

The “Third Wave of Populism” in Latin America



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Introduction

“Populism has refused to disappear and is still a recurrent phenomenon in the politics of Latin America”¹

The return of democracy in Latin American has not entailed the end of populism, which has witnessed a new dawn at the start of the 21st century. In contrast to other parts of the world, Latin America’s version is not only “populism of the street,” but also “populism in power”.² In spite of its authoritarian leanings, it operates in tandem with formal democratic systems. As a result of its long tradition in government, and its hybrid status between democracy and authoritarianism, populism constitutes an almost unique type of political regime, representing one more stage in the process of democratic and state construction throughout the region.

According to their differing public policies, three “populist waves” can be identified as having passed through the region: the national-populist strain of 1940s, the neo-populism of the 1990s, and more recently the left-wing populism wave led by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Aside from Venezuela, this left-wing populism is also conspicuous in the South American governments of Néstor Kirchner, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa, from Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador respectively. Since the “third populist wave” fits within the tradition of national-populism, one of the hypotheses of this document is that it does not enter the category of “neo-populism” or right-wing populism.

This working paper also analyses the phenomenon of Latin American populism in terms of its relationship with democracy. The paper has four main objectives: to define Latin American populism as a hybrid regime type between authoritarianism and democracy, with its own particular characteristics; to differentiate between

three populist models; to conduct a concise analysis of left-wing populism in power, through comparisons of the cases of Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela; and lastly, to draw some general lessons about the relationship between populism, democracy and the state. The paper does not aim to provide a new theory of populism, nor does it offer a complete analysis of all of the chosen case studies. Instead, it is designed as a contribution – in the shape of a series of proposals and ideas – to the wide-ranging debate on the complex phenomenon of Latin American populism and its relationship with democracy.

With these goals in mind, the first chapter, which provides a more general approach, identifies the generic characteristics of populism, starting with its ambiguous connection with democracy. Next, an examination of public policies and political trends grounds the identification of three “waves” or “models” of Latin American populism. The second section considers the main characteristics of the governments of Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa, Evo Morales and Néstor Kirchner. The third chapter compares these four cases, to arrive at the conclusion that current Latin American populism is a response to a crisis of democracy and the state, with a tendency to weaken the former and strengthen the latter.

The phenomenon of “Latin populism”

Although its origins can be traced to the second half of the 19th century in Russia and the United States, populism is currently a predominantly Latin American or South American phenomenon. The return of populism in South America, and particularly in the Andean region (politically the most unstable in Latin America) reflects the fact that the process of democratic and state construction has yet to finish. In order to explain this phenomenon of “Latin populism,” three different theories have been advanced:

¹ Carlos de la Torre, 2001, p. 189.

² Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, Verso, London and New York, 2005.

- The “culturalist thesis” maintains that the cause of populism in Latin America can be found in colonial history, since the Iberoamerican tradition encourages patronage, corruption and personalised ties to power, to the detriment of representative democracy.³
- The “dependency thesis”, which arose in the 1970s as a result of the dependency theory of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, argues that the extreme dependency of Latin American economies has blocked the development of democratic societies with social welfare systems.
- The “political thesis” explains the democratic weakness of the region through the crisis of representative democracy, above all that of the political party system and state institutions.⁴

South American populism is the result of three factors: (1) a political culture of patronage-based networks, in which social policies are not citizens’ rights, but a “gift” from a patron or *caudillo* in exchange for political support, (2) weak states that are vulnerable to fluctuations in the international economic context, and which provide virtually no services to their citizens, (3) elitist governments that have failed to create a political and social sense of citizenship, or a truly representative and inclusive democracy.

The common denominator: between democracy and authoritarianism

“Populism is neither the highest form of democracy nor its enemy”⁵

Populism is one of the few terms that have emerged from the region to have made a substantial theoretical contribution,⁶ and is “one of the most

ambiguous and controversial in the social sciences”.⁷ The extensive body of literature on the subject underlines the impossibility of defining it in a few words.⁸ Populism may be a style of leadership,⁹ a popular movement or a political discourse. All that may be true, but Latin America is also the region where populism can claim the deepest historical roots, and the only one where it has started to establish almost its own regime type.

Despite its negative connotations, Latin American populism is not a synonym for authoritarianism, though it does find itself in a conceptual “grey area” between democracy and authoritarianism, and it uses both in order to stay in power.¹⁰ As a consequence, it falls under the broad category of hybrid regimes,¹¹ albeit with a series of specific characteristics that distinguish it from non-populist hybrid regimes: (1) the absence of an ideology and/or political programme, (2) the direct relationship between the leader and the people via a vertical power structure, (3) the arrival in power of outsiders voicing opposition to the oligarchy, (4) high levels of popular support, and inclusion of the marginalised, (5) the weakening of democratic institutions, and above all of systems of checks and balances.

(1) With regard to the first factor, populism cannot be defined in terms of a precise ideology, but consists of a multi-class alliance that includes the poorest parts of society, the middle class, and on occasion the military. Despite the president’s rhetoric, not even Venezuela has managed to establish a socialist regime. While many historical populist leaders (Juan Domingo Perón,

⁶ The first theorist of Latin American populism was Gino Germani with his book *Autoritarismo, fascismo y populismo nacional*, Buenos Aires, Librería Santa Fe, 1978.

⁷ Carlos de la Torre, “Redentores populistas en el Neoliberalismo: nuevos y viejos populismos latinoamericanos”, in *Revista Española de Ciencias Políticas*, nº4, April 2001, pp. 171-196.

⁸ Guy Hermet, “El populismo como concepto”, in *Revista de Ciencia Política*, nº1, 2003, pp. 5-18.

⁹ Flavia Freidenberg, *La tentación populista*, Editorial Síntesis, Madrid 2007.

¹⁰ Benjamin Arditi places it in the “internal periphery” of democracy: “Populism as an Internal Periphery of Democratic Politics”, in Francisco Panizza (ed.), 2005, pp. 72-99.

¹¹ See, among others, Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes”, in *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, nº 2, April 2002, pp 21-25.

³ See Carlos de la Torre, 2001; and Dietmar Dirmoser, “Democracia sin demócratas” in *Nueva Sociedad* nº197, Caracas 2005, pp 28-41.

⁴ Manuel Alcantara Sáez (ed.), *Políticos y política en América Latina*, Fundación Carolina/Siglo XXI, Madrid 2006; and Laura Tedesco, *The State in Latin America: Failed or Evolving?*, Working Paper 35, FRIDE, Madrid, May 2007.

⁵ Francisco Panizza, 2005, p.30.

