



REVISTA DEL **CLAD**

# **REFORMA Y DEMOCRACIA**

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# DEMOCRACIA

**Y SUS DESAFÍOS EN LA ERA  
DE LOS DESCONTENTOS**

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## Presentación

El número que tenemos el placer y el honor de presentar es la primera Edición Especial de la Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia, en sus 30 años de existencia; en ésta recogemos algunas de las voces más significativas del pasado Congreso del CLAD, el XXIX, realizado en Brasilia. El título “Democracia en tiempos de descontentos” refleja nuestro interés en, contribuir al debate sobre los retos que enfrentan nuestras democracias, y a imaginar y construir soluciones adecuadas.

Nuestro Secretario General, Conrado Ramos Larraburu, ha realizado la Editorial de esta edición, en ésta encontrarán comentarios sobre los discursos y ensayos que incluimos, y sus propias reflexiones sobre un tema del que debemos, sin duda, ocuparnos.

En esta primera edición especial también inauguramos la sección de reseñas, con dos espectaculares contribuciones de Joan Subirats y Pablo Bulcourf; en consistencia, hemos creado nuestro Comité Editorial Adjunto para la sección de Reseñas, lo encuentran en la web como parte del equipo editorial. De aquí en adelante si lo desean pueden enviarnos sus reseñas para ser consideradas.

Y, para no interrumpir nuestra periodicidad, esta edición especial se realiza por fuera de los tres números anuales de la Revista, por lo que nuestras y nuestros lectores encontrarán los números 91-92-

93 (2025), en la medida que se vayan publicando, en nuestra web:  
<https://revista.clad.org/ryd>

Finalmente quiero recordarles que desde agosto del 2024 la revista del CLAD se ha unido al movimiento de acceso abierto, así, la revista garantiza que la investigación y los debates alrededor de temas de gobierno, administración y políticas públicas, estén disponible sin ningún costo para nuestros públicos, alineándose con las políticas de acceso abierto promovidas por declaraciones internacionales como Budapest, Bethesda y Berlín.

Tengo la certeza de que disfrutarán la lectura de esta edición especial, y aprovecho para invitarles a escuchar nuestro Podcast, el cual se suma a la revista como un espacio más de debate y reflexión.



Fraternal saludo,

**Ma. Victoria Whittingham, Ph.D.**

Editora Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia.

Coordinadora Podcast “Voces Iberoamericanas”

Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo (CLAD)



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## Editorial

La edición de este número especial de nuestra revista Reforma y Democracia se enmarca en las reflexiones de destacados actores políticos y académicos que se desarrollaron en nuestro XXIX Congreso Internacional del CLAD, celebrado en Brasilia en noviembre de 2024. El tema central del encuentro fue “la transformación necesaria para un Estado inclusivo, democrático y efectivo”. La elección de este eje central tuvo que ver con nuestro interés por discutir las distintas dimensiones de la administración pública que tanto nos apasionan, pero sin pensarlas aisladas de los procesos más generales que viven la región: la calidad de sus democracias, la solidez institucional de los Estados y la capacidad de incluir a los más vulnerables.

En ese marco, los textos que integran este volumen convergen en una preocupación común: la capacidad de los Estados democráticos y sus gobiernos para sostener su legitimidad y efectividad en contextos de cambio profundo, descontentos ciudadanos, crisis recurrentes y simultáneas. Cada uno de los textos recorre desde distintas miradas estas problemáticas y propone alternativas.

En este Congreso tuvimos además el privilegio de que el expresidente Mujica nos regalara su participación mediante un video. Quizás su concepto fundamental fue la idea de rescatar “un poco

de esperanza burocrática”. En el contexto de los tiempos turbulentos que se viven, y que es destacado por los autores, todos los escritos tienen un poco de esta esperanza burocrática. En otras palabras, la confianza en que los Estados y sus administraciones públicas, aun con sus problemas y deficiencias, es clave para el desarrollo de los países y sus sociedades.

Algunas de las reflexiones que aquí se presentan enfatizan las dimensiones menos exploradas de la democracia y su vínculo con la administración. La democracia solo puede hacerse sostenible si incorpora culturas de participación y colaboración. Informar, consultar y comprometer a la ciudadanía en todas las fases de las políticas públicas es un requisito no solo de legitimidad, sino también de confianza y de resiliencia. Sin ello, los sistemas se arriesgan a la desconexión social, el populismo y el autoritarismo.

Reconstruir instituciones sólidas, fortalecer la gobernanza y hacer de los Estados de derecho democráticos una meta ineludible. En conjunto, estos trabajos ofrecen claves complementarias para pensar el futuro de la gobernanza democrática: fortalecer los Estados para que sean capaces de resistir presiones internas y externas; rediseñar marcos regulatorios y organizacionales que enfrenten riesgos complejos sin generar nuevas vulnerabilidades, y asegurar que la participación y la colaboración ciudadana sean el núcleo de la legitimidad democrática.

Desde el plano político, la expresidenta Bachelet señala el cambio en las subjetividades que es necesario atender. No es suficiente únicamente proveer servicios de forma eficiente, sino que se requiere hacer el esfuerzo por entender que las subjetividades han cambiado y, con ello, algunos de sus valores. La política debe ser capaz de captar y entender lo que sucede a su alrededor. La ministra Dweck, por su parte, señala cómo un Estado verdaderamente transformador debe ser capaz, en primer lugar, de transformarse a sí mismo en múltiples dimensiones: desde promover inclusión social para los grupos históricamente excluidos, liderar

la transición ecológica y enfrentar la emergencia climática, hasta impulsar la transformación digital de la administración pública, para ofrecer servicios ágiles y accesibles entre otros muchos asuntos.

Nuevamente, retomando las palabras de Mujica: “no hay atajos”. Trabajar en el desarrollo institucional requiere alejarse de las posturas populistas y construir reglas de juego para fortalecer los Estados de derecho y construir capital social, evitando capturas corporativas. Desde el CLAD, como organismo internacional multilateral, queremos ser parte de la discusión; estamos convencidos además de que no es posible discutir y poner en práctica la modernización de la administración pública sin considerar su entorno político e institucional. Por ello, esperamos que este número especial colabore a la reflexión y el debate en nuestra región. Trabajemos juntos para enfrentar estos desafíos.

**Conrado Ramos Larraburu**

Secretario General del CLAD



**Esther Dweck**

Ministra da Gestão e da  
Inovação em Serviços  
Públicos (MGI), Brasil

## Discurso de abertura do Congresso do CLAD

26 de novembro de 2024

Excelentíssimas autoridades presentes, painelistas, conferencistas e participantes, senhoras e senhores,

É com grande satisfação que dou início ao 29º Congresso do Centro Latino-Americano de Administração para o Desenvolvimento [CLAD]. Criado há mais de 50 anos, o CLAD é um organismo internacional estratégico, com a missão de promover o fortalecimento das capacidades institucionais dos países ibero-americanos e a transformação de nossas administrações públicas. Esse mandato do CLAD é hoje mais relevante do que nunca.

Nas primeiras décadas deste século, duas grandes crises desafiaram a atuação dos Estados nacionais: a crise macroeconômica de 2008 e a pandemia da covid-19 em 2020. A resposta à primeira trouxe alterações nas regras fiscais de muitos países, buscando maior flexibilidade, especialmente em contexto de forte concentração econômica. Já no caso da segunda, o Estado foi instado a assumir a coordenação dos esforços para combater a doença e mitigar seus impactos sociais e econômicos.

Mas os desafios não pararam por aí.

Nessa esteira, outras crises assolaram os países, como a ambiental e climática, o aumento das desigualdades entre indivíduos e nações, e o intensificar da competição geopolítica, gerando efeitos desestabilizadores globais. A revolução digital, por sua vez, ampliou a complexidade e a interconexão dessas situações, trazendo tanto oportunidades quanto riscos.

Nesse cenário de múltiplas crises, o movimento histórico parece se inclinar novamente para um maior reconhecimento da relevância do papel do Estado na superação dos pro-

blemas contemporâneos. Devemos aproveitar essa chance para fortalecer as capacidades institucionais e promover o diálogo político.

Enfrentamos, assim, um duplo desafio: revitalizar o espírito reformista e estratégico que orienta os debates sobre desenvolvimento e governança econômica global e adaptá-lo às demandas e complexidades do presente.

No evento “Estados do futuro”, que realizamos recentemente no âmbito do G20, discutimos desafios contemporâneos como mudanças climáticas, transformação digital, desigualdades persistentes, novos arranjos geopolíticos e várias outras temáticas que exigem Estados com capacidades renovadas e ampliadas.

Na presidência brasileira do G20, elegemos como prioridades a reforma da governança global, as três dimensões do desenvolvimento sustentável (econômica, social e ambiental) e o combate à fome, à pobreza e à desigualdade.

Nesse contexto, temos defendido que a efetiva atuação do Estado é fundamental não apenas em momentos de crise, mas também como promotor contínuo do desenvolvimento. Essa visão se alinha à missão do CLAD e ao tema deste congresso — “A transformação necessária para um Estado inclusivo, democrático e efetivo”.

Um Estado transformador precisa ser, ele próprio, transformado. E essa transformação precisa ocorrer em múltiplas dimensões. Precisamos desenvolver capacidades para, sobretudo:

- reduzir desigualdades e promover inclusão social, especialmente para grupos historicamente marginalizados;
- fortalecer a democracia e a participação cidadã em todos os níveis de governo;
- promover a transição ecológica e enfrentar a emergência climática com políticas efetivas;
- liderar a transformação digital da Administração Pública, garantindo serviços mais ágeis e acessíveis;
- promover a igualdade de gênero e raça de forma transversal em todas as políticas públicas;
- implementar políticas públicas inclusivas baseadas em evidências e orientadas por resultados;

- reconstruir uma Administração Pública profissional, justa e cidadã, que seja capaz de atender às necessidades de sociedades em mutação.

Nesse contexto de transformação, olhando em especial para a América Latina e para o Caribe, tenho a satisfação de anunciar, como presidenta do CLAD, duas importantes iniciativas.

Primeiro, a entrega do relatório Estado, democracia e desigualdade: uma perspectiva latino-americana, desenvolvido em parceria com o Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento, o PNUD. Como explicar que muitos países se democratizaram, promoveram reformas do Estados e, ainda assim, persistem as desigualdades? Este trabalho se inspirou no histórico relatório do PNUD A democracia na América Latina: para uma democracia de cidadãos e cidadãos, publicado há mais de 20 anos, oferecendo um diagnóstico atual sobre os desafios de nossas democracias.

Mais recentemente, o assunto foi abordado em outro documento, o relatório de desenvolvimento humano de 2021: Presos em uma armadilha: alta desigualdade e baixo crescimento na América Latina e no Caribe. Nosso novo relatório revela uma realidade preocupante: apenas 40% dos latino-americanos estão satisfeitos com suas democracias, e mais da metade aceitaria governos não democráticos que resolvessem seus problemas.

A confiança no Poder Executivo tem caído e os partidos políticos têm perdido credibilidade.

Mas há esperança.

Nas últimas décadas, vários países implementaram reformas constitucionais transformadoras. Argentina, Brasil, Costa Rica, Peru e República Dominicana fortaleceram a participação feminina na política. Brasil, Colômbia e Equador avançaram na inclusão racial. Bolívia e Equador criaram autonomias territoriais para povos indígenas. Essas conquistas provam que podemos construir democracias mais inclusivas e igualitárias.

Em última análise, a publicação nos ajuda ainda a compreender como evoluíram as relações entre Estado, democracia e desigualdade em nossa região, e quais são os caminhos para fortalecer nossas instituições no combate às desigualdades.

A segunda iniciativa que eu gostaria de enfatizar aqui olha para o futuro. O Brasil sediará, em 2025, a COP-30, um momento decisivo para as negociações climáticas globais.

Como contribuição a esse debate, o CLAD desenvolverá um relatório sobre capacidades estatais para a adaptação climática na América Latina, a ser entregue no próximo ano. Esse trabalho será fundamental para compreendermos como nossos Estados podem implementar políticas efetivas de adaptação às mudanças climáticas, promovendo uma resposta resiliente e inclusiva.

O CLAD possui forte representação dos países do Sul Global. As nações que integram esse grupo têm longa tradição de pensar, em termos próprios, a si mesmo e ao mundo.

Sabemos que processos de desenvolvimento não se dão da mesma forma em diferentes lugares. Cada país tem suas especificidades e escolhas, e a diversidade de perspectivas e experiências nacionais aqui reunida é um grande patrimônio político do CLAD.

Este é um momento de reposicionamento do CLAD no cenário internacional. Nossa organização deve ampliar seu papel como ator relevante nas grandes discussões estratégicas sobre o futuro do Estado, em diálogo com todos os demais organismos internacionais que pensam o desenvolvimento regional e global.

O CLAD é um espaço único de encontro entre gestão pública e academia, em que teoria e prática se complementam para enfrentar os desafios concretos de nossas sociedades.

É aqui que gestores públicos e estudiosos podem trocar reflexões e experiências sobre:

- inovação em serviços públicos e modernização administrativa;
- governo digital e novas tecnologias aplicadas à gestão;
- políticas de gestão de pessoas e desenvolvimento de lideranças;
- participação social, transparência e controle social;
- governança colaborativa e relações intergovernamentais; e
- desafios para a consolidação e preservação das instituições democráticas.

Como ministra da Gestão e da Inovação em Serviços Públicos do Brasil, defendo que o Estado do futuro deve ser verde, digital e inclusivo. Um Estado capaz de liderar a transformação digital sem deixar ninguém para trás, de promover desenvolvimento sustentável com justiça social e de fortalecer a democracia com participação efetiva.

A importância do Estado não se limita a momentos de crises agudas. O Estado, como o desenvolvimento, é um projeto de longo prazo: não pode ser “ligado” ou “desligado” no

apertar de um botão. Construir suas capacidades, inclusive aquelas a serem acionadas na prevenção e na resposta a emergências, é um trabalho de acúmulo contínuo.

Este é o momento de reimaginarmos as capacidades estatais necessárias para o futuro. O CLAD tem papel fundamental nessa discussão, como espaço de pensamento crítico e de articulação regional para a transformação do Estado.

Nossa região tem uma longa tradição de problematização, a partir de sua própria perspectiva, seus caminhos para o desenvolvimento.

O CLAD é parte dessa tradição.

Eu termino a minha fala com um breve comentário sobre a programação dos próximos dias. Nesta edição do CLAD, demos um passo significativo ao equilibrar as discussões acadêmicas com debates sobre gestão, bem como balancear as abordagens sobre administração e políticas públicas.

Essa nova perspectiva reflete nossa visão de transformação do Estado, em que a gestão é o suporte para a produção de políticas públicas sustentadas por princípios fundamentais de diversidade, inclusão e democracia. Trouxemos experiências práticas e debates importantes, como serviços compartilhados e inteligência artificial, promovendo um intercâmbio valioso de boas práticas que fortalece nossa capacidade de implementação de políticas efetivas.

Convido a todas as pessoas presentes a participarem ativamente das discussões que se seguirão nos próximos dias.

Em nome do CLAD e do MGI, agradeço à Enap e à Flacso a parceria e a todos os patrocinadores o apoio fundamental ao Congresso.

Que este congresso fortaleça nossa capacidade coletiva de construir Estados mais fortes, sustentáveis e efetivos para nossas sociedades.

Muito obrigada!

## Sobre a autora

### Esther Dweck

Ministra da Gestão e da Inovação em Serviços Públicos. É professora associada do Instituto de Economia da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (IE-UFRJ) e doutora em Economia pela UFRJ. Durante o período de doutorado, realizou estudos na Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, em Pisa, na Itália.

Entre 2011 e 2016, atuou no Ministério do Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão, onde foi chefe da assessoria econômica e secretária de orçamento federal. Foi subchefe de análise e acompanhamento de políticas governamentais da Casa Civil.

Em 2021, o Conselho Federal de Economia concedeu a Esther Dweck o prêmio de Mulher Economista do Ano.

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## **La transformación necesaria para un Estado inclusivo, democrático y efectivo**

Hoy, para mí, es un día muy importante porque toda mi vida mi opción ha sido ser funcionaria pública. Siempre he trabajado con funciones públicas, en distintos grados, partiendo desde un nivel bajo como profesional hasta llegar a ser ministra y luego presidenta.

Me han pedido que hable sobre “La transformación necesaria para un Estado democrático, efectivo e inclusivo”. Obviamente, en el tiempo que tengo, no voy a desvelar todos los elementos clave; voy a hacer algunas menciones, algunos elementos...

Pero cuando estamos hablando de la transformación necesaria de un Estado, no podemos pensar en abstracto. Tenemos que pensar en un Estado en un contexto mundial, regional y específico. El ámbito mundial no es el más auspicioso, ¿no? Tenemos un mundo con grandes desafíos, grandes crisis, y una cantidad enorme de incertidumbre e inestabilidad. Las guerras que hemos visto en los últimos tiempos —no solo la que todo el mundo menciona, que es, sin duda, la de Ucrania, y la tragedia en Gaza— también incluyen tragedias en África, como en Sudán, Haití y en tantas otras partes.

El año 2023 fue el año con más conflictos armados desde 1945; esta es una realidad que, muchas veces, desde América Latina, no tenemos presente.

Enfrentamos una triple crisis planetaria; hablamos habitualmente de cambio climático, pero en las Naciones Unidas hablamos no solo de cambio climático, sino también de crisis planetaria. Esta es tal vez la amenaza más grave para la humanidad, porque incluye la alta contaminación y la cantidad de muertes prematuras por polución, así como la pérdida de biodiversidad y el irrespeto a la naturaleza.

También enfrentamos consecuencias como las altas migraciones, los desplazamientos internos y la inseguridad alimentaria. Además, estamos en un momento en el que, además, se celebran elecciones en Estados Unidos, cuyo resultado no sabemos cómo evolucionará.

Tenemos que repensar muchas de las estrategias que hemos considerado válidas en el pasado para que sigan siendo pertinentes en esta nueva realidad internacional. Por cierto, debemos volver a imaginarnos cómo ser capaces de fortalecer el multilateralismo, convencidos de que los desafíos que enfrentamos en cada país son, en gran medida, globales. Si no somos capaces de integrarnos y de tener un multilateralismo fuerte, es muy probable que no logremos superar esos tremendos desafíos.

Me gustaría referirme someramente al contexto en América Latina. Nuestra región ha experimentado cambios políticos, sociales y económicos. Enfrentamos desafíos estructurales que se combinan con shocks económicos, cambios climáticos, geopolíticos y tecnológicos. A esto se suman las crisis de inseguridad alimentaria y energética, el alza del costo de la vida, así como la desigualdad de género.

Si bien es cierto que, si miramos veinte años atrás, ha habido cambios significativos en nuestra región, marcados por avances tecnológicos, mejoras en educación y salud, y un esfuerzo por avanzar en la igualdad de género —porque, no faltaba más, las mujeres somos poco más de la mitad de la población y, por tanto, representamos también la mitad del potencial de cambio—. Todos estos avances son insuficientes. Incluso, tras la pandemia, en varios de estos aspectos hubo retrocesos importantes.

Quiero recordar aquí también que estamos a solo seis años de alcanzar la fecha para lograr la Agenda 2030 y, según ya nos ha informado Naciones Unidas (ONU), el mundo está más lejos de alcanzar los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible que hace cuatro años. Además, en el ámbito global hemos retrocedido en una cantidad de objetivos clave como la acción climática, la protección de la naturaleza, la seguridad alimentaria, la reducción de la pobreza y de la desigualdad, y la igualdad de género.

Hace tiempo que no veo ninguna resolución de las Naciones Unidas que hable de género. Ya desapareció la palabra “género” e incluso la referencia a las mujeres también es escasa. En la resolución de salud del año pasado no hay ningún elemento vinculado a las mujeres. Entonces, hay un retroceso importante en muchos de estos componentes que dábamos por ganados. Creo que, en el tema de género en particular, cada vez que avanzamos, hay sectores de la sociedad que quieren retroceder. Por eso, hombres y mujeres debemos seguir trabajando juntos para que esto no suceda.

La pandemia por COVID-19 mostró con toda claridad la importancia de los Estados y del sector público. Algunos lo hicieron mejor que otros, pero si no hubiera sido por los Estados, la verdad es que no habría habido respuesta a una tragedia tan grande, porque estos buscaron soluciones reales a la pandemia y respondieron a la ciudadanía frente a sus necesidades. Como digo, algunos lo hicieron mejor que otros. Lo que no logramos, eso sí, fue que los Estados entendieran que esto era una pandemia, un desafío global, y que, por lo tanto, debía abordarse globalmente.

Cada Estado se rascó con sus propias uñas; no hubo solidaridad. Sí la hubo en el mundo científico, que compartió conocimiento para poder desarrollar la vacuna. Pero los Estados, durante mucho tiempo, enfrentaron todo de forma aislada. Luego se sumó el sector privado, pero, en verdad, creo que el Estado fue central. Aquellas personas que no creen en el papel del Estado, que creen que hay que disminuir su tamaño, deberían considerar que necesitamos un Estado fuerte, musculoso, que tenga la capacidad de responder a los desafíos de su ciudadanía.

Esto no quiere decir que tenga que ser gigante, sino que debe tener el tamaño adecuado, el que se necesite, pero debe ser fuerte. Fuerte también en el sentido de sólido. Es importante que el Estado tenga ciertas características —de las que hablaremos hoy— para que podamos acelerar el progreso de nuestra región.

En primer lugar, el Estado tiene que ser democrático. Esto me lleva a una de las principales preocupaciones de los últimos tiempos: el debilitamiento de la democracia en la región. Ustedes podrían pensar que todos los expresidentes somos muy pesimistas, porque Pepe (Mujica) también habló de lo mismo. No, yo digo que somos realistas, que observamos la realidad. Ahora que no somos presidentes, tenemos más tiempo para observarla, porque cuando se está en el Gobierno, lo urgente se come lo importante, ¿no es verdad? Siempre se está respondiendo a las crisis.

Yo también quiero sumarme a lo que dijo Pepe, pero esto lo vengo diciendo hace mucho tiempo: debemos dudar de todos quienes ofrecen soluciones rápidas y fáciles a problemas complejos, porque sabemos que eso no existe. Así, lo único que conseguiremos es socavar y erosionar los controles y equilibrios institucionales necesarios para una democracia duradera.

En algunos países existen carencias institucionales que pueden favorecer el auge de grupos de extrema derecha, con una clara impronta populista y, en algunos casos, incluso autoritaria o autocrática.

En el pasado, en nuestra región, perdimos la democracia a través de golpes de Estado. Esa fue nuestra experiencia: se implantaba una dictadura y perdíamos la democracia. Uno de los problemas que hemos visto en los últimos tiempos es que hay líderes que son electos democráticamente, pero que no creen en la democracia. Una vez en el poder, erosionan las instituciones y violan los derechos humanos, aunque digan que lo hacen porque representan la voluntad del pueblo.

Nos encontramos también con ciertos grupos de ultraderecha que no creen verdaderamente en la democracia y lo dicen abiertamente. Pero hay otros que, aunque llegan al poder por medios democráticos, luego destruyen los elementos básicos de la democracia.

En el estudio de IDEA Internacional, *Diseñar resistencias*. Las instituciones democráticas y la amenaza del retroceso, se plantea que un diseño institucional sólido podría reforzar la resistencia de la democracia. Para ello, es necesario revisar las debilidades de los marcos democráticos en nuestros países y mejorarlos. Allí se aborda la debilidad institucional, porque sin instituciones fuertes y autónomas —por ejemplo, en el ámbito judicial— es muy difícil que las personas creen realmente en la democracia.

Según IDEA Internacional, entre 2016 y 2021, el número de países que se movían hacia el autoritarismo era más del doble que el número de países que avanzaban hacia la democracia. Esto no ocurre solo en nuestra región; lo hemos visto también en el mundo, como en las últimas elecciones europeas, por ejemplo.

El Latinobarómetro nos ha mostrado que el apoyo a la democracia ha disminuido en la región. El número de personas que dicen que “en algunas circunstancias, un gobierno autoritario puede ser preferible a uno democrático” aumentó del 13 % en 2020 al 17 % en 2023. Todavía hay más personas que creen que la democracia es el mejor sistema, pero ha ido creciendo el número de quienes —incluso jóvenes— piensan que prefieren un gobierno autoritario, pero eficiente, a uno democrático que no cumple con lo que la gente espera. Parece que esta cifra aumentó en todos los países, salvo en Panamá.

Ahora, todos sabemos que la democracia no es un sistema perfecto, pero sin duda es el mejor que tenemos, porque es el único que cuenta con mecanismos para corregir sus propias falencias. Debemos proteger la democracia porque, además, es el único sistema capaz de mantener la paz, de apuntar al desarrollo sostenible y de proteger los derechos humanos y las libertades fundamentales de todas las personas, y no solo de unas pocas. Esto se conecta con la necesidad de tener un Estado efectivo, porque para que las personas confíen en la democracia, necesitamos que esta cumpla las promesas hechas a la ciudadanía.



En inglés diríamos: *democracy needs to deliver*. La democracia debe asegurar las condiciones de vida que las personas necesitan —comida, vivienda, educación, salud— y debe considerar su participación en ella. Es la única forma de que el compromiso de las personas esté del lado de defender la democracia.

