

Report of the OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas (Pandemic/2021)



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Abbreviations and acronyms

WB: World Bank

BTI: Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index

ECLAC: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

CAPEL (for its Acronym in Spanish): Electoral Advice and Promotion Center

IACHR: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

PC: Permanent Council

DECO: Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation

ESKER: Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights

EIU: Economic Intelligence Unit

FAO: The Food and Agriculture Organization

FSI: Fragile States Index

GSP: Global Peace Index

IDEA: International: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

EOM: Electoral Observation Mission

OECD: The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

OAS: Organization of American States

IOM: The International Organization for Migration

ILO: The International Labor Organization

WHO: The World Health Organization

TI: Transparency International

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

V-Dem: Varieties of Democracy Institute

WJP: World Justice Project

Introduction and objective

For OAS member states, democracy is a right of the people and an obligation of their governments (Article 1 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, hereinafter IDC).

Article 1 and article 7 of the IDC also set out the "why" of democracy. It states that democracy is "essential for the social, political, and economic development of the people of the Americas" and that it "[Democracy] is indispensable for the effective exercise of fundamental freedoms and human rights in their universality, indivisibility and interdependence, embodied in the respective constitutions of states and in inter-American and international human rights instruments."

Article 2 of the IDC states that the **effective exercise** of representative democracy is the basis of the rule of law; and Article 3 sets out the *essential elements* of representative democracy, thus defining the fundamental conditions of the rule of law:

- respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- access to and the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law;
- the holding of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people;
- the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations; and
- the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government.

Article 4 again refers to the **exercise** of democracy and defines *fundamental components* as:

- transparency in government activities;
- probity;
- responsible public administration on the part of governments;
- respect for social rights, and freedom of expression and of the press;
- the constitutional subordination of all state institutions to the legally constituted civilian authority; and

- respect for the rule of law on the part of all institutions and sectors of society.

Article 6, in turn, declares the participation of citizens as a necessary condition "for the full and effective **exercise** of democracy."

It also states that democracy is indispensable for the exercise of freedoms and human rights while defining the exercise of these freedoms and rights as essential elements: democracy for access to rights, and access to rights for the effective exercise of democracy. An approach that seeks feedback between democracy and human rights serves as a guide for analyzing the existence of possible vicious or virtuous circles in societies. Similarly, statements are made about the interdependence and mutual reinforcement between democracy and development. (Article 11 of the IDC).

On the other hand, the laws in a country can often be an obstacle to the fulfillment of these essential, fundamental or necessary aspects for the effective exercise of democracy. Therefore, it is possible to distinguish between legality and legitimacy. There may be collective actions in a country that, while considered legal, may be considered illegitimate from the point of view of the exercise of democracy.

This distinction refers to another, that distinguishes the legitimacy of origin from the legitimacy of the exercise of democracy. However, the IDC only refers to the exercise and elements of the so-called legitimacy of origin, such as access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law, which is also considered an essential element in the effective exercise of democracy.

In summary, the IDC referred to essential elements, fundamental components, and a necessary condition for the effective exercise of democracy, and in doing so considered the interdependence of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights in a comprehensive approach to democracy.

On this basis, it could be said that democracy is one in which the essential elements, fundamental components, and necessary condition for the effective exercise of democracy established in the IDC are fully realized — *de jure and de facto*. For the

purpose of simplicity, it is proposed that these essential elements, fundamental components, and necessary condition be called "characteristics".

In reality, however (de facto democracy), in all OAS member states there are opportunities for improvement in each and every one of the characteristics of democracy mentioned.

The objective of the Observatory on Democracy in the Americas (hereinafter the Observatory) is precisely to provide elements to the OAS member states to identify opportunities for improvement in the effective exercise of democracy in accordance with what is establishes the IDC.

The Observatory is a tool to serve the member states.

It is as important to define what the Observatory is, as it is to define **what the Observatory is not**. The Observatory **does not** intend to evaluate, catalog or judge countries by the characteristics of democracy nor the effective exercise of it.

The "observation", which is being carried out with the aim of providing elements for member states to identify opportunities for improvement, is based on the following analyses:

- **Analysis of political-electoral processes using the reports of the Electoral Observation Missions (Chapter 1)**
- **Analysis of the indices and indicators of the Observatory which reflect the characteristics of democracy (IDC) and analysis of external reports (Chapter 2)**
- **Analysis of trends that can affect the effective exercise of democracy, such as polarization and fake news through social networks (Chapter 3)**

The reports of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) and relevant resolutions of the Permanent Council and the General Assembly are also taken into consideration.

As a result of the observation, a reflection is offered on the **lessons learned during the pandemic, the democratic problems and risks, and the need to build resilient democracies in the region (Chapter 4)**

From a methodological point of view, the data-driven approach allows the Observatory to prepare reports on democracy in the Americas, which offer a multidimensional vision of regional democracy, establishing the interdependence between access to rights and democracy, to provide a more complete social, economic, and political representation of the realities of our continent. In this way, the Observatory provides information to promote decisions in the member states and in the General Secretariat based on data, lessons learned, and best practices, making efforts geared towards the generation of inputs on democratic issues. For more information on the methodology see Annex I.

Executive Summary

This report prepared by the OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas, for the Pandemic/2021 period, was executed thanks to funding provided by the Spanish Cooperation Agency, and with the support of the teams from the Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy, the Office of the Secretary General and the Strategic Counsel for Organizational Development and Management for Results.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has had characteristics like those defined by Marcel Mauss (1988) as "**a total social fact**", that is, a phenomenon that brings into play all the dimensions of social life in its totality, shaking social relations, their actors and institutions. Among many other efforts to measure the impact of the pandemic in the region, this is a contribution from the perspective of the essential elements of representative democracy:

Essential elements of representative democracy include, inter alia, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law; the holding of periodic, free, fair elections based on universal and secret suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people; the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations; and the separation of powers and independence of branches of government. (Inter-American Charter of Democracy, Article 3).

Following the common thread "democracy and pandemic" this document is organized into 4 chapters in which: I) it compiles institutional and political-electoral difficulties and learnings in the region; II) it presents the five indices constructed by the Observatory that reflect the essential elements and characteristics of democracy (IDC); III) it shows trends; and IV) presents lessons learned and risks that may affect the effective exercise of democracy in the region.

Beyond the diagnosis, the report aims to provide elements to support decision-making, identify opportunities in times of crisis, and point out one of the many routes to follow to preserve and strengthen the democracies of the continent.

1. Political-electoral processes in the context of the pandemic

The first chapter, focusing on **electoral processes in the context of the pandemic**, starts with an overall assessment of the impact of the pandemic on the institutional framework of member states.

Tensions regarding the inadequacies of laws and institutional frameworks in the face of a public health, economic and social problem of enormous magnitude challenged the capacity of democratic states to face this emergency through normal regulatory frameworks, giving way to the continuous or periodic use or states of **emergency or exception**, losing its exceptional characteristic, and opening the possibility for eventual excesses. For this reason, it is essential that parliaments, courts, and constitutional courts must oversee the reasonableness, temporality, progressiveness, justification, relevance, equity, electoral competence, and protection of vulnerable groups within the regulatory framework that allows for addressing the emergency, acting to guarantee the full respect of all rights.

The full functioning of parliaments is also an indicator of democratic health, and the vast majority of parliaments were slow to adapt to restrictions and thus resume their legislative and control activities in the system of checks and balances.

Legislative bodies had to first address the fact that the way their institutions were designed did not prepared them for contingency situations, let alone for remote operation. Because of this, some countries in the region had to reform their Constitutions to allow for virtual sessions. Likewise, throughout the region, countries discussed the possibility of remote voting during plenary sessions. (Tchintian et al., 2020).

The justice administration experienced a similar situation, with an impact on all users of the system and with a direct effect on the right to effective judicial protection. Almost without exception, the judicial apparatuses in the region were completely suspended in a first phase of the pandemic and were gradually reactivated with the

passage of time and with the adoption of electronic signatures, computerized files, and hearings through telematic means/ web-based technology, among others.

In a very complex scenario with the consequences previously described to the detriment of the democracies of the region (in institutional and procedural terms), it must be recognized that the need to use information technology forced democratic institutions to innovate and adapt at a high speed, which, if it manages to be maintained and deepened in an adequate manner, can have an impact on greater access to services. This is the case of the administration of justice aided by virtual access, or greater transparency in information in the case of online sessions or the recording of sessions or votes of parliaments.

The specific case of **political-electoral** rights was characterized by the **complexity of the organization of elections**, the tensions that arose between the rights to health and life, and the full exercise of political rights.

The **first half of 2020** was defined by the **postponement** of electoral processes under an approach prioritizing health and slowing down the spread of COVID-19 and reducing mortality through mandatory quarantine measures and strong restrictions on the rights of movement, transit and assembly. On a global level, up to June 11, 2020, in response to the threat of COVID-19 and in response to preventive health measures, at least 66 countries decided to postpone their electoral processes. However, 33 countries chose to maintain the original electoral calendar (IDEA, 2020.a). In Latin America and the Caribbean, eight countries rescheduled the date of their elections and only one suspended their elections without a fixed date. (Freidenberg y Saavedra, 2021).

Since **mid-2020**, when the transmission rate fell and mortality from the virus was reduced, a gradual advance towards the recovery of electoral democracy was restored, under the approach of coexistence with the virus.

The role of electoral **management bodies** in the organization of electoral processes in a pandemic context **has contributed decisively to the resilience of regional democracy**, demonstrating adaptation and innovation, adopting an inter-

institutional approach in search of consensus, guaranteeing independence and autonomy.

This democratic resilience is largely due to the action of regional electoral bodies, which have been the backbone for ensuring democratic transitions, despite the enormous difficulties arising from the pandemic. It is important to highlight that within the *Democracy Index 2021* of the weekly *The Economist*, the best rated indicator in Latin America and the Caribbean was the one referring to electoral processes and political pluralism, obtaining 7.35 points out of 10. By highlighting this indicator, IDEA states: "During the period from 1 March 2020 to 30 June 2021, a total of 22 electoral processes were held in Latin America and the Caribbean, including national, regional, and local elections, as well as referendums." (Guerrero, 2021.a).

The electoral promotion activity of organizations and candidates had to adjust to this new reality, biosecurity protocols were put in place for the elections; electoral management bodies generally demonstrated a high capacity for reinvention, adaptation, transformation, and innovation in the face of the challenges posed by the pandemic, resulting in democratic resilience.

Indeed, the electoral management bodies showed their capacity to adapt and innovate in the organization of elections by incorporating a health approach throughout the cycle of organization and development of the electoral process, always seeking a balance between the exercise of political rights and the rights to life, and health of citizens. In the words of Francisco Guerrero (2022. a), Secretary for the Strengthening of Democracy at the OAS: "Despite all the obstacles, democracy has survived the pandemic demonstrating its enormous resilience. Against all odds, the regional electoral calendar has been met, demonstrating the foundation of this form of government among the peoples of the continent."

2. Observatory on Democracy: indicators on the political, economic, and social impact of the pandemic in the Americas

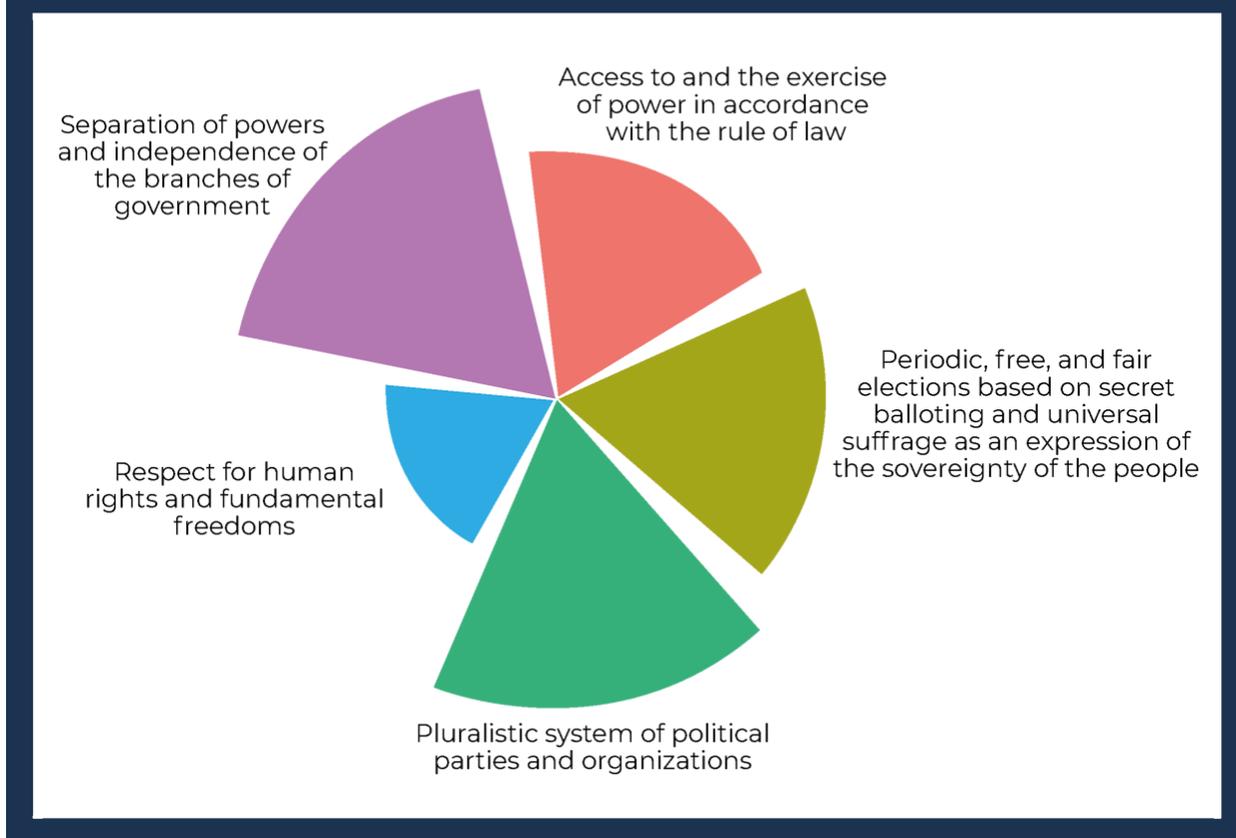
The **second chapter** of the report pulls together the work of the Observatory, that uses information and indicators from various sources and groups them under five indices which represent the essential elements of democracy:

1. Index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
2. Index of access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law, which also includes the fundamental components of the exercise of democracy.
3. Index of holding of periodic, free, fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people.
4. Index of the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations.
5. Index of separation of powers and independence of branches of government.

This process of broad observation was carried out from the perspective of the essential elements of democracy (Art. 3, IDC), the fundamental components of the exercise of power (Art. 4), the interdependence between democracy and human rights (Art. 7 and 8), as well as with the social dimensions (Art. 11 to 13). It is important to note that the analysis of the indices focuses on general phenomena in the region and not on any particular country.

Details on the indicators that make up each index, their scope, and sources (all reputable, reliable, and open), as well as a more detailed description of what the high and low performance indicators of each index measure, are presented in Annex III of the report.

Figure 1: Index of the Observatory: The Essential Elements of Democracy (2021)



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

In this representation of the aggregate indices from the average of the region, it can be observed that the main strength of the Americas lies in the resilience of electoral democracy, the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, and in the values of separation and independence of public powers. In contrast, the main weaknesses would be in the way in which political power is exercised and in the pending agenda of access to human rights and fundamental freedoms.

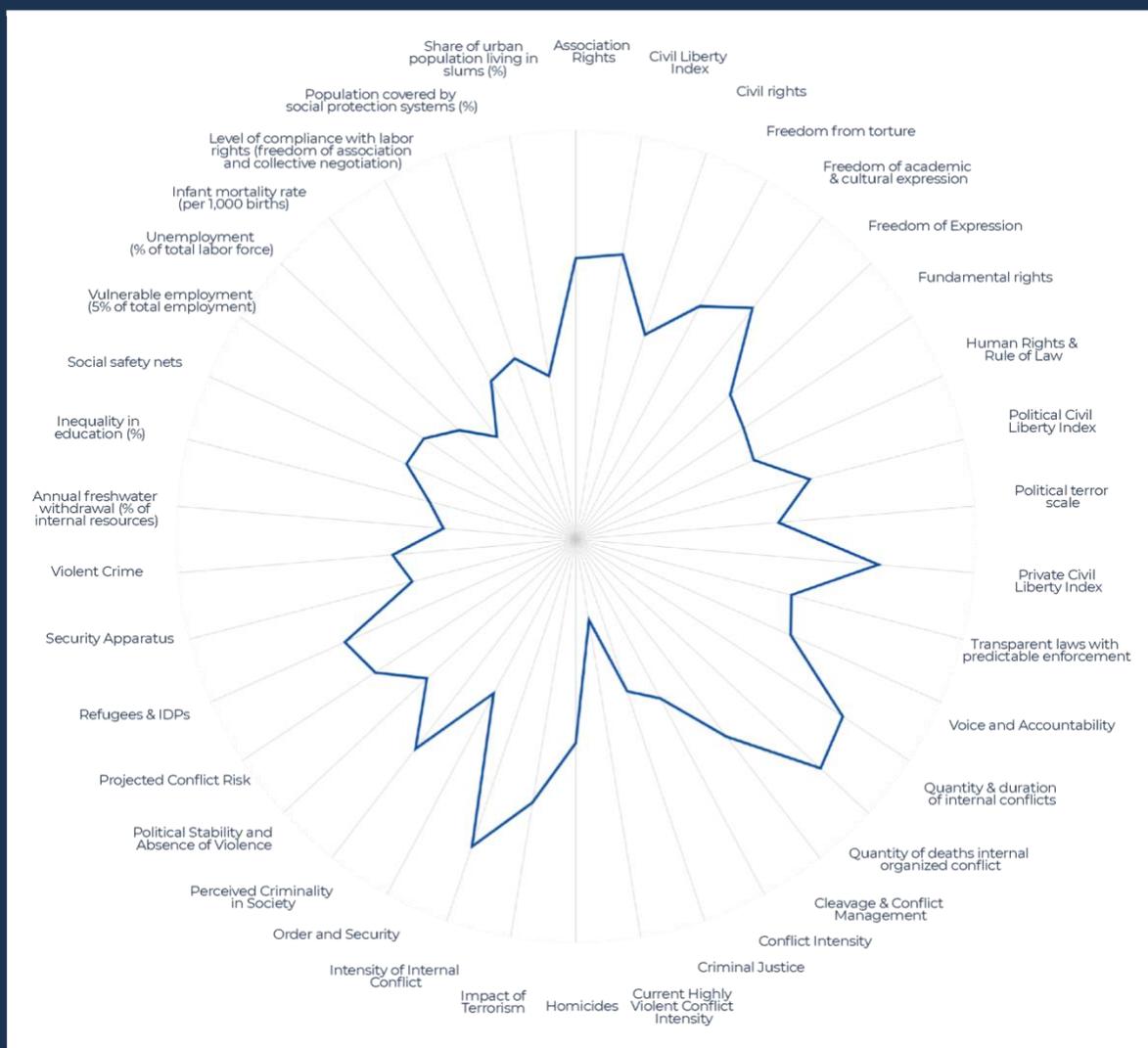
Index 1. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

The best performing indicators in the Americas, within the index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, are: [number of] deaths due to internal organized conflict, number and duration of internal conflicts, and intensity of internal conflicts. Other high-performing indicators include: private civil liberty, academic and cultural freedom of expression, and civil liberties. In contrast, the indicators of lower performance, always at the regional average level, are linked to economic, social,

cultural, and environmental rights, as well as with order and security, criminal justice and the security apparatus.

In the following figure, the radar chart allows us to visualize the regional average of the different indicators that make up the index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. A low score will be reflected in the points closest to the center and represents a weakness in this element of democracy.

Figure 2: Regional average of the index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (2021)



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Index 2. Access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law

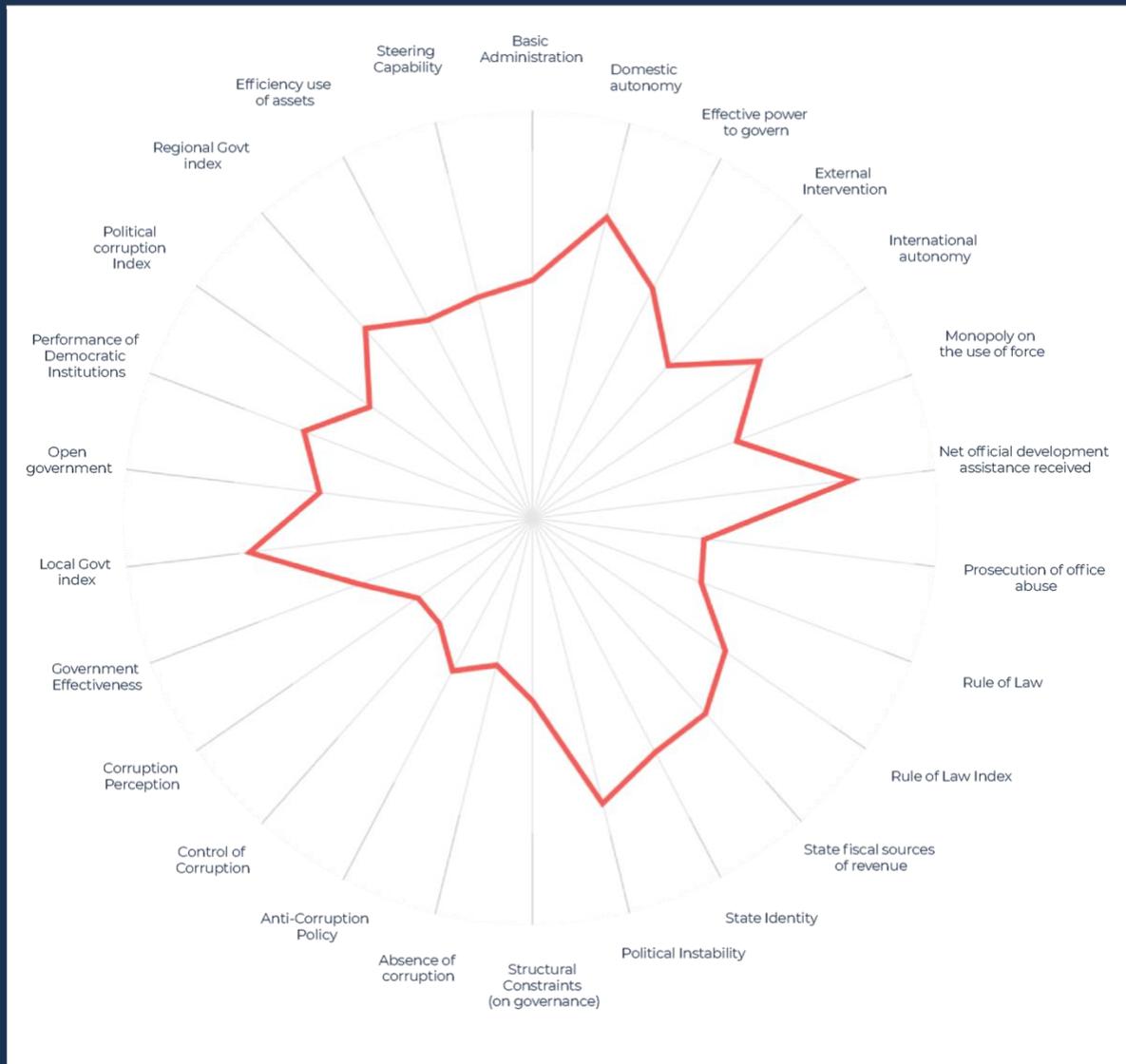
The index of access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law has shown low performance at the regional level. Although political stability and autonomy were positioned within the high-performance indicators, the downward trend could be observed as one of the effects of the pandemic. On the other hand, it is observed that the fight against corruption, transparency and accountability in public management remains a pending task, necessary to consolidate the exercise of democracy subject to the rule of law.

Although the index's best-performing indicators are political stability and autonomy, the downward trend recorded in the index during the pandemic is explained by a deterioration in the indicators of autonomy of States vis-à-vis external, domestic, and international actors, both at national and local government levels.

The lowest-performing indicators are those of corruption. More specifically, this phenomenon is observed in the following indicators of the Observatory: absence of corruption, index of political corruption, control of corruption, perceived corruption, anti-corruption policies, accountability for abuses in public office and the capacity for public management.

The following figure illustrates the average for the region of the indicators that make up the index of access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law. A high score will be reflected in the points farthest from the center of the graph and represents a strength in this element of democracy.

Figure 3: Regional average of the index of access to and exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law (2021)



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

The deficit in the fight against corruption can be observed at the regional level. Transparency International has warned, that the health sector has been vulnerable to corruption particularly during the response to the pandemic, and of cases of irregularities in public procurement.

Index 3. Celebration of periodic, free, fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage

This topic is developed extensively in chapter one of this report, which identifies the measures taken by governments, the response of electoral management bodies and in general, the behavior of the electoral system in the region.

The indicators in this index show that the region has generally managed to organize quality elections. Latin America and the Caribbean demonstrated democratic resilience during the pandemic, having managed to overcome the challenges to organize electoral processes between 2020 and 2022 and guarantee the transition of the governments in the region.

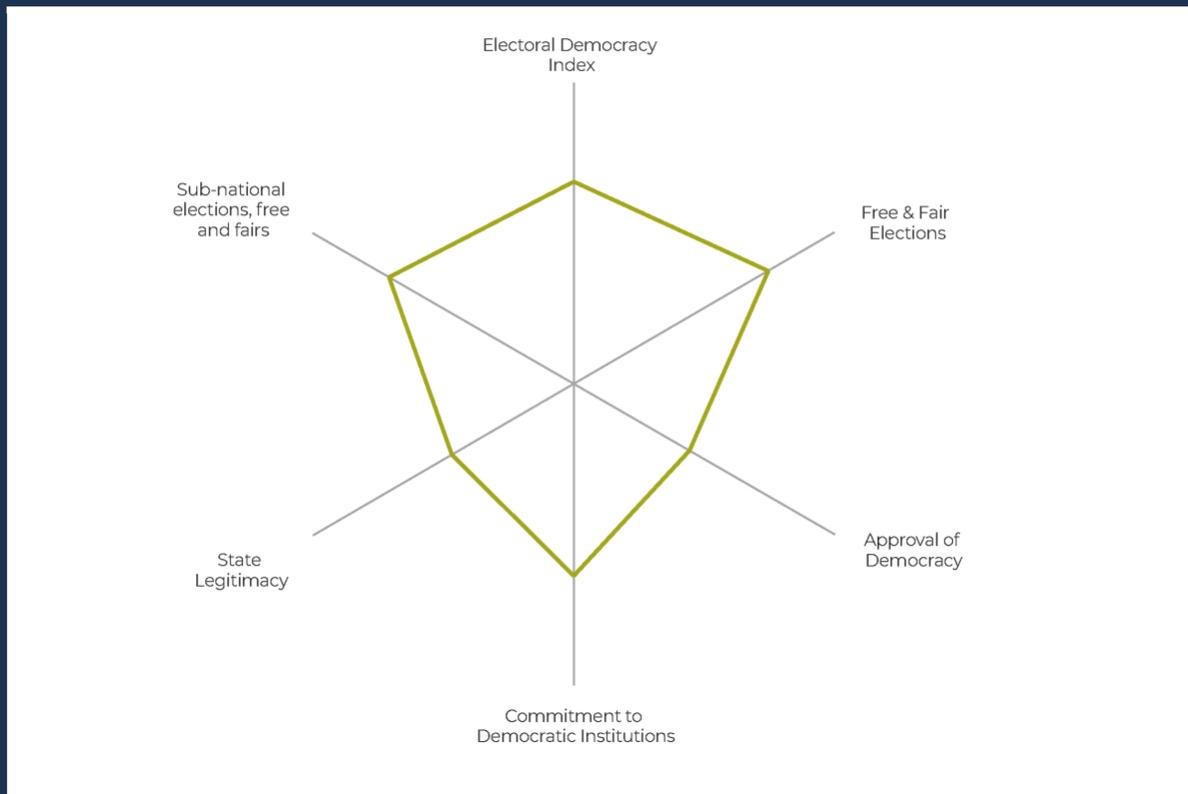
However, the resilience of electoral democracy has not resulted in greater approval of democracy by citizens, nor in greater legitimacy of governments.

The index's best-performing indicators at the regional level are free and fair national elections, and free and fair subnational elections. For its part, the electoral democracy index is an aggregate consisting of five subcomponents: freedom of association, suffrage, fair elections, elected executives, and freedom of expression.

The indicators with the lowest performance in the region are those of approval of democracy (which measures the approval of the rules and procedures of the system itself) and those of state legitimacy (which considers the representativeness and openness of the government, as well as its relationship with citizens measured in terms of trust in institutions and electoral processes).

The following radar chart summarizes the average results for the entire region:

Figure 4: Regional average of the index of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people (2021)



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Index 4. Pluralistic system of political parties and organizations

Following the guidelines of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, representative democracy is strengthened and deepened with the permanent, ethical, and responsible participation of citizens within a framework of legality in accordance with the respective constitutional order. The necessary conditions for the participation of citizens in decisions relating to their own development are available when there is a pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, an essential element of democracies.

The information collected shows that electoral pluralism has strengthened in the Americas (the data for this indicator show that it operates 27 percent above the global average) being one of the best performing indicators. There is also an improvement in the active participation of citizens in decision-making processes, through their

participation in diverse organizations. On the other hand, it is observed that the region, has room for improvement to strengthen the networks that allow for increasing social capital (plural and inclusive network of relationships, ties and bridges which permit the better functioning of political parties and organizations).

The lower performing indicators are civil society traditions, divisions between elite factions, and social capital.

The indicator of divisions between elite factions, measures power struggles, the fragmentation of institutions, and the elites across various kinds of divisions (ethnic, class, race, or religion) and the existence of policies that could lead to the edge of the abyss (taking into account the use of nationalist, xenophobic or irredentism/community solidarity rhetoric).

The social capital indicator measures collaboration between different identity or interest groups in society: the level of interpersonal trust (norms and values) and the number of autonomous and self-organized groups, associations, and organizations in the political sphere (networks). In this way, it tries to obtain a rough estimate of the density of the network of relationships between actors and identity groups.

Poor performance on these three indicators signals high degrees of polarization, disputes among factions, and threats to the perceived legitimacy of leaders. The theory, as well as empirical observation, indicates that an active and interconnected society positively nurtures the strengthening of democracies and the development of nations. In contrast, weak frameworks produce weak institutions and norms.

Figure 5: Regional average of the index of pluralistic system of political parties and organizations (2021)



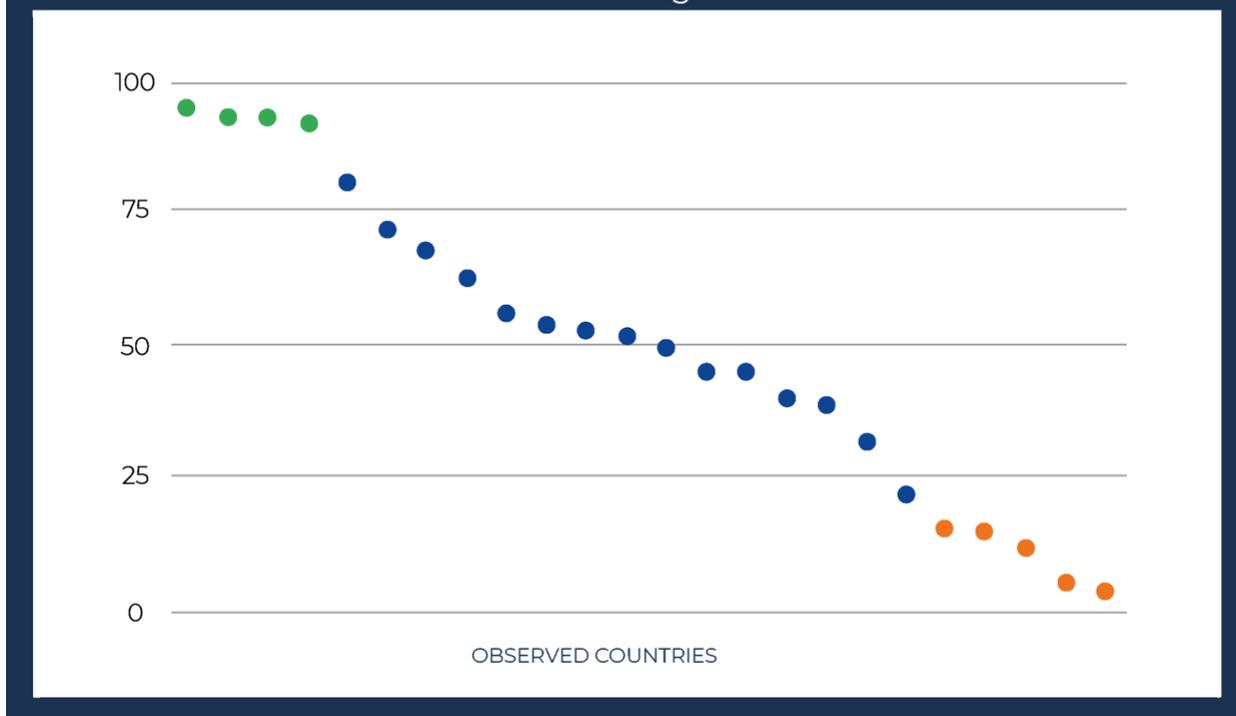
Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Index 5. Separation of powers and independence of branches of government

At the regional level, there is a significant variation in the indicators in this index. Some countries have a de facto separation of powers and systems with healthy checks and balances, while at the other extreme, there are countries in which there is no separation, either de jure or de facto, of public powers.

Figure 6 shows the regional variation in this index of separation of powers and independence of branches of government.

Figure 6: Clusters of the index of separation of powers and independence of the branches of government.



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

It should be recalled that the analysis of the indices focused on averages at the regional level, providing a picture of the region that would appear to be homogeneous. However, **if the data were disaggregated, it would be evident that there is great heterogeneity within the region**, and it would be possible to classify countries into three clusters or groups of high, medium, and low performance. It is noteworthy, that the same countries lead in performance in almost all indices, while others are consistently positioned at the other extreme. This highlights a high level of association or correlation between the essential elements of democracy, so that the strengthening of one or some elements contributes to progress in the others.

Likewise, countries with opportunities for rising to a higher performing cluster are identified, while others could be at risk of descending and positioning themselves in the low-performing cluster, due -particularly- to socio-economic variables and access to power.

The pandemic and vulnerabilities: impact on socio-economic dimensions

In order to expand the democratic standard by incorporating the socio-economic dimension (Articles 11, 12 and 13 IDC), the chapter concludes with a brief analysis of the impact of the pandemic on the living conditions of the inhabitants of the region, especially the most vulnerable. ECLAC (2022) estimates a 27-year setback in quality-of-life indicators, among others: life expectancy decreased by an average of 3 years; the poverty rate is similar to that of 12 years ago in the region, and the extreme poverty rate fell to the same level as 20 years ago. The pandemic has had a secondary impact on education and precarious employment now reaches 58.7 per cent of the total economically active population. (ECLAC, 2020).

Added to this already critical scenario in the region, are the consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, mainly related to the price of fuel, fertilizers, and inflation in the cost of food. With these and other elements, the third chapter ends with projections for 2023 which are not encouraging and challenges that are likely to be increasingly demanding.

3. Trends that may affect the effective exercise of democracy

The **third chapter** of the report analyzes political **polarization, political fanaticism, and hate speech and the effects these have on governance in the region.**

The pandemic context has been a catalyst for virulence, political polarization, and disinformation, due to the deterioration of the quality of life of citizens, the growth of inequality gaps, as well as limitations on the exercise of political rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights, which has resulted in dissatisfaction and distrust in the democratic system and its institutions.

The indicators that reflect the emergence of autocratic and extreme positions in Latin America are evident in the indicators provided by the Latinobarómetro 2021; in which

it is observed that the decline in support for democracy that had been increasing in the last decade has stopped, reaching in 2018 (the previous edition), the lowest records in the last five years. Democracy, in that period, did not seem to pay the bill for the pandemic. Likewise, the pandemic has not produced abrupt changes in the positioning of countries regarding support for democracy; even though there is an increase in more moderate levels of support for democracy than those reached in the nineties, which continues to be interpreted as reflecting some disillusionment and indifference. Support for democracy in the region declined between 2010 and 2018, from 63% at the beginning of the decade, to 48% in 2018. In 2020, the year of the pandemic, support for democracy was 49%.

13% support authoritarianism and 27% are indifferent towards the type of government that is operating.

From 2010 to 2021, regional democracy has lost a total of 14 percentage points of support.

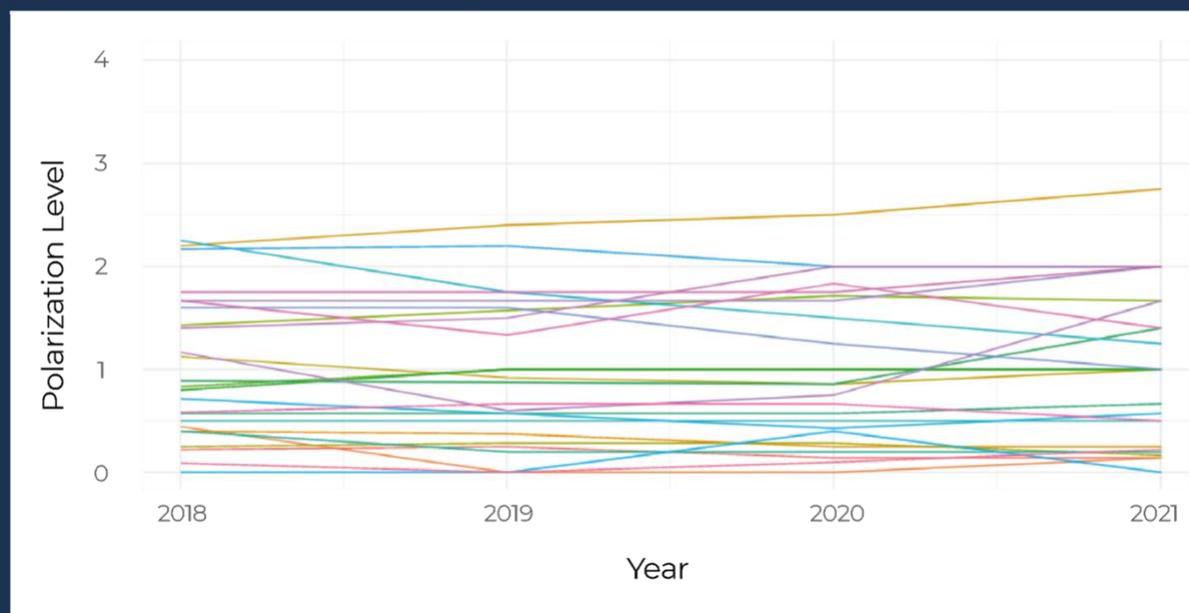
On the other hand, the Democracy Index 2021 of The Economist shows a very low score for the region in terms of the political culture of citizens and political organizations, obtaining 4.53 points out of 10, and 6.64 regarding the exercise of civil liberties. (p.49).

To observe the current polarization in the Americas, the Digital Society Project was used, in particular the Digital Society Survey, which focuses on studying the interactions between politics and social networks. The project utilizes the infrastructure of the Varieties of Democracy Institute, as well as its measurement models and quality control processes, making it one of the sources with the greatest coverage and reliability in its published data.

The Digital Society Survey is comprised of 35 questions, and one of the questions allows for the observation of social polarization. How would you characterize different opinions on the main political issues of the society? The categorization of the answer considers the value 0 (zero) as a high polarization and the value 4 (four) as a society

without any polarization. The question helps to measure social polarization, since it is a perception of the position of the parties.

Figure 14: Polarization of society in selected countries of the American continent



Source: Digital Society Project, Variables of Democracy

The higher the score, it reflects that different or conflicting opinions are given only on some political issues, while the figures closer to zero illustrate a polarization on more issues in the public debate, leaving a very small space for increasing and constructing agreements.

Polarization in networks and false polarization

Massive disinformation, hate messages and fake news through social networks have been a common theme in electoral processes in Latin America between 2020 and 2022, which has led to virulent and polarized electoral campaigns. In this regard, Berganza (2021) points out the following, referring to social networks and their impact on democracy"... They have had negative effects when they have been used as weapons to misinform, attack and discredit those who oppose governments or specific initiatives aimed at deepening democratic practices." (p.179).

The chapter, in addition to using data on the behavior of the debate in social networks, analyzes the studies of several authors on the topic. For example, Jaime Settle (2017) examined how the structure of the social network shapes false polarization, that is the amount of perceived polarization which grows as the social distance between people increases. The perception of polarization increases among people who do not possess a direct connection. In his study, Chris Bail (2021) concludes that "online news consumption was the strongest predictor of false polarization in almost all countries. Social media also exacerbates the contribution of mass media to false polarization. Journalists often use social media to monitor public opinion, and this further distorts their reporting on polarization. It is a vicious circle." (p.102)

Political fanaticism and hate speech

If one group is perceived as strong in relation to the other group, it is more common for the response to be anger. While if the group is considered weak, anxiety is the predominant feeling on the part of this group. Therefore, we see that emotions cloud rational action, thus preventing exchange between groups that radicalize, making their positions extreme and approaching political fanaticism.

