

Modernisation, Digital Media Spread, and the Young's Powerless Political Participation in South America

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Abstract

This article reports a longitudinal study on South American young people's democratic attitudes and political participation along with the growth of digital media use in the region. We tested the association between their democratic values and political behaviour since the 1980s and increasing access to digital media since the 1990s. The forty years of the World Values

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Survey (WVS) database were analysed. We found that young people in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay have not become more democratic and show stable low levels of political participation along with increasing socio-economic development index rates and digital media spread in their countries.

Key words: democratic attitudes - political participation - digital media - South America young people - WVS

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un estudio longitudinal sobre las actitudes democráticas y la participación política de los jóvenes sudamericanos a lo largo del proceso de crecimiento del uso de los medios digitales en la región. Se ha probado la asociación entre sus valores democráticos y su comportamiento político desde la década de 1980 y el creciente acceso a los medios digitales desde la década de 1990. Se analizaron los cuarenta años de la base de datos de la Encuesta Mundial de Valores (WVS). Identificamos que los jóvenes de Argentina, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Perú y Uruguay no se han vuelto más democráticos y muestran niveles bajos y estables de participación política a lo largo del aumento de los índices de desarrollo socioeconómico y la difusión de los medios digitales en sus países.

Palabras clave: actitudes democráticas - participación política - medios de comunicación digitales - jóvenes de América del Sur - WVS

Introduction

Are young South Americans becoming more democratic and politically participative along with the popularization of digital media?

The rise of the internet, in the early 1990s, and of social media, in the early 2000s, besides mobile phones, brought about quite optimistic perspectives on new possibilities of participative democracy worldwide, especially for the young. Scholars, policymakers, and social movements, among other social actors, envisioned new possibilities for democracies coming along with the spread of a new techno-social system that comprises social processes of cognition, communication, and cooperation, in Fuchs's (2017) critical concept of social media.

This is a well-developed and consolidated discussion indeed, but still far from being closed. Other authors also argue that the internet and social media

are harming democracy by facilitating the formation of ideologic bubbles, hate speech, and the creation and spread of fake news (Morelock & Narita, 2021; Bradshaw & Howard, 2019; Bartlett, 2014).

In this paper, we analyse this phenomenon from the Modernisation Theory approach. This theoretical perspective assesses whether economic, social, and technological advances have led to the advance of democratization worldwide. Inglehart (2008) argues that modernisation and economic development produce cultural changes toward democratic values and self-expression. He also states that intergenerational value change will occur if younger generations grow up under different living conditions than those that shaped older generations.

Within this perspective, we chose to study the relations between digital media popularisation with young people's democratic attitudes and political behaviour because this cohort has been strongly impacted by this societal material change during their years of formation as citizens.

We will focus on South American cases. We understand that increasing internet access in the region should contribute to democracy since it is an important material resource in our contemporary societies. Internet access should facilitate people's access to information.

South America is an important case study due to its complexity. The region takes in contrasting socio-economic development dynamics: enduringly increasing development indexes rates, such as literacy, per capita income, and human development, come along with remaining poverty, social inequality, and high crime levels among other social, political, and economic issues.

Young people's disposition for political participation through unconventional means has been studied worldwide at least since the 1960s (Brussino et al., 2009). In this twenty-first century, the internet and social media are expected to give them new opportunities (Herrera, 2012; Cohen & Kahne, 2012; Bennett et al., 2011).

Pérez Islas (2006) traced the history of the investigation of youth in Latin America and acknowledges the relevance of Cecilia Braslavsky (1987)'s work. She identified three first phases: The first one consists of essays written from 1930 to 1960. The second one, between 1960 and 1980, was carried out under a sociological approach predominance and introduced the study of youth as either citizenship or stratification categories. The third one, from 1982 to 1986, was regarded as the creation of the International Youth Day, and it included young people's political participation in the agenda (Pérez Islas, 2006).

Arias-Cardona and Alvarado (2015) conducted a literature review on the theme aiming to group studies by theoretical similarities. The authors found three main theoretical perspectives: the bio-psycho developmental, the socio-historic and the political-cultural. The authors also figure out that many studies concluded that young people's relationship with politics requires transcending the focus on conventional participation because they have negative points of view in relation to it.

In South America, scholars have researched young people's political participation at local, regional, and national levels. Zarzuri (2010) identified that, among young Chileans, more than disenchantment with politics, there is a disenchantment with a certain way that politics are made. The author found that rules imposed by the State, such as compulsory voting, do not lead to young people's more active participation.

In Brazil, Baquero (2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2019) studied political culture, political values, citizenship, political socialization and the internet and new media, especially among young people in southern Brazil. There is a crisis of political mediation expressed in an increasing withdrawal of young people from conventional political mechanisms due to their disillusionment with politics (Baquero & Baquero, 2012).

With this study, we intend to contribute to the discussion on South American young people's political participation from a political-cultural perspective. We ask whether cultural change toward more democratic attitudes and political participation will be associated with digital media use spread. We aim to comprehend whether the results corroborate the thesis of economic development followed by democratic values spread, or whether young South Americans raise a different explanatory model. We do not suggest any causal relation, we are concerned about whether there is any association or prediction capacity.

Our hypotheses propose that: 1) the growing use of digital media by young South Americans is associated with changes in their political attitudes and behaviours, and 2) the increasing use of digital media by young South Americans comes along with more democratic attitudes and stronger political participation.

We follow the UNDESA (2013)'s definition of youth, which "for statistical purposes, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by the Member States" (p. 1). This definition is underpinned and enclosed by Niemi and Hepburn (1995)'s

understanding. They state that the political socialization process is faster and deeper throughout the period between 14 and 25 years old.

Thus, this article reports a longitudinal study, within which some statistical tests, using data from the forty years of the WVS collected in countries of the region in its seven waves. We chose to select all WVS waves aiming at monitoring and comparing results among the different periods of the continent's economic and digital development.

We analyse data from individuals within the cohort of sixteen to twenty-four years old from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Venezuela due to two main reasons: one theoretically based, and the other due to empirical criteria and research limitations.

