BRIDGE WATCH
REPORT

Democracy in Latin America

Jean Monnet Network Policy Debate Bridge Watch Project:
Values and Democracy in the EU and Latin America

2024

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BRIDGE
WATCH
JEAN MONNET POLICY DEBATE

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Latin American Center
of European Studies

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

The BRIDGE Watch Report is one of the main results of the Jean Monnet Network Policy Debate – BRIDGE Watch project: Values and Democracy in the EU and Latin America (101126807). This project, co-funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Program and supported by the Latin American Center of European Studies (LACES), brings together a collaborative network of 14 universities in Europe and Latin America. The participating institutions include: Universidade de Lisboa (Portugal), Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (Brazil), Universidad del Salvador (Argentina), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, Universidad del Rosario (Colombia), Universidad de Sevilla (Spain), Università degli Studi di Milano (Italy), Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (Bolivia), Universidad Central del Ecuador, Universidad Nacional de Trujillo (Peru), Universidad de Chile, Universidad Nacional de Asunción (Paraguay), Universidad de la República (Uruguay) y Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca (Spain).

The BRIDGE Watch project seeks to promote a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Latin American countries from a European Union perspective, focusing on values and democracy. This initiative aims to generate critical knowledge and in-depth analysis to help strengthen the EU's global influence. Still, it seeks to impact public policy systems. In addition, the project also aims to bridge the gap between academia and society by encouraging the active participation of a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society representatives, policy makers, educators, and the media. This global effort is geared towards strengthening the dialog on values and democracy, promoting academic and political cooperation among the regions.

In line with the project's objectives, the BRIDGE Watch Report serves as a strategic tool to provide an in-depth analysis of the progress, challenges, and opportunities related to shared values between the European Union and selected Latin American countries. This approach allows for the identification of points of convergence and areas of divergence that impact both bilateral relations and interregional cooperation. In this edition, the central theme will be Democracy.

Democracy in Latin America plays a crucial role in protecting individual rights and freedoms promoting political stability, social development, and economic justice across the region. Historically, it has been a key pillar in the fight against military dictatorships, authoritarian regimes, and social inequalities. Democracy in Latin America is not limited to the holding of elections; it is grounded in essential principles such as freedom of expression, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. These principles enable citizens to actively participate in their countries' political and social decision-making processes. It is worth noting that participatory democracy has gained significant importance in Latin America as a way to complement and strengthen representative democracy. This model delegates power to elected representatives and fosters active citizen participation in everyday political decisions, aiming for greater inclusion and direct deliberation in public policy development.

This report aims to provide a comparative summary of key aspects related to democracy in ten Latin American countries. Additionally, it offers specific recommendations based on the analysis of contextual characteristics—both positive and negative—and the identification of concrete challenges. The countries included in the current study are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

The methodology used in this report is inspired by a similar Rule of Law mechanism implemented by the European Commission[1]. The primary sources include written contributions prepared by local representatives from the analyzed countries, supported by at least one consultant specialized in the subject matter. These contributions reflect local dynamics until July 31, 2024, the questionnaire submission deadline. The information was collected through a specific questionnaire designed by ad hoc consultants with expertise in the field. This questionnaire was discussed and adjusted in collaboration with local coordinators and consultants to ensure it reflected the particularities of each Latin American country.

The questionnaire is designed as a comprehensive tool to evaluate democracy in the analyzed countries, structured around three fundamental pillars: representation and citizen participation, rights, freedoms, and social equity, and other key aspects influencing institutional quality in these countries. Each pillar encompasses various subtopics, totaling 20 open-ended questions. The specific subtopics covered include:

Pillar I: Representation and Participation

1. Universal, Inclusive, and Equal Suffrage

2. Reliable Elections

3. Free and Inclusive Political Parties

4. Civil Society

Pillar II: Rights, Freedoms, and Social Equity

5. Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

6. Freedom of Association and Assembly

7. Freedom of Movement

8. Rule of Law and Access to Justice

Pillar III: Effective Government and Responsive Administration

9. Local Democracy

The responses to the questionnaires were based on official information provided by local authorities, national and international non-governmental organizations, as well as research groups and specialized think tanks. To ensure the quality of the analysis, priority was given

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1   European Commission. 2023 European Rule of Law Mechanism: Methodology for the preparation of the Annual Rule of Law Report. Retrieved from https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/63_1_52674_rol_methodology_en.pdf.

to factual accuracy, comprehensiveness, reliability, relevance, and the quality of the data collected.

The BRIDGE Watch Report Offers the European Commission a comprehensive tool for evaluating democracy in key Latin American countries. This analysis provides valuable input for guiding trade and diplomatic relations, identifying areas of convergence in shared values and aspects requiring further development. Considering all of this, the Commission can make informed decisions that balance promoting the EU's fundamental principles with strengthening partnerships in the region.

For national authorities in the analyzed countries, the report serves as a solid foundation for fostering broader dialogue and facilitating the exchange of best practices between the EU and Latin America. This cooperation promotes mutual learning, enabling Latin American countries to implement measures that strengthen democratic governance, protect human rights, and reinforce legal and institutional frameworks.

With this approach, the BRIDGE Watch Report positions itself as a significant contribution to guiding decision-making in EU foreign policy and the national strategies of the analyzed countries, emphasizing democracy as a shared value and a common goal in pursuing a more just and equitable future for both regions. In this way, by exploring both challenges and opportunities in these areas, the BRIDGE Watch Report aims to build bridges of dialogue and collaboration, promoting the EU's fundamental values while supporting Latin America's efforts toward sustainable and more democratic reforms.

Lisbon, December 15, 2024.

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Pillar I
Representation and Participation

Section 1 - Representation and Participation: Universal, Inclusive, and Equal Suffrage

Are there legal or practical barriers that prevent certain groups from exercising their right to vote?

Synthesis

Most countries have specific provisions in their constitutions and regulations governing electoral processes at the national, regional, and local levels. From a legal perspective, no barriers restrict the right to vote, which is fully guaranteed for citizens.

However, the surveyed countries agree that, in practice, certain impediments hinder the exercise of this right, with the primary obstacles being of a political nature. Factors such as inadequate information and disinformation campaigns significantly affect electoral processes at all levels.

Additionally, another frequently cited obstacle is related to geographical limitations. The lack of infrastructure and connectivity between rural areas and cities, combined with limited financial resources, isolates certain population groups, making their effective participation in electoral processes difficult. In most countries, LGBTQ+ individuals have the right to have their gender identity recognized on their National Identity Document (DNI). However, in practice, they face restrictions in exercising their right to vote because their DNI does not always reflect their gender identity.

