

In the Name of the People: Democratization, Popular Organizations, and Populism in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador

Carlos de la Torre

University of Kentucky

Abstract:

The regimes of Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa undermine contestation while simultaneously increasing the material inclusion of the poor and the excluded. These regimes that are usually lumped together show distinct patterns in fostering participation. Whereas in Ecuador participation is reduced to voting in elections, participatory institutions were created in Venezuela and Bolivia. And whereas mobilization in Bolivia comes mostly from the bottom up, in Venezuela and Ecuador it comes from the top-down. To compare their divergent patterns this paper analyses: 1) the strength of subaltern organizations when these leaders were elected; 2) the confrontation between governments and the oppositions; and 3) the views of democratization of the coalitions that brought these regimes to power. *Keywords:* populism, social movements, authoritarianism, democratization.

Resumen: En nombre del pueblo: democratización, organizaciones populares y populismo en Venezuela, Bolivia y Ecuador

Los regímenes de Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales y Rafael Correa atentan en contra del pluralismo a la vez que incluyen materialmente a los pobres y a los excluidos. Estos regímenes que por lo general son aglutinados en un mismo saco tienen diferentes patrones para promover la participación política. Es así que mientras que en Ecuador la participación se reduce a votar en elecciones, en Venezuela y Bolivia se crearon instituciones participativas. Mientras que en Bolivia la participación viene en gran medida desde las bases, en Ecuador y Venezuela viene desde arriba hacia abajo. Para comparar los diferentes patrones este trabajo estudia: 1) la fuerza de organizaciones de los subalternos cuando estos líderes fueron electos; 2) la confrontación entre el gobierno y las oposiciones; 3) las visiones sobre democratización de las coaliciones que llevaron al poder a estos líderes. *Palabras clave:* populismo, movimientos sociales, autoritarismo, democratización.

The mushrooming literature on Latin America's left turn and on the rebirth of radical populism shows how the regimes of Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa can simultaneously be conceived as a threat and as a corrective to liberal democracy (Weyland, Madrid, and Hunter 2010; Cameron and Hershberg 2010; Levitsky and Roberts 2011). These governments, on the one hand, are undermining the institutions that guarantee contestation, pluralism, and civil liberties. Power is concentrated in the executive, reducing the authority of counterbalancing powers. These regimes selectively deny the civil and political liberties of the opposition and of the privately owned media to express alternative points of view. Even though the electoral act is conceived as the ultimate expression of democratic legitimacy and elections are clean, the electoral playing field favours incumbents. On the other hand, these regimes foster the inclusion and participation of previously disempowered groups by redistributing income and reducing poverty. They increase citizen's political participation by fostering referendums and other mechanisms of direct democracy. Chávez, Morales, and Correa empower the subaltern by using a populist rhetoric that pits the virtuous people against elites.

Despite the similarities in how these regimes undermine contestation and promote the material inclusion of the poor, there are important differences. In Bolivia, strong social movements curtail Morales' attempts to be the voice of the unitary people, forcing him to negotiate and even to reverse policies. Participation is mostly bottom up, and the government relies on the mobilization of social movements in conflicts with the opposition. Differently from Morales who came to power at the peak of a cycle of protest, Correa was elected when the indigenous movement entered into a crisis, temporarily losing its capacity to engage in sustained collective action. The Ecuadorian opposition did not have the resources to engage in acts of collective defiance against Correa's administration, nor were the stakes perceived as high as in Bolivia or Venezuela. Coupled with Correa's technocratic leadership style, his government did not organize the subaltern beyond elections, and has not promoted mechanisms of participatory democracy at the local and community levels. Chávez's Venezuela lay between Bolivia and Ecuador. The relative weakness of popular social movements and the exclusion of the informal sector from corporatist organizations during the reign of the two party system known as *Punto fijo* democracy allowed Chávez to create organizations of the subaltern from the top down. Unlike Ecuador, the opposition had the organizational strength and the perception that the stakes were serious enough to use collective action to defy and even to try to topple Chávez. The government responded by further

organizing popular sectors. Even though organizations of the subaltern were created from the top down, citizens use these organizations to try to push for their autonomous agendas.

Democracy and populism

Democratization, according to Robert Dahl, warrants contestation, understood as political competition and the possibility to criticize the government offering alternative points of view, while also promoting the participation and inclusion of citizens (Rovira Kaltwasser 2011, 13-15). These two dimensions of democratization could enter into conflict. Dahl argues that under conditions of socioeconomic exclusion, where a vast group of society has little possibility to exercise its rights, ‘this group will support more political participation at the cost of public contestation’ (Rovira Kaltwasser 2011, 14). Using Dahl’s two dimensions of polyarchy, scholars argue that populism ‘increases participation by the inclusion of marginalized groups in society, but limits (the possibilities for) contestation’ (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, 20).