Hate speech is based on political fanaticism. The drawback when addressing hate speech, not only in contexts of political debate, but linked to issues of racism, xenophobia, white supremacy, and other issues, is its definition, since there is no accepted international definition according to the UNESCO report (2021). It overlaps with issues of discrimination, incitement to discrimination, hostility and/or violence. The issue also implies a constant tension with the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the complex debate about whether or not these exchanges should be moderated and by whom.

Effects on governance

Social polarization taken to the extreme breaks the channels of communication, both between parties and between citizens. The impact of polarization translates at the partisan political level into the paralysis of government management, due to the lack

of consensus to carry out public policies for the benefit of the population. Irreconcilable positions make it difficult to reach agreements.

Extreme polarization in civic terms threatens social peace, since it could go from using people identified with extreme positions in social networks, to an identity recognition that materializes discontent, mainly in the form of social conflicts, not only against the circle of the political opponent, but also towards any identity group that is thought to be aligned with the political group of reference. One of the ways it is manifested in the region is in social uprisings with violent actions.

Viral democracy, social media, disinformation, fake news

The chapter is complemented by an analysis of how social networks work, their interactions and the use of this tool that is increasingly important in democracies around the world.

One of the main problems is that people tend to consume information that reinforces their own views. The networks, due to their exposure algorithms and the ease of organized information, have amplified the effect of myopia; perspective tends to be lost due to low exposure to opposing ideas. This type of action has also increased polarization in social networks and opens up the possibility of being used to distort the debate on public affairs. It is proposed to briefly review the categories developed to better understand the phenomenon: fake news, misinformation, disinformation (deliberately wrong), malicious information (with the aim of harming a person or institution).

In the chapter you can find examples of the behavior of networks around electoral politics, in what constitutes a projection of a scenario in which social networks play an increasingly decisive role, and in which the distinction between truth and lies, the narrative and the facts, is becoming irrelevant.

4. Resilient democracies: lessons learned, democratic problems and risks

Although each chapter has conclusions, lessons learned in the area it addresses, some can be highlighted as a corollary of this report:

- The continuous celebration of periodic, free, fair elections based on universal suffrage is derived from the important Inter-American democratic heritage. This is undoubtedly one of the most inspiring aspects for our region that managed to organize and hold elections by adapting, transforming, and innovating in the operation of electoral bodies in the face of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In this sense, during the 2020-2022 electoral cycle, the region overcame the first stage of cancellation and postponement of electoral processes (March-September 2020), and in the second stage (last quarter of 2020 until 2022), moved to coexistence with the virus and the organization of all electoral processes, in all their phases under biosecurity protocols.
- The holding of elections during the COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped the erosion of democracy, and the widening of pre-existing gaps in human, civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, and the continuing threats to progress on the inclusive social development agenda.
- Regarding the issues addressed during this period in the Organization of American States, a review of these highlights the fundamental role that each of its organs and mechanisms plays in the region: recalling the centrality of rights, setting off alerts about risks and threats, articulating a vision and shared action in defense of the regional values expressed in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. From the reforms that threaten judicial independence, through the crisis of migrants and refugees, to crises of

legality or legitimacy in electoral processes, the OAS is established as the most relevant political forum in the Americas, that in times of crisis and democratic deterioration becomes even more important.

- In the context of the pandemic, the role of the Organization of American States and its organs and mechanisms in the debate and global strategies on equitable access to vaccines is also highlighted. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued several resolutions recalling the necessary human rights approach both in the mitigation of contagion, in the response to the pandemic, and in the vaccination process.
- It is essential to deepen the mechanisms of a "new multilateralism" that responds to the urgencies and complexity of this era, and that is capable of creating the necessary synergies to lead the cooperation among countries to address the everyday problems of the people.
- For more than half of Latin Americans, there are insufficient guarantees of access to economic and social rights. According to the Latinobarómetro (2021), this is the strongest impact from the pandemic: the perception of loss of guarantees has the lowest score across the spectrum of economic and social rights. As a result of the effects of the pandemic, most perceive inequality of opportunities, social insecurity, gender disparity and lack of environmental protection.
- These and other impacts are considered in the work of the Observatory. With regard to the indices and indicators in this report, the most important lesson is the correlation between these elements: human rights and freedoms; access to and exercise of power subject to the rule of law; holding periodic, free, fair elections based on universal and secret suffrage; pluralistic system of political parties and organizations; and separation and independence of public powers. When one of these elements is guaranteed, strengthened, or perfected, it has a direct effect on the others. Therefore, no

small advance or setback should be underestimated in any aspect of democratic life in the Americas.

- Polarization, political fanaticism, and hate speech are all phenomena that affect social cohesion, and governance, and are aggravated by the growing influence of social networks in all aspects of political life in the countries.

The risk of polarization and the breaking of political bridges

Traditionally, polarization is thought to be what paralyzes. However, what really causes paralysis is the lack of or rupture of bridges between political poles, eliminating the channels of communication between citizens and political actors, producing acts of social mobilization, with a high probability of producing violent actions. For this reason, the analysis in this chapter deals, not only with the poles, but also focuses on the bridges.

A simplified way to present to what extent polarization has become a problem is on two axes: number of poles and number of bridges. And from that double entry matrix a typology can be created.

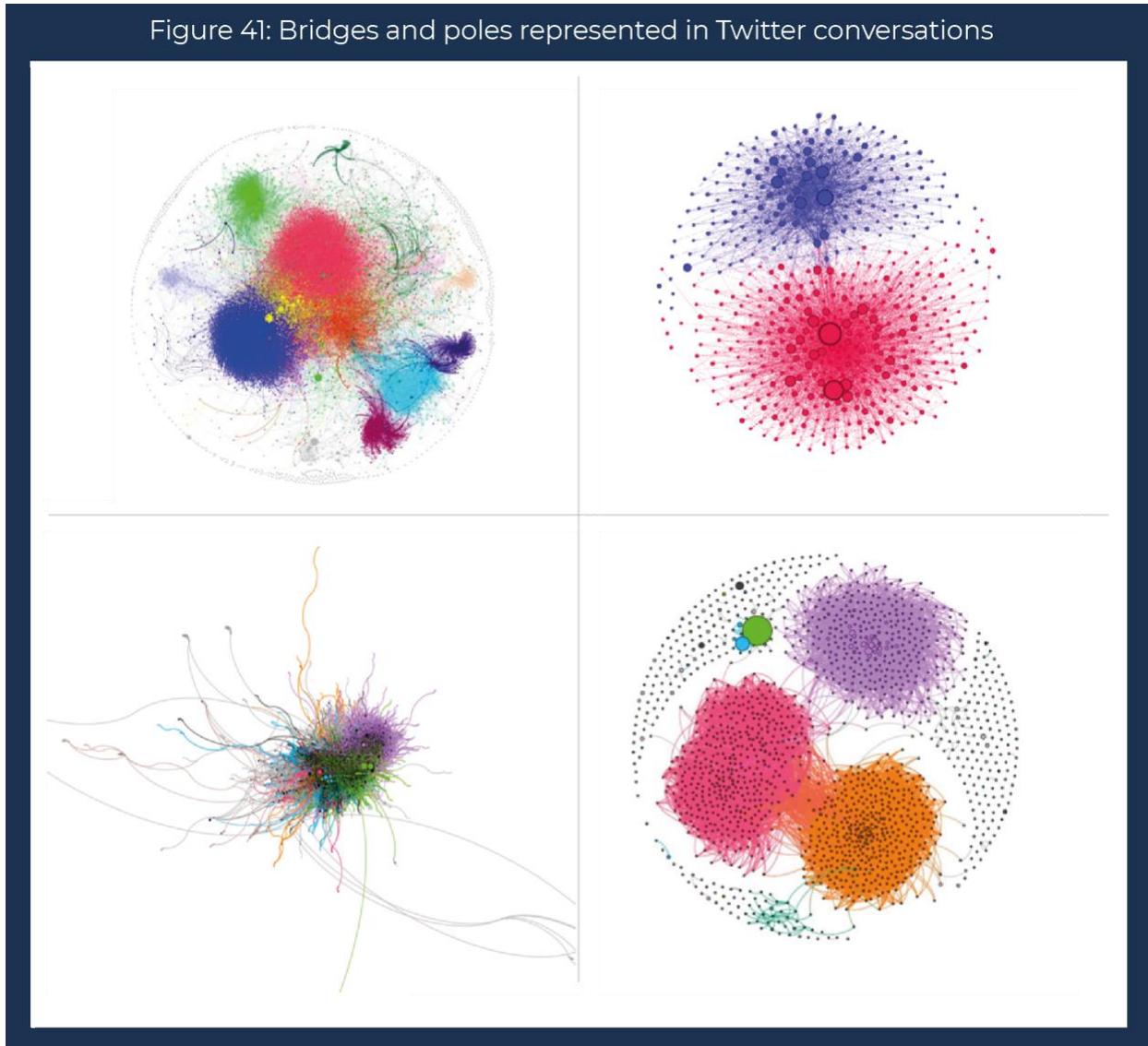
Table 6: Polarization: Bridges and Poles

	Many Poles	Two Poles
Few Bridges	Factionalism	Polarization and Conflict
Many Bridges	Perfect Pluralism	Polarization and Democratic Coexistence

Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

The following figures present info spaces of the Twitter network, for different countries in electoral conditions, which are distributed in the four quadrants, following the previous matrix (Table 6).

Figure 41: Bridges and poles represented in Twitter conversations



Source: Twitter. Elaborated by the Observatory

Twitter infospaces correspond to countries that match the proposed typology. In the upper right quadrant is the network of a polarized country with recurrent conflicts and violence. In the upper left quadrant, the network shows a country with many factions and few bridges, this is reflected in its parliament and suffers from a lack of governability, also recurrent. The lower left quadrant shows the network of a country

with many factions, but also many bridges. Without being a perfect pluralism, it is very similar.

Finally, in the lower right quadrant three poles are shown. However, the lilac community is not a political community, but one of foreign accounts. The pink and orange communities are the political ones and show a large number of bridges between them. This is a country generally considered as having high rankings in the different indicators of Democracy. In addition to the large number of bridges, it has another characteristic common to countries with strong democratic institutions and that is the limited capacity of foreign actors to have influence over internal actors.

The illustrations show that two elements have to be combined for real or potential conflict to appear: extreme positions and absence of bridges between them.

Problems and challenges for democracy in the Americas

In view of the above, regional democracy must face the following fundamental problems: 1) Overcoming pandemic backsliding; 2) Reducing the economic and social gaps widened by the pandemic; 3) Confronting the emergence of authoritarian positions and autocratic regimes, as well as virulence, political polarization, and disinformation, through the strengthening of democratic institutions and digital literacy; and (4) Overcoming weak regional integration.

Regarding overcoming pandemic backsliding, the countries of the region should observe the balance and temporality of states of exception, emergency and public calamity under the parameters established by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the modulation of their respective constitutional Courts and Tribunals, so that the powers of the Executive Branch do not invade those of other state institutions.

The pandemic scenario has been fertile ground for the flowering of extreme positions that question democracy, emerging in some places, strengthening in others authoritarian and populist discourses in the countries of the region; which not only

question the functioning of the basic institutions of a democratic society, but threaten to mold them towards their interests, undermining and weakening institutionalism through continuous actions that collapse the rule of law and the validity of fundamental freedoms.

According to Latinobarómetro 2021, it is observed that the decline in support for democracy that had been increasing in the last decade has stopped, reaching in 2018, (the previous edition), the lowest records in the last five years. Democracy, in that period, did not seem to pay the bill for the pandemic. Likewise, while the pandemic has not produced abrupt changes in the positioning of countries regarding support for democracy; there are more moderate levels of support for democracy than those reached in the 1990s, which continues to be interpreted as certain disillusionment and indifference. Support for democracy in the region declined between 2010 and 2018, from 63% at the beginning of the decade, to 48% in 2018. In 2020, the year of the pandemic, support for democracy was 49%.

13% support authoritarianism and 27% are indifferent towards the type of government that is operating. From 2010 to 2021, regional democracy has lost a total of 14 percentage points of support.

In this vicious circle, the deterioration in the quality of life of the population and the increase in the figures on poverty, extreme poverty, hunger, and inadequate employment have become a risk to democracy. It is essential that this system demonstrates to citizens that it is efficient in guaranteeing rights, offering public services, ensuring the rule of law, in other words, the motives that explain its *raison d'être*.

As for the economic and social gaps widened by the pandemic, there is no doubt that since 2020 all levels of poverty, inequality in access to health, inequality, unemployment, exclusion have increased; rolling back all the sustained progress that the region had made in recent years. Addressing this complex problem requires the generation of long-term agreements between the various political forces, social groups, and citizens within the various countries of the region.

The challenge for the region's democracies is to reduce the economic and social gaps widened by the pandemic, under a multidimensional approach that broadens the vision of poverty and inequality beyond the lack of material and economic goods, and that promotes integral human development under which "(...) people lead lives they value by increasing their capacities, which is not limited to achievements in well-being, but includes the ability to act and freedoms." (UNDP, 2022, p. 13). In this way, people's well-being is expanded, as well as their resilience, being able to recover in the shortest possible time from the shocks we face in a time of uncertainties such as the current one.

The promotion of innovation is aimed helping people adapt to the new challenges and emergencies that may arise in the future, achieving energy efficiency, social innovation, addressing misinformation, improving media and digital literacy, generating data systems and indicators that allow public institutions and governments to make decisions based on updated and accurate information.

Weak regional integration requires that regional forums and institutions be strengthened under a democratic principle, which could expand real processes of horizontal cooperation among the countries of the hemisphere when there are situations of weaknesses within their democracies. This could facilitate the exchange of experiences and the dissemination of good practices in the areas of democracy and human rights.

Finally, the construction of resilient democracies not only implies the periodic and transparent holding of elections in which political and electoral rights are exercised, but also demands that public and private agendas through investment, innovation and the establishment of social protection measures guarantee the full exercise of economic, social and cultural rights, and the closing of gaps, as fundamental for peoples under a human development approach to strengthen their capacities and competencies to face uncertainty and shocks arising from the global and current regional context.

Chapter 1: Political – Electoral processes in the context of the pandemic

The presence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean has posed significant challenges to regional democracy, the consequences of the virus have generated multidimensional and intersectoral conflicts or crises in the health, social, economic, and political spheres.

The rule of law, constitutional regimes, together with the exercise of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights have been affected by the impact of the pandemic and the measures taken by countries to address it.

It is in this scenario, that the analysis is being undertaken on the significant aspects of the exercise of rights and regional democracy in the context of the pandemic, is being undertaken.

1.1. Pandemic, democratic institutions and states of exception

The appearance and expansion in the world of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes the COVID-19 disease between 2019 and 2020, resulted in the declaration of a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. (PAHO – WHO, 2020.a). The presence of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on all social activities, including elections, by imposing restriction measures to contain the transmission of the virus, the number of deaths, and the pressure on health systems.

After two years and six months of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 – 2022) according to data from Johns Hopkins University in the USA, at the beginning of October 2022, it was calculated that there was a total of 619,043,519 infections and 6,550,019 deaths in the world. (JHU,2022). Regarding the Americas, according to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the month of October 2022 began with a record of 178, 470,245 infections, and a total of 2,839,149 deaths across the region. (PAHO-WHO. 2022.b)

¹ In this report, the term "Americas" will be used when referring to the three regions that make up the Western Hemisphere in the reports of hemispheric organizations such as PAHO, OAS, among others.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a multidimensional crisis around the world without parallel in history, in the areas of health, economic, social, political, among others, from which no state, country or region in the world has been exempted and its effects have negatively impacted national and international institutions. Therefore, it can be defined as "a total social fact²", being a phenomenon that brings into play the totality of the dimensions of social life, shaking social relations, its actors, and institutions.

Consequently, the impacts of the pandemic significantly widened the gaps and vulnerabilities that existed before it, within each of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Thus, the different social and political dimensions interrelate and feed each other, directly affecting the erosion of democracy, electoral processes and the governance agenda of the countries of the Americas, as well as the probabilities of recovery in the post-pandemic context. In this regard, Article 11 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IDC) establishes the interdependence between development and democracy, which signals the necessity to implement economic measures that comprehensively guarantee the fundamental rights of citizens, in order to overcome the pandemic and its consequences within the countries of the region.

In the first half of the pandemic (March-September 2020), its effects on the rule of law and constitutional regimes were marked by a persistent discourse by leaders of "apparent insufficiency of laws and institutional frameworks" to face the health emergency. Language focused on:

- a. the novelty and severity of the crisis;
- b. the crucial need to adopt rapid, urgent and effective measures to address the pandemic;
- c. the uncertainty generated;

² As defined by the French sociologist and anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1872 – 1950) in his work "Essay on the gift" the total social facts: "(...) They mobilize, in certain cases, the whole of society and its institutions... All these phenomena are simultaneously legal, economic, religious, and even aesthetic (...)" (1988, p.191).

- d. the difficulties in the functioning of the bodies that act as counterweights in a representative democracy: parliament and judicial courts;
- e. the temporary deactivation of the oversight, participation, and citizen utilization of public entities due to quarantines and other restrictive measures.

In this regard, Freidenberg and Saavedra (2021) establish this scenario with some assumptions:

In Latin America and the Caribbean, where most political systems are considered "polyarchies", a health crisis of this magnitude has put institutional decision-making processes and mechanisms under strain (Pozas-Loyo, 2020) and has focused attention on the structural weaknesses of states; the leadership style of presidencies and their ability to be empathetic and sensitive to people's problems (Freidenberg, 2020); the difficulties in exercising political control over executive decisions (Fuchs, 2020) or the conditions of poverty and structural inequality faced by the countries of the region prior to the pandemic (Saba, 2020). (p. 305 – 306).

In certain cases, the declarations of states of emergency, exception, or public calamity have been denounced by some to exceed the constitutional and legal parameters, under the excuse of facing the health crisis, producing phenomena of arbitrariness, excesses of powers, concentration of powers in the executive, lack of transparency and clarity in state action. While there were those who at the given time and subsequently discussed the possible disproportional use of certain measures, the magnitude, and scale of the crisis provoked a wide variety of reactions and decisions on the part of states.

The states of exception, emergency or public calamity, implemented in the region, sought to strengthen the powers of the executive branch to manage the pandemic, generally lacking a human rights approach and leaning towards management similar to that existing within a military or internal conflict situation by not establishing proportional and balanced measures. There are authors like Ascarrunz (2021) who pointed this out:

One of the main findings recognizes that the strengthening of the powers of heads of state authorized in states of emergency responds to experiences of international conflicts and determining local factors... In the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments around the world implemented different responses with different implications regarding violations of democratic standards. (p. 184).

In this complex context, the capacity of democratic States to face emergencies of any kind through ordinary regulatory frameworks was questioned, and at the same time the continuous and periodic use of this constitutional tool, seemed to be losing its exceptional character for example. Freidenberg and Saavedra (2021) pointed out:

The most common response of Latin American governments to manage COVID-19 has been to invoke the emergency powers or emergency powers provided for in the constitutions of their respective countries. This fact is not irrelevant. One of the aspects underlying the idea of a constitutional democratic state is that the restriction of rights and freedoms is carried out only in an extraordinary way and is legally based on the use of the provisions defined in the constitution itself. Many democracies had to use this type of constitutional instruments to legitimately implement confinement measures in the face of the health crisis. (p. 307).

In relation to the above, these alleged excesses in the exercise of the exceptions to manage the pandemic were generalized at the beginning of it, due to the difficulties of parliaments in meeting, as well as the obstacles to functioning virtually and in automating operations of ordinary and constitutional courts and tribunals. These situations prevented both public powers from not being able to act as effective counterweights in terms of controlling the constitutionality of states of emergency, having oversight, as well as guaranteeing citizens access and judicial protection of their rights in the pandemic. In this regard Olivera (2021) states: "In this context, the control of the Executive by the Legislative and Judicial [bodies] is relevant, in situations such as the health crisis that is being experienced." (p.325).

It is not useless to emphasize at this point that on the other hand there was an exceptional and unprecedented situation and that exceptional problems required exceptional solutions. It should also be noted that in that same period of exceptional measures, the Latinobarómetro (2020) surveys showed a break in the downward trend of previous years in terms of dissatisfaction with democracy and there was an increase in the approval of the governments of the region.

Regarding the Legislative Branch, its functioning within the pandemic was suspended or severely limited in the various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, which left the management of the health crisis exclusively in the hands of the Executive Branch, lacking effective the legislative accompaniment, as Freidenberg and Saavedra (2021) point out: "Although the experience regarding the functioning of the Legislative has been diverse (Tchintian et al., 2020) and still under discussion, most Congresses reduced their actions, and many of the crucial agendas that were being discussed were paralyzed." (p.310).

The crucial factor for this legislative paralysis was the difficulty in legislating and regulating its remote operation through electronic and telematic means, and whether the decisions adopted in this format have constitutional and legal validity. This difficulty was one of institutional design, as the legislative bodies were not designed to function in situations of contingency or remote operation and the rigidity of their regulatory frameworks in moving to a virtual format. (Freidenberg and Saavedra, 2021, p. 310).

In a democracy, the permanent functioning of Parliament is essential to maintain the division of powers, control of decisions taken by the Executive, and provide the necessary legal system for the management of the pandemic, so that it has the formal and material legitimacy that only legislators can ensure, as Daverio indicates: "A hyperactive executive, with a legislature that reacts late and works slowly, is not a good democratic combination." (2021, p. 153). Likewise, "The accelerated transformation of legislative dynamics recognized the need to adapt democratic institutions, while the Executive bodies found solutions by accumulating emergency powers, without taking into account legal restrictions, parliamentary oversight or

deadlines for the restoration of constitutional order." (Freidenberg and Saavedra, 2021, p. 310).

Gradually, the parliaments of Latin America and the Caribbean adopted virtual sessions and voting modalities, and as the levels of infections were reduced, mixed modalities were adopted: face-to-face and virtual, in addition to the adoption of technological tools such as electronic signatures, repositories, one-stop shops for customer service, and generation of online procedures for citizens. In this way, the Legislative Branches of the countries of the region adapted their work to virtual or mixed formats (face-to-face and virtual) within which they dealt with issues such as the approval of laws through technological tools.

The Judiciary also interrupted its administration of justice services as a result of the confinement measures, in the absence of legislation on the use of technology, and in the face of citizens' difficulties in accessing their services through computer information technology tools and telematic means. This situation affected in general terms the protection and guarantee of rights before courts and tribunals, especially of vulnerable groups, as indicated by Daverio (2021): "... The service of delivery of justice, which operates only for the attention of urgent cases, has been interrupted. The suspension of extraordinary work was extended, while measures were put in place for greater computerization of files, electronic signature and remote work of personnel." (p.154).

In the context of the pandemic, the functioning of courts and tribunals is essential to guarantee the effective protection of citizens' rights, sanction possible abuses generated within the frameworks of exception, and also evaluate the constitutionality of the measures adopted by the Executive Branch.

In order to guarantee the functioning of the courts, as well as the processing and resolution of judicial cases, the various Judicial Powers in Latin America and the Caribbean gradually adopted various technological tools:

Among the measures adopted by the Judicial Powers, there is a significant prevalence in the use of digital hearings and presentation of briefs – including

habeas corpus and *amparo remedies* – in a virtual format, to make up for the impossibility of in-person gathering. Of course, these measures do not replace the functioning that every Judiciary should have so that the right of access to justice is guaranteed, but, at least, good practices have served as the for working through the challenges. (Olivera, 2021, p.331)

The most serious harm to the rights for judicial protection and access to justice was suffered by vulnerable groups such as women, children, and adolescents, who were victims of domestic violence and were unable to access judicial bodies in a timely manner due to measures restricting movement and transit (Vela Ávalos 2020). As a result, and in summary:

- a. The implementation of restriction measures established in the states of emergency in Latin America due to the pandemic, generated impacts on the exercise of political-electoral rights and economic, social, and cultural rights in the region, reflecting the mutual relationship and interdependence between both groups of rights, for the construction of democracies and resilient societies. In this context as Piovesan and Morales (2021) point out:

It is unquestionable, that human rights, "are universal, indivisible and interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing for the creation or reconstruction of resilient, inclusive, just and peaceful societies." (...) (p.28).

- b. The most serious impact that the pandemic had on these two groups of rights in Latin America and the Caribbean was the suspension and prolonged restriction of their exercise, resulting in the deterioration of the quality of the democracies of the region, making evident their interdependence, interrelation, and equal hierarchy, as Piovesan and Morales (2021) report: "The denial of one right always prevents the enjoyment of other rights. If the deprivation of one right adversely affects the other rights, the effective guarantee of one right also facilitates progress in safeguarding the other rights." (p.31). The impact on democratic systems is clearly evident when political-electoral rights and economic, social and cultural rights are affected. Access to all rights, inequality of access to rights

- and the corruption that is behind that access and inequality of access is what (de)legitimizes democracies.
- c. The exceptions during this period created conditions for possible excesses. However, the general population valued governments positively and there was less dissatisfaction with democracy than in previous years (Latinobarómetro, 2020).
 - d. The legislative and judicial branches gradually implemented mechanisms to allow them to fulfill their functions in the context of emergency and restrictions, permitting the gradual recovery of counterweight mechanisms, such as judicial control of decisions and effective access to justice for the population.
 - e. In spite of the capacity to adapt, deepening innovation in democratic institutions will allow them to respond better in the future to situations that require exceptions. The pandemic had a negative impact on the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights, by deepening and widening the gaps and vulnerabilities existing in the region in terms of poverty and inequality, and access to health, education, employment, and social security rights, among others. This scenario may affect recovery in the post-pandemic period as well as the governance agenda of democracies in the region.

1.2. Democracy and elections in the context of a pandemic

In the Americas, the exercise of political-electoral rights was suspended during the first stage of the pandemic due to the cancellation and rescheduling of elections, as a result of the establishment of quarantines and other measures restricting the rights of movement, transit and assembly, as illustrated by Freidenberg and Saavedra in 2020 : "In Latin America and the Caribbean some 15 countries have had to revise their electoral calendar, either to maintain, reschedule or suspend elections." (2021, p. 314) Eight countries in the region rescheduled the dates of their elections, and only one suspended them without indicating when they would be held."

This phenomenon of cancellation and rescheduling of electoral processes in Latin America and the Caribbean generated significant problems for the regional

democratic system due to self-extensions in the exercise of public mandates, non-observance of the constitutional and legal norms that regulate elections; especially those referring to deadlines, impossibility for citizens to elect state officials in a timely manner through elections, to vote on matters of public interest, or the organization of elections under conditions of uncertainty and inequity. Regarding the latter, Daverio points out:

(...) It becomes essential to guarantee equal footing to all the political groups participating in the contest, the conditions of access to internet spaces for the dissemination of their platforms, as well as the possibility of using digital applications and virtual modalities, which have proliferated during the pandemic, to disseminate proposals or generate debates between candidates. (2021, p.161)

Subsequently, with the gradual celebration of elections from mid-2020, a health approach prevailed achieving the balance between the rights to health and life with the exercise of political and electoral rights. In this regard, Daverio (2021) expresses the following:

With regard to logistics, we will have to think about care conditions for voters and all those with responsibilities throughout election day, for example, provide for more polling places and polling stations; organize lines of people and temperature control at the entrance; creating distance between tables and people; evaluate the possibility of extending voting hours, determine voting shifts according to document number or establish a special schedule for people at risk, install special booths for people with symptoms, mandatory use of masks and other hand hygiene and material disinfection, constantly clean toilets and facilities, and individually handle food, snacks, utensils and glasses and subsequently discard of them in special containers. (p. 162)

The organization of elections since mid-2020, in pandemic conditions, resulted in important transformations in the organization of the same, as well as in the development of electoral campaigns. The use of digital tools and social networks was promoted, the "rescheduling of the elections meant changes in various directions: in

electoral campaigning and in the processes of selection of candidates, testing the adaptability of the parties and the opportunities for technological innovation to make the decisions that organizations could adopt." (Freidenberg and Saavedra, 2021, p. 314.).

These impacts reflect the centrality of electoral processes and political-electoral rights in democratic systems, by granting representation to leaders, renewing public representatives in a peaceful and orderly manner; and allowing citizens to influence aspects of general interest for their community.

The main dilemma caused by the pandemic in electoral matters is the holding or postponing of elections. Keeping a pre-established date could have health implications and endanger people's health. Postponing the celebration brings with it constitutional and legal considerations. In either case there are also political implications. Each country will have to make a determination in the exercise of its sovereignty. Notwithstanding this, the suspension of the elections should not fall into indefiniteness, but on the contrary, it is essential to explore the legal options (established in the State Constitution and in the Law) to define a date in light of the evaluations made in relation to health matters. Democracy should not fall into uncertainty but, on the contrary, should be reaffirmed through concrete signals and actions.

Regarding the role of electoral management bodies in Latin America and the Caribbean, the pandemic has prompted an institutional redefinition for the organization of elections. In this sense, both administrative authorities and judges in electoral matters have faced important challenges regarding the implementation of the health approach to the electoral cycle in coordination with health authorities, the recovery of public trust and that of political parties, electoral integrity, electoral justice, election financing, regulatory frameworks, among others.

Elections in times of pandemic have posed challenges to the electoral, administrative, and jurisdictional authorities, which have had to attend to the organizational changes imposed on them by this new reality. These challenges have to do with concrete actions to resolve the tension between various political and health rights, but also with

the generation of trust between citizens and political actors regarding how the authorities and political classes solve these challenges. However, it is clear that the pandemic not only brought major challenges for parties and electoral authorities, but also posed a fertile scenario for democratic creativity. (Freidenberg and Saavedra, 2021, p. 317-319)

1.2.1. The 2020–2022 electoral cycle in the Americas

The 2020 – 2022 electoral cycle in the Americas was characterized by the complexity of the organization of elections, raising important tensions between the rights to health and life with the exercise of electoral political rights.

In this sense, the electoral cycle had two clearly defined stages:

- The first, during the first half of 2020, marked by the cancellation and postponement of electoral processes under a health approach aimed at slowing transmission and reducing mortality; and
- The second, which takes place between mid-2020 and 2022 in which electoral processes are implemented under the approach of coexistence with the virus through the implementation of biosecurity protocols for elections.

This has reflected democratic resilience in the region. In this sense, the role of electoral management bodies in the organization of electoral processes in a pandemic context has contributed decisively to the resilience of regional democracy, demonstrating adaptation and innovation in the face of unplanned challenges, and developing strategies and measures in normative matters, inter-institutional coordination, defense of independence and autonomy in its work, generating consensus, developing sanitary protocols, use of technology and electoral observation, among others to successfully carryout elections in the various countries of the region.

In this election cycle, the following relevant problems can be identified:

- difficulties in the organization of elections by electoral management bodies and the need to generate new forms of election organization;

- the holding of electoral processes in highly contested and polarized contexts (virulent democracy); and
- redefining the role of electoral management bodies.

The emergence and expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout Latin America and the Caribbean in 2020 created serious difficulties for electoral bodies in organizing elections in the region. The presence of the pandemic significantly affected the celebration of the electoral processes planned for the year 2020 throughout the world and the region, and subsequently modified the traditional way of holding electoral processes from the middle of that year to the present (2022).

Initially during 2020, elections scheduled in 66 countries in various regions of the world, were postponed or rescheduled for later dates, as referred to by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IDEA: "Globally, until June 11, 2020, in response to the threat of COVID-19 and attending to preventive health measures, at least 66 countries have decided to postpone their electoral processes. However, 33 countries chose to maintain the original electoral calendar." (IDEA, 2020.a).

The cancellation or postponement of electoral processes in Latin America and the Caribbean due to the pandemic incorporated a new variable in the traditional organization of electoral processes, which is the tension between the rights to life and the health of the population and the exercise of their political-electoral rights during the pandemic, as referred to by Querido and Delgado (2021):

Initially, decision-makers, whether in Congress or in electoral bodies, were torn between holding elections, with the great risks of contagion that this entails, and postponing them, facing the limitations provided for in constitutions and laws, such as the expiration of the mandates of the authorities and the dates of inauguration. (p.11).

At first there was tension between the right to life and health versus political-electoral rights within the 2020-2022 electoral cycle, which took place during the first half of 2020, when the first wave of infections began in the Region, in which the virus spread

throughout "50 countries and territories of the Region" (PAHO, 2020.e), going from 3,561 deaths to 247,129 at the end of June 2020 between March and June (PAHO, 2020.f). This accounts for the speed of contagion and the high mortality rate, since by that time Latin America and the Caribbean became the region of the world most affected by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, in part due to the fragility of regional health systems, economic precariousness of countries and informal jobs, and the delayed or lack of coordination among countries in the establishment of social isolation measures to avoid contagion and reduce deaths (Guerrero, 2020.b).

In the first half of 2020, at least 10 electoral processes were planned, which were postponed or rescheduled for later dates, and which were held in the second half of 2020 and in some cases during 2021. As of June 25, 2020, more than 60 elections in the world were postponed due to the pandemic. In the Americas, some countries scheduled new dates for their processes, while others proceeded as scheduled. Other Member States set about preparing for the 2021 elections taking into account the new context. (OAS, 2020, b, p. 10).

It is undeniable that in the early phase of the pandemic a weighing of rights was carried out by the authorities of each country in Latin America and the Caribbean, privileging the rights to life and health over the exercise of political-electoral rights by prioritizing the "slowing down transmission and reducing mortality" recommended by both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

The Guide for Organizing Elections in Times of Pandemic of the Organization of American States notes that "The strategic objectives are aimed at alleviating the stress on health services, operating without exceeding their maximum capacity for expansion and saving lives, as well as buying time until specific pharmaceutical measures are available, currently being research and development." (OAS, 2020, b, p. 10)

It can be concluded, at that time in 2020, the lack of vaccines or other sanitary mechanism to stop the spread of COVID-19, demanded the establishment of total or

partial quarantines, as well as other restrictive measures on the mobility, transit, and assembly of people. In this regard, Alfonso and Stein (2020) pointed out:

The quarantine aims to flatten the curve, that is, reduce the growing rate of contagion until the number of cases is below the limit of what the health system can handle without collapsing. However, there is consensus on the inadequacy of this measure to end the virus. It is only useful in containing it at manageable levels. (p.35).

Considering the health context of that time, characterized by a large number of infections and deaths in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the adoption of the restrictive measures mentioned above on all social activities, including electoral activities, the criterion of cancellation and postponement of electoral processes in the region was imposed. Thus, a large number of the electoral bodies of Latin America and the Caribbean decided to reschedule their elections to new dates "... until their health institutions have control over the situation, with ongoing surveillance for case identification and contact tracing, and would have all the necessary resources to provide essential health services." (Querido, 2021, p. 42).

The decisions of the electoral authorities began to be linked more and more to the measures set by the national health authorities forming an unprecedented nexus with the planning and development of the electoral calendar:

Considering the health approach will make it possible to adapt the activities and procedures defined in the electoral calendar to the conditions created by the evolution of the pandemic. In other cases, extension or modification of deadlines may be necessary. While in others, the inclusion of new activities may be required as a result of the sanitary measures provided. In any case, action should be taken with strict adherence to the law. (OAS, 2020, b. p.36.)

The cancellation and postponement of elections in Latin America and the Caribbean also led to great uncertainty among citizens because of the impossibility of: exercising their right to elect and be elected due to the pandemic, as well as influence matters of public interest, by questioning the legitimacy of the authorities through the

popular vote, the alternation of governments, and the duration of mandates particularly when possible extensions of mandates could contravene the constitutional and legal frameworks - which were based on the idea of avoiding an eventual power vacuum or public institutions without leaders for the management of the pandemic:

Hence, more than a year after the appearance of this virus, there was debate on how to reconcile the obligation of each states in order to guarantee the right to health and life with the constitutional and legal obligation for the timely renewal of the holders of elective positions, whose terms have expired or are about to expire, as well as to carry out consultations and referendums scheduled or which can be activated at the request of citizens, in accordance with the respective legal systems of each country. (Querido, 2021, p.42).

In what we have called a second stage, the various governments of the region began to relax the restriction measures imposed at the beginning of the pandemic, through the elaboration of pilot plans for labor, economic and productive reactivation, establishment of epidemiological traffic lights in their territories, progressive opening of international borders, coordination of national and subnational governments to implement differentiated restriction measures, among others. As noted by Pagués and others in 2020:

The exit from confinement due to the coronavirus will be the most important political decision that the governments of the countries of the region will have to take soon. These decisions will not only involve the moment of the relaxation of the restrictions, but also the modality that this relaxation will take. The stakes are high. It is, on the one hand, about preserving lives. Coming out of quarantine can have a high cost in terms of infections and deaths, particularly if at the same time the tools which the countries use to respond the disease are not substantially expanded. (p. 12).

The progressive elimination of restrictions and lifting of quarantine in the various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean as of 2020 was mainly due to the high losses and high economic costs of continuing to maintain the restriction measures

indefinitely, affecting the preservation of employment and livelihoods of the most vulnerable population, and the loss of effectiveness of restrictive measures. As Alfonso and Stein (2020) indicated:

At stake was the difficult balance between preserving lives or livelihoods. But that decision was not of a purely technical nature. The socioeconomic characteristics of the region (the high levels of informality, very high population density, and the poor living conditions in the most vulnerable areas, as well as the lack of fiscal capacity to transfer sufficient resources to the affected population) made strict confinement measures, beyond their relative effectiveness, unsustainable over time. Even in countries with widespread lockdown measures, with much non-essential economic activity closed, and heavy fines for those violating stay-at-home orders, the informal easing of measures was observed as a result of the prevailing need to bring income to the household. (p.04.).

At the time of the lifting of the restriction measures in the second half of 2020, the health situation in the Americas was still complex according to PAHO, with 5,915,551 confirmed cases, and 266,736 deaths at the beginning of July 2020. (PAHO, 2020.e). "This regional health situation showed that "Latin America and the Caribbean has ceased to be the epicenter of the virus... But this was not because the region had controlled the spread of the virus, but because of the significant resurgence of the number of daily infections in other regions where for months the virus had seemed to be controlled..." (Alfonso and Stein, 2020, p.06)

Mortality from the virus in Latin America and the Caribbean began to decline, due to the expansion of screening tests, the use of protective and biosecurity measures (masks, hand washing and social distancing), and the work of health workers at the regional level. As ECLAC (2022.b) pointed out: In relative terms, the region has 2.5 deaths from COVID-19 per 1,000 inhabitants, North America has slightly higher values (2.6) and is followed by Europe (2.3), Asia (0.29), Oceania (0.19) and Africa (0.18). (p. 29).

This new health approach in electoral matters implied, among other things, strengthening coordination and management between electoral and health

authorities, through spaces for dialogue, debate, and generation of agreements to establish common strategies about when elections should be held, under what conditions, carrying out epidemiological monitoring and based on accurate, reliable, and public data regarding the development of the pandemic.

Thus, in this second stage, elections were held throughout the Americas in 13 countries and 3 territories during 2020 (IDEA, 2020.b). Election officials focused on reducing risk factors for contagion in the process: "... the electoral management bodies are called to and obliged to develop health protocols, in the event that they have not done so, to apply them in the next electoral processes of their respective countries, with the help of all State institutions activated to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, principally among them public health." (Querido, 2021, p.45)

The responsibility of the electoral management bodies was not limited to the process itself, but was related to the national health situation in each of their countries, since the magnitude of an election event without sufficient precautions could have had very serious consequences:

Beyond the decisions taken, it must be recognized that there is no such thing as zero risk. The authorities must be aware that the main risk of an election is that it becomes an opportunity to amplify the spread of COVID-19 in the country. States and electoral bodies therefore have an enormous responsibility. The pandemic implies a redefinition of all the procedures and protocols of the electoral process, given the risk of spreading the coronavirus to electoral officials and citizens. (OAS, 2020.b, p.10).

Greater organization is required given that elections and the various activities involved in an electoral process generally involve the massive the assembly of people, which can accelerate the spread of diseases whose modes of transmission involve direct or indirect person-to-person contact. Therefore, it is necessary to have appropriate risk mitigation strategies, otherwise it can cause an increase in the number of infections and generate a collapse of the health system. Many of these measures involve moving different election activities to a virtual environment, such as campaigns, registration of candidates, training

of people who are at polling stations or helping at voting centers, among others. (p.29).

With the participation of all the actors involved, the capacity for adaptation and innovation of electoral bodies and the responsibility of each citizen, democracy survived the pandemic. Once the measures were verified and the protocols communicated, the electoral processes resumed with great normality. This meant that the percentages of abstention have not exceeded historical percentages, while maintaining a high participation of citizens in the elections. On the other hand, important cooperation between electoral and health authorities was introduced, along with the development of a new design and planning of electoral processes that guarantee transparency, protect health, and reduce or eliminate electoral uncertainty and abstentionism. (Guerrero, 2021.c, p.90 – 91).

