 42, Presidency: 33, Police: 33, Judiciary: 30, Public Administration: 28, Congress: 25, Political Parties: 19.”<sup>19</sup>

But we must understand that Latin American dissatisfaction with political parties, while a specific regional phenomenon, is also a global reality, in fact:

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<sup>16</sup> Achard, D. and Gonzáles, L.E. et al, 2005, *A Challenge for Democracy, Political Parties in Central America, Panama and Dominican Republic*, IDB, IDEA, OAS, UNDP, San José, Costa Rica.

<sup>17</sup> IBID

<sup>18</sup> IBID

<sup>19</sup> Payne, M., Zovatto, D. and Mateo Diaz, M. et al, 2007, *Democracies in Development. Politics and Reform in Latin America*, Inter American Development Bank, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, Washington D.C.

“Citizens across the world have shifted from older and traditional forms of representation, such as political parties and unions, to “newer” modes, such as social movements, informal citizens groups and non-governmental organizations.[ Chandoke Noera]”<sup>20</sup>

Among the different reasons put forward to explain this worldwide phenomenon is the progressively accepted crisis of representation hypothesis.

Another general hypothesis more related to Latin American realities has been advanced to explain the weakening of political parties: “If politics were organized around the state, it was no accident that the state’s retreat disorganized politics”<sup>21</sup>. More specifically it was indicated that

“In other Latin American cases the erosion of historical parties to provide non programmatic side payments to their constituents led either to party collapse (e.g. in Venezuela), increasing voter alienation (Costa Rica), a mixture of both partial collapse and alienation (Colombia), or re crafted patterns of non programmatic cooptation by incumbents (Peru under Fujimori, Argentina under Justicialist governments and Venezuela under Chavez). Uruguay however escaped such rapid party system de-institutionalization.”<sup>22</sup>

Given the different reasons advanced to explain the dire situation of political parties, reasons that refer to traditional parties’ functions as the crisis of representation hypothesis or conditions that affects both new and old parties, it seems necessary to question not only why the political parties had problems fulfilling their traditional responsibilities but also what could now be the new basic functions of political parties.

### **b. Erosion of the traditional functions of political parties.**

In general it is affirmed, the: “Six main functions of political parties can be identified: (a) socialization, (b) mobilization (c) participation, (d) legitimation, (e) representation and, (f) administration or operation of the political regime”<sup>23</sup> These functions in turn can be grouped around the traditional triad: “...(a) representation, intermediation and aggregation of interests , (b) the legitimacy and effectiveness of government administration, and (c) the operation of the political regime or governance...”<sup>24</sup>

This traditional triad is more functionally conceived in terms of a. *governability* that reflects the capacity of political parties to represent, intermediate and aggregate the interests of citizens and thus facilitate the compliance of citizens with the norms and uses of democratic coexistence, b. *governance*, the capacity of political parties to generate

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<sup>20</sup> Cited in Hochsteller Kathryn and Friedman Elisabeth Jay, 2008, *Can Civil Society Organizations Solve the Crisis of partisan Representation in Latin America?* Latin American Politics and Society, Vol. 50 #2.

<sup>21</sup> Cavarozzi, M. and Abal Medina, J.M., 2002, *El asedio a la política. Los partido políticos latinoamericanos en la era neoliberal*, Homo Sapiens Ediciones y KAF, Rosario, Argentina, cited in IDEA

<sup>22</sup> Luna, Juan Pablo, 2007, *Frente Amplio and the Crafting of a Social Democratic Alternative in Uruguay*, Latin American Politics and Society Vol. 49 # 4.

<sup>23</sup> Alcántara, M., 1995, *Partidos políticos y gobernabilidad*, Revista Espacios # 3, Marzo-Junio, San José Costa Rica. Cited in Achard D. and Gonzales.

<sup>24</sup> Achard, D. and Gonzáles, L.E. et al, 2005, *A Challenge for Democracy, Political Parties in Central America, Panama and Dominican Republic*, IDB, IDEA, OAS, UNDP, San José, Costa Rica.

effective and efficient public policies and sustainable private stimuli or in Sartori's terms "government for the people" and *c. legit-regime*, the capacity to perform governability and governance within the respect for liberties and individual and collective rights, as well as the checks and balances of state powers that substantiates democratic regimes or in Sartori's "government by the people".