The concept of populism has a long and controversial history in Latin America (de la Torre and Arson 2013). Most pundits and some academics still equate populism with irrationality. They argue that populism is based on ill-conceived economic policies, and/or the manipulation of irrational masses by demagogues. Modernization theory sustained that populism was a phase in the region’s history linked to the first incorporation of excluded masses to the political system (Germani 1971). According to Dependency theory populism was coupled with Import Substitution Industrialization, inclusionary and nationalist policies on behalf of the excluded, and corporatist arrangements (Ianni 1973).

Rejecting historicist arguments that linked populism to broader socioeconomic processes, political scientists in the 1990s redefined populism as a political strategy used by charismatic leaders to get to power and to govern (Roberts 1995; Weyland 1996, 2001). Populism was not linked to a phase in the history of Latin America, and its economic policies varied from neoliberalism to nationalist etatism. Others understood populism as a discourse that confronted the people against the oligarchy (de la Torre 2000; Raby 2006). All social, economic, and ethnic differentiations and oppressions assemble into two irreconcilable poles: ‘the people’ who encompasses the nation and ‘lo popular’ versus the evil and rotten oligarchy. The notion of ‘the people’ incorporates the idea of antagonistic conflict between two groups, with the romantic view of the purity of the people. As a result, ‘the

people' has been imagined as an undifferentiated, unified, fixed, and homogenous entity (Avritzer 2002, 72).

Populist leaders speak on behalf of 'the people' and claim to embody the popular will. Organizations of the subaltern also claim to be the voice of the people. Their interpretations of who are the people, and what are their interests might clash with how the populist leaders imagine the people. In Bolivia, for example, social movements do not allow Morales to incarnate an undifferentiated and homogenous will of the people, whereas in Ecuador and Venezuela leaders are less constrained when claiming to embody the people as a whole.

This article builds on the literature about the rebirth of radical populism, the turn to the left, and case studies of these regimes. Differently from studies that only focus on the institutional fabric of liberal democracy, it also analyses how populist regimes promote participation, and economic, political, and symbolic inclusion.

Bolivarian participatory democracy

Since the 1980s, organizations in Venezuela based in the middle and popular classes have demanded participatory democracy without the mediation of political parties (López Maya 2011). By the 1990s the two dominant political parties, Democratic Action (AD) and COPEI, became perceived as closed cartel parties that monopolized the political arena, and whose policies led to economic decline and to the impoverishment of the middle and working classes. AD and COPEI dominated labour unions, business associations, and other organized groups of civil society, possessing weak ties among the 'growing urban poor and the informal sectors of society' (Roberts 2012, 141). Market reforms resulted in the retrenchment of the state that simultaneously abandoned its integrationist role as service provider and public sector employer, and increased its surveillance and repression of the poor. Sujatha Fernandes (2010, 76) argues that the neoliberal state maintained 'the shantytowns in a state of permanent crisis and illegality.' Even though there were episodes of protest and even widespread defiance to the established order such as the Caracazo in 1989, social movements were relatively weak and lacked the organizational strength to engage in sustained mobilizations (Ellner 2011, 434; Gómez Calcaño 2009, 18).

The left advocated for a Constituent Assembly understood as the ultimate expression of popular sovereignty for the refoundation of the republic on an entirely new basis (Raby 2006, 155). Building on the prevailing anti-party feelings, and on views of democracy as social justice, participation and equality, Hugo Chávez promised an alternative model to representative

democracy. Participatory democracy became enshrined in the 1999 Constitution. Article 62 mandates ‘all citizens have the right to participate in public affairs.’ Chávez came to power ‘with strong emotional and symbolic identification but with a fragile organizational base’ (Gómez Calcaño 2009, 70). His administration organized the excluded sectors of society. In 1999, Technical Water Roundtables were formed to ‘arrange the distribution of water between neighbouring communities which share the same water mains’ (Raby 2006, 189). In June 2001, to promote the revolutionary process President Chávez encouraged the formation of Bolivarian Circles. These were ‘small groups of seven to fifteen people, they were intended to study the ideology of Bolivarianism, discuss local issues, and defend the revolution’ (Raby 2006, 188). Their aims were to organize disorganized supporters, and to “make participatory and protagonist democracy more effective” (Chávez quoted in García-Guadilla 2003, 192). In their heyday, Bolivarian Circles had approximately 2.2 million members and played an active role in the massive demonstrations that rescued President Chávez when he was temporarily removed from office in the April 2002 coup (Hawkins and Hansen 2006, 103). Since 2002, Urban Land Committees were established to give squatter settlements collective titles to land on which precarious self-built dwellings are situated. By 2006 about 6,000 committees were formed (García Guadilla 2007).