Theoretically, we chose cases according to Mill (1886)'s method of difference and recognise that our cases are different from each other, but they have common conditions for a possible phenomenon occurrence. Our cases are different regarding democratic development and consolidation, but they share structural aspects. Those are region, history, and recent economic development.

Empirically, these are all the South American countries included in the World Values Survey (WVS) database that have longitudinal data for this study's important variables. The WVS also only interviews individuals aged sixteen and over.

1. Literature review

Inglehart and Welzel (2009) state that values change from generation to generation reflects historical changes in the existential conditions of a specific society. Inglehart (2008)'s thesis on modernisation, cultural change, and democratic values is underpinned by two main hypotheses: 1) the scarcity hypothesis implies that prolonged periods of high prosperity will tend to encourage the spread of postmaterialist and self-expression values – and that enduring economic decline will have the opposite effect, and 2) “the socialization hypothesis which proposes generations maintain values developed during their adolescent years” (Graaf & Evans, 1996, p. 609). In this sense, Graaf and Evans (1996) highlight that this thesis tackles both individual (needs and values) and societal (economic development) explanation levels.

In their formative years, individuals tend to adopt values consistent with their own experiences. This gradual process occurs as a younger generation repla-

ces the previous one in the adult population of a society, through an intergenerational change of values. Inglehart (2008)'s cohorts and intergenerational studies point to a gradual process of intergenerational value change associated with socioeconomic development. Increasingly favourable existential conditions of security and individual autonomy tend to make people value self-expression (Inglehart & Welzel, 2009).

A major component of the rise of self-expression values is a shift away from deference to all forms of external authority. Under threat of invasion, internal disorder or economic collapse, people eagerly seek strong authority figures that can protect them from danger. Conversely, conditions of prosperity and security are conducive to the tolerance of diversity in general and major support of democracy (Inglehart, 2008).

According to Graaf and Evans (1996):

In addition to these changes in values, it is proposed that because of the expansion of higher education and the increasingly pervasive contribution of the mass media more people have acquired the knowledge and opportunity to engage with political issues on a national scale. It is thus argued that changing political values and increasing political sophistication are in the process of altering the nature of politics by creating new, value-based cleavages that crosscut the old 'Left-Right' conflicts over the distribution of material resources. (p. 609)

Inglehart (2008) states that gradual shifts from materialist to postmaterialist values, when younger birth cohorts replace older ones in the adult population, have important implications on orientations onto political participation and freedom of expression, support for new causes and new types of political parties.

Thus, an intergenerational change associated with cultural changes, promoted by increasing levels of existential security, has implications for political change and tends to produce growing support for democracy.

Grasso (2014) criticises the societal modernisation account, saying it will not locate generational differences in attitudes towards participation in different politic-historical socialization contexts for different cohorts. From that point of view, "certain generations are more likely to engage in specific political acts than other generations based on the relative importance of different repertoires of participation in the historical periods in which individuals have spent the majority of their formative years" (Grasso, 2014, p. 64).

Does this thesis on the processes that define participatory behaviour and attitudes towards democracy find an empirical basis in South America's socio-economic development indexes and digital media spread, especially among those who have lived their youth years in the last thirty years?

Modernisation Theory can offer great applicability and relevance to this subject matter. However, as previously mentioned, there are alternative explanations. While according to this theoretical approach studying Latin American young people's political behaviour can help us to estimate the future environment for democratic behaviour, the region presents important contradictions in its socio-economic context, such as the concomitance between economic development indexes and remaining poverty, inequality, crime levels, and media monopoly.

1.1 Political participation, the young, and digital media

Almond and Verba (1989) point out that the central issue of politics in the late twentieth and early twentieth-first centuries is what cultural content is emerging around the world. The authors state that Western culture is apparently spreading rapidly along with the technology through which it flows.

However, they believe that the problem in the content of this emerging culture is its political character because although the movement toward technology and rationality appears uniform throughout the world, the path political change is taking is less clear. The authors identify participation as one aspect of this new political culture, but "[...] what the mode of participation will be is uncertain" (Almond & Verba, 1989, p. 3).

Political participation is any activity that seeks to influence the political decision-making process directly or indirectly (Kaase & Marsh, 1979). Conventional political participation is performed, in this matter, by voting, party affiliation and participation in political campaigns (Verba & Nie, 1987). Unconventional ones occur through political actions that seek to interfere in politics through non-institutionalized means (Van der Meer et al., 2009), like participating in political and social movements, signing petitions, engaging in debates through social media etc.

Until the early 1960s, the concept of political participation circumscribed voting, campaigning and contact between citizens and public officials. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was expanded to include community groups; direct contacts between citizens, public officials, and politicians; protest forms; and new social movements. In the 1990s, civil activities, such as volun-

teering and social engagement, were included. Nowadays, ethical consumer practices have become part of political action (Quintelier & Van Deth, 2014).

“[...] fed through processes of educational enhancement and value change, the emergence of direct action and its organisational crystallization in the so-called New Social Movements [...] could be interpreted as an extension of the action repertory of the citizenry”, states Kaase (2010, p. 542).

Cohen and Kahne (2012) propose a new concept of participatory politics at the beginning of this twenty-first century. It is one based on peer group interaction through which individuals and groups seek to exercise their voice and influence matters of public interest using digital media tools. Starting an online political group, writing, and disseminating a post about politics on a blog, or sharing a video with political content are examples of it.

Quintelier and Van Deth (2014) found that “interest in political affairs, feeling of being politically efficacious, political confidence and support for norms and values promoting democratic attitudes lead to an increase in political participation” (p. 155).

1.2 Young people and political participation

Older generations pass on their values to younger ones; individual basic values reflect the most important conditions of living before adulthood, and early socialization tends to be more rigid than late ones. This cultural heritage does not dissipate easily, but it can gradually disappear if it is incoherent with individual experience (Inglehart & Welzel, 2009).