Gradually, electoral calendars were resumed, and elections began to be held, between the months of May and November 2020, in five countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. New health logistics aspects were incorporated into the organization of electoral processes, voting centers were adapted to the requirements of social distancing, the use of biosecurity elements for voters, electoral officials and members of political organizations, the adoption of health and biosecurity protocols, and the implementation of logistical modifications. There was the application of an electoral calendar agreed with political parties and organizations, legal reforms to guarantee the rescheduling of the electoral calendar, coordination with health agencies, deployment of national and international observers in elections, functioning of electoral justice, constitutional amendments to make the execution of the electoral calendar more flexible, elaboration of sanitary protocols for the entire electoral cycle, among others. The adoption of these biosecurity measures under a biosecurity approach, in coordination between electoral and health authorities facilitated a large participation of citizens and electoral officials.

Another aspect in the organization of electoral processes was the implementation of computer and technological tools to ensure the operation and access of electoral services in favor of citizens and political organizations, and the functioning of electoral

justice. All this has been accompanied by a series of constitutional and legal reforms to allow for greater flexibility in the execution of the electoral calendar.

In 2021, the vaccination process in Latin America and the Caribbean was initiated, which had an impact on the reduction of deaths, as ECLAC states:

In the second half of 2021, a notable decrease in deaths from COVID-19 could be observed in some countries of the region, despite the new variants detected... When analyzing vaccination rates, it is observed that the countries with the greatest reduction in deaths reported by COVID-19 in the second semester were also the countries with the highest percentages of population with complete the vaccination sequence. (ECLAC, 2022.b, p. 30.)

The advance of vaccination had a positive impact not only on the organization of elections, but also on the progressive normalization of various economic and social activities. Thus, according to data from the Pan American Health Organization, in 51 countries in the Americas the vaccination rate of the population with the complete dose/ sequence is between 50 percent and 91 percent (as of June 2022), and this has facilitated the return to the rhythm of daily activities similar to that prior to the pandemic. (PAHO 2022.c).

Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean during 2021, 14 elections were held with the implementation of sanitary protocols and measures to organize the electoral process to reduce the chances of voter contagion. (OAS – DECO, 2021.g, p.5). In addition, changes were made regarding voting operations to adopt the biosecurity approach in all phases of the electoral processes, along with the need to provide the necessary financial resources for the implementation of protocols and biosecurity measures in the elections. Regarding the health dimension, 2021 ended with a total of 102,333,991 infections, 2,404. 442 doses and 1,456,115,602 doses of vaccines administered in 56 countries and territories throughout the hemisphere (PAHO, 2021.b, p.1).

In 2022, with the advance of the vaccination process in the world and in the region, the progressive normalization of activities is a general trend. The year 2022 began in

the Americas with 118,072,047 infections, 2,442,862 deaths and 1,511,238,284 doses administered (PAHO, 2022.a, p.1).

Within this trend of normalization of activities, by 2022, 78 electoral processes have been scheduled around the world, of which 30 will be held in Europe, 15 in Asia and Africa respectively, while in Oceania 7 elections are planned (Guerrero, 2022. d).

At the regional level, during 2022 throughout the Americas, "...there were 11 electoral processes divided between presidential and legislative, subnational elections and direct democracy processes." (Guerrero, 2022.d). Up to October 2022, electoral processes have been held in (7) seven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, in which the health focus has been maintained in electoral planning cycle.

1.2.2. Electoral bodies: adaptation and innovation

The democratic resilience of Latin America and the Caribbean during the pandemic has its most significant expression in the organization of electoral processes between 2020 and 2022, which have guaranteed the constitutional, orderly and peaceful transition of the governments of the region through elections in which citizens have exercised their right to vote, as well as used direct democracy mechanisms (plebiscite, referendum, revocation of mandate, popular consultation) to express themselves on issues of public interest. It is important to highlight that within the *Democracy Index* 2021 of the weekly *The Economist*, the best rated indicator in Latin America and the Caribbean was the one referring to electoral processes and political pluralism, obtaining 7.35 points out of 10. (IDEA 2021)

It is evident that electoral bodies have shown the capacity for adaptation and innovation in the organization of elections by incorporating a health approach of coexistence with the virus throughout its cycle of organization and development, always seeking a balance between the exercise of political-electoral rights and the rights to life and health of citizens.

In this context of democratic resilience, electoral bodies both administrative, as well as contentious electoral candidates in Latin America and the Caribbean have

redefined their role within a highly polarized and complex political-electoral scenario, orienting their action to develop the elections under a health approach that offers certainty, confidence and credibility to political parties, candidates, and citizens. As Guerrero puts it: "Electoral bodies are the backbone of democracy. The organization of elections and the resolution of disputes are indispensable to ensure that the will of the citizens is faithfully represented in the distribution of political power." (Guerrero, 2021.e).

However, throughout the pandemic, the electoral bodies of Latin America and the Caribbean, have also had to defend their autonomy and institutional independence against other powers of the State and political actors in the organization of the elections, in aspects such as: the appointment of their members, timely delivery of their economic resources, regressive regulatory reforms, threats of institutional cooptation, as well as the justification and compliance with their administrative and electoral decisions. In this regard IDEA highlights:

Two worrying aspects affecting the integrity of elections are: attacks on electoral institutions and their members by the executive branches or opposition parties, and high levels of political polarization, which in some countries have been accompanied by unfounded allegations of electoral fraud. (2021, p.12).

Therefore, protecting the autonomy and independence of electoral management bodies is critical to ensuring the health of democracy in the region as well as the legitimacy of electoral authorities. "Protecting the institutions of democracy: administrative bodies and electoral judges [electoral justice], is a strategic imperative to sustain the peaceful renewal of authorities, in an increasingly adverse context of political polarization and ideological demonization." (Guerrero, 2021.e).

In this way, the electoral institutions of Latin America and the Caribbean in the 2020-2022 electoral cycle have made great efforts to protect their role as an impartial arbiter in the organization of the elections, stop their cooptation before the political powers and other functions of the State, guarantee the transparency of their actions and decisions, carry out the technical planning of the electoral processes; face the multiple

threats and attacks against its authorities and officials and the erosion of its institutional credibility. In this regard: "Electoral administrations endowed with the principles of independence, autonomy, permanence and specialization are indispensable to strengthening representative democracy and its essential elements defined in Article 4 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter." (Guerrero, 2021.e).

Based on these experiences, it is essential that the electoral authority works together with the national health authority, which has the scientific information on the pandemic and its progress in each place, which will help make decisions about election day, including the processes before and after an election day. Multidisciplinary teams and coordination spaces for both entities (electoral and health authorities) are very useful for the follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of the pandemic in relation to the electoral cycle, and will be responsible for establishing multiple scenarios with regard to the development of the pandemic, the effectiveness of the measures adopted, and determining the resource needs for the elections, as well as cooperation between various state entities.

Create an inter-institutional working space between the electoral body and State institutions that play an indispensable role in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A working space of this nature will allow the electoral authority to receive updated information and technical advice for the adoption of measures that respond to the evolution of the pandemic during the course of the process. It will also make it possible to coordinate the efforts of various bodies that will be involved in the holding of elections. In no situation, should the autonomy and powers of the highest authority in electoral matters be affected. (OAS, 2020.b, p.32.)

In some countries of the region, it was decided to carry out legal or even constitutional reforms in order to give legality and legitimacy to the electoral processes in this cycle, making possible the flexibility of the electoral calendar, new extended schedules or simply new actions compatible with the health reality and the measures imposed in each country:

As far as possible, changes should be endorsed or approved by the legislatures and, if they affect the Constitution, should be especially exceptional. But this requires urgent procedures and the participation of the electoral management body, regardless of whether it has the power to initiate legislative action. (Thompson, 2020, p.13).

The implementation of these reforms required dialogue, consensus and agreements between political organizations and electoral authorities, who jointly agreed on their content and the new dates of the electoral calendar, among other aspects.

However, the regulatory frameworks issued to make it possible to hold elections in a pandemic context must always preserve the democratic principles of periodic, free, fair elections based on universal and secret suffrage; the plural regime of parties; and the separation and independence of public powers in their content.

In this work, Parliaments, as well as Constitutional Courts and Tribunals, must balance reasonableness, temporality, progressiveness, justification, relevance, equity, electoral competence, protection of vulnerable groups and exceptionality of the normative frameworks, without these constituting a "... blank check for the indefinite suspension of elections and extension in the exercise of public mandates." (Guerrero, 2021. c, p.84). In this sense, the process of updating the electoral calendar is essential to provide certainty and legal security and allow the various stages or electoral procedures to be fulfilled in accordance with the law, guaranteeing the exercise of the political rights of citizens. (OAS, 2020.b, p.35).

The successful approval and validity of this exceptional regulatory framework requires the generation of processes of dialogue, consensus and evaluation between political parties and organizations with the electoral and legislative authorities, in order to reduce uncertainty about the organization of elections as well as generate collective agreements that guarantee the success of the elections. In this regard "... It is vital to explore the possibility of achieving a true consensus or a very solid majority among the political forces, as such as components of the legislative apparatus, which allows for the approval of modifications, interpretations, temporary rules or support the determinations and recommendations of the electoral management body..."

(Thompson, 2020, p. 12). Complementing this criterion, Guerrero expresses the following: "... this legal system must be the product of a broad dialogue, and political and social agreement, which includes the proposals of the various actors of the society of a country and gives legitimacy to the regulations, certainty and legal security to the actions of the institutions, and confidence in the electoral process." (2021.c, p.87).

In relation to the above, the health protocols established for all phases and activities of the electoral cycle must be aimed at guaranteeing the participation of citizens and political organizations, refraining from establishing measures or requirements that hinder, restrict, or prevent it unnecessarily. As indicated by CAPEL (2020): "... It is essential that electoral bodies comply with health standards that ensure the conditions for citizens to go to the polling stations to vote, otherwise this could lead to high rates of abstention and, therefore, the political rights of voters would be violated. Action protocols must be found so that, without sacrificing political rights, the right to health could be safeguarded. It's a difficult, but necessary balance. " (p. 4).

With regard to aspects such as registration or change of address in the electoral registry, registration of candidates, and access to electoral justice, the protocols established must eliminate barriers that prevent or limit citizens and political organizations from accessing electoral services, guaranteeing their continuity through technological mechanisms or working days under sanitary measures, as noted by the OAS (2020):

The pandemic has created difficulties in maintaining the functioning of electoral services, including voter registration. Institutions must ensure that voter registration services continue to be offered to ensure the exercise of citizens' political rights. In case of suspension of its operation due to the implementation of sanitary measures, strategies must be adopted to mitigate or replace the time of paralysis, especially in an election year. (2020.b, p.66)

The health protocols in electoral matters must include in their scope of protection electoral officials, citizens and members of political organizations, prioritizing vulnerable social groups, and must contemplate in their design aspects such as:

health protection measures in each phase of the electoral process, incorporating biosecurity elements to electoral work, social distancing measures, conditioning of polling stations, establishment of differentiated hours or extension of voting hours, testing of tests, vaccination of persons involved in essential activities of the electoral process, use of technological mechanisms for electoral training, development of the electoral campaign, etc., among other measures and strategies.

For the successful implementation of health protocols, it is required that there be publicity, dissemination and analysis among the various political subjects, citizens and electoral officials, especially about the protocol that will be used on election day, and the steps to be followed "... during the opening, with the aim of regulating the entry of voters, representatives of political organizations, officials of the electoral body, and other actors, in compliance with health regulations. (CAPEL, 2020, p. 13).

All these measures have budgetary implications, so the financing of these new requirements also requires coordination and dialogue with the respective governments, and subsequent transparency and accountability, with special emphasis on these new resources in order to prevent irregularities due to their execution:

The holding of elections in the current pandemic context will require increased financial resources to carry out the various measures that guarantee the health of electoral officials, voters and prevent the transmission of the coronavirus in the framework of electoral activities. This requires a financial commitment on the part of States to provide electoral bodies with sufficient resources and budgetary planning on the part of the latter that allows the efficient use of public funds. (OAS, 2020.b, p.39).

The economic effects of the pandemic are severe, and countries require significant resources to mitigate its social impact. Given this scenario, in addition to the efficient use of the resources available for the electoral process, it is important that the electoral bodies promote transparency and accountability, especially of exceptional funds allocated to them. Therefore, in addition to adherence to the law, it is suggested that internal control and audit

mechanisms be generated or strengthened to keep a public record of the expenses of the process, with special emphasis on expenses incurred to implement sanitary measures (purchase of protection supplies, prevention, among others), and render a public account on the execution of funds. These mechanisms allow adequate control and help to prevent the use of funds for other purposes. (2020.b, p.41).

Regarding the use of technology, electoral management bodies have been forced to seek its use as much as possible at different stages of the electoral cycle, with "the aim of reducing the probability of transmission of the coronavirus, by minimizing or eliminating the physical presence of people for certain procedures or procedures". (OAS, 2020.b. p.89). To achieve this, electoral management bodies have had to assess their institutional capacities, recruit technical staff, identify needs, and foster cooperation, among other aspects. Among the most common decisions in this period has been "the use of technological tools, free software, telematic media and social networks to develop tasks such as updating the electoral registry, electoral training, registration of candidacies, registration of political organizations, exercise of electoral justice in administrative and judicial channels, exercise of suffrage, conducting public scrutiny and the proclamation of results." (Guerrero, 2021.c, p.92).

In this regard, Tullio (2020) points out: "the consensus of most experts recommends the incorporation of technological tools in the electoral process within the electoral bodies or to assist tasks of electoral preparation or vote counting by polling station members, since polling workers and polling station members are a group more easily encompassed than citizens in general." (p.34). Regarding the conduct of the counts and the resolution of cases within the electoral justice: "The electoral bodies must transform the holding of hearings and the operation for the presentation, substantiation and resolution of appeals related to the electoral process to be able to carry them out online or with the help of remote platforms." (Tullio, 2020, p.34).

Electoral campaigns in this pandemic context must take into account aspects such as: permanent coordination with local health authorities, the realization of safe protocols to carry out activities, limiting the number of attendees at events and face-

to-face meetings, avoiding the participation of high-risk people and seeking to hold events outdoors or in spaces with good ventilation. With the restrictions in place, the fundamental axis of marketing and political communication was through social networks. The campaign teams have experts in the use of nano-segmentation, social listening, journalistic intelligence and ultra-segmentation of messages, software. The traditional ways of doing face-to-face political campaigning are mixed with media and digital strategies, and the pandemic became a new reason for the use of technology and social networks to prevail.

National and international electoral observation must be carried out under strict health parameters, combining face-to-face and remote work, thus ensuring that the work of the missions enable electoral authorities to identify aspects of improvement in the conduct of their electoral processes, the dissemination of good practices, the development of cooperation frameworks, and the formulation of recommendations for the continuous improvement of electoral systems. As always in this type of process, the electoral authorities and the members of the observation team must establish spaces to evaluate the recommendations issued in the reports and their subsequent implementation.

Finally, and as has been pointed out throughout this chapter, the governments of the Americas, their institutions, political organizations, and citizens, undertook as one of the priorities during this period the guarantee of democratic processes and the participation of citizens in the election of their leaders, all essential elements of democracy. The role of electoral management bodies has contributed decisively to this resilience, showing adaptation and innovation, but it must be recognized that the success of these processes is also due to the democratic commitment that exists among the citizens of the region, and that was expressed despite the complexity and tensions that the pandemic represented for the countries of the Americas.

Chapter 2: Observatory on Democracy: indicators on the political, economic and social impact of the pandemic

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

In Article 3 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IDC), the OAS member states embodied the definitions of the essential elements of democracy, establishing a democratic hemispheric standard that serves as the guiding principle for the systematic work of the Observatory.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter also provides a basis for expanding the content of this democratic standard by establishing in Article 7 the principles of universality, interdependence and indivisibility of the democratic system with the effective exercise of the fundamental freedoms and human rights contemplated in the catalog of the inter-American and universal corpus juris. It also includes elements such as:

- transparency of government activities, probity and accountability of the administration, respect for social rights, freedom of expression and the press as an essential component for the exercise of democracy (art. 4 IDC);
- the strength of political parties and organizations (art. 5 IDC);
- the right and responsibility to participate and to promote participation in decisions concerning citizens (art. 6 IDC);
- strengthening the inter-American human rights system (art. 8 IDC);
- the elimination of all forms of discrimination (art. 9 IDC); and
- the effective and full exercise of labor rights, as well as integral development, the fight against poverty and the development of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights (articles 11 to 16 IDC).

The Inter-American Democratic Charter provides clear guidelines for observing the interrelationship between access to human rights and fundamental freedoms and the state of democracy. As will be seen in this section, the criteria defined in the IDC

make it possible to establish a relationship of interdependence between the essential elements and fundamental components of democracy.

The interdependence between access to rights and democracy results in a virtuous feedback loop leading to the construction of a new approach to democracies, for better social, economic, and political representation. In the Democratic Charter, OAS member states recognized more than 20 years ago that economic growth and social development, based on justice and equity, and the effective exercise of democracy, are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The first article of the IDC states precisely that "democracy is essential for the social, political and economic development of the peoples of the Americas."

In order to observe the impacts of the pandemic in the political, social and economic field, the methodology of the Observatory involves the periodic review and updating of indicators – which are compiled in a database – as well as their constant monitoring, normalization, standardization and analysis, so that the observations are comparable with each other. These quantitative and qualitative indicators come from various sources all reputable, reliable, and open. The methodology of the Observatory groups the indicators under 5 indices that represent the essential elements of democracy (according to article 3 of the IDC), namely:

1. Index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
2. Index of access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law, which also includes the fundamental components of the exercise of democracy.³
3. Index of holding of periodic, free, fair elections based on universal and secret suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people.
4. Index of the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations.
5. Index of separation of powers and independence of branches of government.

³ Transparency of government activities, probity, the responsibility of governments in governance, respect for social rights, and freedom of expression and of the press are fundamental components of the exercise of democracy. (CDI, Art. 4)

In response to the mandates of the Organization, the Observatory aspires to achieve coverage of the entire American continent. This task has faced challenges, owing to the lack of data and information on multiple indicators, a situation that is accentuated in some groups of countries. To address this barrier, statistical analysis focused on countries whose data gaps do not exceed the 35 percent threshold. In many countries of the region, the difficulty of accessing data prevails, so the quality of indicators is not sufficient to give a clear complete picture of reality. For the countries referred to, which in many cases were missing some values, the technique of multiple imputation and methods of statistical science were applied. These techniques made it possible to complete the database as faithfully as possible, objectively, and without adding partiality. For more information see Annex II.

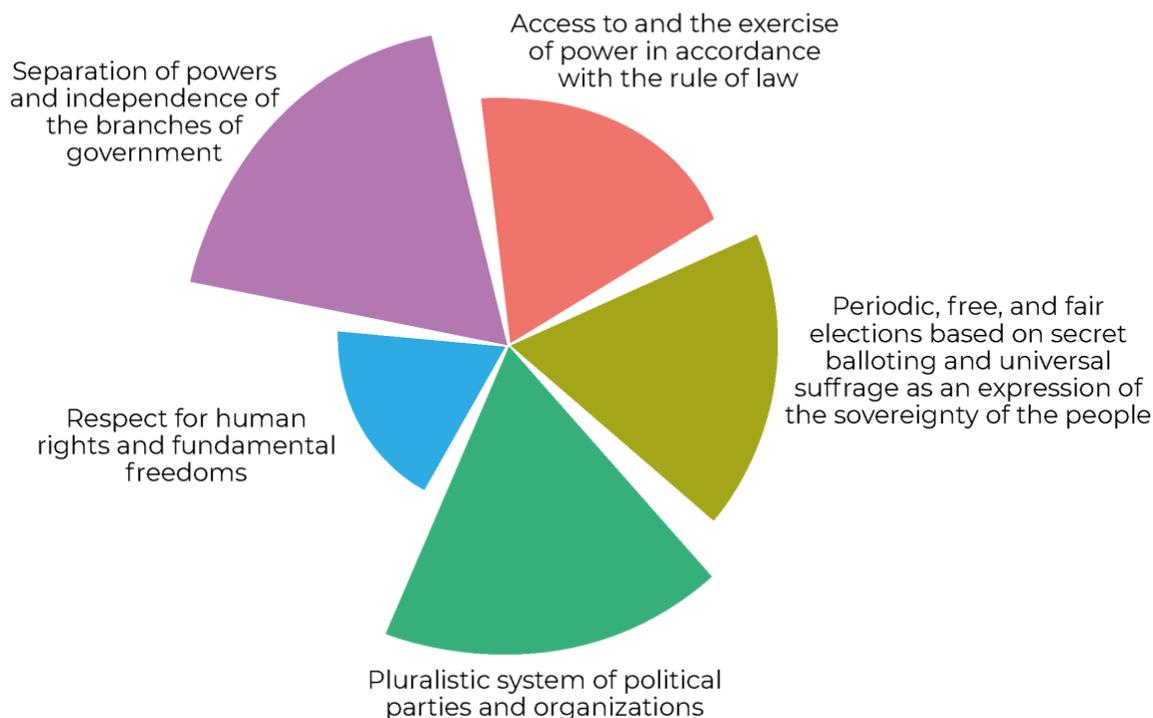
From the methodological point of view, the analysis of data related to each of the five indices constructed by the Observatory allows us to observe trends in the democratic systems of the region, identifying the limitations and challenges they face. This process of integral observation was carried out from the perspective of the essential elements of democracy (Art. 3, IDC), the fundamental components of the exercise of power (Art. 4), the interdependence between democracy and human rights (Art. 7 and 8), as well as with the social dimensions (Arts. 11 to 13); the main results of which are presented in the following sections.

2.1 Indices of the Observatory and its main indicators

This section delves into the composition of the Observatory's five indices and the evidence offered by the indicators to identify areas of risk and opportunity for the strengthening of democracy.

It is important to note that the analysis of the indices focuses on general phenomena in the region and not on a particular country. Figure 1 below presents aggregate indices of the Observatory which represent the average for the region (which was prepared with information from member states whose data gaps do not exceed the 35% threshold and for a total of 24 countries).

Figure 1: Index of the Observatory: The Essential Elements of Democracy (2021)



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

In general, it can be observed that the indices the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations -which includes citizen participation- (green); the holding of periodic, free, fair elections based secret ballotin and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people (ochre yellow) and the separation of powers and independence of branches of government (pink) constitute strengths of democracy in the Americas.

In contrast, the main weaknesses would be in respect for fundamental rights and freedoms (blue), and in access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law (red) which show opportunities for improvement at the regional level to strengthen democracy.

It is worth noting the interdependence between the different essential elements of democracy, as one of the findings of the Observatory that will be addressed in section 2.2.

Next, specific sections are developed in the document for each index, detailing the qualitative and quantitative indicators that compose them; presenting information on their performance at the regional level and observations, based on a representative sample of high-impact indicators from each index, as well as other relevant observations. Annex III provides more detail on what the high and low performance indicators of each index measures and their sources.

2.1.1. Index 1: Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Construction of the Index

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms was the first among the elements recognized by the IDC as essential for representative democracy. The Observatory constructed a specific index to monitor this essential element of democracy, comprised of the following indicators:

Table 1: Composition of the index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

INDICATORS	SOURCE
Association Rights	BTI
Civil Liberty Index	V-Dem
Civil rights	BTI
Freedom from torture	V-Dem
Freedom of academic & cultural expression	V-Dem
Freedom of Expression	BTI
Fundamental rights	WJP
Human Rights & Rule of Law	FSI
Political Civil Liberty Index	V-Dem
Political terror scale	GPI
Private Civil Liberty Index	V-Dem
Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	V-Dem
Voice and Accountability	WB
Quantity & duration of internal conflicts	GPI
Quantity of deaths internal organized conflict	GPI
Cleavage & Conflict Management	BTI
Conflict Intensity	BTI
Criminal Justice	WJP
Current Highly Violent Conflict Intensity	INFORM
Homicides	GPI
Impact of Terrorism	GPI
Intensity of Internal Conflict	GPI
Order and Security	WJP
Perceived Criminality in Society	GPI
Political Stability and Absence of Violence	GPI
Projected Conflict Risk	INFORM
Refugees & IDPs	FSI
Security Apparatus	FSI
Violent Crime	GPI
Annual freshwater withdrawal (% of internal resources)	FAO
Inequality in education (%)	UNDP
Social safety nets	BTI
Vulnerable employment (5% of total employment)	ILO
Unemployment (% of total labor force)	ILO
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	UN
Level of compliance with labor rights (freedom of association and collective negotiation)	ILO
Population covered by social protection systems (%)	ILO
Share of urban population living in slums %	UN

Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Analysis of high and low performance indicators of the index

In general, the indicators of the index allow us to see regional performance in the pacification of armed conflicts, as well as advances in access to civil and cultural rights and freedom of expression. On the other hand, the indicators of the Observatory point out regional challenges in advancing the access to Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (ESKER). They also point out the pending efforts in the regional struggle to reduce levels of violence and achieve multidimensional security without violating access to rights and freedoms.

The best performing indicators in the Americas in this index are: [number of] deaths from internal organized conflict (*Global Peace Index*, GPI); number and duration of internal conflicts (GPI); and intensity of internal conflicts (GPI). As a cross-regional comparative analysis, the latest Global Peace Index (GPI) measurements place the Americas behind Europe and Asia-Pacific and above Russia-Eurasia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and North Africa in terms of conflict.⁴

The indicators that also show high performance are: private civil liberty (Varieties of Democracy, V-Dem), freedom of academic and cultural expression (V-Dem) and civil liberties (V-Dem).⁵

In contrast, the lowest performing indicators, in terms of averages at the regional level, are always linked to economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.

Other low performance indicators are linked to the multidimensional security agenda: the indicators of order and security, criminal justice, and the security apparatus.

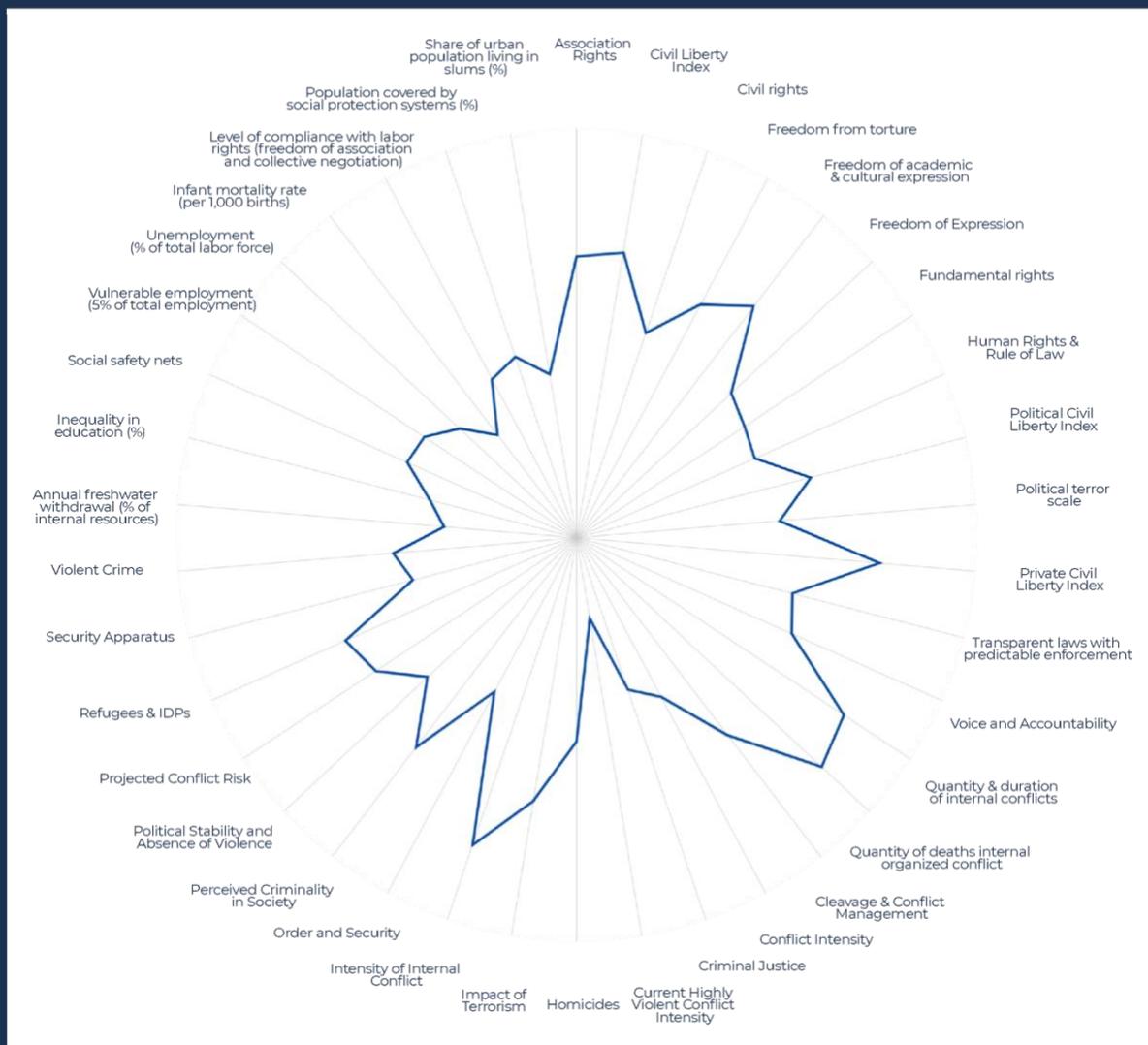
In the following graph, radial chart allows us to visualize the regional average of the different indicators that make up the index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. A low score will be reflected in the points closest to the center

⁴Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index* (2022), available at: <<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/GPI-2022-web.pdf>>

⁵To consult the methodology and historical data of the *Varieties of Democracy* project: <<https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/img/refs/methodologyv111.pdf>>

of the graph (for example, in variables related to the performance of the criminal justice system, citizen security or the security apparatus) and represents a weakness in this element of democracy.⁶

Figure 2: Regional average of the index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (2021)



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

⁶ In order for the data to be comparable with each other, the standard deviation was used, which allows quantifying the variation of the data set.

It should be noted that the indicators differ significantly between countries, regions, and groups. The right to life, liberty and security are violated in several of our countries. Indicators of civil and political liberties, rights of association, and freedom of expression are weak in some countries, which as we will see in section 2.2 are countries performing poorly across all indices. Since the beginning of the pandemic, other countries also had setbacks in security and protection of people, with violent demonstrations, anti-government sentiments, political violence, and perception of increasing crime.

Other observations

In the context of the pandemic, States adopted measures aimed at safeguarding the right to health that could result in the suspension or restriction of rights, the obstruction of the full exercise of democracy and plural participation. As described in Chapter 1 of this report, in seeking to contain the spread of COVID-19, many States adopted measures that could affect or restrict the enjoyment and exercise of human rights. These measures did not always comply with the principles of temporality, legality, reasonableness, necessity, and proportionality. In several countries in the region, the response to the crisis caused by COVID-19 has been accompanied by denunciations of human rights violations and the decline of the rule of law. The latest Latinobarómetro measurement reveals that citizens in the region perceive a significant deterioration in terms of guarantees of access to civil and political rights, as well as economic and social rights. 46 percent perceive that freedom of expression is guaranteed, down 12 percentage points from the previous measurement. 32 percent of respondents (8 percent more than 2 years ago) say there are no guarantees to freely choose their religion.

It is also noted that during the pandemic the organs of the Inter-American Human Rights System once again reminded States that human rights restrictions must respect the requirements of temporality, legality, proportionality, and necessity, and conform to the pro-persona principle. Certain human rights were restricted in responses to the crisis that prioritized the right to life and physical health. Among

them, the right of movement; the right to work; the right to education; the right to freedom of conscience and religion; and the right to the benefits of culture.

2.1.2. Index 2: Access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law

Construction of the Index

The second essential element of democracy as defined in Article 3 of the IDC is access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law. This index of the Observatory was constructed with the following indicators, which include the fundamental components of the exercise of democracy embodied in article 4 of the IDC.

Table 2: Composition of the index of access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law

INDICATORS	SOURCE
Basic Administration	BTI
Domestic autonomy	V-Dem
Effective power to govern	BTI
External Intervention	FSI
International autonomy	V-Dem
Monopoly on the use of force	BTI
Net official development assistance received	UNDP
Prosecution of office abuse	BTI
Rule of Law	WB
Rule of Law Index	V-Dem
State fiscal sources of revenue	V-Dem
State Identity	BTI
Political Instability	GPI
Structural Constraints (on governance)	BTI
Absence of corruption	WJP
Anti-Corruption Policy	BTI
Control of Corruption	WB
Corruption Perception	TI
Government Effectiveness	WB
Local Govt index	V-Dem
Open government	WJP
Performance of Democratic Institutions	BTI
Political corruption Index	V-Dem
Regional Govt index	V-Dem
Efficiency use of assets	BTI
Steering Capability	BTI

Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Analysis of high and low performance indicators of the index

The index of access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law has shown low performance at the regional level. Although political stability⁷ and autonomy were positioned within the high-performance indicators, the downward trend could be observed as one of the effects of the pandemic. On the other hand, it is observed that the fight against corruption, transparency and accountability in public management remains a pending task, necessary to consolidate the exercise of democracy subject to the rule of law.

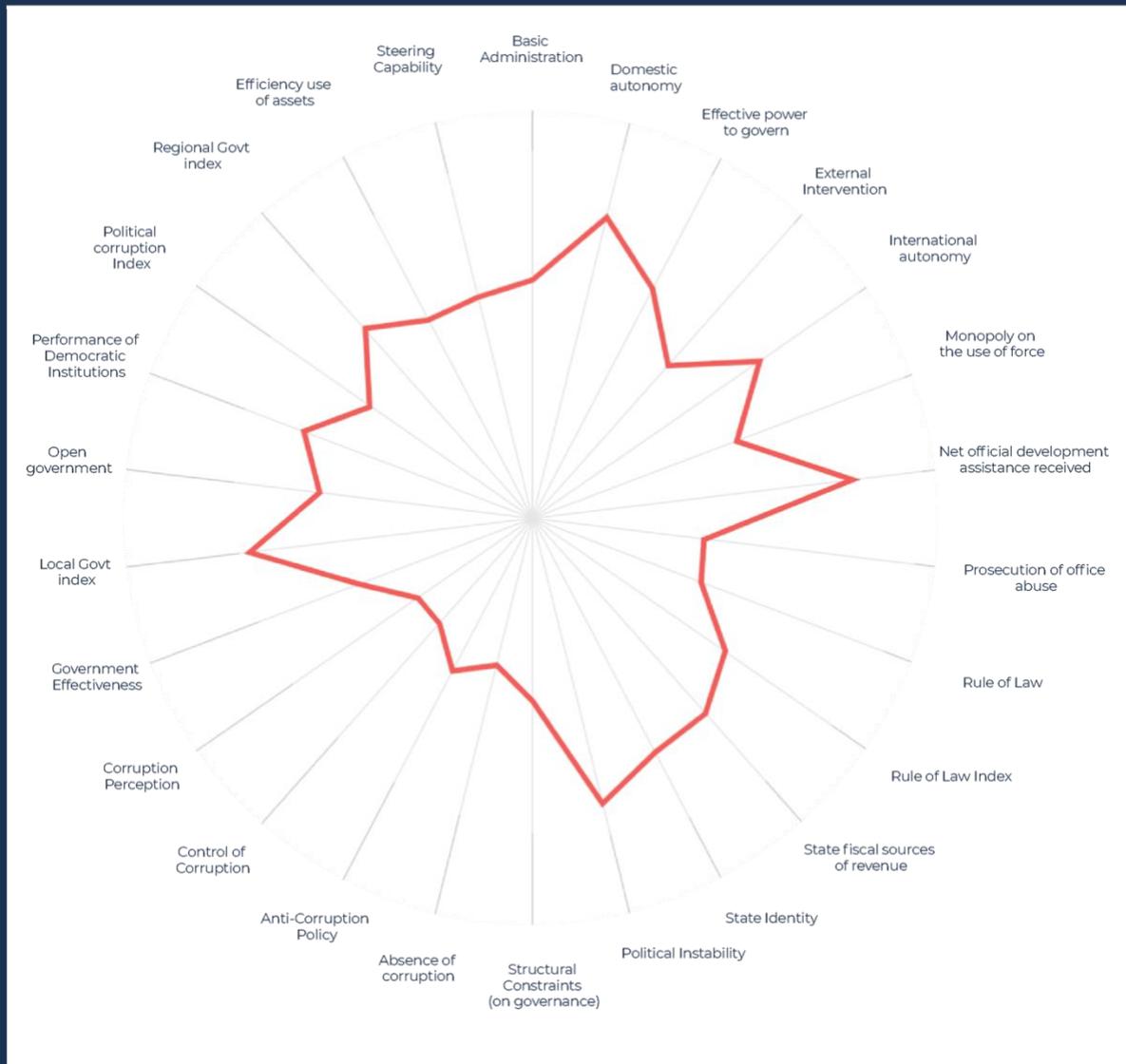
Although the index's best-performing indicators are political stability (GPI) and autonomy (V-Dem), the downward trend recorded in the index during the pandemic is explained by a deterioration in the indicators of autonomy of States vis-à-vis external, domestic, and international actors, both at national and local government levels (V-Dem). However, with few exceptions, it is observed that the region enjoys autonomy in the exercise of power. That is, domestic political actors exercise authority, free from the direct control of external actors. There are few cases in which these directly restrict the ability of national actors to govern, decide who can or cannot govern through formal rules or informal understandings, or exclude certain policies through explicit provisions (see V-Dem, *domestic* autonomy, and *international autonomy*).

The lowest-performing indicators are those of corruption. More specifically, this phenomenon is observed in the following indicators of the Observatory: absence of corruption (WJP), political corruption index (V-Dem), control of corruption (WB), perceived corruption (TI), anti-corruption policies (BTI), accountability for abuses in public office (BTI), and public management capacity (BTI). These indicators are described in Annex III.

The following graph illustrates the average for the region of the indicators that make up the index of access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law. A high score will be reflected in the points farthest from the center of the graph and represents a strength in this element of democracy.

⁷GPI's *Political Instability* indicator measures the phenomenon negatively. For the purposes of the index, it is expressed with opposite symbol, that is, as stability and not political instability.

Figure 3: Regional average of the index of access to and exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law (2021)



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Other observations

The deficit in the fight against corruption can be observed at the regional level. Transparency International has warned that the health sector has been vulnerable to corruption, particularly during the pandemic response. An example that highlights the lack of transparency in state acts and the risk of corruption is linked to public

procurement processes that, in some cases, showed irregularities during the management of the pandemic.

The crisis generated by the pandemic has been used by some states to expand the power of the executive and disproportionately restrict individual rights (measured by the number of decrees of states of emergency in Latin America, which imposed a temporary suspension of rights). Considering, above all, the risk of abuse of the executive decree as a mechanism to establish states of emergency, exception, or public calamity for a disproportionate and indefinite in duration, V-Dem warns about "pandemic *backsliding*" as an impact of the pandemic. The measured setback, particularly in countries with fragile democracies, highlights the importance of protecting the principles of separation and independence of public powers, freedom of expression and access to information.

2.1.3. Index 3: Celebration of periodic, free, fair elections based on secret balloting universal suffrage

Construction of the Index

The third essential element of democracy established in article 3 of the IDC was the holding of periodic, free, fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people. The index designed to observe this element of democracy was constructed with the indicators mentioned below.

Table 3: Composition of the index of periodic, free, fair, based on secret balloting and universal suffrage

INDICATORS	SOURCE
Electoral Democracy Index	V-Dem
Free & Fair Elections	BTI
Approval of Democracy	BTI
Commitment to Democratic Institutions	BTI
State Legitimacy	FSI
Sub-national elections, free and fairs	V-Dem

Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Analysis of high and low performance indicators of the index

The indicators in the index show that the region has generally managed to organize quality elections. Latin America and the Caribbean showed democratic resilience during the pandemic, having managed to overcome the challenges to organize electoral processes between 2020 and 2022, and guarantee the transition of the governments of the region. However, the resilience of electoral democracy has not resulted in greater approval of democracy by citizens, nor in greater legitimacy of governments.