Since 2005, Chávez radicalized the Bolivarian revolution through a call to build a programme of Twenty-First Century Socialism. The goal was the construction of a revolutionary socialist democracy that will transcend representative liberal democracy with the ‘real and quotidian exercise of power by the great majority of common people’ (Acosta 2007, 22). According to Chávez, ‘popular power is the soul, nerve, flesh and bone, and essence of Bolivarian democracy, of a true democracy’ (quoted in Sosa 2007, 52). Differently from orthodox Marxist models based on the historical role of the proletariat, the subject of the Venezuelan Revolution is the pueblo understood as the huge mass made up of the ‘unemployed, the poor, and the excluded’ (Álvarez 2011, 113). Following Marxist models of pyramidal democracy, communal councils are seen as the first step towards the socialist transformation of the state. An association of councils will constitute a commune that in turn will form socialist cities.

Communal councils are organized when ‘communities of between 200 and 400 families in urban areas, or 20-plus in rural areas, would meet in an open citizen’s assembly and elect a communal council.... The citizen’s assembly is the sovereign body, discussing and taking all decisions on what projects, development plans or other activities the community wanted to

pursue' (Bruce 2008, 140). Based on a survey of 1,200 councils, Machado (2008) shows that most of their projects focused on infrastructure, services, and urban renewal. Studies of communal councils differ in their evaluation of how many people in the community participate. Using the AmericasBarometer survey of 2007 Kirk Hawkins (2010, 41) concludes that 35.5 per cent of the adult population participates in Communal Councils, an exceptionally high figure of about 8 million participants. Yet results based on ethnographic research show lower levels of participation. Margarita Lopez Maya reports, 'out of the 350 or 400 hundred families that made a communal council in Caracas no more than fifteen people actively participate' (2010, 37). Most of these are women who had previous experiences of participation.

Jesús Machado contends that community councils were departing from paternalist and clientelist traditions towards 'popular responsibility in the construction of collective responses to attain a better life' (Machado 2008, 50). However not all studies agree with this positive evaluation. Communal councils, in their views, were not autonomous, as they were created and regulated by a charismatic president that neutralizes or prevents autonomous grass root inputs (Sosa 2007; Wilpert 2007, 195-204). They depended on the unilateral and centralized decisions of president Chávez to determine the amount of money to be distributed and how to spend it. Communal Councils were drafted to campaign in favour of the president in referendums and elections. Involvement in Communal Councils and other Bolivarian initiatives were 'strongly associated with affect for Chávez ... based on their ideological affinity for Chávez populist discourse and leftist nationalism' (Hawkins 2010, 60).

Communal Councils worked closely with the Barrio Nuevo Tricolor project of the armed forces. Through this mission the military established military garrisons in poor neighbourhoods to work on social projects, to give temporary work, and to provide a free lunch to unemployed young people. Chávez argued that the people and the armed forces need to be united under his leadership to transform social, economic, and moral structures, preserving national independence. However, the military presence in the everyday life of the poor posed the threats of militarization and of social and political control (Corrales 2010; Reyna and D'Elia 2009).

As in other Latin American countries, it was mostly women who participate in community activism. Patriarchal gender roles, their exclusion from traditional male spheres, and their centrality in the life of their barrio explain their participation and empowerment (Fernandes 2007, 111). These women were using whatever the government offers to improve their commu-

nities and, in the process, feel that they belong and are taken into account.

Activists who became involved in leftist politics well before Chávez are using the openings of the political system in order to advance their agendas (Fernandes 2010). For example, Wayúu indigenous people of the state of Zulia, with the support of ecologists and the Asociación Nacional de Medios Comunitarios, Libres y Alternativos (ANMCLA), are resisting open-pit coal mining operations (Fernandes 2010, 237-255; Martínez, Fox, and Farrell 2010, 205-217). The goal of the state is to increase coal production in Zulia from 8,000 to 30,000 tons. The Wayúu and their allies ‘took the language and symbols of the Chávez government itself, to challenge its plan for coal mining’ (Fernandes 2010, 244). This confrontation illustrates that, for some, activist participation is not reduced to acclaiming Chavez in plebiscites and in the plazas. As Fernandes (2010, 254) sustains, these struggles ‘redefine the meaning and nature of participation.’

For those who actively participate in the different Bolivarian institutions, it has meant a new sense of dignity and inclusion. It also questions views of participation in these institutions as entirely top-down. The state and popular organizations negotiate how representative, participatory, and bottom up these experiments are. Yet Chávez’s charismatic leadership set the limits for popular autonomy, as the ‘revolutionary process’ is centred on his figure, his wishes, and even his dreams. It remains an open question if common people will be successful when they articulate demands that extend beyond the wishes of their charismatic leader or of state bureaucracies. It is also uncertain how these experiments of Bolivarian democracy will evolve after Chávez’s death.