Family, school, groups of friends, media and events are prominent agencies in the political socialization of young people. Among other issues, they provide the potential for change in political attitudes from one generation to the next, say Niemi and Sobieszek (1977).

Mannheim (1928) argues that young people experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same generation. These experiences crystallise, differentiate generations in the population, and endure constantly through the life cycles. Thus, historic periods of socialization onto cohorts are expected to have effects on political attitudes and behaviours of distinct political generations (Grasso, 2014).

Bennett et al. (2011) stress that the passive culture promoted by television and the decline of communitarian associations might have led to a generational apathy toward politics and public life, and new forms of online civic

action cannot reverse it. However, this new digital generation seems to promote new forms of engagement. Thus, Bennett et al. (2011) suggest that the passive culture accounts for a fragmentation of the old civic order, but social media can enable civic practices back into political action.

Baquero and Baquero (2012) point out that while formal democracy is strengthened, there is a crisis of political mediation that is expressed in the increasing withdrawal of young people from conventional political mechanisms due to their disillusionment with politics.

However, that does not mean that young people are absent from informal channels of participation. Putnam (2001) argues that “[...] the younger generation today is no less engaged than their predecessor but engaged in new ways” (p. 21). Krischke (2004) also says young people have not fallen into political apathy but have been investing their political energy in informal channels of political participation.

Castro (2009) states that the decline of conventional participation is related to changes in values because the new generations no longer welcome hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations and prefer unconventional political experiences.

Agudelo-Ramírez et al. (2013) point to the invisibility of young people’s meaningful actions in the diverse spaces and contexts of their daily lives. They enjoy different forms of participation, relationships and communications; collective building; and political understanding. They want to create new meanings for the public sphere, representing themselves as political subjects and exercising citizenship in places such as family, groups, community, organizations, universities, and social activities (Agudelo-Ramírez et al., 2013).

Agudelo-Ramírez et al. (2013) claim that young people re-politicise politics from the outside. They engage in participation through formal mechanisms, resignifying concepts and values of such practices since they use them precisely to transform them. They participate in student representation practices, municipal youth councils, local organizations, and in systematic election monitoring initiatives.

They also participate in social networks for political purposes, use information technology as a tool for participation, re-appropriate aesthetic elements as a possibility for other manifestations, and incorporate what visual art offers them to promote other ways of life. From the place where mainly cultural elements play, daily participation with a growing voluntary character is intensified (Agudelo-Ramírez et al., 2013, p. 595).

Muñoz (2012) states that, whether twentieth-century youth cultures had arisen in the post-second world war, in the twenty-first century, they rise under information and communication technologies. The passage from youth cultures to cybercultures is a novelty intimately related to an era change and to the interactive digital culture influence on young people's worlds. Their ways of life are built in environments of multiple convergences.

Arias-Cardona and Alvarado (2015) emphasize that information and communication technologies became mediators of political processes. Technology has made it possible for young people to become involved in new ways in decisions that are made in their contexts.

Thus, young people's participation ways are multidimensional, reflect diverse causes and efforts, both individual and collective, and are characterized by multifaceted leadership. They participate in a heterogeneous way, signify traditional practices, and seize upon cultural elements and markets to wave diverse political manifestations. It reflects complex forms in which young people inhabit public spaces and are configured as citizens (Agudelo-Ramírez et al., 2013).

Vaccari and Valeriani (2021) argue that "social media are part of the reason why Western democracies are witnessing an increase in different forms of political participation, some of which involve citizens who were previously not deeply engaged in public affairs" (p. 3).

However, Fuchs (2017) criticises scholars' concepts that "highlight positive aspects of social media and point out that these media are possible to make culture and society more democratic" (p. 66). He stresses that "an Internet that is dominated by corporations that accumulate capital by exploiting and commodifying users can never, in the theory of participatory democracy, be participatory and the cultural expressions of it cannot be expressions of participation" (Fuchs, 2017, p. 82).

1.3 South American development since the 1980s

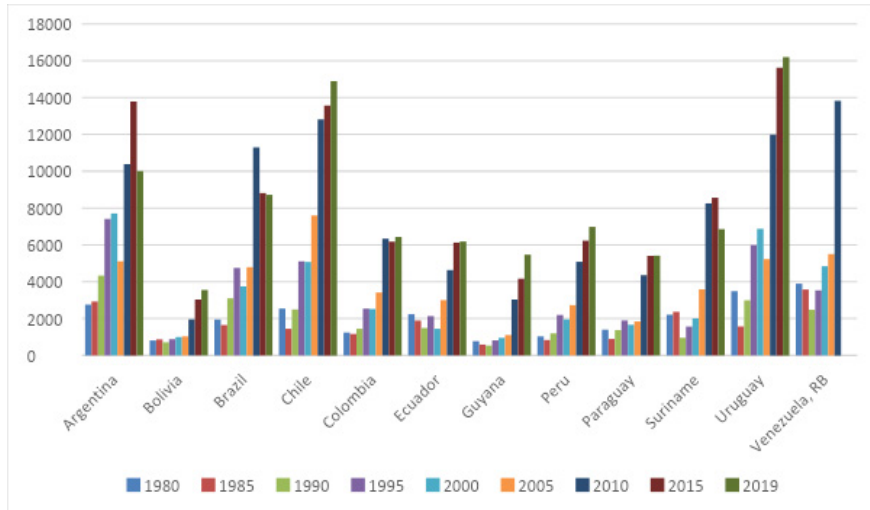
Latin America has experienced important economic, political, and social changes in the twenty-first century (Baquero, 2011). To identify these changes, we present some indexes of social development in South America since the 1980s.¹

¹ Online analysis can be run at DataBank | World Development Indicators available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/home>.

The first indicator analyses adult literacy rates, defined by the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (Unesco) as the percentage of the population aged fifteen years and over able to read and write, though understanding a simple statement on everyday life. It showed solid progress between 1980 and 2018. Only Chile and Suriname reported a slight decrease in the last decade, but both keep 96.4 per cent (Chile) and 94.38 per cent (Suriname) of their adult population literate. While Guyana currently has the lower rate (85.64 per cent), the Argentinian rate is 99 per cent. Brazil held the lowest rate in the region in the 1980s (74.59 per cent) but jumped to 93.23 per cent in the 2010s.

