Democratization

Society, parties and elections: how to rebuild political representation?

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Democracy today faces a complex paradox. Democratic politics is unimaginable without political parties. Where political parties do not exist or are very weak, democracy does not work well. Simultaneously, parties are the most questioned political institutions in the world. They are credited with most (if not all) of the problems democracies face: corruption, injustice, abuse of power, inequality, poverty, backwardness, underdevelopment, misery. It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of citizens have great mistrust towards them.

The World Values Survey[1] ratifies this, a study carried out periodically since 1981 with a current coverage close to 90% of the world population, distributed in 79 countries (illustrated in Figure 1). According to the data, the portion of interviewees that mistrust political parties in the world is not only greater than the portion that does trust them, but it also seems like mistrust is deepening overtime. While in the early nineties half of those interviewed (53%) expressed their reservations regarding parties,

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1   See: https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp

30 years later, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, distrust has extended to three-quarters parts (75%).

In political life, however, there are no gaps. Social functions must be performed, and when one institution loses legitimacy, another takes its place. We thus find that great efforts are being made everywhere to replace parties, while Think Tanks are trying to decipher the keys to a democracy without parties[2]. The media besiege them, denouncing the dark motives and interests behind their decisions.

They are also hunted down by social movements, businessmen, social organizations, and a long etcetera, waiting for the opportunity to prove their suitability as substitutes. Anti-party leaders are everywhere today, presenting themselves as the alternative to end the evils suffered by democracies. Their speeches, despite the different situations, contexts and even countries, are always suspiciously similar: replacing political parties and elites in order to allow the people, together with their true and legitimate leaders, to govern for their own benefit.

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2 See: https://horizontal.mx/bienvenidos-la-era-de-los-post-partidos-politicos/; https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/19/politics-without-parties-citizens-initiatives-tax-havens-abortion-corruption-spain-mortgage-civil-society/; https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/is-this-the-end-of-political-parties/2019/02/22/39b46568-36aa-11e9-854a-7a14d7fec96a_story.html.

Figure 1. Trust in political parties in the world, 1989 - 2020
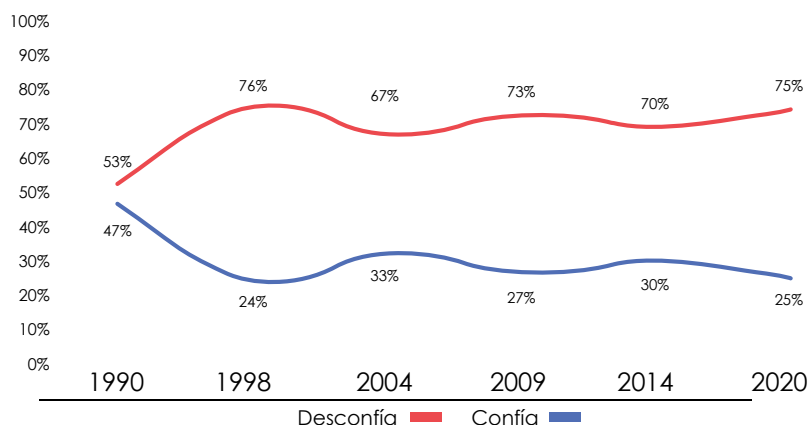
Source: World Values Survey, own calculations. The red line represents distrust, while blue, trust.

This type of speech is very familiar in Venezuela. The leaders that govern the country since 1999 built their project on the promise of eliminating political parties and with them all the evils of democracy: "If these parties are completely rotten, then they will disappear, a necessary action to reorder the political system"[3], announced Hugo Chávez in an interview months before winning the 1998 presidential elections.

Indeed, during the early years of Chavismo, the center of the government's political action revolved around a large number of social organizations of different kinds: social movements, cooperatives, political circles, community committees, community councils, among many others, while opposition political action was not very different. The media, the military, businessmen, workers, social organizations

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3 Own translation. You can see the original in http://www.todochavez.gob. ve/todochavez/2339-programa-especial-conversatorio-del-comandante-presidente-hugo-chavez-con-periodistas, consulted on 29.01.2021.

and even the Catholic Church displaced the delegitimized opposition parties in the political conflict against the government.

However, in 2006, Chavismo decided to reverse its discourse and organize all its political action, from then on, around a new political party. "I am going to create a new party. The [allied] parties that [do not] want [to unite], go forth (...), [but] of course you would not be a part of the Government (...) I want a single party to govern with me". This is how President Hugo Chávez announced the formation of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), a political organization impossible to tell apart from the State itself.