Recommendations

1. Improve access to electoral information: Implement strategies to combat disinformation and ensure that all citizens have access to truthful, clear, and timely information about electoral processes. Promote inclusive campaigns that utilize diverse communication channels, such as community radio, social media, materials in Indigenous languages, and accessible formats for people with disabilities.

2. Expand infrastructure and connectivity: Reduce inequalities in access to voting, it is essential to invest in improving the country's physical and technological infrastructure. This includes building and maintaining roads, installing communication networks in rural areas, and expanding public transportation to reach isolated regions.

3. Facilitate accessible voting mechanisms: Develop alternative voting mechanisms such as electronic voting, voting by mail, and early voting. Train electoral personnel and raise voter awareness about these methods to maximize their effectiveness and acceptance.

Section 2 - Reliable Elections: Regularity and Compliance

Are elections held regularly under constitutional requirements?

Synthesis

Elections are held regularly in all the countries surveyed. The frequency of general elections varies according to each country's electoral cycle, typically ranging from four to five years. Most countries operate democratic systems in which elections are held to elect presidents, legislators, and other local, regional, and national authorities. These elections are typically periodic and, in many cases, are governed by their respective constitutions and electoral laws, which determine their frequency, generally every four to five years. These regulations aim to ensure democratic stability and provide a clear legal framework for citizen participation.

However, the regularity of elections does not always guarantee that these processes are entirely free, fair, and transparent. In many of the surveyed countries, such as Bolivia, Mexico, and Ecuador, cases of electoral fraud have been reported, including vote count manipulations and the use of voting technologies vulnerable to tampering. Transparency issues in electoral processes are also highlighted, with complaints about limited access to information and opacity in transmitting results.

Another factor undermining the fairness of the process is the irregular use of public resources to finance ruling party campaigns, which can give them unfair advantages over opposition parties. This may include the mismanagement of public funds, manipulation of media coverage, or electoral clientelism, where benefits are offered to vulnerable groups in exchange for electoral support.

Recommendations

1. Implement more secure and auditable voting technologies: Adopting electronic voting technologies could be an effective option to prevent irregular voting count irregularities. Voting platforms must be auditable, transparent, and resistant to tampering. Additionally, it is essential to conduct security tests and audits before each electoral process, particularly with the involvement of international and national observers, to ensure their reliability.

2. Enhance transparency in the transmission and publication of electoral results: The processes for transmitting results should be rapid, clear, and public. Increasing the visibility of procedures and providing real-time access to information—such as through open digital platforms—could help minimize doubts about potential manipulations. Furthermore, political parties and observers should have access to official records, enabling them to audit the process and thereby increase public confidence in the results.

3. Strengthen laws and mechanisms to prevent the misuse of public resources: Authorities must implement stricter laws on campaign financing, including regular audits and severe penalties for the misuse of public resources for electoral purposes. Promoting transparency

in the private funding of electoral campaigns is also crucial, requiring explicit declarations of donors and stricter oversight of the origin of funds.

4. Encourage the participation of international observers: The presence of independent observers and the public release of their reports can serve as a control mechanism to deter irregularities and enhance trust in the results.

5. Promote democratic education and culture: Education efforts should include training on electoral rights and the importance of voting free from external pressures. Governments and civil society organizations should join the efforts to promote civic and political education, ensuring that citizens understand the significance of their vote, the implications of their electoral decisions for the country's political future, and the direct impact on society as a whole.

Section 3 – Electoral Integrity

Are there verified fraud, corruption, or disinformation reports involving electoral processes, officials, or entities? Mention the three most recent and notorious cases.

Synthesis

The ten countries surveyed report fraud, corruption, and disinformation cases in some of their recent electoral processes. Although the situation varies according to the context of each country, these facts undermine citizen confidence in democratic systems.

Electoral fraud includes manipulations in vote counting, alterations in voter registries, misuse of voting technologies, and even cases of vote-buying. In some instances, such fraud has been so significant that it has destabilized a country's political process, as occurred in Bolivia in 2019.

Electoral corruption is evident in the use of public resources to benefit candidates or ruling parties, practices of clientelism, and control of media outlets to manipulate public opinion in favor of specific interests.

Disinformation has grown significantly with the rise of innovative technologies, mainly through social media and digital platforms. Certain groups often use these to spread fake news, hate speech, and biased political propaganda. In countries like Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, disinformation has been a key factor in further polarizing the electorate and distorting public perceptions. These issues present significant challenges to democracies in the region.

Despite ongoing efforts by international organizations and certain governments to improve transparency, justice, and fairness in electoral processes, the persistence of malpractice such as fraud, corruption, and disinformation underscores the urgent need for profound reforms. Consequently, it is essential to adopt more effective and rigorous mechanisms to ensure electoral processes that are genuinely transparent, clean, fair, and trustworthy.

Recommendations

1. Reform campaign finance laws and control of public resources: Ensure equity among parties and candidates by strictly regulating the use of public resources to prevent clientelism and other forms of corruption.

2. Guarantee autonomy and independence: Ensure that electoral bodies are truly independent and free from political influence, with adequate funding and functional autonomy.

3. Regulate disinformation and the use of social media or digital platforms: Implement legislation prohibiting the dissemination of fake news and content manipulation for electoral purposes, promoting accuracy and impartiality in media coverage.

4. Develop digital literacy programs: Education plays a crucial role in preventing disinformation. Therefore, programs focused on digital literacy should be implemented to help citizens identify false information, understand the impact of news on elections, and make informed decisions.

5. Strengthen transparency and facilitate access to electoral information: Electoral authorities should ensure free access to records and relevant documents during electoral processes and guarantee that political parties and citizens can verify and audit the procedures.

Section 4 – Electoral Participation

What level of participation is observed in elections, both from voters and candidates? Provide participation data for the last three national elections.

Synthesis

According to data collected from the ten countries in the study and based on their most recent general elections, the average voter turnout is 74.9%. This data, when broken down by country, present significant variations: Argentina reaches 77%, Bolivia 84%, Brazil 79%, Chile 85%, Colombia 60%, Ecuador 80%, Mexico 61%, Paraguay 63%, Peru 70%, and Uruguay leads with 90%.

One factor explaining these figures is the mandatory nature of voting, a distinctive characteristic in several Latin American countries, which directly impacts participation rates. In countries like Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru, electoral laws establish compulsory voting, accompanied by fines or other penalties for those who fail to fulfill this civic duty. This regulation promotes higher participation rates, as many citizens vote to avoid financial penalties or legal consequences.