Rómulo Betancourt) and contemporary ones (Rafael Correa, Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales) employ revolutionary rhetoric, they tend to be rather more reformist once in power.¹²

(2) The second factor, namely the relationship between leader and people without institutional intermediaries, constitutes populism's main difficulty with democracy. According to Gino Germani,¹³ populism is based on "demagogic seduction by a charismatic leader", whose appeal has been studied by Germani's disciple, Ernesto Laclau.¹⁴ Populism finds it hard to survive without charismatic leadership, which is at once its principal ballast as well as its main risk of drift towards authoritarianism. Indeed populists' thirst for power can lead them closer to authoritarianism than to democracy. Populists depict themselves as bearers of an extraordinary gift, enabling them to speak on behalf of the people,¹⁵ and thereby hold institutions in contempt.

Populists almost always deploy emotive or sentimental rhetoric appealing to patriotism, religion or national sovereignty. Through the use of symbols that easily rally collective identity, they create and represent new national identities. Television and radio, public demonstrations in the street, and visits by the president to poor districts and outlying towns are the chief instruments that are used to manipulate citizens and unite them around populism. The charismatic leader who embodies the popular will (and manipulates it at his whim) is an almost messianic figure in whom the citizens "trust".

(3) Turning to the third factor, populists are leaders who, due to their characteristics and careers, are able to distinguish themselves from the traditional political establishment. They are always men (with the exception

¹² Paz Larrain Mira, "El Populismo en América Latina", in *El Siglo XX y los desafíos del siglo XXI*, Universidad Gabriela Mistral, Santiago de Chile, 2005, pp. 225-254.

¹³ Gino Germani, *Autoritarismo, fascismo y populismo nacional*, Buenos Aires, 1978.

¹⁴ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, London/New York, Verso, 2005.

¹⁵ Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, London/New York, 2005, p. 21.

of Eva Perón), with the result that populism also represents Latin American masculinity and/or machismo.¹⁶ In many cases these leaders' origins and physical appearances are quite different from those of the white elite. "The Turk" was the nickname of Carlos Menem, whose family was Syrian in origin, while Alberto Fujimori was "The Chinaman", even though he was born to a Japanese family. Evo Morales is indigenous, while Hugo Chávez is said to have the native physique of the Venezuelan people. Neither the former president of Ecuador, Abdalá Bucaram, whose parents were Lebanese, nor Néstor Kirchner, whose origins are Swiss and Chilean, belong to the traditional elites of their countries. Populists tend to have been born in the provinces, and do not represent the interests of the national capital.

(4) As for the fourth factor, populists are not only democratically elected, but also live on levels of public support that tend to be high. They lose legitimacy and often power if they can no longer count on the support of a majority of the population. Democracy thus forms part of the discourse of all Latin American populists, whose success and failure depends on public approval. In fact populists spur media-based communication with the people, electoral mechanisms and very often public referenda, which are their main instruments of democratic legitimation. As a result, and in accordance with the identification of the leader with the people, they support the political inclusion of the marginalised, and in this sense strengthen democracy. But they also establish their resources of power outside the intermediary institutions of democracy, above all political parties.

(5) Lastly, populism tends to substitute democratic institutions with strong leadership, promising rapid solutions based on personal bonds of loyalty without making recourse to formal structures. Their anti-party stance is usually a reflection of a conflict between government and parliament.¹⁷ Every populist, including

¹⁶ Carlos de la Torre, 2001, p. 182/183.

¹⁷ Scott Morgenstern/Benito Nacif, *Legislative Politics in Latin America*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

neo-populists such as Carlos Menem and Alberto Fujimori, spurned and undermined traditional parties, and/or governed by short-circuiting the legislative structure (through the de-facto dissolution of parliament or presidential decrees). Their relationship with the judicial system also tended to be fractious.¹⁸ Political leaders such as Carlos Menem, Néstor Kirchner (in his time as provincial governor), Rafael Correa and Hugo Chávez have placed supporters in key posts within the judicial system. As a result, populists tend to control democratic institutions and concentrate power in the executive branch, with or without oversight by control bodies.

Democratic institutions and their role as mediators are thus weakened, while minorities and/or the opposition suffer discrimination. Populism reflects a political culture that trusts more in personal leadership than in the democratic institutions of the state, which are not perceived as neutral bodies guaranteeing people's rights, but as part of the fight for political power. To a certain extent, Latin American populism reveals the failure of real existing representative democracy in the region,¹⁹ and points towards a different type of direct or participatory democracy. Ludolfo Paramio speaks of a "crisis of representation", expressed in mistrust of institutions and democracy itself.²⁰ Many countries across the region have generated electoral democracies and sham democracies that neither satisfy public demands nor the call for broader participation. They are closely tied to public institutions that are unable to provide their citizens with basic services, a fact that is reflected in the poor public image of democratic institutions, particularly the houses of congress, the judicial system and political parties.²¹ In this context, populism is not the cause but the result of states which protect few rights, have weak democratic institutions

and are unable to achieve an effective separation of powers.

Although it has been the subject of scant analysis from this point of view, the phenomenon of populism is linked to the long and controversial theoretical debate on presidential systems, their different types, their impact on democracy, and the appropriateness or not of introducing parliamentary systems to Latin America.²² This paper argues that the current political system in almost all Latin American countries favours populism, and that presidential systems without checks and balances are populism's most prominent feature. With the exceptions of Brazil, Chile and Mexico, limited control over the executive branch makes it easier for populist leaders to rise to power in many countries of the region.

A further factor, related to the contribution of "super-presidentialism" to charismatic populism,²³ is the fragility of the political party system.²⁴ Political parties with stable electoral bases, representation throughout the national territory and a clearly defined programme have been consolidated in very few countries. The outstanding feature of the Latin American party system is instead a highly volatile relationship with supporters, and the rise of transient political forces. With a few exceptions, movements based around a strong leader with names suggestive of their populist credentials, such as "Frente para la Victoria" (front for victory) or "PAIS" (country), are the forces that prevail over the political landscape in place of consolidated political parties.

Many populist leaders - currently Chávez, Correa and Morales - aim to create a new type of democracy,

¹⁸ Manuel Alcantara, Mercedes García Montero and Francisco Sánchez López, *El Poder Legislativo en América Latina a través de sus normas*, Universidad de Salamanca, 2005.

¹⁹ Guillermo O'Donnell, *Delegative Democracy?*, Working Paper, Helen Kellogg Institute, 1992.

²⁰ Ludolfo Paramio, "La izquierda y el populismo" in Pedro Pérez Herrero (ed.), *La izquierda en América Latina*, Editorial Pablo Iglesias, Madrid, 2006, pp. 21-47, p. 22.

²¹ *Latinobarómetro* ([www.http://latinobarometro.org](http://latinobarometro.org)), Santiago de Chile, 1995-2005.

²² Some authors such as Jorge Lanzaro, *Tipos de Presidencialismo y coaliciones políticas en América Latina*, Nueva Sociedad, Caracas 2001, defend presidential systems, while others, such as Dieter Nohlen and Mario Fernández (eds.), *Presidencialismo versus Parlamentarismo: América Latina*, Nueva Sociedad, Caracas, 1991, set out the case for reform. Others, such as Juan J. Linz, *La quiebra de las democracias*, Alianza, Madrid, 1993 (second edition).

