



Latin-American governance in crisis: Clash between population's and politicians' interests

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People and power are changing in many ways, and such changes become unstoppable. Currently, humankind has advanced greatly in terms of technology, industrialization, and mass production. In addition, the phenomenon of globalization has led to a new way to understand national borders, has fostered international trade, and has made communication more widespread and efficient. Furthermore, the shifts in the average mentality of the population, about their role in the society and the construction of a nation, have shaped a new conception of needs, and new duties to be met by States.

Nonetheless, Latin-American States and politicians seem to struggle with the aforementioned challenge. The institutions have been hardly adapting, and the political willingness tends to show no interest in encouraging participative democracy, decentralization and high-quality education; since politician's power and wealth will get diminished. This lack of adaptability on the governmental institutions, the clash of interests between politicians and citizens, the lack of political willingness to share decision power, and the corruption of political leaders, make an efficient representation unfeasible and have become the real issue of Latin-American governance[1]. The text firstly explains that it is essential to determine the current shifts on power in order to understand the new population's needs. Then, the analysis of Latin American States governance points out its flaws to propose possible solutions.

Considering current power shifts, Latin-American countries need to figure out their own governance systems. Those countries should consider that power itself has been suffering multiple global transformations. According to Naim (2013) power is becoming "easier to achieve, harder to use, and easier to lose". These changes are an outcome of three current revolutions: The More, Mobility, and Mentality revolutions.

The More revolution suggests that there is more of everything: there are more countries, more people, more food, better education, etc. Additionally, the Mobility revolution states that everything can be transferred longer distances at a cheaper cost. Furthermore, the Mentality revolution establishes that people's perceptions of how to be successful are more achievable. Thanks to information and communication technologies, people can notice that there are countries with better education, higher life quality, stronger economies, etc. As a consequence, people demand more goods and services from their State than governments can provide. (Naim, 2013)

The aforementioned revolutions have shaped people's needs in many ways. Even though the work of several democratic organisms remains visible, "citizens are losing credibility on the function of democratic institutions and international organizations" (Palacios, 2019). Besides, people are losing credibility on their elected politicians, who are perceived by people as not being the proper representatives in the State's institutions. In contrast, people want to be heard and they do not want to feel oppressed by the State.

Representative democracy alone is no longer effective, and neither is a highly centralized and bureaucratic government. According to Montecinos (2009, p. 155), Latin American politicians do not properly implement the participative budget[2] because of the “lack of political willingness to share decision power”. Politicians do not seem to be interested in representing the whole population, but the most wealthy and powerful share.

In Latin America, examples of flawed popular representation by politicians are broad. Colombia’s president, Ivan Duque, had to deal with student, indigenous and professor strikes in his first 261 days of government (Semana, 2019). Moreover, Mauricio Macri’s administration has faced several popular strikes against his economic policies (El País, 2018). Besides, Paraguay has had various violent protests because of its latest constitutional reform (CNN Español, 2017). Regarding the previous facts, it is noticeable the lack of political willingness to attend the popular needs properly.

As regards, there is a clash of interests between representatives and represented. As people want to be heard and to involve in their own government, politicians generally look for their own welfare. Moreover, that welfare usually depends on the power gap between the elites and the rest of the population. Therefore, political elites will try to engage power barriers in order to save their position in the hierarchy.

Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba are examples of the previous construct. Venezuelan population is struggling to survive; however, Nicholas Maduro can afford a lunch in New York (Semana, 2018). Moreover, violent protests in Nicaragua against Daniel Ortega’s administration has left more than 300 people hurt (El País, 2019). Furthermore, Cuba’s regime has caused a wave of illegal maritime migration towards the United States (Aja, 2017), and its currency policies have reduced a lot the acquisition power of the population (Pavel, 2009). As regards, authoritarian governments are not effective in terms of governance in the Latin America.

Authoritarian regimes in Latin America worsen popular representation on State institutions. On the contrary, OAS’ Inter-American Democratic Charter states that it is an obligation to implement democracy correctly[3]. Nonetheless, the democratic system in Latin America must be improved. A correct implementation of participative democracy, plus a well-administrated decentralized system will transform the Latin American States into more effective ones.

Representative democracy in Latin America has shaped problems in regional governance. People delegate the decision-making process fully to their political leaders. Nonetheless, people cannot delegate the quality of the decisions that their leaders will take (Montecinos, 2009). Since Latin American leaders are not usually the proper representatives of people, the quality of their decisions will not satisfy the population. The outcome is that the public policies, carried out by all-powerful politicians, will not solve the problems of the society.

Unlikely, Latin American States must improve participative democracy as OAS’ Inter-American Democratic Charter points. A well-implemented participative democracy will reduce power inequality, will enhance political representation of the population, and will ensure that political leaders carry out better public policies. However, its proper implementation will depend totally on the political willingness to do so.



For instance, Chile has shown advances in terms of democratic governance at a subnational level. Participative budget has shown as being effective, and Lautaro commune exemplifies that: there is an existent political commitment on participative democracy implementation; also, there is a politically active citizenship; and finally, public policies respond to the people's needs (Gaviria, 2012). However, participative democracy remains subjugated to representative democracy at a national level (Montecinos, 2011).

On the other hand, several analysts have stated the multiple advantages of a decentralized administration. In the fiscal sphere, the income source and the public expenditure are closer related; ergo, there is a better "fiscal equivalence". The sociological approach points out that decentralization encourages social participation and improves democratic governability. Public management analysis argues that subnational regions have better control on their investment and expenditure, making the regional management more efficient. Yet, decentralization can also encourage corruption on political leaders; because of the higher autonomy they have. (Montecinos 2005)

The aforementioned facts are crucial objectives to be met by Latin-American States. Nevertheless, participative democracy and decentralization are not a solution per se. Low-quality education, lack of connectivity and poor infrastructure are facts that maintain the power barriers of politicians. Then, those are the main issues to solve before implementing a better participative democracy and a decentralized government.

At first, governments must carry out a better education for people: more inclusive, with higher quality, that must foster citizen participation, encourage being informed about what happens in people's socio-political context, and teach people to interact with social media and internet. Therefore, people will learn how to vote, why to vote, and aid to shape an idea on who to vote for. Afterwards, corrupted politicians and traditional political schemes will lose support. The fact that populism and demagoguery are no longer effective will cause the political death of corrupted politicians, and will make better politicians rise.

Hence, it is crucial to improve transportation and connectivity. The governments must improve public transport, railroads and highways; so, people who live in the peripheries can get to their school or college easier. Furthermore, States must improve connectivity to the network; therefore, more people can use it to know what happens in their socio-political context. With a better quality of transportation and better connectivity; people will be even more educated, will enjoy better opportunities in other parts of the country, and will be encouraged to study.

Thus, there must be an institutional reform that fosters decentralization and participatory democracy. Given that corrupted political elites will lose support, it will be possible to implement decentralization. Moreover, it is a duty to encourage the participation of people in the State institutions; it will diminish the power gap between the society and ensure that public policies actually respond to the demands of the people.

To conclude, the main problems of Latin American governance is the lack of political willingness to share decision power, the insufficient adaptation of State institutions to the changes on power and society, the clash of interests between politicians and citizens, and the corruption of political elites.



However, the solution for the aforementioned issues is hard, and will ironically depend on the political willingness to make the first steps. The solution could be considered as utopian and unfeasible, but it is the only way to build a better future in Latin America. Governments must take into account the OAS' Inter-American Democratic Charter, and respect democracy as that charter points out. Until then, citizens must realize the importance of their vote and their voice, and must use them wisely.