On the other hand, countries where voting is voluntary, such as Chile, still achieve notable participation levels at 85%, reflecting a high degree of civic awareness. However, the data also highlights challenges. In countries like Colombia (60%) and Paraguay (63%), voter turnout remains low, which could be linked to factors such as a lack of trust in electoral institutions and political disengagement. These figures underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to foster citizen engagement beyond mandatory voting.

Recommendations

1. Foster civic education: Design and implement educational programs that inform the population about their political rights, the importance of participating in electoral processes, and the functioning of the democratic system. Such initiatives should be adapted to distinct cultural contexts and educational levels, using innovative resources such as digital platforms and in-school activities to engage young people and adults.

2. Implement measures to increase accessibility and facilitate the electoral process: Provide easier access to polling stations, especially in rural or hard-to-reach areas, with particular attention to older adults and people with disabilities (reduced mobility or sensory impairments).

3. Encourage voting by mail or using technologies that allow online voting: This action would increase citizen participation and facilitate the exercise of the right to vote, especially in communities that face geographic, logistical, or accessibility barriers. These options provide practical solutions for citizens living in remote areas, those with disabilities, or those who are abroad on Election Day.

4. Promote inclusion and diversity in candidacies: Implement or strengthen programs that encourage the active participation of women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and other under-represented groups, aiming to enhance representativeness and enrich political debate by incorporating diverse perspectives. This will contribute to a stronger connection with the needs of society as a whole and foster a more inclusive, equitable, and participatory political system.

Section 5 – Autonomy of the electoral body

Does the electoral body have sufficient financial, logistical, and human resources and autonomy from the government to operate effectively?

Synthesis

In a collective evaluation of the ten surveyed countries, there is a general consensus that electoral bodies are perceived to have adequate financial, logistical, and human resources to carry out their primary functions. However, when examining specific cases involving irregularities such as electoral fraud or the absence of effective measures to increase citizen participation through options like voting by mail or adopting new technologies, indications emerge that these resources are insufficient. This is particularly evident in countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Paraguay. These observations reveal that, while electoral bodies can manage basic operations, they face significant challenges in critical areas that require greater investment and institutional strengthening. Examples of these limitations include a lack of specialized personnel in electoral technologies, insufficient infrastructure to implement remote voting options securely, and the absence of educational programs to foster public trust in these systems. This underscores the need to review the budgets allocated to these institutions and to implement comprehensive strategies to optimize their operational capacities.

Recommendations

1. Guarantee an annual and autonomous budget for electoral bodies: Ensure that the institutions responsible for organizing and overseeing electoral processes have a stable, sufficient, and autonomous budget. This budget should be approved by the Legislative Branch or established through a clear and transparent process, avoiding any political interference that could compromise the independence and neutrality of these institutions.

2. Incorporate state-of-the-art technologies: Implementing advanced technological tools can significantly optimize various aspects of the electoral process. This includes voter registration, which can be modernized with biometric systems or digital platforms, the rapid and accurate counting of votes using optical scanners, and the dissemination of electoral results through secure portals.

3. Implement internal and external audits: Internal audits enable institutions to continuously evaluate their performance, identify potential shortcomings in the planning and executing activities, and implement corrective measures. On the other hand, external audits should be conducted by independent entities and may include verifying electoral standards, validating vote-counting mechanisms, and evaluating security protocols for handling sensitive information. Both types of audits promote accountability and provide valuable recommendations to improve the functioning of electoral bodies in the short and long term. Their implementation should be periodic and accompanied by the publication of results to ensure that citizens have access to this information. These actions will help build trust in the democratic system.

4. Foster international cooperation: Establish connections with international organizations specializing in electoral processes to share best practices, such as the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union (EU), and the United Nations (UN). Receive technical assistance through partnerships with international institutions like the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) or the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (IIDH).

Section 6 – Free and Inclusive Political Parties: Freedom and Independence

Do political parties enjoy freedom from governmental interference or control? Are they free to run electoral campaigns?

Synthesis

According to the data collected from the ten surveyed countries, there is generally freedom and independence for political parties in the region. Nevertheless, this does not mean the political system is free from significant challenges.

While the laws in the ten Latin American countries surveyed guarantee the existence of a plurality of parties, various structural problems and authoritarian practices continue to

undermine the autonomy of political parties and democratic functioning. These include the criminalization of opposition and political persecution through judicial means, illegal financing, and links to drug trafficking and organized crime.

For political parties to operate with complete independence and in a healthy democratic environment, governments, civil society, and international organizations need to work together to strengthen democratic institutions, ensure free and transparent elections, and protect political plurality.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen judicial independence and ensure impartiality in the judicial system: It is essential to implement reforms that guarantee the independence of judges and prosecutors, ensuring the Executive Branch or partisan interests do not influence them.

2. Reinforce or Establish Specialized Courts for Electoral and Political Cases: These courts should be composed of highly trained judges with expertise in electoral law and politics, ensuring they can address these matters with impartiality, independence, and strict adherence to democratic regulations. Such courts must have transparent selection and evaluation mechanisms and sufficient resources to perform their functions efficiently and fairly.

3. Combat illegal financing: Develop stronger monitoring and oversight mechanisms to track the origin, amount, and allocation of resources used during electoral campaigns. Additionally, it is crucial to impose stricter legal sanctions on those involved in illicit financing practices, from political parties to donors. Sanctions should range from significant fines to the political disqualification of involved candidates. Awareness campaigns targeting citizens can also help foster a culture of rejection toward these practices.

4. Promote a safe environment for political activity: Ensure the protection of candidates, leaders, and members of political parties, especially in contexts where organized crime poses a direct threat. To achieve this, it is essential to implement effective measures to prevent political violence, such as awareness campaigns targeting society and creating specific security protocols to protect political actors and strengthen confidence in democratic processes.

Section 7 – Political Financing

How do you regulate and ensure fair competition through political and electoral financing?

Synthesis

According to the data collected from the ten surveyed countries, implementing mixed financing models, combining public and private funds, can be observed. Public financing aims to level the playing field among political parties by providing state resources to ensure fair competition especially for those with less economic capacity. On the other hand, private financing, obtained,

through individual donations, corporate contributions, or fundraising events, allows parties to access additional funds, provided they comply with the limits and requirements established by law. Political parties also rely on membership fees, a practice that strengthens the connection between members and their organizations, fostering internal commitment. However, it is essential to strengthen monitoring and auditing systems to prevent irregularities and ensure all income and expenditures are reported and properly overseen.

Recommendations

1. Improve public financing laws: Implementing an equitable public financing system that ensures all parties have sufficient resources to compete fairly, with clear and strict regulations, considering both the size of their structures and the number of votes obtained in previous elections.