²³ César Arias, "Situación y perspectivas del presidencialismo y el parlamentarismo en América Latina", in *Perspectiva* n°6, 2004, pp. 34-38.

²⁴ See, among others, Jorge Lanzaro et al., *Presidencialismo, sistema de partidos y reforma política: cuatro enfoques desde América Latina*, Corte Nacional Electoral de Bolivia, La Paz, 2004.

which they call “radical”, “participatory” or “direct”, and which is to be contrasted with liberal democracy. In their opinion, representative democracy has not provided channels for participation, and has only benefited a narrow elite. As a result, populists are not anti-political, but anti-system leaders who construe their “popular democracy” as a binary opposite to “elitist democracy”. They all profess the intention of transferring institutional democracy to the street and to spaces of direct mediation.

It is hard to define the boundary between “popular or populist democracy” and “quasi-democratic authoritarianism”.²⁵ On one hand, populism is inclusive and participatory in that it is oriented towards the least privileged parts of society, and seeks to introduce elements of participatory democracy. Through these initiatives, and empowerment, historical populist and left-wing movements have transformed social outcasts into political subjects, and have encouraged their inclusion in democratic life.²⁶ However, at the same time they have induced a polarisation between “us” (friends) and “them” (enemies),²⁷ thereby opening new divisions of polarisation and exclusion.

Their rhetoric tends to be confrontational and to exacerbate the antagonism between rich and poor, white and non-white, nationals and “vendepatrias” (literally, nation-sellers). In addition, populists manipulate the people (giving rise to *disempowerment*), undermine democratic control bodies, dissolve institutions, concentrate power and do not furnish rights, but favours. Due to the absence of mechanisms for checks and balances, corruption and patronage are part and parcel of virtually all populist movements in power, from Argentina’s Peronism to today’s *chavismo*.

The relationship between populists and democracy is ambiguous: leaders sustain democracy, and in some

respects (above all through elections and referenda) strengthen it, while at the same time manipulating it and using it for their own ends, weakening institutions in the process. On one side, they hold elections and derive their power from public support, while on the other they create - through referenda, new bodies and other channels - new forms of direct democracy. However, the omnipresent populist leader weakens institutions and brings about institutional changes (reform of the Constitution and/or strengthening the executive branch) that undermine the separation of powers. The result is almost always an electoral democracy without rule of law.

The variables: the socio-economic factor and the “three populist waves”

While Latin American populisms, be they of the right or the left, share this ambiguous relationship with democracy, their public policies are distinct. The variable of socio-economic policy serves to distinguish between three populist waves or models: liberal, in the case of neo-populism: state interventionist, in the case of national populism; and mixed, in the case of left-wing populism.

The three populist waves arose in different contexts: import substitution and nationalism characterised the public policies of the first populist wave; the Washington Consensus - the neo-liberal economic policy aimed at reducing state intervention - shaped the policies of the so-called “neo-populisms”; while the rejection of the former through increased state intervention and a return to nationalism, even within a broad capitalist framework, dominate the policies of “left-wing populism”.

On the basis of applied public policy, it is possible to delineate three populist waves or types in South America from the 1940s to the present day: (1) the historical national-populism of the 1940s and 1950s, exemplified by Juan Domingo Perón and Gétulio

²⁵ Frank Decker (ed.), *Populismus: Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. Wiesbaden, 2006.

²⁶ See Ernesto Laclau, 2005.

²⁷ Francisco Panizza, 2005, p. 28.

Vargas in Brazil, (2) the neo-populism or right-wing populism of Carlos Menem in Argentina and Alberto Fujimori in Peru from the end of the 1980s through the 1990s, and (3) the left-wing populism of Néstor Kirchner in Argentina, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela at the start of the 21st century.

The main populist leaders in Latin America, 1940-2007

Argentina	Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955; 1973-1974) Carlos Menem (1989-1999) Néstor Kirchner (2003-
Brazil	Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945; 1951-1954) Fernando Collor de Melo (1990-1992)
Bolivia	Evo Morales (2006-
Colombia	Álvaro Uribe (2002-
Ecuador	José María Velasco Ibarra (1934-1970*) Abdalá Bucaram (1996-1997) Lucio Gutiérrez (2003-2005) Rafael Correa (2007-
Mexico	Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940)
Peru	Alan García (1985-1990; 2006-) Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000)
Venezuela	Rómulo Betancourt (1945-1948; 1959-1964) Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-1979; 1989-1993) Hugo Chávez (1998-

* In this time he secured five presidential mandates.

The national populism of the 1940s. In its original incarnation, Latin populism served to create nation-states through the inclusion of the most underprivileged urban classes. In contrast to the populisms of Russia and the United States, the Latin American variant arose in the context of a transition from rural to industrial societies. Historical populism was thus a belated response to a crisis of the oligarchic liberal state, dominated until then by large landowners. This transition produced new political protagonists, whose social demands were channelled vertically through the populist movement. The most noteworthy populists to have held onto power for long periods were

Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina, Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and José María Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador. Other figureheads of historical populism were Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico, and Víctor Haya de la Torre in Peru. All these charismatic leaders supported universal suffrage, greater inclusion for workers and the creation of systems of social protection. In economic terms, this populism was connected to the model of import substitution that dominated the region until the 1980s.

The neo-populism of the 1990s. At the end of the 1980s various right-wing populists rose to power and proceeded to apply neo-liberal economic policies,²⁸ in keeping with the recommendations of the so-called Washington Consensus.²⁹ Its principal representatives were Carlos Menem in Argentina and Alberto Fujimori in Peru. Both of these men abused their political leadership by concentrating power and governing around or in direct competition with democratic institutions - as shown by the "institutional coup" of 1992 in Peru, when President Fujimori closed down parliament. These two leaders applied economic policies based on the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF): the fight against inflation, a reduction in the size of the state, privatisation of state firms, and openness to trade. Both represented the interests of major investors, while also backing the rise of a new group of national business leaders.³⁰ The two bequeathed a disastrous legacy, which has made deep political, social and economic reconstruction necessary in their respective countries.

21st century left-wing populism. As will be explained below, the policies of current Latin American populism in power constitute a populist "third wave". This can be distinguished from the historical variant of populism by its left-wing political discourse and orientation, as well

²⁸ See, among others, Kurt Weyland, "Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America: Unexpected Affinities", in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, vol. 31, n°3, pp. 3-31.

²⁹ See, among others, José Antonio Ocampo, "Más allá del Consenso de Washington: una visión desde la CEPAL", in *Revista de la CEPAL*, n°66, Santiago de Chile, 1998, pp. 7-28.