En el año 2019, cuando yo era Alta Comisionada de Derechos Humanos, se produjo en Chile un estallido social. Pero ese mismo año, y hasta antes de la pandemia, en 80 países la gente estaba movilizada en las calles. Estudiando todo esto, nos dimos cuenta de que las personas estaban profundamente desilusionadas de la democracia. Esto ocurrió en todas las regiones del mundo, porque la democracia no estaba entregando los resultados esperados, ni desde el punto de vista político ni desde el económico. La democracia no había mejorado la vida de una gran cantidad de personas.

Parte de la desconfianza, frustración y desilusión de las personas, se debió a que los gobiernos no estaban respondiendo a sus necesidades. También influyeron factores que ya se han mencionado aquí: la crisis de representatividad, la crisis de legitimidad, la crisis de confianza en el mundo político, en los parlamentarios, en la justicia, e incluso, en algunos países, en las iglesias, las fuerzas armadas y las policías.

El último Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano Global del PNUD, correspondiente a 2023-2024, aborda lo que se llama la “paradoja de la democracia”: un fenómeno en el que la gente valora la democracia como ideal, pero percibe que los sistemas actuales no funcionan. Aunque el 29 % de la población mundial vive en gobiernos democráticos, el 68 % siente que tiene poca o ninguna influencia sobre las decisiones de su gobierno. Esta falta de efectividad ha llevado a un aumento significativo en el apoyo a líderes que eluden las reglas democráticas.

Algo me ha tenido pensando hace mucho tiempo: el cambio de las subjetividades. Las sociedades actuales, especialmente los jóvenes que nacieron en la era digital y están acostumbrados a la inmediatez, tienen otra manera de relacionarse con el mundo. Esto nos obliga, como funcionarios públicos, a enfrentarnos a una realidad que vive y piensa de forma distinta, donde las subjetividades son muy diversas y donde temas como la migración, la criminalidad o el crimen organizado se han vuelto centrales en la vida de las personas.

En este contexto de subjetividad negativa, aunque cumplamos lo que prometimos, la gente puede tener una percepción negativa. Sienten que fue insuficiente, que no se cumplió completamente o que lo hicimos porque estábamos obligados. Digo esto porque he estado profundamente involucrada en estos temas, tratando de entender mi propia sociedad.

Por eso, creo que cuando pensamos en el Estado, no basta con analizar cómo podemos mejorarlo o innovarlo. Tenemos que entender muy bien quiénes son sus usuarios y cómo han cambiado, para poder ofrecer respuestas que realmente se hagan cargo de sus dudas y cuestionamientos.

Siempre he dicho que, para que un Estado sea efectivo, las políticas públicas deben adaptarse a las necesidades de las personas, y no al revés. No significa que cada persona deba tener una política pública específica, sino que estas deben responder a realidades diversas. Esto nos lleva a la necesidad de que el Estado sea también más inclusivo, para que las personas vean y sientan cómo las políticas mejoran su vida.

Y vuelvo entonces a otra obsesión mía: el tema de la interseccionalidad. Este es un concepto muy antiguo, pero tal vez su relevancia se hizo mucho más evidente durante la pandemia, porque el virus podía afectar a cualquier persona, pero su impacto variaba según las características —yo diría condicionantes— de cada una.

Durante la pandemia vimos cómo esta afectaba mucho más a los sectores vulnerables, históricamente excluidos, discriminados o marginados del acceso a servicios. Por ejemplo, al acceso a un diagnóstico adecuado y rápido, o a la provisión de salud. Entonces vimos que las más afectadas eran las mujeres, las niñas, las personas mayores, las personas con discapacidad, quienes vivían en zonas rurales o en situación de pobreza, las personas migrantes, refugiadas y desplazadas, las personas de la diversidad sexual, las personas afrodescendientes y las pertenecientes a pueblos indígenas.

Esto ocurrió no porque estas poblaciones fueran biológicamente más vulnerables, sino porque han sido históricamente marginadas. Si no las incluimos en nuestras políticas públicas —y habitualmente no lo hacemos porque no tenemos los datos ni los cruces necesarios—, seguiremos dejándolas atrás. Sabemos cuántos hombres y mujeres hay en nuestra sociedad, cuántos pobres y no pobres, cuánta gente vive en zonas rurales o urbanas. Podemos estimar cuántas personas viven con discapacidad, cuántas son migrantes, refugiadas o desplazadas, cuántas pertenecen a la diversidad sexual, y en algunos países tenemos información sobre afrodescendientes o pueblos indígenas. Pero no tenemos los cruces: no sabemos cuántos adultos mayores con discapacidad viven en la pobreza rural, por ejemplo. Sin esos cruces, lo más probable es que, al diseñar políticas públicas, sigamos dejando a los que están atrás aún más atrás.

Entonces, he aprendido a lo largo de mi vida que las políticas no pueden ser neutrales: tienen que considerar a quienes están más atrás. Por lo tanto, necesitamos poder cruzar dis-



tintos datos que muchos países de la región aún no tienen. Pero, para que nuestros Estados sean más efectivos e inclusivos, también necesitamos que se hagan cargo de la desigualdad que ha marcado la historia de nuestra región. Desde hace muchos años, América Latina ha sido descrita como la región más desigual del mundo.

Siempre hablamos de la desigualdad socioeconómica. De acuerdo con el reporte de la CEPAL *Panorama Social de América Latina y el Caribe 2023*, 181 millones de personas viven en la pobreza en la región, y 70 millones en extrema pobreza. Solo en el año 2020, según datos del Banco Mundial, la pandemia empujó a aproximadamente 97 millones más de personas a la extrema pobreza, un revés que revirtió años de progreso en la reducción de la pobreza. Sin duda, la reducción de la pobreza debe ser la piedra angular de nuestros esfuerzos colectivos para avanzar en materia de igualdad.

Creo que la iniciativa del presidente Lula sobre la alianza global contra la pobreza y el hambre, y su aprobación, es una gran noticia. Yo estuve en la reunión en que se aprobó con los ministros de Finanzas en Río, luego de la actividad con la ministra Dweck, y también fue aprobada en el G20. Ojalá que esta prioridad que el presidente Lula le dio al G20 sea continuada por Sudáfrica y que siga dando resultados positivos.

Sin embargo, hoy me gustaría referirme en particular a la desigualdad de oportunidades, que está muy vinculada con las condiciones heredadas.

La semana pasada participé en un congreso sobre desigualdades en Latinoamérica, donde el académico brasileño Francisco Ferreira —quien está en la London School of Economics, dirige el Instituto Internacional de Desigualdades, y creció en São Paulo— planteó que más de la mitad de la desigualdad actual en la región se puede explicar por diferencias heredadas, como el lugar de nacimiento, el entorno familiar, el género o la etnia.

Como dije en mi presentación, es más importante —llamémosle así— el código postal que el código genético cuando hablamos de desigualdades. De hecho, los dos factores que más influyen en los ingresos de la próxima generación son la educación de los padres y el lugar donde viven, es decir, el lugar de nacimiento.

Esto se debe a que los padres con más recursos financieros suelen tener también más recursos educacionales y culturales. Entonces, los niños y niñas reciben más herramientas, no solo por el barrio en el que se desenvuelven, sino también por el vocabulario que aprenden, la calidad de la educación y de la salud a la que acceden. En el mundo actual, probablemente tendrán un computador desde muy temprana edad y acceso a lo digital. Todas estas venta-

jas se acumulan a lo largo de la vida. Lo mismo ocurre, pero en sentido inverso, cuando no se tienen esas oportunidades.

Por eso, el Estado debe emparejar la cancha de la desigualdad para todos y todas.

La desigualdad fue siempre una de mis principales preocupaciones. Así, en mis gobiernos nos preocupamos por aumentar los cupos y el acceso a salas cuna y jardines infantiles. Creamos el programa Chile Crece Contigo para acompañar, proteger y apoyar a todos los niños, niñas y adolescentes, junto a sus familias, a través de un sistema integrado de intervenciones sociales, desde el embarazo hasta los nueve años.

Nos preocupamos también de ampliar el acceso a la educación superior. Dada la diferencia en la calidad de la educación recibida en la escuela, creamos un programa de acceso y acompañamiento a la educación superior para los jóvenes provenientes de sectores más vulnerables.

Además, impulsamos un conjunto enorme de iniciativas de innovación y mejoramiento de la gestión pública. Creo que esta instancia del Congreso es clave para compartir experiencias, porque muchas veces no hay que inventar la rueda, sino adaptar lo que ha funcionado en otro país a la realidad específica de cada uno.

En América Latina, la desigualdad genera un profundo malestar, así como descontento y desconfianza en el sistema político, porque las personas perciben una distribución injusta de los privilegios en nuestros países. Sobre todo, si hay algo que molesta mucho a la gente, es la desigualdad en el trato digno y la falta de respeto hacia ellos.

Creo que eso también es un llamado a quienes hemos trabajado o trabajamos en el sector público, porque muchas veces no podemos hacer todo lo que la gente quisiera. Pero si damos buenas explicaciones, si somos capaces de tratarlos con afecto, con respeto, con dignidad, las personas lo valoran enormemente.

Amigos y amigas, necesitamos que nuestro Estado sea más democrático, efectivo e inclusivo para que las personas valoren la democracia y no quieran optar por gobiernos autoritarios o populistas. Para lograrlo, nuestro gobierno debe estar basado en principios de igualdad, participación inclusiva, respeto por los derechos humanos y el Estado de derecho.

Yo creo profundamente en la participación inclusiva. Cuando fui ministra, desarrollamos consejos de hospitales y de consultorios, donde se sentaban juntos la comunidad y los profesionales. Los profesionales podían conocer qué cosas incomodaban a los usuarios y me-



jorar la atención, mientras que la comunidad entendía las limitaciones y los problemas de recursos que enfrentaban los centros de salud. Juntos, comprendiendo cada realidad, eran capaces de encontrar soluciones.

Hice muchas comisiones para abordar temas importantes. Tanto fue así que me acusaron de tener “comisionitis”. Curiosamente, quienes me acusaron luego repitieron el modelo cuando hicieron parte del Gobierno. Pero, en fin, así es la vida.

Por eso, insisto: nuestro gobierno debe estar basado en principios de igualdad, participación inclusiva, respeto por los derechos humanos y el Estado de derecho. Las instituciones deben ser transparentes y rendir cuentas para que las personas puedan confiar en sus resultados. Además, las personas necesitan poder expresar sus opiniones libremente y participar en los procesos para que estos sean verdaderamente democráticos.

Creo que las personas son razonables cuando se les habla con la verdad, cuando se explican las limitaciones o por qué una promesa no se pudo cumplir, ya sea porque cambió el contexto mundial o el espacio fiscal, entre otros factores.

Lo que sí siempre recomiendo a quienes quieren dedicarse a la política es que no prometan lo que saben que no podrán cumplir, porque esa es una de las principales razones de la pérdida de confianza.

Ahora, me gustaría que nos preguntáramos: *¿cuál es el papel que está jugando cada uno de nosotros y qué decisiones tomaremos para ser agentes de cambio activo en nuestros países?* Nuestra región necesita liderazgos que valoren y protejan la democracia. En un ambiente de creciente polarización política, es importante que cada uno de nosotros sea promotor del diálogo, la colaboración y la disposición a llegar a acuerdos.

Siempre debemos recordar que en el centro de la política están las personas, y que el objetivo es mejorar su calidad de vida. Ese debiera ser el motor que nos mueva día a día. Es por nuestros hombres y mujeres, niñas y niños, que debemos avanzar en las políticas que se necesitan.

Por otro lado, en nuestro mundo interconectado, la acción colectiva es la única forma de avanzar en una agenda de desarrollo inclusiva que no deje a nadie atrás y que se haga cargo de los desafíos que ninguna nación puede resolver por sí sola. Es también la única forma de avanzar en la Agenda 2030.

Fortalezcamos nuestra cooperación e integración regional. Conversábamos con Conrado (Ramos): esta es la región con el nivel más bajo de comercio intrarregional, y eso es absurdo. Tenemos tantas potencialidades y tantas posibilidades, ¿no?

Cuidemos nuestras instituciones democráticas y transformemos nuestros Estados para que sean democráticos, efectivos e inclusivos. Esa es la única forma de vivir en una sociedad mejor, que considere a todos y todas, y que no deje a nadie atrás.

Hay días en que uno se siente pesimista al mirar el mundo, ¿no es verdad? Pero yo siempre repito una frase que le copié —y siempre doy los créditos— al arzobispo sudafricano Desmond Tutu, quien se describía como un rehén o prisionero de la esperanza.

Creo que el mundo está cambiando, que es complejo, que cada región, cada país, enfrenta desafíos enormes. Pero quiero llamarlos a que no nos rindamos, a que sigamos trabajando con entusiasmo, con sentido de urgencia y compromiso, con amor y respeto, para asegurar a todos y todas un presente y un futuro mejor en nuestra región.

¡Muito obrigada, muchas gracias!

## Sobre la autora

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Es una política chilena que ocupó la presidencia de Chile de 2006 a 2010 y de 2014 a 2018, en representación del Partido Socialista de Chile. En el 2010, fue nombrada como primera directora ejecutiva de ONU Mujeres, organismo de la ONU que vela por la igualdad de género y el empoderamiento de la mujer. Fue designada Alta Comisionada de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en el 2018.

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## **América Latina en la era de los descontentos**

### **Latin America in the age of discontent**

### **A América Latina na era dos descontentamentos**

#### **Resumen**

El argumento del artículo es que el mundo ha entrado en un cambio de época que el artículo denomina “la era de descontentos,” caracterizada por la volatilidad política y el auge de populismos de diversa naturaleza. Si gobernar se ha vuelto más difícil en la era de los descontentos en las economías avanzadas, lo mismo y más aún se aplica a América Latina. En este contexto, tres crisis caracterizan a la región: de desarrollo, de crecimiento, y de representación. Las tres crisis están interrelacionadas y no comenzaron con el cambio de época. No obstante, este las retroalimenta, profundiza sus repercusiones y les da nuevas características, las cuales impactan negativamente en la calidad de la democracia en la región. El artículo concluye que las dislocaciones del orden político y económico que caracterizan el cambio de época, combinan peligros, incertidumbres y oportunidades para la región. Neutralizar los peligros, afrontar las incertidumbres y aprovechar las oportunidades requiere una visión estratégica de cuáles son los principales problemas de la región y como enfrentarlos.

**Palabras clave:** cambio de época, descontentos, populismo, democracia, capacidades estatales.

## Abstract

The article's argument is that the world has entered a new era that it calls “the era of discontents,” characterized by political volatility and the rise of various forms of populism. While governing has become more challenging in the era of discontents in advanced economies, the same – and even more so – applies to Latin America. In this context, three crises characterize the region: a development crisis, a growth crisis, and a crisis of representation. The three crises are interrelated and did not begin with the new era. However, the new era reinforces them, deepening their repercussions and giving them new characteristics, which negatively impact the quality of democracy in the region. The article concludes that the disruptions in the political and economic order characteristic of the new era combine dangers, uncertainties, and opportunities for the region. To neutralize the dangers, face the uncertainties, and seize the opportunities, a strategic vision is required to identify the region's main problems and how to address them.

**Keywords:** New era, discontent, populism, democracy, state capabilities.

## Resumo

Neste artigo, argumenta-se que o mundo entrou em uma nova fase denominada “a era dos descontentamentos”, caracterizada pela volatilidade política e pela ascensão de diversas formas de populismo. Governar tornou-se mais difícil nessa era, especialmente nas economias avançadas; mas essa dificuldade é ainda maior na América Latina. Nesse contexto, três crises caracterizam a região: a de desenvolvimento, a de crescimento e a de representação. Essas crises estão inter-relacionadas e não começaram com a nova era, embora esta as tenha intensificado, aprofundando suas repercussões e conferindo-lhes novas características, que impactam negativamente a qualidade da democracia na região. O artigo conclui que as rupturas na ordem política e econômica, características dessa nova era, combinam perigos, incertezas e oportunidades para a região. Para neutralizar os perigos, enfrentar as incertezas e aproveitar as oportunidades, é necessária uma visão estratégica capaz de identificar os principais problemas da região e como enfrentá-los.

**Palavras-chave:** Nova era, descontentamentos, populismo, democracia, capacidades estatais.

## La era de los descontentos

La condición de la democracia en América Latina no puede analizarse separadamente de lo que sucede con la democracia en el resto del mundo. El argumento de este artículo es que el mundo está viviendo un cambio de época, que, parafraseando al historiador inglés Eric Hobsbawm (1987), quien escribió sobre el fin del largo siglo XIX, marca el fin del largo siglo XX. Quiero referirme aquí a cuatro procesos que caracterizaron las últimas décadas siglo XX y las primeras del corriente siglo (las cuales conjuntamente comprenden lo que aquí se caracteriza como el final del largo siglo XX), cuyas crisis han llevado a una ruptura con el orden económico y político dominante del fin del siglo XX. Estas crisis se produjeron principalmente en las llamadas democracias avanzadas de Occidente, pero tuvieron importantes repercusiones en América Latina, las cuales se analizan en este artículo.

El primer proceso se refiere a la globalización en clave neoliberal. El neoliberalismo es un modelo económico prometeico y flexible, pero su núcleo duro es la postulación del mercado como el principio organizador de la economía, la sociedad y las subjetividades y su promoción de la desregulación en lo interno y la libre circulación del dinero, las mercaderías y las personas como los principios básicos del orden económico global (Gerstle, 2022, p. 5). Aunque la globalización neoliberal no tiene una fecha precisa de comienzo, fue un proceso que comenzó hacia fines de los años 70 y creció explosivamente entre los años 80 y la primera década del corriente siglo. Durante este periodo, el comercio internacional, propulsado por la reducción de las tarifas aduaneras y las barreras de importación y por desarrollos tecnológicos en las comunicaciones, alcanzó un pico del 60 % del producto global en 2008 (Wolf, 2023, p. 64). La apertura comercial fue impulsada por los países capitalistas avanzados y los organismos internacionales bajo su control y adoptada por muchas economías emergentes, incluyendo países de Asia y América Latina. Este proceso llevó a la formación de cadenas productivas que crearon estrechos vínculos entre las economías de los países desarrollados de occidente y los de Asia, principalmente China.

Dos eventos fundamentales de la segunda globalización fueron la entrada de China a la Organización Mundial de Comercio (OMC) en diciembre de 2001 y el lanzamiento del primer teléfono celular en 1984, aunque se pueda argumentar que el cambio tecnológico más significativo fue el lanzamiento del primer teléfono inteligente de IBM en 1994. Esta revolución llegó a su pico tecnológico preinteligencia artificial, con el lanzamiento del primer iPhone en junio del 2007.



El segundo se refiere al surgimiento del nuevo orden político internacional que emergió del derrumbe de la Unión Soviética. Este orden ha sido caracterizado, para usar los términos en inglés, como *“a rules-based international order”*, un conjunto de tratados, instituciones y organizaciones que establecieron los parámetros políticos y económicos del orden global en que los Estados Unidos (EE. UU.) eran la única superpotencia y los países desarrollados de occidente y especialmente los EE. UU., legisladores, jueces y policías (Dugard, 2023). El momento emblemático del surgimiento del nuevo orden fue la caída del muro de Berlín en noviembre de 1989.

El tercero tiene como centro a los avances de la democratización en clave de democracias liberales de mercado. Se puede discutir en profundidad las relaciones entre globalización y democratización, pero esta discusión es para otra oportunidad. El punto aquí es que los procesos de globalización neoliberal y democratización liberal corrieron en paralelo en los años 80 y 90. Alcanzaron sus picos alrededor del mismo tiempo en la primera década del corriente siglo (Li y Reuveny, 2003). La expresión política de este consenso en los países desarrollados en la década del 90 fueron los gobiernos de la llamada Tercera Vía, de Bill Clinton en los EE. UU., Tony Blair en el Reino Unido y Helmut Schulz en Alemania. Estos gobiernos mantuvieron y en algunos aspectos profundizaron las reformas neoliberales de mercado de Thatcher y Reagan y usaron los recursos del crecimiento económico para financiar programas sociales y mejoras en los servicios públicos (Guidens, 1998). La mejor formulación del contrato implícito entre los gobiernos de Tercera Vía y el sector privado fue expresada por Peter Mandelson uno de los principales ideólogos del gobierno Blair, en 1998: “Estamos intensamente relajados sobre los superricos en cuanto paguen sus impuestos” (Rentoul, 2018).

El cuarto tiene que ver con cambios en los sistemas de valores y la emergencia de nuevas formas de identificación sociopolíticas. En la ya clásica formulación de Ronald Inglehart (1977), este cambio fue tanto cultural como generacional y habría sido producto de la prosperidad creciente, los mayores niveles educativos, el aumento de la diversidad étnica y las luchas por la igualdad de género en los años 80 y 90 en las democracias avanzadas de occidente. El cambio se manifestó en la transición de la centralidad de los valores materialistas referidos al crecimiento económico y la seguridad personal, a valores postmaterialistas focalizados en la calidad de vida, el multiculturalismo, la diversidad étnica, las nuevas formas de identificación personal y de género, la protección del medioambiente y el cosmopolitismo. Un evento marcante de este cambio de valores fue la legalización del matrimonio igualitario en los Países Bajos en 2001, seguida por su le-

galización en más de 30 países del mundo, mayormente en Europa y las Américas en los años subsiguientes (“Same-Sex Marriage around the World”, 2025).

Los cuatro procesos que caracterizaron el fin del largo siglo XX: la globalización neoliberal, el nuevo orden internacional, la democratización en clave de democracias liberales y la emergencia de nuevos sistemas de valores y formas de identificación sociopolítica, se vieron afectados críticamente por la gran recesión en las economías capitalistas avanzadas de 2008-2014, la pandemia de COVID de 2020-21 y la guerra de Ucrania que comenzó en febrero de 2022 y continúa hasta la fecha de escritura de este artículo. Los efectos acumulativos de estas crisis han sido el ascenso de los populismos autoritarios de derecha en las llamadas democracias maduras de Europa y los Estados Unidos, con impactos significativos en otras regiones del mundo, incluida América Latina.

La gran recesión de 2008 a 2014 marcó el comienzo del fin a la globalización en clave neoliberal (Patomäki, 2013). Esta afectó significativamente a las economías capitalistas avanzadas, pero tuvo repercusiones globales (Tooze, 2018). Crisis económicas de diverso tipo son parte del capitalismo, pero las crisis financieras son las más impactantes, por sus repercusiones sociales, políticas y económicas. Por su naturaleza, estas crisis están en el centro de las relaciones entre la política y la economía, y envuelven actores políticos, sociales y económicos, nacionales, regionales e internacionales (Panizza, 2014). El impacto económico inmediato de la gran recesión fue la caída del producto bruto interno de los países desarrollados y su efecto negativo en el ingreso de los hogares. Según un estudio del McKinsey Global Institute (citado en Wolf, 2023, p. 102) los ingresos reales de entre el 65 % y el 70 % de los hogares en los países desarrollados se estancaron o cayeron entre 2005 y 2014. El impacto en la economía real fue aún más significativo en el cuasi estancamiento de la productividad entre 2010 y 2019. La crisis también tuvo efectos importantes (aunque temporales) en el desempleo y afectó a más largo plazo la posición fiscal de los países desarrollados como resultado del aumento del gasto y la caída en la recaudación, lo cual intentó ser balanceado con una combinación de austeridad y aumento de la deuda pública.

Las repercusiones políticas de la crisis se hicieron sentir de diferentes maneras en diferentes países, pero en su conjunto ocasionaron la pérdida de confianza por parte de la ciudadanía en la capacidad y probidad de los actores que controlaban los sistemas financieros, económicos y políticos en el tiempo de la crisis. Vale la pena citar a Martin Wolf, el *Chief Economic Commentator* del *Financial Times*, al respecto:

La mayoría de los errores en las decisiones políticas y económicas son invisibles para la mayoría de los votantes. Pero estos no pudieron dejar de darse cuenta de que quienes estaban a cargo fallaron en percibir los riesgos que habían permitido correr al sector financiero. Muchos ciudadanos llegaron a la conclusión de que las fallas no fueron simplemente el producto de la incompetencia, sino de la corrupción moral e intelectual de los tomadores de decisiones y formadores de opinión a todos los niveles. Los ciudadanos también percibieron que los recursos del estado estaban siendo usados para rescatar tanto a los bancos como a los banqueros, mientras que ellos sufrían importantes pérdidas de ingreso como resultado de un prolongado periodo de estancamiento o caída de los salarios reales y de la austeridad. El emperador estaba desnudo (Wolf, 2003, p. 104, traducción propia).

La crisis de la globalización neoliberal es económica y política al mismo tiempo. Políticamente, está relacionada con la competencia económica y política entre las dos mayores economías del fin de siglo, EE. UU. y China. La globalización ofreció oportunidades de inversión en China a las empresas occidentales para bajar sus costos de producción e hizo posible el acceso a bienes de consumo importados de China a los consumidores de los países desarrollados (y también de los emergentes) y un mercado chino de creciente importancia para las exportaciones de materias primas de los países en desarrollo y de tecnología y productos manufacturados de los países desarrollados. Pero los costos políticos de este *trade off* fueron gruesamente subestimados en los países desarrollados. Hay toda una discusión sobre el peso relativo de la liberalización del comercio internacional y los cambios tecnológicos en la pérdida de empleos industriales de calidad, principalmente en los EE. UU. Aunque en números absolutos la pérdida de empleos por la competencia con China no habría sido demasiado grande en términos relativos, su impacto social y político ha sido mayor y más duradero de lo que se anticipaba durante el auge del comercio entre las dos naciones con las consiguientes repercusiones políticas. El proteccionismo antichino iniciado por Donald Trump durante su primera presidencia, continuado por Joe Biden durante su presidencia, y maximizado por Trump en su segundo mandato, ha sido una respuesta política a una realidad social que no comenzó en 2008, pero que se hizo mucho más visible en la gran recesión.