2. Create audit and transparency mechanisms: Establishing independent auditing systems to trace the origins of funds and ensure that political parties follow transparency standards.

3. Promote transparency in private financing: Require political parties and candidates to publicly disclose the identities of donors and the origins of received funds. Establishing strict penalties, such as significant fines or electoral disqualification, is also essential for those who fail to comply with the regulations.

4. Impose severe penalties on political parties receiving illegal funding: Prevent the involvement and influence of unlawful actors, such as drug trafficking or organized crime, in political processes by implementing a system of sanctions, including significant fines, temporary suspension of activities, disqualification from participating in future elections, and, in severe cases, the dissolution of the implicated party. To firmly sanction such practices, it is also crucial to ensure swift, thorough, and transparent investigations.

5. Promote fair competition among political parties: Ensure that minority and opposition parties have adequate funding and access to media and public spaces, enabling them to compete fairly and equitably.

Section 8 – Minority Participation

Are marginalized groups adequately represented and allowed to participate in political parties and run as candidates?

Synthesis

Although, in general terms, the ten surveyed countries report that laws guarantee equal opportunities in electoral processes, the reality reveals a significant gap between theory and practice.

Despite national and international regulations establishing conditions to ensure political participation for all citizens, structural and social barriers persist, perpetuating the exclusion of

certain groups. Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, and persons with disabilities continue to be marginalized in political decision-making spaces, reflecting a disconnect between laws and their effective implementation. These historically excluded groups are rarely represented on the candidate lists of political parties. In cases where individuals from these groups are included, their representation is often symbolic, without a real impact on elections or public policies.

Furthermore, the lack of effective measures or inclusion quotas further hinders their access to national and regional leadership positions. Barriers to institutional politics not only manifest as discrimination but also serve as obstacles to building a more inclusive, equitable, and representative democracy.

Recommendations

1. Implement or strengthen an inclusive representation quota system: Adapting inclusive representation quotas is key to ensuring diversity in legislative and government bodies. These quotas promote equitable participation of historically underrepresented groups, such as women, youth, Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. Establish regulatory frameworks that require political parties to include candidates from these sectors in significant positions on their lists.

2. Develop policies to ensure accessibility in electoral processes for people with disabilities: Ensuring accessibility in electoral processes for people with disabilities involves designing action plans to eliminate physical, informational, and technological barriers. This includes adapting polling stations for people with reduced mobility, providing materials in accessible formats such as Braille or audio, and using assistive technologies for those who need them.

3. Establish electoral oversight mechanisms to address systemic discrimination within political parties and promote a legal framework that mandates parties to include historically excluded groups on their lists.

4. Reform electoral laws to embrace cultural and social diversity, encouraging an inclusive electoral system that reflects the diverse realities of the countries.

5. Ensure inclusive funding: Establish specific public funds to support candidates' campaigns from historically excluded groups to level the playing field in electoral competition. Promoting transparency to prevent misappropriation or misuse of those resources is also crucial.

6. Monitor and evaluate political inclusion: Create independent mechanisms to oversee compliance with quotas and publish periodic reports detailing progress, areas for improvement, and best practices, fostering transparency and accountability.

Section 9 – Civil Society: Formation and Registration

What facilities are available to civil society organizations (CSOs) in their formation and registration process?

Synthesis

In legal terms, all the countries included in the study have national regulations guaranteeing the formation and registration of civil society organizations (CSOs). However, in practice, CSOs face various obstacles that hinder their effective functioning. One of the main challenges is excessive bureaucracy in the registration processes, with complicated and slow procedures that affect both new and already established organizations. Additionally, many CSOs rely on international donations and face limitations in accessing public or local funding, which impacts their autonomy and operational capacity, particularly in areas of high social need. Another issue to overcome is resistance from the executive branch when CSOs expose governmental abuses or irregularities. CSOs that criticize the public policies of the ruling government often face retaliation, criminalization of their activities, and legal complaints due to the lack of judicial independence in some countries.

On the other hand, countries like Paraguay and Peru have more limited protection mechanisms, relying on general regulations or recommendations from international treaties. Paraguay has no specific law, but the Code of Ethics and related regulations include basic protection measures. In Peru, the implementation of protective measures depends on an evaluation of the seriousness and significance of the allegations.

Recommendations

1. Simplify bureaucratic procedures and expedite registration processes: Establish digital platforms that centralize the necessary procedures, with clear and accessible requirements, to facilitate the creation and maintenance of CSOs.

2. Promote diversified and accessible funding: Create specific funds for CSOs working in critical social areas or marginalized regions. Additionally, tax incentives should be implemented for companies and individuals who donate to these organizations, and public-private collaboration should be encouraged. These measures could reduce excessive reliance on international donations and ensure greater autonomy for CSOs.

3. Ensure transparency of CSOs through the online publication of harmonized financial statements, clear communication of their economic and social status, and transparency in the use of financial support and the management of services under agreements.

Section 10 – Freedom to Operate

What level of freedom do CSOs have to operate, and how significant is their influence?

Synthesis

Most countries recognize the importance of CSOs and their right to operate freely, valuing their crucial role in strengthening democracy. However, despite this legal recognition, many report that CSOs face political persecution and repression, especially when their activities question or challenge the interests of those in power.

Despite these challenges, CSOs continue to play an indispensable role in defending human rights, promoting citizen participation, and serving as watchdogs for public accountability. In addition to being key actors in promoting transparency, CSOs directly impact the provision of essential services in areas where the government either does not reach or fails to serve the population adequately. Often, these organizations become the sole source of support for marginalized communities, facilitating access to essential resources such as healthcare, education, and public services. At the national, regional, and local levels, CSOs are vital in monitoring and oversight, ensuring that governments fulfill their obligations and provide quality services to all citizens. Their political influence is significant in Latin American societies, helping to ensure greater accountability and improvements in quality of life, particularly for the most vulnerable communities that might otherwise be excluded from public policies.

Recommendations

1. Ensure legal security for CSOs by governments, establishing clear laws to protect their independence and right to operate without fear of reprisals. Enact laws that safeguard their autonomy and right to act independently from political power, particularly for those operating in high-conflict contexts or denouncing abuses of power.

2. Establish effective protection mechanisms for CSO leaders and members against political persecution, violence, or intimidation: Implement security protocols, confidential reporting lines, and asylum programs for those at risk.

3. Ensure that reports of human rights violations and other abuses are not met with reprisals: Create transparent and reliable procedures to investigate such reports, along with clear sanctions for perpetrators, contributing to creating a culture of accountability.

Section 11 – Repression

Are there instances or patterns of repression against CSOs?

Synthesis

Reports on political repression against CSOs vary considerably among the surveyed countries.

In Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador, cases of government-led repression are acknowledged, where CSOs face restrictions on their work and direct attacks against their members. In these countries, organizations defending human rights or criticizing government policies are often subjected to harassment, criminalization, and violence.
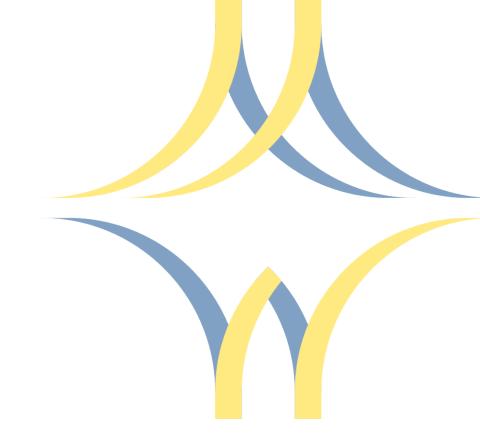
On the other hand, in Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay, while no systematic repression is currently reported, there have been isolated incidents over the past decades. This indicates that, although the situation has improved, it remains a sensitive issue that could resurface under certain circumstances. The most common methods of repression include political persecution, the criminalization of CSO activities, as well as violence and threats against their members. A frequent tactic involves imposing restrictions on funding through laws that make it difficult to access international funds, often justified under arguments such as "foreign interference" or "national security." For instance, Mexico passed a tax reform that imposed limits on deductible donations from individuals. Similarly, in Brazil, although some fiscal benefits for donations to CSOs have been maintained, there have been restrictions and adjustments in tax deductions. These measures limit the ability of CSOs to operate independently and effectively. Collectively, these tactics negatively impact the work of CSOs, often forcing them to operate under highly vulnerable conditions, facing risks and reprisals.

Recommendations

1. Guarantee freedom of expression and judicial protection: Establish regulations that ensure freedom of expression and association and access to legal mechanisms that allow CSOs to report irregularities without fear of reprisal.

2. Strengthen transparent funding: In addition, promote initiatives for local financial support, such as development funds, aimed at strengthening the autonomy of CSOs, reducing their dependence on external resources, and ensuring their sustainability without compromising their independence.

3. Strengthen judicial independence and protect CSOs from political retaliation by governments: Governments must guarantee judicial independence and safeguard CSOs from any form of reprisal or criminalization for exposing governmental irregularities. Authorities should investigate and penalize any acts of harassment, intimidation, or abuse of power against CSOs exercising their right to criticism and whistleblowing.

4. Monitor and penalize acts of repression: Establish independent observatories to document cases of harassment and violence against CSOs, publishing periodic reports to highlight these patterns.

5. Implement clear and effective sanctions for those responsible for such acts, including public officials who violate the rights of CSOs, thereby ensuring accountability and the protection of civil society.

6. Raise awareness about the importance of CSOs: Develop campaigns that emphasize their fundamental role in strengthening democracy, defending human rights, and promoting social justice. These initiatives should foster a culture of respect and collaboration between the gov-

ernment, civil society, and other stakeholders, reducing prejudices and tensions against CSOs while promoting their recognition as key allies in building more just and inclusive societies. It is essential for CSOs to ensure transparency by publishing harmonized financial statements online, clearly communicating their economic and social status, and maintaining transparency in the use of financial support and the management of services under agreements.

Pillar III
Rights, Freedoms, and Social Equity

Section 12 – Rights, Freedoms, and Social Equity Freedom of expression and access to information

Are men and women free to participate openly in discussions on political issues? Is there academic freedom to express cultural opinions connected to politics?

Synthesis

All the surveyed countries reported that both men and women are free to participate in political discussions and that their respective legal systems guarantee the entire exercise of these rights.

However, despite the legal guarantee of equal opportunities, it was noted that women across the ten surveyed countries are often relegated or marginalized in specific political power spaces, limiting their effective participation in decision-making processes. Moreover, while academic freedom is formally protected in all ten countries included in the study, some countries reported instances of censorship or restrictions within the educational and academic spheres.

Such restrictions may involve the suppression of ideas or the persecution of critical voices in political or social contexts, threatening the free exchange of ideas and developing a democratic society founded on respect for diverse perspectives.

Recommendations

1. Promote gender equity in political participation: Implement affirmative measures, such as gender quotas in decision-making spaces, to ensure balanced representation between men and women in debates and political structures.

2. Establish mechanisms for oversight and accountability in academic freedom: Implement structures to ensure that universities and research centers operate entirely independently, free from external influences that might compromise academic freedom. This includes creating autonomous bodies responsible for reviewing hiring processes, funding, and research publications.

3. Develop protocols to ensure that academics can work without fear of reprisals for expressing ideas contrary to official or current government positions. Transparency in educational content and institutional policy decisions should be a priority, fostering a culture of accountability within academia.

4. Strengthen legal protections for defenders of freedom of expression: Create legal frameworks to protect defenders of freedom of expression, including journalists, activists, and academics, from physical, legal, or psychological threats and ensure that any attack or intimidation is promptly investigated. Additionally, provide access to legal and psychological support and establish preventive measures to avoid criminalizing those exercising their right to free expression. These actions will help ensure that dissenting voices remain heard and that democracy remains stable.

5. Monitor and evaluate freedom of expression: Create independent observatories to analyze its scope in political, academic, and social contexts, publishing regular reports that highlight progress and challenges. Moreover, it is essential to foster cooperation with international organizations to ensure compliance with global standards for freedom of expression and human rights, consequently strengthening a more open and democratic society.

Section 13 – Freedom of Association and Assembly Freedom of the press

What is the general state of press freedom, including freedom of expression and beliefs, in the country?

Synthesis

Press freedom in Latin America faces significant challenges that remain unresolved. While all ten surveyed countries have enshrined press freedom in their constitutions and legal frameworks, the reality is that, in practice, this freedom continues to be limited in many cases. All the countries participating in the study report instances where journalists face censorship, intimidation, threats, and even violence, particularly when investigating sensitive topics such as corruption, organized crime, drug trafficking, or abuses of power by authorities. An analogous situation exists with freedom of belief. All ten countries surveyed include this freedom in their legal systems, but implementing this right faces various challenges and tensions in some instances. Religion continues to be a fundamental part of daily life; however, in recent years, interreligious tensions have shown a significant rise.

Recommendations

1. Strengthening effective legal protections: Review and reinforce existing legal frameworks to ensure comprehensive freedom of the press and eliminate ambiguous regulations that may enable censorship or persecution of media outlets and journalists. Governments must enact laws that protect press freedom and ensure their effective enforcement.