The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita has also increased in all the countries. Despite shrinking periods from time to time –in 1985, nine out of the twelve countries suffered shrinkages–, the overall evolution from 1980 to 2019 is positive. The GDP in Guyana had grown seven times since then. Even Ecuador, which shows the lowest growth, increased it almost three times, as the figure below shows:

Figure 1. GDP per capita (US\$, 01/07/2020)



Note. Source: The World Bank

Growing GDP is likely to boost development and we can see this trend from the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) in the region. It shows

a continued growth pattern between 1990 and 2018. Venezuela had a 0.45 per cent decrease in its index during the 2010-2018 period, but its overall growth was 0.46 per cent. Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay are among the group countries with very high human development according to rank. Only Guyana is still among the ones with medium human development, despite it having evolved 0.79 per cent in these three decades. The others have high human development indexes (UNDP, 2020).

GINI Indexes' evolution in South American countries between 2000 and 2018 have not achieved an optimistic level yet but is also quite consistent. The index measures income inequality on a scale of 0 (perfect equality) to 100. Despite all countries in the region having reduced inequality in these two last decades, all of them are still above 40, considered a high level of inequality. Bolivia reported the highest decrease in the period, 19.4 points.

The homicide rate follows a less positive pace between 1990 and 2018 than that of inequality, according to UNODC.² While it decreased significantly in Colombia (73.5 to 25.3) and slightly in Argentina and Ecuador, it increased in Brazil (from 19.7 to 27.4) and in Uruguay (from 6.6 to 12.1). Peru and Chile show stable indexes. Only Argentina, Chile and Ecuador keep it below the world mean (between 5.8 and 6.8), while the other countries have shockingly high levels of homicides per 100.000 population rates.

1.4 Increasing access to the internet

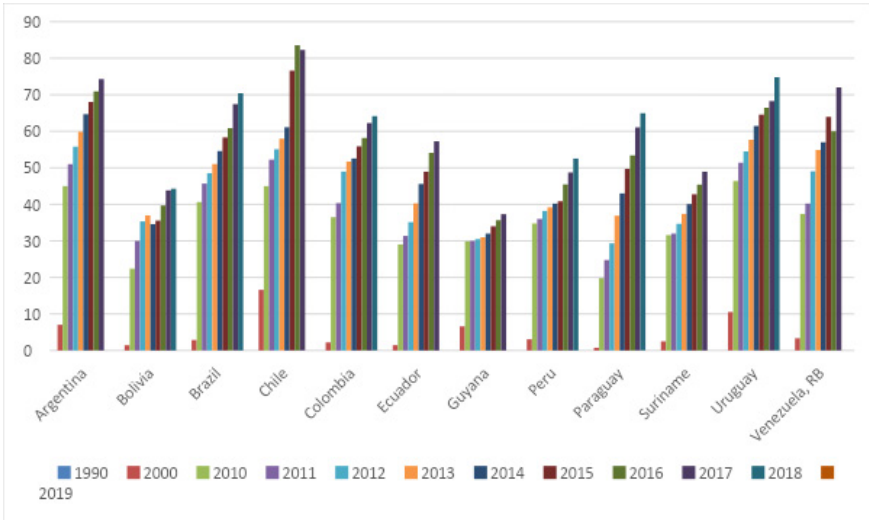
According to data by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), published by The World Bank³, all countries in the region have shown constant internet use growth since 2000. They follow the global trend: almost 50 per cent of the world's total population was using the internet at the end of 2017.

Chile saw a slight shrinkage in 2017, like Venezuela, in 2016, and Bolivia, in 2014, had seen. After the boom in 2010, out of the twelve countries, seven had overcome that world mean by 2017, as shown in figure 2:

² Online analysis can be run at UNODCDATA | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime available at <https://dataunodc.un.org/content/data/homicide/homicide-rate>.

³ Online analysis can be run at DataBank | World Development Indicators available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/home>.

Figure 2. Individuals using the Internet
(% of countries' total populations)



Note. Source: ITU/ The World Bank

The World Bank website makes free data available through the TCdata360 initiative.⁴ International organisations, such as ITU, United Nations and World Economic Forum, provide it with indexes that measure access, resources and infrastructure related to the internet all around the world.

Despite the challenges to spread access to new technologies and digital media, the region shows significant development in the last decade. The international internet bandwidth (kb/s) per internet user is the sum of the capacity of all Internet exchanges offering international bandwidth measured in kilobits per second (kb/s). In Ecuador and Peru, the kb/s use increased more than four times in those five years. In Paraguay, Guyana, and Argentina, where the lower growth rates were reported, it still doubled in the period, but Argentina already had the highest use rate among the twelve countries in 2012.

A more even trend is found when the percentage of inhabitants who are within range of a mobile cellular signal, irrespective of whether they are subscribers, is measured. By 2016, all the twelve countries had more than 90

⁴ The World Bank's TCdata360 initiative is accessible at <https://tcdata360.worldbank.org/>.

per cent of the population covered by mobile coverage. Bolivia more than doubled the range in the period, jumping from 45.9 per cent to 100 per cent.

The percentage of households with personal computers and internet access also increased constantly from 2012 to 2016, but at a slower pace and showing countries' asymmetries. In Guyana, the number of houses with personal computers and internet access increased more than four times, while the same growth rate was found in Bolivia for internet access at home. Despite the growth, only in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay more than 50 per cent of the houses have both resources. In Bolivia, while 34.8 per cent of the houses have personal computers, only 17 per cent of them have internet access. While 67.4 per cent of Uruguayan households have personal computers, only 26.8 per cent in Guyana do. Whether internet access is considered, 57 per cent of houses in Uruguay have it, facing 17 per cent in Bolivia.