The index's best performing indicators at the regional level are free and fair elections (BTI) and free and fair subnational elections (V-Dem). V-Dem's electoral democracy index is an aggregate consisting of five subcomponents: freedom of association, suffrage, fair elections, elected executive, and freedom of expression.⁸

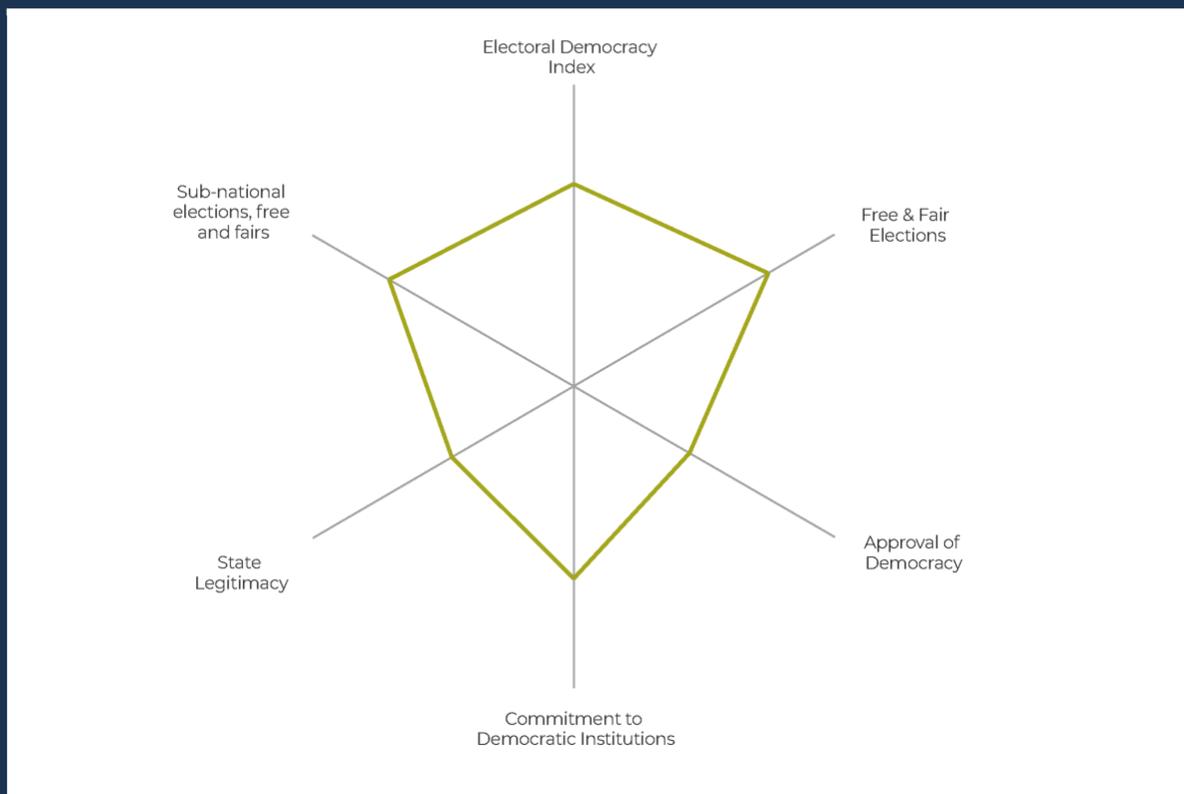
The indicators with the lowest levels of performance in the region are those related to the approval of democracy (BTI), and state legitimacy (Fragile States Index, FSI). This last indicator considers the representativeness and openness of the government, as well as its relationship with citizens: level of popular trust in institutions, state processes and integrity of elections, as well as the effects of the absence of trust. That is, when trust is corroded, it seeks to evaluate its impact: incidence of demonstrations, civil disobedience, or – in extreme cases – the emergence of armed insurgency.

The two indicators – with low performance levels – may point to the potential risk of protests as a result of citizen discontent. This is relevant in a context such as that indicated by Latinobarómetro data (2021), in which regional support for democracy in 2020 was 49 percent (it should be noted that between 2010 and 2018 there had been a drop in support, from 63 percent to 48 percent).

⁸Each of the components was constructed from a series of indicators, which capture the seven institutions of polyarchy defined by Robert Dahl in 1971. See *Varieties of Democracy, Methodology v11.1*, <<https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/img/refs/methodologyv11.1.pdf>>

The following spider chart summarizes the average results for the entire region, of the indicators that make up the index of periodic, free, fair, and universal suffrage-based elections.

Figure 4: Regional average of the index of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people (2021)



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Other observations

Regarding the holding of elections, the countries of the region present acceptable average values as shown in the graph above, with some exceptions of low performance. Among the most significant impacts observed during the period, the difficulty in organizing elections, the high levels of polarization in electoral contexts, and the economic and social effect on the political sphere stand out, all of which has increased democratic erosion. The cancellation and postponement of elections was observed, due to measures restricting movement and transit rights, and prohibiting

public events. Chapter 1 of this report details these and other impacts on political-electoral processes.

2.1.4. Index 4: Pluralistic system of political parties and organizations

Construction of the Index

Article 2 of the IDC recognizes that representative democracy is strengthened and deepened with the permanent, ethical, and responsible participation of citizens within a framework of legality in accordance with the respective constitutional order. The necessary conditions for the participation of citizens in decisions concerning their own development (art. 6, IDC) are given when there is a plural regime of political parties and organizations, an essential element embodied in article 3 of the IDC. Consequently, the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations was designed around the following indicators.

Table 4: Composition of the index of the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations

INDICATORS	SOURCE
Electoral Pluralism	EIU
Party System	BTI
Anti-dem. Actors	BTI
Consensus on goals	BTI
Deliberative Index	V-Dem
Divided party control index	V-Dem
Factionalized Elites	FSI
Group Grievance	FSI
Likelihood violent demonstrations	GPI
Social Capital	BTI
Civil Society Participation	BTI
Civil Society participation index	V-Dem
Civil Society Traditions	BTI
Participatory Dem Index	V-Dem

Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Analysis of high and low performance indicators of the index

The index and its indicators show that electoral pluralism has strengthened in the Americas (data from this indicator show that it operates 27 percent above the global average). There is also an improvement in the active participation of citizens in decision-making processes, through their participation in diverse organizations. On the other hand, it is observed that the region, has room for improvement in strengthening networks that allow for increasing social capital (plural and inclusive network of relationships, ties and bridges, which permit the better functioning of political parties and organizations).

The index's highest performance indicators at the regional level are: electoral pluralism (EIU), civil society participation (V-Dem) and anti-democratic actors (BTI).⁹

The lower performing indicators are civil society traditions, divisions between elite factions, and social capital.

The indicator on civil society traditions measures the extent to which civil society traditions exist, such as: long-term public or civic commitments, a civic culture of participation in public life, numerous and active civic associations, and abundant social capital.

The indicator of divisions between elite factions, measures power struggles, the fragmentation of institutions and the elites across various kinds of divisions (ethnic, class, race, or religion), and the existence of policies that could lead to the edge of the abyss (taking into account the use of nationalist, xenophobic or irredentism/community solidarity rhetoric).

⁹An improvement in citizen participation indicators during the period is noteworthy: estimates based on analysis by a network of experts and data collected by the V-Dem project and *the Economist Intelligence Unit* indicate, on average, an improvement of almost 0.2 points in participation measurements, between 2019 and 2022.

The social capital indicator measures collaboration between different identity or interest groups in society: the level of interpersonal trust (norms and values) and the number of autonomous and self-organized groups, associations, and organizations in the political sphere (networks). In this way, it tries to obtain a rough estimate of the density of the network of relationships between actors and identity groups.

It is important to highlight that poor performance in these three indicators signals high degrees of polarization, disputes among factions, and threats to the perceived legitimacy of leaders. The theory, as well as empirical observation, indicates that an active and interconnected society positively nurtures the strengthening of democracies and the development of nations. In contrast, weak frameworks produce weak institutions and norms. This culture of relationship building, necessary to strengthen democracy, is also reflected in the traditions of civil society.

The following graph illustrates the average of the region with respect to the index of the pluralist system of political parties and organizations.

Figure 5: Regional average of the index of pluralistic system of political parties and organizations (2021)



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Other observations

Citizen participation indicators represent high values throughout the region with the exception of countries that have compromised individual freedoms, as well as freedom of expression, and that consistently show low performance in other indices. It should be noted that the indicators are understood not only by participation in electoral events, but also in citizen mobilizations. This point is important, citizen participation is the basis of democracy in the region and can also degenerate into social outbursts when grievances not heard by their political representatives.

It's not all good news, though. According to Latinobarómetro 2021, 45 percent of respondents said there is freedom to participate in politics. This proportion declined 17 percentage points, from 62 percent in 2018. Moreover, according to the same study, in the last 10 years the proportion of Latin American citizens who believe that the country is governed by a few powerful groups for their own benefit and not for the common good has increased by almost 20 percent. That is, 3 out of 4 people perceive that "it is governed for the interests of a few." It is also notable that trust in political parties is the lowest among all institutions of democracy, 12 percent trust this class of organizations a lot or somewhat, and only 29 percent of citizens feel "close" to a political party. The latest Latinobarómetro report acknowledges: "the fact that the people point out that the loss of civic and political freedoms should constitute an alert for the leaders. Certainly, the indicator of division in politics suffered a strong impact in 2020 due to the pandemic and the restrictions imposed by it regarding the freedoms of assembly and association, making those freedoms difficult to fully exercise."

2.1.5. Index 5: Separation of powers and independence of branches of government

Construction of the Index

The separation of powers and independence of branches of government is recognized not only as an essential element of democracy in Article 3 of the IDC but is intrinsically linked to the rule of law. The index of separation and independence of powers is the smallest, composed of the following indicators designed by the *World Justice Project* (WJP) and the *Bertelmann Foundation* (BTI):

Table 5: Composition of the index of separation of powers and independence of branches of government

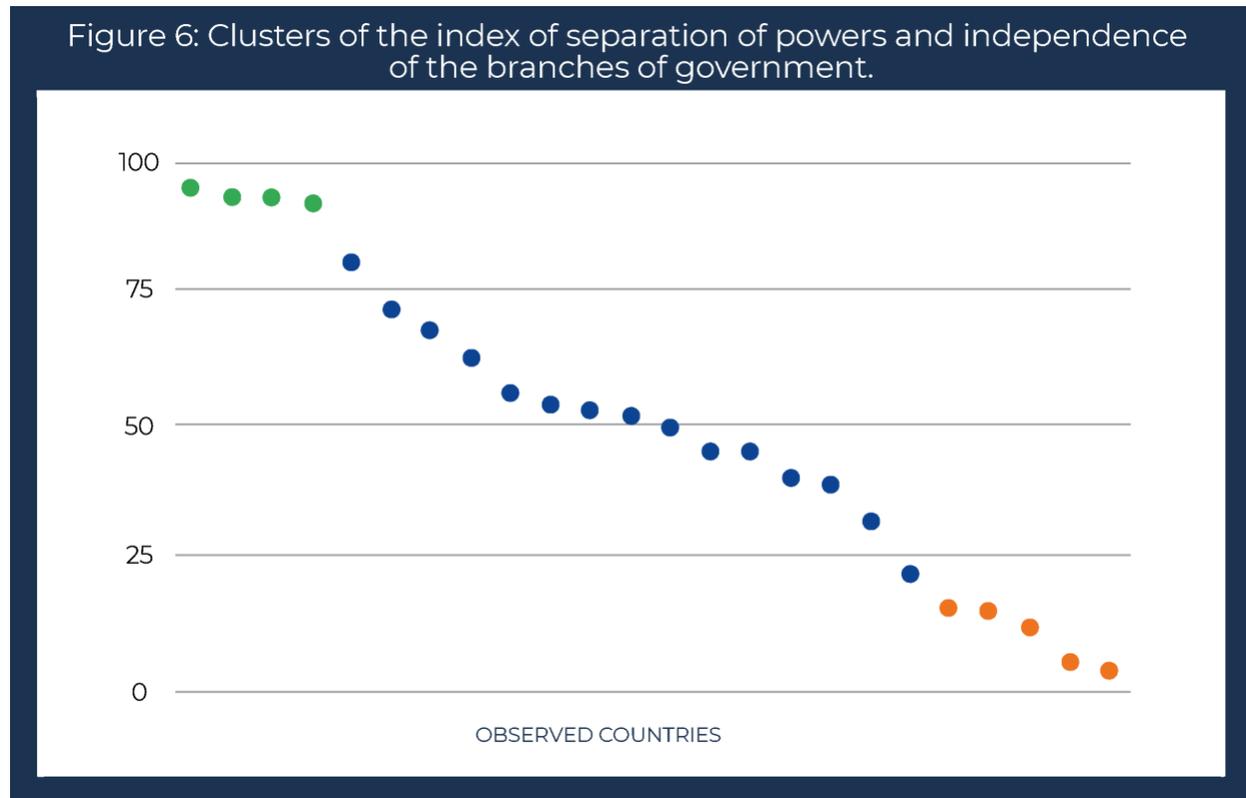
INDICATORS	SOURCE
Constraints on Government Powers	WJP
Independent Judiciary	BTI
Separation of Power	BTI

Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Analysis of indicators of the index

At the regional level, there is a significant variation in the indicators in this index. Some countries have a de facto separation of public powers and systems with healthy checks and balances, while at the other extreme, there are countries in which there is no separation, either de jure or de facto, of powers. Values can range from situations where there is a clear separation of powers with cross-checks and balances, to the extreme where there is no separation of powers, either de jure or de facto.

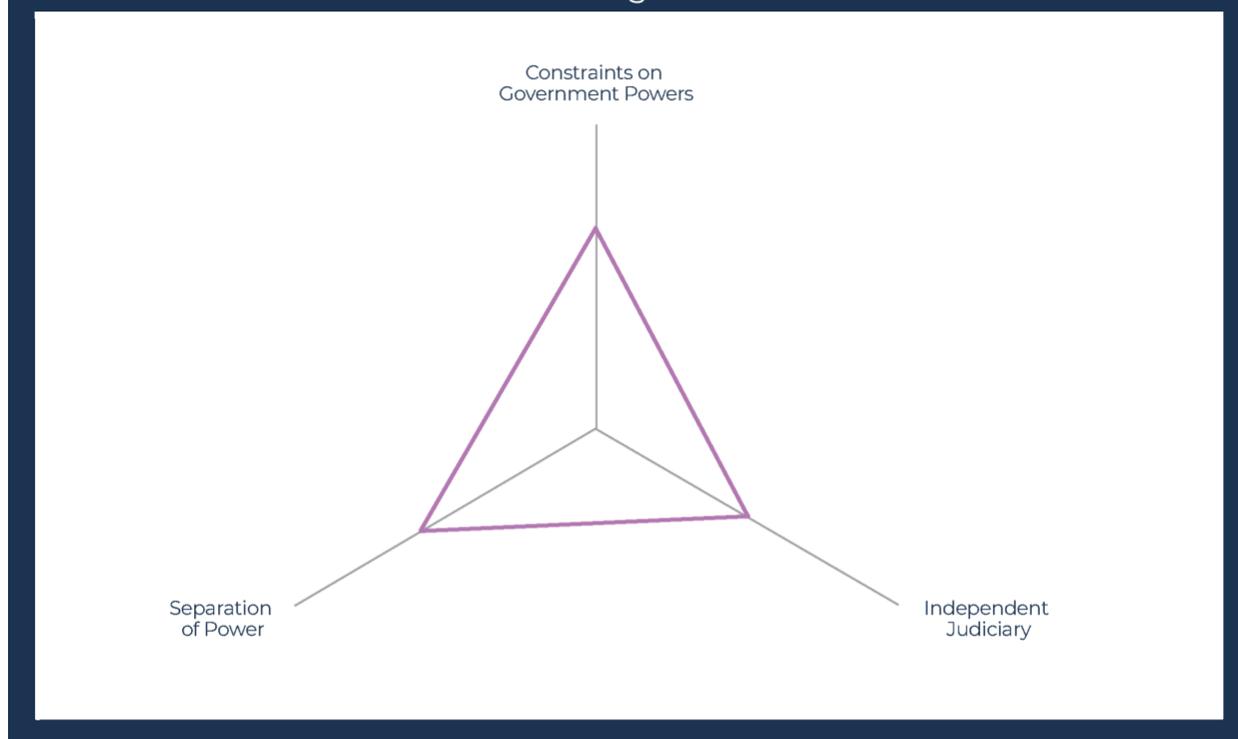
Figure 6 shows the regional variation in this index of separation of powers and independence of branches of government.



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

The following radar chart/spider chart shows the regional average for the indicators in this index, illustrating an interdependent relationship between the variables, of separation of powers, judicial independence, and restrictions on the powers of government that make up the index.

Figure 7: Index of separation of powers and independence of the branches of government



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Other observations

One of the main challenges, faced by many countries in the region as a result of the pandemic, was to guarantee the division and independence of powers. Checks and balances, particularly on the control of the executive branch and the role of the judiciary and legislative branches, are fundamental in democracy. In many cases, there was a lack of control over declarations of states of emergency, as well as measures suspending or restricting access to rights. The judiciary, in particular, plays a fundamental role in safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable individuals and groups. In several countries, the limitation of the functioning of the legislative and judicial branches generated complaints from different sectors of society. Likewise, guarantees were violated in the processes of appointment of judges, and there were pressure, threats, and undue interference. At the regional level, in general there is an improvement according to the indicator of control of the executive power by the judiciary (V-Dem).

2.1.6 Considerations based on the observation of the 5 indices of the Observatory

A synthesis of the results of the observation of the 5 indices of the Observatory shows: that peace processes are important to advance the rights agenda, but much remains to be done so that economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights are accessible to everyone, as well as to combat violence in all its forms. In order to consolidate the exercise of power subject to the rule of law, it is imperative to strengthen the fight against corruption. The index of the holding of periodic, free, fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people illustrates that it is not enough to improve the quality of electoral systems to build public confidence in democracy and the legitimacy of States. The index of pluralistic systems of political parties and organizations underscores the importance of strengthening and deepening democracy through more and better citizen participation, while recognizing the importance of strengthening social capital in all our countries. Finally, the Observatory indices point out the importance of strengthening the rule of law through respect for independence and separation of political powers.

2.2. Heterogeneity reflected in the indices of democracy

Throughout section 2.1, the indices and their indicators were described and plotted as regional averages. It should be recalled that the analysis of the indices focused on averages at the regional level, providing a picture of the region that would appear to be homogeneous. However, if you disaggregate the data, it is evident that there is a lot of heterogeneity within the region. The association between the essential elements of democracy, as can be seen from the analysis of the five indices, illustrates clear differences between individual countries and groups of countries.

For a better understanding of heterogeneity in the region, without going into the study of each country, this section will present the results of a cluster analysis: a statistical analysis method that allows countries to be grouped into sets (or clusters) that share similar characteristics and, in this way, to be able to reflect the differences between the groups of countries in the region (the clusters have been built considering the normalization of the data, taking as reference the standard deviations of the mean).

The analysis of data from the indicators and indices of the Observatory allows us to observe three clusters or groups of countries of: high, medium, and low performance. It is noteworthy that the same countries lead in performance in almost all the indices, while others are consistently positioned at the other extreme. Likewise, countries with opportunities for moving up to a higher performing cluster are identified, while others could be at risk of descending and positioning themselves in the low-performing cluster, due - particularly - to socio-economic variables and access to power.

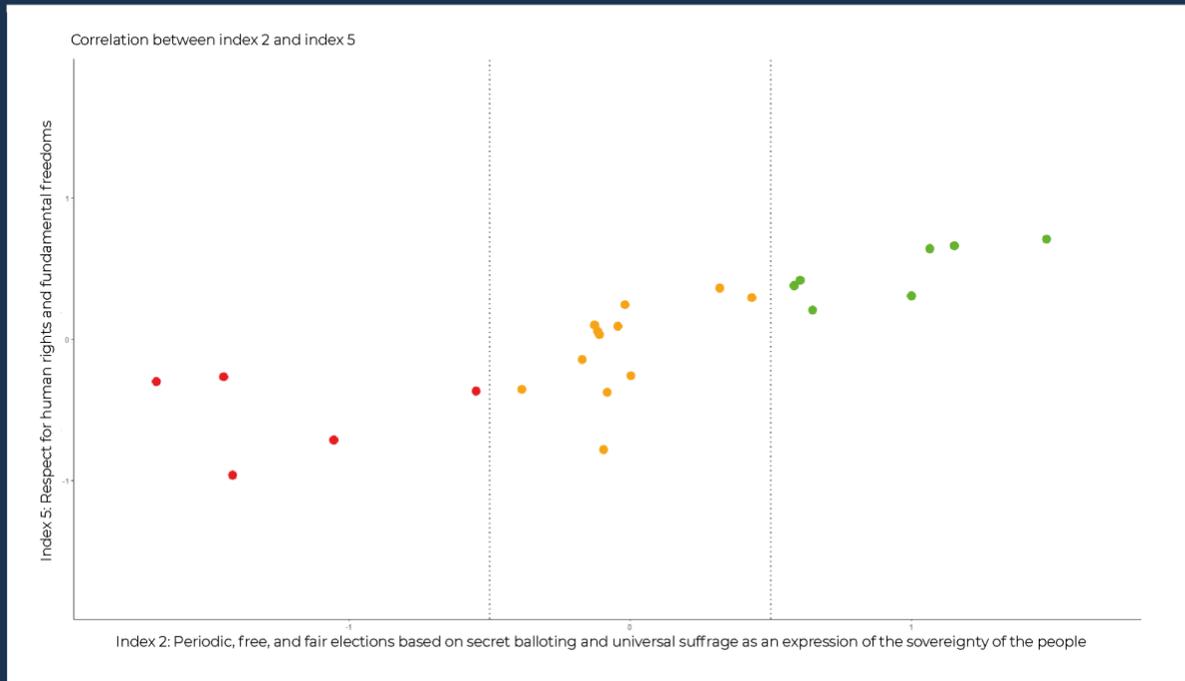
The data from the Observatory's indices also allow us to see the high level of association or correlation between the essential elements of democracy. In other words, countries that perform high on one index tend to have a high performance in all indices. On the contrary, countries which underperform show underperformance in all their indices.¹⁰ Countries demonstrating high-performing correlations are shown in the following charts in the upper right quadrant and low-performing countries are located in the lower left quadrant. Most countries can be found in the middle of the graphs.

In these countries, it is observed that there are some minimal displacements in the relationship between variables. If the shift is toward the upper right quadrant, it can be perceived as an overall improvement for the region — and a decline, if it's the other way around. For more details on the statistical analysis carried out, see Annex II.

¹⁰ Correlation is used to test relationships or associations between quantitative variables or categorical variables. In other words, it's a measure of how things are related. The study of how variables correlate is called correlation analysis.

To illustrate these points, in the following Figure 8 it can be seen that the performance of the index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms predicts the performance of the index of periodic, free, fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage.

Figure 8: Correlation between the index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the index of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people

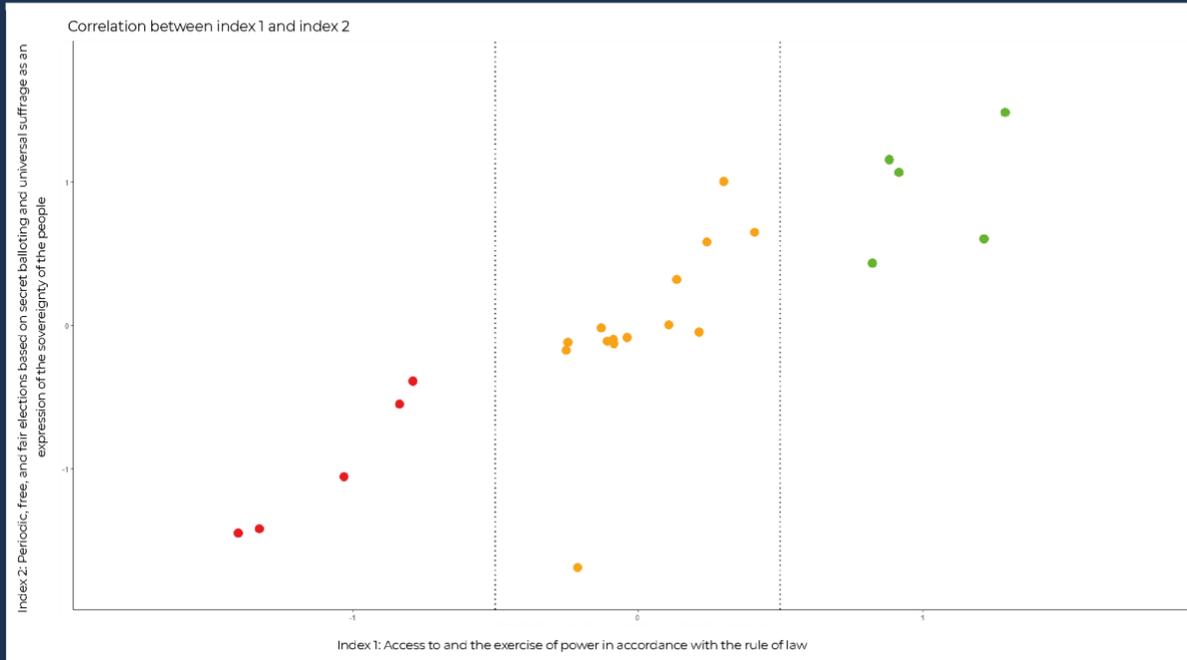


Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

As can be seen in all the graphs presented in this section, there is a majority of countries with intermediate performance (orange) that are located in the center, and a minority with low and high performances (red and green) grouped (in clusters) at the extremes. It is also observed that in the cluster of countries that show lower performance in all indices, the interdependence of the essential elements of democracy is weakened. There are countries (red group) that appear recurrently with values below the average of the Americas, which generates a lowering of values at in global and regional levels.

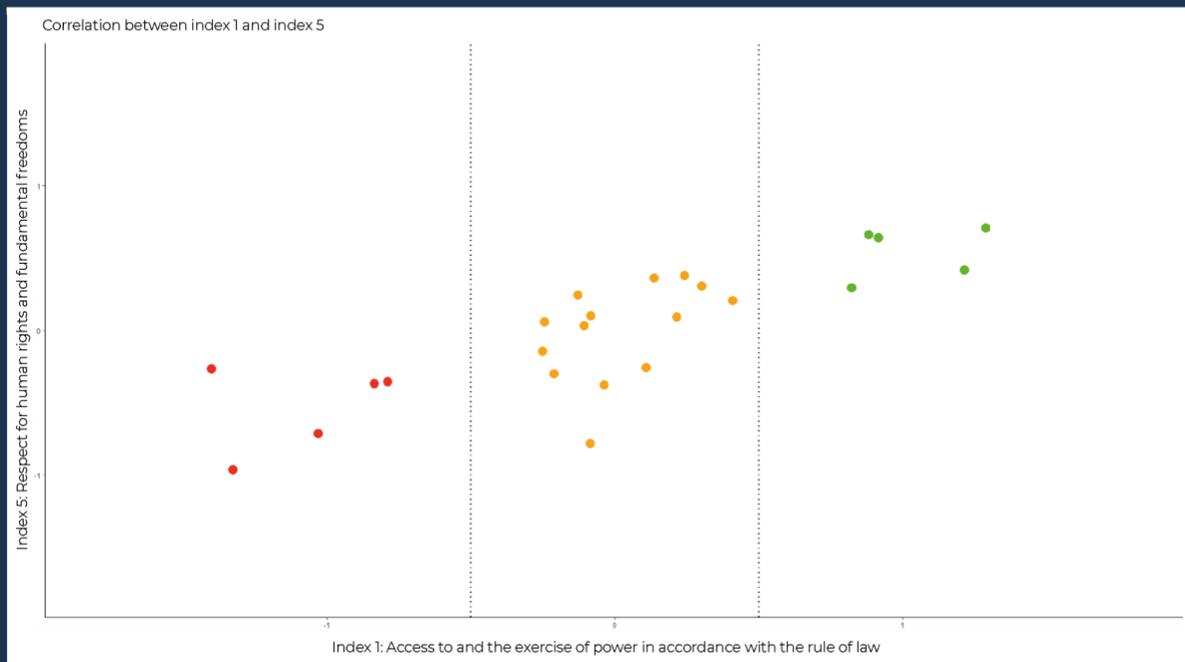
Figure 9 illustrates the strong correlation between the electoral index and the rate of access to and exercise of power subject to the rule of law, and Figure 10 shows the correlation between access to rights and the exercise of power subject to the rule of law.

Figure 9: Correlation between the index of access to and the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law and the index of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

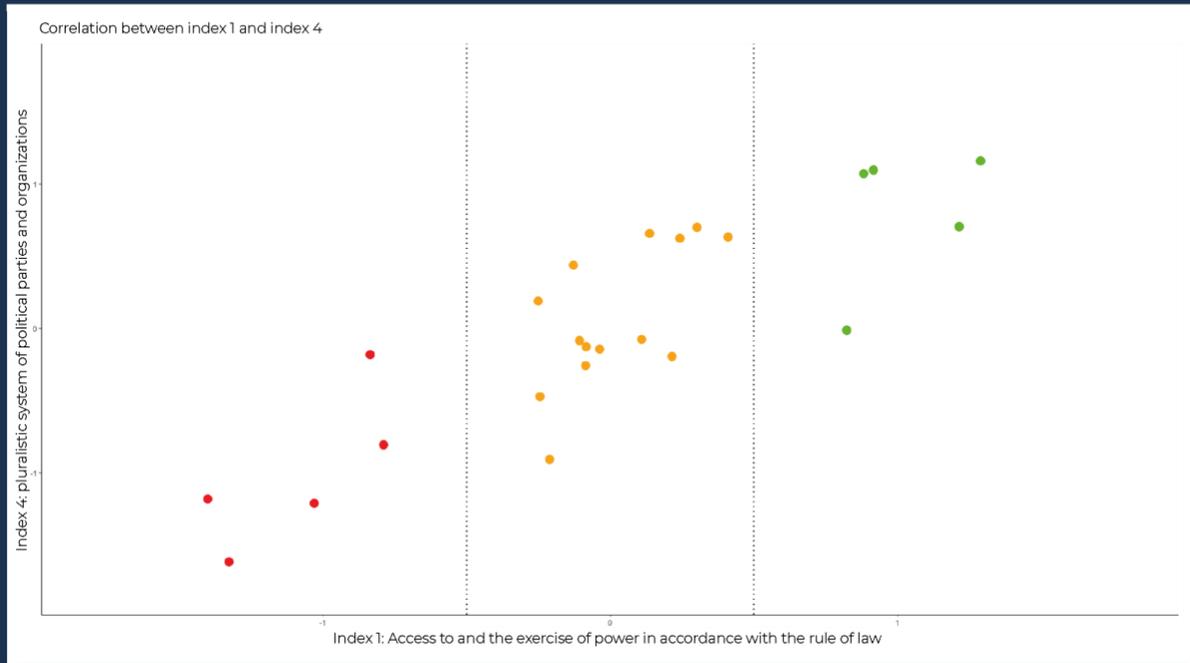
Figure 10: Correlation between the index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the index of access to and the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

In Figure 11, it can be observed that the rate of exercise of power subject to the rule of law is positively correlated with the index of pluralistic systems of political parties and organizations. The same countries that show a high score on one index, have a high score on the other, and vice versa. The positive correlation is even stronger between the index of separation of powers and independence of branches of government, which is a necessary condition for the rule of law, and the rate of access to power and exercise subject to the rule of law (Figure 12). While there is a positive but weaker correlation, between the index of pluralistic systems of political parties and organizations and that of holding periodic, free, fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people (Figure 13).

Figure 11: Correlation between the index of pluralistic system of political parties and organizations and the index of access to and the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Figure 12: Correlation between the index of separation of powers and independence of the branches of government and the index of access to and the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law

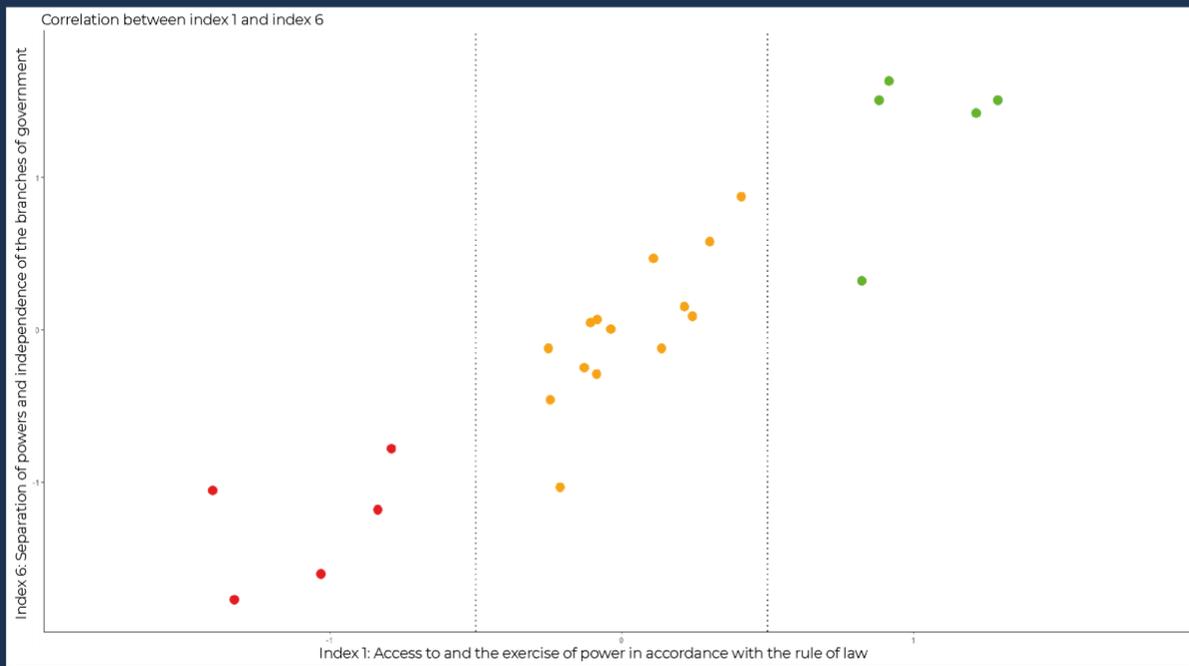
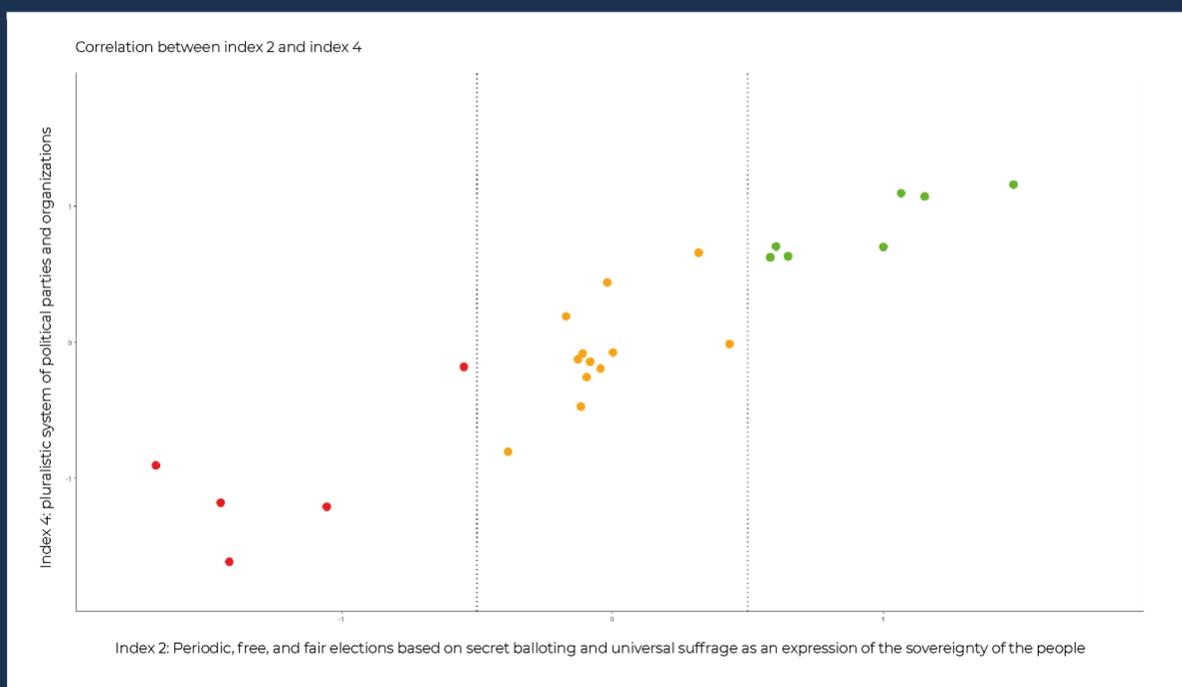


Figure 13: Correlation between the index of pluralistic system of political parties and organizations and the index of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people



Source: OAS Observatory on Democracy in the Americas.

To summarize, the correlations between all indices are statistically significant, although the degree of correlation of the variables differs as could be seen in the graphs.

The empirical evidence from the data indicates that strengthening one or some of the essential elements represented in the Observatory's indices contributes to the progress of the others.

This positive relationship between indices, observed from the correlation analysis, shows that the essential elements of democracy are interdependent as defined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. In this way, an **improvement in the checks and balances between state powers would favorably affect the quality of electoral democracy, as well as the exercise of power; an improvement in access to and respect for rights would positively affect the quality of all the elements of democracy.**

The correlations identified present opportunities for debate among Member States on the conditions that would allow countries to make a qualitative leap towards the full exercise of democracy.

It is important, that the design of policies for post-COVID recovery and democratic strengthening, take into account the interdependence of the essential elements of democracy to maximize the desired results. Similarly, hemispheric policies would achieve greater impact if they are designed, taking into account the heterogeneity of the groups of countries that make up the region.

2.3. Pandemic and vulnerabilities: impact on socioeconomic dimensions

Understanding the imperative to broaden the democratic standard, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, it is essential to understand the implications of the crisis from a perspective centered on socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Latin America and the Caribbean faced considerable challenges which affected their political, economic, and social development trajectories. Furthermore, many of these -such as inequality, labor fragility, informality, and poor social protection -have a clear gender dimension and distinctly affect vulnerable individuals and groups.

We note that the most significant cost of the crisis caused by the pandemic is social in nature. As a matter of fact, COVID-19 can be understood as a force that exacerbated social exclusion. We observed an increase in pre-existing gaps in terms of access to economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights, as well as increased risks for the most vulnerable groups to fall, or relapse, into poverty. Moreover, multiple forces impact both supply and demand negatively, with a differentiated effect by sectors. All this affects the prospects for countries to retake a path to recovery with inclusion.

The pandemic widened the gaps in terms of inclusive development -gaps which are but a pre-existing condition in all the countries of the region. As the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights stated in 2020, there are problems cutting across all member states that make the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 even more

worrisome: “...the deep social gaps in which poverty and extreme poverty constitute a transversal problem to all the states in the region; as well as the lack of or precariousness in access to drinking water and sanitation; food insecurity, situations of environmental decay and lack of adequate housing. To which high rates of labor informality and precarious work and income add up. Altogether, these factors affect a large number of people in the region and make the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 even more problematic.” (IACHR, 2020, p.3). During the pandemic, international standards related to non-discrimination and protection of people in vulnerable conditions (poverty, human mobility, informal work, among others) were neglected, as referred to by authors such as Vela Ávalos (2020, p. 159-160).

As a region, we face the risk of a setback in the social, economic, and democracy-building achievements that have been built-upon over decades. For more than half of Latin Americans, insufficient guarantees of access to economic and social rights remain. According to Latinobarómetro (2021) this is the most substantial impact of the pandemic: “In 2020, various economic and social guarantees fell to their historical minimum points. This is the strongest impact of the pandemic, the perception of loss of guarantees in all areas of things.” (p.58). So, there is a region-wide perception of loss of guarantees, which -across the entire spectrum of economic and social rights- stand at their minimum points since measurements are available for comparison. As a consequence of the effects of the pandemic, the majority perceive inequality of opportunities, social insecurity, gender disparity, and lack of environmental protection. It should be remembered that the safeguarding of economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights requires the guarantee of civil and political rights and vice versa. For this reason, the Inter-American Human Rights System continues to stress the importance of reinforcing the protection of individuals and groups in situations of vulnerability.

Inequality makes us vulnerable. Latin America and the Caribbean has been and continues to be the most unequal region in the world: “The richest 10 percent of the population captures 22 times more of the national income than the poorest 10 percent. The richest 1 percent earn 21 percent of the income of the entire economy, double the average for the industrialized world” (IDB, 2020c, p. XIII). But inequality

goes beyond income and extends to territorial inequalities, gender, race, ethnicity, age, preferences, status, and access to rights.

Furthermore, inequality results from a vicious cycle that reduces our resilience as a region: as highlighted in multiple paradigmatic rulings by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, vulnerability - defined as the inability to recover from a shock - evolves from a situation of extreme poverty and as a consequence of the lack of protection measures for economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. In other words, inequality is also expressed in the lack of capacities and instruments available to specific groups to respond to the crisis resulting from the pandemic.

That is why it is important to understand poverty as multidimensional and not as a condition of mere lack of income. Vulnerable populations, such as the chronically poor, have been experiencing the exacerbation of multiple deprivations unrelated to income: overcrowding, lack of access to water and sanitation, difficulties in following epidemiological recommendations to prevent contagion, stressful situations including domestic violence and child abuse, and service interruptions that disproportionately affect the poor (access to food, health care, schooling, and early childhood services).

There has been a 27-year setback as measured in the quality of life indicators for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2022.a). This is the result of dire economic and social outlooks, often made worse by measures taken to confront the pandemic: prolonged states of emergency and freedom of movement restrictions. Worryingly, while there are important regional variations, life expectancy has fallen, on average, by almost three years.

In 2019, 30.5 percent of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean was in a situation of income poverty, which was equivalent to approximately 187 million people. Of these, 70 million people (11.3 percent) were in a situation of extreme poverty. By the end of 2020, the poverty figure reached 209 million people (33.7 percent of the population), while extreme poverty covered 78 million (13 percent of the population). Regarding poverty rates, it is necessary to go back to 2008 to find a similar rate, which implies a 12-year setback for the region, as indicated by ECLAC. This setback is even

more significant in the case of extreme poverty, where we must go back over 20 years - to 2000 - to find a similar rate (ECLAC, 2022.a).