2. Promoting media plurality: It is essential to encourage media diversity by supporting independent and new digital outlets and fostering the formation of community and independent media to broaden the range of voices in public debate. Journalists must be guaranteed the ability to work without external pressures, protecting their impartiality and independence.

3. Encouraging interreligious dialogue: This type of interaction allows different religious traditions to share common values and resolve disagreements respectfully. Designing and implementing educational programs, open forums, and joint projects can serve as effective tools to break down cultural barriers and overcome prejudice.

4. Protecting the rights of Indigenous and minority religions: Recognize their practices, defend their sacred sites, and include them in public policy formulation. Combat discrimination and hate speech against these communities. Launch educational initiatives to raise awareness in

society about the importance of these traditions, fostering integration and promoting respect to ensure that all religious expressions are valued as part of the cultural heritage.

5. Foster international cooperation: Collaborate with organizations like the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS), and Reporters Without Borders to incorporate international standards in protecting press freedom and religious beliefs. Seek funding from multilateral organizations such as the World Bank or the European Union to implement projects that strengthen press freedom and promote respect for religious diversity.

Section 14 – Legal Framework

How does the legal framework support or limit the rights of association and organization?

Synthesis

In the ten surveyed countries, legal frameworks guarantee the rights of association and organization. However, challenges remain, including cases of repression and the criminalization of protests and social organizations. Restrictions include excessive legal requirements, obstacles to the establishment of associations or other types of organizations, and regulations that limit the activities of political or civil associations. Additionally, there are instances of threats and violence against leaders and activists, particularly those defending human rights in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Chile, and Mexico. There are also cases where governments restrict funding sources or condition access to financing—whether domestic or external—on control over the activities of associations or organizations, which significantly undermines their independence.

Recommendations

1. Simplify legal processes for establishing associations: Reduce the legal and bureaucratic requirements that hinder the creation and operation of civil organizations by establishing clear, accessible, and efficient procedures. Additionally, digitizing and centralizing necessary processes is crucial, allowing associations to manage their registration and operations more swiftly and transparently.

2. Ensure legal protection against the repression and criminalization of protests: Implement legal frameworks that safeguard the right to peaceful protest, prevent abuses of authority, and guarantee that citizens can express themselves freely without fear of reprisals.

3. Enhance mechanisms for activists and social leaders to report abuses without fear of retaliation: Ensure protection against political or judicial persecution, reinforcing freedom of expression and association, which are hallmarks of a consolidated democratic society.

4. Support the financial independence of associations and organizations: Provide adequate resources and promote diverse funding sources to enable associations to operate without

undue influence, strengthening their ability to act autonomously in pursuit of their objectives. Offer tax incentives to businesses and citizens who financially support nonprofit associations or organizations.

Section 15 – Labor Rights

To what extent are workers' rights protected, particularly regarding union freedom and collective bargaining?

Synthesis

The ten surveyed countries have national regulations and have signed international treaties and agreements that protect union freedom and collective bargaining. However, there are instances, such as in Mexico and Colombia, where governments disregard these national regulations and fail to fulfill their international commitments. Additionally, in some countries, the power of employer associations surpasses that of unions, as seen in Peru and Ecuador. Overall, the surveyed countries also report cases of retaliation against groups advocating for improved labor conditions. Another significant factor is the high level of informality in the labor market across many countries in the region. This means that despite the legal framework on this subject, many businesses are sole proprietorships or employ a small number of workers, and if they are not formally registered, applying union freedom and collective bargaining rights becomes challenging. In this context, many workers face precarious working conditions, such as temporary contracts, underemployment, and lack of job security, further complicating union organization.

Recommendations

1. Strengthening the implementation of national and international regulations: Ensure governments comply with national laws and international treaties protecting union freedom and collective bargaining by establishing monitoring and oversight mechanisms. This can be achieved through independent regulatory bodies tasked with enforcing compliance and imposing penalties.

2. Enhancing the capacity of unions: Support unions by providing training and leadership development programs focused on union leadership and collective bargaining, particularly in informal sectors and industries with high labor turnover.

3. Secure and confidential channels for reporting labor violations: Develop accessible channels for workers to report violations of union freedom and collective bargaining rights without fear of retaliation. Include strict protocols for handling information to ensure whistleblower data is not disclosed without the country's consent.

4. Reducing labor informality: Implement public policies that incentivize job creation and formal employment, such as tax incentives for companies to register legally and comply with labor regulations. Strengthen labor inspections to identify and regularize workers in informal conditions.

5. Raising awareness about labor rights: Launch campaigns to increase awareness of labor rights among workers and employers, emphasizing the importance of union freedom and collective bargaining.

6. Promoting international cooperation: Collaborate with international organizations, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), to align local regulations with global standards and receive technical implementation support. In addition, it encourages participation in international forums to exchange experiences and best practices for defending workers' rights.

Section 16 – Freedom of Movement: Mobility

Are there disparities in ease of movement based on gender, ethnicity, or other factors? Are there challenges related to internal displacement?

Synthesis

There is no indication of legal restrictions on freedom of movement in any of the ten countries surveyed. Instead, they highlight that, in practice, women and individuals belonging to ethnic minority groups often face significant barriers that limit their ability to move freely. This is particularly evident in countries with a high percentage of Indigenous populations, such as Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador. Examples include gender-based violence and harassment targeting women. Social and economic factors also play a role. Poverty and lack of access to financial resources disproportionately affect women's freedom of movement, particularly those who are primary providers for their families or economically dependent on their partners. The lack of financial dependence limits their ability to make autonomous decisions, preventing them from emigrating or moving freely within their countries. Moreover, limited access to adequate and safe transportation significantly restricts women's mobility, particularly in peripheral urban and rural areas. Regarding ethnic origin, instances of discrimination are observed where Indigenous or Afro-descendant individuals face obstacles in accessing employment or essential services such as healthcare, justice, and education.

Recommendations

1. Combat racial and gender discrimination through public policies and education: Implementing public policies that promote equality and penalize discriminatory practices is essential to reducing inequalities. This should be complemented by educational programs that raise societal awareness about the importance of respect and diversity. Informational campaigns, training in schools and workplaces, and disseminating positive stories of inclusion should be conducted to reinforce the value of an equitable society.

2. Ensure the safety and protection of women and ethnic minorities in their right to move freely: Address harassment and violence through laws and awareness campaigns.

3. Encourage equal access to resources, infrastructure, and public services to promote mobility: Invest in infrastructure, such as accessible transportation, safe road networks, and essential

services in isolated communities. These measures should target marginalized populations, ensuring equal opportunities to move and access basic resources such as education, health-care, and employment, removing economic and social barriers.