The representation, intermediation and aggregation functions were largely affected because

"...In party systems based on the mobilization of workers [as opposed to elitist party systems] there was a significant change in the ways in which parties established ties with society. ... At the center of these changes lies the erosion of the political ties that linked the parties to large-scale secondary associations, such as trade unions and peasant organizations, under the old economic model. As social relationships have been restructured according to market principles, these secondary associations have been severely weakened. The relative number of stable [highly unionized] jobs...has decreased, while there has been a dramatic expansion of the work force in small business and the informal sectors."<sup>25</sup>

These phenomena in turn rendered it more difficult for political parties to generate effective policies and thus their governance capabilities diminished and in turn this affected, and was also reinforced by, governability problems.

### **c. Deinstitutionalization, de-massification and de-legitimization affecting the consistency of political parties.**

Some studies describe the effects of the erosion of the traditional triad in three general trends:

"1. ...a de-institutionalization of political representation, as voters have become increasingly independent of party organizations". 2. ...de-massifying of political representation...and...3. the increasingly vertical nature of the bonds between parties and society...horizontal forms of organization based on class interest and solidarity give way to vertical, multi-class networks that depend on the exchange of individualized material and political favors."<sup>26</sup>

It is affirmed that these trends would give "...a rise of increasing delegitimation whose magnitude depends on the depth of an eventual crisis of governance, to the extent that parties stop preparing and creating citizens".<sup>27</sup> In that sense, political parties are expressing their flagging condition. It is even said that "Political parties are no more the main protagonists of political life."<sup>28</sup>, thus their need to analyze how to perform new substantive functions.

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<sup>25</sup> Roberts, Kenneth, 2002, *El sistema de partidos y la transformación de la representación política en la era neoliberal latinoamericana*, cited in Cavarozzi y Medina, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> IBID.

<sup>27</sup> Rivas Leone, Jose A., 2002, *Transformaciones y crisis de los partidos políticos. La nueva configuración del sistema de partidos en Venezuela*, Instituto de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, Working Paper # 202, Barcelona, cited in Cavarozzi y Medina, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Roncaglio, Rafael, 2007, *Los Partidos Andinos: entre la crisis y el cambio*, en Roncagliolo, R. y Meléndez, C., editores, 2007, *La agenda pendiente: los partidos andinos entre la crisis y el cambio*, Agora Democrática, Transparencia, IDEA International, Lima, Perú.

#### **d. Volatility and structural disequilibrium in the political system.**

It is logical to consider that the severe weakening of political parties would lead to the deterioration of political systems. In fact, it is currently considered that political party systems "...have at least three characteristics that affect how well a democratic government functions: (1) their level of institutionalization; (2) their degree of fragmentation; and (3) their degree of polarization." <sup>29</sup>

The progressive deterioration of political parties brought an additional element of weakening of the institutionalization of Latin American party systems. In fact as a sub-regional study affirmed:

Following Mainwaring and Scully (1995) party systems can be considered to be institutionalized when: patterns of interparty competition are relatively stable; parties have fairly stable and deep bases of societal support; parties and elections are viewed as legitimate and as the sole instruments for determining who governs; and party organizations are characterized by reasonably stable rules and structures." <sup>30</sup>

In Latin America, political parties traditionally have a greater volatility than in regions in which democratic systems have been functioning for a long time, such as in parts of Europe.

"In several Latin American countries, the average volatility exceeds the greatest recorded value in this 100-year period of Western European democracy. And in terms of the period averages, more than two-thirds of Latin American countries experienced more electoral volatility than the most volatile European democracy. Over the period, average electoral volatility measurements conceal considerable change in the party systems of some countries." <sup>31</sup>

It is estimated that volatility of political parties has increased at least in some periods during the last three decades in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. "In contrast, Brazil's party system evolved during the period from extreme volatility to reasonable stability." <sup>32</sup>

Probably Guatemala best exemplifies the unrelenting efforts in Latin American countries to try to overcome the weaknesses of political parties through the creation of new political parties. The creation of new political parties with most of the same weaknesses as the existing ones creates the so-called dynamic disequilibrium "in which fluctuations in popular demand...generate important vote shifts but the supply of parties is relatively stable..." Thus the political system is characterized by a systematic increase in its volatility. So what seems clear is that much more important than trying to create new political parties is to look into the emerging modifications of the basic performative functions of political parties in Latin America.