This pivotal new discourse, however, was not able to reverse his own work, crystallized institutionally in the 1999 Constitution, which replaced the term *political parties* with the vague concept of *organizations with political ends*, while at the same time strictly prohibited public financing to political parties, political activities and electoral campaigns. It also failed to reverse the Venezuelan distrust in political parties, which after a period of increase and great volatility still remains after 20 years in the same scale as in 1998, as can be seen in Figure 2.

In the years shown in Figure 2, trust towards parties experienced a stage of increase associated with the electoral cycles (the highest points correspond in fact to presidential electoral processes, referendums and parliamentarians). However, after the progressive loss of confidence in elections as a mechanism for political change, trust in political parties returned to its lowest in 2018, suggesting that the valuation of parties is closely associated with elections. Venezuelan political parties are socially valued based on their competition for political power through elections.

Figure 2. Trust in political parties. Venezuela, 1998-2018
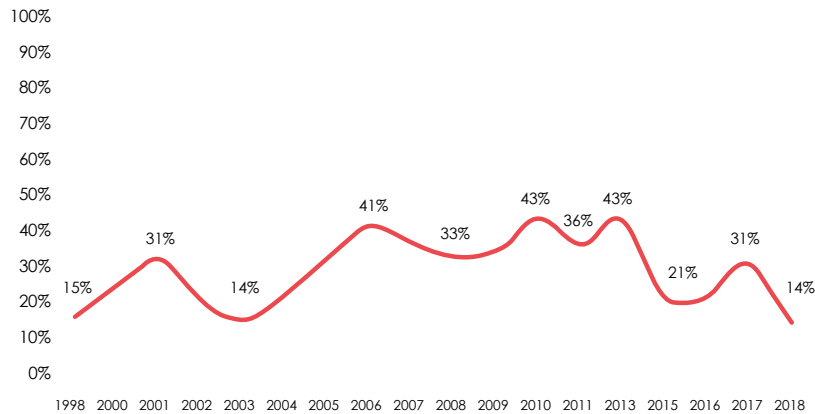
Note: The graph groups together the responses "A lot" and "Some" to the question: How much trust do you have in political parties? Would you say you trust them a lot, some, little or nothing at all? Source: *Latinobarómetro*, own calculations.

The functions of political parties in democracy

The electoral role is the distinctive and original character of political parties. In it, the representative function that makes modern democracy possible is specified. However, for representation to take place effectively, parties must perform a broader set of functions:

1. Identify, add and channel demands;
2. Design and promote public policies;
3. Recruit and nominate candidates;
4. Mobilize support and stimulate the participation of the electorate;
5. Create governments;
6. Orient public opinion; and

7. Integrate citizens into the political system and ultimately
   into the Nation-State[4]

Currently, parties are not the only institutions that play these roles. Social movements, constituencies, the media, universities, civil society organizations, unions, among many others, perform, with varying degrees of effectiveness, several of the traditional functions of parties. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to point out that representation is not the exclusive responsibility of parties, but of all those actors who exercise political functions. Universities, for example, play a fundamental role in the formation of leaders, while the media is central in the formation of public opinion, and civil society organizations and trade unions, in the identification and aggregation of demands.

This implies that for political representation and representative democracy to function properly there must be a balance of forces (symmetry) between social actors. Political parties require a strong civil society that facilitates the representative function by participating in the process of identification and aggregation of demands, while acting as instances of social control and counterweight of parties.

Political parties, like all social organizations, tend to expand their power to other sectors of society. If civil society is not strong enough to resist them, parties run the risk of conquering it and imposing their own dynamics, producing a corrosive clientelistic redundancy that destroys both civil society and parties. For this reason, for parties to be successful and to be able to effectively exercise their role of representation they depend on a solid, independent and autonomous civil society.

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4 Larry Diamond & R Gunther, *Political Parties and Democracy*, (January 1, 2001), 1-391.

Thus, what has been called *partycracy*, a system in which the power of parties expands beyond their natural borders to dominate social life, obstructing the functioning of democracy[5], is, from this point of view, both a manifestation of the expansive power of parties as of the weakness of civil society.