This pandemic crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean is becoming more acute to the extent that vulnerable groups are the ones who have been most affected. That is why, the pandemic has materialized fears about a general backsliding in much of the ground that has been gained in terms of social inclusion and access to rights. Vulnerability has a human face: 8 out of 10 people in Latin America and the Caribbean belong to vulnerable groups, thus suffering a differentiated impact in moments of crisis and requiring reinforced protection. This highlights a responsibility towards these groups who, even before the pandemic crisis, suffered exclusion in terms of access to housing rights, rights to education and work, water and sanitation, and food or health.

It is necessary to highlight, as well, the situation of children and youth, whose vulnerability has been amplified by the effects of the pandemic. 167 million students were affected by the closure of educational centers at the peak of the pandemic, and 121 million even in September 2020. This situation has been compounded by a sharp gap in Internet access for children in low-income brackets. The rise in school dropout, increase in child labor, deterioration of educational infrastructure, and insufficient efforts by the State to move from face-to-face to virtual in public education, primarily affect students from the most disadvantaged sectors. Furthermore, lack of connectivity, access to technology, and vulnerable family contexts affect the upward mobility of children living in poverty. The inhabitants of informal settlements are especially vulnerable, having fewer possibilities to work remotely and difficulties in guaranteeing educational continuity. (ECLAC, 2021). All these factors put together generate lasting effects.

For this reason, we observe that the pandemic could have long-lasting effects on human capital, thus damaging the prospects for better preparation for future challenges. The impact in terms of loss of human capital is even more worrying when it is observed that this loss will be distributed unfairly and asymmetrically: it affects disadvantaged children particularly, causing a substantial decrease in secondary

education rates (ECLAC, 2020.b). There is concern that the observed increase in exclusion in education will reverse some of the most important advances of the last decade: according to the IDB, there is a substantial risk of a 15 percent increase in the number of children from vulnerable families who drop out of school. Therefore, more efforts and specific policies are needed to reduce the possible lasting consequences of the pandemic on the human capital of the most vulnerable (IDB, 2020.b).

The lasting effects on human capital are cause for concern, moreover, considering the substantial impact that the pandemic has had on employment -with differentiated consequences for vulnerable groups, such as women and youth. 25 million people lost their job during the pandemic. 13 millions of these were women. Likewise, precarious, and informal employment -already at worrying pre-pandemic levels- reached 58.7 percent of total employment. As both ECLAC and the ILO point out, employment recovery was slow, incomplete, and uneven. On average, the regional Gini index was 0.7 percent higher in 2020 than in 2019. The increase in poverty is a logical consequence of the increase in the unemployment rate.

It should be noted that the regional unemployment rate had been growing since 2018, when it stood at 8 percent. By 2020, it had reached 10.5 percent (ECLAC, 2022.b). By 2022, the expectation of recovery of jobs in the region was still insufficient, since the economic growth rate in Latin America would barely reach 2.7 percent: "...by 2022 it is projected that Latin American and the Caribbean will close with a GDP growth rate of 2.7 percent on average, returning to the path of low growth exhibited before the start of the pandemic" (ECLAC, 2022.b, p.19). This is negatively affected by the prevalence of global events such as worldwide rising inflation, reduced growth in global trade, and the end of the post-pandemic economic boom. The increase in labor deterioration in 2020 was due to the massive closure of companies and micro-enterprises, which destroyed "(...) more than 8.5 million jobs: 8.1 percent of total formal employment in the business sector and more than a fifth of the jobs generated by microenterprises." (ECLAC – Europyme, 2020).

All forms of inequality due to gender, race, socioeconomic or regional cleavage, or age has been exacerbated. The social cost and the impacts in terms of access to rights are

accentuated due to the effects of the pandemic on economic growth scenarios. Diverse analysis coincides in their warnings about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 onwards, pointing to a sharp contraction in supply and demand and a special impact on sectors in a situation of vulnerability. The pandemic has produced the most severe economic recession in almost a century in Latin America and the Caribbean. ECLAC points out to this when referring to "a triple combined and asymmetric crisis: health, economic and social." (2020.a). In 2020, the indicators that reflected the COVID-19 crisis were manifested in the fall of GDP in Latin America by 7.7 percent (CEPAL, 2022.b); 2.7 million companies closed due to the Coronavirus (equivalent to 19 percent of firms in the region), and; the aforementioned conditions in terms of poverty, as well as access to employment and education (CEPAL-Europyme, 2020).

Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced lower external demand, greater economic uncertainty, a collapse of tourist flows and, likewise, the consequences in terms of exclusion of the same efforts to try to contain the spread of the disease (World Bank, 2020). Market concentration and distortions in many productive sectors, public debt levels and the fragility of credit markets have increased (OECD, 2021). Furthermore, low productivity and competitiveness, dependence on primary sectors, concentration of exports and poor positioning in global value chains, as well as the digital and connectivity gap constitute limiting factors for the regional capacity to generate growth with inclusion. With the arrival of the pandemic in 2020, on average, global economic production decreased by 6 percent, although in the poorest and least developed countries this figure doubled. The possible stagflation scenarios, that is, high inflation without growth, could accentuate the economic, social, and political challenges.

More so, the projections for 2023 are not encouraging. According to ECLAC, the region will resume the levels of low economic growth seen prior to the pandemic, accentuating the complexity of this scenario due to the possible recession in the world, as well as growing inflation generated by the constant prices of fuels, food, energy, and fertilizers in international markets generated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine (CEPAL, 2022.b).

A second element making the prospects for recovery more complex is growing inflation worldwide, reflecting the rise in commodity prices and interruptions in global supply chains. The regional inflation rate, monitored based on indicators provided by ECLAC, has been rising progressively since 2020 - going from 3 percent in that year to 6 percent in 2021 and reaching 8.1 by the end of April 2022. This growing regional inflation would respond to "rises in the prices of energy (oil and gas), mining (coal, copper and nickel), food (wheat, corn and oils) and fertilizers, due to the relevant position of the Russian Federation and Ukraine in the production and world trade of these products" (ECLAC, 2022.b). An increasingly difficult access to goods and services could generate processes of political and social unrest due to the deterioration of people's purchasing power.

This meager regional economic growth expected for 2023, accompanied by the end of the post-pandemic economic boom and the aforementioned inflation, leads to a slow and incomplete recovery of the region's labor markets, which mainly affects women and youth looking for a job.

The region faces competitiveness challenges that are not new. Low investment (17.2 percent) highlights the problem of a recovery that will not only be slow but could be driven mainly by raw materials and low complexity sectors. The historical inequality of opportunities and capabilities persists, influenced by the quality of education and the digital divide, as well as the consequences of multidimensional poverty. Inequality also marks access to quality public services and the right to voice.

All these economic difficulties that arise on the regional horizon have led to a significant setback in the reduction of poverty and extreme poverty rates in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this sense, ECLAC projected by 2022 the percentage of poverty to climb to 33 percent of the regional population, while extreme poverty could reach 14.7 percent, with small chance of a decrease in the short and medium term. On the contrary, if inflation levels and reduced economic growth continue, trends could deteriorate, as indicated by ECLAC: "These levels are notoriously higher than those observed before the pandemic and remove the possibility of a speedy recovery." (2022.c) In quantitative terms, there are 86.4 million people in extreme poverty in the

region and suffer from food insecurity, projecting a total of 7.8 million by the end of 2022.

In conclusion, Latin America, being the most unequal region on the planet, had had a meager economic performance before the pandemic. With its onset, the economic crisis and regional socio-economic gaps were accentuated, generating enormous long-term structural challenges. To change the trends and meet the needs of a growing vulnerable population, it is important to adopt a perspective of social justice based on access to rights.

An approach focused on the capabilities of the region in the economic and democratic spheres would allow us to understand the possible ways to overcome poverty traps and promote access to rights. Multidimensional poverty results in the violation and deterioration of multiple rights. It violates the ability to enjoy not only economic and social rights, but political and civil rights as well. For poverty denies a voice to vulnerable individuals and groups. It is essential to establish an agenda of protection of people living in poverty as a priority, since the pandemic has evidenced the negative impact on vulnerable groups, highlighting the need to develop fairer, more inclusive, and resilient social protection systems. It is noteworthy to mention that several countries in the region have understood this need, and consequently strengthened social protection systems and provided vouchers for people identified as vulnerable.

Chapter 3: Trends that may affect the effective exercise of democracy

3.1. Political polarization, political fanaticism, hate speech and its effects on governance.

In order to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of polarization and its effects on governance, we consider it important to review the experiment of the psychologist Muzafer Sherif, that laid the foundation for understanding membership effects and intergroup conflicts.

Robbers Cave experiment was an initiative of the psychologist Muzafer Sherif in 1954, where twenty-two eleven-year-old children were selected, with almost identical psychological, social, educational, economic and physical profiles; white, middle-class, Protestant kids from Oklahoma City who have never seen each other before. These were sent to a summer camp in the state park "Robbers Cave", they were divided into two groups, one was called Eagles, the other Snakes. During the first week, the children strengthened ties within their groups, unaware of the existence of the opposing group. In the second week, the groups were introduced to each other and challenged to compete in a baseball tournament. Immediately, each group began to refer to the members of the opposing group as "the others", and it did not take long for them to begin to refer to them in a pejorative way. By the third week, the conflict between the groups had escalated and the children had lost their ability to objectively judge reality. They unabashedly supported the members of their group and disqualified the member of the opposing group, even in situations in which both representatives were in the same development of actions. The violence began to materialize through attacks on the facilities of the opposing group, to the point of beginning to arm themselves with stones for a hand-to-hand confrontation. At this point the experiment was suspended to preserve the safety of the children.

Robbers Cave experiment glimpsed membership effects and inter-group conflict. If the group is isolated first and encouraged to compete later, the members tend to group around an identity, forging the idea of inside and outside, and the subsequent

competition distorts the perception of reality, overestimating the abilities of the belonging group and reinforcing negative stereotypes of opponents.

This experiment is still the cornerstone for understanding intergroup conflicts. The same is cited by Lilliana Mason (2018) in her book "Uncivil agreement: how politics became our identity", as well as by Chris Bail (2021) in his book "Breaking the prism of social networks: how to make our platforms less polarizing." Therefore, the experiment continues to be the conceptual framework for understanding polarization as a social fact, just as it has been transferred and installed in new forms of communication such as social networks.

3.1.1. Membership groups

Sherif's experiment is consistent with other studies that recognize the human need to create groups to belong to (Brewer, 1991). These groups to belong to are made up of people with similar characteristics (Allport, 1979). This form of grouping is known as homophily, a mechanism that encourages people to associate with similar individuals and contributes to understanding how clusters work in social networks.

For Greene (2013) the idea of belonging to a group is deeply rooted in human psychology, and it is almost impossible to escape from it. This generates, even in the smallest actions, a bias that benefits the membership group and creates negative associations for actors external to the group.

His conclusion was that, even if there was nothing to fight for, individuals favor their group members with the logic of winning. This could naturally lead to future conflicts, given the tendency for the group to isolate itself in order to strengthen itself, and then compare itself with another.

"...under circumstances of perceived threat or competition, in-group preference can lead to open hostility toward the out-group, particularly when the competition is a zero-sum game." (Brewer, 2010)

For Allport (1979) the comparison between groups exaggerates the difference between them, leading to misunderstandings and, on many occasions, to the creation of conflicts.

Regardless of party politics, group formation expands to all dimensions, mainly ideas, thus creating hundreds of factions in society.

We have long known that religion, race, and even sports team affiliations have led people to split into factions, pitted against each other along a dividing line. Partisanship may be necessary for the government to organize and help its citizens make decisions. The problem arises when partisanship implicitly evokes racial, religious, and other social identities. As the classification takes place (...) the parties become more and more socially homogeneous. It is this social dimension of the partisan divide that makes it so much easier for individual supporters to dehumanize their political opponents. (Mason, 2018)

These belonging groups are also receptors and generators of identities. We forge and forge ourselves in interaction. What is interesting is that the polarization processes manage to align different identity groups behind political proposals, which are also identity-based. Finally, they bring together a multiplicity of factions. Therefore, there is a tendency to rationalize the individual position and the defense of issues, in order to maintain a position consistent with the position of the party group. The need to belong clouds the rational position when facing the facts.

Decades of social scientific evidence shows that voting behavior is primarily a product of inherited party loyalties, social identities, and symbolic attachments. Over time, engaged citizens may construct political and ideological preferences that rationalize their choices, but these issues are rarely fundamental (Achen & Bartels, 2016, as cited in Mason, 2018).

3.1.2. Polarization, classification and ideology

Since polarization is a polysemic term, we will define it, as well as other associated terms, in order to develop the analysis.

The term **polarization** has traditionally been used, in political studies, to describe an expansion in the distance between the two political parties that agglomerate the majority of voters in a country. While the polarization **process** refers to the positioning of said communities of voters or followers, of one party or another, towards opposite ends of an axis (left-right, liberal-conservative, among others).

Mason (2018) explains that there can be two types of polarization, one that is social (or affective) and another that is based on issues. Social **polarization** refers to the increase in social distance between political parties. Composed of three phenomena: greater partisan bias, greater emotional reactivity, and greater activism. On the other hand, **issue-based polarization** refers to the traditional concept of polarization, indicating an increasing distance between the average positions of the parties with reference to specific issues.

Meanwhile, the **classification** is defined as an increasing alignment between the party and the ideology, where the ideology indicates a set of positions or values on common issues. The **classification process** will then refer to the fact that a party maintains positions on issues related to its axis of position, for example, left-wing politics. While the other party performs the same action in the opposite direction.

The ideological dimension is added to the debate on polarization, which is also divided into two types. On the one hand, **identity-based ideology**, also known as symbolic identity, refers to the sense of belonging to one of the groups in dispute, as we have observed in the *Robbers Cave* camp experiment. On the other, there is **issue-based or operational ideology**, which refers to a set of political attitudes and the extent to which they tend to be at one end of the spectrum or the other.

Finally, Mason (2018) states that there are also two forms of classification, the **social classification** that expresses a growing homogeneity within the party groups regardless of the orientation of the actions, and the **classification based on themes**

that is closer from the traditional understanding, which means that the party group must maintain its ideological reference positions, for example, the right-wing groups must maintain more conservative positions.

3.1.3. Political polarization in the Americas

The presence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the rule of law, democracy, and the organization of elections have been extensively analyzed in the preceding sections of this report. However, it is necessary to highlight that the pandemic context has been a catalyst that has allowed disinformation to spread more quickly on the networks. The deterioration of the quality of life of citizens, the growth of inequality gaps, as well as the limitations on the exercise of political-electoral rights and economic, social and cultural rights, have brought dissatisfaction and mistrust in the democratic system and its institutions. A reflection of this are the low scores obtained by Latin America on a scale of 1 to 10 in the *Democracy Index 2021 of The Economist*, in indicators such as the functioning of the government: 5.03 and political participation with 5.58. (p.49). This is corroborated by the growing indifference of citizens to the type of regime and to the current political participation in their countries in the region, which reaches an average of 27 percent in the region. (Latinobarómetro, 2020, 26.a)

This scenario has been fertile ground for the flourishing of extreme positions that question democracy and its institutions, and dangerously emerging authoritarian and populist positions and discourses, as indicated by the 2020 Latinobarómetro:

...it is possible to observe the impact of the pandemic, since the multiple crises of 2020 affected the indicators of diffuse authoritarianism with an upward trend, which is certainly not the same as a military dictatorship. With the pandemic, the monsters are accentuated by the desperation of finding a solution to the multiple crises. The risk of increasing support for populism and autocracies increases with the pandemic. (Latinobarómetro ; 2020: 33 - 34.a).

The indicators that reflect the emergence of autocratic and extreme positions in Latin America are evident in the indicators provided by the Latinobarómetro 2021; in which

it is observed that the decline in support for democracy -that had been increasing in the last decade- has stopped, reaching in 2018, (the previous edition), the lowest records in the last five years. Democracy, in that period, did not seem to pay the bill for the pandemic. Likewise, the pandemic has not produced abrupt changes in the positioning of countries regarding support for democracy; even though there is more moderate levels of support for democracy than those reached in the nineties, which continues to be interpreted as reflecting some disillusionment and indifference. Support for democracy in the region declined between 2010 and 2018, from 63% at the beginning of the decade, to 48% in 2018. In 2020, the year of the pandemic, support for democracy was 49%.

13% support authoritarianism and 27% are indifferent to the type of government that is operating. (2020, pp. 37, 39, 43.a).

From 2010 to 2021, regional democracy has lost a total of 14 percentage points of support.

On the other hand, The Economist's Democracy Index 2021 shows a very low score for the region in terms of the political culture of citizens and political organizations, reaching 4.53 points out of 10, and 6.64 with respect to the exercise of civil liberties. (p.49).

Derived from this panorama, the massive dissemination or overabundance of disinformation, hate messages and fake news through social networks has been the common tone of the electoral processes in Latin America between 2020 and 2022, which has led to virulent and polarized electoral campaigns. In this regard, Berganza (2021) points out about social networks and their impact on democracy: " However, they have also had negative effects when they have been used as weapons to misinform, attack and discredit those who oppose governments or specific initiatives aimed at deepening democratic practices." (p.179).

Social networks have become a fundamental vehicle for strategic communication. The number of people around the world using them, their immediacy, ease of use,

and the frequency with which they can be accessed have made them a primary source of information that has displaced traditional media.” (Berganza, 2021: 179)

To observe the current polarization in America, the Digital Society Project was used, which focuses on studying the interactions between politics and social networks. The project has several aspects, among which is the Digital Society Survey that has been carried out since the year 2000, covering 179 countries¹¹. For the present study, a sample was taken from the countries corresponding to those selected for the construction of the Observatory indices.

The Digital Society Survey contains 35 questions, one of which allows us to observe social polarization. How would you characterize the different opinions on the main political issues in society? The categorization of the response considers the value 0 (zero) as highly polarized and the value 4 (four) as a society without any polarization. The question contributes to measuring social polarization, since it is a perception of the position of the parties.

¹¹ The project uses the infrastructure of the *Varieties of Democracy Institute* (V-Dem) as well as its measurement models and quality control processes. Making it one of the sources with the greatest coverage and reliability in its published data. It is a conglomerate of academics, the main researchers being members of V-Dem and the University of Gothenburg, University of North Carolina, Brandeis University, among others.

dealing with the pandemic. In those situations where we see an increase in the score, more cooperation than usual has been perceived. Where there has been a decrease in the score, the perception has been the opposite, the political parties have not cooperated during the pandemic.

3.1.4. Polarization in networks and false polarization

The values previously expressed, by the Digital Society Project, refer to summary values for each country. In addition, we can observe in detail what happens in the exchange within the Social Networks themselves, which, although they belong to different events and geographies, maintain a permanent topology.

Figure 15: Social Network, Ideological Communities, Fruchterman and Reingold algorithm

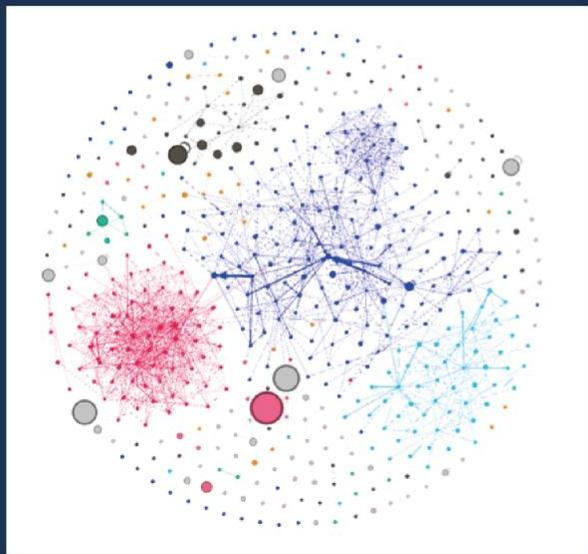
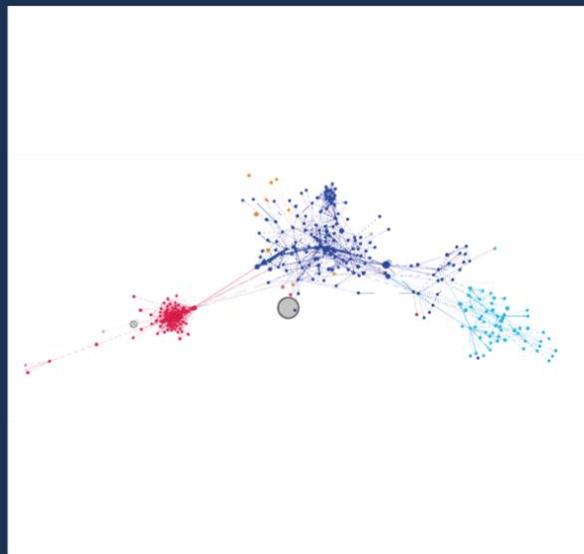


Figure 16: Social Network, Ideological Communities, Yifan Hu algorithm



Source Figures 15 and 16: Twitter, July 3 to 10, 2022. Elaborated by the Observatory for Democracy.

Figures 15 and 16 represent the exchanges within the Twitter Social Network whose main discussion is the political situation of a country. We observe that the colors of the network are assigned by means of a community detection process (*clustering*), when executing the Louvain algorithm. These detected communities could be considered ideological communities and/or identity groups. The classification of ideological communities entails observing within them reference authorities such as,

for example, political representatives of a specific party, as well as the dialogues between its members, which can range from exchanges on a bill, discussion on some particular issue and/or its position, for example, on the orientation that the government should take with respect to migration. These analyzes contribute to reliably validate the category assigned to the community.

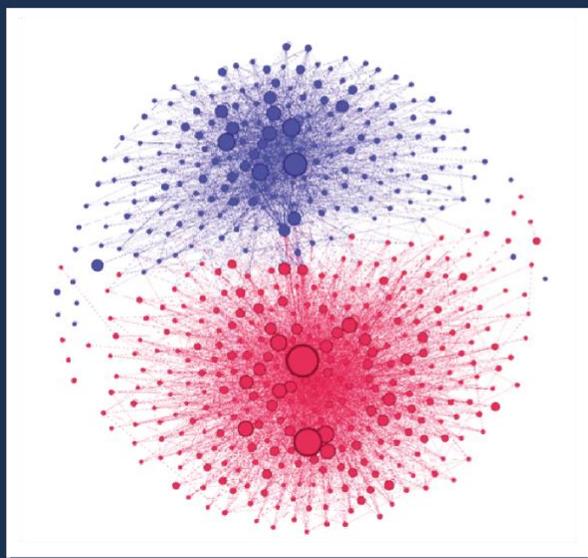
In our example, we can see three main identity groups: the red group represents accounts with a left-wing ideology expressing an opinion on the situation in the country; while the blue group is its counterpart in the ideological spectrum, the right. And the third group, light blue, is mostly debating the country's sports news. We also visualize other communities with other colors, but with a much smaller presence.

Both figures represent the same situation, the same network. But Figure 15 develops its visual design using the Fruchterman and Reingold algorithm, which is concerned with positioning each node equidistantly from other nodes with the same reference and completing the intermediate space with the distribution of nodes with a lower degree of centrality. This algorithm allows us to observe the existence and volume of the different communities within the entire network. While Figure 16 is developed visually using the Yifan Hu algorithm, which considers nodes as objects with attractive and repulsive forces due to their degrees of connection. Figure 16 allows us to observe what constitutes a polarized expression of the accounts under analysis. On the one hand, we observe the concentration of accounts ideologically categorized as left, and on the other, the accounts of the right, and sports. This alignment of identities confirms a process of polarization, between extremes of the ideological spectrum. Social classification coincides with an ideology by identity. With the exception of the light blue identity group, because there are no links between the sports community and the leftist ideological community. Although there are relations between the sports community and the right-wing ideological community. Therefore, it exemplifies what was previously developed on the alignment of different identity groups. Reinforcing here the volume that constitutes a right-wing partisan position that brings together various identity groups.

Brewer (1991) stated that when multiple identities align, people tend to be more biased, less tolerant, and more aggressive in reacting to outside groups. Mainly because the other is perceived as someone totally different, whose values are understood as illegitimate.

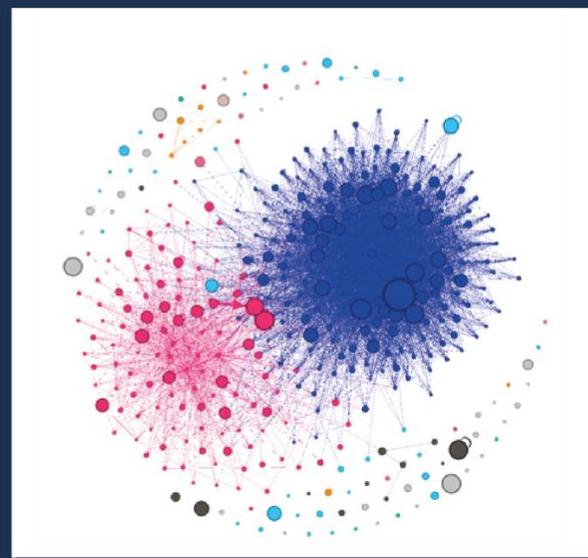
If we return to the classification of polarization by the Digital Society Project, we observe a coherence between its position with a value of 0.5 (Serious Polarization) and the classification of social polarization offered by the Yifan Hu algorithm. This network structure, which can be observed through political debates on social networks regardless of the country, constitutes a recurring dynamic and a pattern of organization in social networks.

Figure 17: Social Network, Ideological Communities, Fruchterman and Reingold algorithm



Source: Twitter, June 6-13, 2022.

Figure 18: Social Network, Ideological Communities, Fruchterman and Reingold algorithm



Source: Twitter, July 3-10, 2022.

Figure 19: Social Network, Ideological Communities, Fruchterman and Reingold algorithm

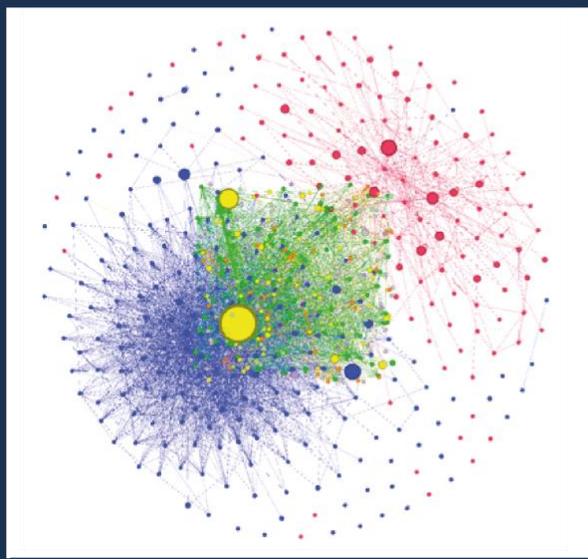
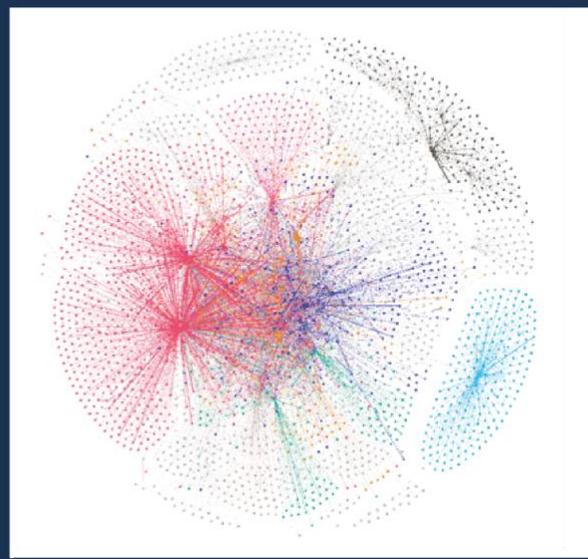


Figure 20: Social Network, Ideological Communities, Fruchterman and Reingold algorithm



Source Figures 19 and 20: Twitter, July 3 to 10, 2022. Elaborated by the Observatory.

Figures 17, 18, 19 and 20 present the same visualization algorithm. But the levels of network filtering by communities differ. While in Figure 17 we only see the two main groups, left in red and right in blue, in Figures 18 and 19 other groups have been maintained. In Figure 18 we see that the volume of representation of third groups is almost imperceptible, while in Figure 19 we see that there is a third group in green, but after analyzing it, it is a group that is not connected to the two ideological groups, since its content refers to a national celebration and preparation for the imminent tropical storm Bonnie. Finally, in Figure 20 we observe the presence of several identity groups, the relationship between the left (red) and the right (blue) has overlaps.

Figure 21: Approach to the Social Network, ideological communities by degree centrality

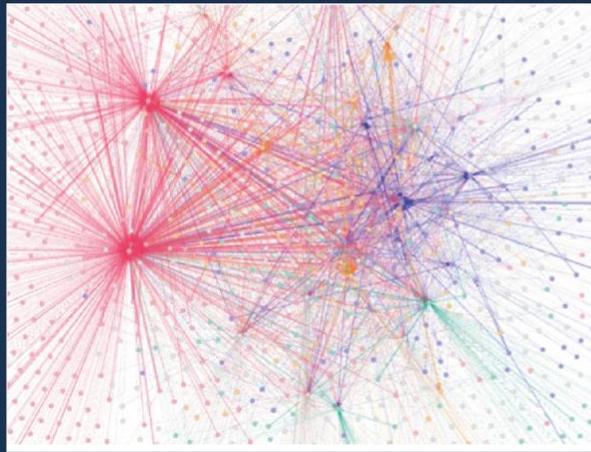
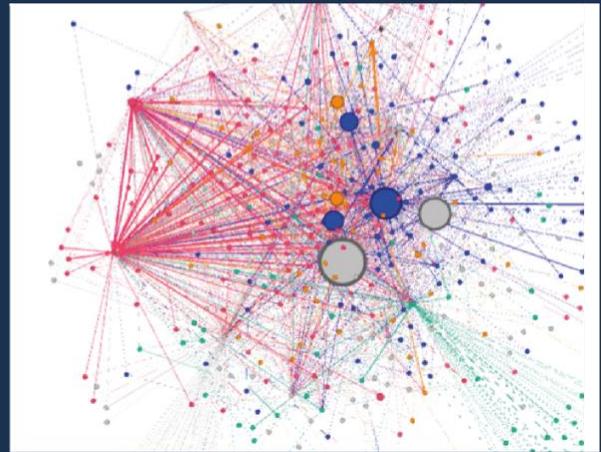


Figure 22: Social Network, by betweenness and by eigenvector centrality



Source Figures 21 and 22: Twitter, July 3 to 10, 2022. Elaborated by the Observatory

The superimpositions observed in the network of Figure 21 allow us to understand that at certain times the third parties can function as communication bridges between ideological extremes. Figure 22 represents the same communities being analyzed as in the previous figure, but the degree of centrality has been changed to the degree of betweenness, and the main node (eigenvector degree), which allows communication between the communities identified, has been isolated.

Therefore, a person who holds two social identities that are not aligned, has a transversality that allows them to approach different groups, which makes them a more tolerant person. According to Allport (1979), promoting contact between people from different groups helps to reduce prejudice. This exposure allows a person to see the problem from different perspectives, thus understanding that both approaches have degrees of legitimacy in their own right and, therefore, can be debated.

Although the existence of these double identities would help to reduce polarization, we see that in public debates and especially in social networks, their prevalence is less and less. Mainly, due to a phenomenon that social scientists call false polarization, which refers to the tendency of people to overestimate the degree of ideological differences between themselves and people from other political parties, Matthew Levendusky and Neil Malhotra (2016).

According to the Pew Research Center, about 55 percent of people involved in political debates recognize themselves as very liberal or very conservative. But, in social networks, the volume of accounts with extreme positions that participate is around 6 percent. If we compare the observed proportions, there is an asymmetry in perception. The number of people with extreme positions in the networks is very low, only 6 percent of the total network. But the perception that we have of them, is that they are a much larger number than the extreme positions that dominate the network. In fact, it is actually the opposite, which is a false polarization.

Jaime Settle (2017) examined how the structure of the social network shapes false polarization; the amount of perceived polarization grows as the social distance between people increases. The perception of polarization increases among people who do not have a direct connection.

In 2016, a group of fourteen academics examined the gap between perceived and actual polarization in ten countries. Although the researchers found conflicting evidence about whether the consumption of information in legacy media (for example, television news, newspapers, and magazines) contributes to the perception gap, they found that the consumption of news online was the strongest predictor of false polarization in almost all countries. Social networks also exacerbate the contribution of the mass media to false polarization. Journalists often use social media to monitor public opinion, and this further distorts their reporting on polarization. It is a vicious circle." (Bail; 2021:102)

3.1.5. Political bigotry and hate speech

The polarization process is a homogenization process. Different identity groups end up lining up behind an identity group that supports a political proposal. Therefore, this homogenization reduces the differences, simplifies them, and cuts the relationships between the previously existing diverse groups, when they are absorbed in the greater mass.

Without the existence of bridges, individuals cannot exchange opinions, understand each other, and develop the ability to tolerate difference. Therefore, the identity

ideology is reinforced, creating stronger ties between the participants of a group, and rejecting outsiders. The partisan confrontations are transferred to social and cultural confrontations. In the words of Mason (2018), "The social homogenization of the parties reduces the space for compromise and increases the importance of the simple victory of the party."

Intergroup emotion theory (an outgrowth of social identity theory) has found that group members which strongly identify with the group react with stronger emotions, particularly anger and excitement, to group threats. (Mackie , Devos and Smith 2000, cited in Mason 2018)

If one group is perceived as strong in comparison to the other group, the response is more likely to be anger. While, if the group considers itself weak, anxiety is the predominant feeling on the part of this group. Therefore, we see that emotions cloud rational action, meaning that the exchange between groups cannot take place, mainly because the groups are radicalizing, exaggerating their positions, and approaching political fanaticism.

In the context that we are discussing political debates, hate speech is based on political fanaticism. The problem when addressing hate speech, not only in contexts of political debate, but linked to issues of racism, xenophobia, white supremacy, and other issues, is its definition, since there is no accepted international definition, according to the UNESCO report (2021). It involves overlaps with issues of discrimination, incitement to discrimination, hostility and/or violence. In addition, a constant search for balance with the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

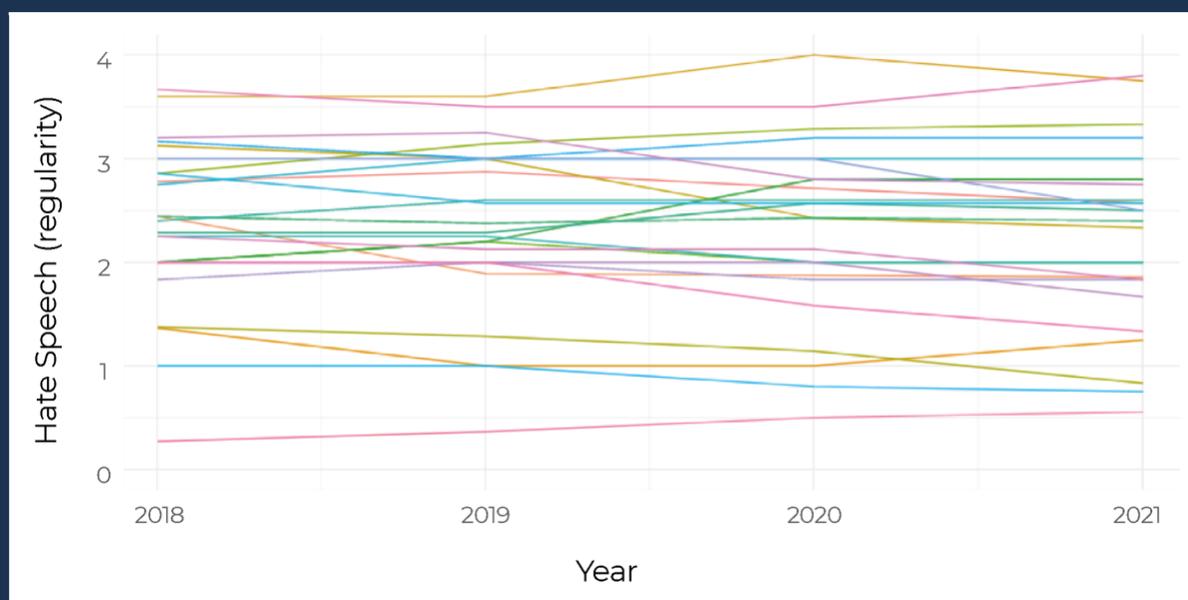
This brings up the question of who should moderate these expressions. Within social networks, hate speech is controlled by the delegation to this task to the same platforms that support the content and communication. Which also brings about other debates, such as the discretion of censorship, since it is a private company that decides what can or cannot be published, and therefore it can also be understood as a reduction in the user's freedom of expression. Many claim that only the state, in its judiciary, has the competence to carry out such categorizations. But it is a vicious circle, as it is the State in several countries which demands that platforms must

remove from their own spaces, messages and/or publications that can be understood as hate speech in stipulated times: 24 hours, 48 hours etc. under penalty of fines. This has also triggered platforms to automate the detection and block content not linked to hate speech, but when in doubt -of a classification that is vague in itself- it is better to carry out the cancellation of an action rather than face the pecuniary penalty.

The debate around Twitter, the platform for political debate *par excellence*, and the one that is generally considered the most open because, unlike other platforms such as Facebook, the messages are open to the public for reading, as well as access to network information in general, has not been any less. Despite the great opening, Twitter decided to permanently suspend the accounts of people who post messages that could incite violence, antisemitic messages, etc. This makes clear the complexity, of measuring hate speech on social networks, as well as, how to act accordingly.

The Digital Society Project proposes a measurement of hate speech in partisan political environments, considering the value 0 (zero) as the very frequent use of hate speech within partisan political speeches and the value 4 (four) as if it is never or almost never used by political parties.

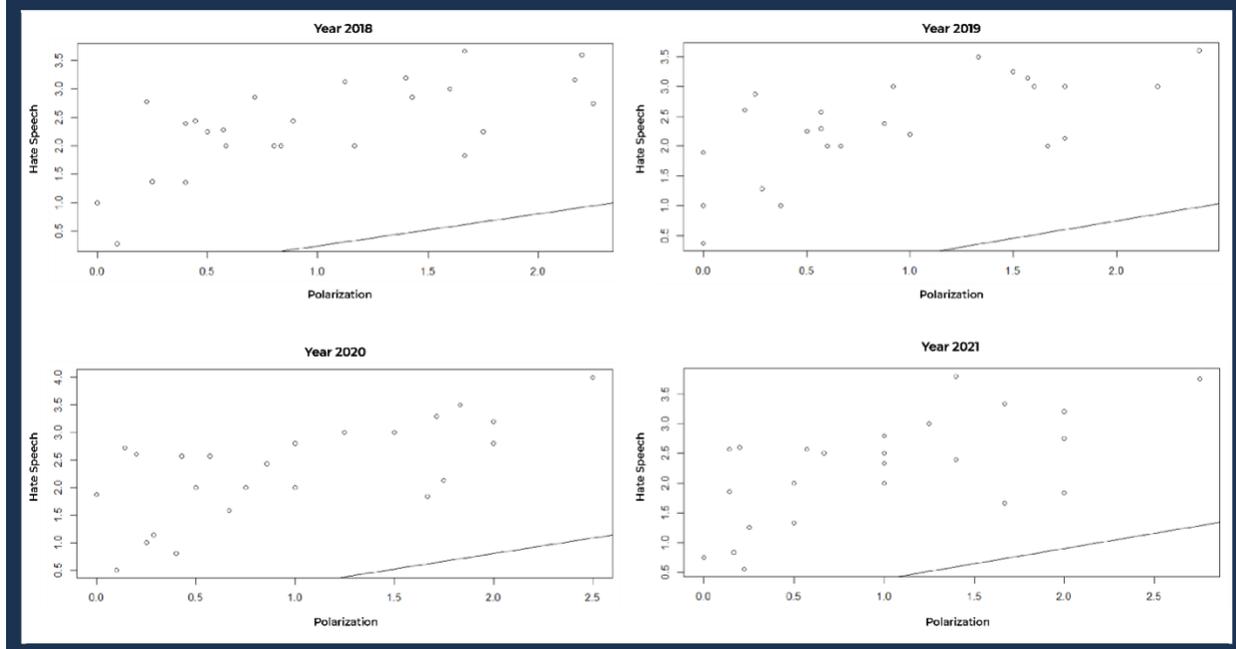
Figure 23: Hate speech in selected countries of the American continent



Source: Digital Society Project, Varieties of Democracy

We observe that there are few countries in the region that have a radicalized position in discursive terms. Most of the countries find that political parties use hate speech in their arguments sometimes (value = 2) or infrequently (value = 3). These values, we must highlight, are considered in relation to the behavior of political parties, which would also cause a radicalization, if the same discourse were present frequently.