Social movements, Evo Morales, and Bolivia’s decolonization

From 1985 to 2003 Bolivia was considered to be a model of neoliberal reform and political stability. Hyperinflation that was running at 20,000 per cent in 1984-85 was halted. Bolivia’s fragmented and polarized party system was transformed into ‘a party system of sorts in which three main parties shared power in various combinations for nearly twenty years’ (Crabtree 2013, 277). This was called the ‘democracia pactada’. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the political system was widely regarded as clientelist, corrupt, and in need of renewal. Neoliberal reforms failed to create employment, reactivate the economy, and reduce poverty. Privatization had the perverse effect of increasing budget deficits. Bolivian governments depended on external aid to pay salaries for public employees, and tried to increase revenue with plans of privatizing water, raising taxes, or exporting gas via Chile.

From 2000 to 2003, Bolivia underwent a cycle of protest and political turmoil that resulted in the collapse of pacted democracy and of the neoliberal economic model. Scholars debated whether Bolivia underwent a revolutionary epoch (Dunkerley 2007, García Linera 2006, Hylton and Thomson 2007). Society was split into two antagonistic coalitions that had radically different economic and political projects. As García Linera (2006, 83) explains, these coalitions were based on ethnic and cultural polarities (indigenous/qaras (white) gringos), class cleavages (workers/businessmen), and regional divisions (Andean west/Amazonian crescent).

Rural and urban unions, indigenous organizations, coca growers' unions, and middle class sectors fought against water privatization, increasing taxation, the forced eradication of coca leaves, and surrendering gas reserves to multinational interests. The state increasingly relied on repression, in turn radicalizing protestors. The Gas War was resolved when President Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada was forced to leave Bolivia and was succeeded by his vice president Carlos Mesa in October 2003. 'Neither Morales nor the MAS was actively involved in these uprisings, which were instead the result of grassroots organizing' (Postero 2010, 14). Insurgents refused to take power, and Morales supported a constitutional exit from the crisis in 2003. Insurgents accomplished their goals of getting rid of the neoliberal model, and defending Bolivia's national resources. In 2005, Evo Morales was elected as the nation's first indigenous president with a platform of 'refoundation' understood as decolonization and strengthening the state apparatus.

Following the lead of the alliance of indigenous, peasant, and workers' organizations of the Pacto de Unidad (Mayorga 2011), Bolivia's 2009 Constitution redefined the nation state as 'plurinational and communitarian.' The Constitution of 2009 granted indigenous rights such as autonomy, self-governance, and the right to culture. It recognized '36 indigenous languages as official languages of the state (Article 5), describing the 'moral ethical' basis of Bolivia's plural society as resting on indigenous cosmological principles such as 'to live well' (Article 8). It formally embraced a 'democratic participatory, representative and communitarian' mode of government inspired by indigenous communities' (Albro 2010, 79).

Morales' party, the MAS, had its origins in strong grassroots movements, and his leadership is grounded on an extensive network of peasant unions and indigenous organizations. According to Crabtree (2013, 284), these organizations share 'a strong communitarian tradition, with problems discussed and decisions taken collectively. Among social movements, there is a culture of active participation and adherence to decisions. There is also

a strong pressure on leaders ... to be accountable to those who put them in positions of authority’.

President Morales follows the practices of communal democracy when he consults policies with social movement organizations. For instance, he gave a parallel state of the union address of his first year in government to peasant organizations and unions (Mayorga 2009, 158-159). He discussed fundamental governmental policies, such as the law on education, coca leaf, and social security after consulting with peasant, indigenous and other popular organizations (García Linera 2009, 90). Scholars question the extent to which these long meetings – which sometimes last for about 20 hours – are based on the participation of all, or on the imposition of Morales’ criteria. For the government this is a democracy of social movements (García Linera 2009). For critics, the regime uses followers to intimidate the opposition through mass rallies and other forms of collective action.

Morales’ attempts to speak on behalf of the Bolivian people are sometimes supported and on other occasions challenged by organizations of the subaltern. For example, movements organized in the Pacto de Unidad had an active and independent role in the drafting of the new constitution. In 2007, social movements previously organized in the Pacto de Unidad became part of the CONALCAM (Coordinadora Nacional por el Cambio). This organization was presided by Morales who mobilized supporters from the top down in struggles against the opposition in a conjuncture of acute confrontation. Social movements marched to support several MAS legislative initiatives, and in 2008, they campaigned for Morales in the recall referendum (Mayorga 2011, 28). Social movements are not subordinated to Morales’s authority, however. For example, ‘in 2011, there were widespread protests against government’s policies to raise fuel prices, there were demonstrations against wage restraints, and there was a march by indigenous peoples from the lowlands protesting a government’s plans to build a road through their territories. In each case the government found itself having to bow to popular pressures at considerable political costs’ (Crabtree 2013, 286).