Parties must represent and channel social demands, so they are obliged to build bridges with other organizations that allow them to identify and systematize interests in public policy proposals. The stronger civil society and its organizations, the more easily needs can be identified, processed and transformed into public policies. Representation, in short, becomes hampered when the relationship between representatives and represented is disproportionately asymmetric or unequal. However, even when the relationship between the two is symmetrical, the process of political representation is complex. Symmetry is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democratic representation.

The distinctive characteristic of modern society, including Venezuelan society, is the growing diversification of identities that complicates the process of political representation and, even more so, social integration[6]. However, political parties are organizations designed in 19th century society in order to represent social, economic and religious cleavages that today seem to have no validity[7]. How to reconcile such a magnitude of identities and interests in the same

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5 Michael Coppedge, "Partidocracia y reforma en una perspective comparativa", in Andrés Serbín and others (eds). *Venezuela: La democracia bajo presión* (Caracas, Invesp-North-South Center, University of Miami-Editorial Nueva Sociedad, 1993), 142.

6 Indeed, one of the most important threats democracies face today is the weakening of the idea of political community as a consequence of progressive fragmentation, to the point that many citizens do not recognize each other as members of the same country.

7 Seymour Lipset & Stein Rokkan (eds) *Party system and voter alignments* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

political organization? How to prioritize demands? The representation process is in crisis, because what needs to be represented (society) is increasingly complex and diverse, and the institutions in charge of representing (political parties) have not been able to adapt their operating structures to the level of current social complexity.

The main response to this process has been the diversification of the political offer. It seems to be a global trend that modern plural societies demand diversity of political parties. This has caused, after a long period of relative stability in party systems, a rising number of political parties at least since the early 1990s across the globe (see Figure 3, effective number of electoral parties), modifying the dynamics of party systems functioning, making decision-making processes and public policy formation more complex.

However, the expansion of the political offer has not solved the problems of representation by itself. The Venezuelan electoral data serve to illustrate it. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, 256 political organizations presented candidates (mostly grouped in the two major government alliances –*Polo Patriótico*– and opposition –*Mesa de la Unidad Democrática*–), although only 11 of them received a vote equal to or greater than 1% of the votes.

An electoral political offer that is too broad, far from improving representation, tends to worsen it, confusing the population at best, atomizing it at worst, and strengthening the largest minorities. It does not seem then that the answer is just to create more parties, but rather ensuring parties that are more similar to society.

Figure 3. Effective number of electoral parties, in Venezuela and the world. 1958 - 2018
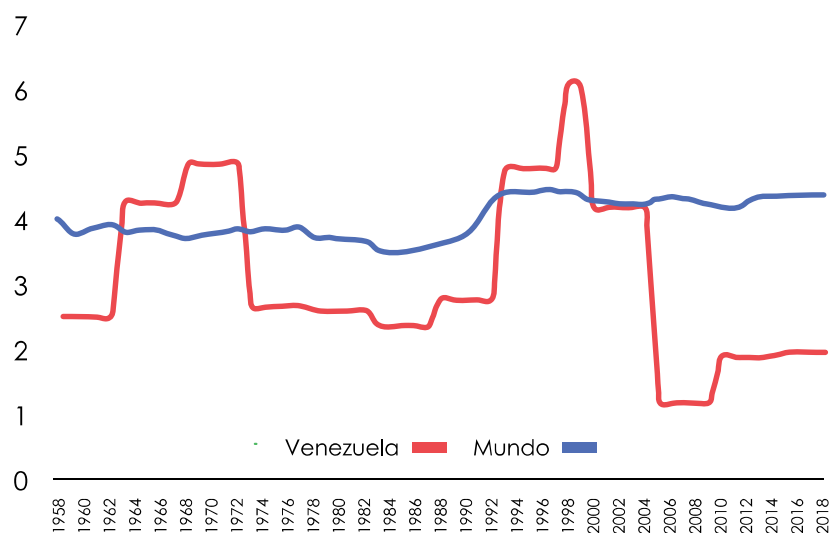
Source: Bormann & Golder (2013), Briceño (2013, 2017), own calculations

Still, it should not be forgotten that any process of representation is mediated by political institutions, especially by the laws that regulate political parties and electoral processes, in which the relationship between the contradictory principles of representation, social fragmentation and governance is outlined[8]. Electoral formulas define the winners and losers of electoral contests, as well as how many parties can compete for power, in which circuits, and with what means. Political institutions also define the size of parliaments and other collegiate bodies, as well as the majorities necessary for decision-making. In short, a distinction must be made between

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8 Nohlen, Dieter (2007) "Sistemas electorales Presidenciales y Parlamentarios", pp. 294-333, in: Nohlen, Dieter; Zovatto, Daniel; Orozco, Jesús & Thompson, José (Compiladores), *Tratado de Derecho Electoral comparado de América Latina*, IDEA/Fondo de Cultura Económica, México.

democratic institutional models that encourage governance and those that encourage greater representation[9].