Figure 24: Correlations between polarization and hate speech in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021



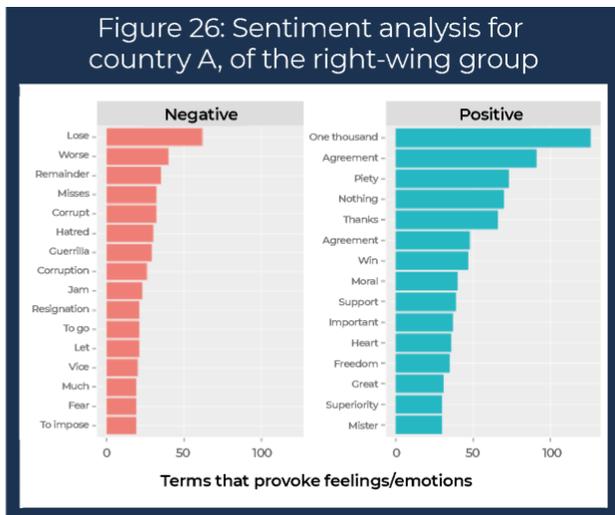
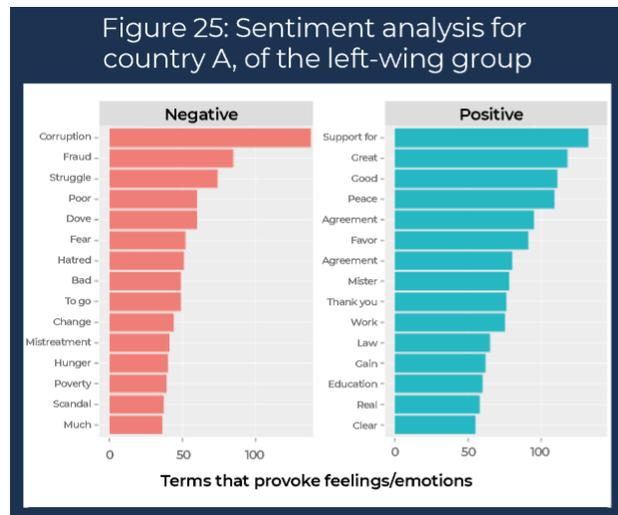
Source: Digital Society Project, Varieties of Democracy

We observe clearly, that at the level of political parties, there is no association between the variables of polarization and hate speech, for any year. Therefore, the polarization shown in the values for countries, would not be linked to partisan political discourses.

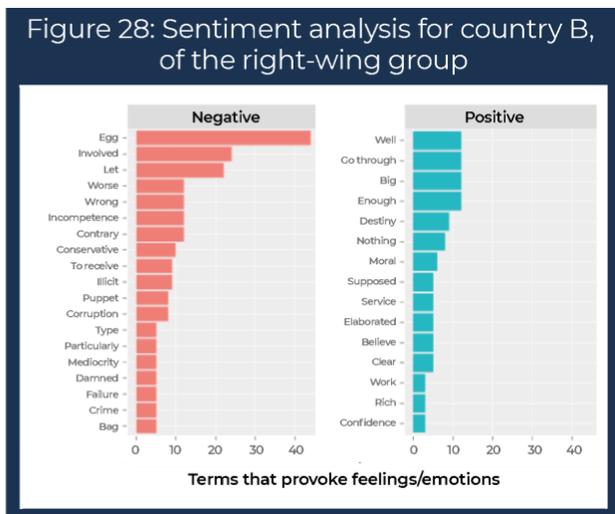
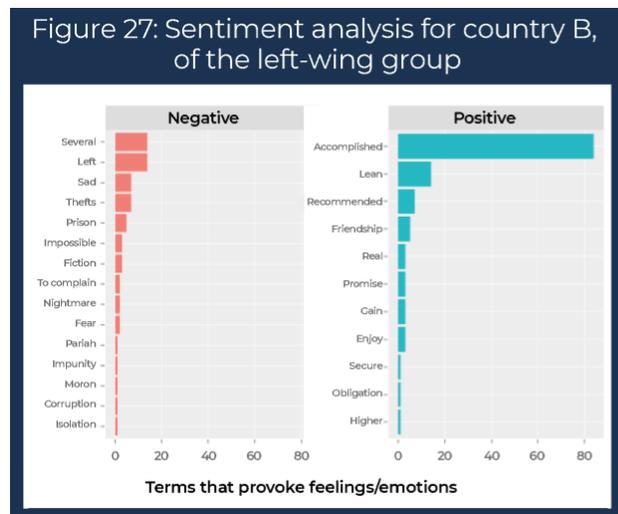
However, the dynamics of social networks present a different scenario. The possibility of categorizing the contents of the communication of each identity group, allows us to clearly observe if the circulating messages carry the possibility for conflict. Content monitoring and analysis is the technique used by platforms to detect hate speech.

Next, as an example, we present two countries: A and B. In country A (Figures 25 and 26) we observe that the accounts associated with the left carry a greater negative tone in the communication, than the one presented by the right, during the same period

of analysis. In the country B (Figures 27 and 28), we observe that the same action is carried out from the accounts associated with the right. The asymmetric existence towards a negative position constitutes communication that incites conflict in the social network and, indeed, does contribute to social polarization. However, that said action is not the property of a particular identity group, but can alternate between ideological groups, as well as vary over time.



Source Graphs 25 and 26: Twitter, July 3 to 10, 2022. Elaborated by the Observatory



Source Figures 27 and 28: Twitter, July 3 to 10, 2022. Elaborated by the Observatory

3.1.6. Effects on governance

Social polarization taken to the extreme breaks communication channels, both between parties and between citizens. The impact of polarization translates at the partisan political level into the paralysis of government management, due to the lack of consensus to carry out public policies for the benefit of the population. Irreconcilable positions make it difficult to reach agreements.

Extreme polarization in civic terms threatens social peace, since it could go from using people identified with extreme positions in social networks, to an identity recognition that materializes discontent, mainly in the form of social conflicts, not only against the circle of the political opponent, but also towards any identity group that is thought to be aligned with the political group of reference. Today, social uprisings with violent actions, have moved from the attack on institutional symbols, to attacks on other forms of representation.

According to political scientists, cutting across divides is the most effective way to reduce political polarization. The average voter, not fully co-opted by a political party and who is willing to change their support and/or vote, is important for democracy. According to Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954) they contribute to making the political system less rigid and able to adapt to changes in domestic or international conditions. These voters are the natural regulators of political polarization.

The drawback with the average voter or the non-polarized citizen is that they have very low participation in social networks, and therefore their level of influence, in this case as a deactivating agent of the polarizing conflict, is insignificant.

3.2. Viral democracy, social networks, misinformation and fake news

In the 1960s, Stanley Milgram conducted an experiment that is remembered as the "six degrees of separation." The experiment demonstrated how connected people are in the world. He delivered to hundreds of people, living in Nebraska, a letter addressed to a businessman in Boston. The goal was simple, the people from Nebraska were to send the letter to someone they knew directly, and who they thought knew the man

from Boston directly or indirectly. Finally, the number of times each letter was passed to its destination was averaged as six times, pointing to the concept of a small world, in which we are six steps away from anyone in the world.

Given some criticism of the Milgram experiment, such as it was conducted in a skewed geographic setting and with homogeneous cultural representation, Duncan Watts, along with Peter Dodds and Roby Muhamad replicated the experiment in 2002 on a global scale. Using emails, they increased the scale of the experiment, starting with more than 90,000 subjects who had to contact eighteen targets in thirteen countries, which were quite dissimilar, such as an archivist in Estonia, a Norwegian veterinarian, etc. The destinations were randomly assigned. And again, confirming Milgram's 1960s experiment, the average was six steps.

Closer to our time, in 2016, the Facebook company repeated the Milgram experiment, within its own platform. Using his own database of 1.6 billion users, it was calculated that on average each account was separated from the others by 3.57 steps, or degrees of connection. Considering that the experiment was carried out within the social network itself, and that not everyone at that time had a Facebook account, the result confirms how interconnected we are globally.

Although the range of people is 3.57 or 6 degrees apart, according to studies by Christakis & Fowler (2011), the degree of influence is much lower, in what they refer to as the Rule of Three Degrees of Influence.

... [in] the Rule of Three Degrees of Influence. Everything we do or say tends to spread through our network, impacting our friends (one degree), friends of our friends (two degrees), and even friends of friends, of our friends (three degrees). Our influence gradually dissipates and ceases to have a perceptible effect on people beyond the social border that is found in the three degrees of separation. Similarly, we are influenced by friends within the three degrees, but generally not by those beyond. The rule of three degrees applies to a wide range of attitudes, feelings, and behaviors, and it applies to the propagation of phenomena as diverse as political views, weight gain, and happiness. (Christakis & Fowler, 2011)

Influence is limited by the intrinsic decay of the information itself. A message deteriorates as it is transmitted, even deforms. Therefore, its fidelity fails to exceed a few degrees of connection. To this we must add the constant changes in the links, the paths through which our influence flows which occur in an unstable network, friends fight, people die, people move, new people enter our lives, etc. Finally, there is an explanation linked to evolutionary biology; our hominid past is marked by the formation of small groups. We have not lived in large groups long enough for our evolution to change in favor of those people who have connections beyond the borders of three degrees.

...while the observation that there are six degrees of separation between two people applies to how connected we are, the observation that there are three degrees of influence applies to how contagious we are. These properties, connection, and contagion, are the structure and function of social networks. They are the anatomy and physiology of the human super-organism. (Christakis & Fowler, 2011)

3.2.1. Understanding Social Networks

To understand how important social networks are in our time and how they work, mediated by technology, we will first talk about Social Networks, to conceptually understand how they are formed and behave, and then we will talk about their impact on social media and how they affect democracy.

In English, the consideration of the term social network is differentiated, unlike in Spanish, Social Network is used to refer to Social Networks made up of people regardless of their support base, and SocialMedia is the term used to refer to the Social Networks of the Internet platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, etc.

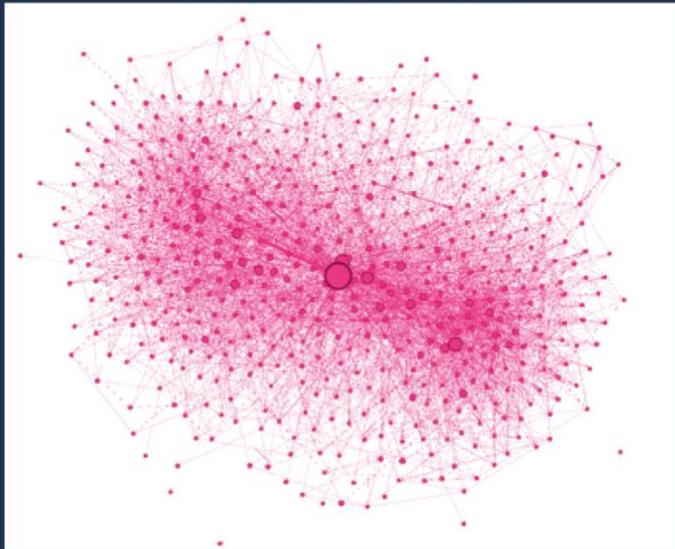
When we talk about a group of people, the term group is defined by an attribute of the people that compose it. For example, women, political supporters of a party x, lawyers, supporters of a sports club, etc. Therefore, a group of people is a collection of individuals who can be categorized by a common attribute. A Social Network on the

other hand, is defined by its connections. The individuals that compose it have relations between them, they are linked in some way.

“...a social network is an organized group of people that consists of two types of elements: human beings and the connections between them. (...) the organization of social networks is natural not usually imposed. Real, everyday social networks evolve organically from each person's natural tendency to seek and make many or few friends, to have large or small families, to work in pleasant or anonymous places. (Christakis & Fowler, 2011)

A group is defined by an attribute. Suppose people go to watch a football game, they wear the same jersey, cheer for the same team, even sit next to each other in the stands, but once the game is over each party goes to their house. They never related to each other, either before, during, or after the game. A Social Network, on the other hand, could be found at that same event, with or without the same shirts, even without being supporters of the same team, for example a couple of friends who promised to accompany one another to see the final of their favorite team. These friends were connected since before the event. They are defined by their relationships, not by their attributes. They are a Social Network, a small one, but one with direct connections.

Figure 29: Visualization of a Social Network by degrees centrality. In the center is the most connected node



The visual designs of social networks, in general, focus on showing those individuals who are most connected. The visualization algorithms show those with the most connection at the center and the least connected at the periphery. This allows us to measure the degree of centrality, counting the quantity/number of existing connections to each node.

Although the network does not have up and down, or left or right, this action makes it possible to understand the position of an individual in the Network, more central or more external to it

Source: Twitter. Elaborated by the Observatory

The different individuals, which we will now call nodes, represented by circles, which are connected to each other, and the connection, which is represented by a line which we will call an edge, constitute the essential elements of a Network. The edges may or may not have direction, which is the way the connection flows. For example, if the connections were made by who initiates and who receives a telephone call, we could see the direction of the calls through an arrow on the edge and, with it, the flow of information. On the other hand, if the edges are bidirectional, suppose that a friendship bond is represented, there is no directionality to follow, since it flows in both directions.

When some nodes are strongly connected, which means there are many edges between them, we can define them as a community. Within a network there can be several communities, since a group of nodes can be more connected than another or other groups in the same network.

In addition to the elements: nodes and edges, social networks have two fundamental aspects, one is the connection, who is connected to whom. Analyzing the connections

is complicated, since they can be fleeting or long-lasting, weak or strong, and the connection defines the links and, therefore, the network topology.

The other fundamental aspect is contagion, which refers to what can flow through the edges of the network. It can be information, germs, money, violence, among other issues. But each of these elements that flow through the network are governed by their own rules.

Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler (2009) compiled what they learned about how social networks work and condensed their understanding into five main rules.

Rule no. 1: We form our network based on homophily, the conscious or unconscious tendency to associate with people who resemble us. We tend to look for those people who share our interests, stories, and dreams. In addition, the structure will be mediated by decisions. First, with how many people we are connected with. Second, we influence depending on how densely interconnected our friends and family are. Third, we control how central we are to the social network. Obviously, these decisions are not unilateral since they enter into cooperation or conflict with similar decisions made by other members of the network.

Rule no. 2: Our network also shapes us. Our relative position in the network also affects us. A person who has no friends has a very different life than one who has many.

Rule no. 3: Our friends affect us. What actually flows through the network connections is crucial. A fundamental determinant of flow is the tendency of human beings to influence and copy one another. Each one of these edges offers opportunities to influence and be influenced. Students with studious roommates become more studious. And this simple tendency of one person to influence another has tremendous consequences when we look beyond our immediate connections.

Rule no. 4: Friends of our friends affect us. It turns out that people don't just copy their friends. They also copy the friends of their friends and the friends of the friends of their friends. Our friends and family can influence us to do things, like gain weight or go to the polls. But your friends and family can also influence us.

Rule no. 5: The network has a life of its own. Social networks may have properties and functions that are not controlled or perceived by the people who form them. These properties can only be understood by studying the whole group and its structure, not by studying isolated individuals.

3.2.2. How are ideas spread on a Social Network?

In social networks and social media, it is commonly believed that diffusion occurs in relation to the rule of three degrees of influence. That is to say that we influence people close to us, these people influence others and these latter ones influence yet others. That said, influence would be mediated by how strong the bonds are that bind the relationships; but strong bonds are with the group that one is a part of. Therefore, the influence is not linear, but seems to double back on itself, which reinforces internal communication, but does not facilitate going outside the group.

Mark Granovetter (1973) from Stanford University, recognized the importance of weak links, which had previously been discarded in terms of disseminating information.

Granovetter argued that these weaker connections often act as bridges from one group to another and therefore play a critical role. Strong ties can unite individuals in groups, but weak ties unite groups to the larger society and are crucial for the dissemination of information. (Christakis & Fowler , 2011)

The idea behind using and trusting weak links is that, within our communities, we have more or less the same information as the rest of our close connections. Therefore, the search for new information must take place outside our core group.

This reconverts the centrality of the network, where the nodes that function as bridges, despite their low degree of centrality (number of connections) become highly relevant due to their position in the dissemination of information between groups or for access to new information.

3.2.3. Politics and social media

The conclusion of the studies of the 1940s by Paul Lazarsfeld and Bernard Berelson on political behavior at the time of voting is well known, “the media do not reach the masses directly, but through a small group of people (leaders of opinion), who filter and reinterpret the messages for those close to them. Politicians tend to use the same strategy in the electoral campaign, connect with local referents, so that they influence their relatives to vote.” In other words, both the media and politicians are based on the idea of approaching the person with the highest degree of network centrality so that he or she can mediate on their behalf with their closest contacts.

If imitation is taking place, then we should see a correlation in behavior between two people who are socially connected. In fact, that's exactly what we see when it comes to voter turnout. “(...). But does this influence extend beyond that to the rest of the network? It turns out that we see a correlation between people who are directly connected, and also between people who are indirectly connected through a mutual friend. In other words, if he/she votes, their friends of friends are more likely to vote too.” (Christakis & Fowler, 2011).

So, electoral behavior is influenced by the formation of like-minded groups, as we have seen in the behavior of social networks. Therefore, it can be easily identified, monitored, and even promoted.

In Figure 30, we can see the Social Network that was formed around a presidential electoral process, in a country in the region. The nodes represent the degree of centrality (number of connections) for each account, therefore, a larger node means more connections and with it, greater popularity, since it is better known than smaller nodes. We also observed, by colors, the existing communities in the networks, which were classified using a modularity algorithm. We clearly observe two poles, on the one hand, in pink is the community linked to a certain political party, on the other pole several communities coexist. The green, light blue, and orange communities represent different political parties, but ideologically they have more similarities than the pink party that is in the opposite position in the Network. It is observed that the

network is extremely dense (this refers to the number of connections). It is so dense within each community that the number of links overlap and seem to form a large mass. It is here that information of members is primarily exchanged among themselves; they reinforce their views with news that validates them, they criticize the opposition, and they feel part of a community. This dynamic is repeated within each of community.

Figure 30: Social network in the context of primary elections, expressed by degree centrality and by the Yifan Hu algorithm

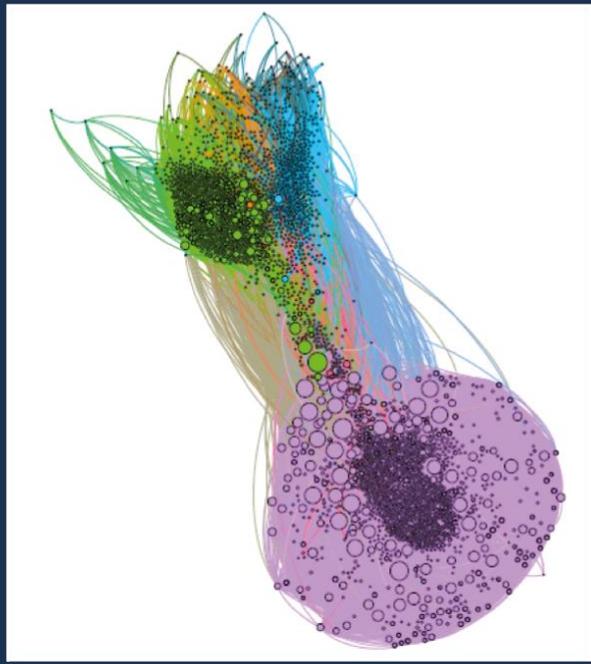
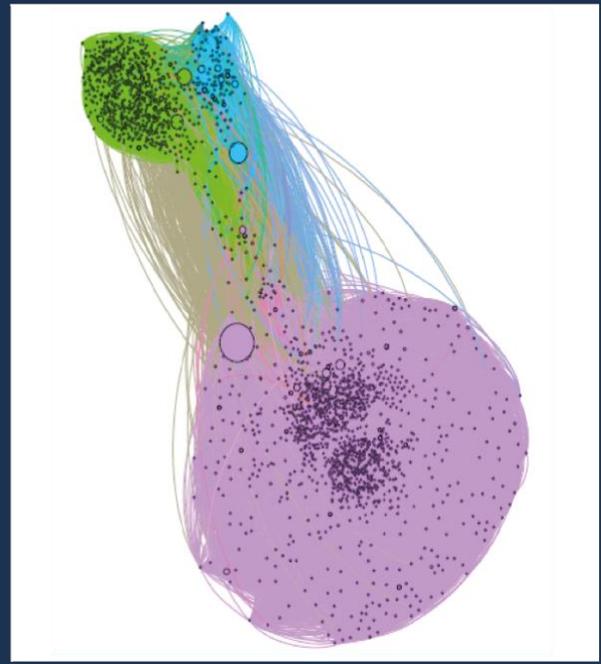


Figure 31: Social network in the context of the second electoral round, expressed by betweenness and by the Yifan Hu algorithm



October 1 and 8, 2018. Elaborated by the Observatory

In Figure 31, we observe the same Social Network, but we have changed the calculation of centrality for one of betweenness, the algorithm calculates the unweighted shortest paths between all pairs of nodes in the figure. That is, it identifies the shortest paths, without considering the importance of the nodes. It does not matter if in order to go from one end of the Network to the other, we go through the node that we previously considered most important due to its connections, or we go

through a node that has almost no links, what is really important is to identify the shortest paths, that is the one which will be the fastest to transmit information.

The betweenness degree allows us to detect the nodes that are in a privileged position with respect to the flow of information in the network, therefore, they become bridges between communities. We clearly see that nodes with a high degree of centrality decrease in size, because their importance was due to their position within each community. On the other hand, other nodes in a much smaller number, increase their importance, becoming bridges between communities. These nodes are represented in the graphic in a larger size. In the case that we exemplify, the relevance node in Figure 31 belongs to the account of an artist who, although he is part of the community of a particular party, facilitates the flow of information between both poles. His position is very important in the Network, which does not mean that the person himself is aware of his relevance.

3.2.4. Echo Chambers and Fake News

If the formation of groups is driven by like-minded people, it will also determine the selection of information that we consume. In the 1960s, the Echo Chamber was a concept developed to describe the relationship between repeated exposure to biased information and the relationship with subsequent ideological voting.

But, as reality is stranger than fiction, it was soon understood that echo chambers already existed in real life, and that supporters of one political color or another were already voluntarily exposing themselves to biased information. It is a concept known as selective attention (Del Vicario et. Al, 2016; Himelboim, Smith & Shneiderman, 2013), where users only pay attention to content that is consistent with their own worldview.

...social scientists also began to uncover substantial evidence of social media echo chambers. A 2015 study by data scientists at Facebook estimated that only a quarter of the content Republicans post on Facebook is ever seen by Democrats, and vice versa. A Twitter study came to similar conclusions. More than three quarters of the people who retweet or share a message, the study found, belong to the same party as the author of the message. These findings

were especially troubling, as social media was fast becoming one of the most popular ways for Americans to get their news. Between 2016 and 2018, the number of people who received news from social media exceeded those who learned about current events from print newspapers. By 2018, social media had become the most popular news source among 18–29-year-olds.” (Bail; 2021:5)

Therefore, the main problem is that people seek to consume information that reinforces their own points of view. And the networks, due to their exposure algorithms and the ease of organizing information, have amplified the effect of myopia, as perspective is lost due to low exposure to contrary ideas. This type of action has also increased polarization in social networks.

The disorder of information, as highlighted by UNESCO (2018), when approaching the problem between the veracity of journalistic information and how it circulates on social networks, tries to describe with greater specificity the different events which we face daily in social networks.

When we talk about fake news, we combine two previous notions, on the one hand, misinformation, *which refers* specifically to the fact that the information being referred to is simply wrong, for example, it is reported that some thieves from a jewelry store escaped in a white car; but the car is later verified as red and not white. At this point, there is no animosity regarding the veracity of the news, it is only an error, since the person transmitting it believes that it is true.

On the other hand, the concept of disinformation presents us with a person who knows that said information is false, so he deliberately promotes a lie. Returning to the same example, if an accomplice of the perpetrators of the robbery communicates that he saw the thieves leave in a white car -when this fact is not true-, and spreads the information, his intention is to deliberately deceive people and confuse others - the authorities. The combination of both constitutes false news.

There is also a third category, which refers to malicious information, which is real information that is disseminated with the aim of harming a person or institution. For

example, the leaking of information about the private life of a candidate, with the aim of damaging his reputation.

The main problem is that we rarely really know what is true and what is false. There is no continuous process of verifying the news, just an alignment with pre-existing beliefs. Calvo and Aruguete (2020), state that our certainties are mediated by actors, communities, and institutions in which we trust. If we do not have direct access to the event, to the source, to the empirical evidence, we simply depend on those who transmit that message to us.

But, as we have already seen, our reference groups can differ profoundly, due to the effect of polarization. Therefore, if there is no consensus among the groups about the information in circulation, it could also be classified as *fake news* from one group to another. The rupture of consensus favors its propagation, according to Calvo and Aruguete (2020), the rupture of the cognitive consensus allows the acceptance of information based on beliefs and not evidence, due to motivated reasoning. The breakdown of the political consensus allows the issuance of false statements to harm the opponent. And, the breakdown of the citizen consensus classifies that the beliefs and evidence are separated by communities, with the aim of expelling any information that does not coincide with the community itself.

The *fake news* are not informative frames intended to convince readers, nor are they the representation of a cognitive dissonance to which we avoid submitting. They seek to look the opponent in the face and spit out information that outrages, offends, and demeans him. It doesn't matter if they're *fake news* and are debunked a few minutes, hours, or days later. In fact, its intention is not to last, but to hurt. They do not make up an information strategy, but an act of *bullying* intended to activate, mobilize, and confront. (Calvo & Aruguete , 2020).

3.2.5. Dissemination of fake news

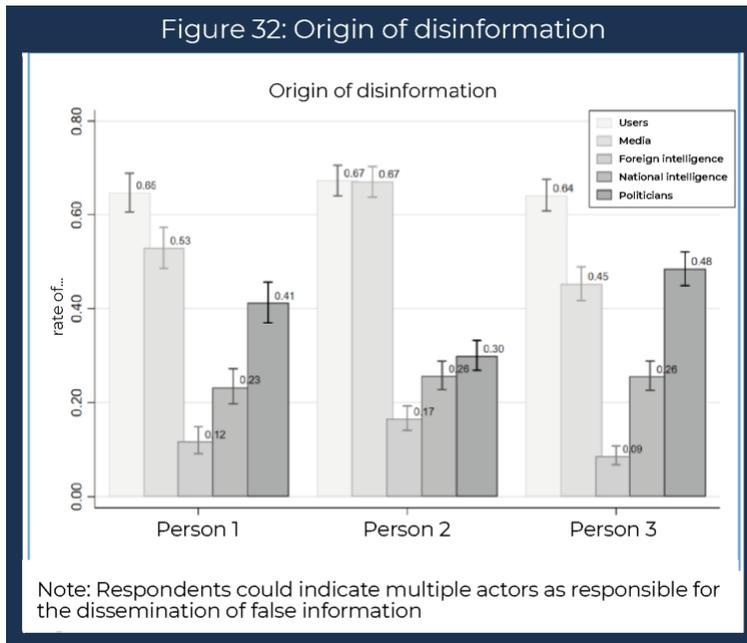
Fake news tends to spread through the internet, to go viral, not only when the message is aligned with the reader, whose motivated reasoning finds a cognitive

congruence and, therefore, shares it as validation. But also, because it can appeal to an affective relationship, the news connects us on an emotional level. This news makes us happy, angry, disgusted. If it arouses a feeling, is also key to evaluating whether it deserves and/or should be shared. It is, therefore, a validation of the news itself, but above all of what it expresses.

Calvo and Aruguete (2020) carried out authoritative framing experiments, which is a survey that presents similar information, but that is issued by different media or political authorities. An example of this experiment can be expressed as follows: "This year, corruption has reached unprecedented levels." If it is attributed to a source opposed to the government, and the person reading it is also an opponent of the government, they would understand the message as true, since it would be aligned with their beliefs and they would probably share it, helping it spread. Meanwhile, if the message is read by a person related to the current government, they could understand the message as a political operation, they would classify it as false, and there is very little chance that they would share it.

In another study, the *Interdisciplinary Laboratory of Computational Social Sciences* of the University of Maryland, observed that the positive reinforcements granted by fact checking organizations increased the perception of validity and the rate of activity, which translated into sharing said information. These organizations, whose mission is to provide corrections to fake news circulating on social media, are faced with a dilemma. When the news was verified as true or positively worded, the reader perceived it as a "cognitive reward" and reinforced their particular belief in the organization. But, when the news circulating on the networks was corrected, this act could also confuse the reader, who received the correction as a shock to their beliefs, a "cognitive damage". The correction of the news, on the contrary, diminished the belief in the veracity of the organization and, said correction was not shared on the network. According to Calvo & Aruguete (2020), the corrections decreased the levels of attention and propagation of their publications. Therefore, the corrections fail to arouse the interest of the reader and are poorly shared on the networks.

On the other hand, fake news has a higher propagation rate, because they do not clash with the mental scheme that we form of it, the one who shares them can do it consciously, knowing that they are spreading false news or, failing that, it is aligned with their beliefs and therefore it is perceived as real.



Furthermore, the study found that two out of three respondents identified as the main perpetrators of *fake news*, other users, politicians, and media. Regardless of the respondent's ideology, they expressed that the best way to deal with the *fake news*, if they are identified, it is to eliminate them and not to correct them. Therefore, this reinforces the pressure on the platforms to manage the veracity of the information circulating.

Source: Calvo & Aruguete (2020).

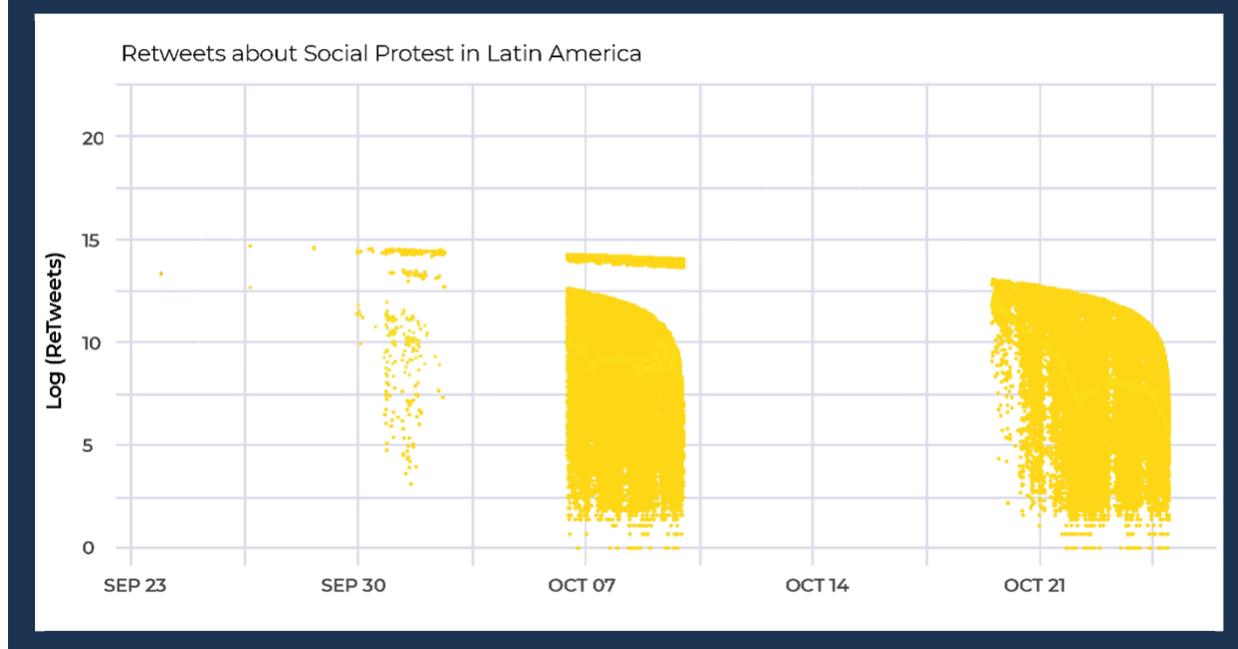
3.2.6. Social protests on social networks

Sandra González-Bailón (2017) talk about the concept of Collective Effervescence, originally raised by Durkheim (1912) where people quickly converge towards peaks of activity.

When a time series helps to predict another time series, it means that there is a transfer of information from the first geographic region to the second, that means that, the second region is following the first. (González-Bailón; 2017: 62).

At the end of 2019, Latin America experienced an activation of social protests that crossed the continent, and the way social networks respond to them are analyzed in the following figure.

Figure 33: Evolution of Tweets during social protests in Latin America



Source: Twitter. Elaborated by the Observatory

Data set from 09/30 to 10/03, from 10/06 to 10/10 and, from 10/19 to 25, 2019

In Figure 33 we can see how the network is activated on different dates. Each date coincides with a registered social protest in a country in the region. Therefore, beginning on September 30 and extending for almost a week, a peak of activity is detected that gradually decreases. Subsequently, on October 6, a new peak of activity was detected, coinciding with a social protest in another country and, whose dynamics in the network are similar, a peak of activity that gradually decreased. Finally, in a third country, starting on October 19, there is another social protest that is registered, and where the dynamics of the network are verified, a peak in volume with a gradual decrease. In this sense, we observe the translation of the activity peak from one country to another, during the timeline.

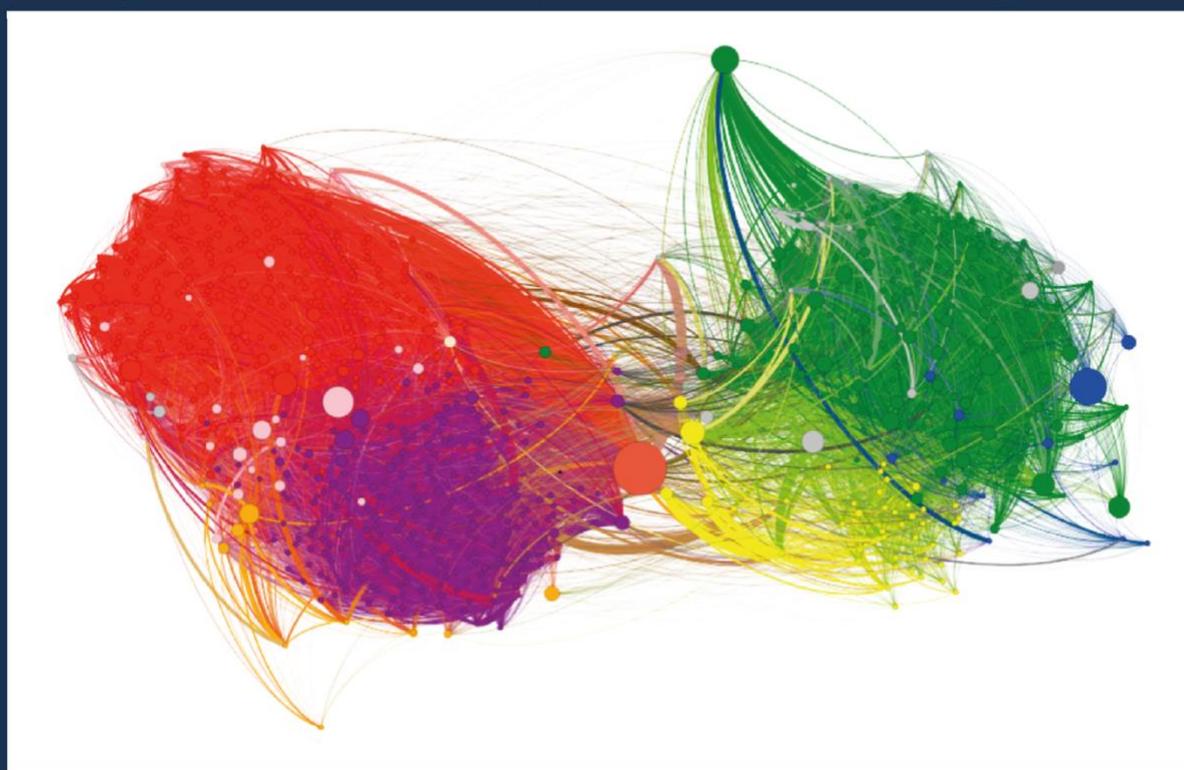
The events that we cite here have different origins, one is linked to political confrontations between the executive and the legislative powers, another linked to economic measures on public services, another to State subsidies in energy matters and, finally, another in the context of the presidential election. But, despite their differences, the dynamics they have in social networks are almost identical, the

volumes of participation skyrocket at the beginning of the event and then decrease over time, this is a pattern of behavior that is also associated with the actors that make up social networks. In the case of the region, the actors transcend their national spaces and become involved in international discussions, which contributes both to the "collective effervescence" and to the geographical contagion of the social protest mentioned by González-Bailón (2017).

3.2.7. Internationalization of conflicts and the role of the media

We observe, in this time series that goes from September 30 to October 25, 2019, that the protests share actors, which allows them to build a social network that includes the mentioned events.

Figure 34: Social Network of protests in Latin America, period between September 30 and October 25, 2019. Yifan Hu visualization algorithm



Source: Twitter. Elaborated by the Observatory.

The process of internationalization of politics is remarkable, where the domestic agenda transcends borders, summoning the interest of citizens from other territories. Even more so is the formation of ideological blocks between territories, therefore, if we maintain the left-right ideological arc as a general classifier, we will obtain consistent alignments between sectors of the countries.

In Figure 34 we can observe the constitution of ideological communities from different countries that are aligned on either side of the proposed ideological dimension. The ideological polarization is regional, as is the presence of national actors with international projection. We also clearly observe the presence of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

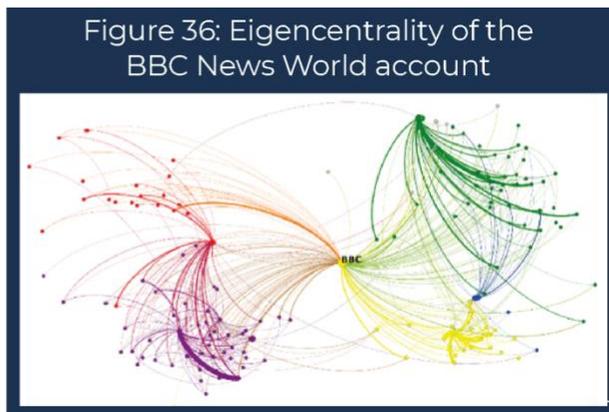
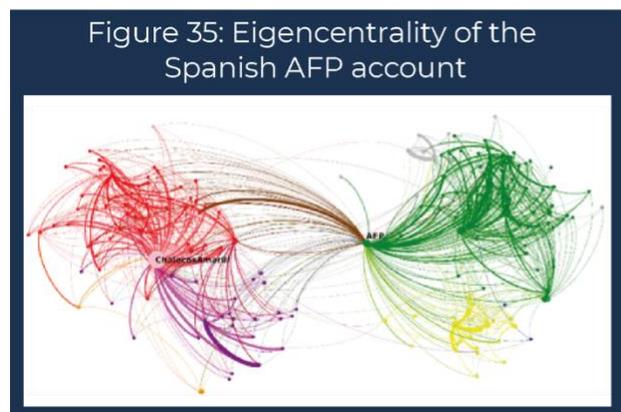
In the Latin American environment, the left-right dimension does not necessarily refer to ideological ideals, such as Socialism vs. Liberalism, but to opposing positions with a certain degree of alignment with the ideas previously described.

The problem arises from the fact that the distances between the political referents of these spaces or dimensions are increasing, and therefore a fracture is caused in the lines of dialogue and joint cooperation.

Structurally, Figure 34 allows us to see two large conglomerates of accounts. First, we must observe, in each conglomerate, the reference accounts that are towards the center of them since they represent important accounts for said blocks. On the other hand, the accounts that are towards the extremes make communication difficult since they represent extreme positions. Meanwhile, if the accounts approaching the opposite block, have links, they allow communication between them. We identify the communication media, which, more than allowing the transfer of communication, are the original sources of it, which is consumed to different degrees by the proposed blocks.

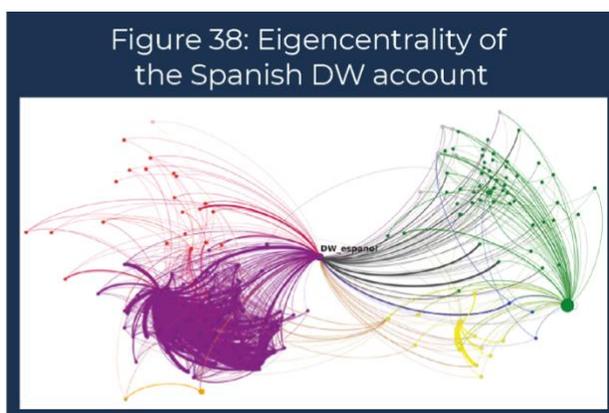
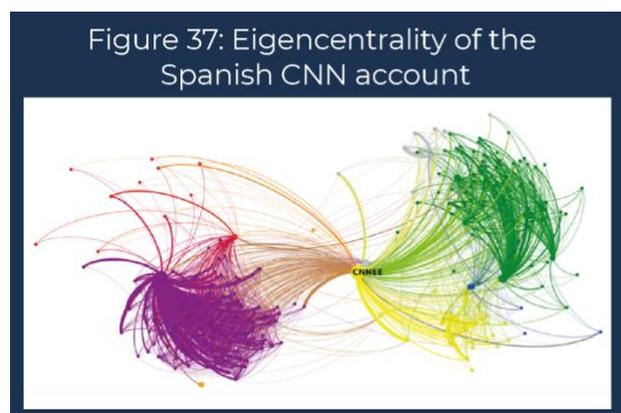
In this configuration, the media are a formative part. They are great players within the Network, both because of their diffusion power and the degree of centrality they obtain by becoming a source of information for the rest of the nodes. The media does not escape the problem of polarization, since the news, takes a slide of reality, and the

line of reasoning that they develop make them prone to being consumed more by one quadrant or the other. Figure 35 through 38 are a breakdown of the Eigencentality network of the mainstream media that exist in Figure 34, and therefore the colors of the communities have been retained for ease of reading.