En términos de política, el fin de la globalización neoliberal se ha traducido en el abandono de elementos básicos del modelo económico dominante en las últimas décadas del largo siglo XX. En un análisis de lo que sugestivamente llama la “gran regresión” la revista

británica *The Economist* señala los aumentos de tarifas, la proliferación de subsidios y sanciones económicas, el retorno de las políticas industriales, los vetos a las inversiones extranjeras directas y la decadencia de las organizaciones internacionales que impulsaron la globalización, principalmente la Organización Mundial de Comercio, como indicadores de lo que califica como “desglobalización” (“The world’s economic order is breaking down”, 2024).

La pandemia tuvo repercusiones globales, económicas, políticas y sociales que impactaron de manera diferente en cada país, pero en su conjunto contribuyeron a la puesta en cuestión de la globalización neoliberal que se había comenzado durante la gran recesión. En lo que se refiere a la economía, el Estado asumió un papel protagónico en los programas sociales y de apoyo a las empresas, poniendo en evidencia las limitaciones de los mercados para enfrentar agudas crisis económicas y sociales (Gerstle, 2022). La intervención estatal para limitar el impacto socioeconómico de la pandemia se hizo a costa de aumentos masivos del gasto público, financiados con niveles de endeudamiento con pocos precedentes históricos en la mayoría de los países desarrollados (Guilbert y Génin, 2022). En el plano del comercio internacional, la interrupción en los flujos de las mercancías y productos manufacturados puso en evidencia la vulnerabilidad de las cadenas productivas de larga distancia que eran parte integral de la globalización neoliberal.

El impacto de la pandemia se hizo sentir también en la política y en las guerras socioculturales. Entre el 1 de enero de 2020 —y el 31 de diciembre de 2021—, se registraron 14,9 m de excesos de mortalidad (*excess deaths*) directa e indirectamente vinculados con el virus, de acuerdo con estimaciones de la Organización Mundial de la Salud (United Nations, s. f.). Las variaciones en las tasas de mortalidad entre los países pusieron en cuestión las estrategias de los gobiernos para combatir el virus y las fortalezas y debilidades de los sistemas de salud, con el consiguiente impacto en la popularidad y legitimidad de los gobiernos. Las medidas de contención del virus pusieron en cuestión las potestades de los estados para restringir libertades ciudadanas y potenciaron guerras socioculturales en torno a cuestiones tales como el uso de tapabocas y el efecto de las vacunas.

La guerra de Ucrania provocó una crisis del rules based international order y afectó negativamente las economías de los países capitalistas avanzados, principalmente en Europa. El uso de la fuerza por parte de Rusia, para cambiar las fronteras de un estado europeo puso fin a la ilusión de que las guerras entre naciones solo tenían lugar en el Tercer Mundo: la guerra de Ucrania constituye el conflicto armado más importante en Europa desde el fin de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Políticamente, la guerra forzó a los países eu-

ropeos a aumentar los gastos de defensa, los cuales habían bajado considerablemente tras el fin de la Guerra Fría, acotando espacios fiscales para políticas sociales. Económicamente, la decisión de los países europeos de restringir la importación de petróleo y gas natural de Rusia ocasionó fuertes subidas en los costos de la energía con su consiguiente impacto inflacionario, lo cual contribuyó de manera importante al descontento de los ciudadanos europeos con los partidos gobernantes de la época. Paralelamente, el fracaso de las sanciones económicas impuestas por la Unión Europea y los EE. UU. en el objetivo de asfixiar económicamente a Rusia ha puesto en evidencia los límites de la hegemonía de Occidente en un mundo crecientemente multipolar.

El cuarto punto de quiebre con el orden económico y político hegemónico del fin del largo siglo XX se refiere a la crisis de la democracia liberal (Haggard y Kaufman, 2021) y el aumento de la polarización política. La literatura académica y los diversos índices que intentan medir el estado de la democracia en el mundo difieren sobre si la democracia se encuentra globalmente estancada o en regresión (Little y Meng, 2023). Algunos índices de democracia arrojan que el mundo ha regresado a los niveles de democracia previos al fin de la Guerra Fría en 1989 (V-Dem, 2025). Más significativo para los argumentos desarrollados en este artículo, según los mismos índices, el consenso de Tercera Vía del fin del largo siglo XX (Crouch, 2012), ha sido sucedido por la polarización como la mayor amenaza a la democracia en el siglo XXI. Como lo afirma el informe V-Dem de 2022: “A su nivel actual, la polarización y la autocratización forman un círculo vicioso” (Varieties of Democracy, 2022). El voto por Brexit en julio de 2016 y la elección de Trump cuatro meses más tarde fueron los eventos detonantes de la polarización que ha proseguido hasta nuestros días, como lo muestran las elecciones legislativas en Francia y Alemania en 2024 y en 2025, respectivamente, y más dramáticamente la victoria electoral de Trump en las elecciones presidenciales de noviembre de 2024 en los EE. UU.

La polarización se refleja en nuevos alineamientos políticos. La expresión de estos alineamientos son las llamadas “guerras culturales” sobre cuestiones tan diversas como las identidades de género, el cambio climático y el multiculturalismo. Si las guerras culturales no pueden ser separadas de sus raíces socioeconómicas en la globalización neoliberal, tampoco lo pueden del papel que juegan las redes sociales convertidas en cámaras de resonancia que profundizan la polarización cultural, política y afectiva (Kubin y Von Sikorski, 2021). Existen diferentes versiones de estos conflictos en cada país, pero en común representan una reacción de ciertos sectores de la sociedad contra el cosmopolitismo neoliberal que fue la expresión a nivel sociocultural de la globalización econó-

mica (Gerstle, 2022). Esta reacción se tradujo en las llamadas democracias avanzadas, en la redefinición de los clivajes políticos de sus raíces en las clases sociales a divisiones políticas, en términos de educación, geografía y cultura (Nouri y Roland, 2020). En este planteamiento, la izquierda ha venido a representar a los sectores sociales de mayor nivel educativo, habitantes de los grandes centros urbanos, definidos por su defensa de la diversidad étnica de raza y orientación sexual (Eatwell y Goodwin, 2018). Por su parte, la derecha ha construido una base social popular de base étnico nacionalista entre los sectores que sienten su lugar en la sociedad amenazados por las dislocaciones económicas de la globalización, la inmigración y los cambios socioculturales, y reaccionan contra la sensibilidad multicultural dominante en los sectores de mayor nivel educativo (Mudde, 2007; Camus y Lebourg, 2017).

Los avances del populismo, principalmente en claves de derecha nacionalista autoritaria, han sido la expresión política más significativa del cambio de época resultante de las crisis que marcaron el fin del largo siglo XX. El populismo, definido aquí como una forma de hacer política basada en la división antagonista del orden político entre “el pueblo” (entendido como “los de abajo”) y un cierto *otro* que lo oprime, lo explota o lo excluye (la oligarquía, la casta, el establishment político, la elite cosmopolita, etc.) (Laclau, 2005) fue considerado por mucho tiempo como característica de las llamadas democracias emergentes, y muy especialmente de la política latinoamericana: un síntoma de las debilidades de estas democracias. En su seminal libro *Hegemonía y estrategias socialistas*, escrito en los años 80, Ernesto Laclau y Chantal Mouffe (1985) consideraban que la prosperidad económica y la complejidad social de las sociedades capitalistas avanzadas no permitían la dicotomización del espacio político característico del populismo.

Que el populismo efectivamente tiene sus orígenes en los EE. UU. y haya sido integral a la política de ese país (Kazin 2017) no viene ahora al caso. Lo relevante es que en el cambio de época el populismo de derecha autoritario se ha vuelto integral a la política de las democracias occidentales. En este contexto, la victoria electoral de Donald Trump en las elecciones presidenciales de noviembre de 2024 en los Estados Unidos y las medidas tomadas en los primeros meses de su presidencia, expresan y potencian la ruptura económica y política con el orden neoliberal del fin del largo siglo XX tanto a nivel doméstico como internacional: la imposición de tarifas de importación masivas el 6 de abril de 2025 (“*Liberation Day*”) es directamente contraria a los principios de libre circulación de mercancías que es de la esencia del neoliberalismo (The White House, 2025). La distancia política entre Trump y sus aliados europeos occidentales, su declarada ambición de

incorporar Canadá y Groenlandia a los EE. UU., su acercamiento a gobiernos autoritarios así como su alineamiento con la narrativa rusa sobre la guerra de Ucrania, representan el comienzo de un nuevo orden internacional transaccional, bilateral, nacionalista y neoimperialista. En el ámbito doméstico, su control absoluto del Ejecutivo y del Congreso, y el respaldo de la Suprema Corte, potencian el personalismo autocrático y el decisionismo transgresor que caracterizan la gobernanza populista. En la misma línea, deben entenderse la política de deportación masiva de inmigrantes y la exacerbación de las guerras culturales por parte del ejecutivo, ejemplificadas por la eliminación de las políticas de Equidad, Diversidad e Inclusión y los ataques a la libertad académica (Trump's Executive Orders on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Explained, s. f.; *Harvard University Sues Trump Administration over Funding Freeze*, 2025).

Si tomamos en consideración los cambios internacionales y domésticos, sociales, económicos y políticos, que caracterizan el cambio de época, los quiebres con el fin del largo siglo XX son evidentes. No obstante, es confuso cómo caracterizar el cambio de época. Si bien el largo siglo XX puede ser caracterizado como la era de la globalización neoliberal, el comienzo de la nueva era es más difícil de etiquetar. Académicos y analistas políticos la han llamado la era de la confusión, la era de la incertidumbre, la era del peligro y la era del desorden. Todas estas calificaciones dicen algo sobre el mundo en que vivimos, pero yo creo que la caracterización más adecuada es llamarla la “era de los descontentos”. Paso ahora a caracterizar la era de los descontentos en América Latina.

## América Latina en la era de los descontentos

Los descontentos no son nuevos en América Latina. En sus manifestaciones actuales, estos combinan causalidades con profundas raíces históricas con otras, producto de los procesos característicos del cambio de época analizados en la sección anterior.

En los años 1980 y 1990, América Latina experimentó cambios políticos y económicos en línea con el nuevo orden global del fin del largo siglo XX, incluyendo democratizaciones en clave de democracia liberal y reformas económicas en clave neoliberal (Panizza, 2009). El evento que mejor reflejó este nuevo orden a nivel regional fue la primera reunión de jefes de Estado del Hemisferio Occidental, que tuvo lugar en Miami en diciembre de 1994, bajo el manto de la OEA (Peceny, 1994). La cumbre fue presidida por Bill Clinton y contó con la asistencia de líderes, tales como Fernando Henrique Cardoso y Ricardo Lago, cuyos gobiernos representaban la versión latinoamericana de la tercera vía.

La declaración de la cumbre sintetiza el espíritu de la época:

Los jefes de Estado y de Gobierno [democráticamente] elegidos de las Américas estamos comprometidos a fomentar la prosperidad, los valores y las instituciones democráticas y la seguridad de nuestro hemisferio. *Por primera vez en la historia, las Américas son una comunidad de sociedades democráticas.* Si bien nuestros países enfrentan diferentes desafíos en materia de desarrollo, *están unidos en la búsqueda de la prosperidad a través de la apertura de mercados, la integración hemisférica y el desarrollo sostenible.* Estamos decididos a consolidar y fomentar vínculos más estrechos de cooperación y a convertir nuestras aspiraciones en realidades concretas (Previous summits of the Americas - I summit of the Americas, s. f; énfasis añadido).

El consenso de tercera vía de los años 90 dio lugar en la primera década del corriente siglo a una ola de gobiernos de izquierda y centro-izquierda que accedieron al gobierno con la promesa de reparar las fracturas sociales ocasionadas por las políticas neoliberales, implementar nuevos modelos de desarrollo económico y profundizar la democracia. La combinación de altas tasas de crecimiento, producto del *boom* de las materias primas de la primera década del nuevo siglo, y políticas sociales redistributivas financiadas con las rentas del crecimiento, produjeron profundas transformaciones sociales en la región. signadas por caídas significativas en la pobreza y el crecimiento de una clase media baja heterogénea y con vínculos diversos al mercado laboral, formal e informal. Entre los años 2002 y 2014, la pobreza cayó del 44 % al 28,5 % y en el año 2014 alrededor de una tercera parte de la población era clasificada como clase media por sus niveles de ingreso (ECLAC, 2016).

Los gobiernos de izquierda de la región también implementaron una amplia agenda de reformas constitucionales dirigidas a promover nuevas formas de participación política y el reconocimiento de nuevos derechos en línea con las nuevas formas de identificación sociopolítica que marcaron el fin del largo siglo XX. Estos cambios fueron significativos en una región históricamente caracterizada por democracias excluyentes, valores sociales, conservadores y múltiples formas de discriminación de género, étnica y racial. La agenda de derechos incluyó entre otros, la creación de mecanismos de participación directa de la ciudadanía, en Venezuela y Ecuador, el matrimonio igualitario y el derecho al aborto en varios países de la región, el reconocimiento de la naturaleza plurinacional y multiétnica del estado en Bolivia y de los derechos de la naturaleza en Ecuador (Balán y Montambeault, 2020).

El panorama político-social actual de la región muestra los límites de estos cambios. Que los gobiernos de izquierda hayan perdido elecciones en los países en que estas son competitivas, es parte del juego democrático. No obstante, más allá de los vaivenes electorales, es importante marcar ciertas tendencias políticas, sociales y económicas, que ponen en cuestión los alcances de los cambios procesados por los gobiernos de izquierda en el nuevo siglo. En dos áreas de especial importancia para evaluar el alcance de los cambios, el de la promoción de mecanismos de participación democrática y el desarrollo sustentable, la distancia entre la retórica de los gobiernos de la época y la realidad de las transformaciones ha sido especialmente llamativa. Un estudio de Benjamin Goldfrank concluyó que los avances en la calidad de los derechos de ciudadanía bajo los gobiernos de izquierda fueron limitados y que estos gobiernos perdieron la oportunidad de transformar las relaciones de ciudadanía mediante la construcción de robustas instituciones participativas (Balán y Montambeault, 2022). En lo que se refiere a nuevos modelos de desarrollo económico, la literatura sobre el postneoliberalismo y sobre el llamado modelo extractivista ha discutido los alcances y limitaciones de los cambios al modelo neoliberal de los años 90 (Grugel y Riggirozzi, 2012). Sin embargo, el debate centrado sobre la medida en que los gobiernos de la época se apartaron de la ortodoxia neoliberal oculta limitaciones de más largo plazo a los cambios en la economía y en la política de la región. En este contexto, tres crisis caracterizan a la región: una de largo plazo de desarrollo, una cíclica de crecimiento y una de representación. Las tres crisis están interrelacionadas y no comenzaron en el cambio de época, pero el cambio de época las retroalimentó y les dio nuevas dimensiones.

Por crisis de desarrollo, me refiero a la tendencia de largo plazo que se ha mantenido y profundizado en el cambio de época: las bajas tasas de crecimiento y su razón principal, el bajo crecimiento de la productividad. Virtualmente no ha habido aumentos en la productividad de la región en los últimos 40 años. Cuando la región estaba creciendo al ritmo del super *boom* de las materias primas, el crecimiento en productividad continuó estando comparativamente por debajo del de otras regiones del mundo (ECLAC, 2023a). Como lo afirma Paul Krugman (1997), la productividad no es todo, pero en el largo plazo, lo es casi todo. El resultado es que, en 1981, el producto bruto combinado de América Latina representaba el 35 % del de las economías en desarrollo. En 2011, la proporción había caído al 22 %. En 1981, el producto bruto conjunto de Brasil y Argentina era ligeramente superior al de China. Actualmente, el producto bruto de China es mayor que el del conjunto de América Latina (ECLAC, 2023a).

Las causas del fracaso en aumentar la tasa de desarrollo son fundamentalmente estructurales y de largo plazo. Las mismas abarcan tanto a las políticas neoliberales de los años 90 como a las postneoliberales de las primeras décadas del corriente siglo. Cabe solo mencionarlas brevemente aquí: el dualismo estructural de economías caracterizado por una distribución altamente polarizada de las empresas en que unas pocas empresas gigantes con gran poder de mercado coexisten con un gran número de trabajadores cuentapropistas e informales y microempresas dedicados a actividades de baja productividad e innovación; los bajos niveles de inversión y acumulación de capital; los altos niveles de desigualdad; mercados laborales atomizados y segmentados; la incapacidad de generar suficientes empleos de calidad, y las carencias del capital humano, para mencionar algunas de las más relevantes. Ben Ross Schneider (2013) caracteriza este modelo económico como capitalismo jerárquico.

Por crisis de crecimiento, me refiero al impacto negativo de la gran recesión, del fin del super- ciclo de las *commodities* y de la pandemia en el crecimiento de la región. A la llamada “década ganada” de alto crecimiento económico de 2002-2014 la acompañó una larga década perdida de estancamiento: entre 2014 y 2023, la región creció a un promedio anual de solo 0,8 %. Este promedio está por debajo del 2 % registrado durante la década perdida de los años 80 y equivale a solamente un quinto del crecimiento promedio registrado entre 1950 y 1979 (Salazar-Xirinachs et al., 2023). Hacia fines del 2023 el producto bruto de la región estaba al mismo nivel que en 2015 (ECLAC, 2023a). El estancamiento económico de la última década ha impactado especialmente en los sectores de la llamada nueva clase media que vieron mejorar sus niveles de vida durante los años de alto crecimiento económico y ven su estatus socio económico amenazado por la falta de crecimiento, así como en el fin de la caída sostenida en las tasas de pobreza y desigualdad registradas en los primera década y media del presente siglo (ECLAC, 2023b).

Por crisis de representación, me refiero a una combinación de factores estructurales con otros propios de la era de los descontentos. En la formulación del politólogo argentino Andrés Malamud, en América Latina es fácil ganar, pero difícil gobernar. Sistemas políticos presidencialistas y regímenes electorales de representación proporcional ponen pocas barreras de entrada a los candidatos (Linz, 1990). A esto se debe sumar que, en los últimos años, nuevas formas de comunicación social y de visibilidad mediática que facilitan el contacto directo con la ciudadanía y minimizan la necesidad de tener largas carreras políticas y militantes partidarios con presencia en el terreno. La contracara del contacto mediático directo entre candidatos y ciudadanía ha sido la crisis de los partidos

políticos (Mainwaring, 2018). Esta crisis no empezó en el cambio de época y no es exclusiva de América Latina, pero se ha profundizado durante este tiempo como resultado de las transformaciones sociales que han debilitado los mecanismos de representación política y mediación social, y de la pérdida de la ya baja confianza de la ciudadanía en los partidos e instituciones políticas como producto del estancamiento económico de la última década.

Los partidos pueden ser menos necesarios para ganar elecciones, pero siguen siendo necesarios para representar y gobernar. La presencia de los partidos en el terreno consolida las bases sociales que dan sustento político a los gobiernos. En su ausencia, los presidentes dependen de la opinión pública. Los presidentes sin partidos o con partidos minoritarios en sistemas de partidos fragmentados enfrentan dificultades para formar mayorías parlamentarias que el presidencialismo de coalición solo puede superar parcialmente a costa de políticas que reflejan mínimos común denominadores y aumento de los *veto players*. Como lo muestran desarrollos recientes en varios países de América Latina, la combinación de gobiernos sin partido o con partido minoritarios, dependientes de la opinión pública y precarios apoyos parlamentarios, presenta tres peligros sistémicos: *impeachment*, parálisis legislativa y estallidos sociales (Abofarha y Nasreldein, 2022, Luna y Munck, 2022).

Si gobernar se ha vuelto más difícil en la era de los descontentos en las economías avanzadas, lo mismo y más aún se aplica a América Latina. Desde el punto de vista de la sociedad, la era de los descontentos ha dejado a largos sectores de la ciudadanía escépticos de la política, descreídos de los gobiernos y desarraigados de los partidos y una opinión pública abierta a nuevas interpelaciones socioculturales, nuevas narrativas políticas y nuevas formas de identificación política. Una década de estancamiento económico y de aumento de la vulnerabilidad social ha resultado en el aumento de la volatilidad política y la inestabilidad social. En contraste con el ciclo de victorias oficialista y el predominio de reelecciones presidenciales de comienzos del corriente siglo, entre enero de 2018 y diciembre de 2023 ha habido 19 alternancias de poder donde la oposición se ha convertido en gobierno (Luna y Munck, 2022). A esto debemos sumar el golpe fallido en Brasil en enero de 2023 y los estallidos sociales en Ecuador, Chile, Colombia y Perú entre 2019 y 2022.

Los paralelos entre las causas del auge del populismo en los países desarrollados que se analizan en la sección anterior y su continua presencia en el contexto latinoamericano son significativas. Solo para recordar: bajo crecimiento económico, estancamiento o caí-

da de los ingresos reales de grandes sectores de la población, pérdida de confianza en la capacidad y probidad moral de las elites políticas y económicas y percepción de que se gobierna en interés de unos pocos (la casta, las élites, los globalistas, el 1 %). Si a esto le sumamos el desprestigio de los partidos gobernantes de centro izquierda y centro derecha, la polarización política que es causa y consecuencia del populismo y una división tanto cultural como de clase entre una elite intelectual y económica globalista y la cultura nacionalista plebeya de sectores populares vulnerables a las dislocaciones socioeconómicas de las últimas décadas, tenemos una buena síntesis del populismo característico de la política cambio de época .

De esta comparación se podría concluir que la era de los descontentos ha hecho los sistemas políticos de los países desarrollados más parecidos a los de América Latina, y ha hecho a América Latina más parecida a sí misma. Pero los cambios políticos en los países desarrollados de occidente en la era de los descontentos han también permeado la política latinoamericana. Mas específicamente, el auge de los populismos de derecha en los Estados Unidos y Europa ha proporcionado a las derechas latinoamericanas un nuevo imaginario político y nuevas gramáticas discursivas asociadas con las guerras socio culturales que combinan elementos comunes con otras específicas de cada región. Esta conjunción de derechas populistas se articula en redes internacionales que las validan y las reproducen y dan visibilidad y legitimación a sus líderes (Munck et al., 2023). Más importante, cuando hablamos de semejanzas y diferencias, es que el auge de los populismos de derecha en la región ha puesto en cuestión la caracterización de los populismos latinoamericanos como inclusivos y a los europeos como excluyentes (Mudde y Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Esta es una caracterización que largamente se superpone a la de los populismos latinoamericanos siendo mayormente de izquierda y los europeos largamente de extrema derecha. El pueblo contra la casta fue el antagonismo populista de Podemos en España y ha sido astutamente copiado por Milei en Argentina.

## Conclusiones

Las dislocaciones del orden político y económico que caracterizan el cambio de época combinan peligros, incertidumbres y oportunidades. Neutralizar los peligros, afrontar las incertidumbres y aprovechar las oportunidades requiere una visión estratégica de cuáles son los problemas y como enfrentarlos. El principal problema político de América Latina no es tanto el desencanto con la democracia, sino el descontento con su funcionamiento. La democracia en la región ha probado ser resiliente a crisis económicas y conflictos

políticos de diversa naturaleza e intensidad. No obstante, la democracia en la región sobrevive en un equilibrio de largo plazo de baja calidad (Mazzuca, 2021). La persistencia de este equilibrio se manifiesta en la incapacidad de los gobiernos de la región para enfrentar problemas tales como el bajo crecimiento económico, los bajos niveles educativos, las fracturas sociales y las altas tasas de desigualdad e informalidad que impiden procesos de desarrollo sostenible y la construcción de democracias más inclusivas, con sistemas de representación política arraigados en la ciudadanía y estados con capacidad para atender las demandas de los ciudadanos en cuestiones de seguridad pública, educación y justicia entre otros.

Los populismos autoritarios han sido una respuesta a estos y otros descontentos en la región y en el mundo. Creo importante sin embargo no percibir la era de los descontentos como un estado de crisis permanente y sin horizontes de salida. La era de los descontentos debe ser entendida como una coyuntura crítica en la cual el espectro de opciones abiertas a los actores políticos se expande sustancialmente. Las crisis quitan poder pero también dan poder.

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## **Democracies, Populisms, and the State in Latin America. Some observations for the current debate.**

**Democracias, populismos, y el Estado en América Latina. Algunas observaciones para el debate actual.**

**Democracias, populismos e o Estado na América Latina. Algumas observações para o debate atual.**

### **Abstract**

The brief observations focus on some key challenges that Latin American states are currently confronting, and on the question of how they can function effectively in their present state and under the pressures of polarizing transformations. There will be four points: First, the current state of democracies will be discussed, which is basically characterized by processes of democratic erosion or recession. Second, the challenges posed by the various populist movements, politics, and regimes will be addressed, which have proliferated and changed, making them more radical, aggressive, and detrimental to democratic politics. The third section will be dedicated to the problems of the functioning of the states in Latin America, their aspirations, shortcomings, and deviations, and the transformations the model of the weak 'strong developmental state' has gone through during the last

half century. In the final fourth point some recommendations for political action and for further clarification and research will be debated ('what could be done').