In Venezuela, the democratic institutional model established in 1958, characterized by privileging conciliation between elites[10] and, secondly, the satisfaction of popular demands, was progressively replaced since the arrival of Chavismo in 1999 by a hegemonic authoritarian regime, characterized by stimulating polarization and confrontation as a mechanism for the imposition of political decisions, in which the only recognized demands –i.e. the only represented demands– are those of the power bloc and its allied economic rings.

Figure 4. Political parties on the Left (izquierda) - Right (derecha) scale
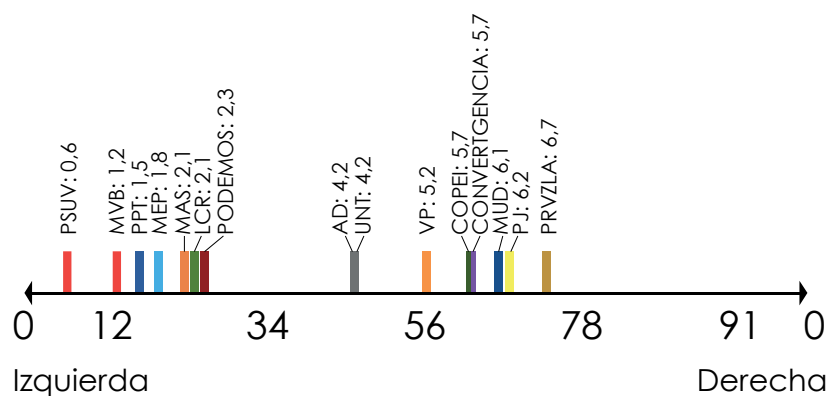
Note 1: Graph results represent the average of the responses of the academic experts, by placing each party on the left and right scale. Only political parties that have received at least 5% of the vote in an election between 1970 and 2019 are included.

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9   Arend Lijphart, *Modelos de democracia. Formas de gobierno y resultados en treinta y seis países* (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 2000).

10 Juan Carlos Rey, "La democracia venezolana y la crisis del sistema populista de conciliación", in *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, no 74 (1991): 533-578.

Note 2: The scale used by V-Party, which varies between extreme left (0) and extreme right (6), was adjusted to a scale of 0 to 10 points.
Source: V-Party & Global Party Survey, own calculations.

The polarization system, however, has not been limited to the political sphere, but has been deliberately expanded to all spaces of society in order to prevent the construction of any social consensus that evidences the possibility of an alternative form of solidarity that could undermine the legitimacy of the Chavista domination model.

The Chavista political system is an institutional model designed with the explicit objective of demolishing the representation system, its main actors (political parties), as well as the democratic society that supports it. Therefore, rebuilding the representation system of democracy in Venezuela faces the construction of inclusive and representative social and institutional spaces that demonstrate the possibility of alternative decision-making mechanisms, based on consensus building and democratic values, as its main challenge.

Parties and elections

The main form of relationship between political parties and Venezuelan society since 1998 has been through elections.

Chavismo took advantage of the popularity of Hugo Chávez since he came to power to cement, through elections, the foundations of the new political system, generating an intense electoral cycle. During the period between 1998 and 2015, five presidential elections, five parliamentary elections, five referendums, and the election of a constituent took place in Venezuela. Additionally, four regional and four municipal elections were held. For this reason, it is not an exaggeration to affirm that the political struggle in Venezuela was settled during this phase of Chavismo at the polls and that the political

parties were constantly forced to prioritize the electoral pathway over any other form of relationship with society.

However, the prevailing electoral support that Chavismo received at the polls, at least until 2012, was never enough to impose, by itself, the political hegemony to which the Chavista project aspired, for which it had to constantly manipulate electoral institutions to maximize the benefit of their support, perfecting "the paradoxical art of destroying democracy through elections"[11], turning elections into the main mechanism of national and international legitimation of the new regime.