If during the revolution of 1952, ‘the people’ was understood in class terms and as mestizo, Morales re-elaborated this category as ‘plurinational’ (Mayorga 2012, 243-45). The empowerment of indigenous people is evidenced in the symbolic changes in the Bolivian political landscape. Indigenous rituals are performed in the Presidential palace, previously a centre of white power (Ticona 2006). ‘The MAS congressional bloc after the 2006 election consisted of 72 representatives of whom 43 were indigenous; twelve senators of whom three were indigenous (and one female). Its first

cabinet included four indigenous people (two of whom were women)' (Hylton and Thomson 2007, 27-28).

The cultural and symbolic inclusion of indigenous people was coupled with a populist discourse that turns rivals into enemies. The authoritarian spectre is present in small communities and at the national level. For example, after learning the results of the 2005 presidential election in the small village of Quilacollo an indigenous leader affirmed: 'in our community there was one vote for Tuto Quiroga (Morales rival in the election), we are going to investigate who this is because we cannot tolerate betrayals by our own comrades' (Stefanoni and Do Alto 2006, 20). This undemocratic view of opponents as enemies characterizes the president and vice-president's worldviews and speeches (Postero 2010). Morales's regime does not always respect the rule of law or the independence of the judiciary (Gamarra 2008). Power is concentrated in the executive, and Morales serves as the country's president, the head of the MAS party and of Chapare coca growers.

Correa's techno-populism and the conflicts with social movements

Between 1997 and 2005 three elected presidents of Ecuador were deposed by what many interpreted as the sovereign people rebelling against illegitimate governments. Abdalá Bucaram lasted six months in power. He was deposed by Congress in February 1997, on the grounds of mental incapacity to govern, after massive protests. Jamil Mahuad, a Harvard trained technocrat, faced the same fate. A coalition of junior military officers and social movement leaders – including the powerful indigenous movement – overthrew the president in 2001. Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez, the leader of the failed coup, was elected in 2003, in a short-lived coalition with the indigenous movement and their political party Pachakutik. Yet, he could not finish his term in office and was overthrown in 2005. Finally, Rafael Correa, another outsider, was elected in 2006. When he came to power, the party system collapsed. His administration reversed neoliberal policies with a statist and redistributive model of development.

Unlike Bolivia where the regime constantly negotiates with organizations of the subaltern, Correa is in conflict with most social movements. Despite the government's rhetoric in favour of participation, no institutions to promote participation have been formed. Participation under Correa is mainly reduced to voting in elections. After the people vote, the role of the leader is to design policies on behalf of the poor but without seeking their engagement. A technocratic elite and the president – who is also an expert – know the road to lead their nation to a different model of development and democracy. They portrait the defensive reactions of social movements

to the loss of autonomy and hard won rights and privileges as proofs that their universalistic project of state building is resisted by an array of groups that only seek their particularistic prerogative and not the wellbeing of all (Correa 2012; Quintero and Silva 2010).

The project of Correa's government is to build a state conceived as the representative of the general interest of society. All organized groups, regardless of their ideology or class, 'were dismissed as privileged interlocutors representing special interests, while his elected government was deemed the only legitimate guardian of the national interests' (Conaghan 2011, 274). The responsibility of bringing back the state and transforming society lies in the hands of the National Secretary of Planning and Development (SENPLADES). This institution is in charge of public planning, reforming the state apparatus, public investment, training public servants, and writing the national development plan, whose task is to set the overall goals of social, cultural, and economic policies.

Unlike neoliberal technocrats who had links with international organizations such as the IMF and with private financial institutions, SENPLADES' technocrats come from academia and NGOs. Differently from neoliberal experts who believed in econometric models, they are interdisciplinary and eclectic, quoting postcolonial theorists, radical democrats, unorthodox economists, and political ecologists in their documents (SENPLADES 2009, 2009a). As other technocrats, they envision themselves as acting for the interests of society as a whole.

Technocrats are not just cold-blooded, rational, and efficient bureaucrats. They have moral and redemptive missions, such as rebuilding their nations, bringing progress, development, or modernity. Sergio de Castro, the guru of the Chilean Chicago Boys, for example argued that he had to revert not just three years of failed socialist policies under Salvador Allende, but also 'half a century of errors' (Constable and Valenzuela 1991, 186). Domingo Felipe Cavallo saw himself as 'a Messiah who had to solve all Argentinean economic calamities' (Corrales 1997, 50). Similarly, Ecuadorian technocrats have a mission. Their goal is to build the *sumak kawsay*, metaphysically understood as 'the harmony between community and their cosmos'. This objective, they claim, comes from indigenous cosmology and aims to build non-Western relationships between society, nature, and development. In order to reach the good life, they must reorganize the state and civil society.

In order to achieve the 'good life', the first steps were the rationalization and modernization of the state to eliminate administrative irrationalities and corporatist privileges. As a consequence Correa's government had conflicts

with most organized groups of civil society: teachers, students, public employees, and indigenous organizations (Becker 2011; Martínez Novo 2009, Ospina 2009). The government does not consider these groups to be ‘real’ social movements or representatives of civil society. They are depicted as privilege groups that hinder the strengthening of state power. Correa’s government clashed with both students and teachers over changes in the high school and university curricula. The government tried to reduce the power of the unions of state employees; it intended to get rid of the teacher’s union controlled by the leftist Democratic Popular Movement; and it aimed to restrict unionization in the public sector.