**Keywords:** Democracy, authoritarianism, populisms, state functions, structural change of the public sphere.

## Resumen

Las breves observaciones se centran en algunos de los principales desafíos que los Estados latinoamericanos enfrentan actualmente, así como en la cuestión de cómo pueden funcionar de manera eficaz en su situación presente y bajo las presiones de transformaciones polarizantes. Se abordarán cuatro puntos: en primer lugar, se examinará el estado actual de las democracias, caracterizado fundamentalmente por procesos de erosión o recesión democrática. En segundo lugar, se analizarán los desafíos planteados por los diversos movimientos, políticas y regímenes populistas, que se han multiplicado y transformado, volviéndose más radicales, agresivos y perjudiciales para la política democrática. El tercer apartado estará dedicado a los problemas del funcionamiento de los Estados en América Latina, sus aspiraciones, limitaciones y desviaciones, así como a las transformaciones que ha experimentado, en el último medio siglo, el modelo del "Estado desarrollista fuerte débil". Finalmente, en el cuarto punto, se debatirán algunas recomendaciones para la acción política y para una mayor clarificación e investigación ("qué podría hacerse"), y se situarán las trayectorias de los Estados latinoamericanos dentro de un esquema general de las distintas etapas de construcción estatal.

**Palabras clave:** Democracia, autoritarismo, populismos, funciones del Estado, cambio estructural de la esfera pública.

## Resumo

Estas breves observações concentram-se em alguns dos principais desafios que os Estados latino-americanos enfrentam atualmente, além de abordar a questão de como esses Estados podem funcionar efetivamente em seu estado atual e sob as pressões de transformações polarizadoras. Para isso, são apresentados quatro pontos. Primeiro, é discutido o estado atual das democracias, que é caracterizado, basicamente, por processos de erosão ou recessão democrática. Em segundo lugar, são abordados os desafios colocados pelos diversos movimentos, políticas e regimes populistas, que proliferaram e se modificaram, tornando-se mais radicais, agressivos e prejudiciais à política

democrática. A terceira seção é dedicada aos problemas do funcionamento dos Estados na América Latina, suas aspirações, deficiências e desvios, além das transformações pelas quais o modelo do “Estado desenvolvimentista forte”, que na prática se revela um Estado fraco, passou durante a última metade do século. Por fim, são discutidas algumas recomendações para a ação política, bem como para novos esclarecimentos e pesquisas (“o que poderia ser feito”).

**Palavras-chave:** Democracia, autoritarismo, populismo, funções do Estado, mudança estrutural da esfera pública.

## Some observations for the current debate

One of the most urgent questions of Latin American politics and its mirror in political science (including the Congress of CLAD) is: What are the most critical challenges the states and their agencies are confronted with, and how can they function effectively under the pressures of the ‘deep’ transformations they are facing? The most important among the latter being the present changes and trends of modern mass democracy (or its deformations), globalized interdependencies, the new ‘social media’ and their platforms, the profound structural change of the public sphere and of political communication and intermediation they have brought about, further technological, social and cultural change, the various perceived crises of the institutions and social relations, and the rise of new political movements, most of them populist. An adequate answer to these questions would require a series of books that have yet to be written. We are still at the beginning of the debate. In what follows, I will attempt to outline some basic aspects of the issue, provide key points, indicate the general direction of the argument, and identify some questions and open ends for further research. I hope that my modest observations can contribute to the ongoing debates. In doing this, I will primarily focus on the general constellations and give more attention to politics than to policies.

Debating the problems of democracy and the functioning of states in Latin America always implies that we must also discuss the various populisms in many Latin American countries and their impact on democracy and the state. Hence, I will address four points: First, the current state of democracies will be discussed, which, despite a basic resilience, is presently characterized by processes of democratic erosion or recession. Second, I will address the specific challenges posed by the various populist movements, politics, and

regimes during a phase of proliferation and transformation. This has made them more radical, aggressive, and detrimental to democracy, to the liberal script, and the effective functioning of the state. The third section will be dedicated to the concerns of the functioning of the states in Latin America, their ideals and aspirations, their shortcomings and deviations, and the transformations the model of the weak 'strong developmental state' has gone through during the last half century. In the final fourth point, some recommendations for political action and for further clarification and research shall be addressed ('what could be done').

## Democratic erosion

The democratic euphoria, which also in Latin America had set in after the demise of military regimes since the 1980s (Fukuyama's 'end of history'), lasted for not much more than a decade. Processes of democratic consolidation which were underway, in many countries have slowed down, remained protracted and contained, or have been stopped or reversed. Even though Latin America, its highest degrees of political polarization and violence notwithstanding, still is the second most democratic region in the world after the transatlantic region (Nord et al. 2025; BTI 2024), most democracies have performed in a defective or incomplete mode regarding the requirements set for 'liberal' or 'embedded democracy' (Merkel et al. 2003; Merkel 2004). While the direction of politics so far has overwhelmingly followed the swings of the pendulum from right to left and back decade-wise,<sup>1</sup> we find continuous processes of democratic erosion (or democratic recession, as the Latinobarómetro has put it) since the beginning of the 21st century, and more so since the 2010s.

According to the respective indicators (V-DEM 2025, BTI 2024, Latinobarómetro 2023, LAPOP 2023), we now locate the usual suspects de *toujours* as consolidated 'liberal' or 'embedded democracies', mostly also with solid governance: Uruguay, Chile, and Costa Rica, of which the latter, however, has recently somewhat receded and lost democratic quality. At the other end, we find six autocracies: Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Haiti, which also qualifies for failed stateness. All other countries can be found between these two, in the large group of what has often been called electoral democracies and what we have called defective democracies: democracies with defects in particular sectors, which could be characterized in more detail (Merkel 2004).

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1 More rightist governments in the 1990s and 2010s, more leftist governments in the 2000s ('pink tide') and 2020s (with exceptions and slowing down), both categories including moderates and radicals, and more or less democratic and authoritarian ones. Cf. Börzel et al. forthcoming.

Among these, Peru and Mexico, overall, have lately shown a downward tendency; Panama, Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic have partially improved, though often incrementally or with significant sectoral deficits (like blocked governance). Others have oscillated around stagnation or moved back and forth. The dynamics of change may also vary: processes of erosion could be due more to polarization (as seen in Ecuador or Peru), or to the expansion of executive power (as in Mexico, Argentina, or Brazil).

Since the second decade of the 21st century also the support for democracy has receded. According to Latinobarómetro data (2023), since 2018 the support for democracy (as the 'best' or 'preferable' form of government) on the Latin American average has been as low as 48%, much less in LAPOP (28%). Despite little movement on average, in some countries support for democracy has receded dramatically between 2020 and 2023, in Venezuela by 12 percentage points, in Costa Rica by 11, in Mexico and Guatemala by 8. The authoritarian potential has grown respectively on average by 4 percentage points, more in Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic. In 2023, according to Latinobarómetro, 17% of the interviewed Latin Americans preferred an authoritarian regime, and 28% answered 'da lo mismo'. The details may vary, but the trend is clear.

Support for democracy has also declined in the 'Churchillian' version, from 79% in 2013 to 63% in 2020 and 66% in 2023. Satisfaction with the way democracy functions in a particular country is down to 28% (69% unsatisfied), and only 21% said that the political parties 'funcionan bien'. Hence the share of those who agreed that 'no puede haber democracia sin partidos' has fallen from 58% in 2013 to 44% in 2023. Trust in institutions has generally declined. But here, the various country profiles often tell us more than the Latin American average.

Latin American democracies have also shown a general vulnerability in relation to authoritarian temptations (many of them populist) or simple inefficiency and corruption, not least due to their institutionalized presidencialismo, weak mechanisms of control and accountability, and executive-heavy models of democracy. They also prefer output legitimation (and not procedural legitimation). It is no coincidence that the most democratic states (Uruguay, Costa Rica, Chile) are those that have the strongest and most influential parliaments.

## Old and new populisms

The same constellations that had the potential to endanger and disfigure democracies in Latin America have often favored the rise and success of populist movements and regimes through most of the 20th century. At the beginning of the 21st century, however, we are facing an exceptional situation with a decisive impact: Both democracy and the functioning of the states have been affected by the challenges of various populisms in a phase of their hype and proliferation, but also of a significant change of their constellations and some fundamental transformations. These transformations make them more radical, more polarizing, and destructive, and more of a threat and danger to democratic politics and institutions. We need to examine the details more closely to understand what happened.

In general, populisms have always had an ambivalent relationship with democracy. They have helped to consolidate and extend democracies as well as contributed to their erosion and demise, the latter due to their antiliberal positions, their Freund/Feind schemes (cf. Schmitt, 1923), conspiracy narratives, and their rejection of intermediary organizations (parliaments, parties, courts of law, or independent media), in favor of the fiction of a direct, unmediated relationship between the leader(s) and the followers. Their disregard for effective control and accountability, their anti-pluralist and polarizing practices, and often the uninhibited authoritarian inclinations of their leaders, overall, have done more damage to democracies than their participatory aspirations have improved them (Puhle, 2020; cf. also Urbinati, 2019; Müller, 2016).

There have, however, been exceptions, particularly in Latin America, in the 'classical' time of populist regimes, between the 1930s and the 70s. Here we find three different types: Not only the postrevolutionary stabilizers (the PRI in Mexico from the 1930s on, or the MNR in Bolivia since the 1950s) and authoritarian rulers (like Vargas in Brazil and Perón in Argentina), but also quite a number of important democratic populist parties, like APRA in Peru, Acción Democrática in Venezuela, the Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN) in Costa Rica, the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD), and, in a second wave, since the 1960s, the Christian Democrats in Chile, Venezuela (COPEI), El Salvador, Guatemala, or Acción Popular in Peru. All of them have been anti-imperialistic 'project populisms' with a reformist *desarrollista* agenda,<sup>2</sup> and they all (except APRA which never governed) have contributed substantially, though with limitations and costs, to a wave of progressive politics of development, to an increase in participation and reformist stabilization of their

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2 In contrast to the protest populisms in the United States or in Europe.

countries (for more details, see Puhle, 2020, and forthcoming).<sup>3</sup>

This period, however, has ended. Typological diversification began in the late 1980s, with the rise of rightist 'neoliberal', at times also authoritarian, later anti-migration, evangelical, and all kinds of protest variants as they were also known from Europe or the United States, e.g., of minorities, 'anti-globalists', extremists of the Right and the Left, etc. (cf. Puhle, 2024, 2020). They all no longer correspond to the traditional patterns of Latin American populism but represent entirely new (sub)types. So at present we can find at least three variants of populisms in Latin America, among them two with a certain continuity: On the one hand we have the populist movements with a longer tradition, like the Peronists in Argentina (with a more rightist and a more leftist wing), or the PRI in Mexico, both now democratized. On the other hand, we have new or mixed and hybrid movements which still move within the lines of traditional Latin American populisms (and more on the left), like the PT in Brazil, MORENA in Mexico, the MAS in Bolivia (cf. Wolff, 2029), the Correistas in Ecuador, or, differently, also the erratic Chavismo in Venezuela. A third variant lacks the lines of continuity with traditional Latin American populisms, however modified and diluted (cf. De la Torre, 2018). Here we find all the movements of completely new types, protesters, evangelicals, libertarians, destructive state skeptics and true believers of all kinds (more on the right), and also some heavyweights like Bukele in El Salvador who fights organized crime and terrorists with state terrorism (cf. Meléndez-Sánchez & Vergara, 2024), and Bolsonaro in Brazil (cf. Tanscheit, 2023), Milei in Argentina (cf. Vommaro, 2023) and Kast in Chile (cf. Díaz et al., 2023), who are trying to combine, in different ways, neoliberal economics with ultraconservative, reactionary and repressive aspirations and libertarian approaches.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, the mixes, and hybrids dominate. At present, we can find all imaginable kinds of populisms in Latin America (and elsewhere), those with projects and those of protest, not to speak of the many fundamentalist believers and missionaries. We also find trans-continental learning processes, as well as decontextualized and fragmented, loose populist elements traveling around and being imitated or modified (compare, e.g., the rhetoric and politics of Trump and Bolsonaro). The new populisms are more polarizing and des-

3 For the extended literature on the 'classics' of Latin American populisms, see also, e.g., Di Tella, 1965; Ionescu & Gellner, 1969; Hermet, 2001; Hermet et al., 2001; Weyland, 2001; Laclau, 2005; Roberts, 2015; Taggard & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016; De la Torre, 2017; for the context Collier & Collier, 1991.

4 On the theoretical background of the elective affinities between neoliberal concepts and the populist far-right, see now Slobodian, 2025.

tructive, contesting democratic institutions frontally, whereas the traditional populisms have been more integrating, stabilizing, and reformist (cf. Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019; Puhle forthcoming). These trends have been enhanced by the repercussions of the new structural change of the public sphere ('Habermas II'),<sup>5</sup> a significant threshold worldwide that has involved advanced globalization, the breakthrough of 'connective action' (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) with its network logic and the 'social media', new modes of political intermediation, communication and campaigning, and a significant push forward of the elements of what one might call 'populist democracy' (as a structure; Puhle, 2020). The latter is particularly characterized by the emphasis on the direct and immediate relationship, and the fiction of a permanent two-ways communication between the voters and the leader(s), circumventing the 'corps intermédiaires' designed to provide channels of control and accountability (like parties, parliaments, courts of law and independent media). These changes clearly tend to favor populist actors and politics, giving them a comparative advantage.

As structural changes and populist aspirations are reinforcing one another, this is a good time for populists, for movements anyway, but also for individual mavericks who do not represent a significant movement or party (present in the country and parliament). If they know how to use the new mechanisms, and if they are able, entertaining and lucky, they can attract sufficient votes to make it to the presidency (like Milei), and then try to build parliamentary parties later (a kind of leadership populism, or postmodern caudillismo).

The new constellations (down to the logic of the algorithms of the social media favoring negative emotions) fit well with the populists' Freund/Feind scheme, with their view of elections as a permanent war between good and evil which should be guided by hatred and rage, and their preferences for 'politics of fear', negative campaigning and affective polarization (cf. van Erkel & van Aelst, 2021). They have also helped much to facilitate the dissemination of typical elements of an enhanced and 'modernized' populist subversion, like

- the attitude of 'antiestablishmentarianism' (Urbinati),
- contempt for institutions and semi-loyalty towards democracy (cf. Linz, 1978),
- the conversion of prejudices and fundamentalist convictions into quasi-religious belief systems,

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5 On a decisive earlier structural change of the public sphere, see the seminal work by Jürgen Habermas, 1990 (1962). Its equivalent for the recent change is still a desideratum.

- the transformation of repeated propaganda lies and conspiracy narratives into outright reality denial (e.g., of COVID-19, climate change or election results) and 'alternative facts',
- refined techniques of resemanticization (*Umdeutung*), and 'doublespeak' (cf. Urbina-ti, 2014; Puhle, 2023).

All in all, it appears that the present-day populisms in Latin America, and particularly the new ones, overall, are less democratic than they were in the 'classical' phase. Particularly, the new mixes and the polarizing antidemocratic versions of populisms seem to advance, and it might be possible that also Latin America may finally fall for the worldwide trend towards the simple new cleavage of (authoritarian) 'populism' vs. democracy (cf. Norris & Inglehart, 2019), with less productive exchange and interaction between the two than before.

## The functioning of the States

Also in Latin America, the challenges of democracy and the enhanced and diversified populist contestations interact with specific problems of the various states and of state-ness. I will attempt to briefly summarize the nature of these problems, their impact on state functioning, and potential solutions to improve the situation. Doing this I will look at state functions with special emphasis of development and 'progress' however defined, and of the ways how the states deal with the 'varieties of capitalism' (Hall & Soskice, 2001) they are confronted with (since at present, with very few exceptions, capitalist economies appear to be 'the only game in town'). Here the state is a key actor, and an exceptional actor, for two reasons: it is not just one actor, but many actors; and it is not only an actor, but also an arena, among other things.

'The state' is a construct, a reification, a simplifying notion for many hard things, like the institutions of government, at all levels and in all branches, and the personnel that represents these institutions, from the policeman, tax inspector or schoolteacher to the city planner, welfare bureaucrat or Supreme Court judge. The term can also stand for some 'grand designs', programs and projects to which the government may have committed itself, and for many aspects of the resulting processes of interaction (like in Engels's (1962, p. 222) and Hilferding's definition of the state as 'der ideelle Gesamtkapitalist'). The functions of the state (counting only the most important ones) usually fall into four closely intertwined clusters, with some overlaps: the guaranteeing state (strong state), the servicing state (active state), the enabling and empowering state (strong and active), and the mediating or moderating state (broker state).

The guaranteeing state provides:

- protection (life/liberty/estate, internal and external peace, etc.),
- order, regulation, effective administration,
- predictability and 'stability' (inside/outside, real/perceived).
- rules for all kinds of competition,
- property,
- rule of law,
- transparency, accountability,
- human rights,
- freedom of choice, equal chances,
- 'taming', containment, self-restraint of the state.
- conduciveness (to growth, development, 'progress', protection, 'justice', integration, etc.) as a guarantee.

The servicing state cares for:

- planning, communication, infrastructure
- education,
- organization of the labor market,
- welfare,
- integration, inclusion (e.g., of the poor, weak, discriminated, migrants, minorities),
- sustainability,
- securing capabilities for innovation, R&D, economic stimuli,
- effective tax collection (the 'tax state').

The enabling and empowering state provides:

- conduciveness (to growth, development, 'progress', protection, 'justice', integration, etc.) as an effort (see above),
- special proactive efforts to fight inequalities, provide justice, freedom of choice, equal chances, 'respect'.

The mediating or moderating state should:

- channel and moderate interactions between corporate agreements and institutionalization,

- mediate between capitalist interests and 'the people',
- negotiate 'common interests' and the pacts to secure more 'justice' and equal chances
- provide schemes for legitimation,
- moderate transformation conflicts (adapt institutions and power relations to changed constellations).

It is important to note that the state (or the 'government', in the Anglo tradition) is not a single actor, but many actors, in different institutions and bureaucracies whose interests can be opposed or overlap only in parts (cf. local bureaucrats vs. central bureaucrats), so that minimizing gridlock can become an asset of good leadership. The state is also the arena in which societal and political interactions and conflicts occur, serving as the gatekeeper and organizer of the marketplace for economic, social, and political relations and processes, often acting as a mediator. The state is the chief notary public and regulator of society, a norm-setter and a provider of protection, of law and order, and of legitimation, at times of empowerment. Due to this multiplicity of functions, the state is an exceptional actor, and indeed 'more equal' than other actors. And we also must not forget that 'the state' is not a static entity, but an ongoing process, or better: a process of processes, given to change and transformation, reflecting particular trajectories and past and present entanglements. Mostly, the state 'is' not this or that (not even for a given period), but it 'happens', it moves, acts, and reacts, in particular constellations.

The answer to the question of how the states of the future should look like would be easy and normative: The states should be strong and sustainable democratic social and welfare states under the rule of law (*estados de derecho*) with strong institutions, effective and impartial administration, control and accountability, functioning responsive and responsible political parties and politicians, and good governance, fighting polarization and violence, populist aspirations, authoritarian temptations, corruption, poverty, exclusion and inequality, promoting security, justice, and more equality of life chances. And they should be capable of mediating between the different logics of democracy and capitalism (which is one of their most important tasks).<sup>6</sup> On the background of the real existing Latin American states, all these items sound like parts of a nice utopia. But as benchmarks and ultimate goals towards which to work, every one of them is, I think, valid and useful.

<sup>6</sup> On the different trajectories on which this could be accomplished, see the classic by Rueschmeyer et al., 1992.

Keeping these targets in mind, we might start by asking what a realistic set of priorities would be to address the present needs. As a first step, we must account for the real situation: The functioning of the states in Latin America, in most cases, does not live up to the needs of the countries. The reasons for that are well known, and their mix may vary. Among them we find the structural dependencies on world markets and powerful neighbors or partners in trade, recurrent economic crises, recently the receding dynamics and 'negative stagnation' of the last decade, in addition to the overarching problems of demography and migration, of interdependent inequalities, inclusion, and sustainability. A more direct impact have institutional and political inadequacies, particularly the weak and unbalanced institutional systems lacking effective mechanisms of representation, control, and accountability and inviting for an expansion of executive power, personalismo, corruption or golpes fácticos, as embodied in insufficient checks and balances, neglect or contempt for the rule of law, a lack of trust and of a national consensus (also on goals), a weak and fragmented civil society, also reflected in the party system, and an inherent trend towards polarization. Moreover, in the field of services, tax collection and control, the institutions are often inadequate. The critical infrastructure of democracy is often not in good shape, despite significant progress in some areas (e.g., women, minorities, indigenous communities).

We must, of course, not forget that the Latin American states also are at a structural disadvantage due to the historical constellations in which they must operate, and the time constraints they are under. The older states of Europe have had more time to develop the norms and rules, the institutional devices, the procedures, politics, and policies of modern statehood. They mainly could address the needs of each of the (so far) six phases, or stages of state building, one after the other:

1. state building in absolutism: law & order, taxes, the military, basic education, economic empowerment;
2. rule law, estado de derecho, Rechtsstaat;
3. the constitutional state;
4. a (more or less) democratic state, the inclusionary state (1);
5. the social and welfare state, of various kinds, the inclusionary state (2),
6. and last the environmental state, our present challenge.

In Latin America, we find more backlogs and problems at various stages must be handled simultaneously. Some states still must work on law and order, on the tax systems and

rule of law, as well as on the social and welfare state, infrastructure, and human services (apart from exceptional forerunners like Uruguay), and not only on the issues of the last challenge which is the environmental state. There is still much more work to be done.

The Latin American states also had and have to cope with the ongoing crises of the traditional model of the 'strong' developmental state, as it had been practically (and sectorally) developed in some countries since the first decades of the 20th century, and was theoretically established after the Second World War in the interventionist concept of 'developmentalism' or 'Cepalismo' (named after the UN Economic Commission for Latin America ECLA/CEPAL) which dominated the region through the 1960s and much of the 70s. It favored autocentric development, acknowledged the center/periphery divide and the constellations of unequal exchange, and combined the strong developmental state with advanced policies of import-substituting industrialization (ISI), a diversification of production and exportation, some Keynesian and some corporatist instruments and an integration into the mechanisms of the World Bank system (see Prebisch, 1950; Bielschowsky, 2016; Lewis, 2019).<sup>7</sup> The 'strong state' often, however, in reality turned out to be rather weak, ineffective and, particularly, unaccountable, due to the usual vices of underdevelopment, dependency<sup>8</sup> and fragmentation, bad leadership, clientelism, corruption, etc. Notions like the 'weak strong state' (or 'giants on feet of clay') have been used by some authors since the 1970s to characterize Latin American countries (and also autocracies of Southern Europe; cf. Malefakis, 1995).<sup>9</sup>

As the states, on the whole, did not deliver, the concepts of the strong state came even more under attack from three sides: from leftist and internationalist critiques along the lines of theories of imperialism, dependency, the new world system, later antiglobalism and neo-imperialism (e.g., Hardt & Negri, 2000), from the reform-averse establishment and from market-centered neoliberals and libertarians, as embodied in the economic adventures of the 'Chicago Boys' in Pinochet's Chile which liberated the economy from state

7 I cannot go into the details here, and I leave out forerunners and related debates, e.g., on 'economic backwardness' favoring autocratic regimes and divergences from 'Western' patterns (Gerschenkron, 1962; Tilly, 1975, 1992), the 'Prussian model' (Löwenthal, 1963, and the 'Sonderweg' debates), or 'development dictatorship' (from Atatürk and the PRI to Franco, Vargas and Perón), and the problem of the concepts' regime blindness.

8 Such observations were backed up by many of the findings of dependency theories. Cf. Cardoso & Faletto, 1979; Kay, 2011; see also Oszlak, 1978; Whitehead, 1994.

9 We can find a similar pattern in East and South Asia where the regime-blind strong developmental state was discovered later than in Latin America, in Chalmers Johnson's book of 1982 (on Japan), and modified by Shalini Randeria's sophisticated 'cunning state' (on India; 2003) which is neither strong nor weak, but rather ambiguous, and heavily unaccountable.

guidance and initiative to the point that —while the state was looking on — international market mechanisms, privatization and financial speculation could ruin traditional Chilean industry almost completely. For some time, the call for ‘bringing the state back in’ (according to the Evans et al. book of 1985) became fashionable (again), even in countries and situations where the state as an important player had never been ‘out’. In a way, over the last decades, processes of increasing and decreasing state initiatives and interventions in the economy and society have often followed the swings of a pendulum (like the changes between more leftist and more rightist governments; cf. Börzel et al., forthcoming).

We do, however, also have to account for a more categorical threshold in the last wave (so far) of what has come to be known as ‘Transformations of the State’, the title of a well-known research cluster at the University of Bremen (cf. Leibfried et al., 2015). Other research clusters studying the respective changes were organized under headings such as ‘Limited Statehood’, ‘Interdependent Inequalities in Latin America’, or ‘Contestations of the Liberal Script’ (all at the FU Berlin). They were complemented by many other studies on ‘Multiple’, ‘Entangled’, or ‘Reflexive Modernities’, etc. They all have centered around the repercussions of advanced globalization, of the breakthrough of IT and the ‘network society’, of the structural change of the public sphere which has already been mentioned, and new types of economic crises which have made state functions and power relations within and between the states more complex and challenging. Among the consequences of these transformations, we find more transnational entanglements and a reduced steering potential of the nation states, ‘Entgrenzung’, more transnational migrations, movements of capital and transfers, hence more transnational actors, institutions and regulations, and a contained and fractured sovereignty. This has, however, not enhanced the chances for more effective supranational regional alliances which in Latin America, on the whole, have remained weak and deprived of any ambitious functions, due to the reluctance of the member states to concede jurisdictions and competencies to the supranational entities.<sup>10</sup> Within the states, apart from the decisive changes of political intermediation, communication and campaigning that have been mentioned, we particularly can observe more fragmentation, scattered responsibilities (more ambiguity and less accountability), loosely-coupled agency (or ‘anarchy’, as some would have it), short-term protest politics, and more populist mobilizations, either in disfigured and defective democracies or in what has been called electoral authoritarianism.