³⁰ Kurt Weyland, "Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America: How much affinity?", paper presented to the 24th Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), Dallas, March 2003.

as by its refusal to embrace import substitution, and from neo-populism by its public policies and its opposition to neo-liberal economic orthodoxy. Greater intervention in the economy, including the nationalisation of natural resources, alongside new education and health programmes are among the measures adopted by the new populist leaders in their endeavour to strengthen the role of the state. High prices in the world energy markets have allowed the governments of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela to use gas and oil to finance their programmes, and afforded them a “political weapon” in dealings with foreign countries. Another common characteristic of left-wing populism is its link to and affinity with Cuban socialism, and an anti-globalisation stance that differentiates it from historical national populism.

While the “second populist wave” or neo-populism opted for policies that were close to the Washington Consensus, both historical and present-day populism share a series of political ingredients that are particularly conspicuous in Venezuela, but can also be found in each of the other three countries that will be studied below:

The invention of collective symbols. These may be heroes from the nation’s political history, such as Simón Bolívar in Venezuela or General Eloy Alfaro in Ecuador,³¹ or more recent mythical figures such as Eva Perón, and symbols of identity, including the *descamisados* (shirtless ones) in Argentina, the coca leaf as an emblem of the trade union fight in Bolivia, and the red berets (*boinas*) in Venezuela. All these symbols are Latin American, and stress the movements’ native roots. Both historical and present-day populism can thus be regarded as part of an ongoing process of national construction around symbols that generate simple/easy collective identification.

Creating popular movements. Following the example of Peronism in Argentina, populists have tended to

create their own movements. In contrast to representative political parties, Peronism, *chavismo* in Venezuela or *velasquismo* in Ecuador are all perceived as united forces or as quasi-families, based on patronage networks and personal loyalties towards the populist leader, who is the movement’s principal reference point and its *raison d’être*.

Slandering the national “oligarchy”. Historical and left-wing populism are based on an antagonistic relationship between the people and oligarchy. The former political elite, branded the “oligarchy”, is the internal enemy against which the populist fights. Polarisation between the new and the old political elite, between the rich and the poor, is a characteristic of Latin populism. At the institutional level, this conflict is translated in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela into a fight for power between the government and the parliament, and between popular movements and parties, weakening or eliminating the latter in both cases.

Changing institutions and Constitutions. Current and former populists attempt to govern outside the legislative process, while many take the lead of Perón in seeking to reform the Constitution so as to permit their re-election, preferably over an indefinite period of time. A second objective of the constitutional reforms in Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador is to create a new state based on participatory democracy, in which institutions play a secondary role and the leader can increase his power.

Extending state control over the economy. The historical and current versions of populism strengthen state intervention, whereas the neo-liberal variant complied with the recommendations of the Washington Consensus. Government intervention aimed at reducing inflation, controlling prices, nationalising key economic sectors and providing subsidies are instruments of historical populism (in Argentina, Mexico and Venezuela) and the present-day variety (Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela).

Increasing social spending. Social programmes and a substantial increase of state spending (in contrast to

³¹ The general and two-time president Eloy Alfaro (1842-1912) shared the beliefs of Simón Bolívar, in particular that of Latin American unity, and was a friend of the poet and Cuban national hero José Martí.

Brazil) constitute the principal purpose and source of legitimacy for both historical and current Latin American populism. Reducing poverty and social inequality through public policies in order to improve education, health, housing and employment is their chief merit. However, this welfare policy heightens public spending, which in turn feeds inflation and reduces spending power.

Acting with and against religion. Latin American national-populism is Catholic. Right and left-wing populists portray themselves as messianic and almost religious figures. Hugo Chávez has proclaimed Jesus Christ as the first socialist in history; Rafael Correa terms himself a “left-wing Christian humanist”, and pledges to create the Kingdom of Heaven in Ecuador. Both Liberation Theology and social Christian doctrines have influenced populist thinking. Their relationship with the more traditional brand of Catholicism, however is ambiguous, and can even incur confrontation.

Defending independence and sovereignty. Patriotism and the recovery of national sovereignty form part of the appeal of both historical and present-day populists. All of them, including Néstor Kirchner, exploit nationalism and/or national identity. This can imply strengthening sovereignty and resistance to foreign interference in domestic affairs, as well as criticism of US imperialism as an obstacle to the development and independence of their nations.

Searching for external enemies. Anti-imperialism is another hallmark of historical and current populism. Left-wing populists, including Néstor Kirchner, reject the economic policies of Washington and President Bush. The populists’ anti-imperialist message is as simple as it is aggressive. Hugo Chávez has insulted the President of the United States on numerous occasions, and has labelled him as a “tyrant” and “the devil”. Evo Morales has identified colonialism, and with it Spain, as the principal cause of social exclusion and poverty in Bolivia, while Rafael Correa accused the United States of being the main culprit for the poverty of the Ecuadorean people.

On the basis of these shared characteristics, the current populists in power can be considered close to historical populism, and thus do not fall into the same category of neo-populists as Carlos Menem and Alberto Fujimori, both of whom defended a different set of economic policies and an alternative model of development. As a result, it is possible to speak of a “third wave” of populism that is close to historical national populism, while preserving certain differences.

Left-wing populism in power

“Latin America and Ecuador are not living through an era of change, but an authentic change of era”³²

In South America, populist governments have risen to power in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela. These represent “left-wing populisms” that are close to the historical variant of populism, and, with the exception of Argentina, are closely linked to the “chavista model” and its goal of national refoundation. Whereas the governments of Bolivia and Ecuador stand for a “refoundational populism”, Argentina is distancing itself from the *chavista* camp. Peronism is nevertheless an important reference point for Hugo Chávez’s military national populism.

The Venezuelan “model”: military national populism

“Nation, socialism or death” - Hugo Chávez, January 10, 2007.

Hugo Chávez is not a new phenomenon in Venezuela, for the country has a long tradition of populism. As the two governments of populist Carlos Andrés Pérez served to prove, its rise and fall is closely linked to that

³² Inaugural speech by President Rafael Correa, January 22, 2007.

of the rentier oil state. As a result, petro-dollars are the country's main power resource while also constituting the most significant risk faced by Venezuelan populists, the current president included. What distinguishes Chávez's government from that of his populist predecessors is his marked tendency towards authoritarianism and his questioning of representative democracy, which formed the framework in which Rómulo Betancourt and Carlos Andrés Pérez operated. Until the arrival in power of Chávez, populism had been compatible with the system of representative democracy that was re-established in 1958 through the Punto Fijo political pact.