4. Support the legal recognition and protection of Indigenous peoples' territorial rights: Strengthen the legal framework to recognize Indigenous territorial rights as a priority action to protect their cultural identity and autonomy. This includes land demarcation, protection against evictions, and prior consultation on projects that impact their territories. Guaranteeing these rights promotes sustainable development and preserves their traditions in the face of external threats.

Section 17 – Rule of Law and Access to Justice: Personal Security

Is there a prevalence of torture or politically motivated violence and/or murders?

Synthesis

Throughout Latin America's history, many countries have lived under military regimes and dictatorships that made use of torture and political assassinations as tools to suppress opponents, activists, and anyone perceived as a threat to established power. Among the most emblematic cases are Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico. Currently, in the framework of the research carried out, it is observed that, of the ten countries participating in the project, only two, Argentina and Uruguay, report that there are no recent cases of torture or political assassinations. But in the other eight countries surveyed (Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru), cases of torture and politically motivated killings are still reported.

In addition, mention has been made of the practice of torture in prisons against political prisoners and also among ordinary prisoners, a phenomenon that reflects the persistence of practices of abuse and violation of human rights in various regions of the continent. These events underscore the need to continue efforts to ensure justice, reparations, and prevention of future human rights violations.

Recommendations

1. Promote judicial independence: Ensure that courts and prosecutors operate with complete independence from political power, enabling fair investigation and prosecution of cases involving torture and killings.

2. Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks: Bolster national laws and international treaties against torture and human rights violations, such as the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, ensuring their effective enforcement.

Train security forces and public officials: Develop mandatory human rights training programs for security forces, prison staff, and other state officials. Include specific modules on the proportional use of force, prevention of torture, and respect for detainees' rights.

3. Eliminate clandestine structures: Dismantle parallel or clandestine structures within governments that enable torture and killings by creating independent commissions to investigate the existence of such structures, identifying their members, support networks, and operations.

4. Protect whistleblowers: Establish secure and confidential channels for citizens and officials to report abuses or the existence of clandestine structures without fear of retaliation.

5. Expand international cooperation: Collaborate with international organizations, such as the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, to obtain technical assistance and monitor the eradication of these structures.

Section 18 – Domestic Conflict

What is the prevalence and impact of domestic conflicts on the security of the civilian population?

Synthesis

Of the ten countries surveyed, Argentina and Uruguay reported no internal conflicts within their borders. In contrast, the remaining eight countries—Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru—indicated the presence of some form of domestic conflict. Organized crime and drug trafficking are the two primary drivers of these conflicts.

Such issues have significantly impacted civilian security, affecting not only individuals directly involved in armed confrontations but also undermining national stability, the quality of life for citizens, and the integrity of democratic institutions.

In Mexico and Colombia, instances have been reported where state security forces were implicated in human rights violations, further eroding public trust in these institutions. These events have fueled social discontent and reinforced the perception that the government cannot ensure the security of the civilian population.

Recommendations

1. Enhance public security institutions and the judicial system: Provide adequate financial, technological, and human resources, along with training for their members on human rights and modern protocols. Promote coordination between security forces and the judicial system to ensure efficient investigations and fair trials, thereby reinforcing public trust.

2. Improve international cooperation in combating organized crime, drug trafficking, and corruption: Expand international treaties, share intelligence, and coordinate cross-border operations—essential measures, mainly through participation in regional initiatives.

3. Establish independent oversight bodies to monitor law enforcement actions and prevent abuse of power: Create independent entities with the authority to investigate complaints, impose sanctions, and recommend improvements. Their work should be accessible to the public to strengthen citizen trust in institutions and ensure adherence to the law.

4. Fight corruption and strengthen democratic institutions: Develop specific policies to reduce corruption within security forces and judicial systems, enhancing transparency and accountability. Ensure that democratic institutions remain resilient to infiltration by criminal actors seeking to destabilize them.

Section 19 – The Judiciary Branch

Do all population sectors have equal and secure access to the judicial system?

Synthesis

In the ten countries surveyed, although regulations exist to guarantee equal and secure access to justice, numerous challenges still hinder this fundamental right's effectiveness. One of the most prominent issues highlighted across the ten countries is the lack of resources in the judicial sector, leading to a shortage of trained personnel and inefficiencies in judicial systems in some countries. This situation delays legal processes, affecting both the quality and speed of case resolutions.

Additionally, a significant portion of the population cannot afford to hire private lawyers. In many countries, public defense systems are underfunded and ill-equipped to assist those without financial resources adequately. Systemic discrimination against various social groups further exacerbates inequalities in access to justice.

Corruption within some judicial systems contributes to widespread public distrust, undermining the perception of impartiality in the judiciary. This issue is particularly critical for vulnerable groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, which continues to face prejudice and unequal treatment in various judicial settings, perpetuating discrimination in access to justice.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen the capacity and resources of the judicial sector: Increase investment in the judicial system to hire and train more personnel, ensuring that courts can operate efficiently and resolve cases within reasonable timeframes. Modernize judicial infrastructure and digitize processes to facilitate access to justice and improve the speed and transparency of proceedings.

2. Support public defense: Expand the network of public defenders so that everyone has access to quality legal representation. Additionally, provide specialized training for public defenders on topics such as human rights and support for vulnerable groups to enhance the quality of legal representation.

3. Implement mechanisms for transparency and accountability within the judicial system, such as independent observatories and regular audits, to combat corruption.

4. Ensure the protection of vulnerable groups: Implement inclusive public policies to protect vulnerable groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, women, Indigenous peoples, and Afro-descendants, from judicial discrimination.

Pillar III

Effective Government and Responsive Administration

Section 20 – Effective Governance and Responsive Administration: Democracy and Decentralization

Are there locally elected governmental bodies? If so, are subnational elections free and fair?

Synthesis

All the surveyed countries have locally elected governmental bodies, such as municipalities, governorships, mayoralties, and regional councils, which play a fundamental role in providing and administrating essential services. These institutions are responsible for managing key areas such as health, security, transportation, education, and urban development, directly contributing to improving the quality of life for the population. However, deep economic and social inequalities often constrain their performance, especially in rural areas and marginalized communities. These disparities hinder the equitable delivery of services, leaving numerous citizens with unmet needs.

In recent decades, countries like Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and Paraguay have undertaken decentralization processes to strengthen the autonomy of local governments and bring administration closer to the realities of communities. Yet, significant central influence persists, limiting their management capacity. This central influence prevents municipal and regional authorities from developing policies tailored to local specificities.

Additionally, the lack of financial, technical, and human resources poses another significant obstacle to executing projects that promote sustainable and balanced development. In this context, it is crucial to drive structural reforms that ensure greater autonomy and funding for local governments, thereby encouraging more equitable, efficient, and citizen-centered management.