Source: Twitter. Elaborated by the Observatory

We observe that the different news agencies have influence in different areas of the Internet. In Figure 35, we see that the French agency AFP is consumed mainly by the right quadrant. But it presents a relevant presence in the community of the left. On the other hand, the English medium BBC, in Figure 36, has a low penetration of the entire Internet; although its reputation and perception of objectivity allow it to be consumed by all the Internet communities.



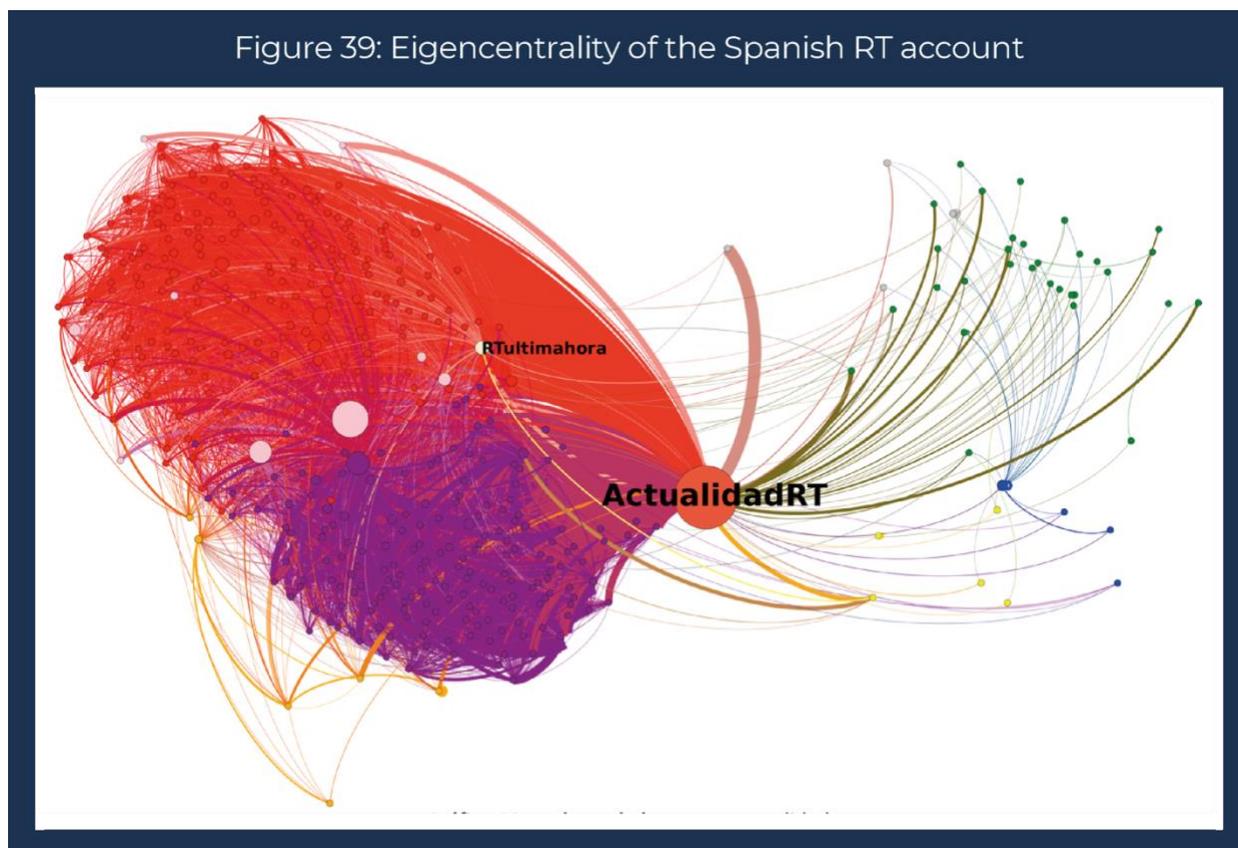
Source: Twitter. Elaborated by the Observatory

Source: Twitter. Elaborated by the Observatory

CNN in Spanish, in Figure 37, is the medium that best distributes its information on the Internet, with the exception of the upper left quadrant. Finally, the German DW,

Figure 38, achieves an interesting penetration in the lower-left quadrant community, which coincides with its presence in said territory.

Figure 39: Eigencentality of the Spanish RT account



Source: Twitter. Elaborated by the Observatory

A special case is the account of *Russia Today* (RT) in Spanish, Figure 39. It is presented as the largest source of information during the Social Protests. Mainly its high degree of centrality is observed since it is a source of mass consumption of the left quadrant. Within the left quadrant, there are multiple small local media accounts, most of them informal. But all those accounts constitute a synergistic ecosystem of information on a large scale.

Multiple small media, reproducing the same information have a more direct reach than most other accounts in the same sector; and in this way expanding its diffusion and has a more forcefully impact than a traditional media. As we had seen at the beginning, in the three-degree rule proposed by Christakis & Fowler (2011).

Russia Today is characterized by explanatory information with a clear political position. As indicated at the beginning, RT is not changing the thinking of its consumers, but strongly revalidating a stereotype that positions social movements and violent revolts as a valid form of expression and claim for social rights.

“Just as politicians make decisions about the issues on which they campaign taking into account the ideological preferences of voters, in the current digital scenario it is possible to know, based on the motivations that moves users to share information online, the optimal point between the decisions of users and the newsworthiness criteria of journalists and editors to maximize news consumption.” (Calvo & Aruguete , 2020)

3.2.8. Viral democracy and infodemic

As the Internet became more accessible, politics also made its way onto the *World Wide Web*. But it was not until 2008, that the full potential offered by online social networks was used.

This presentation of politics directly on social networks and the possibility of shortening the distance between candidates, politicians, and citizens, was understood as a new form of democracy. One even more accessible to the average citizen, along with the notion that with open government and open data, transparency, and trust in governments would increase.

But, as we have seen, polarization prevails in social networks. The dissemination of *fake news*, the selective consumption of media, which turns each participant into an enclosed spectator, since there is no notion of the real dimension of what happens and circulates on the network, focusing only on a reduced segment of it which coincides with their general beliefs. Later, the pandemic happened having a direct impact on the dynamics of the electoral processes, and also on the social norms that govern our daily lives.

“The 2020-2021 electoral cycle has developed in the midst of three viruses: COVID-19; that of instant, abundant and globalized information, where fake news and

disinformation prevail and, as a consequence, virulent and polarized campaigns. We live a kind of viral democracy.” (Guerrero Aguirre, 2021)

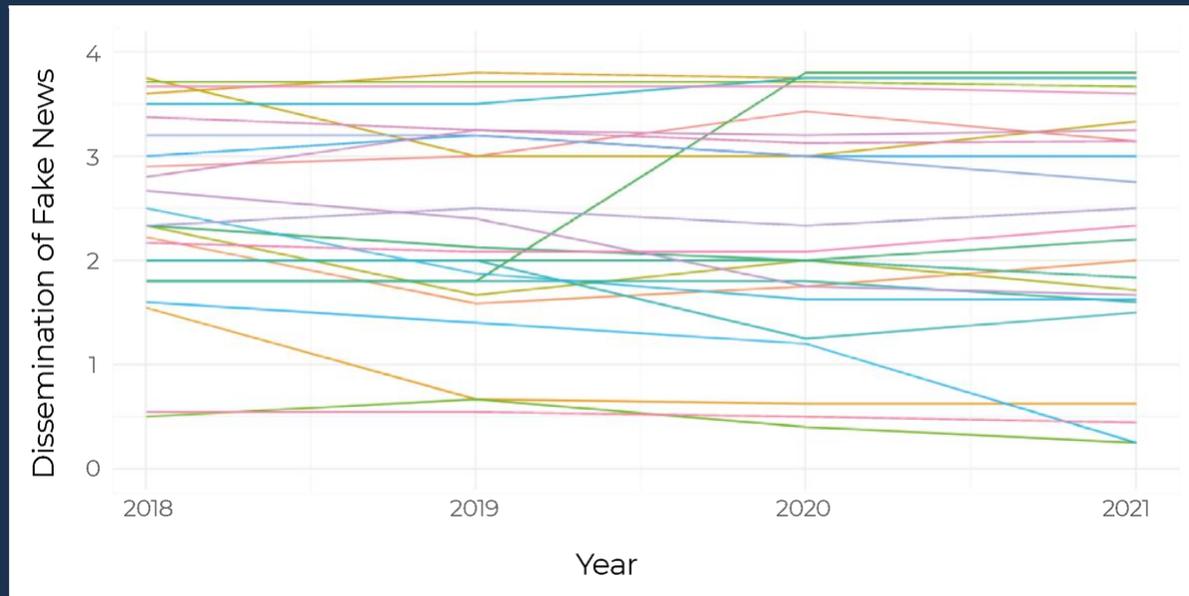
The idea of Viral Democracy goes hand in hand with the Infodemic, another recently coined concept, within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization (2020) understand infodemic as the excessive amount of information linked to a particular topic, which may or may not be correct, but which makes it difficult for people to find reliable sources.

When we combine both concepts, viral democracy and infodemic, we find that the networks have massified their production during the pandemic. All countries had to establish some type of movement restriction for their citizens, strict, intermittent, or intelligent quarantines and, therefore, new forms were sought, or existing forms of communication were exploited, with networks being the fastest growing. Our interactions became mostly digital, and governments also utilized them fully.

This led to greater production and greater consumption, and in an information frenzy (infodemic), where citizens focused on the public policies adopted by their governments, and multiple electoral processes were held.

Governments also have responsibilities regarding the health of Democracy and in ensuring that virality does not cause it detriment. In terms of relative location, there is a perception that fake news is disseminated in approximately half of the social media posts on particular topics in the region:

Figure 40: Dissemination of fake news from the Government



Source: Digital Society Project. *Varieties of Democracy*.

Therefore, democracy suffers, not only from processes inherent to social networks such as the growing polarization and the information situation due to the COVID-19 epidemic, but also from the increase in circulating fake news. Furthermore, if governments lose credibility in their own publications, official sources will lack the confidence required to contribute to social order.

Internet penetration has been growing permanently throughout the world, infrastructures have improved, as have technology and accessibility costs; even generating free access by States at all levels, local, subnational, and national. The Social networks have also evolved, the platforms have been changing, adding greater attractions for users. They have diversified, and they have specialized. The expansion of the offer has gone hand in hand with the incorporation of more people to them.

Although the beginnings are confusing and chaotic, little by little, users have begun to understand the logic of how networks work, creating subspaces and new dynamics. They have appropriated them and have incorporated them into their lives.

Our society is marked and mediated by the use of the internet and its different social media platforms.

Although there is no agreement on whether social networks, by themselves, can be understood as the expression of public opinion, it is considered that certain platforms allow measuring the political agenda. On this last point, we understand that the observation of networks allows us to understand the dynamics of the states, of the relevant actors in the politics of the different countries, as well as the traditional and alternative media and the people interested in it.

But, although we can understand how they work, and decode behavior patterns, networks provide a feature that allows the disclosure of information, its horizontality, all users have the same privileges and anonymity, users can choose not to reveal themselves to others, as well as create fake profiles or even impersonate others.

These conditions allow for viral information, where *fake news* has found a privileged place to develop. As we have seen, fake news is present in each one of the communities of a network. Fake news contributes to confirming cognitive biases and, therefore, is more attractive for dissemination. A person who manages to find information that confirms their thinking, whether it is true or not, tends to want to share it, and unknowingly contributes to the viral-like spread of fake news.

This information, as we have seen, damages democracy. It is a source of conflicts and contributes to the growth of extreme positions and, therefore, to polarization. Polarization erodes democracy because it cuts the channels of communication between divergent groups. Finally, leading to direct damage to democracy. The increase in the use of social networks without a correct direction, augurs for a deepening of dirty campaigns on the Internet.

States, as well as social media platforms, the media, and political parties, have a responsibility that does not diminish with social platforms. They must contribute to the dialogue between different positions, so that all voices are heard, and their messages are not distorted. The concept of viral democracy is relatively new, and it is negatively charged since it refers to the distribution of *fake news*. It is everyone's

responsibility to be positively associated. Viral democracy can change its concept towards a democracy that is promoted through social networks, that uses the characteristics of horizontality and accessibility, so that citizens enjoy a healthier democracy, with a better quality of life, with better representatives, and with better policies.

Chapter 4: Resilient democracies: lessons learned, democratic issues, and risks

Evaluating democracy is not a simple or homogeneous task; on the contrary, it is a complex and deep task that has multiple angles and dimensions.

As it is a polysemic concept, we must insist on which of its dimensions this assessment will focused on. The starting point for this is Article 3 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and its enumeration of the essential characteristics that a representative democracy must meet:

“...respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law, the holding of periodic, free, fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people, the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, and the separation of powers and independence of branches of government.” (IDC, article 3)

In the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, the nations of the world agreed that democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of peoples to determine their own political, economic, social, and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives. (UN, 1993).

Contemporary global and regional democracy is undergoing a dizzying and constant transformation, within a complex geopolitical scenario marked by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency, the war in Europe, and the increasingly preponderant role of social networks in the democratic field and public debate. All these elements interact and affect the lives of people, institutions, states and national and international organizations.

This report, under the title Democracy and Pandemic, emphasizes the impact of the triple crisis -health, social, and economic- caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Americas, and explores different aspects of democracies in the region, seeking an

assessment through the analysis of indicators that make it possible to set off alarms, draw attention, and make decisions in line with the preservation and strengthening of democracy in the Americas at a turbulent time in which new risks and challenges are emerging.

4.1 Lessons learned

Although each chapter presents conclusions, lessons learned in relation to the dimension that it addresses, some can be highlighted as a corollary of this report:

- a. The continuous celebration of periodic, free, fair elections based on universal suffrage is derived from the important inter-American democratic heritage. This is undoubtedly one of the most relevant aspects of our region, which is due to the fact that member states through their institutional electoral frameworks knew how to manage, and organize the holding of elections by adapting, transforming and innovating in the operation of electoral bodies in the face of the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- b. The complexity in the organization of the elections due to the pandemic, the need to structure new forms of electoral organization, the presence of highly contested and polarized electoral contexts; and the redefinition of the role of electoral bodies, have been the fundamental characteristics of the 2020-2022 electoral cycle.
- c. In this sense, during the 2020-2022 electoral cycle, the region overcame a first phase of cancellation and postponement of the electoral processes (March-September 2020), marked by the prevalence of health criteria aimed at achieving a balance between the rights to health and life with the exercise of political and electoral rights. In this first period, the suspension of political rights prevailed due to restriction and confinement measures imposed during the pandemic.

- d. Subsequently, from the last quarter of 2020 to the present (2022), there was a phase of coexistence with the virus and the organization of electoral processes under biosecurity protocols in each of its phases. Therefore, the role of electoral bodies in Latin America during the pandemic has prompted an important institutional redefinition for the organization of elections, incorporating automation, and remote processes in the different phases of the electoral processes.
- e. It is important to mention that the holding of elections during the COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped the erosion of democracy and the widening of pre-existing gaps in terms of human, civil, and political rights; as well as economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights; that continues to threaten the progress in the social and inclusive development agenda persist.
- f. The challenge for the region is that periodic, free, and fair elections based on universal suffrage guarantee absolute respect for the will of the people at the polls, contribute to orderly and peaceful transitions between governments, strengthen citizen confidence in their institutions, and promote citizen participation in elections and in matters of public interest, reflecting a greater commitment by citizens to democracy.
- g. Regarding the issues addressed during this period in the Organization of American States, a review of these highlights the fundamental role that each of its organs and mechanisms plays in the region: recalling the centrality of rights, setting off alerts about risks and threats, articulating a vision and shared action in defense of the regional values expressed in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. From the reforms that threaten judicial independence, through the crisis of migrants and refugees, to crises of legality or legitimacy in electoral processes, the OAS is established as the most relevant political forum in the Americas especially in times of crisis, and democratic deterioration which makes it more important than ever.

- h. For more than half of Latin Americans, there are insufficient guarantees of access to economic and social rights. According to the Latinobarómetro (2021), this is the strongest impact of the pandemic: the perception of loss of guarantees has the lowest score in the entire spectrum of economic and social rights. Because of the effects of the pandemic, the majority perceive inequality of opportunities, social insecurity, gender disparity, and lack of environmental protection.
- i. Another clear effect of the pandemic crisis in the social and development sphere is the strong setback generated between 2020 and 2022, in which 90 percent of the world's countries showed a decrease with respect to all the indicators that make up the Human Development Index (HDI), pulverizing the advances that humanity achieved in a five-year period in terms of improving people's living conditions. As pointed out by the UNDP-UN (2022): "For the first time in history, the global HDI value dropped, and the world regressed to the time immediately following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. Every year there are countries that experience drops in their respective HDI values." (p.13). It is worrying that this also marks a chronic and sustained downward trend in the HDI in the coming years, with no end in sight in this deterioration. Stopping this deterioration and overcoming it implies a demand for public policies in terms of investment, innovation, and the creation of security mechanisms for the population. This data is confirmed and is made worst for the Americas, which, in the words of ECLAC, has suffered a devastating and disproportionate effect in the context of this prolonged pandemic.
- j. The pandemic context has been a catalyst for virulence, political polarization, and misinformation, due to the deterioration of the quality of life of citizens, the growth of inequality gaps, limitations on the exercise of political-electoral, economic, social, and cultural rights, which has generated dissatisfaction and mistrust in the democratic system and its institutions. Consequently, the uncertainty and multidimensional insecurity caused by the pandemic have

become central elements in our societies, destabilizing the lives of people in the world, and hindering the possibilities of human development. The latter is cautioned by the UNDP (2022): “If uncertainty overshadows all aspects of human development, it undermines the ability to act. This can cause disempowerment.” (p.13).

- k. These and other impacts are evaluated in the work of the Observatory. Regarding the indices and indicators in this report, the most important lesson is the correlation that exists between these elements: human rights and freedoms; access and exercise of power subject to the rule of law; holding of periodic, free, fair elections, based on universal and secret suffrage; pluralist systems of political parties and organizations; and separation and independence of powers. When one of these elements is guaranteed, it is strengthened and perfected, it has a direct effect on the others. Therefore, no small advance or setback should be underestimated in any aspect of democratic life in the Americas.

4.2 Risks for regional democracy

At present, important risks loom over regional democracy; the emergence of authoritarian positions and autocratic regimes, virulence, political polarization, and misinformation; phenomena that have been accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic. All these aspects have had a direct impact on the deterioration of the quality of life of citizens, the growth of inequality gaps, limitations on the exercise of political-electoral rights, together with economic, social, and cultural rights, and has generated dissatisfaction and mistrust in the democratic system and its institutions.

The pandemic scenario has been fertile ground for the flourishing of extreme positions that question democracy, dangerously emerging authoritarian and populist positions and discourses within the region, which not only question the functioning of the basic institutions of a democratic society, but also threatening to mold them towards their interests, undermining and weakening the institutional framework

through continuous actions that collapse the rule of law and the validity of fundamental freedoms.

Clear evidence of this situation is the Latinobarómetro 2021 report, where it is observed that the decline in support for democracy which had been increasing in the last decade has stopped, reaching in 2018, (the previous edition), the lowest records in the last five years. Democracy, in that period, did not seem to pay the bill for the pandemic. Likewise, while the pandemic has not produced abrupt changes in the positioning of countries regarding support for democracy; there are moderate levels of support for democracy in comparison to those reached in the 1990s, which continues to be interpreted as certain disillusionment and indifference.

Support for democracy in the region decreased between 2010 and 2018, going from 63% at the beginning of the decade to 48% in 2018. In 2020, the year of the pandemic, support for democracy was 49%.

13% support authoritarianism and 27% are indifferent to the type of government that is functioning.

Likewise, The Economist's Democracy Index 2021 shows a very low score for the region in terms of the political culture of citizens and political organizations, reaching 4.53 points out of 10, and 6.64 with respect to the exercise of civil liberties.

Unfortunately, there are still countries in the region with significant democratic setbacks, which have weakened their democratic institutions and the essential elements of a representative democracy indicated in article 4 of the IDC. Through the concentration of power in the executive, the absence of independence of parliament, courts and tribunals of justice, the cooptation of electoral bodies, the permanent violation of human rights by the police and military forces, the absence of free, fair periodic, transparent, and competitive elections, persecution and imprisonment of opponents and journalists, all of which are aspects that contribute to the deterioration of the quality of democratic life for its citizens.

Among the problems and risks of contemporary democracy at a global and regional level are: political polarization, fanaticism, misinformation, hate messages, political violence; and, fake news through social networks, which have been the common trend of the electoral processes in Latin America between 2020 and 2022, and which have led to virulent and polarized electoral campaigns, through misinformation, attacks and discrediting those who think differently.

Now, traditionally it is thought that polarization is what paralyzes. However, what really causes the paralysis is the lack or breakdown of bridges between political poles, resulting in acts of social mobilization, with a high probability of generating violent actions.

Therefore, for the purposes of analyzing the behavior of political polarization, it is not only the poles that matter, but also the bridges, the weak connections, that exist between the poles. The concept of bridges refers to the fact that, if these relationships are lost, the members of each community will lose contact with the other community.

A simplified way of presenting to what extent polarization becomes a problem is therefore on two axes: number of poles and number of bridges. And from this double entry matrix, a typology can be made.

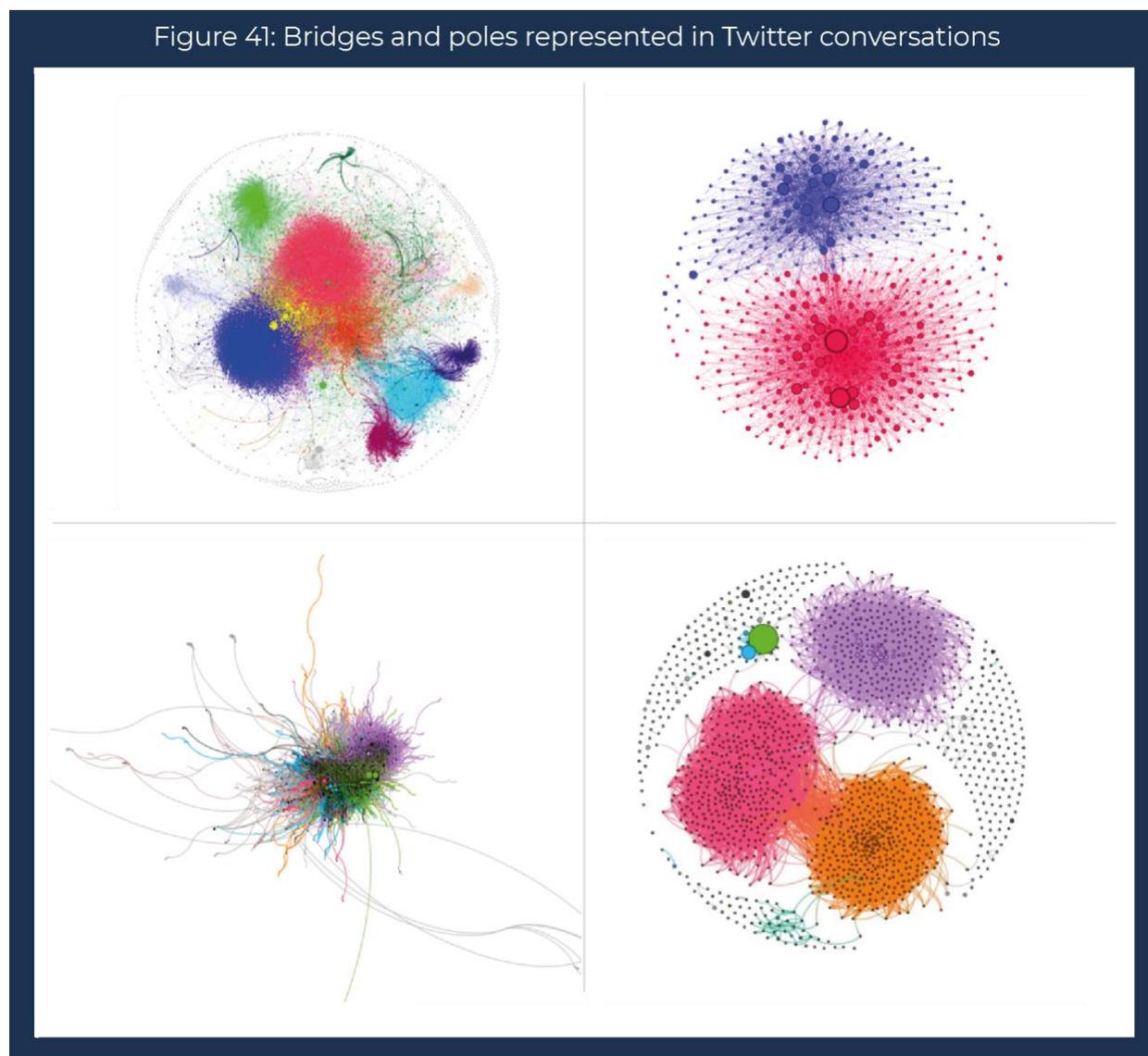
Table 6: Polarization: Bridges and Poles

	Many Poles	Two Poles
Few Bridges	Factionalism	Polarization and Conflict
Many Bridges	Perfect Pluralism	Polarization and Democratic Coexistence

Source: OAS Observatory.

Social media platforms help illustrate this.

Below are infospaces of the Twitter network for different countries in electoral circumstances distributed in the four quadrants, according to the previous matrix (Table 6).



Source: Twitter. Elaborated by the Observatory

The Twitter infospaces correspond to countries that match the proposed typology. The upper right quadrant shows the network of a polarized country with recurring conflicts and violence. In the upper left quadrant, the network is presented for a country with many factions and few bridges, this is reflected in its parliament and suffers from a lack of governability, also recurring. In the lower left quadrant, is a

country with many factions, but also many bridges. Without being a perfect pluralism, it is very similar. Finally, in the lower right quadrant three poles are shown. However, the lilac community is not a political community but one of foreign accounts. The pink and orange communities are the political ones and show a large number of bridges between them. This is a country which is considered to have generally high rankings in the different indicators of Democracy. In addition to the large number of bridges, it has another characteristic common to countries with strong democratic institutions and that is the limited capacity of foreign actors to have influence over internal actors.

In short, polarization in political science has always been associated with a tendency towards division in society into extreme positions, and with actual and potential conflict. However, the illustrations presented in this article show that two elements have to be combined for the actual or potential conflict to appear: the extreme positions and the absence of bridges between them. Bridges also matter for governance even when there is pluralism of positions, so that this does not become factionalism. Bridges ensure greater density of relationships between interest groups at the economic level, identity groups at the social level, and ideological families at the political level.

Hate speech is disseminated through social networks, not only in contexts of political debate, but also linked to issues of racism, xenophobia, racial supremacy, discrimination, incitement to discrimination, hostility and/or violence and other issues, in which there is a lack of communication bridges, through which individuals can exchange opinions, understand each other, and develop the ability to tolerate difference. Likewise, the dissemination of this kind of message on social networks raises debates regarding who controls this content, the discretion of censorship by digital platforms, and balance with the right to freedom of expression and opinion.

Public institutions within the scope of their powers must provide reliable and verified information to the public. If trust in the institutions is lost, there is no frame of reference for the information available on the networks. States must also seek alternatives to the direct censorship of information on networks, mainly through monitoring actions.

Coordinated actions between the State and social platforms are essential in the search for strategies that reduce misinformation, fake news, and hate speech. A permanent line of action linked to good practices in the digital era is a process of education and digital literacy that promotes the proper use of social networks, as a space for democratic interaction, where citizens can discern for themselves what is true, and what is not; a citizenry that verifies, contrasts, and contextualizes the information it receives.

Regarding fake news, this combines misinformation that specifically refers to the fact that the information being referred to is simply wrong; and, the concept of disinformation, which is presented by a person who knows that said information is false, so that they deliberately promote a lie. There is also a third category, which refers to malicious information, which is real information that is disseminated with the aim of harming a person or institution. In addition, the existence of fake news, which is produced with the specific intention of deceiving, does not intend to change the mind of the person who reads it, but rather to generate an emotional response, mainly to annoy the person who recognizes the lie.

The problem that this generated is encouraging public debate about information that is not correct, fueling polarization and hate messages, as indicated in chapter 3 of this document: *"But, as we have seen, in social networks, polarization prevails, the dissemination of fake news, the selective consumption of media, which turns each participant into an enclosed spectator, since there is no notion of the real dimension of what happens and circulates on the network, but in a reduced segment of it, which coincides with their general beliefs. And then, the pandemic happened having a direct impact on the dynamics of the electoral processes, and on the social norms that governed our daily events ..."*

In this way, the combination of all these elements has built a Viral Democracy, which goes hand in hand with the Infodemic, another recently coined concept, within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pan American Health Organization understands by infodemic the excessive amount of information related to a particular topic, which may or may not be correct, but which makes it difficult for people to find

reliable sources. In this regard, in chapter 3 of this document, it was determined that: *“ When we combine both concepts, we find that the networks have increased their production during the pandemic, all countries had to establish some type of movement restriction for their citizens, strict quarantines, intermittent or intelligent. And, therefore, new forms were sought or existing forms of communication were exploited, with networks being the fastest growing. Our interactions became primarily digital. And the governments also turned fully towards them”* (PAHO, 2020).

Therefore, as indicated in chapter 3 of this document: *“Extreme polarization in civic terms threatens social peace, because it could be transferred from the use of people identified with extreme positions in social networks, to an identity recognition that would materialize their discontent, mainly towards social conflicts, not only against the opposing political arc, but also towards any identity group that is understood to be aligned with the reference political group”*.

In a democratic society, it is essential to respect diversity, pluralism, freedom of expression and opinion, which are fundamental pillars of a peaceful social coexistence. Therefore, the polarization process is a homogenization process, in which different identity groups end up aligning themselves behind an identity group that supports a political proposal. This homogenization reduces the differences, simplifies them, and cuts the relationships between the previously existing diverse groups, at the point of their being absorbed in the great mass.

4.3 Problems and challenges for democracy in the Americas

Taking into consideration what was presented in this document, regional democracy must face the following fundamental problems: 1) Overcome the pandemic backsliding; 2) Reduce the economic and social gaps widened by the pandemic; 3) Face the emergence of authoritarian positions and autocratic regimes, as well as virulence, political polarization, and misinformation, through the strengthening of

democratic institutions and digital literacy; and 4) Overcome weak regional integration.

Regarding overcoming the “pandemic backsliding,” the countries of the region must observe the proportionality and temporality of the states of exception, emergency and public calamity under the parameters established by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the modulation of their respective Constitutional Courts and Tribunals, with the purpose of ensuring that the powers of the executive do not override those of other state institutions.

In this sense, it is necessary -under the internal legal system- to regulate aspects of crisis management, guaranteeing the continuity in the operation and access to the services of state entities, especially parliament and the courts and tribunals of justice, in addition to improving coordination between the various national and subnational state entities for crisis management, not only in relation to health, but in any emergency that occurs within each of the countries of the hemisphere.

The adoption of these measures would contribute to improving the separation and independence of public powers, fostering greater understanding and respect for the constitutional and legal powers conferred on each public agencies, reducing the possibilities of discretion and the misuse of functions, that could violate the rights of citizens. It is necessary to adopt an approach of preservation and protection of rights under the umbrella of decision making by public authorities, paying special attention to the integrality and interrelation among the various human rights groups.

Regarding the economic and social gaps widened by the pandemic, there is no doubt that levels of poverty, inequity in access to health, inequality, unemployment, and exclusion have all increased since 2020; reversing the sustained advances that the region had achieved in recent years. Facing this complex problem requires the generation of long-term agreements between the various political forces, social groups, and citizens within the various countries of the region.

The challenge for the democracies of the region is to reduce the economic and social gaps widened by the pandemic, taking a multidimensional approach which broadens

the vision of poverty and inequality beyond the lack of material and economic goods, to seeking to promote integral human development under which "(...) people lead a life that they value by increasing their capabilities, something that is not limited to achievements in terms of well-being, but includes the ability to act and freedoms." (UNDP, 2022, p. 13). In this way, the well-being of people is expanded as well as their resilience capacity, being able to recover in the shortest possible time from the shocks that we face in a time of uncertainty, such as the current one.

In this sense, as recommended by the UNDP-UN, public policies and institutions should prioritize investments that focus on human development based on nature, universal public services, global public goods and preparedness regarding natural threats, which enables people and countries to improve their capacities to face emerging challenges, as recommended by the United Nations Development Program: "Investment should be the connecting link. Nature-based human development can protect and enhance natural resources while protecting people from shocks, promoting food and economic security, and expanding the range of options available." (UNDP, 2022, p.21).

The creation and reinforcement of social security mechanisms for the entire population is aimed at offering various support tools to people in times of general uncertainty, hence the need to strengthen and expand social protection systems, access to basic services, protection of human rights, public deliberation, and opportunities for broad participation. In this regard, the UNDP (2022) indicates: "Insurance (social security) offers an essential stabilizing force in the face of uncertainty. To begin with, it is necessary to revitalize and modernize the structures that manage various risks in people's lives, mainly in various forms of social protection, including people with informal employment or other precarious jobs, such as those with sporadic employment. We need to reverse course and move away from risk segmentation towards broader approach of risk sharing." (p.21)

The promotion of innovation is aimed at achieving an adaptation of people regarding the new challenges and emergencies that can arise in the future, achieving energy efficiency, social innovation, addressing misinformation, improving media and digital

literacy, generating data systems and indicators that allow the public and governing institutions to make decisions based on updated and accurate information.

In this way, the United Nations Development Program states that: “Innovation will be crucial to successfully face the challenges that lie ahead, which are many, unforeseen and unknown. We already have some ready-to-use tools, while others can be modified and updated to adapt them to new contexts. It will also be necessary to create others from scratch. In part, innovation is related to new technologies and ensuring that they reach all people” (UNDP, 2022, p.22).

In this context, electoral processes and democratic transitions, common agendas, multilateralism, and political dialogue are the ideal spaces and instruments to reach such agreements and consensus among the different political actors who exercise or seek to exercise public power. It is necessary to leave behind the idea that elections are battlefields in which the political rival must be exterminated. On the contrary, they (elections/democratic transitions) must be meeting spaces within which the generation of agendas and public policies are agreed upon based on legitimacy of the popular vote to allow adequate governance and the exercise of a democratic opposition.

As we face the emergence of authoritarian positions and autocratic regimes, virulence, political polarization, and misinformation; there is a need for strong democratic institutions and critical and vigilant citizens in the face of threats to the democratic regime. In this sense, the digital literacy of citizens is essential so that they can find, identify, evaluate, and use the information provided by digital media effectively.

This task is largely under the responsibility of the authorities in charge of public instruction or education at the national level; however, this does not exclude other state agencies from this task, specifically electoral ones. In this sense, digital literacy needs to be inserted within the civic and democratic education or democratic training, which is a proper and specific function of the electoral bodies granted by the respective constitutional or legal frameworks of each country, being necessary for the

success of the electoral process and the responsible exercise of political-electoral rights.

The strengthening of electoral bodies and political parties is necessary for the exercise of political participation in conditions of equity, trust, and certainty. For this reason, the existence of democratic societies in most of the countries in the region allows for making the reforms necessary for this purpose.

Weak regional integration requires that regional forums and institutions be strengthened under a democratic principle, which could expand real processes of horizontal cooperation between the countries of the hemisphere when there are weaknesses within their democracies. This could allow for the exchange of experiences and the dissemination of good practices on democracy and human rights.

There is a need to have stronger regional institutions, attentive to the needs of member states and the peoples of the Americas, which are willing to lead hemispheric cooperation and stand in solidarity with them. It was demonstrated that there is an imperative need to collectively coordinate common strategies and initiatives, aimed at facing the pandemic and threats to regional democracy.

The new regionalism and multilateralism imply the need for global and regional cooperation, under the principles of solidarity, pluralism, and inclusion, in various areas: health, economic, social, environmental, among others.

The organizations of the Inter-American System, especially the Permanent Council of the OAS, the General Secretariat, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, have carried out permanent and uninterrupted work during the pandemic, migrating to virtual, face-to-face, and hybrid meeting and work formats, which have facilitated debates on various topics, including: proportional, temporary restriction measures, and attached to the constitutional and conventional frameworks for managing the pandemic; attention to vulnerable groups and the need to address the gaps generated by the pandemic; the strengthening of health systems, the challenges of the post-COVID-19 era; the regional migration crisis; the situation of

political prisoners; the worsening of the political and humanitarian situation; judicial reforms that alter the independence of powers; democratic deterioration and institutional weakening; all urgent and specific debates on the particular situations of the member countries of the Organization.

A great example can be found in the vaccination process in the Americas, which has reflected the need to strengthen regional cooperation and integration mechanisms, since it has developed in a heterogeneous and fragmented way, in terms of its progress and coverage. In general terms, according to PAHO-WHO, they determined that until the beginning of October 2022 in the Americas, a total of 2,017,400,1245 doses have been administered since the vaccination process began in the region, reaching a total of 51 countries and territories. Breaking down this total number of administered vaccines, the first doses reached 719,233,958, while the second doses reached 689,884,904 people. Regarding the complete vaccine schemes with their reinforcements, the regional figure reaches 717,071,279 doses, while the single doses have reached 28,163,422 doses. (PAHO, 2022)

Despite the general data, the countries of the region were characterized by the fragmented acquisition of vaccines. Each State negotiated these supplies individually with the pharmaceutical companies through its diplomatic and commercial channels. This approach was weak in terms of promoting the acquisition as a regional bloc or through collective cooperation mechanisms.

The development of vaccination programs in the region was heterogeneous, advancing quickly and efficiently in some countries and stagnating in others. Regarding the percentage of vaccination coverage of the population, there was a disparity in access to the vaccines and in the strength of their health systems. In the indicator of complete schemes per 100 inhabitants, shows that there is a group of countries with very low percentages of inoculation of the population -whose percentages are between 1.9 percent and 40 percent. On the other hand, within this same indicator, another group of countries in the region has exceeded 50 percent of their population vaccinated, reaching high percentages between 80 percent and 97 percent. In this regard, ECLAC (2022) points out:

Given the importance of the vaccination process to control the triple crisis unleashed by the pandemic, it would have been important to have better a approach in the development, production, acquisition, and distribution of vaccines, in order to be more timely, equitable, accessible, safe, and effective.

In this framework, the development of regional initiatives of a multilateral nature to collectively assume the challenge of democratizing access to vaccines promoted by PAHO and WHO, such as the COVAX program, allows for improving the position of the region in the negotiation and acquisition of these medical supplies within global markets, prioritizing countries with weak health capacities. This collective effort in health matters will gradually reduce the region's external dependence on the countries and supranational blocs that control the production of vaccines, technology, and health supplies.

From the OAS, through various resolutions of the Permanent Council, the Member States have been urged to develop common strategies to guarantee equitable access to vaccines and health systems for all their population, guaranteeing the rights to health and life of their citizens, fostering common mechanisms for negotiation, financing, logistics, donation, etc., among the countries of the Americas, in addition to bilateral and multilateral cooperation within the region.

Cooperation and solidarity is fundamental for the strengthening of regional initiatives, it allows for the promotion of cooperation between the countries of the region, expanding and improving capacities at the national or regional level in health matters; making the link, in this way, to the development and production of raw materials, vaccines, diagnostic tests and treatments, so that vaccination rates are increased in countries with lower immunization indicators, sharing successful strategies and lessons learned in this process.

Finally, the construction of resilient democracies not only implies the periodic and transparent holding of elections in which political and electoral rights are exercised, but also demands that, public and private agendas through investment, innovation, and the establishment of measures of social security, address the full exercise of economic, social, and cultural rights and the closing of gaps. This is essential so that

people and towns -under a human development approach- could develop their capacities and competencies to face uncertainty and shocks from the global and current regional context.

Strengthening the substantive elements of a representative democracy promotes the participation of public and private actors around common issues, building communication bridges between different sectors, reaching agreements and consensus on common problems.

Resilience implies addressing the new realities, challenges, and problems of democracy in our hemisphere collectively, and taking a continental view of the new global challenges.

Multilateralism within the inter-American sphere is indispensable for promoting a strategy to face the multiple post-pandemic challenges in economic, social, cultural, and environmental matters, through a renewed regional institutional framework adapted to the new, and current realities in our hemisphere.

Annex I

Methodology of the Observatory on Democracy in the Americas

Introduction

The Observatory on Democracy in the Americas has established inter-American democratic standard, contemplated broadly and comprehensively in the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IDC), as the point of reference for its analytical work on hemispheric democracy, taking into account its linkage with the various political, social and economic spheres in the countries of the region.

In this way, the Inter-American Democratic Charter establishes in article 3 of the regional democratic standard, the essential elements of representative democracy including: the validity of human rights; holding of free, periodic, and fair elections; existence of the rule of law; plurality of political parties and separation of powers and independence of branches of government.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter expands the content of this traditional standard by establishing in article 7 the principles of universality, interdependence, and indivisibility of the democratic system with the effective exercise of fundamental freedoms and human rights, contemplated in the catalog of the Inter-American and universal corpus juris.