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<sup>29</sup> Achard, D. and Gonzáles, L.E. et al, 2005, *A Challenge for Democracy, Political Parties in Central America, Panama and Dominican Republic*, IDB, IDEA, OAS, UNDP, San José, Costa Rica.

<sup>30</sup> IBID.

<sup>31</sup> IBID

<sup>32</sup> IBID

## **5. Toward efficient political party systems.**

### **a. Democratic governance and political parties.**

In terms of democratic governance, the ideal administration seems to be one that respects human rights and general conditions of political alternation in a framework of checks and balances on state powers, and in addition which is effective in avoiding unemployment, inflation, environmental degradation, rising crime rates, inequality and exclusion, supporting vulnerable groups and promoting gender equality.

Even before the emergence of the global financial and economic crisis and the crumbling of the only-market-solutions, and the resurgence of the public sphere as a protection safeguard for common citizen well being, in Latin America it was found that...

“...regardless of the particular content of policies and the levels of public spending, public opinion toward democracy is influenced most directly by citizens’ perceptions of how effectively public services are delivered in practice...Even though the level of spending is somewhat related to citizen satisfaction with democratic performance...levels of satisfaction with the functioning of public services appear to be even more strongly associated with the degree of satisfaction with democracy.”<sup>33</sup>

For the same degree of freedom, the government which achieves better results in terms of security and employment will be more appreciated and supported. It thus goes without saying that governance, or the quality of the design and execution of public policies and functions, is an essential and integral component of government support.

The thoughts that “in most [Latin American] countries, creating effective democratic governance has proven more difficult than most analysts anticipated in the early 1990’s ” and that “ institutionalized party systems facilitate effective democratic governance”<sup>34</sup> tend to explain why governance flaws affected the stability of political systems and how this was reflected in lower governance capabilities.

### **b. Democratic governance and popular aspirations.**

We must consider that governance capability is one necessary condition for citizen support for democratic systems. But it is not a sufficient condition. Therefore, it is necessary to consider that “Effective democratic governance does not always satisfy popular aspirations...”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Payne, M., Zovatto, D. and Mateo Diaz, M. et al, 2007, *Democracies in Development. Politics and Reform in Latin America*, Inter American Development Bank, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>34</sup> Mainwaring, S. and Scully, T.R., 2008, *Latin America: Eight Lessons for Governance*, Journal of Democracy, Vol. 11, # 3.

<sup>35</sup> IBID.

It is also clear that under some circumstances governments could receive massive citizen support even with clear governance shortcomings in terms of large portions of citizenship temporarily ignored, usually in exchange or in combination with a strong feeling of identity be it ideological, ethnic, clientelistic or a combination of these, resulting in a clientele effect with high appreciation for immediate gains with less concern for long term results. In that sense, "...two types of mechanisms are fundamental for increasing the legitimacy of democratic systems: one type is oriented toward results and the delivery of goods and services, "government for the people" -; the other is oriented toward inputs, or the processes by which decisions are made, "government by the people".<sup>36</sup>

It is an old and long-standing aspiration to have governments that avoid governance shortcomings. With that aim in mind skillful participation is required from political parties in government responsibilities so they could help to avoid unstable process and circumstances. This requires that governments and political parties have the willingness and the skills to sense looming unstable conjunctures, usually displayed through the overheating<sup>37</sup> of political variables that could substantially contribute to the alteration of supposedly well-organized and responsible governments into new ones with no strong governance and/or governability capacities.

The conceptual and practical preoccupations and behaviors that tend to avoid the overheating of political variables, are both directly and indirectly, referred to the need to have a countercyclical political focus.