Betancourt's democratic populism. The Triennium (1945-1948), the revolutionary government headed by Rómulo Betancourt, marked the beginning of Venezuelan populism. Betancourt differentiated himself from the traditional political class through his nationalist rhetoric, his anti-imperialism and his symbolic identification with the people.³³ Public services improved under the Triennium, universal suffrage was instated, and a new Constitution was proposed. His programme sought to oppose "formal democracy".³⁴ His party, the social democratic Acción Democrática (AD), was regarded at its inception as a people's party. During his second administration (1959-1964), Betancourt was one of the architects of the democratic pact between AD and the conservative COPEI party. Contrary to his populist beginnings, his international legacy was the "Betancourt Doctrine", which stipulated the non-recognition of governments that are not democratically elected.

The national and neo-populism of Carlos Andrés Pérez. Within the same democratic framework, the two governments of Carlos Andrés Pérez represented historical national-populism (1974-1979) and neo-populism (1989-1993). The nationalisation of the oil industry, anti-imperialism and a generous policy aimed at redistributing the oil bonanza of the period were the

three pillars of his first presidential mandate. His second mandate, however, was shaped by worsening economic conditions, which forced him into adopting the neo-liberal policies imposed by the IMF, including a rise in prices and a reduction in public services. These unpopular measures sparked the so-called *Caracazo* in 1989, which involved violent protests and looting. Two attempted coups were mounted during this second mandate, one of them led by Hugo Chávez. The president's low popularity and a corruption scandal brought his presidency to a premature end.

Chávez's foundational populism is reminiscent in certain aspects, such as the economic bonanza deriving from high oil prices and its "developmental megalomania", of the first presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez: "The Venezuela of Hugo Chávez is the most notable case of a return of populism in its traditional redistributive guise".³⁵ Even so, *chavismo* represents a more authoritarian brand of populism. Militarism is a key feature of *chavismo*, distinguishing it from other populisms in power and placing it closer to historical Peronism.³⁶ *Chavismo* and Peronism have much in common: the military background of their leaders; popular mobilisation and the creation of their own movements; the struggle against the national oligarchy; strong and authoritarian presidential rule, along with control of institutions; state intervention in the economy, as well as programmes of social welfare; and anti-imperialist political rhetoric.³⁷

Although his government spelled the end of the two-party system run by the AD and COPEI, Chávez was not the cause but the consequence of this system's decline. Hugo Chávez and his Bolivarian movement emerged from the ashes of a liberal democratic system based on a pact between the leading political forces, in which neither the Communist Party nor the armed forces took part. Today, the forces excluded from that

³⁵ Ludolfo Paramio, "Giro a la izquierda y regreso del populismo", in *Nueva Sociedad* n° 205, Caracas, 2005, pp 62-73.

³⁶ See Nelly Arenas, "El gobierno de Hugo Chávez: populismo de otrora y de ahora", in *Nueva Sociedad*, n° 200, Caracas, 2005, pp. 38-50.

³⁷ Carlos Malamud, "Perón y su vigencia en los populismos latinoamericanos", in *Revista de Occidente*, n° 305, October 2006, Madrid, pp 43-55.

³³ See Luis Ricardo Dávila, "Populismo e identidades sociales en Venezuela", in *Acta Científica Venezolana*, volume 52, Caracas, 2001, pp 126-137.

³⁴ *Alocución a la nación.* Speech by Rómulo Betancourt, October 18, 1945.

pact - the left, the military and the marginalised - are Chávez's main allies. His "enemies" are the representatives of what he terms the "rotten oligarchy": the political parties, the unions, the church and the business community.

Hugo Chávez has accentuated his country's polarisation and political repression. Although the government does not engage in any open repression, it practises censorship and excludes the opposition from political life and institutions. One example of this was the decision in 2007 not to renew the license of Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV). The de-facto closure of this private media company unleashed a national and international controversy that reflected the authoritarian tendencies of *chavismo*, which with its quasi-monopoly of the media now controls all the country's democratic institutions. The eight years since Chávez took power have transformed the country.

A new Bolivarian state. The 1999 Constitution established the "Bolivarian Republic" of Venezuela, and with it extended the presidential mandate from four to six years, eliminated the Senate, gave military personnel the vote and strengthened direct democracy through the mechanisms of referenda and public votes of censure. Since then, Chávez has used his supporters to take control over the main state institutions. Today, all the democratic institutions of the state – the executive and legislative branches, the judicial system, electoral commission and the armed forces – are under his control. Three new plans will accentuate this centralisation of power: (1) the creation of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Único Socialista de Venezuela, PSUV, which agglomerates various factions of the Bolivarian movement), (2) reform of the Constitution, which will among other things enable Chávez to be re-elected indefinitely, and (3) a reorganisation of municipal and community authorities so as to "convert the old counter-revolutionary state into a revolutionary state", controlled by a central power.³⁸

³⁸ Hugo Chávez's inauguration speech, Caracas, 10 January 2007.

A civic-military government. Hugo Chávez is, and thinks like, a military officer, who only a few years ago led a failed coup d'état. Senior military officers occupy posts in PDVSA and run several of the missions, while according to Michael Shifter, a third of state governors are also military officers loyal to Chávez.³⁹ Furthermore, if the plans for constitutional reform are approved, the president will be able to decree "special military regions in any part of the territory".⁴⁰ Other features of the regime confirm its militarism⁴¹ and the trend to civic-military government: military education for pre-school infants, the militarised Bolivarian circles, the creation of civil militia based on the Cuban model, and the increase in military spending, including the purchase of arms and military equipment.

A state-run economy. Oil is the backbone of the Venezuelan economy, and the state-run firm PDVSA is the key to political power. "Black gold" makes up roughly 50 percent of state revenues and over 80 percent of the country's exports. Chávez government approved a new Hydrocarbons Law, which hiked up the state's profits from and control over the oil industry. At the international level, Venezuela has played a more active role in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and pursued a policy of raising prices to their maximum and cutting production quotas. In early 2007, Chávez also announced fresh nationalisations, of telecommunications and electricity firms, along with the remaining private sector operations in the oil industry.

"The missions". The social programme of the Bolivarian revolution – in education, housing and food – is embodied in 15 "missions", created by the president and depending directly on him. Many of them are administered by former military officers, and draw on the work of Cuban experts. Lacking in both control and transparency mechanisms, the missions are an example of "welfare policies run exclusively by the

³⁹ Michael Shifter, 2007, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Constitutional reform bill drafted by President Hugo Chávez.

⁴¹ See Nelly Arenas and Marcos Avilio Trejo, "El militarismo, autoritarismo y populismo en Venezuela", in *Provincia* (Revista Venezolana de Estudios Territoriales), Universidad de las Andes, Mérida 2006, pp. 313-319.

president, and parallel to formal constitutional institutions".⁴²

These aspects of the "Bolivarian Revolution" have in common the pivotal role played by the president. The strengthening of executive power, the frequent cabinet reshuffles and the appointment of Chávez's followers to political and administrative posts have made the president the icon of the Bolivarian project. A further example of Venezuelan populism's proximity to authoritarianism came in January 2007 with the approval of the Enabling Law, which gave the president special powers over the next 18 months. The law was approved by the sole house of parliament, made up solely of Chávez's supporters in the wake of the opposition boycott of legislative elections in December 2005.