The mobile telephone subscriptions (post-paid and prepaid) per 100 population index considers a subscription to a public mobile telephone service that provides access to the Public Switched Telephone Network using cellular technology. Only Guyana (from 73.6 to 70.5) and Suriname (from 169.6 to 161) reported shrinkages during the period. Furthermore, only in Bolivia (96.3), Guyana (70.5) and Venezuela (98.9) the index is below 100. The other nine countries have more per 100 population, with Uruguay reporting 160.7 and Argentina, 158.7.

Despite all the positive indexes described above, it is important to stress that democracy institutionalization and structural economic reforms in the political arena have not produced significant effects in the social field.

Baquero (2011) points out that popular pressures have called for more equality in access to politics, more transparency and effectiveness in political institutions oversight, and corruption eradication. However, he states, Latin Americans register a disenchantment with politics because they do not perceive the materialization of public policies in conditions that will allow them to develop their potential.

Besides that, remaining social inequality, poverty, difficult access to health services, low-quality education and poor working conditions are recorded in all Latin American countries. They also feed a fear of institutional ruptures and *coups d'état*. Baquero (2011) similarly highlights that there is a demand for public policies on security and crime eradication.

2. Method

This is a longitudinal analysis of the answers of individuals within the cohort of sixteen to twenty-four years old using the complete WVS database. We conduct a longitudinal study according to Hernández-Sampieri et al. (2018) who state that changes in a defined population or subpopulation should be monitored over time.

The whole WVS research consists of nationally representative surveys conducted in almost a hundred countries, using a common questionnaire with hundred-eight enclosed variables. Seven waves had been performed since 1981.⁵

We examined the cases of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay. Bolivia and Venezuela have also been tracked by WVS, but they lack important variables for this study. Venezuela has not measured democratic attitudes since 2005, and Bolivia came to participate only in the last wave.

Our independent variables are those about sources of information: digital media (e-mail, internet, and mobile phone) and information media (daily newspaper, radio news and TV news). The dependent ones are those on democratic attitudes and participatory behaviour (membership participation and political action). See table 1 below. Voting was excluded from this last one since it is compulsory in most South American countries, except for Chile and Colombia.⁶

⁵ Available at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>.

⁶ Cepal, Observatorio de Igualdad de Género. Available at <https://oig.cepal.org/es/paises/9/system>

Table 1. Conceptual definitions

| Source of Information | | |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Code | Label | Operationalization |
| E248 | Information source: daily newspaper | All the variables are recorded in ascending order. |
| E258 | Information source: TV news | |
| E259 | Information source: radio news | |
| E260 | Information source: mobile phone | After the factorial analyses, the variables were summed in their clusters and normalized on a common scale. |
| E261 | Information source: e-mail | |
| E262 | Information source: internet | |
| | | |
| Participatory Behaviour | | |
| Code | Label | Operationalization |
| A098 | Membership: church or religious organization | All the variables are recorded in ascending order. |
| A099 | Membership: sport or recreation | |
| A100 | Membership: art, music, educational | After the factorial analysis, the variables were summed in their clusters and normalized on a common scale. |
| A101 | Membership: labour unions | |
| A102 | Membership: political party | |
| A103 | Membership: environmental organization | |
| A104 | Membership: professional organization | |
| A105 | Membership: charitable/humanitarian organization | |
| E025 | Political action: signing a petition | |
| E026 | Political action: joining in boycotts | |

| | |
|------|--|
| E027 | Political action: attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations |
| E028 | Political action: joining unofficial strikes |

Democratic attitudes

| Code | Label | Operationalization |
|------|--|---|
| E226 | Democracy: people choose their leaders in free elections. | All the variables are recorded in ascending order. |
| E229 | Democracy: civil rights protect people's liberty against oppression. | |
| E235 | Importance of democracy | After the factorial analysis, the variables were summed in their clusters and normalized on a common scale. |
| E236 | Democraticness in own country | |
| E117 | Political system: having a democratic political system | |

Our factorial analysis is detailed in table 2 below and is an exploratory approach to check the cohesion of the variables and whether it fits our theoretical assumptions. Beyond the variables equal and higher than 0.6, we accepted the ones close to it due to their theoretical relevance. The variables Membership of sport or recreation organisation, Membership of church or religious organisation and Democraticness in own country did not reach any statistical relevance and had to be rejected.

Then, we gathered them in dimensions, built their means, and created indexes. Finally, we ran a multiple linear regression to measure the level of prediction of digital media and information media's influence on democratic attitudes and political behaviours of young South Americans.

Table 2. Factorial Analysis

| Dimension: | Factor | Loading |
|--|--------|---------|
| Source of Information | 1 | 2 |
| Email | ,842 | |
| Internet | ,821 | -,343 |
| Mobile phone | ,758 | -,302 |
| Radio news | ,358 | ,659 |
| TV news | | ,655 |
| Daily newspaper | ,405 | ,635 |
| Participatory Behaviour | 1 | 2 |
| Membership of professional organisation | ,737 | |
| Membership of environmental organisation | ,725 | |
| Membership of charitable/humanitarian organisation | ,707 | |
| Membership of political party | ,676 | |
| Membership of labour unions | ,659 | |
| Membership of art, music, educational organisation | ,572 | |
| Membership of sport or recreation organisation | ,518 | |
| Membership of church or religious organisation | ,424 | |
| Attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations | | ,827 |
| Joining unofficial strikes | | ,767 |
| Joining in boycotts | | ,704 |
| Signing a petition | | ,676 |
| Democratic Attitudes | | 1 |
| Democracy: People choose their leaders in free elections. | | ,722 |
| Democracy: Civil rights protect people's liberty against oppression. | | ,691 |
| Importance of democracy | | ,655 |
| Political system: Having a democratic political system | | ,596 |
| Democraticness in own country | | ,291 |

Notes. Colombia n = 2584; Ecuador n = 497; Peru n = 1572; Brazil n = 1560; Chile n = 1113; Argentina n = 1360; Uruguay n = 411 (all waves).