The overwhelming victory of Chavismo during the election of the members of the National Constituent Assembly in 1999 demonstrated very early on the magnitude of this challenge. On that occasion, Chavismo obtained, with 66% of the votes, 95% of the seats, thanks to the normative design aimed at making the most of the Chavista electorate, by imposing a double majority electoral system (of multi-member regional constituencies and a national constituency of open lists) alien to the Venezuelan democratic tradition and experience. To this we must also add the vote distribution strategy (known as *quiniela*) implemented by Hugo Chávez's party, the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) and the great discipline shown by his followers, who obeyed the call of the leadership, showing a vote of confidence between the Chavista and opposition parties and their respective sympathizers.

The Chavista electoral strategy forced the opposition parties to privilege elections as a form of bonding with society over any other strategy, and the electoral coordination between parties over any other form of political relationship. Thus, the most relevant

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11 Moisés Naím & Francisco Toro, "Venezuela: los progresistas del mundo no pueden seguir callados", in *El país* (Spain). Available in: https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/07/09/actualidad/1468099480_304349.html, consultado el 09.02.2021.

opposition political alliances of Chavismo's 20 years in power have been fundamentally spaces for electoral coordination. The most important of them, the *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática* (MUD, 2008-2018), was a successful alliance that managed to reverse the electoral roles of Chavismo and the opposition in just 10 years, until the opposition political parties became an absolute majority in the 2015 parliamentary elections, despite the official electoral advantage and manipulation.

The organizational structure of the MUD, however, was built on the basis of the electoral performance of the member parties, which resulted in a tautological internal tension that stimulated a continuous struggle for hegemony within the bloc, a struggle that was fought with (and by) the available resources of the platform, reducing the action of the parties to a double competition: internal hegemony and external survival.

The electoral cycle of 1998-2015 also strengthened political polarization, by progressively reducing the political spectrum to the antagonistic Chavismo-opposition dichotomy, consolidated on the axis of struggle "maintaining power" (Chavismo) versus "removing the government" (opposition), also reducing political representation to the exclusive representation of polarization itself, subordinating any social demand to its own logic. In the opposing case, the representation of polarization was transformed into the representation of the demand for a change of government, an objective against which any other demand was subject. Furthermore, some social demands came to be perceived as opposing or as obstacles to the change of government, so that their recognition, inclusion and representation were systematically denied.

Society, for its part, perfectly understood this dynamic, adapting its identities to it, also reducing its own demands to the aspiration

of political change. Those who approached the opposition parties primarily sought representation in the struggle for political power. Social sectors that, for various reasons, were willing or had the possibility to postpone their economic and social demands[12], until the political goal was achieved.

The enormous volatility of support within the opposition bloc expresses precisely the role played by the demand for representation of political change among opposition sympathizers. Between 1998 and 2013, each party that exercised electoral leadership was seen as the main representative of the demand for change, which is why it tended to concentrate the majority of electoral support within the bloc. In 1998 the Venezuela Project Party (PRVZLA) of the presidential candidate Enrique Salas Römer, obtained 72% of the votes of the main opposition alliance[13]. In the 2000 presidential elections, the main opposition political parties decided not to present a candidate, and the responsibility fell on the controversial military man Francisco Arias Cárdenas, a comrade in arms of Hugo Chávez during the 1992 coup, who served as governor of the Zulia state, a position that he had won with the votes of the MVR party, led by Hugo Chávez. His candidacy was supported by a group of small opposition parties, the most important of which was La Causa R (LCR), which concentrated 51% of the votes of the circumstantial alliance.

2006 was the year for Un Nuevo Tiempo's (UNT) turn, presidential candidate Manuel Rosales's party, becoming the main opposition party by obtaining 36% of all the votes of the opposition alliance. In the 2012 presidential elections, the candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski, a member of the Primero Justicia party, took the leadership

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12 A decision that involved both political culture and certain social conditions.
13 Made up of 4 parties, Proyecto Venezuela, Acción Democrática, COPEI, and Por Querer a la Ciudad.

of the coalition by concentrating 28% of the total alliance[14]. In 2013 the opposition coalition would participate jointly under the exclusive identity of the Democratic Unity Table, to concentrate 100% of the alliance's votes. In summary, the great volatility of internal support in this alliance expresses the representation of the aspiration for political change; a demand that has not been the exclusive property of any party, but of the alliance of parties, temporarily administered by the leadership of the day within the coalition.

For their part, those social sectors that did not identify with extreme political polarization were systematically excluded from the system of representation. Sectors defined as not aligned with either side, independent, among many other categories that describe non-polarized groups, have always shown an equal or greater interest in issues other than the axis of the Chavista-opposition polarization: maintaining power (Chavismo) vs. remove the government (opposition).