A Bolivarian international? With the help of petrodollars and the spiritual guidance of his mentor, Fidel Castro, Hugo Chávez is building a regional plan whose main goal is to become a coalition against the United States. The core of this is the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), devised as a counter-plan to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and formed by Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua, alongside Venezuela. The same anti-imperialist tendency has informed the creation of the Telesur television channel, and initiatives such as Petrocaribe and the Banco del Sur (Bank of the South), both financed by Venezuela. The two flags of the "Bolivarian international", anti-imperialism and Bolivarianism, are not free of contradictions. In spite of his constant verbal attacks against President Bush, Venezuela still supplies oil to the United States, and commercial ties have not been affected by the diplomatic crisis.⁴³ The rhetoric of Latin American unity also contrasts with Chávez's clashes with neighbouring countries (Colombia and Chile, for instance), and his exit from the Andean Community. Instead of fostering integration, *chavismo*

⁴² See Heinz R. Sonntag, "Populismo como herramienta", comment in *Foro Europa-América Latina*, at <http://www.eurolatin.fride.org>, FRIDE, Madrid, 12 February 2007.

⁴³ See Michael Shifter, *Hugo Chávez, A Test for US Policy*, A Special Report of the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD), Miami, March 2007, p. 11.

"has rekindled the flame of nationalism in Latin America".⁴⁴

The chavista model. Chávez's military national populism is refoundational. In place of imposing his political plan immediately after gaining power, he followed a script for controlling, step by step, the totality of state institutions, and separating the opposition – and with it the former political elite – from power:

Chávez's institutional script

1. Win presidential elections with an absolute majority.
2. Summon a Constituent Assembly
3. Hold a referendum to elect the Constituent Assembly
4. Draft a new refoundational Constitution that strengthens the executive branch
5. Hold a referendum to ratify it
6. Reform and control the electoral and judicial systems
7. Hold fresh presidential elections
8. (Hold a referendum on the president)
9. Take control of Congress
10. Approve and implement new laws to control the press

Two later populists, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Evo Morales in Bolivia, have started to follow the same institutional script in order to impose their similarly refoundational objectives, albeit with several differences to the Venezuelan model. In the case of Argentina, the influence runs the other way, since Chávez's initiative is partly inspired by the historical experience of Peronism and its refoundational programme of the 1940s.

Ecuador: a copy of *chavismo* or a path of its own?

"Give me a balcony and I'll become president" (José María Velasco Ibarra)

"I am the last spasm of Ecuadorean populism" (Abdalá Bucaram)

"The nation is now for everybody" (Rafael Correa)

⁴⁴ Nelly Arenas, 2005, p. 40.

Like Venezuela, Ecuador has a long tradition of both democracy and populism, which received further confirmation in the election of Rafael Correa as president in 2006. At first sight, Correa appears to be following the example of his friend Hugo Chávez, who financed part of Correa's election campaign. But closer examination reveals certain differences, principally those of the "counterweight" of the indigenous movement, the absence of militarism, and the more progressive and intellectual bent of his administration.

Ecuador was not only the first country in Latin America to re-establish its democracy in 1978, but is also one of the first to have undergone a crisis in its system of representative democracy - a crisis that has not yet abated. Over the last 10 years, the country has been governed by eight presidents, with none of them able to finish his mandate. Three presidents were overthrown by popular protests, indicating that "street power" is a recurrent source of power linking democracy with populism. As a result, Ecuadorean populism is a phenomenon that flows from above (through charismatic leaders) as much as from below (from popular movements). This characteristic is apparent in the three populist waves to have hit Ecuador.

National populism. During his five presidential mandates from 1934 to 1970, the charismatic leader José María Velasco Ibarra dominated political life in his country, forging a new political style by supporting the political inclusion of the "common citizen". He was the first candidate to lead an election campaign throughout the whole of Ecuador, including the most remote villages. Velasco Ibarra came to power in the midst of a crisis of the discredited liberal and conservative parties, and distanced himself from both of them. His image as the "saviour of the nation", his charisma and his multi-class alliance were fused together in his promise of welfare (particularly education and infrastructure), and his relationship with the people.⁴⁵ Although he was linked with the first populist party, the Concentration of Popular Forces

(CFP) - which still exists - his personal style of leadership blocked the creation of a movement. Velasco Ibarra backed universal suffrage, and democratised "Ecuador's public spaces", but he showed little respect to his "enemies" in the traditional national elite.⁴⁶ His economic policy was nationalist and "anti-oligarchic".

Folkish neo-populism. The former mayor of Guayaquil, Abdalá Bucaram, won the election of 1996 by haranguing the "white oligarchy" and portraying himself as an extravagant popular leader who played football and the guitar. In 1983 he created his own movement, the Roldosista Party of Ecuador (PRE), which brought together various small parties and represented the more marginalised sections of society.⁴⁷ Although he was only in power for six months, Bucaram is considered an important representative of neo-populism.⁴⁸ Aside from his privatisations and neo-liberal economic policy,⁴⁹ his brief mandate was characterised by its high levels of corruption, the performances of the president in his musical group "Los Iracundos" (the angry ones), his links with Diego Maradona and an excessive fondness for parties in his residence. "The Madman" (a nickname that he used about himself) was stripped of office in February 1997 by Congress, which declared him to be "mentally unfit".

Left-wing populism. Like his friend and ally Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa won the presidency with 56.6 percent of the vote, on the back of a promise to "refound the country". He is an outsider to the established party system, having created his own party PAÍS (Patria Altiva Í Soberana, or the Proud and Sovereign Country) shortly before elections were held on October 15, 2006. After studying economics in Belgium and the United States, Rafael Correa gained extensive international and also political experience, having served as economy

⁴⁶ Carlos de la Torre, "¿Es populismo la forma constitutiva de la democracia en América Latina?", paper presented to the XXI Congress of LASA, 2006.

⁴⁷ For more details, see Flavio Freidenberg, *Jama, caleta y camello, Las estrategias de Abdalá Bucaram y el PRE para ganar las elecciones*, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito, 2003.

⁴⁸ See, among others, Carlos Torre, op. cit.

⁴⁹ One of his advisers was the former Argentine economy minister, Domingo Cavallo.

⁴⁵ See Ximena Sosa-Buchholz, "The Strange Career of Populism in Ecuador", in Michael L. Conniff, *Populism in Latin America*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa 1999, pp. 138-157.

minister to his presidential predecessor, Alfredo Palacio. In 2005, Correa resigned after refusing to sign a free trade deal with the United States.