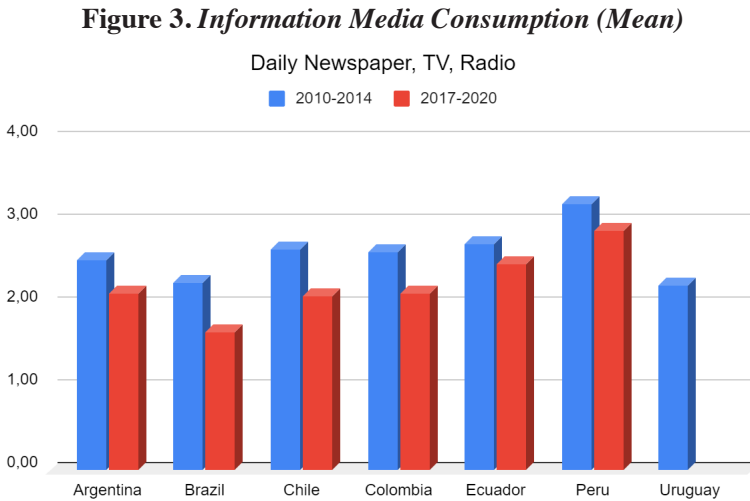
Extrac. Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

Source information: KMO Test: ,686 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Sig.= 0,000. Participatory Behaviour: KMO Test: ,829 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Sig.= 0,000. Democratic Attitudes: KMO Test: ,660 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Sig.= 0,000

3. Results

We found information on the use of media by young South Americans in the last two WVS waves (2010-2014 and 2017-2020). It gives us an understanding of how these data behaved throughout the last decade according to the interviewees' answers.

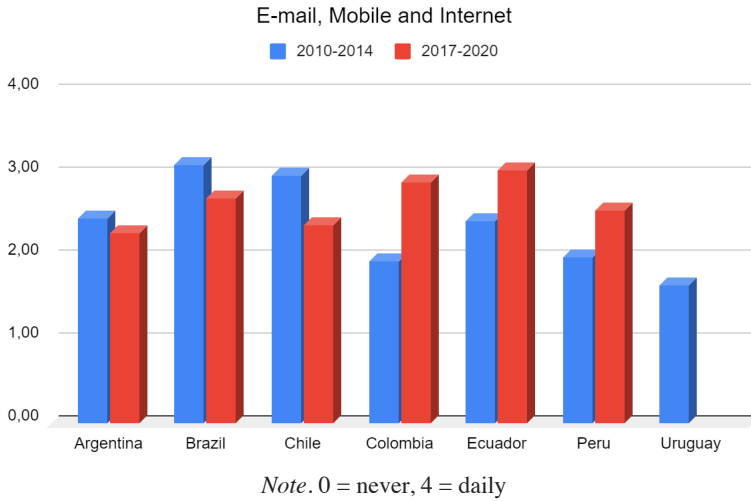
As the figure below shows, the daily newspapers, television and radio news consumption mean is shrinking in all countries - Uruguay had not had the last wave conducted. We found dramatically growing percentages of individuals who never read a daily newspaper, followed by a decrease in daily reading. Data on television and radio news consumption are also decreasing but show less dramatic disparities.



Note. 0 = never, 4 = daily

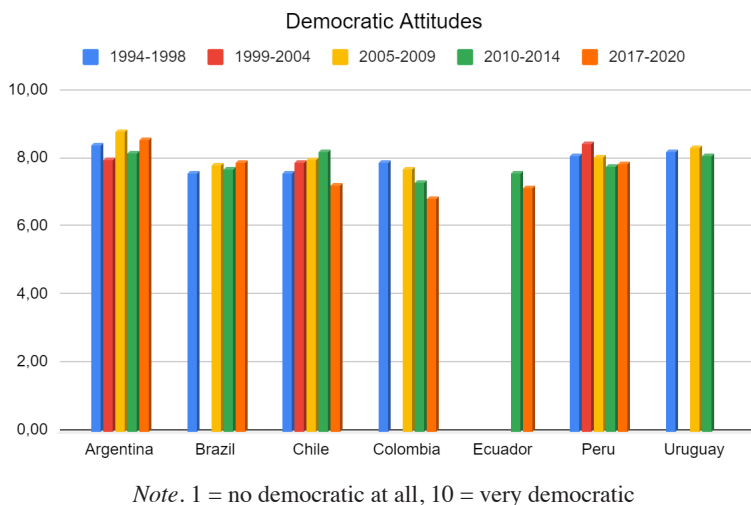
Digital media (e-mail, mobile and internet) use shows an uneven pace among the countries in this last decade. Considering the mean, while its use increased in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru from one wave to the other, it shrank in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. When we analyse percentages in each country, Chile is the only one where the internet, email and mobile phones have their use by young people shrinking altogether.

Figure 4. Use of Digital Media (Mean)



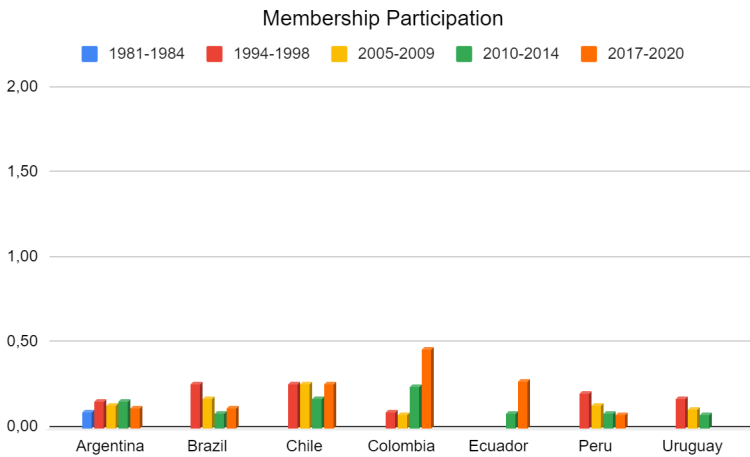
Democratic attitudes have been measured since 1994 in South American countries. We can see in figure 5 that the countries show some stability and similar levels of democratic attitudes in their means throughout these two and a half decades. According to the mean, we assume that only Argentines and Brazilians show little change toward more democratic attitudes since 1994.