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10 This also implies a structural problem, as the persisting need to empower, strengthen and ‘modernize’ the states in most cases may not be easily compatible with transferring functions and powers from them to supranational bodies.

These transformations have indeed affected the functioning of the state. Depending on 'degree', intensities, and sectoral impacts, they have made it less 'rational', less reliable, and less conducive to good governance and to delivering what people are expecting. The changes have affected the channels of legitimation, the mechanisms of accountability, the character of state-society relations, and many other functions of the guaranteeing state, the servicing state and the enabling and empowering state. They have also influenced the role of the state as a mediator between 'the interests' and the 'common good', or between capitalism and democracy. And they have broken up whatever there may have been left of the model of the strong, or weak and strong developmental state. Various model mixes have emerged, eventually shifting from traditional catch-up strategies to those of an 'alternative' development, more in the way of bricolage than of conceptual cohesion. There is no way back to Cepalismo, however modified.

## What could be done

The changes and transformations that have been briefly sketched here, particularly those of more fragmentation and weakness, more populist democracy and autocracy, more ambiguity and more unaccountability, have affected most of the functions of the state. The most important among them might be those of 'stability' and 'conduciveness', effective administration and controls, the rule of law, freedom of choice, inclusion, various economic and social policies, empowerment, and legitimation. The obvious question of what could be done will usually trigger two lines of recommendations: one asking for a list of priorities for immediate action, and a second one trying to identify, in a more focused way, some particularly interesting (or even 'key') problématiques that should be addressed because they have impacts on many others, provide useful spin-offs and might inspire further research.

Regarding the first line, priorities for action, the usual recommendations for policies have been extensively discussed by experts and politicians alike, most of it as part of an effective Reforma del Estado, but also beyond that. From what I have learnt in these debates, at present priority should also be given to investments and reforms in the educational and health care systems, to advances in digitalization and AI, and to institutional reforms addressing inequality and exclusion, curtailing the informal sector and increasing productivity. Even more urgent might be measures to improve and empower tax collection, and an efficient regulation of the internet platforms and social media. Functions have been widening and so must be the capabilities. Regarding politics, particularly the

challenges by populist and antidemocratic mobilizations would have to be addressed. Here the best remedy has always been 'good' and adequate, responsive and responsible politics and policies of the democrats and non-populists: Establishing trust, securing consensus and fairness, avoiding and sanctioning corruption, setting adequate priorities, not promising the impossible 'and 'delivering' on what has been promised (and what is most urgently needed). Equally important, however, is that these 'good' and adequate politics and policies are communicated convincingly. Democratic leadership basically is effective communication. And the best policies are of little help if they are not effectively communicated.

In the second line of recommendations, the 'big' problems for longer debates, many issues could be raised. I will conclude with five key examples I find particularly interesting for a future research agenda on the functioning of the state.

1. One crucial question is whether a state has the adequate strength and power to perform its functions (and which functions with priority), and if not, how it could be made strong enough to do so. Analytical and programmatic (or therapeutical) observations go hand in hand here. The state should neither be too weak, nor too strong, with regard both to its capabilities to fulfill its various functions (particularly in their basic guaranteeing and servicing dimensions), and overcome opposed interests, and to its mission to secure free space for the members of an open society. The situation typically depends on the specific problems at hand and the constellations of competition and conflict.

A central requirement that has often been neglected here is effective tax collection and revenue administration. The modern state, among other things, is supposed to be what Joseph Schumpeter has called a 'Steuerstaat' (tax state). Its European variant has been one of the inventions of continental absolutism (a component of 'discipline'), but also the Anglo nations have copied it, and all modern states have come to terms with it. Where it is deficient or non-existent it should be built, promoted, and empowered because otherwise the autonomy of the state lacks one of its fundamentals. In some non-European countries, there have been functional equivalents to build on. In the Latin American context, systematic research in this field (and some political action) has just begun.

The state also needs sufficient means to fulfill the functions which could be labeled under the term 'conduciveness', both in its guaranteeing and its enabling dimensions: The normative assumption here is that the state performs in a way that is conducive to all the other good things the state is expected to provide or promote, like growth, deve-

lopment, 'progress', protection, 'justice', integration, inclusion, etc. The state should be able to guarantee this conduciveness, and to make additional enabling efforts to that end where necessary.

2. A second area of particular interest could be the functions of the moderating state, or broker state. One question here is how and to what extent the state can manage to moderate the conflicts resulting from the more recent transformations, and the challenges to state and society that have been mentioned, particularly where those imply phenomena of social and cultural upheaval (e.g., migrations, and reactions), economic degradation and despair, ethnic diversity, fundamentalist ideologies, violence, etc., but also where they require more organizational efforts to cope with diverging interests and to adapt the institutions and power relations to the changed constellations. This leads to another, more general issue that refers to the capacity of the state and its leaders to channel and moderate the processes of interactions between corporate agreements, on the one hand, and institution-building and institutionalization, on the other. Successful politics of change and transformation usually occur along two parallel procedural lines of interactions: The actors involved come to agreements and negotiate pacts the contents of which then is transferred into laws, rules and institutions, based on which the next round of negotiations and potential agreements can follow, etc. These processes require a good sense for responsiveness, and for scope, timing and sequencing, on the side of the respective actors, but also adequate institutional and procedural resources and rules on the side of the state so that the steps of progress made in one line of interactions fit neatly into those of the other line.

3. A third area of interest on the agenda would refer to the protection of the weak. The question here is what the state does, and what it could or should do, to identify the groups of the weak, the poor, the needy, underprivileged, etc. that need protection, and what it would do, in which way, to address their problems. Particularly, it will have to be decided, in the process of implementation, whether adaptations of the general rules and of setting market incentives might be sufficient, or whether additional measures of empowerment will be needed requiring that an explicit consensus for it be organized. Here, the state has an important gatekeeping function.

4. One of the key characteristics of recent transformations has been a significant upsurge of protest politics. Protest, often violent protest, has been directed for and against change (often related to migrations), for the good old rights or for more rights and against their violations, against repression, or the corruption of elected and autocratic elites, for

the rule of law, for more participation, inclusion, etc., triggering reactions from other groups and particularly from 'the state'. Here a fourth cluster of relevant research topics emerges around the question of how these (often diffuse) protest energies can be (re-) integrated into civil society and organized politics: associations, networks, movements, parties, and the channels of political interaction provided and moderated by the state. New orientations and alliances depend on many factors, like social and political mobilization and organization, economic, social and cultural cleavages, religious and ideological 'values' and perceptions (and the cultural heritage behind), and not least leadership. The outcomes have shown a high degree of variation as many empirical studies from all continents have demonstrated. But they have also indicated that, in these processes, the reactions and initiatives of the government and of the agencies of the state have usually been of crucial importance.

5. This brings me to a fifth area of immediate concern because here, political regimes make a difference. In fact, we cannot refer to the state, to its role and functions, without referring to its political regime, and to where it stands, or moves, at least more or less, on the scale between autocracy and democracy and the many subtypes, nuances, and hybrids in between. I cannot see how even in development theory, reflections on the role of the state could, in the end and beyond limited technocratic assessments, remain regime-blind. Democracy makes a difference for many things relevant here. By which I mean: embedded, or liberal democracy, i.e. democracy cum rule of law, with the respective controls, as a working system without too many ambiguities and deficiencies.

This is particularly evident in several key state functions that have been identified as significantly impacted by recent transformations and therefore figure prominently on our agenda. Above all, this concerns the various factors required to secure accountability: like transparency, freedom of information, public control of state officials and corruption, human and civil rights, the rule of law, and limitations to the powers of the state. The more democratic a state is, the better it can fulfill these crucial guaranteeing functions. The same seems to apply for the functions that can be labeled under 'conduciveness', and for those that have to do with guaranteeing the life chances of citizens, like freedom of choice, equal chances, 'justice', 'respect', etc. It also appears that a more democratic state can much better fulfill the mediating functions which have been mentioned, including those of moderating between the capitalist interests and 'the people', or the public good.

Hence it would be legitimate to rank high on our agenda the question of whether or not (and why) the politics and policies of the state, and of those who are running it, can contribute to make the state more democratic, to secure democracy, or reduce the respective obstacles, and how, in case, conduciveness to more democracy could be enhanced.

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## **Participation and collaborative Governance<sup>1</sup>**

### **Participación y gobernanza colaborativa**

### **Participação e governança colaborativa**

#### **Abstract**

Democracy implies participation and gains legitimacy by adding collaborative governance. This enhances trust in all three stages of participation: informing, consulting, and engaging. However, cultures of participation and collaboration matter in the interactions of citizens, politics, and administrations. A special focus is needed for situations of crises. A general focus is needed at the micro, the meso, and the macro level to ensure resilience.

**Keywords:** Participation, collaboration, governance, democracy, informing, consulting, engaging

#### **Resumen**

La democracia implica participación y gana legitimidad al añadir gobernanza colaborativa. Esto mejora la confianza en las tres etapas de participación: informar, consultar y comprometerse. Sin embargo, las culturas de participación y colaboración son importantes en las interacciones de

<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on a presentation and lecture at the XXIX Congreso Internacional del CLAD on 'La Reforma del Estado y de la Administración Pública' which took place in Brasilia, Brasil in November 2024. The presentation is based on my research agenda and publications on public sector reform in combination with the OECD's databases on reform and trust.

los ciudadanos, la política y las administraciones. Se requiere un enfoque especial en situaciones de crisis. Se requiere un enfoque general a nivel micro, meso y macro para garantizar la resiliencia.

**Palabras clave:** Participación, colaboración, gobernanza, democracia, información, consulta, involucramiento

## Resumo

Democracia implica participação e ganha legitimidade ao adicionar governança colaborativa. Isso aumenta a confiança em todos os três estágios de participação: informação, consulta e engajamento. No entanto, culturas de participação e colaboração são importantes nas interações entre cidadãos, política e administrações. É necessário um foco especial em situações de crise. É necessário um foco geral nos níveis micro, meso e macro para garantir a resiliência.

**Palavras-chave:** Participação, colaboração, governança, democracia, informação, consultoria, engajamento

## Introduction

This essay explores the connection between ‘participation’ and ‘collaborative governance’. In line with the dynamics and trajectories of public sector reform, the shift away from a classical bureaucracy moved towards ‘markets’ as major drivers for governing the public sector. The New Public Management was a strong expression of this shift, which was ideologically driven, theoretically grounded in economic neo-institutionalist theory, and practically implemented by consultants and political advisors.

However, the initial pure model of NPM lost its attractiveness when Sustainable Development Goals on People, Planet, and Prosperity also required strong local communities (SDG11), strong institutions, peace, and justice (SDG16), and strong partnerships (SDG17), vertically, between all levels of government, and horizontally, between public, private for-profit, and private non-profit. Markets had to be complemented by networks which were developed in the New Public Governance Model.

The emergence of major crises, and ultimately the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated that markets and networks are necessary but insufficient to ‘solve’ or ‘contain’ these crises and systemic turbulence. The State was back and proved that public sector organizations,

framed democratic and rule-of-law-based hierarchies, were necessary to regulate markets and networks, and occupy a hybrid governance space based on hierarchies, markets, and networks.

To keep the State legitimate, democratic and trustworthy, it was essential to define its hierarchy as open, transparent, and inclusive of citizens. Therefore, participation is not just an instrument, a tool or a technique, it becomes an essential element of a Strategic Development Goal (SDG17). This is not only because there is an operational need to mobilize resources to realize SDGs, but also to strengthen the resilience of the system. Partnerships require active participation, which depends on trust between the involved actors. This results in the need to 'inform', 'consult', and 'engage' citizens, non-profit and for-profit organizations, all levels of government as partners. This should not only happen in the design and decision-making stage, but also, and perhaps even more, in the implementation and evaluation stage, which constitutes collaborative governance.

If this is a convincing trajectory and a 'promised rose garden', then why is it not happening, or so difficult to achieve? Genuine participation is difficult to realize. Informing is difficult but easier than consulting. Consulting is difficult but easier than engaging citizens. Engaging can be tricky. There is distrust, unwillingness to participate, underrepresentation in participation, diverging motivations behind participation, resistance from administrations and their professional bureaucratic structures.

Nevertheless, the alternative is a system devoid of participation, which can lead to populism, illiberalism, or authoritarian leadership.

This essay argues for participation and collaborative governance as a system that is more trustworthy, legitimate, resilient, democratic, constitutionally grounded in the rule of law, and effective for all citizens.

## Setting the broad governance agenda for the future

Examining reform histories as complex trajectories and as public sector reform policies, a range of literature becomes relevant to understanding the past, and even more so to anticipating the (possible) futures of these trajectories and reforms. Different types of crises and turbulence demonstrate that the future cannot be a repetition of the past or an extrapolation of current trends. There is a need for serious reflection on how changing circumstances affect reforms to avoid providing past solutions which do not fit the current and future problems (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

New complexities should be recognized in reshaping public systems through the reform policy cycle which includes reform design, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. This implies that the reform design is not merely one problem that has one solution, with a linear and causal link between the problem and the solution. The level of wickedness of problems implies not just risks but even more uncertainties about components, interactions, and levels of activities. However, there is also wickedness in solutions, which includes not only the ultimate objectives and goals, within changing societal values, but the shifting complexity of actors in their deliberation and decision making processes to define shared objectives, goals and (ideological) choices of instruments to realize visions for a consolidated Whole of Society (WoS) or Whole of Government (WoG).

### **A pessimistic version of reality**

In an ideal liberal democracy, based on fair and transparent elections, a parliament is chosen that assembles a majority for a government. This government acts within a constitutional legal framework and with related administrative law to run a bureaucracy which interacts with citizens and society (Figure 1).

This ideal picture is under pressure in several countries due to factors that result in shaking and disconnected systems and societies. Polarized societies are influenced by social media, which further polarize, sometimes under populist leaderships. The legislative branch becomes fragmented and polarized. Countries with majoritarian election systems experience fragile majorities that are unwilling to compromise. Countries with proportional systems are face fragmentation of the political center, and rising extremism to the left and to the right. Governments in several countries try to reduce the independence of the judicial branch by politicizing judicial appointments. The three branches do not provide adequate checks and balances anymore.

Many administrations, especially in neo-liberal regimes, have undergone serious budget cuts, and have lost capacity to govern effectively. There is serious pressure on the representativeness and on how merit determines the functioning of bureaucracies. This results in further weakening of the administrative culminating in efforts to deconstruct this administrative state. Policies and service delivery face budget cuts and to ideological focus resulting in a general feeling of exclusion of segments of society. This perception of exclusion fuels further polarization, which manifests in the next elections.

Adding to this picture, major crises are becoming more frequent and more intense,

threatening to destabilize the system itself—as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, where lockdowns of society resulted in a systemic shock (Bouckaert and Galego, 2024).

From this experience of handling the pandemic, it became clear that relying only on market mechanisms, as is promoted by NPM, and only networks, as in New Public Governance models, is not able to contain a major turbulence.

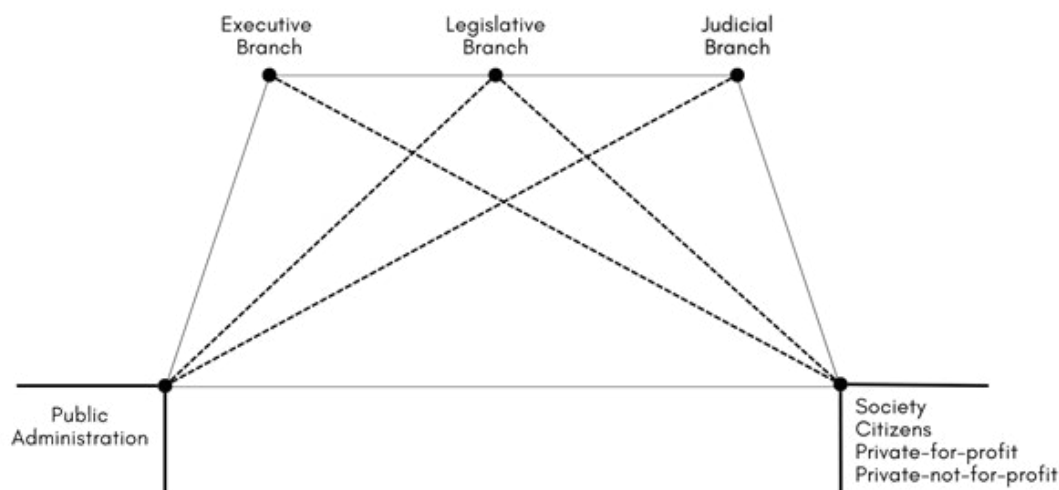
Some lessons learned from the pandemic and from other crises are that hierarchies, as well organized public organizations within an administrative legal framework, remain indispensable for governing the public sector and its WoG, but also for steering the WoS.

Markets remain useful; however, they are not equally functional in all policy fields. Market-type-mechanisms, which create quasi-markets (through vouchers, benchmarks, tenders) can be organized for certain production functions, but their effectiveness depends on the structure of supply and demand, and their interaction. These markets and quasi-markets also require robust regulation. There are many examples where self-regulation proved inconsistent with public values and the collective interest, necessitating a revised regulation 2.0 frame (Lodge, 2025).

Networks, both digital and social, remain useful and indispensable. However, ensuring their functionality requires clear mechanisms for monitoring, organization, and evaluation. Additionally, digital networks must be effectively regulated.

An explicit reform policy is required to coordinate hierarchy, markets, and networks within a governance space, and to implement an aligned set of mechanisms, tools, and techniques. With New Public Management (NPM) as a market driven governance space, and New Public Governance (NPG) as a network driven space, the Neo-Weberian State model is a hierarchy driven public governance space, embedded in a democratic and a rule-of-law based constitutional system, with a functional, open, and diverse bureaucracy (Bouckaert, 2023).

The State and its legally based hierarchy remain a crucial driver for functionally integrating administration with markets and networks. The Neo-Weberian State model could be a model for the future since this model has the capacity, within a democratic and rule-of-law based framework, to deliver services and policies, to contain major crises, and to trigger innovations that combine service delivery with crisis governance. Participation becomes a crucial concept redefining our systems and developing collaborative state governance.

**Figure 1.** *Participation and State Governance*

### An optimistic version for the future

For a long time, public trust research assumed that levels of trust— and changing levels of trust— of society in ‘government’ depended on the ‘ability’ to deliver, the perceived ‘benevolence’ of the authorities, and the ‘integrity’ of those in charge in the politico-administrative system.

The OECD trust surveys have added another dimension to establishing trustworthiness in society: the conviction and feeling of being taken into account, of being included (OECD, 2022). The 2024 survey states that “(f)or trust in local government, one variable stands out as a focus for increasing trust: Individuals who find it more likely that local government would give them an opportunity to voice their opinion when taking a decision affecting their community are 6.1 percentage points more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the local government” (OECD, 2024, p. 146).

The feeling of being excluded seems to trigger systemic dominoes to fall and for distrust to become entrenched. This becomes a downward spiral and logic of disconnecting and distrusting.

To reverse from a logic and practice of disconnecting into a logic and practice of connecting and trusting starts with efforts to include people in an active way. By linking participation (as informing, consulting, and engaging citizens) to trust, this becomes again

a fundamental societal mechanism not only for ensuring sustainable communities, but also for building effective and sustainable systems, and ultimately the State (OECD, 2024).

A fundamental bottom-line for connecting and including people is a trusting environment. Individual and institutional relationships are about dividing labor, sharing responsibility and accountability, agreeing on and sharing power to facilitate action, and above all, about trusting both individuals and, even more, institutions.

According to the OECD (2022), three pillars constitute trust in institutions which support democracy as an institution (figure 2): public governance for combating misinformation and disinformation; representation, participation and openness in public life, and stronger open democracies in a globalized world (global responsibilities and building resilience). These pillars refer to including more citizens and society, enhancing the inclusion of citizens and society, and creating a culture of openness and active participation.

**Figure 2.** *Governance pillars for building trust and re-inforcing democracy.*



Source: OECD (2022).

## Unpacking Participation and Collaborative Governance Complexity: Clarifying participation terminology

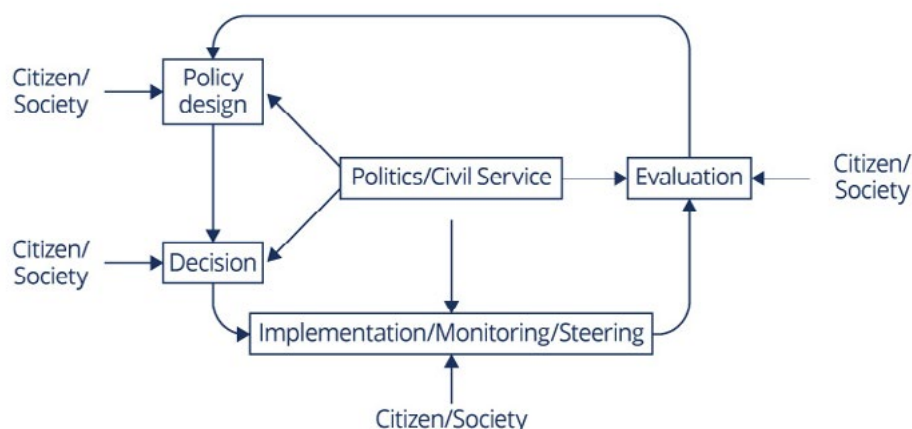
Participation, as a fundamental societal mechanism for ensuring sustainable and resilient communities, has multiple dimensions and components. There is a range of terms that have different histories and different origins, such as ‘inform’, ‘consult’, ‘engage’, ‘deliberate’, ‘involve’, ‘include’, ‘collaborate’, or ‘participate’. It is unclear whether these English words translate effectively to all languages and cultures.

Deliberation includes dialogue and debate. It could be a process that leads to consensus. It could also be a type of democratic system that not only broadens forms within an open, empowered sphere, but is also responsible and accountable (Owen & Smith, 2015).

According to the OECD (2020), stakeholder ‘participation’ involves the whole policy cycle and includes ‘information’, ‘consultation’, and ‘engagement’. ‘Information’, as an initial level of participation, is a one-way dissemination process. ‘Consultation’ is more advanced, as it involves a two-way communication with a feedback function. ‘Engagement’ enables resource-supported collaboration during all phases of the policy cycle.

Collaborative governance (figure 3) is about ‘information’, ‘consultation’, and ‘engagement’ of citizens and various societal actors, in all stages of the policy cycle within policy fields and participating public sector organizations: from design to co-design, from decide to co-decide, from implement to co-implement, from evaluate to co-evaluate. The full size of collaborative governance is about co-co-co-co.

**Figure 3.** Collaborative governance: shifting from a closed to an open policy cycle



In shifting from a 'closed' system where the politico-administrative system controls the policy cycle through design, decision, implementation, and evaluation, to an 'open' system, the key question is what the 'right' proportions and shares of engagement are (Table 1).

The subsequent discussion is how to increase or decrease engagement, and how to align these 'three' stake actors: politicians, civil servants, and citizens/society (see also Svvara, 2001).

**Table 1**

*Stakeholder proportionality in collaborative governance: politicians, civil servants, and citizens/society*

| Levels of engagement by stakeholders | Design | Decide | Implement | Evaluate |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|-----------|----------|
| Politicians                          | X      | A      | U         | Q        |
| Civil servants                       | Y      | B      | V         | R        |
| Citizens/society                     | Z      | C      | W         | S        |
|                                      | 100    | 100    | 100       | 100      |

It is clear that focusing on one part of the policy cycle is not enough. Each element has its own necessary and sufficient conditions. Involving citizens and society in design is essential since sufficient evidence shows that co-design enhances ownership of decisions (OECD, 2024, p. 147). Thus, co-design is necessary but not sufficient, it should impact decisions, ideally by involving citizens and society in the decision-making stage.

Citizens and society will feel excluded when the logic of the decision is not followed by its implementation. This requires political will and an administrative culture of openness to 'walk the talk', and not only to 'listen', but also to 'learn' and possibly adjust implementation. In some cases, co-implementation, or co-creation, or co-production could be the missing link to keep ownership of decision taken. Finally, this co-implementation state could be necessary but not sufficient, while evaluation should include co-evaluation or participatory evaluation.

At the macro level, this collaborative governance is logically embedded in 'deliberative and participatory democracy' (table 2). The purpose of this contribution is not to elaborate and develop this macro level. However, it is useful to demonstrate the key differences (OECD, 2020, p. 12). Whereas participatory democracy has a longer history with social and activist movements in a context of reversing discrimination (Pateman, 2012), deliberative democracy is more recent and responds to the pressure on representative democracy (Owen & Smith, 2015).