Opposition electoral coordination spaces, defined on the basis of polarization, were always unable to represent external demands to the dynamics of polarization. The ideological diversity of opposition parties that coexisted in the opposition ranks made it impossible to agree on political projects beyond the rescue of democracy. Discussions about different models of society, development models, public policies, international alliances, for example, were constantly postponed to prioritize the fight for democracy, turning this common denominator of the alliance (the fight to rescue democracy) into the only possible expression, not only of the alliance but of any opposition party, obstructing the expression of the political identities

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14 However, this year the MUD electoral coalition presented its own electoral identity on the ballot, obtaining 34% of the votes of the entire opposition alliance, surpassing all opposition parties, including the party of candidate Henrique Capriles.

of each party, ignoring social demands that could endanger internal consensus.

Table 1. Ideological distance, measures of central tendency. 2016

		PSUV	MUD
Chavistas	Mean	-0,3397	-
	Variance	9,745	-
	SD	3,1216	-
	Standard error of the mean	0,2159	-
	Kurtosis	1,964	-
	Asymmetry	-0,049	-
	N	209	-
Opposition	Mean	-	-0,7713
	Variance	-	9,672
	SD	-	3,1099
	Standard error of the mean	-	0,1223
	Kurtosis	-	1,074
	Asymmetry	-	-0,107
	N	-	647
Neither	Mean	1,0761	-0,5649
	Variance	15,11	14,31
	SD	3,8875	3,7829
	Standard error of the mean	0,2287	0,2241
	Kurtosis	0,203	0,340
	Asymmetry	-0,156	0,161
	N	289	285

Note: The questions used in the study are: 1. Nowadays, when talking about political tendencies, many people talk about those who are more sympathetic to the left or the right. Based on how the terms "left" and "right" mean to you when you think about your political point of view, where would you be on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 means left and 10 means right? 2. Using this same

scale, where would you place the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)?
3. And where would you locate the Table of Democratic Unity (MUD)?
Source: LAPOP 2016, own calculations.
Fuente: LAPOP 2016, cálculos propios.

Table 1 shows an approach to polarized representation based on the analysis of the ideology of parties and voters. Based on the Barometer of the Americas (LAPOP) study carried out by Vanderbilt University[15], we compared the results of self-placement on the left-right scale in contrast to the position that the interviewees assigned to PSUV and the MUD on the same scale, segmented according to the intention to vote: Chavistas, opponents and non-aligned.

The distribution analysis of the differences between both placements shows that, indeed, voters from both parties, PSUV (Chavistas) and MUD (opposition), have relatively similar distribution measures. The ideology assigned to a party by each interviewee from said party, is very similar to their own ideology, thus fulfilling the assumption of ideological representation by proximity.

The non-aligned group, however, exhibits measures that are very different from those assigned to the PSUV, but similar to those assigned to the MUD, with an average (mean) even lower than that of the MUD voters themselves. This shows that, although the MUD could represent them by ideological proximity, it failed to meet their expectations outside the spectrum of political polarization.

Representation and hopelessness. Some conclusions.

The dynamics of the Venezuelan political conflict escalated to an even higher level after the opposition victory in the parliamentary elections of December 2015, radically transforming the relationship between parties and elections.

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15 Ver: https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/

The loss of Chavismo's electoral effectiveness, reflected that year in a 56% to 41% vote in favor of the opposition, showed the Maduro-led government since 2013 that advantageousness and electoral manipulation were no longer sufficient to maintain power. He then decided to further undermine political and electoral conditions, drastically and unconstitutionally modifying electoral rules, outlawing the main opposition parties, persecuting, imprisoning and even torturing party leaders. However, Chavismo did not stop holding elections despite the new conditions and growing popular rejection, proof of the important role they play in maintaining legitimacy vis-à-vis their own allies, both internal and external. Thus, between 2017 and 2020, four electoral processes were held, namely the 2017 National Constituent Assembly, the 2017 regional elections, the 2018 presidential elections and the 2020 parliamentary elections.

As a consequence of the deterioration of political conditions, voters and opposition political parties progressively lost trust in voting as a mechanism for political change, refusing to participate in almost all of them, except in the 2017 regional elections. This position, however, brought forth the interruption of the traditional link between society and parties, generating a new problem: in the absence of competitive elections, how would parties and society be linked? and more importantly, what are the functions of political parties in an undemocratic political system? And what should political parties do?