Figure 5. Democratic Attitudes (Mean)



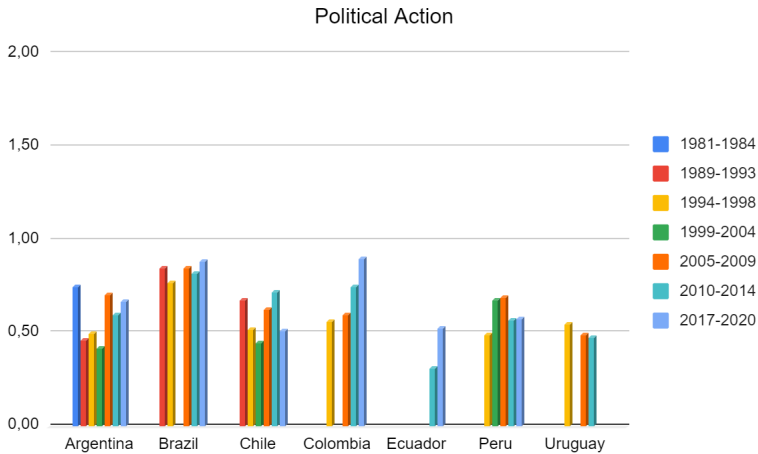
Analysing participative behaviour, we can see that membership participation indexes are poor in all countries since 1981, and there is an even decrease in Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay. Argentina and Chile register stable levels. Colombia and Ecuador show growth in this dimension in the last wave, but still at low levels of participation:

Figure 6. Membership Participation (Mean)



Note. 0 = no participative at all, 2 = very participative

Still considering participative behaviour, despite being also low and uneven across the waves, political action shows higher levels in all countries. While the means increased in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru since 1981, it shrunk in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay:

Figure 7. Political Action (Mean)

Note. 0 = no participative at all, 10 = very participative

3.1 Theoretical model lack of predictability

Through a multiple linear regression, we verified if information media consumption and digital media use were able to predict democratic attitudes, membership participation, and political action.

We run six different models to test comparatively if there were relations between those variables: 1) Use of Digital Media/Democratic Attitudes, 2) Use of Digital Media/Membership Participation, 3) Use of Digital Media/Political Action; and 4) Information Media Consumption/Democratic Attitudes, 5) Information Media Consumption/Membership Participation, 6) Information Media Consumption/Political Action.

When we analysed democratic attitudes, we found that our model is statistically significant ($F(2, 154608) = 177,894$; $p < 0,001$; $R^2 = 0,002$). However, digital media use ($\beta = -0,22$; $t = -8,210$; $p < 0,001$) and information media consumption ($\beta = 0,49$; $t = 18,558$; $p < 0,001$) together do not predict democratic attitudes. The model estimates only 0.002 per cent (R^2) of democratic attitudes variation.

The model for political action is also statistically significant ($F(2, 146614) = 6900,840$; $p < 0,001$; $R^2 = 0,086$). Again, digital media use ($\beta = 0,225$; $t = 86,925$; $p < 0,001$) and information media consumption ($\beta = ,137$; $t = 52,862$;

$p < 0,001$) together do not predict political action. Like the model of the democratic attitude, the possibility of estimation is close to zero ($R^2 = 0,086$).

Finally, membership participation is also statistically significant ($F(2,154892) = 2779,287$; $p < 0,001$; $R^2 = 0,035$). Digital media use ($\beta = 0,134$; $t = 51,843$; $p < 0,001$) and information media consumption ($\beta = 0,98$; $t = 37,769$; $p < 0,001$) also do not have prediction ability. Again, the possibility of estimation is close to zero ($R^2 = 0,035$).

4. Discussion

Despite distinctive national trajectories and asymmetries, common broad socio-historic periods and social-economic data trends shared by all South American countries allow us to consider them an exploratory place for this study.

Since the 1980s, literacy, GDP per capita, and HDI have increased significantly in all the countries - our cases record high HDI. GINI Index is still high but shows decreasing rates. According to the World Bank, since 1990, information and communication infrastructure and use have spread in all the countries, following the global pace - internet use growth is constant since 2000, for example.

Those are important material conditions for individuals who passed through that while in their formative years.

Has this process been followed by cultural change towards more democratic attitudes and political participation though?

Our first hypothesis proposes that the growing use of digital media by young South Americans is associated with changes in their political attitudes and behaviours. However, our multiple linear regression analysis results show little prediction ability on the relations between digital media use and information media consumption and democratic attitudes and political behaviour.

Digital media use by individuals in the database has increased in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru indeed, but decreased in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, separating the countries into two opposite trends. Then, we can also state that there are changes in democratic attitudes and political behaviours, but they show slow and low indexes of change: democratic attitudes means have been between 7.34 and 8.83; membership is around 0.25; and political action between 0.5 and 1.0.

According to our second hypothesis, increasing use of digital media by young South Americans comes along with more democratic attitudes and stronger political participation. The growing use of digital media is recorded in Colombia and Ecuador, and young people have become more participative there indeed. On the other hand, it decreases in Brazil and Argentina, but their young nationals show a change toward more democratic attitudes since 1994.

When we consider active members of political parties, a conventional sort of political participation, slightly more young people are participating only in Chile and Ecuador. However, it is plummeting in all the other countries, and it hardly reaches 3.6 per cent of the individuals in Ecuador, the highest percentage among the cases. Membership's mean in general is shrinking.

These data underpin the literature referred to in this article, which has recorded young people's disaffection with conventional and institutionalized political participation. Political action, conversely, driven by digital media propagation in the last decade, is the only dimension where we can find some increase.