Recommendations

1. Enhance the autonomy of local governments: Ensure greater control over fiscal resources and administrative activities to implement policies tailored to local realities.

2. Strengthen technical and administrative capacity: implement training programs for local officials in key areas such as public management, urban planning, sustainable development, and accountability to ensure efficient resource management, as well as the use of technology to improve service delivery.

3. Promote intergovernmental cooperation: Encourage collaboration between central, regional, and local governments by designing and implementing coordination mechanisms that foster more effective partnerships among them.

4. Address social and economic inequalities to implement inclusive policies prioritizing marginalized and vulnerable communities.

5. Ensure free and fair subnational elections: Local electoral bodies must have autonomy and independence from political interests to prevent external actors from influencing their decisions. Additionally, implementing technologies enabling independent monitoring and international electoral observation can help ensure fraud-free elections with credible outcomes.

6. Prevent electoral manipulation: Enforce strict measures to prevent vote-buying, bribery, or any form of electoral manipulation. In local contexts, the proximity between politicians and voters facilitates direct interaction, which, while strengthening representation and citizen engagement, also increases the risk of improper practices aimed at influencing electoral outcomes.

Conclusion

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the current state of democracy in Latin America, highlighting progress, challenges, and priority areas for improvement. Accompanied by specific recommendations, this study is organized around three essential pillars: Representation and Participation, which examines inclusion and the effective exercise of citizenship; Rights, Freedoms, and Social Equity, focused on protecting fundamental rights and promoting equality; and Effective Governance and Responsive Administration, which evaluates the quality of public management and the responsiveness of democratic institutions. This analysis offers a broad and structured perspective to support the strengthening of democracy in the region.

Strengthening democracy in Latin America is essential to building more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable political systems that effectively address the needs of citizens. The region faces multiple challenges, such as growing social inequality, recurring economic crises, and various cases of corruption, which threaten political and social stability. In this context, it is imperative to advance toward democracies that are more participatory, transparent, and accountable, with the strengthening of democratic institutions, respect for the rule of law, freedom of expression, and the protection of human rights as fundamental pillars for consolidating effective and legitimate governance.

One of the most pressing challenges today is how those regional governments address the demands of the digital era. The technological revolution has transformed how citizens engage with politics and access information, but it has also revealed new vulnerabilities, particularly concerning misinformation. The spread of fake news and manipulation of information poses a significant threat to public trust in democratic institutions, especially during elections. While social networks have enabled greater participation, they have also become tools for spreading misleading content, further polarizing and distorting political debate. Moreover, the digital divide between rural and urban areas, compounded by the lack of digital education in various population segments, limits access to reliable information and restricts the political participation of many individuals. Among the emerging challenges is the need to protect digital rights and citizens' privacy in a globalized context, where governments must balance the use of technology to ensure security with the protection of civil rights. Mass data collection and online activity monitoring present significant risks if adequate regulatory frameworks are not implemented. Governments must adopt public policies that safeguard privacy and promote transparency in using technological tools, preventing abuses and ensuring freedom of expression.

Ultimately, to strengthen democracy in Latin America, governments need to adapt public policies to technological advancements, fostering greater equity and participation in a digital environment. This requires a concerted effort to ensure that all citizens, regardless of geographic location or level of education, have access to accurate information, protection of their rights, and the ability to participate in politics freely and effectively.

To consolidate democracy in the ten countries surveyed, targeted actions are proposed in the areas of representation, rights, and local governance. Under the first pillar, focusing on representation and participation, measures are suggested to ensure inclusive suffrage, such as civic education programs, mobile ballot boxes, and ballots in the native languages of each country. Strengthening the reliability of elections is also recommended by allocating additional resources to electoral bodies, adopting recent technologies, and encouraging the participation of independent observers. For political parties, gender parity, equitable financing, and transparency are advised to be promoted in electoral campaigns. The importance of protecting activists and offering legal and fiscal incentives to CSOs is also emphasized.

Under the second pillar, which is focused on rights and freedoms, priority is given to protecting freedom of expression through guarantees for journalists, internet access, and informational transparency regulation. Regarding freedom of association, it is proposed that laws that restrict protests be reviewed, the registration of CSOs should be facilitated, and dialogue spaces with social movements should be opened. Recommendations to strengthen the Rule of Law include increasing judicial resources, creating mobile courts, and ensuring culturally inclusive justice.

Finally, under the third pillar, dedicated to local democracy, the need to implement decentralized governance is highlighted, with actions such as delegating resources to local governments, promoting participatory budgets, and professionalizing public officials. Additionally, this proposal includes enhancing citizen communication with governments through technological platforms.

Among the challenges highlighted, the study identifies several areas of cooperation between the European Union and the Latin American countries analyzed:

1. Strengthening Democracies: Foster enhancing democratic institutions and the rule of law through exchanging experiences in public policy.

2. Disinformation and Digital Regulation: Cooperate in establishing regulatory frameworks to combat disinformation and protect citizens' digital rights.

3. Digital divide and education: Develop cooperative digital education and technology programs, focusing on rural and marginalized areas.

4. Protection of human rights: Collaborate in promoting and protecting human rights, particularly in the digital sphere, by strengthening legislation and oversight.

Cooperation in these areas can significantly strengthen and promote more robust and equitable democracies.

The primary aim of this report is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the degree of convergence in shared values between the European Union and Latin America, taking into account the social, political, and economic dynamics of both regions. While not exclusively focused on this aspect, this report includes detailed recommendations for each topic covered within the analyzed pillars. These recommendations are informed by established practices within the European context and guidelines promoted by international organizations, ensuring their relevance and applicability. Readers are encouraged to explore the specific sections of this report for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the issues discussed.

The topics addressed reflect a reality of constant transformation, particularly in Latin America, where certain aspects, such as preserving democracy, are undergoing rapid changes. These transformations impact the internal functioning of democratic systems in the region and pose challenges to international cooperation. This context highlights the need for continuous and detailed monitoring, generating empirical data and analysis to accurately assess progress in the exchange and adoption of shared values between the two regions. Such efforts are essential to building mutual trust and advancing toward more effective cooperation aligned with democratic principles.

The BRIDGE Watch Report: Democracy in Latin America not only helps to strengthen ties between the European Union and Latin America but also serves as a strategic tool for guiding public policies and concrete actions aimed at promoting democratic values. In this regard, the report goes beyond descriptive analysis, offering a solid foundation for planning collaborative initiatives that foster commitment to the principles of political participation, freedoms, and democratic governance in both regions.