**Table 2***Key differences between deliberative and participatory democracy*

|                                | Number of participants   | Type of participation                                                                   | Participant selection method                        |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Deliberative democracy</b>  | Small and representative | Deliberation, based on information, from different perspectives with a public judgement | Civic lottery: random selection with stratification |
| <b>Participatory democracy</b> | Large, ideally everyone  | More participation; focus on diversity                                                  | Self-selected participation                         |

*Source: OECD (2020, p. 12).*

One of the missing links in literature and in practice is the disconnect between deliberative democracy (as promoted by the European Commission), and collaborative governance. While allowing citizens to participate in the design and decision stage of the policy cycle, its implementation should follow the same logic. However, the administrative culture could lead to resistance during the implementation. One way to 'address' this is through implementation governance that is based on collaboration and participation (Barandarian et al., 2023). The acid test for a functioning deliberative democracy will be whether collaborative governance becomes a perceived and tangible reality (Blockmans & Russack, 2020; Alonso et al., 2007).

One of the reality checks will be the distribution of the capacity of different parts of society to effectively engage and collaborate, and how this matches a culture of openness of the politico-administrative system. Shifting from 'information' to 'consultation' to 'engagement' will determine the level of trustworthiness of collaborative governance.

## **Unpacking Participation and Collaborative Governance Complexity: "I never promised you a rose garden"**

### **Culture matters**

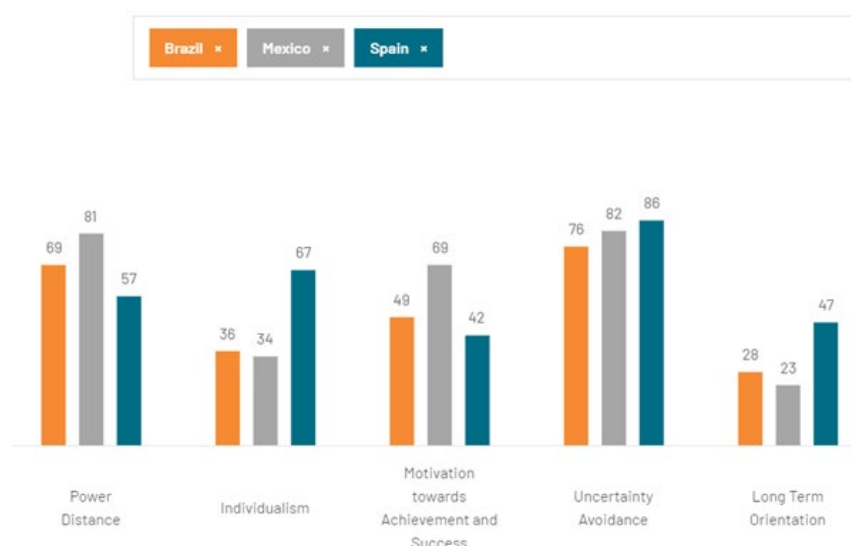
Culture matters, particularly for determining levels and types of engagement. Hofstede's cultural dimensions could guide a discussion on how these dimensions affect levels and types of engagement in society.

Hypothetically, one could state that higher power distance, one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, could reduce the level of engagement, since it discourages active partici-

pation, contribution, or speaking up. However, the pressure for participation could also challenge this power distance. One could also assume that higher levels of individualism reduce the willingness to participate, deliberate, or collaborate, and feel responsible for the common good. Conversely, achievement-oriented cultures may foster greater engagement. On the other hand, high levels of uncertainty avoidance could discourage engagement with uncertain outcomes. Finally, a longer-term orientation could promote engagement as a long-term strategy.

Figure 4 illustrates the differences in these five cultural dimensions for Brazil, Mexico, and Spain. The conclusion is that different cultures of engagement are likely related to these differences in the dimensions of culture itself. As a consequence, copying and pasting 'solutions' from 'other' cultures is not a guarantee for what will work. Also, sharing 'good practices' remains essential to check the compatibility with one's cultural features, and to start a debate of what approaches are matching your cultural or professional features.

**Figure 4.** Comparing Hofstede's cultural dimensions for Brazil, Mexico, and Spain.



Source: <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool>

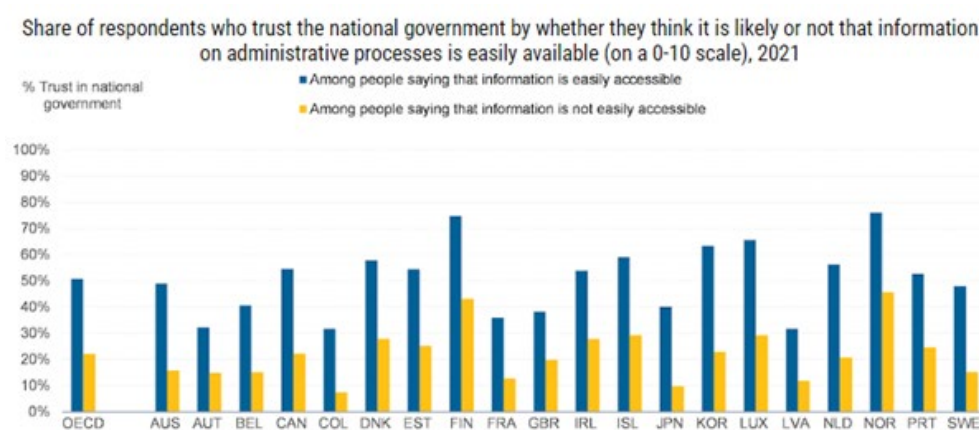
### Walk the talk: walk fully the entire talk

Engaging society in the entire policy cycle is not obvious and is not always taken for granted by the population across all policy fields. Historically, 'information' as a one-way, top-down type of communication is generally accepted and common practice. The next stage of 'consultation' as a two-way exchange of information also resulted in developing

citizen and customer surveys to gauge perceptions and expectations, levels of satisfaction, and even trust in specific service delivery. When this active ‘listening’ results in ‘learning’ and adjusting administrative behaviour and interactions, consultations have an impact. The next stage in engagement is co-production and co-creation, leading to collaborative governance. This is not obvious to many citizens and their organizations. Finally, there is the evaluation part of active listening to citizens. The condition for impactful evaluations is if and when they affect the next cycle in its design, decision, implementation, and evaluation. This feed-forward approach in ‘walking the talk’ should be well perceived as convincing.

There is evidence in OECD countries that all levels of engagement (information, consultation, participation) contribute to trustworthiness and trust levels (OECD, 2021). Figure 5 (OECD, 2021) demonstrates that when people are convinced “that information on administrative processes is easily available,” their level of trust in national government is significantly higher. On the other hand, people who are not convinced of this have a lower level of trust. Even the ‘easy’ part of participation and engagement, such as sharing information, has a positive impact on trust. We assume here that people trust the information they can obtain. That is why investing in a perception of trustworthy information and combating disinformation and misinformation is crucial.

**Figure 5.** *‘Informing’ as a first stage of ‘participation’ enhances trust in national government.*



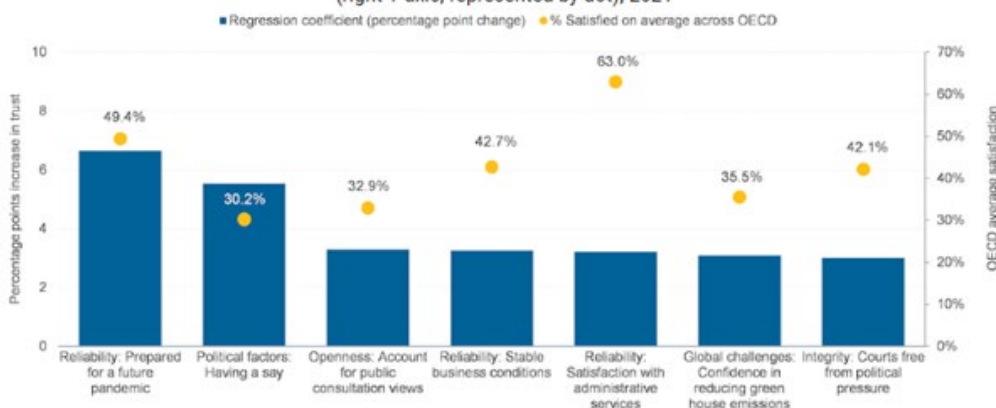
Source: OECD (2021).

Beyond ‘informing’ as the first stage of participation, ‘consultation’ also positively impacts trust levels (OECD, 2021). A perception and feeling of ‘having a say’, and therefore having an experience of being included, and being taken into account, at central and at local government level, is essential.

Figure 6 demonstrates that the ‘having a say’ in politics, and that openness practiced as taking public consultations into account, have a significant impact on trust (and also on satisfaction) (OECD, 2021).

**Figure 6.** ‘Consultation’ as a second stage of participation.

Percentage point change in trust in national government in response to improvements in selected variables (left Y-axis, represented by bar) and OECD unweighted average respondents' satisfaction in the noted variables (right Y-axis, represented by dot), 2021

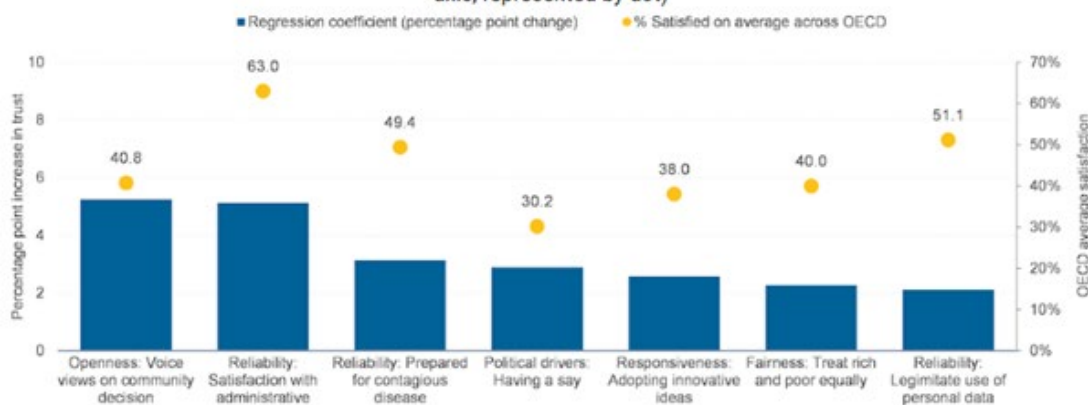


Source: OECD (2021).

‘Engagement’, the third stage of participation, also impacts trust, especially at the local government level, where the interactions between citizens, politics, and administration are the closest and most direct. Given that in general, in liberal democracies, trust levels in local government are higher than in central government, a primary driver at local government levels are ‘voice views on community decision’ in a context of engaged openness (Figure 7).

**Figure 7.** ‘Engagement’ as a third stage of participation.

Percentage point change in trust in local government in response to improvements in selected variables (left Y-axis, represented by bar) and OECD unweighted average respondents' confidence in the noted variables (right Y-axis, represented by dot)



Source: OECD (2021).

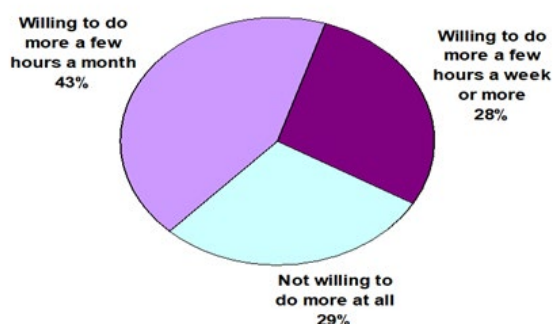
For all three levels of participation (inform, consult, engage), there is a positive impact on the trusting levels in local government by its citizens.

### It needs (at least) two to tango: citizens and government

Participation of citizens requires a willingness to participate among citizens. However, not all citizens are willing to engage in all policy fields at all times, across all stages of the policy cycle. There is not much empirical evidence on the willingness of citizens to engage in public service, even when there is a reality of volunteers and solidarity within communities, and even when there is evidence of 'public service motivation' outside the public sector.

According to Löffler et al. (2008), in a survey on the willingness to contribute to public service, almost one-third is not willing to engage (more), and nearly one-third is willing to do a bit more (figure 8).

**Figure 8.** *Participation: the future role of citizens' willingness to participate.*



Source: Löffler et al. (2008).

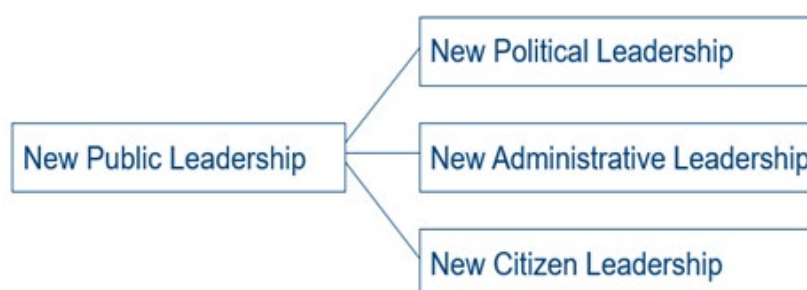
In a similar survey by a Dutch agency on the changing willingness and profile of volunteers between 2019 and 2021, there was a 7.8% decrease in the number of citizens who declared conducting work as a volunteer. It is unclear to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to this, especially since volunteers and their networks were essential and crucial in combating the pandemic within local networks and communities. On the profile of these volunteers, there are also some indications of under- and over-representation vis-à-vis the average population. The age group of 25-35 years (and also beyond 75 years) is under-represented. Lower-level education groups are underrepresented, and higher-level educated individuals are overrepresented. Dutch-Dutch citizens are over-represented compared to other non-Dutch-originated citizens (SCP, 2021).

It is clear that 'the' citizen does not exist in the world of participation. There are significant differences in terms of willingness and representation.

### It needs three to tango: citizens, politics, and administration

Classical and traditional bureaucracies are not always willing or able to accept citizen participation, which is sometimes perceived as interfering in public affairs. To the extent that the historical participatory democracy movement correlated with social movements in society, the debate of representative bureaucracy emerges. To what extent are bureaucracies representative of the diversity of populations they serve? In this matter, perception of access to positions in bureaucracy is crucial, and hyper-diverse societies, especially in countries with considerable migration waves, become part of the participatory debate (Schröter, 2019).

**Figure 10.** *Collaborative Governance, Participation and New Public Leadership*



Another shift in the capacity of the bureaucracy to facilitate engagement and participation is the positioning of Street-Level Bureaucrats (SLBs) as the primary interface with citizens. SLB is under pressure from two sides: political polarization and populism, and replacement by Artificial Intelligence. Lotta has clearly described, in the Brazilian case, how SLB is subject to populist pressure, and what possible responses, in the interest of citizens, could be (Lotta, 2025). Also, substituting ‘expensive and inefficient’ SLB by cost-friendly and efficient algorithms and artificial intelligence, as it happened, e.g., in neoliberal governments of Australia and the Netherlands under the then Minister-President Rutte, resulted in activating biases in these algorithms, and also in extrapolating mechanisms of decisions which caused serious violations of citizen rights.

For deliberating and representative politicians, collaborative bureaucracy, and participating citizens to tango together, new types of leadership will be needed (figure 10). This implies collective leadership, characterized by open communication and respectful dialogue, with genuine listening and genuine learning (Ospina, 2017).

## **The necessity of participation in handling crises and turbulence**

The need for participation goes beyond standard policies and service delivery. A different type of participation is required during crises and periods of system turbulence.

Classical administrations rely on certainty and stability for standard operating procedures, with predictable and known mechanisms in a context of clear and accepted 'solutions' for citizens. Risk and uncertainty transform this classical bureaucratic regime entirely. In a VUCA context characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, the role of participation shifts. It gets even more problematic when there is a situation of turbulence and disruptive environments, with oscillating, unpredictable, and unknown quality of data, information, and knowledge of what to do. This deteriorates even further when policy fields collapse like dominoes, with unknown sequences. During the COVID-19 pandemic, what started with an implosion of 'health' triggered a range of policy dominoes: mobility was shut down, followed by education and the economy, which in turn affected security.

This was even more the case when sets of sustainable 'solutions' were opposed by experts from different disciplines (health versus economy), publicly disputed, and where 'solutions' became as wicked as the problems. These TODO system-quakes (Bouckaert & Galego, 2024) (Turbulent environments, Oscillating knowledge quality, policy Domino's falling, Opposing 'solutions') require adjusted governance, which will urgently need different types of participation from society.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a clear case of this, demonstrating the need for flexible governance with strong yet diverse types of participation from local governments and communities.

## **Resilience needs strong levels of inclusion and participation**

In line with the need to have a strong potential to activate and different types of participation also to handle crises and turbulence, participation becomes a key requirement for resilience, as is also shown in the OECD agenda for strengthening government resilience (OECD, 2021). 'Representation', 'Interest aggregation', and 'Inclusion in policy-making' all refer to different degrees and types of participation to build, keep, and maintain trust and transparency by ensuring the 'inform', 'consult', and 'engage' troika of participation.

**Figure 11.** *The OECD model for strengthening government resilience.*



Source: OECD (2021, p.44).

### **Governing 'Participation' through 'Collaborative Governance' (Barandiaran et.al., 2023)**

Collaborative governance, as a complement or component of deliberative or participatory democracy refers to the public sector and its policies, directly engaging non-state stakeholders, in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative; which entails new structures of governance as opposed to hierarchical organizational decision making; and that engages across the boundaries of levels of government, and the public, private and civic spheres, to achieve common goals and to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished (Agranoff, 2006; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bingham et al., 2005; McGuire, 2006; Emerson et al., 2012; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015, among others).

The term 'collaborative governance' (CG) is interpreted normatively and culturally in different ways in different countries. However, in general, CG is about multi-actor collaboration, led by a public sector organization, aimed at building consensus among stakeholders on a formal set of policies, designed and implemented to address key current challenges in social policies (Batory & Svensson, 2017). A key question is how practices of CG could travel across borders and countries.

The following statements (Table 3) are hypothetical sentences, and in this sense, might work as propositions for practice and research for strengthening 'participation' through 'collaborative governance'. These propositions are clustered around three governance levels: macro (the system), meso (policies), and micro (management) (Bouckaert et al.,

2023). Linking ‘participation’ and ‘collaborative governance’ in a sustainable, resilient, and functional way should happen at an operational and strategic level, at an individual and collective level, culturally and structurally. Based on an empirical analysis of a collaborative governance reform programme in the Basque Country (the Gipuzkoa province) (Barandiaran et al., 2023), these clustered propositions have inductively been generated. In essence, the conclusion is that participation can only be facilitated when all levels of collaborative governance are developed, including macro-systemic, meso-policy, and micro-organizational levels. The chain of involvement through collaborative governance will only be so strong as the weakest part of that chain.

**Table 3.** *Positive drivers for collaborative governance*

| Levels of collaborative governance | Positive drivers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Macro                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A history of social capital and collaboration in civil society</li> <li>- A shared vision between the major political factions beyond elections</li> <li>- Support from political and societal actors who think collaborative governance is desirable and feasible</li> <li>- Have more non-political actors included in the political process</li> <li>- Systemically and systematically, institutionalise the inclusion and alignment of different stakeholders</li> <li>- Redistribute the power of legitimate stakeholders</li> <li>- Focus on results, but also and even more on appropriateness</li> <li>- Realize a ‘hierarchy’ (as a ‘rule of law’ driven democratic state) with ‘markets’ and with ‘networks’</li> </ul> |
| Meso                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mobilize local knowledge through dialogue for sustainable societal ownership</li> <li>- Mobilize proactively local universities to foster knowledge governance</li> <li>- The sooner key societal actors are involved in the policy cycle of design (decision, implementation, and evaluation), the better</li> <li>- Ensure interaction and alignment of different levels of government</li> <li>- Realize interactive, distributed, and collaborative leadership</li> <li>- Ensure horizontal accountability</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Micro                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure internal and external active collaborative listening and learning</li> <li>- Make sure civil servants have a culture of change, allowing empowered stakeholders</li> <li>- Organize different communications for different purposes and different target groups</li> <li>- Acting together is more important than sending messages</li> <li>- The more tangible the intangible outcomes of collaborative projects, the easier it is to involve all target groups in collaborating</li> <li>- Ensure that the making and the telling come together in communication</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                              |

Source: Barandiaran et al. (2023).

## In conclusion

Participation and collaborative governance are not a panacea; however, this essay assumes that a system based on these concepts is more trustworthy, legitimate, resilient, democratic, and rule-of-law-based, as well as effective for all citizens.

The list of challenging conditions for today's democracies is long: increasing polarization, the changing nature of political parties, tensions between executive, legislative, and judicial powers, easier conditions for the dissemination of fake news, and expanding populism (Bouckaert, 2025). Handling crises and turbulence only adds to this.

Even when participation and collaborative governance are not a panacea, they help move toward a self-fulfilling prophecy. OECD evidence demonstrated that participation (informing, consulting, engaging) contributes to a more trustworthy system. This culture and practice of participation requires adjusted leadership, also in times of crises and turbulence. To be consistent and resilient, this culture and practice of participation and collaborative governance should be implemented at the macro-institutional, meso-policy, and micro-organizational levels. For that purpose, a hybrid governance space which combines hierarchies, markets and networks will be necessary, however not controlled by market (NPM) or by networks (NPG), but by a democratic, open, transparent, inclusive, and rule-of-law based hierarchy as in a Neo-Weberian State.

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## **The resilience of the regulatory state in an age of polycrisis**

### **La resiliencia del Estado regulador en una era de policrisis**

### **A resiliência do Estado regulador na era da policrise**

#### **Abstract**

The world of ‘polycrisis’ poses fundamental questions about the resilience of the regulatory state. This paper introduces the core challenges of the polycrisis era for the regulatory state. Particular attention is paid to debates surrounding resilience and how regulatory regimes may develop capacity for resilience. The paper considers resilience in terms of information processing capacity. It identifies four possible futures for the regulatory state in an age of polycrisis, but notes that such futures depend on assumptions regarding the resourcefulness of regulators and the regulated. It suggests that building resilience into regulatory capacity requires continuous mediation and conversation, rather than relying on fixed blueprints.

**Keywords:** polycrisis, regulatory state, resilience, information processing capacity, regulatory capacity.

#### **Resumen**

El mundo de la “policrisis” plantea preguntas fundamentales sobre la resiliencia del Estado regulador. Este artículo presenta los principales desafíos de la era de

la policrisis para el Estado regulador. Se presta especial atención a los debates en torno a la resiliencia y cómo los regímenes regulatorios pueden desarrollar capacidad para ser resilientes. El artículo considera la resiliencia en términos de capacidad de procesamiento de información. Identifica cuatro posibles futuros para el Estado regulador en una era de policrisis, pero señala que dichos futuros dependen de las suposiciones sobre la capacidad de recursos tanto de los reguladores como de los regulados. Se sugiere que construir resiliencia en la capacidad regulatoria requiere una mediación y conversación continuas, en lugar de una dependencia en planes predefinidos.

**Palabras clave:** policrisis, Estado regulador, resiliencia, capacidad de procesamiento de información, capacidad regulatoria.

## Resumo

O mundo da “polícrise” coloca questões fundamentais sobre a resiliência do Estado regulador. Este artigo apresenta os principais desafios da era da polícrise para o Estado regulador. Dá-se atenção especial aos debates sobre resiliência e sobre como os regimes regulatórios podem desenvolver essa capacidade. O artigo considera a resiliência em termos de capacidade de processamento de informações. Identifica quatro futuros possíveis para o Estado regulador na era da polícrise, mas observa que esses futuros dependem de suposições sobre a capacidade de recursos tanto dos reguladores quanto dos regulados. Sugere-se que a construção da resiliência na capacidade regulatória exige mediação e diálogo contínuos, ao invés de depender de modelos fixos.

**Palavras-chave:** polícrise, Estado regulador, resiliência, capacidade de processamento de informações, capacidade regulatória.

## Introduction

A series of crises has marked the first quarter of the 21st century. National and international regulatory frameworks have been challenged by, among other things, terrorism, environmental disasters, and financial crises. Notable examples include the 9/11 attacks, the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004, the 2008 economic and subsequent sovereign debt crises, the 2010 Chilean Copiapó mining disaster, the 2015 Mariana Dam disaster in Brazil's Minas Gerais, the COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in January 2020, the Russian invasions of Ukrainian territory in 2014 and 2022, extensive electricity blackouts, such as those affecting Spain and Portugal in late April 2025, and the accelerated move away from a multilateral international order. Some of these examples might be regarded as contemporary examples of well-known phenomena. Others might be considered qualitatively different 'known risks'; for example, the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events at least raise questions about existing approaches. Other examples include the concept of 'unknown unknown'; for instance, cybersecurity-related risks pose new challenges in the emerging world of a fully connected 'Internet of things,' leaving public and private entities vulnerable to various threats—as witnessed in the 2022 cyberattack on Costa Rica.

Crises are associated with irreversible harm to social systems that expose the vulnerabilities of (regulatory) systems that were intended to prevent or, at least, mitigate against precisely these types of events (Hood & Jackson, 1991a, b). While much has been said about crises in the context of actual, measurable harm (e.g., death counts, reconstruction costs), other types of crises expose vulnerabilities in institutional arrangements without necessarily causing directly quantifiable harm. Such crises include the considerable extent of democratic backsliding across the Global North and South, including challenges to election results and the outright denial of the legitimacy of the political 'rules of the game.' The disregard for often unwritten 'rules of the game' has exposed the limits of regulatory regimes intended to regulate political conduct, whether related to ethics or electioneering (Bakke & Sitter, 2022).