First, parties are obliged to reconnect with the demands of the broad and diverse Venezuelan society, especially with all those that have been postponed during the long Chavismo years: Social, ecological, economic, development demands, justice, equality, security, inclusion, recognition. However, this reconnection with society should not occur from a populist perspective of

equalization and dissolution of all demands in a thick, abstract and homogenizing idea of "people", but from a broad democratic perspective that rescues the value of a plural society, equal in rights, but diverse in identities.

Parties are also obliged to make political representation effective, channeling and transforming social demands into concrete proposals for public policies and draft laws that stimulate public opinion and citizens in general, a debate around specific public policies tied always to the democratic political project.

Authoritarian regimes are characterized by the exclusion of the demands and preferences of the great majority in privilege, of the allied economic, military and political elites. Democracy, in contrast, is characterized by recognizing all demands on an equal footing. For this reason, political representation is a phenomenon that only becomes effective in a democratic political system. In today's Venezuela, however, political representation cannot be subordinated to system change. On the contrary, the political representation of diverse social identities is a requirement for political change.

Finally, political parties are obliged to rescue the elections as a fighting mechanism for the reconquest of democracy. The data presented in this study clearly show that the relationship between parties and society is strengthened through electoral processes, and not by chance. During elections, parties get closer to the citizens to dialogue, to listen to them and convey their proposals. They construct messages to highlight the capabilities of both their programs and projects, and their leaders. When parties are democratic, they direct a message not only to their followers, but also to their adversaries, trying to convince them or, if not, to propose coexistence, promoting cooperation networks and

stimulating social solidarity. Reestablishing the electoral pathway as a mechanism to fight for political change generates solid and deep social bases for the subsequent construction of a more solid democratic system.

In the absence of elections, on the contrary, mistrust and despair grow. Parties grow apart and society turns to search for new and more suitable actors to represent them in other political spaces.

Conclusion: organization, unity, and representation

The tenth issue of *Democratización* ends. It was dedicated to the study of political representation and featured articles by Tomás Straka, Héctor Briceño, Guillermo Aveledo Coll and Pedro Pablo Peñaloza. By way of conclusion, we share three ideas that can contribute to the analysis of the current moment:

1. **Organization and representation**: Tomás Straka, in "We, the Representatives", establishes the relationship between organization, representation and legitimacy. The author highlights that those who carried the weight of our independence on their shoulders faced anarchy and tyranny by resorting to tools of territorial political organization –Congresses– that allowed the creation of formal mechanisms of representation -the vote- that gave political legitimacy to the triumphs achieved with arms. This legacy of our national history reaffirms the importance of political organization as a ferment of real representation that can offer legitimacy to the actors and their decisions. This key can be useful when those who today usurp power in Venezuela have hijacked our right to choose and we face the challenge of promoting a real representation that rescues the mechanisms -the vote- that allow the democratic system to recover.

2. **Mechanisms of representation**: Héctor Briceño, in "Society, parties and elections: how to rebuild political representation?", described the autocratic advance of

the Chavista revolution in electoral matters. The author explains that after the parliamentary defeat of 2015, the Nicolás Maduro regime further limited the conditions of electoral justice and Venezuela became a traditional, closed, or hegemonic dictatorship (depending on the political terminology that you want to use). This autocratic consolidation took away our vote and has meant a substantial setback in our democratic tradition. In this sense, Chavismo has turned out to be a leapfrog for more than 200 years in our republican history, and the democratic forces in Venezuela today fight for the same thing that the "representatives of 1811" defended: the right to choose and own our own destiny.

3. **Unity and representation**: Urgent calls to rebuild the unity of the opposition are frequently heard in everyday, academic and political environments. Certainly, it is urgent to join forces to resist and, as far as possible, to advance in the liberation of our country. However, after twenty years of the Chavista dictatorship and considering the current situation in Venezuela, it is convenient to ask ourselves about the foundation of unity and its scope. I do not pretend to be exhaustive in this reflection, but I place this premise on the table: the recomposition of the unit must be accompanied by the reconstruction of the capacity for political representation of the forces that comprise it, with organization and political formation as the main working tools. If the institutions that make up the unit are empty shells that do not represent the wishes of the country, the agreements reached will be artificial and will not be reciprocated with obedience by the entire society. Without real representation, there will hardly be efficient unity.