## **6. Dissimilar countercyclical experiences in Latin America**

### **a. Effects of Latin American learning on counter-cyclical economic mechanisms.**

Latin American countries, facing intense difficulties in the framework of the debt crisis and the so-called lost decade, recognized as a permanent public policy the need to build and consolidate macroeconomic equilibriums which showed that even in the economic field Latin American countries were, with few exceptions, until the last decades of the past century, quite deaf to some essentials premises of the economic process. This contributed to maintaining and probably solidifying channels and mechanisms through which this deafness was transformed into an increased volatility of the business cycle. Consequently, it was even affirmed that volatility *is* the trend in the region.<sup>38</sup>

The high volatility in the economic arena contributed to making Latin America the region with the most intense and widespread spiral of price increases. Thus, during the 80's and

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<sup>36</sup> Payne, M., Zovatto, D. and Mateo Diaz, M. et al, 2007, *Democracies in Development. Politics and Reform in Latin America*, Inter American Development Bank, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>37</sup> Overheating: generating sources and propagation mechanisms that lead to the intensification and amplification of effects that make unviable to keep specific variables, within predetermined margins.

<sup>38</sup> Aguiar, Mark and Gopinath, Gita, 2007, *Emerging Market Business Cycles: The Cycle is the Trend*, Journal of Political Economy., Vol. 115, # 1.

early 90's, three Latin American countries –Bolivia, Nicaragua and Peru - had hyperinflationary processes and Argentina and Brazil very high, persistent inflationary processes. These cases contributed to an average yearly growth in the Consumer Price Index-CPI in Latin America and the Caribbean in 1990 of a staggering 1,188.3 per cent. During the 90's Latin American countries' learning and achievements were so impressive that in 1995 the average CPI growth in Latin America was reduced to 25.8 per cent and at the end of the decade, in 1999, the Latin America average CPI growth was reduced to a single digit: 8.4 percent.<sup>39</sup>

The important structural adjustments of the 90's and in a few countries, the counter-cyclical economic policies that allowed the consolidation of financial reserves, during the boom years, made it possible to build fiscal space for economic reactivation policies in recession periods. In that sense the lessons learned regarding the search for structural equilibriums and countercyclical economic policies show that Latin American countries, while very seriously affected by the present crisis, appear much more institutionally and financially better equipped to face the crisis than during the 80's.

#### **b. Consequences of Latin American disregard for counter-cyclical political mechanisms.**

In the economic field there has been awareness for at least seventy years of the need for explicit conceptual thought and practical efforts oriented towards the design and adequate implementation of countercyclical policies and mechanisms to smooth economic and business cycles. On the contrary, in the political arena, especially in Latin America, there is less concern, and even complete disregard, toward counter-cyclical analysis, tools and mechanisms and towards the crucial importance of a consistent and coherent handling of the “political overheating”.

In Latin American countries pro-cyclical, or at least non-countercyclical, political analysis and attitudes are nurtured by diverse and unfortunately, mutually reinforcing sources. Even though in the economic field, the reforms designed for the stabilization processes were largely discussed by their proponents and operators in terms of the timing and sequence of their implementation, it seems that in the political space there is no need for analyses of time and sequencing of policy implementation. On the contrary, there are at the domestic and at the international level, at least two phenomena that contribute to accentuating the pro-cyclical process in the political arena.

At the domestic level, the increased use by governments of public opinion surveys as guides to the type of policies to be implemented and the timing of their execution, tends, in periods of economic expansion, to increase the pro-cyclical nature of public policies. During economic recessions those surveys usually reduce the political will required to face the costs and trade-offs of countercyclical policies.

At the international level it is paradigmatic that the pro-cyclical role of some financial institutions that in periods of abundance of monetary flows tended to promote public and

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<sup>39</sup> ECLAC, 1997 and subsequent years, *Estudio Económico de América Latina y El Caribe*, Santiago, Chile.

private indebtedness and expenditures and when the economic recession affected the emerging economies, and these were in dire need of fresh resources, the same financial institutions interrupted their financial flows or recommended even more contractionary policies, displaying in that way seriously misguided pro-cyclical orientations.