The government’s conflicts with the main indigenous organization, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), are rooted in strong disagreements over mineral extraction and over the autonomy of indigenous organizations. Correa sees mining as the country’s future and proposes to use natural resources to alleviate poverty. He repeatedly says, ‘We cannot be beggars sitting in a sack of gold’. The indigenous movement and ecologists argue that the new constitution’s overarching goal of *sumac kawsay* – meaning ‘the good life’ or ‘living well’ in Kichwa – requires a rejection of mineral extraction and asks for alternative relationships between humans, nature, and development.

The government also collided with indigenous movements over the question of autonomy. From 1988 to 2009, indigenous organizations managed a parallel educational system of bilingual education outside the Ministry of Education. This was the only case in Latin America in which indigenous organizations had the autonomy to nominate the personnel of educational bureaucracies, to hire teachers, and to give shape to a new curriculum. The state retained control over the budget of intercultural education in a period of sharp decrease in social and educational spending. Equating autonomy with privatization, seen by Correa’s government as a malignant legacy of neoliberalism, the government transferred bilingual education from indigenous organizations to the Ministry of Education. Indigenous teachers opposed this transfer as an attack to their autonomy (Martínez Novo and de la Torre 2010).

Social movement organizations have also been the target of Correa’s belligerent rhetoric. In July 2008, he called environmentalists ‘*añaditos*’ (well-to-do, infantile, and not fully masculine pampered kids) ‘with full bellies who oppose everything all the time’ (Correa 2008). A few months later he asserted: ‘We always said that the main danger to our political project, after defeating the right in elections, are the infantile left, environmentalists, and indianists’ (Correa 2009). In October 2009 in the midst of a con-

flict over the use of water he called the leadership of the indigenous organization CONAIE, 'golden ponchos' out of touch with their social base.

The government is trying to divide the leadership of CONAIE from the rank and-file. Parallel indigenous organizations were created (Becker 2011, Martínez Novo 2009, Ospina 2009). For instance, the government reactivated the Federation of Ecuadorian Indians (FEI) from the top down. Leaders of smaller organization that had rivalries with CONAIE are using these opportunities to strengthen their organizations. Similarly, the Afro-Ecuadorian movement chose to ally with the government. They drafted legislation such 'The National Plan against Racial Discrimination,' and Executive Decree Number 60 for affirmative action. These laws mandate state institutions to hire indigenous people, Afro-Ecuadorians, and Montubios (peasants from the coast considered as an ethnic group) in accordance of their percentages in the Census. Affirmative action laws have not been enforced because the leaders of the Afro-Ecuadorean movement are working for the state, and as a result their organizations do not have the capacity to engage with the government to make it fulfil this progressive legislation (de la Torre and Antón 2012).

Correa sees indigenous and other poor Ecuadorians as beneficiaries of state distribution but not as autonomous actors. When organizations articulate their own views of development or democracy, they are stigmatized as 'infantile' leftists or as being manipulated by foreign NGOs. Protest is criminalized and more than two hundred indigenous and peasant leaders who opposed open pit mining face accusations of terrorism (Amnesty International 2012).

Comparing Different Approaches to Participation

To explain different patterns in civil society participation this section analyses the interrelationship between: 1) the strength of subaltern organizations when populist leaders obtained power; 2) the conflict between the government and the opposition that encouraged or not the mobilization of the subaltern; and 3) how these coalitions, and their leaders, conceived of democracy.

1) Social movements and populism: who speaks for and who mobilizes the people?

Evo Morales came to power at the peak of indigenous led popular protest against neoliberalism and pacted democracy. His party is the political instrument of strong social movements. Participation in Bolivia is to a large

extent grounded in communitarian traditions where all participate and deliberate until a decision is made. Leaders at all levels are accountable to their social base. Participation under Morales is more bottom-up, and organizations of the subaltern have the capacity to force the government to reverse policies.

Differently from Morales, Correa came to power when the indigenous movement's capacity to stage sustained collective action had diminished. CONAIE, and sectors of their political party Pachakutik, took part with Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez in a failed coup d'état in January 2000. Later they served under Gutiérrez's elected government. By 2006 Pachakutik was considered by many citizens to be just another traditional political party. Luis Macas the historical leader of the indigenous movement got only 2.2 per cent of the vote. For the leadership of CONAIE it became difficult to mobilize the rank and file because their successful demands for cultural recognition were not accompanied by socioeconomic distribution (Martínez Novo 2009a).