For the past three decades, much emphasis has been placed on regulatory institutions to mitigate and respond to crises. Indeed, the past three decades have witnessed a notable emphasis on relying on so-called expert-dominated agencies, decoupled from direct political oversight, and a reliance on 'enforced self-regulation' that placed the primary responsibility on the regulated entities themselves. These institutional arrangements have increasingly come under strain due to the experience of crises. Moreover, the contempo-

rary capacity challenge for national regulatory states extends beyond whether regulatory regimes have been found negligent in the context of a specific event. The central challenge is that contemporary crises are transboundary, protracted, and involve ‘wicked problems’ (Boin, 2019; Boin et al., 2020; Rittel & Webber, 1973). Such a context poses a set of issues:

Firstly, crises that span across jurisdictions challenge the capabilities of national regulatory systems (Cabane & Lodge, 2024). National regulatory responses may generate externalities in other jurisdictions that are affected. Therefore, national regulatory responses may become potential triggers for crises elsewhere. Secondly, crises are ‘protracted’; they might involve elements of ‘acuteness’—the immediacy of an environmental disaster, the insolvency of an institution that some deem ‘too big to fail’, or concerns over specific behaviors—but they not only persist, but, as initial responses, generate side effects that in themselves require further interventions.

Contemporary crises are also transboundary in terms of representing ‘wicked problems’—they are multifaceted, transcend epistemological boundaries, involve highly ethical decisions, and consequently surpass the limitations of conventional policy analysis (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Head, 2022). The challenge of how regulatory regimes can respond to such ‘wicked issues’ is further complicated by the interconnection of these disparate threats and crises.

The range and variety of fast- and slow-moving crises challenge the resilience of existing regulatory regimes. At the same time, regulatory regimes may also be regarded as part of the problem; a decentralized approach towards governing raises specific coordination challenges. Thus, the contemporary world of crises has thrown the overall resilience of the regulatory state into question: the need to respond to the demands of an acute crisis occurs in the context of significant levels of inequality, evidence of democratic backsliding, and the climate crisis, as well as limited trust in the authority of the regulatory regimes themselves.

Of course, each generation has faced its own set of transboundary and protracted crises that were regarded as existential, transformative, or unprecedented (Lodge, 2009; Radkau, 2017). Different generations have experienced their own ‘crisis of the state’ (Lodge, 2013). However, the contemporary generation of crises might be said to be qualitatively different and therefore may appropriately be called an era of ‘polycrisis’ (Henig & Knight, 2023). For one, this is often described as an age of the Anthropocene, whose im-

pacts are already noticeable (Morin & Kern, 1993; Ellis Erle, 2024; Lawrence, 2024; Seyd, 2025). The certainty about the phenomena (climate change) is coupled with uncertainty about potential futures.

Furthermore, this age of polycrisis is distinctly transboundary—an era of escalating climate change raises questions about the appropriate balance of adaptation and mitigation, but also points to likely cascading effects involving geopolitical tensions, migration, and the exacerbated effects on societal inequality—just at a time when political systems are widely criticized for their lack of problem-solving capacity, and when politicians are said to be increasingly tempted to play populist tunes (Lodge & Wegrich, 2014). Furthermore, the nature of transboundary crises extends beyond the challenges to the structure and operation of regulatory regimes; they directly expose individuals to the vulnerabilities of the governmental institutions that were supposed to protect them. Such exposure to vulnerability, in turn, fosters a growing politics of anxiety that cannot be resolved by the analytical and calculating capacities of regulatory regimes alone (Chalmers, 2005).

Questions regarding the problem-solving capacities of contemporary states in an age of polycrisis, therefore, relate to the dominant ways in which contemporary states have been structured over the past few decades. As noted, over the past three decades, contemporary states in the Global North and South have been described as ‘regulatory states’ (Majone, 1997). This kind of regulatory state has been associated with the creation of regulatory institutions that emphasize ‘expert judgement,’ the reliance on private provision of public services, and extensive formal contractualization. Considering three decades since the ‘rise’ of the regulatory state, what can be said about the resilience of the regulatory state? Does the regulatory state contribute to resilience? Have the institutions of the regulatory state contributed to societal resilience or proven an impediment?

To address these questions, the following argument proceeds in three steps. One is to point to the capacity requirements that the world of polycrisis poses. The second is to define conditions for ‘resilience.’ Ideas regarding ‘resilience’ have been contested in the broader literature on risk regulation, but they broadly refer to the idea that systems can bounce back from disruption. Finally, given the diagnosed capacity requirements, what kind of regulatory state is likely to evolve in the future?

## The world of polycrisis

The age of polycrisis presents transboundary challenges, as noted. The term ‘transboundary crises’ implies that crises and crisis responses are influenced by the challenges of overlaps (gridlock due to competing organizational claims over their jurisdiction) and underlaps (the absence of any organization claiming authority over a particular issue) (Boin, 2019). These conditions lead to multi-organizational sub-optimization (see Hood, 1976). Such failures of coordination can arise due to jurisdictional boundaries, such as the lack of coordination across countries during the financial crisis (with governments rushing to support their national banking systems), the global migration crisis with limited interest in cross-country coordination, or pandemic responses where each country outbid others for access to supplies and vaccines.

Jurisdictional boundaries not only present challenges for horizontal coordination across states but also pose challenges for both vertical and horizontal coordination within states (Cabane & Lodge, 2024). One of the central themes in crisis management has been the doctrine of relying on local authorities as the first level of defense, with regional or central governments only becoming involved if lower levels of government are seen to be overwhelmed. However, the interplay between different levels of government, whether in terms of resources, oversight, or coordination, before, during, and after a crisis, has proven highly problematic. Indeed, in a world of polycrisis, establishing the appropriate level of regulatory authority is particularly challenging, as transnational responses to transboundary crises are likely to conflict with the emphasis on crisis management as a core characteristic of national sovereignty.

To explore these coordination challenges, it is worthwhile to focus on the core definitional components of ‘crisis.’ There are several well-established characteristics that define a ‘crisis’ (Rosenthal et al., 2001), including threat, uncertainty, and urgency. For an event to be recognized as a crisis, it requires, therefore, the identification of a threat to the integrity of a social system (at whatever level), the problem of being able to identify, classify, and address an event given a lack of information, and the requirement to respond immediately. The term ‘social system’ highlights that crises can affect different organizational levels, ranging from an individual organizational entity to human civilization. In the context of this paper, the ‘threat’ level links to the viability of political, social, and economic systems.

To explore this world of polycrisis further, it is worth considering the challenges presented by the three key characteristics of crisis, namely threat, uncertainty, and urgency.



(i) Threat: One of the primary distinctions between an individual ‘tragedy’ and a ‘crisis’ lies in the assessment of a ‘threat’ to the survival of a social system, involving both irreversible harm as well as loss of trust in the capacity of institutional arrangements to cope with types of disturbances (or threats).

What is perceived as a threat to the viability of a system, however, varies across domains, particularly in terms of disciplinary or professional perspectives. The challenge, therefore, is to establish an understanding of the ‘threat of what to whom.’ The challenge of detecting well-known threats relates not just to questions of measurement, but to issues of what is identified as ‘threatening.’ Professional and organizational worldviews bias what kind of ‘threats’ are being looked for, but also what kind of ‘risk appetite’ is associated with specific threats. Detecting a ‘threat’ necessitates a continuous examination of what constitutes a ‘threat’ to whom, what, and when. It also requires continuous reflection on how many resources are allocated to such ‘threat’ identification exercises (see also March et al., 1991). The contemporary advocacy of ‘risk regulation’ presents, for example, a method of classifying threats based on ‘probability’ and ‘impact’ (typically perceived as irreversible harm) (Black & Baldwin, 2010). However, this approach contrasts with the well-known crisis management approach, which emphasizes the importance of preparing for ‘worst-case scenarios’ (Pigeon & O’Leary, 2000).

(ii) Uncertainty: Crises invariably entail elements of ‘surprise’ (La Porte, 2007). Uncertainty pertains to the confusing nature of ‘early’ signals when there is a lack of an agreed understanding regarding the significance of these indicators. Uncertainty further relates to the lack of clarity regarding the causes and the extent of emerging disasters. In addition, there is also uncertainty arising from ‘fog of war’ situations during a crisis. In such circumstances, while local information may exist, there is a lack of a ‘big picture’ understanding at a higher level of organization. Consequently, systems that detect and process information necessitate a reliance on the quality and relevance of the information.

The problem of distinguishing between ‘information’ and ‘misinformation’ is further complicated in an environment characterized by intentional misinformation, whether it manifests through explicit problem denial (as exemplified by the Soviet Union’s initial response to the Chernobyl catastrophe) or manipulative issue framing (e.g., ‘information’ generated by hard-to-trace bots).

The world of crisis is characterized by uncertainty regarding probabilities and impacts. Traditionally, as noted, this type of uncertainty is associated with some understanding

of cause-and-effect relationships. However, uncertainty may also extend to genuine ignorance regarding causes and effects. Uncertainty therefore manifests itself in various forms. One manifestation is the absence of understanding the nature of the crisis one may be confronting. While all crises involve elements of surprise due to their unpredictability, some crises are more unpredictable than others. Specifically, some crises are associated with well-established cause-effect relationships. The detection of certain information leads to well-practiced responses, as the causes and consequences are, at least relatively, well-understood. Conversely, other crises may be defined as 'rude surprises' because they do not conform to any existing formula; they are defined by uncertainty regarding 'causes,' 'pathways', and 'consequences.'

Immediate or acute crises are frequently characterized by a lack of comprehension regarding the nature and extent of the posed threat. For example, there was little discussion in the summer of 2006 of the potential fallout of the freezing of US mortgage markets, namely state bailouts of banking sectors and sovereign debt crises. Cascading effects are also associated with disruptions in energy supply, where very local disruptions can quickly escalate through often-internationally connected transmission systems. Similarly, during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a limited understanding about the risks posed by the virus, particularly in terms of transmission, as well as a lack of insight into the appropriate interventions to contain the virus's spread (mainly as existing global and national pandemic guidelines were quickly found wanting). Furthermore, it could be argued that the world of increasingly frequent extreme weather events necessitates systems to move away from established assumptions about the impact of certain events, transitioning to a world of 'rude surprises' that demand a reassessment of the probability and impact of specific events.

(iii) Urgency: Crises are associated with 'pressure' on systems to respond to diagnosed disruptions immediately. Whether it is dealing with wildfires, flooding, earthquakes, the reduction of infections during pandemics, or the need to ensure the functioning of financial markets, the world of crisis involves decision-making in highly pressurized and concentrated periods, necessitating the initiation of situation rooms, for example. Such 'forced choice' situations might be the result of media-feeding frenzies in the context of dog attacks on vulnerable children. Such crises may not involve significant irreversible harm to large parts of the population (despite the tragedies involving vulnerable individuals in such cases). Instead, it is the perceived need to respond to a wider moral panic that might be viewed as threatening confidence in existing social arrangements (Cohen,

2011/1972). One of the key issues with urgency, then, is to deal with the much-maligned 'knee-jerk' or 'Pavlovian' responses by politicians, where the need to be seen to act overpowers concerns about the actions being taken (in terms of information basis, certainty about the likely effectiveness of proposed measures, and such like) (see Lodge and Hood, 2002; Hood and Lodge, 2005).

While much has been said about 'urgency' as a key characteristic of a 'crisis', the world of climate change (and demographic change), as well as the experience of the COVID pandemic, have contributed to a growing interest in slow-moving or 'creeping' crises (Boin et al., 2021). The lack of 'immediate' urgency in the face of the climate crisis has led to rather limited interest in action, despite growing evidence of irreversible degradation occurring. Similarly, the inability of political and economic systems to deal with continued inequality and lack of social mobility is widely considered a result of a lack of recognition of 'crisis.' The extent of the problem and its consequences are therefore not recognized.

## Searching for resilience

Considering the challenges in managing varieties of threat, uncertainty, and urgency, what prerequisites are required for 'resilience' (Boin & Lodge, 2021, 2016)? Among the various approaches to 'resilience' recently, for this paper, resilience is defined as the capacity of systems to respond to disturbances, including the timely recovery of operational functioning (see Comfort et al., 2010). However, the extent to which systems can be assumed to be 'resilient' and the extent to which 'resilience' in terms of 'bouncing back' should be encouraged have attracted considerable controversy. Fundamental to this debate is the role of the regulatory state, with its emphasis on expert analysis and calculation, which contrasts with, on the one hand, more anxious perspectives that fundamentally distrust the capacity of governing (regulating) institutions as well as (private) regulatees to mitigate crisis and, on the other hand, perspectives that relate to the early writings on resilience that expressed great skepticism regarding 'control' and 'prediction' and emphasized collaborative self-organization.

In his work on 'normal accidents', Charles Perrow (1984) illustrated how certain technologies posed impossible challenges for resilience. He noted how particular technological properties influenced organizations' capacities to manage accidents. He categorized technological systems along two dimensions: the degree of tight or loose coupling and the degree to which production followed a linear or complex pattern. Perrow identified the specific challenge presented by, on the one hand, tight coupling, and, on the other hand,

complexity. In terms of tightly coupled systems, he noted that such interdependencies necessitated centralized oversight. In contrast, the complexity necessitated a decentralized approach due to the multiplicity of processes. By combining these two recommendations, Perrow argued, a tension arose that was irresolvable: how to control systems that require both centralized and decentralized approaches.

Given the inevitability of accidents, Perrow asserted that no type of organization could manage the challenges of tight coupling and complexity. In addition, Perrow noted that certain technologies implied the potential for catastrophic, intergenerational effects. Consequently, Perrow advocated that certain technologies should be prohibited and abandoned. This argument can be viewed as consistent with the precautionary approach, which advocates for the prohibition of certain activities until they are proven to be 'safe.'

In contrast to Perrow's abolitionist approach, perspectives that emphasize the opportunities associated with risk have traditionally been more closely linked to the notion of 'resilience.' For example, Aaron Wildavsky (1988) argued that such a precautionary approach reduces rather than enhances overall resilience. Specifically, making sure that 'accidents' could not happen diverted resources away from other, potentially more worthwhile activities. Put differently, seeking to prevent 'last year's crisis from recurring led to a reduced capacity to respond to the inevitably different future crisis in several ways. First, the opportunity to learn from trial and error was lost, thereby reducing the scope for innovation. Second, over-investing in one area was likely to drain resources from other areas. Therefore, in the face of uncertainty, over-investing in 'known' problems was likely to diminish resilience. For Wildavsky, achieving resilience meant accepting that things would go wrong to enhance the prospects of a rapid recovery. Of course, there are certain limitations to such an emphasis on 's' resilience'; for instance, some accidents might be deemed to cause such irreversible harm that a 'trial and error' based approach might appear less appealing.<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of the attractions and limitations of Perrow's and Wildavsky's arguments, the idea of 'resilience' as 'bouncing back' has witnessed an increased attention to 'anticipation,' involving most of all an interest in the capacities of regulated systems to respond to disturbances, but also in focusing attention to certain high-risk (or high-hazard) perspectives. In doing so, growing significance has been attached to the ways in which information is processed in organizational settings under the conditions of threat, uncertainty,

<sup>1</sup> Wildavsky (1988) noted that 'anticipation' (e.g., precaution had a role where there was high probability and high degree of certainty.

and urgency (see also Hood & Jackson, 1991a). To achieve resilience, an organizational architecture requires:

An integrated systematic information system that, while not overly centralized, maintains a degree of tight coupling. An information detection system that decentralizes the capacity and willingness to raise alarms, incorporating numerous points of overlap (e.g., the engineering principle of redundancy). A system that balances biases towards efficiency and performance outputs with an emphasis on procedural safeguards.

One way of addressing these three essential requirements for resilience has been developed in the literature on 'high reliability organizations.' According to the literature in this area (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007; LaPorte, 1991), for organizations (or sets of organizations) to be highly reliable, they require resources and ex-ante professionalism. In essence, 'safe systems' rely on extensive professionalization that not only encourages a willingness to 'report' on matters beyond one's immediate responsibilities but also fosters a willingness to 'respond' to safety concerns by an organization's leadership, even if such a response may conflict with other objectives. Furthermore, it necessitates an emphasis on 'redundancy,' whereby multiple sources may be entrusted with identifying 'threats,' even if such systems are subject to efficiency considerations. Through such an emphasis on 'heedful interrelating,' the identified prerequisites for resilience were addressed. In sum, a world of 'high reliability' offers appeal: it relies on human knowledge to manage risks without prohibiting the opportunities arising from risk-taking.

Such 'high reliability organizations' are, however, difficult to find (Boin & van Eeten, 2013). Indeed, the lack of 'high reliability' is often a good indicator as to where and how failure incubates and leads to disaster (Vaughan, 2005). Even if the emphasis of resilience is on 'quick recovery,' such systems are dependent on functioning information processing systems that are based on the three components identified above. Such prerequisites for resilience are highly challenging in any organizational context, especially in the context of transboundary (poly) crises.

## **The promises of the regulatory state**

As noted, for the past thirty years, one primary emphasis in public sector reform has been the creation of a 'regulatory state,' characterized by the establishment of quasi-autonomous regulatory agencies, the marketization of public services, and an increasing codification of contractual relationships. Starting first in the world of 'economic regula-

tion' (considering network industries, such as energy, communications, and transport), features of the regulatory state have moved into other public services (Majone, 1997). The language of risk has been central to the regulatory state with its emphasis on expert judgment based on careful calculation. It offered a persuasive response to a society that was seen as increasingly intolerant of accepting crisis as 'fate' (Beck, 1992).

One of the key justifications for organizing regulation through the device of free-standing regulatory agencies was 'credible commitment' —the emphasis on addressing investor concern about the potential meddling by politicians (see also Cunha & Lodge, 2025; Dussauge-Laguna et al., 2024). At the same time, the regulatory state of the past thirty years is also associated with the idea of 'enforced self-regulation'. Accordingly, standard setting occurs based on 'principles', enabling regulated entities to respond in reflective and discretionary ways, thereby encouraging learning and improvement. Such an 'enforced self-regulation' approach was associated with performance-based and management-based regulatory frameworks; the former focused on the measurement of outputs and outcomes, while the latter focused on the level of attention paid to key hazards and risks (Coglianese & Lazer, 2003). In either case, a link to credible sanctions for non-compliance was seen as sufficient to encourage those organizations that might not be too motivated to engage with such an approach.

The 'enforced self-regulation' approach responded to a range of criticisms of how regulatory activities were pursued in the past, which were said to have enhanced vulnerability rather than resilience (see also Lodge, 2024). These criticisms can be distinguished on two dimensions: first, questions about the appropriate distance between regulator and regulatee, and second, the extent of regulatory prescriptiveness. Each of these dimensions also had implications for resilience. First, criticisms of 'too much distance' argued that regulation could not ensure resilience in the face of potential crisis as it was ill-informed and detached from 'real-world' contexts. When coupled with an emphasis on highly prescriptive rules, regulatory settings were accused of being 'highly formalized.' In cases where criticisms of 'too much distance' combined with concerns regarding a 'too discretionary' approach, a lack of resilience was attributed to excessive leeway granted to regulated entities, thereby allowing risks to incubate and inevitably leading to their realization.

Second, criticism of 'too close' regulatory relationships, when coupled with accusations of highly prescriptive provisions, can be associated with concerns about 'paternalism' (a criticism that resonated with Wildavsky's position, outlined earlier): regulators were criticized for assuring themselves through close involvement and prohibition, thereby reducing the



overall ability of systems to ‘learn’ through trial-and-error processes. Coupling the criticism of ‘too close’ regulatory relationships with a criticism of ‘too discretionary’ rules, reflected concerns with professionalism dominance that detached itself from external accountability. Such dominance of single professional perspectives reduced overall resilience by incurring risks of selective perceptions and blind spots (see Lodge, 2019; Bach & Wegrich, 2019, for more general discussion). Table 1 summarizes the argument (see also Lodge, 2024).

**Table 1.** *Typology of Regulatory Relationships*

|                                       | High regulatory distance                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Low regulatory distance                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>High regulatory rule intensity</b> | <p><b>Problem of formalism</b><br/>Diagnosed problem of ill-considered application of rules without professional judgment</p> <p><u>Reduced resilience due to limited informed adaptability to circumstances.</u></p>                | <p><b>Problem of paternalism</b><br/>Diagnosed problem with rule prescriptiveness and close entanglement with state interest</p> <p><u>Reduced resilience due to limits of information deficits as ‘state knows best’.</u></p> |
| <b>Low regulatory rule intensity</b>  | <p><b>Problem of business self-regulation</b><br/>Diagnosed problem of lack of professional discipline and absence of understood rules</p> <p><u>Reduced resilience due to short-termism incentives of business self-control</u></p> | <p><b>Problem of professionalism</b><br/>Diagnosed problem with dominance of in-group deliberation without external accountability</p> <p><u>Reduced resilience due to blind spots of single professional perspective</u></p>  |

As noted, the past thirty years offered a particular response to these concerns. Relying on detached expertise in delegated agencies and ‘enforced self-regulation’, the past thirty years were characterized by the decentralization of risk management responsibility to the entities directly involved in the risk, namely the producer. This approach was intended to mitigate the inherent information asymmetry problem in any superior-subordinate relationship. It was intended to foster flexible and creative responses rather than imposing standardized prescriptions. Furthermore, it was intended to promote a cooperative rather than adversarial relationship between the regulator and the regulatee(s). This collaborative approach was meant to free regulators from the need to spread themselves too thinly and to allow them to concentrate on critical cases.

In addition, the promotion of systems of 'self-observation' by regulated entities was intended to encourage proactive promotion of operational 'safety' rather than relying solely on formal regulatory assurance exercises. The approach was to enable designed regulatory entities to focus on key output/outcome measures or specific hazard mitigation strategies, combining decentralized and centralized intervention. Finally, the requirement for regulated entities to balance competing objectives, such as efficiency and security, was believed to be more effective than relying solely on external oversight.

How, then, did the regulatory state perform? Does it represent a 'high reliability organization' or has it been seen to encourage regulated 'high reliability organizations'? The past thirty years have offered a mixed picture in terms of performance, at best. At the time of writing (2025), none of the criticisms of regulation have gone away. Regulation continues to be criticized for being 'too distant' or 'too close' on the one hand and 'too discretionary' or 'too prescriptive' on the other. Indeed, what was once advocated as 'high intelligence' regulatory techniques for mitigating crisis have turned into a criticism of regulatory 'rituals of verification' whose overall effect is likely to aggravate risks rather than reduce them; in addition, the emphasis on decentralization has become widely criticized for the lack of coordinative capacity.

Indeed, considering some of the crises noted at the outset of this paper, regulation was accused of being 'too close' and 'discretionary' during the financial crisis, which, a decade later, led to concerns that regulation was 'too prescriptive'. Relying on enforced self-regulation was not just found wanting during the financial crisis, where regulated entities were found to be neither motivated nor capable of regulating themselves. The Wirecard scandal highlighted the limitations of national oversight regimes. Equally, emissions scandals involving a range of car manufacturers, especially Volkswagen, highlighted the incentives for regulated entities to 'cheat' given the low likelihood of detection.

Elsewhere, calls for more 'discretionary' regulation were generally accompanied by demands from regulated parties for 'more guidance'. For example, on the day of drafting, the higher education regulator for England, the Office for Students, published its 'guidance' on how universities were to facilitate 'freedom of speech'. This guidance included a 66-page document including 54 'vignettes' (Office for Students, 2025). Similarly, while regulators were seen to be increasingly under pressure to justify their actions and witnessed closer political oversight (for the UK, see Koop and Lodge, 2020), there was also concern with the self-expanding (crisis) authority that regulators had assembled during periods of crisis (see Tucker, 2019). Indeed, regulators were blamed for 'strangling' political attempts at financial regulatory reform (see Carpenter, 2010).

More generally, there was a concern that the dispersed authority that characterized the age of the regulatory state stood in the way of addressing the ‘grand challenges’ of the 21st century. In other words, regulatory states have been found wanting in terms of finding the appropriate balance among the three resilience-building components identified earlier. The regulatory state, as conceived in the 1990s, aimed to facilitate markets and establish a supposedly fine-tuned balance between the state and markets. While the regulatory state overall seemed resilient in that its main features — reliance on agencies and enforced self-regulation — had not been replaced, it is less clear whether it has reduced or enhanced the resilience of regulated activities. In the European context, it was notable how transnational arrangements increasingly sought to coordinate national crisis management in the regulatory state, leading also to an increased merger of the worlds of risk and crisis management that, until the early 21st century, had been largely kept distinct (Cabane & Lodge, 2024). Against this perspective of incremental transformation towards a multi-level world of regulatory regimes, the age of polycrisis may be said to require a different age of a regulatory state. Such a response regards regulation not as a facilitator of markets, but as one that constitutes markets to redirect economic incentives towards more sustainable futures and one that focuses on the generation of infrastructural ‘public goods’ that are unlikely to be generated by markets alone (Beckert, 2024, pp. 191–193).

In sum, therefore, although the regulatory state offered the promise of addressing criticisms regarding the lack of resilience provided by earlier periods of regulation, it was confronted, by the mid-2020s, with considerable criticism. Indeed, it was widely questioned whether a type of regulatory arrangement that emphasizes detached expert judgment is sufficiently responsive to the new age of populist politics and the cross-cutting demands of the polycrisis era.

## **Building regulatory capacity for resilience**

What kind of regulatory capacity might, then, provide for resilience of and by the regulatory state in an age of polycrisis? Any response to such a question requires a focus on the available resources of regulators and regulatees. Focusing on the resources available to regulators and regulatees presents four potential futures, each with distinct implications for establishing resilience in an era of polycrisis (Lodge, 2024).