On the other hand, at the international level, naïve and not properly contextualized considerations, in which NGO's could have a growing role, often convey accumulative and contradictory requirements to stressed political systems in emerging countries. When a political system shows flexibility and increased adaptability to democratic governance, these requests seem to generate pro-cyclical domestic and international demands which tend to overstress both the political system possibilities and the national institutional capabilities.

Besides the above-mentioned domestic and non-domestic significant facilitating conditions towards political pro-cyclical demands, we must also take into account the cultural conditioners of contemporary

“...hypermodernity...distinguished by the way the reign of urgency has become ubiquitous and turned into an ideological matter...Hypermodern society appears as the society in which time is increasingly experienced as a major preoccupation, one in which an increasing pressure on time is exerted in ever wider ways...hypermodern time registers a feeling that time is being increasingly rarefied.”<sup>40</sup>

This sense of urgency is much more pressing in Latin American countries where the usual combination of massive poverty, high levels of inequality, democratic liberties and electoral competition are compounded to generate impatience.

This contributes to the creation of a very complex social situation which would seriously affect the future roles, possibilities and limitations of political parties. The complexity includes millions of citizens without enough time to respond to their not only one but two or even three different jobs. In these cases, the macro sense of urgency is multiplied by an individual factor of micro urgency. It also includes another mass of citizens that “...have a lot of time [that comes] from the cognitive surplus which have been created [and in some aspects masked] over fifty years”<sup>41</sup>. These citizens have a lot of time, but have also a different but equally pressing sense of urgency and an explicit need and demand for “architecture of participation”.<sup>42</sup>

These two different components of the complex social situation of urgency in Latin America tend to transform unsatisfied basic human needs into very pressing social demands and any unanswered social demand into an “empty signifier” essential to consolidate... “populist identities...created by the dichotomization of the political space through the establishment of a political frontier between what [has been called] “unfulfilled political demands” on the one side and the status quo on the other.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Lipovetsky, Gilles and Charles, S. 2005, *Hypermodern times*, Polity.

<sup>41</sup> Shirkyon, Clay, 2008, *Gin, Television, and Social Surplus*, [www.shirky.com](http://www.shirky.com), April, 26.

<sup>42</sup> IBID.

<sup>43</sup> Panizza, Francisco, 2007, *On Political Reason by Ernesto Laclau*. The Political Quarterly, Vol. 77 # 4.

From that point of view, it is possible to say that the combination of pressing demands and unfulfilled political promises in Latin American countries gave birth to populism, not as an ideology –it may be leftist or rightist populism – nor even as a form of government – it can be libertarian, flexible populism as well as authoritarian and rigid- but as a cyclical institution. Cyclical considering that an institution is a “socially sanctioned symbolic network in which a functional component and an imaginary component are combined in variable proportions and relations”<sup>44</sup>. The (cyclical) populist institution is enacted when the new assumed content of unfulfilled social demands – the functional component of institutions - superimpose the expectations – the imaginary component of institutions-of the majority of citizens on a vision that the traditional elites were unable to share with the people.

In this way, we can understand how the political system in a country is significantly affected and realigned, often in a concentrated manner, through the process in which the populist institution is enacted, because most political parties, with the exception of the enactor of the populist institution, are blamed both for the historic failure to fulfil the social demands and for some of the problems that arise in the governance and governability horizon of the administration that trigger the populist institution.

## **7. Counter-cyclical Policies: Easier said than done.**

### **a. The new role of political parties.**

It is affirmed that “...democratic revolution emerged as the transformation process of subordinates (who are ordered) to citizens (who must be convinced)”<sup>45</sup>. It can thus be said that the Informational revolution could be perceived as the process in which network society emerges as “the social structure of our time”<sup>46</sup>. One of the characteristics of this new social structure is that fellow-citizens must be previously connected in order to have the possibility of being convinced as citizens. This network feature should be assumed by political parties if they aspire to recover their role as irreplaceable protagonists of democratic political life.

As connectors, networks are an outstanding aggregative tool. Therefore, instead of competing with other networks, political parties should seek to differentiate themselves from other type of networks in their explicit and legitimate objectives.