In Venezuela, corporatist arrangements between the organized sectors of society and the state bypassed the growing informal sector of the economy. When Chávez came to power social movements did not have the organizational structures to engage in sustained collective action. His regime tapped on the opportunity to organize and to mobilize the excluded understood as those without work in the formal economy, the poor, and those without formal education (Gómez Calcaño 2009; Ellner 2011, 427; Álvarez 2011, 99-116).

2) Confronting the Oligarchy?

Populism is based on a Manichaeian rhetoric that pits the people against the oligarchy. Populist regimes differ in their challenge to elites, provoking different levels of polarization. When confrontation is reduced to the political arena, leaders do not need to organize supporters beyond elections. When conflicts are over perceived social and economic interests, populist leaders promote popular organizations and/or organize political parties (Roberts 2006).

Chávez grabbed power, reduced the spaces for contestation, and used a populist discourse to polarize society into two antagonistic camps (Corrales 2005). Between 2001 and 2004, a coalition of business, labour, and civil society organizations, with the active support of the privately owned media, took to the streets to protest against changes to the educational law, agrarian reform, and the dismissal of technical personnel in the state petroleum company PDVSA. Chávez responded by increasing the organizational ca-

capacity of the subaltern, and mobilizing popular sectors to defend his regime, especially after the failed coup d'état. After a period of disarray and electoral abstention the opposition in Venezuela united into the Mesa de la Unidad. Under the leadership of Henrique Capriles they became a powerful contestant against Chávez in October 2012. To confront the opposition Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro continued to mobilize supporters in the streets.

As in Venezuela the politics of polarization were used by Morales to concentrate power. The opposition regrouped in strong autonomous movements in the lowlands. Morales reorganized social movements in the CONALCAM and used collective action to confront the opposition. Even though Correa uses similar strategies to provoke confrontation and polarization, the opposition in Ecuador is fragmented and has not felt the urgency to be united into a common electoral front. Differently from Venezuela where middle class people formed neighbourhood organizations and human rights groups, the Ecuadorian middle class was not organized. The stakes in the confrontation between Correa and the opposition were not perceived to be as high as in Venezuela or Bolivia. Correa included the middle class by expanding state employment, and even though at times he uses a polarizing rhetoric, his policies have not targeted the structural power of elites. Given the weakness of the opposition and the crises of the indigenous movement Correa did not need to mobilize followers beyond elections.

3) How do populist leaders and their coalitions understand democratization?

To compare the mechanism created to foster participation it is important to analyse how populist leaders and the coalition that brought them to power understand democratization. As a result of the pressures of his constituencies, but also because of his views of the need to replace 'bourgeois' with 'real democracy,' Chávez's regime formed an array of participatory mechanisms, selectively disrespecting the rules of the 'bourgeois' democratic game, such as the separation of powers, pluralism, and accountability. Even though participatory institutions were created from above, poor people appropriated the discourse of participation, and in some cases as shown in this article, went beyond the directions coming from above.

Chávez's rhetoric politicized relations of inequality between different classes and ethnic groups. He reclaimed Venezuela's indigenous and black heritages that were downplayed by the *punto fijo* elites (Buxton 2009, 161). He tapped into the 'deep reservoir of daily humiliation and anger felt by people of the lower classes' (Fernandes 2010, 85). Chávez's goal was not

to reform the system but to create a new Venezuela that needed to be baptized again as the Bolivarian Fifth Republic. He claims that ‘a comprehensive moral and spiritual revolution’ was required to demolish ‘the old values of individualism, capitalism, and selfishness’ (Zúquete 2008, 114). The people of Venezuela are incarnated in their leader. He reiterates the phrases ‘I am not myself, I am the people’ and ‘I represent, plainly, the voice and the heart of millions’ (Zúquete 2008, 100, 104).

Evo Morales was socialized in politics as the leader of the coca growers union. He views politics as a show of power in the form of rallies that demonstrates strength in the streets. A successful social movement and party strategy, he argues, is based on the mobilization of thousands of organized supporters, and ‘as a sum of assemblies, negotiations with politicians and officials, and fights in the streets and roads’ (Sivak 2008, 43). Roberto Laserna (2010, 28) explains that Morales and his party are opposed to representation arguing that the people can govern themselves directly and without intermediaries. They understand democracy as ‘the active participation of organized masses’ (Laserna 2010, 52). Jorge Lazarte (2010, 35) uses the expression ‘democracy of the streets’ in order to describe how, for the MAS, ‘each act of collective mobilization is as an act of popular sovereignty.’ The MAS conceives ‘the people’ to be inherently democratic and virtuous. Social movements that speak on behalf of the people could challenge Morales’ claim to embody the unitary will of all, and at times have forced him to revert policies because they went against the interests of ‘the people.’ Yet Morales’s charismatic leadership remains unquestionable and brings together the different factions that make up the MAS (Laserna 2010; Postero 2010).