Despite the data discussed above, digital media is spread, and, in the last wave, mobile phones were used by 68.8 per cent of Colombians, 71.1 per cent of Brazilians, and 66 per cent of Ecuadorians. Brazilians (74.4 per cent), Colombians (73.2 per cent) and Ecuadorians (73.6 per cent) were also the countries where more young people use the internet.

Chile is worth being highlighted, since it puts our hypotheses to the test, reversing them. It is the only country where the use of the internet, email and mobile phones by young people is equally decreasing. At the same time, three out of four democratic attitudes measured are shrinking among them, and they have been less participative since 1981 too. Socioeconomic macro data are positive in the country, despite literacy showing a very slight shrinkage from 2000-2009 to 2010-2018.

Modernisation Theory proposes that conditions of prosperity and security are conducive to a tolerance of democracy and self-expression values. Richer societies are much more likely to be democratic than poor ones, and, under economic collapse threatening, for example, people may be willing to submit to authoritarian rule.

It is mandatory to consider here that, despite showing conditions of prosperity, South American societies are in varying developing stages, asymmetrical among each other. For young people, this can be confusing: while there is a continental peace zone, domestic conflicts and urban violence makes them

feel unsafe, when not directly impacted by it. Inequality has reduced, but it still shows up very often in young people's experiences with each other. Democratization has advanced, but corruption, political parties' failures, and *coups d'état* challenge their values.

Along with that, literacy, higher education, and mass media are supposed to bring knowledge, information, and opportunities to engage with political issues on a national scale. Instead, the region's information media systems and their practices and monopolies are evenly and sharply losing young people's interest. Furthermore, individuals' accomplishments in literacy and education do not guarantee their access to political decision institutions and processes.

Political action, such as participation in demonstrations, has not been properly addressed by political institutions, frustrating people's attempts at participation and feelings of political efficacy and confidence. Despite Chile's recent political changes achieved also based on people's and young people's demonstrations, we did not find it as a South American pattern.

All the above-mentioned, do not offer proper conditions for significant cultural change, and that is what data show.

Conclusion

We intended to explore the analytic potential of longitudinal and generational data as a powerful tool for the analysis of cultural change towards democratic and self-expression values among South American young people since 1981, considering the spread of digital media since the early 1990s.

We found that, according to WVS data, democratic attitudes and political participation are not associated with the spreading use of digital media among those young people. There are subtle cultural changes, but they are low and uneven if compared to the pace of media infrastructure and use advances in societies. They show more stability than a change in those four decades.

It is important to note that infrastructure improvement and access to digital media growth in the continent have occurred in the last two decades. Thus, only young people who participated in the last WVS wave grew up in their childhood and adolescence under the full influence of digital media.

This study's results dialogue with socialisation theory in considering that individuals tend to maintain political culture patterns developed up to ado-

lescence (Graaf & Evans, 1996, p. 609). These young people's socialisation processes were impacted by values and attitudes transmitted by a generation that lived in a non-democratic context, in its cultural and political terms. Latin America has a history of alternations between democratic and authoritarian regimes and low levels of democratic attitudes and political participation (Baquero, 2011).

On the other hand, Modernisation Theory proposes that better living conditions than those that shaped older generations lead to self-expression and post-modern values and that favourable existential conditions of security and individual autonomy tend to make people value self-expression (Inglehart & Welzel, 2009). Our study suggests that Modernisation Theory better fits richer societies, where this approach was developed and is still based.

South American societies are recording levels of prosperity, but they are still developing socio-economic and political conditions. It is possible to say that South American countries have not yet reached all the basic conditions for a full and autonomous life.

The Modernisation Theory thesis shows itself somewhat limited in the regional context. It does not offer tools to analyse the diversity of political experiences across the region – like the civil war in Colombia, dictatorship and democratization in the Southern Cone and Brazil, and the alternation between right-wing and left-wing neo-populist governments across the continent. Prosperity has risen, but democratic attitudes and participation do not follow similar patterns in such diverse political contexts.

Apparently, more important than each country's position in the economic development ranking has been the prevalence of its high levels of social inequality, poverty, and crime despite the increase in economic indexes such as GDP, or human indexes such as HDI and literacy rate.

An important concern is the actual effect of increased literacy rates, which should promote advances in democratic attitudes and behaviour in a context where the media is explored by monopolies and ideologically. Furthermore, urban violence, economic crisis, political instabilities, and broad changes in political parties and their relationships with citizens are some of the circumstances people face in their daily lives.

Finally, despite theoretical perspectives on the possibilities promoted by greater access to the internet and the advance in technological infrastructure reported in South America, a use reduction was reported in Brazil, Chile, and

Argentina in the last decade - despite it not affecting the high rates of use on the continent. Anyway, it is possible to better understand why the averages and statistical tests for the region did not result as expected.

This article brings some contributions to theoretical perspectives on young people's political-cultural behaviours and attitudes. In general, it was not possible to identify a clear change in the dimensions over time, nor to observe whether small changes occurred to configure a movement towards an increase in democratic attitudes and participatory behaviour. On the contrary, we can see more clearly the variables' stability.


Besides learning from the dissonance between literature and research results, it is important to emphasize some of this study's limitations.

First, most countries in South America have mandatory voting which impacted our analysis of political behaviour. This does not allow measurements and comparison of forms of unconventional participation with the main form of conventional participation, hindering the evaluation of change in one type of behaviour in relation to the other.

The database also brings its limitation. Data on media use and consumption were collected only in the last two WVS waves (2010-2014 and 2017-2020). Besides that, digital media use only refers to e-mail, mobile, and the internet. There are no data on social media use.

We also missed information about Uruguay, which has not had the last wave conducted; Venezuela, which has not measured democratic attitudes since 2005; and Bolivia, which came to participate only in the last wave.

Finally, we recognise the limitations of quantitative research in the study of young people's political participation. While the quantitative data macro approach can help us to understand what has happened within this population in general, especially longitudinally, qualitative research can bring insights into how young people are creating their ways to make politics and change it.

New studies, based on participatory democracy theory and mixed methods are welcome to better understand the future to come in the region. 

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