Parties, in order to avoid contributing to the disappearing of politics, have limited possibilities of being specifically relevant in the network society. On the other hand,

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<sup>44</sup> Castoriadis, Cornelius, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>45</sup> Roncaglio, Rafael, 2007, *Los Partidos Andinos: entre la crisis y el cambio*, en Roncagliolo, R. y Meléndez, C., editores, 2007, *La política por dentro*, Agora Democrática, Transparencia, IDEA International, Lima, Perú.

<sup>46</sup> Castells, Manuel et al, 2007, *La transición a la sociedad red*, Ariel.

societies do not have many alternatives besides political parties to develop politics as a participatory channel for democratic governance.

Thus political parties or organizations that are generated, maintained and legally recognized as competitors for political power, should seek to renew and replace themselves as the organic intellectuals of the industrial society and become, for the network society, their systemic political operators. In this type of society the first operation is the connection between already aggregated and diversely intermediated citizens' entities. As political operators, political parties should have, as part of the public institutions, transparency obligations. They also should have 'at the same time a democratic right to privacy.'<sup>47</sup>

In order to be able to play a countercyclical role and become relevant major players in political life, political parties must consider that citizens in network society do not look so much to be represented – in the sense of to make it “manifest” “existent/present”<sup>48</sup> because citizens already feel that way. In fact, in a network society and in a globalized world the fact of the presence itself does not seem to be the crucial issue as much as is the type and the identity of that manifested presence: what citizens seek is to be included and projected, the citizens themselves aspiring to be participants in both the inclusion and projection process.

Therefore, the most difficult task of political parties is to get the attention of fellow citizens, while not simply being an echo of their desires and expressed needs, but intelligent processors of their strategic interests. Taking into account that these interests include counter-cyclical considerations, political parties should seek to facilitate doable alliances and initiatives that can help to put the political processes to achieve citizens' strategic interests into operation.

#### **b. New tools and challenges for political parties.**

It is evident that political parties in Latin American countries are in retard vis-à-vis other organizations including civil society movements in the utilization of information and communication technologies-ICT- in their daily performances. While political parties are used to seeking the specialized services of public opinion surveys and marketing strategies in their efforts to respond to the manifested preferences of citizens, political parties in the region seem to have resigned, or at least delegated to other institutions and organizations, the broader systemic use of ICT.

Political parties turning their attention toward citizens, only or mainly during electoral times, would “represent” citizens sporadically and thus precariously. They would not connect to citizens because connection requires a more permanent link. Thus, political parties should change their organizational aptitudes and skills from electoral mobilization

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<sup>47</sup> Magolowondo, Augustine Titani, 2007, *Internal party democracy: the state of affairs and the road ahead*, NIMD Knowledge Center.

<sup>48</sup> Botana, Natalio, quoted in Adrianzen, Alberto, 2009, *La tentación autoritaria en el Perú*, Le Monde Diplomatique edición peruana, Mayo.

for citizen representation toward systemic organization for permanent connection with citizens. One byproduct of this strategic change of competitive skills would be political parties' search for new organizational, communication and information tools that would help them to maintain a potentially permanent connection with fellow citizens. That connection is a pre-requisite that political parties should comply with, if they want to become organic political operators with counter-cyclical capabilities.

The connection with fellow citizens implies that political parties must face at least two crucial challenges. The first one is to connect with fellow citizens in an inclusive manner and thus become a community in the sense that

“Community is not a property, nor is it a territory to be separated and defended against those who do not belong to it. Rather, it is a... gift to the other that also reminds us of our constitutive alterity with respect to ourselves”<sup>49</sup>

To be significant this kind of constructed community developed by political parties must enable the latter to have the possibility to consistently assume their second challenge: to be, initially, political operators from and for a part of the population and subsequently to support policy design and execution for the totality of the population –at national, regional or local level – especially if they are victorious in electoral competitions.

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<sup>49</sup> Esposito, Roberto, cited by Campbell, Timothy, 2005, *Interview with Roberto Esposito*, abdn.ac.uk.

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