It also includes elements such as: the transparency of government activities, the probity and responsibility of the administration, as well as respect for social rights, freedom of expression and the press as an essential component for the exercise of democracy (Art. 4, IDC); the strength of political parties and organizations (Art. 5, IDC); the right and responsibility to participate and promote participation in decisions that concern citizens (Art. 6, IDC); the strengthening of the Inter-American system of human rights (Art. 8, IDC); the elimination of all forms of discrimination (Art. 9, IDC); the effective and full exercise of labor rights, as well as integral development, the fight

against poverty, and the development of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights (Articles 11 to 16 of the IDC).

These seven components determine the resilience or quality of democracy. In a multidimensional sense, it is proposed that the interdependence between access to rights and democracy results in a virtuous feedback sequence leading to the construction of a new approach to democracies, for better social, economic, and political representation.

As can be seen, the Inter-American democratic standard derived from the Inter-American Democratic Charter is broad, multidimensional, and interdisciplinary, which takes into account that the countries of the Americas are not a homogeneous unit of analysis. Although it is possible to formulate clusters of countries that share certain general characteristics, each case has its particularities, for this reason the Observatory has established a three-dimensional methodology: deductive, inductive, and hypothetical-deductive to address, analyze, and establish conclusions, alerts, and recommendations regarding democracy in the region from the various political, economic, and social angles.

To this end, it has compiled, collated, compared, and updated more than 2,500 pieces of data collected from specialized and accredited indicators and indices throughout the world, which cover a large number of the countries of the American continent, for the 34 OAS member states, which have indicators and variables that address electoral democracy, fundamental rights and freedoms (liberal democracy) and the rule of law (constitutional democracy). These quantitative and qualitative data and indicators have been chosen because they encompass the elements that make up the democratic standard contemplated in the IDC. In addition, the data and indicators have been selected based on the general criterion that they have been used to observe the state of democracy in the world, and can also be easily obtained since they are publicly available in specialized web portals.

Methodology

The methodology used by the Observatory establishes as a theoretical paradigm, the democratic standard founded in the Inter-American Democratic Charter regarding the essential elements of representative democracy and its connection with the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms.

The first step of the methodology was the collection of data ¹¹ and the construction of a database -combining quantitative and qualitative indicators- covering the 34 Member States. The database was built on a significant number of indicators from a variety of reputable, reliable, and open sources (depending on the sources, and in some cases, using the latest data available in 2020-2021). Among them: Varieties of Democracy (University of Gothenburg, Sweden), the Economist (Democracy Index, United Kingdom), the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (Germany), the Fragile states Index (FSI; before the Failed states Index, The New Humanitarian 2019, USA), the Global Peace Index (GPI, Institute for Economics & Peace, USA), Report Index (Joint Research Center of European Commission), Transparency International (Berlin, Germany), United Nations Development Program, World Bank.

Once the data and indicators were compiled, the second step was carried out, which consisted of grouping them into 5 indices that represent the essential elements of democracy, in accordance with article 3 of the IDC, namely:

- Index of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- Index of access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law, which also contemplates the fundamental components of the exercise of democracy.
- Index of holding periodic, free, fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people.
- Index of the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations.
- Index of separation of powers and independence of branches of government.

The third step was the analysis of other internal sources produced by the Organization and the IACHR, such as: 1) Inter-American Commission on Human Rights IACHR reports and rapporteurships; 2) information from the Permanent Council; and 3)

information generated in the context of electoral observations, such as the reports of the Electoral Observation Missions. Also, the analysis of external sources (IDB, ECLAC, etc.)

The last step consisted of preparing the report on Democracy in the Americas, based on the analysis and observation of: i) the data and indicators of the 5 indices of the Observatory (this comprehensive analysis and observation process is carried out from the perspective of the essential elements of democracy (Art. 3, IDC), the fundamental components of the exercise of power (Art. 4, IDC), the interdependence between democracy and human rights (Arts. 7 and 8, IDC), as well as with the social dimensions (Arts. 11 to 13, IDC), and ii) internal and external sources.

The report offers a multidimensional vision of regional democracy, establishing the interdependence between access to rights and democracy, for a better social, economic, and political representation of the realities of our continent. The report shows the trends of the democratic systems in the region, identifies the limitations and challenges it faces. In this way, the Observatory provides information to promote informed decisions in the member states and in the General Secretariat based on data, lessons learned, and best practices, articulating efforts to create inputs related to issues affecting democracy.

ⁱⁱⁱThe data collection entailed the periodic review and updating of these indicators, as well as their constant monitoring, normalization, standardization, and analysis, so that the observations are comparable to each other.

Annex II

Construction of indices for the Observatory on Democracy (Chapter 2)

Missing Data Imputation Methodology

A technique of multiple imputation was applied to fill the missing data, with repeated simulations using the Monte Carlo method. The results were combined to provide estimated results and confidence intervals that account for the uncertainty introduced by missing values. Multivariate imputation was performed using linear regression. Where possible, data were imputed comparing with countries in the same cluster.

Correlation analysis

Based on the indices modeled from the Inter-American Democratic Charter, a correlation analysis was carried out. Regression analysis is a broad term for a set of methodologies used to predict a response variable from one or more predictor variables. In general, regression analysis can be used to identify the explanatory variables that are related to a response variable, to describe the form of the relationships involved, and to provide an equation for predicting the response variable from the explanatory variables. The proposed multiple linear regression model meets the statistical assumptions of Normality, Independence, Linearity and Homoscedasticity.

Linear Model of the Indices:

ASSESSMENT OF THE LINEAR MODEL ASSUMPTIONS

USING THE GLOBAL TEST ON 4 DEGREES-OF-FREEDOM:

Level of Significance = 0.05

Call: gvlma (x = fit)

Value	p-value	Decision	
Global Stat	6.60509	0.15829	Assumptions acceptable.
Skewness	3.13988	0.07640	Assumptions acceptable.
Kurtosis	3.38018	0.06598	Assumptions acceptable.
Link Function	0.02726	0.86887	Assumptions acceptable.
Heteroscedasticity	0.05777	0.81005	Assumptions acceptable.

A comparison of bivariate relationships was carried out:

```
Fit <- lm(Index of Access and Exercise of Power ~ Elections Index + Citizen  
Participation Index + Political Pluralism Index + Human Rights and Fundamental  
Freedoms Index + Separation of Powers Index, data = oda_indx_df)
```

```
summary ( fit )
```

Call:

```
lm(formula = Index of Access and Exercise of Power ~ Election Index + Citizen  
Participation Index + Political Pluralism Index + Human Rights and Fundamental  
Freedoms Index + Separation of Powers Index, data = oda_indx_df)
```

Residuals:

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max	
-0.86094		-0.16085	0.05146	0.17013	0.58423

Coefficients:

Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
Index of Access/Exercise of Power	0.0008349	0.0676068	0.012 0.99028
Election Index	0.0834906	0.3500713	0.238 0.81419
Citizen Participation Index	0.1667812	0.2245979	0.743 0.46732
Political Pluralism Index	-0.4200658	0.3304109	-1.271 0.21979
Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms Index	-0.2292642	0.3091174	-0.742 0.46785
Separation of Powers Index	0.7754568	0.1742776	4.450 0.00031

Meaning _ Codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 0.329 on 18 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.8395, Adjusted R-squared: 0.795

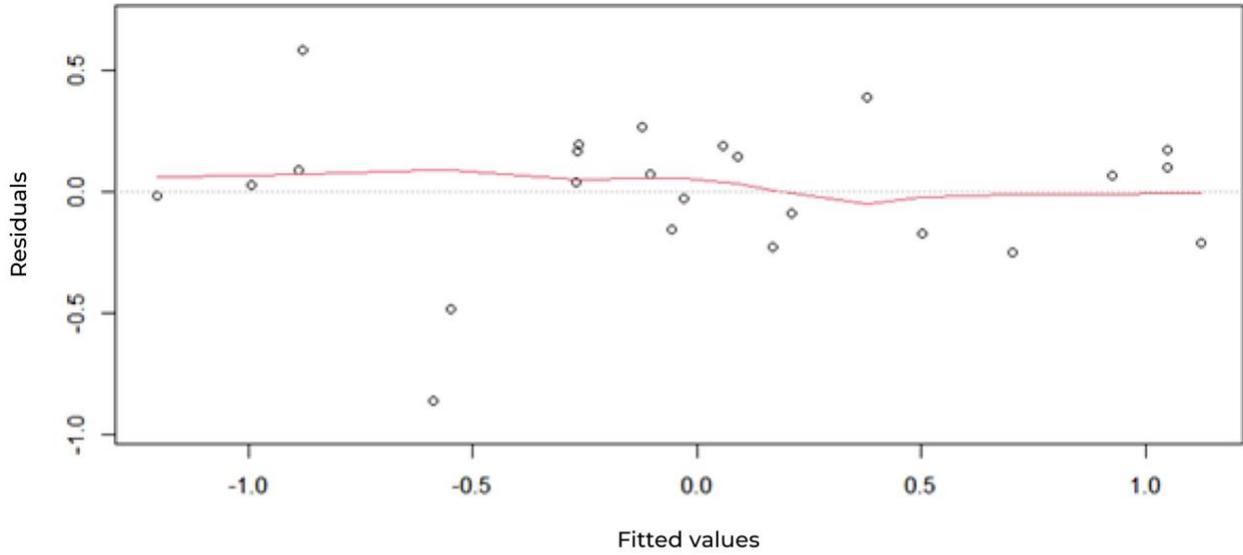
F-statistic: 18.83 on 5 and 18 DF, p -value: 1.378e-06

When there is more than one predictor variable, the regression coefficients indicate the increase in the dependent variable for a unit change in one predictor variable, holding all other predictor variables constant. For example, the regression coefficient for the Citizen Participation Index is 0.17, which suggests that a 1 percent increase in the Access and Exercise of Power Index (Access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law) is associated with an increase of 0.17 percent in Citizen Participation

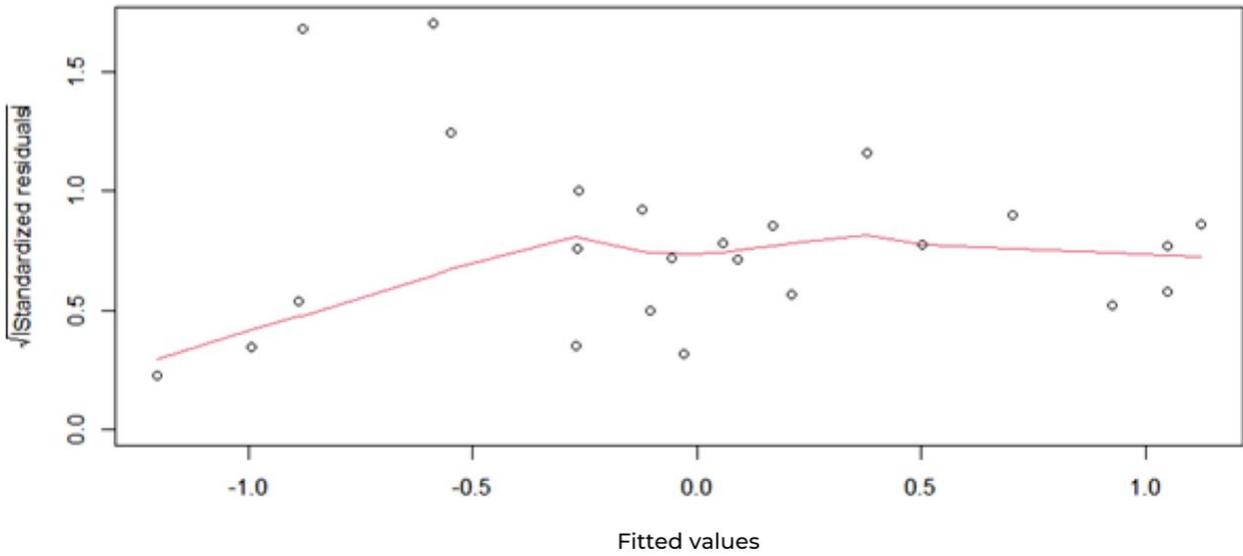
as a necessary condition "for the full and effective exercise of democracy", controlling for the Election Index, Political Pluralism Index, index5 and the Separation of Powers Index. The coefficient is significantly different from zero at the $p < .0001$ level only in the Separation of Powers Index (Separation and independence of political powers). Extreme values have also been calculated, to understand which countries do not fit well to the proposed model. As can be seen in the Cook Distance graph.

Regression diagnostics:

Residuals vs Fitted

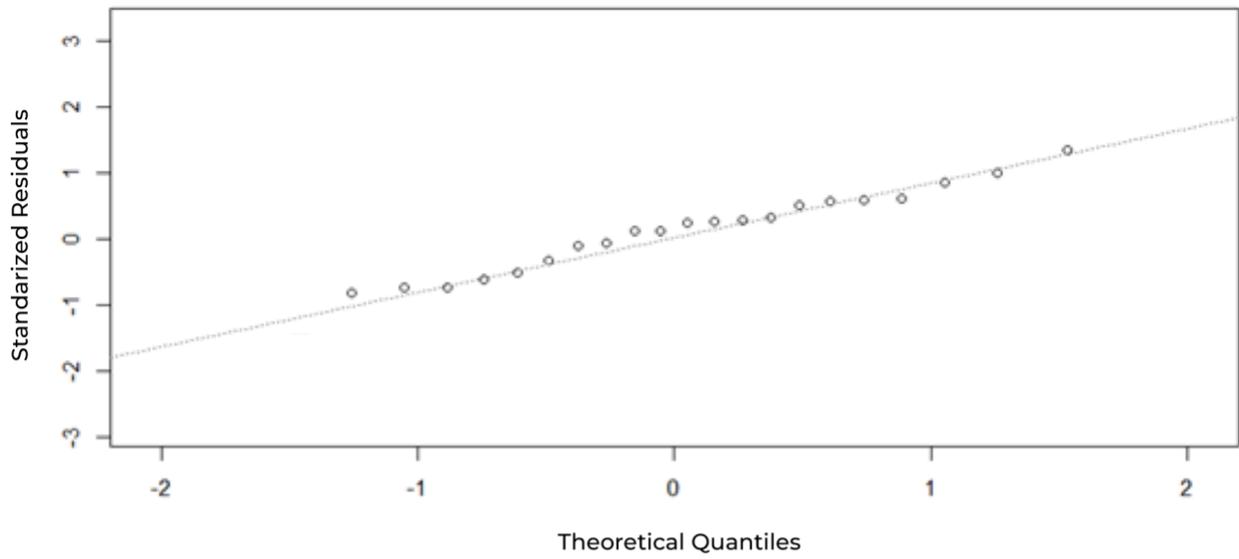


Scale-Location

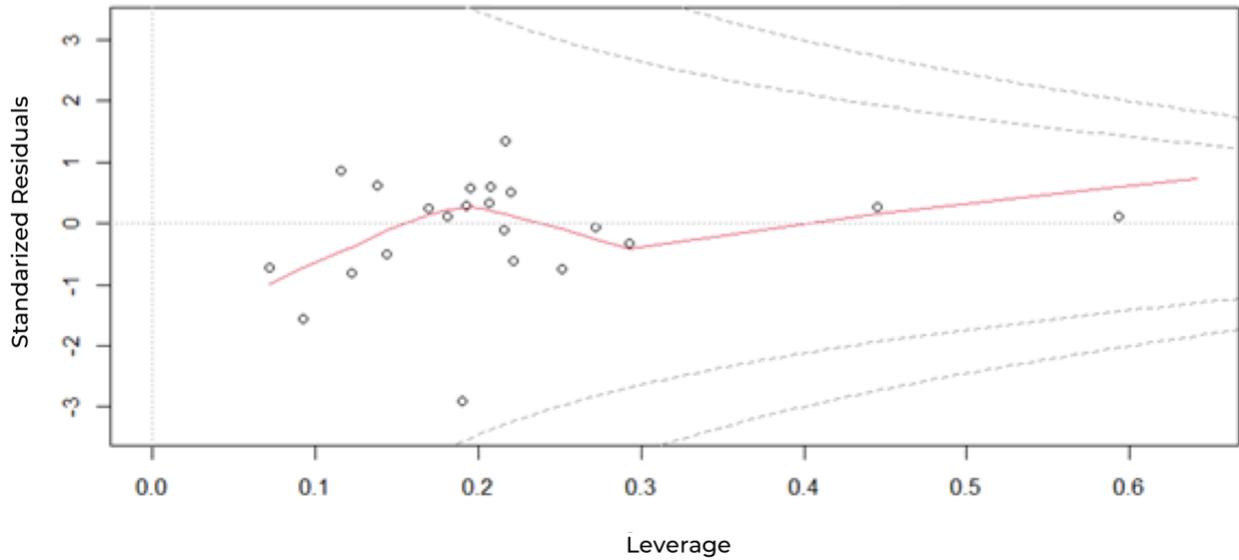


OBJ

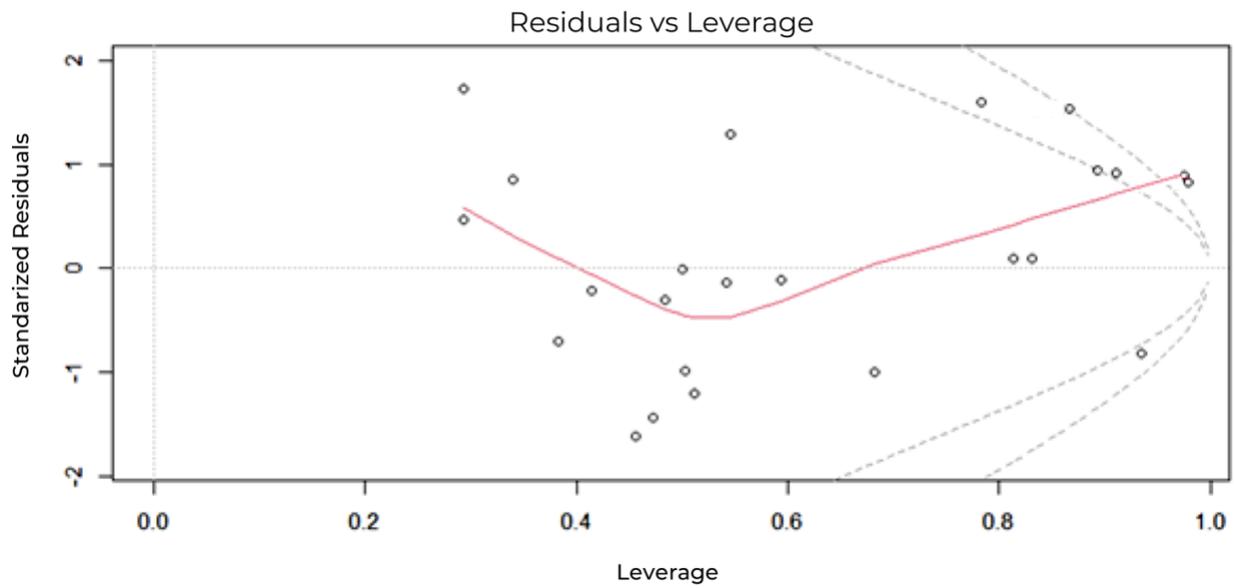
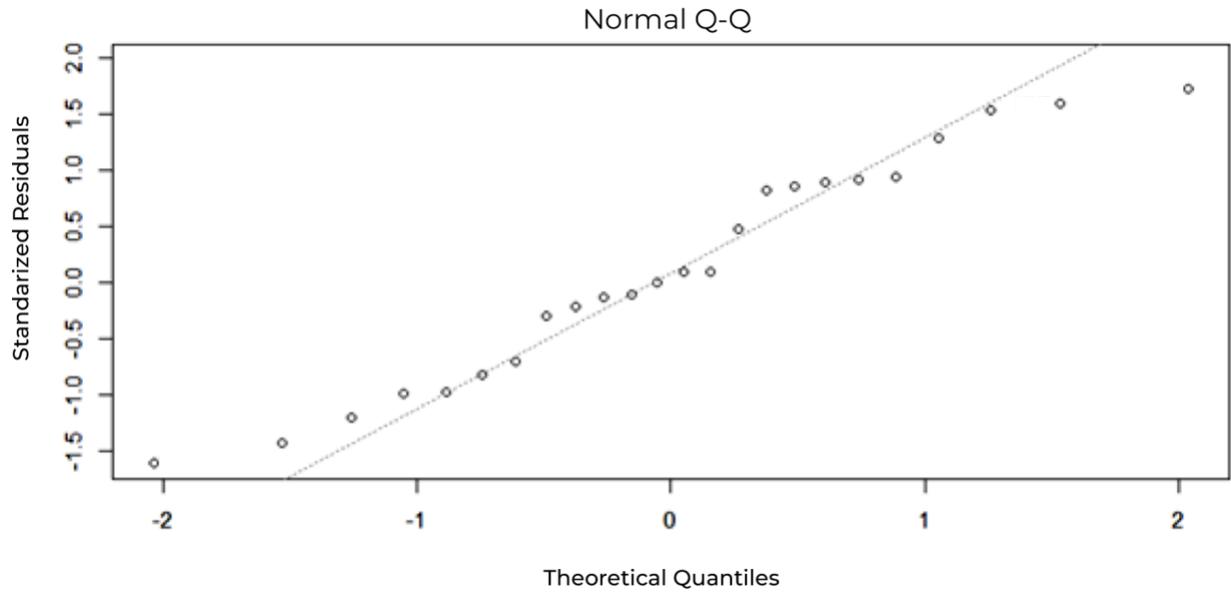
Normal Q-Q



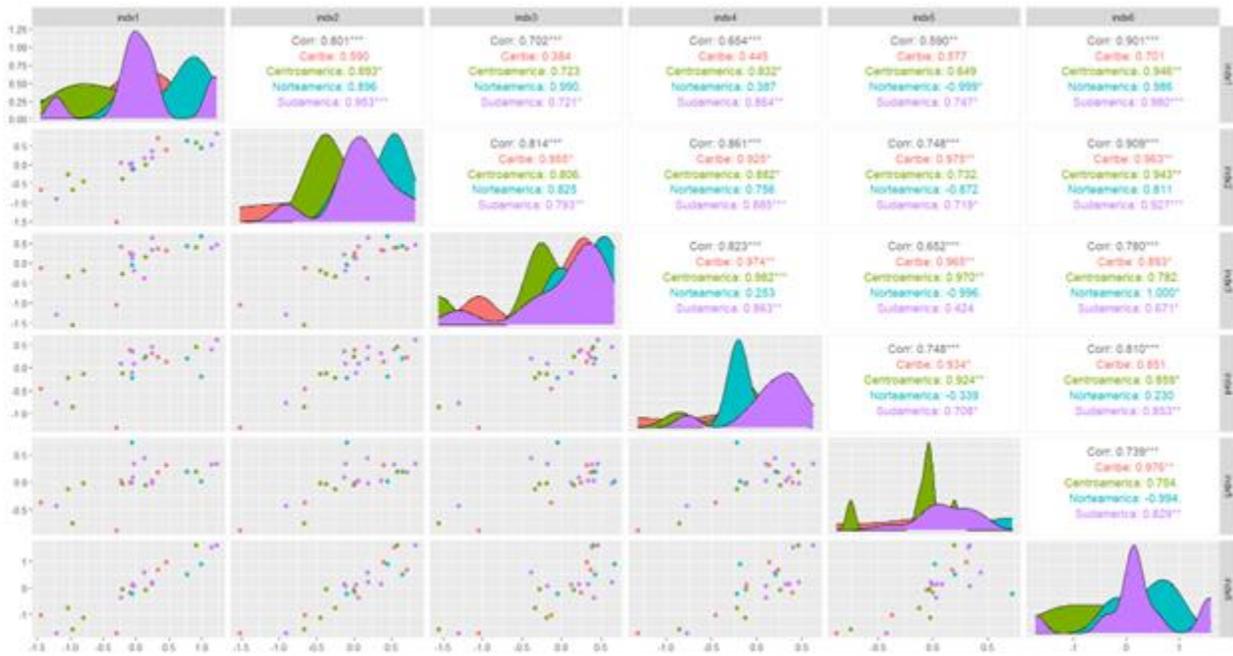
Residuals vs Leverage



Regression Diagnostics with Interactions:



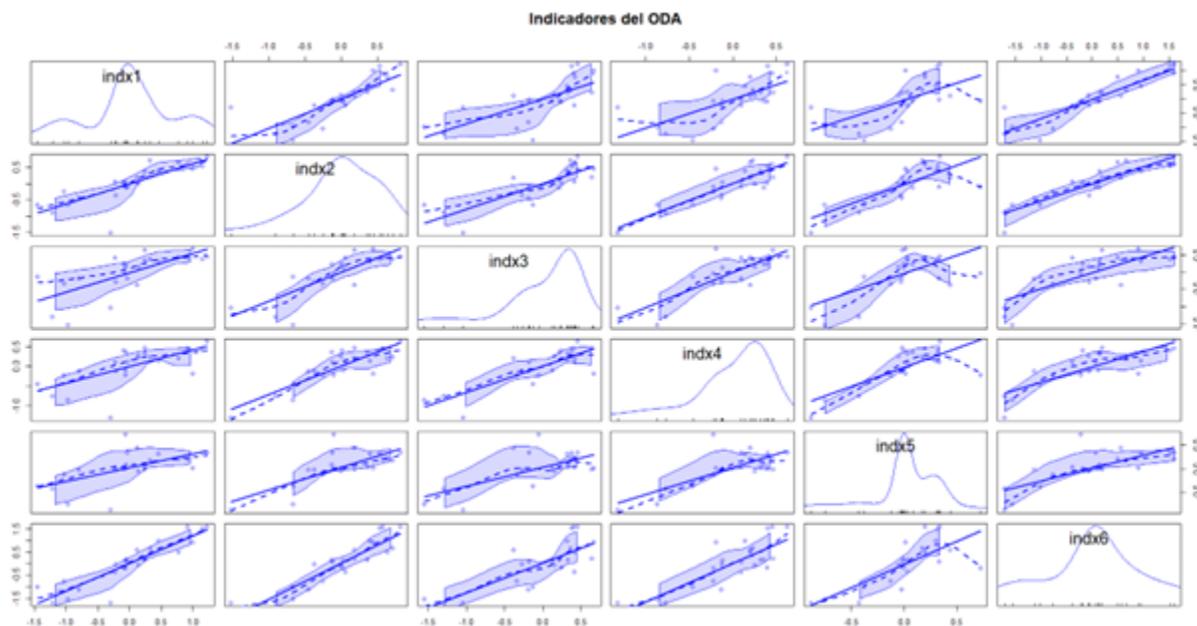
Graph: Analysis of Correlations and Clusters



The geographic cluster and correlation analysis plot illustrates the performance of different geographic sub-regions on each index and how this performance helps predict performance on the other observatory indices.

Code	IDC Essential Components
indx1	Access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law
indx2	Holding of periodic, free, fair elections based on universal and secret suffrage
indx3	Citizen participation as a necessary condition "for the full and effective exercise of democracy"
indx4	Plural regime of political parties and organizations

indx5	Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms
indx6	Separation and independence of political powers



Annex III

High and low performance indicators of the indices:

What each indicator measures and sources (Chapter 2)

This annex presents in more detail what the high and low-performance indicators of each index measure and indicates the respective sources.

Index I: Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

The best-performing indicators in the Americas, in this index, are: [number of] deaths from organized internal conflict (Global Peace Index, GPI); quantity and duration of internal conflicts (GPI) and intensity of internal conflicts (GPI). While the first two are self-explanatory, the internal conflict intensity indicator is a qualitative assessment developed jointly by Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) specialists and the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), which measures the probability of the development of disputes between and within countries. As an inter-regional comparative analysis, the latest measurements of the Global Peace Index (GPI) place the Americas behind Europe and Asia-Pacific and above Russia-Eurasia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa. of the North in matters of conflict.¹²

The indicators that also show high performance are: private civil liberty (Varieties of Democracy, V - Dem), freedom of academic and cultural expression (V - Dem) and civil liberties (V- Dem). The V- Dem methodology defines progress in civil liberties as the decrease in physical violence committed by government agents and the absence of government restrictions on private and political liberties.¹³

In contrast, the indicators with the lowest performance at the regional average level, are linked to economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.

The infant mortality rate (per 1,000 births) and the indicator of inequality in education denote, respectively, the problematic situation in terms of health and education. The indicators of vulnerable employment (percentage of total employment) and the level of compliance with labor rights point to the precariousness of work and freedom of association - phenomena that are even more sensitive given the low percentage of

¹²Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Peace Index (2022), available at:

<<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/GPI-2022-web.pdf>>

¹³To consult the methodology and historical data of the Varieties of Democracy project:

<<https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/img/refs/methodologyv111.pdf>>

the population covered by social protection systems. Meanwhile, the annual rate of freshwater withdrawal as a percentage of internal resources, and the proportion of the urban population living in slums function as warnings about access to the rights to a healthy environment, water and sanitation, and a decent housing.

Two indicators stand out in terms of rights to health and education. The indicator that measures the infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) works as a proxy for access to health more broadly and is based on estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-Agency Group (UNICEF, WHO, World Bank, UN DESA Population Division). The education inequality index compiled by UNESCO and the United Nations Development Program describes the distribution of resources for socially excluded communities (for example: funding for schools; availability of qualified teachers and school personnel; access to information technology and communication, among others).

The following are three indicators regarding labor rights. The vulnerable employment rate estimated by the International Labor Organization measures the proportion of contributing family workers and self-employed workers whose employment is often characterized by low or uncertain income, low productivity and/or difficult working conditions that limit access to fundamental rights for part of the workers. The indicator of the level of compliance with labor rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) measures access to fundamental labor rights at the national level, based on the legislation in force in each country and six criteria from the labor control body, the ILO. The indicator of the proportion of the population covered by social protection systems reflects the proportion of people effectively covered by the main components of social protection: child and maternity benefits, support for people without work, people with disabilities, victims of work accidents and older people.¹⁴

Two outstanding indicators refer to the agenda of environmental rights, water and sanitation, and access to housing. First, the annual freshwater withdrawal (FAO) indicator measures the stress on water availability, understanding that proper management of water resources is a critical component of growth, poverty reduction, and equity. Secondly, the indicator that measures the proportion of the urban population living in marginal neighborhoods highlights the housing deficit and unequal access to decent housing in the cities of our region.

Other low performance indicators linked to the multidimensional security agenda are: order and security indicators; criminal justice and; of the security apparatus.

¹⁴For more information about the metadata of each indicator, see UNSTAT, SDG indicator metadata, available at <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-08-08-02.pdf>>

- The order and security indicator (WJP) seeks to quantify the capacity of the State and society to guarantee the security of people and property, understanding that security is one of the defining aspects of the Rule of Law, a fundamental function of the State and a necessary condition for access to rights and freedoms. It measures factors such as the prevalence of common crimes, including homicide, kidnapping, robbery and theft, armed robbery, and extortion, as well as people's general perceptions of safety in their communities; whether people are effectively protected from armed conflict and terrorism, or; whether people resort to intimidation or violence to resolve civil disputes or to seek redress from the government.
- The Criminal Justice Indicator (WJP) is aimed at making an assessment of the entire system (including police, lawyers, prosecutors, judges and prison officials) by measuring seven components: (1) to what extent the perpetrators of crimes are effectively detained and charged and if the police and prosecutors are adequately resourced, free from corruption and perform their duties competently; (2) whether the perpetrators are effectively prosecuted and punished, as well as whether judges and other judicial officials are competent and their decisions are timely; (3) whether correctional institutions are safe, respect the rights of persons deprived of their liberty, and are effective in preventing recidivism; (4) whether the police and judges are impartial or discriminate in practice based on socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity; (5) if the work of the police, prosecutors and judges is affected by corruption, bribery or undue influence of criminal organizations; (6) whether the criminal justice system is independent of political influence and; (7) if the basic rights of the accused are respected, including the presumption of innocence and protection against arbitrary arrests and preventive detention outside of reasonable criteria, as well as access to fundamental rights of persons deprived of liberty.¹⁵
- The security apparatus indicator (WJP) considers threats to the security of states, which may include bombings, terrorist attacks, insurgency, or coups, as well as highly serious criminal factors such as organized crime and private militias, paramilitaries or irregular security forces that serve private interests to the detriment of access to rights by the general public or groups placed in a situation of vulnerability by being subjected to abuses by these forces.

¹⁵For more details about the methodology and data collection, it is possible to consult: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/wjp-rule-law-index-2021/methodology>

Index 2: Access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law

Despite the fact that the best performing indicators of the index are political stability (GPI) and autonomy (V- Dem), the downward trend registered in the index during the pandemic is explained by a deterioration in the autonomy indicators of the states with respect to external, domestic and international actors both at the national and local government levels (V- Dem). In any case, with few exceptions, it is observed that the region enjoys autonomy in the exercise of power. That is, domestic political actors exercise authority, free from the direct control of external actors. There are few cases in which they directly restrict the ability of national actors to govern, decide who can and cannot govern through formal rules or informal understandings, or exclude certain policies through explicit provisions (see V- Dem, domestic autonomy and international autonomy).

The indicators with the lowest performance are those of corruption, specifically this phenomenon is observed in the following indicators of the Observatory: absence of corruption (WJP), index of political corruption (V- Dem), control of corruption (BM), corruption perceived (TI), anti-corruption policies (BTI), accountability for abuses in public office (BTI), and public management capacity (BTI). These indicators are described below.

The indicator of absence of corruption in the government of the Observatory considers the indicators of the World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index that measure factors such as bribery, undue influence of public or private interests, and misappropriation of public funds or other resources, examining these three forms of corruption with respect to government officials in the executive branch, the judiciary, the armed forces, the police, and the legislature.

The political corruption index (V- Dem) measures how often public sector employees, members of a State Power, or their agents grant favors in exchange for bribes, kickbacks, or other material incentives, and how often they steal or embezzle public funds or other state resources for personal or family use.

The control of corruption indicator, developed by the World Bank (WB), captures the extent to which the exercise of public power is perceived to be for private benefit, including small and large forms of corruption, as well as the "capture" of State by elites and private interests.¹⁶

¹⁶World Bank, Open Database, <<https://data.worldbank.org/>>

For perceived corruption, the Transparency International corruption perception index is taken as a reference, which estimates the perception of corruption in the public sector of each country, according to expert surveys.¹⁷

The indicators of accountability for abuses in public office and anti-corruption policies come from the indicators of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index. Stiftung (BTI), which monitor the exercise of power subject to the rule of law and efficient and responsible use of public funds.¹⁸

Lastly, the public management and prosecution capacity indicator measures abuses in the exercise of power (BTI), a variable that also registers a deterioration during the period.

Index 3: Holding of periodic, free and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage

The best performing indicators of the index at the regional level are free and fair elections (BTI) and free and fair subnational elections (V- Dem). The V- Dem Electoral Democracy Index is an aggregate consisting of five subcomponents: freedom of association, suffrage, fair elections, elected executive, and freedom of expression.¹⁹The following describes what each of the subcomponents measure:

- The freedom of association subcomponent measures prohibitions and barriers imposed on political parties and organizations; autonomy of opposition parties; electoral pluralism and situation of civil society organizations (factors that also impact the index of plural regime of political parties and organizations, which are developed in the following section).
- The suffrage subcomponent measures the percentage of the population that has access to suffrage.
- The clean elections subcomponent measures the autonomy and capacity of electoral bodies, the quality of the electoral roll, the incidence of vote buying and other irregularities, government intimidation in electoral contexts, as well

¹⁷ Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index, <<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021>>

¹⁸ It is possible to consult the qualitative data collection methodology of the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) and consult its databases at: <https://bti-project.org/en/methodology>

¹⁹ Each of the components was built from a series of indicators, which capture the seven institutions of polyarchy defined by Robert Dahl in 1971. See Varieties of Democracy, Methodology v11.1, <<https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/img/refs/methodologyv11.1.pdf>>

as other types of electoral violence and - in short - how free and fair are the electoral processes.

- The elected executive subcomponent measures whether the executive branch is constituted as a direct result of popular elections, or indirectly through a popularly elected legislature.

Finally, the subcomponent of freedom of expression and access to alternative sources of information measures the censorship efforts of governments and media harassment of journalists, self-censorship, and media bias.

The indicators that present the lowest levels of performance in the region are those of approval of democracy (BTI) and state legitimacy (Fragile states Index, FSI).

The democracy approval indicator measures approval of the rules and procedures of this system. It should be noted that for years the Bertelsmann Foundation has measured the decline in approval of democracy - not so much in terms of democratic norms as by the performance of institutions and the representativeness of processes.

The state legitimacy indicator considers the representativeness and openness of the government, as well as its relationship with the citizenry: level of popular trust towards institutions, state processes and integrity of the elections, as well as the effects of a lack of trust. In other words, when trust is eroded, it is sought to evaluate its impact: incidence of demonstrations, civil disobedience, or - in extreme cases - emergence of armed insurgency.²⁰

These indicators can point to the potential risk of protests as a consequence of citizen discontent. This is relevant in a context such as that indicated by the data from Latinobarómetro (2021), in which regional support for democracy in 2020 stood at 49 percent (it should be noted that between 2010 and 2018 there had been a drop in support, from 63 percent to 48 percent).²¹

Index 4: Pluralist system of political parties and organizations

The indicators with the highest performance of the index at the regional level are: electoral pluralism (EIU), civil society participation ²²(V - Dem) and anti-democratic

²⁰ Fund for Peace, Fragile States Index Methodology, <<https://fragilestatesindex.org/methodology/>>

²¹ Latinobarómetro, Report 2021: Goodbye to Macondo, <<https://www.latinobarometro.org/>>

²² It is worth noting an improvement in the citizen participation indicators during the period: estimates based on the analysis of a network of experts and on data collected by the V-Dem project and the

actors (BTI). The electoral pluralism indicator captures the extent to which all citizens can choose their representatives, through free and fair elections. The civil society participation indicator looks at the periodic consultation process between the main civil society organizations and those responsible for policy formulation, as well as whether the participation in said organizations is broad, inclusive, and with the presence of women, and; the anti-democratic actors indicator measures the extent to which democratically elected decision makers can overcome barriers imposed by powerful political actors that could cause democratization to stagnate or fail.

The lowest-performing indicators are civil society traditions (BTI), elite factional divisions (FSI), and social capital (BTI).

The civil society traditions indicator measures the extent to which civil society traditions exist, such as the existence of long-term public or civic engagement, a civic culture of participation in public life, numerous and active civic associations, and abundant social capital.

The elite factional divisions indicator measures power struggles, the fragmentation of institutions and elites along cleavages of various kinds (ethnic, class, race, or religion), and the existence of policies that could bring us to the brink of the abyss (taking into account the use of nationalist, xenophobic rhetoric or irredentism/community solidarity).

The social capital indicator measures the collaboration between different identity or interest groups in society: the level of interpersonal trust (norms and values) and the number of autonomous and self-organized groups, associations, and organizations in the political sphere (networks). In this way, it attempts to approximate an estimate of the density of the network of relationships between actors and identity groups. This observation is important as poor performance on these three indicators points to high degrees of polarization, factional disputes, and threats to the perceived legitimacy of rulers. The theory, as well as empirical observation, indicates that an active and interconnected society provides positive feedback for the strengthening of democracies and the development of nations. In contrast, weak networks produce weak institutions and regulations. This relationship culture, necessary to strengthen democracy, is also reflected in the traditions of civil society.

Economist Intelligence Unit indicate, on average, an improvement of almost 0.2 points in participation measures, between 2019 and 2022.

Index 5: Separation of power and independence of branches of government

At the regional level, there is an important variation in the indicators of this index. Some countries have a de facto separation of powers and healthy systems of checks and balances while, at the other extreme, there are countries in which there is no separation of powers, neither de jure nor de facto of public powers.

The Separation of Powers Indicator (BTI) monitors the configuration and basic operation of the separation of public power among various entities and organizations: institutional differentiation, division according to functions and, above all, checks and balances. Values can range from situations where there is a clear separation of powers with cross checks and balances to the extreme where there is no separation of powers, either de jure or de facto.

The Independent Judiciary Indicator (BTI) measures the ability and autonomy of judges and courts to interpret and review laws, legislation, and policies, as well as the ability to develop their own reasoning or organize themselves in a process free from the influence of policyholders, of political decisions, de facto powers, and free of corruption.²³

The indicator of restrictions to the powers of government (WJP) allows us to observe to what extent: the Executive Powers of the countries govern with respect to the Legislative counterweights; to what extent political power is concentrated in one person, or - in contrast - whether it is distributed among different independent branches of government; to what extent opposition parties, or opposition factions within dominant parties, can publicly express opinions contrary to government policies, without fear of retaliation; or, in the hypothetical case that the Executive Branch of a country decides to adopt public policies that are openly contrary to the Constitution, to what extent can the Legislature stop illegal actions.²⁴

²³ It is possible to consult the qualitative data collection methodology of the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) and consult its databases at: <https://bti-project.org/en/methodology>

²⁴ For more details about the methodology and data collection, it is possible to consult: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/wjp-rule-law-index-2021/methodology>

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