Rafael Correa combines the populist with the technocrat in his persona. Self-described post-neoliberal experts occupy key positions in his administration. They understand democracy as social justice, selectively disregarding the institutional mechanism of liberal democracy as impediments to express the will of the majority. The leader and the experts see themselves as capable of speaking on behalf of the people as a whole, and not for special interest groups. The leader acts as if he embodies the will of the people. Experts consider themselves to be located above the egotistic interests of civil society, therefore believing that they can work for the benefit of the nation. The populist leader and technocrats share a view of society as an empty space where they can engineer entirely new institutions and practices. All existing institutional arrangements are thus considered to be corrupt, and in need of renewal. The defensive reactions of different social movements and organizations of civil society to the penetration and encroach-

ment of the state reinforce their notions that their project of redemption is resisted by a wide array of egotistical enemies. Assuming that they hold the only truth that comes from the knowledge of experts and from the unitary voice of the people, they do not value dialogue. Dissent is interpreted as treason.

Conclusions

If analysed solely with liberal standards that guarantee contestation the populist regimes of Chávez, Morales, and Correa show a bleak picture for democratization. Populist Manichaean discourse transforms democratic rivals into enemies. Differently from adversaries who fight according to a shared set of rules, and whose positions could be accepted, enemies represent an evil threat. The construction of enemies polarizes society into two poles, builds strong identities of ‘us against them’, and blames others for the failures of the leader. Acting on what they perceive as the ‘true’ interests of the people, these leaders selectively disregard the rule of law, the separation of powers, and the institutional arrangements that guarantee for pluralism and accountability. They do not see themselves as regular politicians in a sequence of elected officials (Montúfar 2013). On the contrary, they feel they are leading foundational projects that would bring the second and definitive independence to their nations and even to their continent.

As shown in this article, democratization also promotes inclusion and participation. Populist democratizing credentials are based on the material, political, and symbolic inclusion of the excluded. Chávez, Morales, and Correa are materially including the excluded by distributing mineral resource pitfall rents to reduce poverty – though perhaps not in a manner that can last in the long run (Weyland 2013). As a result, and according to figures from the Economic Commission for Latin America, poverty in Venezuela fell from 48.6 per cent of the population in 2002 to 29.5 per cent in 2011. In Bolivia it dropped from 62.4 per cent in 2002 to 42.4 per cent in 2010. In Ecuador, it was reduced from 49 per cent in 2002 to 32.4 per cent in 2011 (CEPAL 2012: 14).

These regimes are promoting political participation beyond regularly scheduled elections. They have instituted mechanisms of direct democracy such as referendums and plebiscites. Constituent Assemblies were conveyed; new constitutions were drafted, and later approved in referenda. These administrations use elections to displace rival political elites and to constantly bring together charismatic presidents with their electors. These leaders brought to the public sphere topics that were either ignored or treated as technical issues. For instance, they demystified the assertions of tech-

nical neutrality of neoliberal experts. They politicized the economy as a political economy that serves particular class interests. They also politicized their societies by appealing to those who are apathetic and disenfranchised about politics.

Yet as argued in this article, these regimes differed in how they promoted participation. Whereas in Ecuador participation is mostly reduced to voting in elections, in Venezuela and Bolivia, formal and informal mechanisms to promote participation are experimented at the communal, local, and national levels. The strength of popular organizations at that time these leaders were elected, the perceived stakes in the confrontation between government and the opposition, and the views of democratization of populist coalition, explain these divergent patterns in promoting participation.

Classical populists undermined autonomous social movement and the possibility of forging strong civil societies (Oxhorn 1998). Radical populist regimes are on the one hand following the pattern of their predecessors. These regimes are co-opting autonomous organizations of the subaltern, and the attacks to civil liberties are undermining the institutional bases needed for a strong civil society to thrive. But on the other, organizations of the subaltern might use the discourse on behalf of the poor, and the policies promoting their active participation as opportunities to push for their own demands. In Bolivia autonomous social movements confront Morales, forcing him to sometimes revert his policies. In Venezuela and Ecuador the governments have temporarily co-opted social movements. As in other populist experiences, co-optation and selective repression might end up transforming grass root activism into the plebiscitary acclamation of self-described authoritarian redeemers of their nations.

Carlos de la Torre <c.delatorre@uky.edu> is Director of International Studies and Professor of Sociology at the University of Kentucky. His areas of research are populism, and populist movements in Latin America, and racism and citizenship in Ecuador. His latest publications are *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century* coedited with Cynthia Arnson, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013; *Populist Seduction in Latin America*, Ohio University Press, second edition 2010; and *The Ecuador Reader* coedited with Steve Striffler, Duke University Press, 2009. He was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, and of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

Carlos de la Torre
 Director, International Studies Program
 Professor, Department of Sociology
 University of Kentucky
 1533 Patterson Office Tower
 Lexington, KY 40506
 United States

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