Firstly, a world where resourceful regulators and regulated entities coexist could be characterized as a ‘regulatory state 2.0’, where the same methodologies applied over the

past three decades would be further refined. This would imply an emphasis on enforced self-regulation overseen by free-standing or 'independent' regulatory agencies. A key emphasis might therefore involve a reconsideration of 'regulatory burden' along the lines of Klein and Thompson's Abundance agenda (2025). Accordingly, a key focus would be on removing procedural obligations that have been placed on regulated organizations as part of 'management-based' approaches towards regulation. The primary challenge for regulators would be to ascertain, in a transboundary context, whether regulated entities were both 'capable' and 'motivated' to comply. Such a system would also necessitate an increasing emphasis on how to organize regulation in multi-level settings.

Alternatively, a future where regulators are limited in their capacity, but where the state can rely on its resources, could be termed the 'control state'. In such a scenario, regulatory activities would shift away from free-standing bodies and into ministerial departments. This development aligns with the criticism that free-standing regulators have become mini-governments, incapable of making joined-up decisions. It also criticizes a world of regulators that have taken on a wide range of tasks that should be decided in the political domain (e.g., debates on whether central banks should consider climate risks). The 'control state' assumes that states possess the resources to guide regulated actors and can overcome the criticisms of 'too prescriptive' and 'too distant' regulatory regimes. Similar to arguments supporting an 'orchestrating' role of the state in a 'mission-oriented' machinery of government (Mazzucato, 2018), a world of the 'control state' would address the criticism that existing approaches have, failed to address the kind of problems identified with the existing regulatory institutions and, in addition, that the challenges of the kind of transboundary, wicked polycrisis require more state intervention and coordination.

Third, a world that assumes limited regulatory capacity but perceives regulated entities as having the capacity (in both resource and motivational terms) to 'do the right thing' might lead to a 'self-certification state'. Following existing transnational governance arrangements, transboundary regulation to address transboundary crises would emphasize industry-led self-regulation, building on examples in international standard-setting or international environmental or social initiatives. The argument in favor of such a future would be to point to the limited resources of states to address the sources of polycrisis, and that a reliance on industry would encourage industry innovation, in terms of both regulatory systems and the development of resilient systems. A potential criticism is that the track record of such transnational governance regimes is debatable.

Fourth, a world of limited resources leads to a world with limited overall capacity to build resilience. In this world, individuals and societies are essentially ‘on their own’. Such a world of ‘abandonment’ might lead to novel forms of societal resilience and resemble the well-known contexts of limited (or failed) state capacity, characterized by private networks that adapt to and mitigate potential harm. Whether such a world can address questions of migration and environmental catastrophe is questionable. At most, this is a world that emphasizes mitigation by individuals and local actors.

Table 2 provides a summary of the argument. The emphasis of this discussion is to accentuate difference. The worlds of ‘regulatory state 2.0’, ‘control state’, and ‘self-certification’ offer distinct responses to building resilience in prescribing how to balance tight and loose coupling, addressing questions of redundancy and multiple objectives. Discussions on ‘capacity’ here focus on the type of authority different organizations should have and how informational and financial resources are utilized to support resilience.

The world of ‘abandonment’ similarly presents a scenario of selective responses to demands for building resilience, lacking the capacity for synoptic and long-term commitment. Societal forms of resilience may emerge to compensate for the lack of regulator or regulatee capacity. Such a perspective is desirable but deserves to be taken seriously. Suppose we cannot assume that either states and their regulators or the regulated entities are sufficiently resourced to provide for resilience. In that case, the world of ‘abandonment’ might appear as the sole viable option.

**Table 2.** *Building regulatory capacity for resilience*

|                          | Low regulatee capacity                                                                                                                                                                                   | High regulatee capacity                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| High regulatory capacity | <b>Control state</b><br>Return of regulatory oversight to ministerial departments and more explicit state involvement<br><i>Resilience through purposeful and authoritative governmental involvement</i> | <b>Regulatory state 2.0</b><br>Enforced self-regulation—based regulation with more responsive regulatory bodies<br><i>Resilience through enforced self-regulation relying on high quality oversight and capable and motivated regulates.</i> |
| Low regulatory capacity  | <b>Abandonment</b><br>Ad hoc regulatory activities without long-term commitment<br><i>Resilience by ‘every community is on its own’</i>                                                                  | <b>Self-certification state</b><br>Reliance on industry self-regulation and certification to guide consumer choice/ enabling of experimentation<br><i>Resilience through the self-interested activities of corporate actors</i>              |

## Conclusion

Building resilience against institutional vulnerabilities and mitigating irreversible harm constitutes the primary function of public management (see also Beck, 1992). A world of transboundary polycrises in which crises spill across jurisdictional borders presents a particular challenge for regulatory states. As the underlying assumptions of the regulatory state of the late 20th century have become questioned, there is no dominant set of doctrines as to how regulatory regimes (and societies more generally) build resilience ready to be 'rudely surprised' (LaPorte, 2007) in the sense of both the extent of irreversible harm and the limited resilience of institutional architectures to mitigate and adapt.

The regulatory state that emerged over the past three decades—in both its national and transnational forms—presented a particular set of instruments to provide for enhanced resilience, offering the prospect of embracing risk as an opportunity for growth. A world of transboundary crisis collides with such a logic—it reveals the vulnerabilities of the regulatory state, and thereby also the vulnerabilities of individuals. A world of polycrisis, given its transboundary nature, exposes not only the potential inevitability of irreversible harm but also the need for collective action. However, it also questions the legitimacy of state authority as crises reveal not just individual exposure to risks (such as a cyber-attack) but also immediately expose the precarious nature of institutional arrangements that were presented as resilient.

While the regulatory state and its emphasis on enforced self-regulation by regulatory agencies offered the promise of enhanced resilience, it has been found wanting across a series of crises in the early 21st century, and it has not escaped the very same criticisms that it was supposed to address in the first place. Indeed, the world of transboundary crisis, especially considering the kind of democratic backsliding that has been observed across continents, requires the acceptance that regulatory institutions need to provide for both a world of 'expert' judgment—and thereby embrace 'risk' as opportunity—but also engage with the logic of vulnerability and anxiety that is central to understanding transboundary crises. This paper has highlighted that ways of adapting the regulatory state to the contemporary world of polycrisis require an exploration of the resources of both regulatees and regulators alike. In other words, a debate needs to be central to any discussion of resilience.

Drawing upon the literature on resilience, the paper underscores the informational requirements for any system to effectively manage risks and crises. The demands of a system strike a balance between tight and loose coupling, an emphasis on redundancy, and the incorporation of managing competing objectives may appear daunting. It appears particularly daunting as resilience does not provide for an easy-to-copy recipe.

This paper emphasizes the absence of a fixed blueprint for resilience. Instead, it has emphasized a further critical capacity requirement: resilience is expressed through continuous debate and adjustment, rather than relying on a specific organizational approach. To prepare for the world of unexpected surprises in a polycrisis, conversations about regulatory capacity should begin with the essential prerequisites for building resilience. It is through the ongoing regulatory conversation surrounding issues of 'excessive' or 'insufficient' coupling, the support and challenge of professional attention, and the balancing of redundancy with other key objectives that resilience can be established within any regulatory regime.

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### **Reseña del libro**

## **Handbook of Public Policy in Latin America**

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### **Un punto y aparte en el estudio y el análisis de políticas públicas en América Latina**

El *Handbook of Public Policy in Latin America* es una gran obra colectiva que, indudablemente, representa un paso adelante muy importante en la consolidación y proyección internacional de los estudios sobre políticas públicas en Latinoamérica y el Caribe. El libro que han editado y coordinado Leonardo Secchi (UDESC) y Cesar N. Cruz-Rubio (GIGAPP) ha conseguido agrupar las contribuciones de más de 60 especialistas de la región. Esto con el objetivo de establecer un balance del estado del arte y de los desarrollos que se han ido produciendo en este importante campo de estudios tanto desde una perspectiva teórica como también desde el punto de vista metodológico y empírico.

Como bien señalan los autores en su introducción, el campo del estudio y análisis de políticas públicas en América Latina ha transitado de una etapa de fuerte dependencia intelectual respecto a los marcos teóricos y metodológicos del norte global, hacia una progresiva autonomización y apropiación crítica de estos enfoques. Se

han desarrollado además aportes propios del contexto en el que se han desarrollado.

La obra que aquí comentamos presenta una notable pluralidad de aportaciones, integrando capítulos analíticos sobre los marcos teóricos más significativos, estudios comparados transnacionales y también análisis de casos de algunos de los países de la región. Una mirada al índice muestra ya la coexistencia de enfoques de la corriente mayoritaria y alternativos, así como la emergencia de perspectivas críticas, feministas, decoloniales y autóctonas, que enriquecen el debate y abren nuevas agendas de investigación desde lógicas analíticas más situadas. Podríamos decir que encontramos tanto la adaptación y resignificación de los marcos analíticos más presentes en el escenario académico internacional, como la reivindicación de innovaciones y desafíos propios de las experiencias latinoamericanas.

En este sentido, el prólogo de Aguilar-Villanueva pone de relieve la lógica estado-céntrica que ha predominado en el debate intelectual de la segunda mitad del siglo XX, con preocupaciones muy centradas en las políticas de desarrollo y en los problemas estructurales de América Latina: desigualdad, debilidad institucional, déficit de legitimidad, fragmentación de políticas, y la tensión permanente entre modelos de gobernanza centralizados y muy focalizados en estrategias de planes de desarrollo y las demandas de participación e implicación social. Señala asimismo que la recepción latinoamericana coincidió con momentos de gran convulsión en el continente, lo que motivó que el énfasis se situara en aspectos como la transparencia, la integridad y la rendición de cuentas. Estos han sido temas esenciales en contextos donde la efectividad de las políticas públicas está constantemente vinculada a la legitimidad y a la calidad democrática.

Llevamos muchos años de ofensiva contra el papel del Estado en la interacción social. La presión para reducir el intervencionismo institucional en el funcionamiento de las lógicas de mercado ha sido constante desde los años 80 del siglo pasado. Se necesita repensar el papel del Estado, reimaginando su capacidad, su poder y las formas de ejercerlo y, finalmente, su sentido final. En este sentido, el libro que aquí comentamos constituye un buen zócalo o base sobre la cual generar este debate, y orientar el sentido de las políticas públicas en la región en los próximos y decisivos años.

En definitiva, la publicación de este handbook en “tiempos inciertos y turbulentos” (Foreword), con todas sus consecuencias multidimensionales, sociodemográficas, ambientales, geopolíticas y culturales, plantea nuevos desafíos a los especialistas en la materia, si quieren combinar relevancia académica e impacto social. Ello exige potenciar la

producción teórica con perspectiva propia y situada, articulando más las comunidades epistémicas y fomentando agendas de investigación colaborativas y significativas en relación con los problemas locales y territoriales que tienen fuertes interdependencias.

Quiero subrayar, finalmente, que el texto hace hincapié en la importancia de construir puentes y alianzas entre universidades, centros de investigación, gobiernos y sociedad civil. Estas alianzas pueden fortalecer la interacción entre saber y hacer y traducirla en políticas públicas concretas y efectivas que refuercen la legitimidad de los sistemas democráticos en pleno avance de populismos autoritarios. Solo así, el conocimiento académico podrá tener un impacto real y sostenido en la mejora de las políticas públicas y en la calidad de vida de las sociedades latinoamericanas. El texto que aquí comentamos tiene la virtud de articular la riqueza y diversidad de enfoques con una mirada crítica sobre los desafíos estructurales y las oportunidades de innovación en el estudio y la práctica de las políticas públicas latinoamericanas.

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### **Reseña del libro**

## **Abrir el Estado: ¿Quién tiene la llave?**

**Oszlak, Oscar. (2025). *Abrir el Estado: ¿Quién tiene la llave?* Editorial Prometeo. ISBN: 978-931-6683-28-1.**

Desde hace más de cincuenta años, Oscar Oszlak viene analizando la compleja relación entre el Estado y la sociedad en sus diferentes dimensiones. No se trata solamente de una cuestión científica, sino que a lo largo de su amplia carrera profesional pudo atravesar los diferentes laberintos que conforman el entramado de relaciones sociales que conforman esta relación, ejerciendo diferentes roles. Esto, a lo largo de tanto tiempo, enriqueció su mirada adoptando una perspectiva que ha logrado captar los cambios más significativos del vínculo.

Oscar Oszlak realizó su carrera de grado en la Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, donde se graduó como contador público, especializándose en temas impositivos. Esto le permitió ingresar en la Dirección General Impositiva (DGI), llevándolo a efectuar estudios de posgrado sobre la temática en la Universidad de Harvard. Con el golpe militar de la “Revolución Argentina” en 1966 se trasladó con su familia a los EE. EE. UU. para realizar su máster y doctorado en ciencia política en la Universidad de California en Berkeley. Como él mismo ha señalado en varias oportunidades, pasó de ser contador público a contador de lo público (Oszlak, 2015).

A su regreso a la Argentina, formó parte, junto a otros especialistas que habían realizado también sus posgrados en el exterior, del Centro de Investigación en Administración Pública (CIAP), dentro del Instituto Di Tella. En 1975, algunos de ellos, entre los que se encontraban Guillermo O'Donnell, Elizabeth Jelín, Horacio Boneo y Marcelo Cavarozzi, crearon el Centro de Estudios sobre Estado y Sociedad (CEDES). Esta institución se conformó como uno de los centros más relevantes de las ciencias sociales en América Latina. A pesar de la dictadura militar que se implantó con pocos meses de posterioridad, Oszlak y O'Donnell desarrollaron el *enfoque histórico-estructural*, uno de los aportes más originales de la ciencia política argentina al mundo, estableciendo un diálogo fecundo entre la producción regional y los grandes debates que se estaban produciendo en los países centrales. El impacto de estos especialistas fue tan amplio durante décadas que introdujeron el análisis de políticas de corte lassweliano en Latinoamérica sin perder su sentido crítico y reflexivo (Oszlak y O'Donnell, 2008; Bulcourn, 2023). En este contexto, se producirá uno de los textos más significativos de Oszlak: *La formación del Estado argentino*, obra que construye un puente entre la ciencia política y la historia. Desde su publicación original hasta la fecha ha habido dos ediciones y seis impresiones (Oszlak, 2024).

A comienzos de la democracia en el país, Oszlak ocupó varios cargos públicos y fue asesor del propio presidente Raúl Alfonsín. Entre sus actividades institucionales más destacadas se encuentran la creación de la Maestría en Administración Pública de la Universidad de Buenos Aires y la Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Político, de la que fue su primer presidente. Su experiencia como consultor internacional abarcó acciones en varios continentes trabajando en organizaciones como el BID, el PNUD y el CLAD. Entre 2016 y 2023, dirigió en el Instituto Nacional de la Administración Pública (INAP) la revista científica-académica *Estado Abierto*.

En plena pandemia del COVID-19, Oszlak reflexionó sobre la relevancia del factor tecnológico en el manejo de los grandes datos, presente en su libro *El Estado en la era exponencial*. Allí sostuvo:

La tecnología no es más que una herramienta que abre nuevas oportunidades para que los Estados adquieran mayor capacidad y sean más eficientes. Pero al amplificar de modo exponencial el poder de los datos, su impacto sobre el bienestar de las sociedades y sobre la naturaleza del régimen político pasa a depender del uso de ese poder. A lo largo de toda la historia de la humanidad, la coerción, el dinero o la ideología han sido empleados como instrumentos de

dominación y sojuzgamiento; hoy, la información —como recurso de poder— también puede serlo. En términos potenciales, la acelerada evolución de estas herramientas informativas hace posible utilizarlas —y ya hay suficiente evidencia de ello— para marginar poblaciones discriminadas en virtud de una “decisión logarítmica”, para “guiar” las decisiones de consumidores y votantes conociendo sus gustos y preferencias, o para perseguir y encarcelar a opositores políticos (Oszlak, 2020, p. 239).

Como se desprende de esta obra, el estudio de las nuevas tecnologías y de la utilización de los macrodatos es una problemática que trabajó Oszlak en su vínculo con la gestión pública dentro del contexto de la “era exponencial”, que reconfigura de forma exponencial los alcances potenciales de estos recursos.

El libro *Abrir el Estado, ¿quién tiene la llave?*, está estructurado con un prólogo y cinco capítulos, el último siendo similar a un epílogo. El primero, confeccionado por Joan Subirats, catedrático en la Universidad de Barcelona, que ejerció también varios cargos públicos en su país, entre ellos el Ministerio de Universidades español; y fue también uno de los principales referentes del campo de la administración y las políticas públicas en Iberoamérica. Este capítulo está centrado en el desarrollo de la conceptualización histórica del “gobierno abierto” y el “Estado abierto”, del cual nuestro autor fue creador en 2013 durante el *XVIII Congreso Internacional del CLAD sobre la Reforma del Estado y la Administración Pública*, realizado en la ciudad de Montevideo.

El primer concepto tuvo su origen en 2009, cuando asumió la presidencia de los EE. UU. Barack Obama, orientando su gestión hacia construir un gobierno abierto, participativo y colaborativo, así surgió la concepción de *open government*. Esta concepción sobre la forma de gobernar modifica el vínculo entre la toma de decisiones de última instancia y la ciudadanía. Si bien no podríamos establecer una correlación directa, estas nuevas tecnologías (TIC) pueden facilitar instrumentalmente las posibilidades reales de una implementación efectiva.

El concepto de “estado abierto”, del cual el propio Oszlak fue uno de sus principales promotores, pretende ir más allá de las acciones del poder ejecutivo y se extiende hacia el legislativo y el judicial en un sentido funcional. A su vez, expresa una ampliación conceptual en sentido territorial, ya que se extiende hacia las unidades subnacionales, ya sean “estados” dentro de un país, provincias o municipios. Poco a poco estas ideas han ido ganando terreno no solo desde un plano analítico, sino principalmente en un

conjunto de medidas tomadas por los propios Estados-nación y por organismos internacionales, fomentando su implementación efectiva en diferentes áreas de gobierno. La visión de Oszlak sobre el concepto va más allá de una cuestión aditiva, expresándolo de la siguiente manera:

Pero en mi interpretación, el Estado abierto no es simplemente la suma de gobierno abierto, parlamento abierto y justicia abierta, para nombrar los términos más habituales. Concebirlo así reduciría el concepto a un agregado institucional que, si bien comparte una filosofía similar, pierde de vista el compromiso común y la vigilancia mutua que hacen la esencia de la división de poderes en una democracia. Además, dejaría fuera otras instancias institucionales extra o paraestatales que también deberían transparentar su gestión, en la medida en que utilizan recursos públicos o subsidios estatales, como en los casos de sociedades con participación estatal, emprendimientos público-privados, fundaciones, beneficiarios de regímenes de promoción, servicios públicos subsidiados y similares. Definitivamente, el “todo” del Estado abierto es más que la suma de las “partes” (43).

El segundo capítulo está centrado en el análisis de los supuestos del gobierno abierto y el dilema que presenta en aspectos que consideramos fundamentales para una implementación efectiva de sus prácticas. ¿Qué sucede cuando desde el gobierno no se interpretan las necesidades y aspiraciones de la ciudadanía? ¿Coincide el sentido de las políticas públicas con los valores e intereses de estos ciudadanos? O también pueden plantearse desde el otro punto de vista: ¿qué pasa cuando la ciudadanía no participa, no se ve interesada en las decisiones políticas? ¿Qué sucede cuando existe una gran diferencia de información?

Esto plantea parte del dilema “principal-agente”, mostrando la compleja trama de relaciones entre gobernantes y gobernados, tomando también el papel de las burocracias y el manejo efectivo de información legible por las personas de a pie. El capítulo también analiza la *Open Government Partnership* (OGP), integrada hoy por 75 países y 150 gobiernos subnacionales.

El vínculo entre el régimen político y la gestión pública bajo las condiciones del Estado abierto es analizado en el tercer capítulo. Aquí podemos ver la relación entre los procesos de democratización y las políticas públicas, donde la propia acción ciudadana debería tomar un papel central en democracias que propician los mecanismos del Estado abier-

to. Esto nos lleva a centrarnos de manera innovadora en las formas de implementación de las políticas públicas dentro del propio ciclo. Aquí, los sectores sociales y la ciudadanía en su conjunto no solo son actores de las demandas y entrada en agenda de los problemas públicos, sino que recorren todo el proceso, para lo cual disponer de información fluida es algo fundamental. Por esta razón, el déficit en el proceso es algo que debe ser atendido en toda la gestión de políticas públicas. Es así como el control y la evaluación no son solo una cuestión de los agentes gubernamentales. Una pregunta se instala como prioritaria: ¿cómo debería ser el diseño institucional de un Estado abierto?

El cuarto capítulo está centrado en lo que sucede en los parlamentos y en la justicia en materia de Estado abierto, un tema central que expresa la amplitud de este concepto y su correlación con los umbrales de la democratización. Es una temática muy relevante en algunas regiones como América Latina, donde la justicia es tan cuestionada y sus procesos internos desconocidos, lo que genera una mayor opacidad a la ciudadanía. Sin lugar a dudas, aquí encontramos una deficiencia muy amplia que genera una limitación efectiva hacia la consolidación del Estado abierto en su sentido más amplio.

En el último capítulo, Oszlak nos ofrece también elementos para poder evaluar las implicaciones y alcances de las políticas tendientes a la paulatina implementación de un Estado abierto, advirtiéndolo sobre la amplitud y diversidad de aspectos y la complejidad variada de actores y metas a lograr. Esto nos plantea el dilema que expresa nuestra obra desde su título, lo que se expresa en las palabras del autor de esta forma:

Otra conclusión que podemos extraer de nuestro análisis es que el problema de la apertura del Estado no consiste únicamente en descubrir quién tiene la llave para abrirlo. El problema real es que son muchas las cerraduras y cerrojos que requieren ser abiertos. No existe una única llave ni un solo cerrajero. Todavía son pocos, más allá de la retórica, los que desde el propio aparato estatal están dispuestos a romper los candados. Y desde la ciudadanía no existe una vocación sostenida por desempeñar el legítimo rol que le cabe como custodio de los custodios. En definitiva, dependerá de que se multipliquen los cerrajeros dispuestos a abrir las puertas del Estado (185).

Hemos intentado presentar el libro *Abrir el Estado, ¿Quién tiene la llave?*, engarzado en una de las trayectorias intelectuales más destacadas del campo de la administración y las políticas públicas, quien durante más de cincuenta años ha trabajado incansablemente por comprender la compleja trama de relaciones entre el Estado y la sociedad. Su obra

ha trascendido tanto a la Argentina como al resto de América Latina, lo que le valió, entre otras distinciones, el otorgamiento del *Public Administration Award* en 2003 por parte de la *American Society for Public Administration* (ASPA), y posteriormente el *Transition and Development Economies Award* en 2021 por parte de la *International Public Policy Association* (IPPA). En 2023 fue galardonado con la máxima distinción que otorga el Estado argentino a sus investigadores: la distinción de investigador de la Nación argentina, siendo esta la primera vez que se le otorgó a alguien proveniente del campo de las ciencias sociales. Un año después, la *Latin American Studies Association* lo premió con el *Guillermo O'Donnell Democracy Award and Lectureship*. ¿Por qué mencionar esta serie de reconocimientos? Es sencillo: expresa la enorme repercusión de una obra que va más allá de la medición temporal del impacto de un trabajo específico y refleja la minuciosa construcción del prestigio. Oszlak suele comentar en sus numerosas charlas y encuentros con jóvenes que en su primera etapa se dedicó a estudiar el pasado, después el presente y ahora, a su avanzada edad, el futuro. Esto lo vemos en sus últimos trabajos, de los cuales este libro sintetiza una temática abordada en los últimos 15 años, sin dejar de sostener una mirada crítica y reflexiva, como nos comenta Joan Subirats en el prólogo:

En definitiva, en su obra Oszlak no es ingenuamente optimista ni tampoco acrítico. La perspectiva desde la que analiza el tema reconoce los avances y el potencial del gobierno abierto, pero no oculta sus límites reales. La distancia existente entre discurso y práctica, y la necesidad de seguir trabajando en un enfoque crítico y realista para evaluar su impacto. En su análisis encontramos tanto esperanza en la necesaria transformación como advertencias sobre la complejidad y las resistencias estructurales que enfrenta el tema. Más allá de la retórica, Oszlak, con su mirada lúcida, nos advierte de los límites y potencialidades que hemos de tener en cuenta para conseguir que podamos acercarnos a “tener la llave” del Estado contemporáneo (11).

La mayoría de los libros no serían posibles sin las editoriales y las librerías que se encargan de producirlos, distribuirlos y hacer de ellos una empresa cultural. La Editorial Prometeo ha hecho un enorme esfuerzo para dar cabida a las publicaciones del ámbito de las humanidades y las ciencias sociales. En lo que nos concierne, ha reeditado y editado gran parte de la obra de Guillermo O'Donnell y, más recientemente, de Oscar Oszlak; esto ha permitido la preservación y llegada a las nuevas generaciones del *enfoque histórico-estructural* y las obras posteriores de sus creadores.

Queda invitarlos a la aventura intelectual de indagar sobre nuestro futuro de la mano de uno de sus analistas más profundos, como nos diría Antonio Gramsci, combinando cierto pesimismo de la inteligencia con el optimismo de la voluntad.

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