President Correa seems to be following the footsteps towards institutional control set down by his mentor Hugo Chávez. On April 15, 2007, the government held a referendum on a Constituent Assembly to amend the Constitution of 1998. A total of 81 percent of Ecuadoreans approved the plan. The next step, again following the Chávez script, will be the creation of a new Constituent Assembly. Elections were indeed held to this effect on September 30, 2007, in which the País Alliance secured a clear majority of 72 percent of the vote. The constitutional reform package includes the possibility of a popular vote of censure against presidents and a strengthening of executive power.

The referendum on the Constituent Assembly sparked a serious conflict with Congress – where Correa’s party has no representatives – which in turn unleashed a major institutional crisis. When a group of deputies opposed the referendum and demanded the replacement of the president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) who had approved it, the latter decided to strip the 57 deputies of their seats. On April 23, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that 51 of these 57 deputies should be reinstated. As a result, parliament replaced the nine judges on the Constitutional Tribunal with allies of the president. In the future, the executive branch will be able to rule outside the control of judicial and legislative authorities, given that the new Constitution envisages additional and exceptional powers for the president.

Unlike Chávez, a major support base for President Correa lies in the divided indigenous movement. Although he has formed no alliance with it, at the start of his mandate the president drew on the support of the indigenous movement, which has consolidated itself into the leading political force in the country. Indigenous people are mainly represented by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), and its political wing, the Pachakutik New Country Movement of Plurinational Unity (MUPP-

NP). In a ceremony held in an Andean village, the president, who speaks quechua, was presented with the chieftain’s staff of the indigenous community. It was more than a mere symbolic gesture in light of the considerable political power belonging to the movement, despite the current leadership crisis in the CONAIE and the MUPP-NP.⁵⁰

Since Abdalá Bucaram, whose mandate saw the creation of a ministry for indigenous affairs, all governments have taken indigenous power into account. Its first show of force was the popular uprising of 2000 – supported by the former Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez – during which indigenous protesters occupied parliament and installed a civic-military junta, which deposed the then president, Jamil Mahuad. His presidency had suffered the largest financial crisis in the country’s history, which Mahuad tried to stall through the adoption of the dollar as the national currency.

Five years later, CONAIE and the MUPP-NP once again played a crucial role in popular protests. The “revolution of the outlaws” led in April 2005 to the ousting of the indigenous movement’s former ally, President Lucio Gutiérrez (2003–2005). The forced exit of President Gutiérrez, who had to flee the country, proved that the indigenous movement was able to overthrow governments to which it had formerly been friendly. Indeed, the objectives of CONAIE include the “fight against the Single-Nation Ecuadorean State, its governments and its authorities”. This and the movement’s demands – control over land and natural resources – makes the movement a potential risk factor for President Correa.⁵¹

His government represents above all else the interests of the left, reflected in a Cabinet made up of women⁵² and intellectuals. With this team, the government

⁵⁰ See Carlos de la Torre, “Entre el corporativismo y las ciudadanías débiles”, in Víctor Bretón et al. (eds), *Ciudadanía y exclusión: Ecuador y España frente al Espejo*, Catarata, Madrid 2007, pp. 151–182.

⁵¹ See Carlos de la Torre, “Populismo, democracia y crisis políticas recurrentes en Ecuador”, *Europa-América Latina*, n° 21, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Rio de Janeiro, 2006.

⁵² Women run the Defence and Foreign Ministries, among others.

intends to refound the state, following the path of Chávez. Correa's government plan is focused on five main areas: (1) a constitutional and democratic revolution, including a deep reform of state institutions, (2) a moral revolution through a media campaign and tougher penalties against those guilty of corruption, (3) an economic and productive revolution against the interests of big business, (4) an education and health revolution through the creation of new social programmes, and (5) a revolution for dignity, sovereignty and Latin American integration.

Correa's main proposal has been to create a "radically participatory democracy" that is distinct from the electoral, judicial and legislative authorities, which are branded as "haunts of political mafia with ties to the economic power of the oligarchy and the banks".⁵³ Furthermore, and in line with Chávez, President Correa has included the media in his list of adversaries, considering it to represent the interests of the banking sector.⁵⁴ Following in Venezuela's footsteps, his participatory democracy is designed as a democracy without institutional control, and thus closer to the authoritarian model.

Migration is a prominent issue for the government, which has created a new (fifth) region to represent migrants, a National Secretariat for the Migrant, and a state fund to make productive use of remittances. Correa wishes to provide Ecuadoreans with the possibility of "voice" as an alternative to that of "exit", the option chosen by the 10 percent of Ecuadoreans currently living in Spain and the United States.⁵⁵ Migrants represent an important electoral constituency that Rafael Correa has been intent on capturing through an electoral campaign in recipient countries, and promises to normalise their legal status.

⁵³ "A major step for the radical transformation of Ecuador" in *Plan de Gobierno del Movimiento PAÍS 2007-2011*, Quito, November 22, 2006.

⁵⁴ Rafael Correa, speech to the Casa de América, Madrid, July 11, 2007.

⁵⁵ Following the Proposal of the País Alliance for Ecuadorean emigrants, the Migration Policy, Quito 2006 (<http://www.rafaelcorrea.com>), the government has created a new region representing migrants in Congress, a National Secretariat for the Migrant, and a remittance fund.

In line with Venezuela, Correa's economic policy is also nationalist. This has affected the oil industry above all else, since this is the country's main export, making up 35 percent of state revenue. The government has announced the return of Ecuador to the oil-producing cartel OPEC, from which it withdrew in 1992. The new energy policy includes maximisation of the profits of the national firm Petroecuador, and the revision of contracts with foreign companies. As regards financial reforms, Correa has proposed the creation over the medium term of a new national currency, and a review of the autonomy of the Central Bank.

Likewise, the president has announced an about-turn in foreign policy, entailing as a first step the suspension of negotiations over a free trade treaty with the United States. The government has also declared that it will not renew the concession of the military base Manta to the United States in November 2009. Moreover, Rafael Correa has signed up to the Bolivarian initiative backed by Chávez, and could shortly join the ALBA.

Bolivia: refoundational ethnic populism

"We have to serve the people, not live from the people" –
Evo Morales, January 22, 2006

The political programme of Evo Morales also has much in common with the *chavista* model. Its rejection of representative democracy and its goal of creating a new state indicate that the Bolivian leader's political project, with all its national idiosyncrasies, is close to the institutional path laid down by Hugo Chávez. Following the Venezuelan model, Morales' government has held elections for a Constituent Assembly that will draw up a new Constitution, and in which the majority party, the Movement to Socialism (MAS), plays a leading role. Like *chavismo*, Morales' followers have begun to clash with the legislative and judicial bodies that are supposedly dominated by the "oligarchy".

However, the key role played by ethnic identity, a long democratic tradition and the movement's rural origins

means that Bolivia fits less comfortably into the category of populism. In the first place, the president's Aymara origins distinguish him from other populists. Secondly, Bolivia has not had a long tradition of populist governments. Thirdly, Bolivian populism can be differentiated from that of Venezuela in terms of its high level of civil society mobilisation, which has been termed the "motor of change".⁵⁶ As a result, and in contrast to *chavismo*, Bolivia has seen the rise of an "ethno-populism" from below, which is in conflict with the country's traditional white elite, concentrated in the four richest provinces.

The assumption of power by Evo Morales following the elections of December 2005 began a new era in the political life of Bolivia, the poorest country of South America,⁵⁷ and the only one with an indigenous majority that has for centuries been excluded from power. In contrast to other variants of populism in power, Morales' government is not so much reformist as a harbinger – 50 years after the National Revolution of 1952⁵⁸ – of a virtual ethnic revolution.⁵⁹ The main features of Bolivian populism are the indigenous protest movement, and to a much lesser degree, the president's charisma.

Since the start of the 21st century, this country has witnessed a gradual transition from representative democracy to participatory democracy. Evo Morales is the protagonist and at the same time the product of the political changes that occurred in the final stage of the "democracy of pacts" (1985-2005) between Bolivia's three main political parties (Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) and National Democratic Action (AND)). This system, which in its beginnings was inspired by a culture of dialogue and a search for consensus, was transformed over the years into a system of rule by parties and elite consensus, with little

popular support to draw upon.⁶⁰ Lastly, the country's traditional elite faced growing opposition from a highly mobilised civil society, whose protests forced the resignation of two former presidents, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (2003) and Carlos Mesa (2005).

As in Ecuador, indigenous people's interests are an essential part of political life in Bolivia. They represent the support base for the president, who emerged from the trade union movement of Chapare, in which he represented indigenous coca-growers. This movement led to the creation of the political force that is now the ruling party, MAS, which has been present in parliament since 2002, when alongside the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP) it won 27 percent of the vote. In contrast to his rival Felipe Quispe, Evo Morales and MAS stand for an "inclusive indigenous movement"⁶¹ that attracts various ethnic groups, part of the middle class, the unions, and a large number of civil society organisations.

Morales' political approach – like that of Chávez and Correa – is nationalist and foundational. The main demand of the indigenous movement is for a change in the "colonial state". The simplification of Bolivian history into "500 years of exploitation and colonial pillage" forms part of the president's rhetoric, and helps to identify his principal enemies: the "land-owning oligarchy", the "white elite", foreign businesses and the United States. As with Chávez and Correa, Evo Morales governs through referenda, populist appeals that polarise Bolivians, and an open conflict with parliament and the judicial system (based in Sucre). He has branded the latter "the prejudicial system", and has accused judges of being "corrupt thieves".⁶²

Evo Morales represents the indigenous majority, which in his own words has been politically oppressed and culturally alienated.⁶³ His rise to power is the result of

⁵⁶ Mariano Aguirre/Isabel Moreno, 2006.

⁵⁷ 62 percent of Bolivians live in poverty, and 34 percent in extreme poverty.

⁵⁸ The leader of the first Revolution of 1952 was Víctor Paz Estenssoro, founder of the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR)

⁵⁹ See Cletus Gregor Barié, *Bolivia: ¿Cuánta revolución cabe en la democracia?*, FRIDE comment, Madrid, March 2007.

⁶⁰ See René Antonio Mayorga, *Bolivia's Democracy at the Crossroads*, in Frances Hagopian/Scott Mainwaring, 2005, pp 149-179.

⁶¹ Raúl L. Madrid, "The Rise of Ethno-Populism in Latin America: the Bolivian Case". Paper presented to the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, 2006.

⁶² *El País*, Madrid, 06/06/2007.

⁶³ Interview with Evo Morales, in *Spiegel Online*, Berlin, 28/08/2007.

a new stage in the long-standing distributive battle between white and indigenous people over access to land and natural resources. Some analysts maintain that the president represents "populist ethnic fundamentalism".⁶⁴ By embodying the indigenous majority's legitimate and democratic aspiration to take control of the country and establish "a different Bolivia", Evo Morales will find it hard to mend the country's ethnic, social, political and regional divisions, particularly considering that some of his followers oppose any broad national consensus. Furthermore, Evo's electoral promises to re-establish state control over key economic sectors, reject free trade agreements and control natural resources - among them gas and water - are conceived as threats to the interests of the country's white elite. In his inaugural speech, the president compared the situation in Bolivia to that of apartheid in South Africa.⁶⁵ This leaves room both for future reconciliation and for increased conflict.

The test will come in the shape of the new Constitution. Following the institutional pattern set by Chávez, Morales called elections for a new Constituent Assembly, which his party MAS won with 50.7 percent of the vote, albeit without the two thirds majority needed to impose his constitutional design. Since its opening in August 2006, the Constituent Assembly has been debating a new Constitution, which - after a three-month delay - will in principle be ready by the end of 2007. As in the early years of *chavismo*, the Constituent Assembly is at the centre of the fight for power between the new and traditional elites of the country, both of which are represented.

In its National Development Plan 2006-2010,⁶⁶ the government unveiled a strategy based on community culture and its values (solidarity, fraternity, respect for nature), in contrast to the "deformed oligarchic state, which is centralised, patrimonial and corrupt, and is entrenched in representative democracy". This use of language reveals the growing east-west polarisation

between the "two Bolivias":⁶⁷ the poor western side with its indigenous majority, and the rich eastern region,⁶⁸ populated by white and mestizo people, and home to the country's natural resources and agriculture. Evo Morales is supported by over 80 percent of Bolivians in La Paz and El Alto, but is opposed by 53 percent in Santa Cruz de la Sierra.⁶⁹ The country's political division is reflected in five issues:

Land distribution. The recovery of land for community farming is one of the main demands of the indigenous population, and at the same time one of the most divisive issues in the country.⁷⁰ In November 2006, a law was passed that would enable uncultivated land to be redistributed. This law affects above all the four provinces where land-owning classes are predominant (Beni, Pando, Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Tarija), and where the law is fiercely opposed.

Regional autonomy. A referendum was held in June 2006 on the issue of a new statute of regional autonomy. In line with government expectations, a majority voted against the proposal, but the four provinces in the eastern crescent voted in favour by a clear margin. Since then, a conflict has been simmering between national unity as backed by the government, and the "separatism" of the country's eastern regions. A new proposal envisages dividing the national territory into 41 regions (in place of the nine current provinces), thus undermining the power of the most antagonistic regions.

The site of the capital. As part of the debate on constitutional reform, the political battle between "east and west" sparked a fresh conflict in the summer of 2007, including violent protests and blockades, over the opposition's demand that the capital be moved from La Paz to Sucre, where the country's judicial authorities are based. The proposal has been supported

⁶⁴ René Antonio Mayorga, 2005, p. 178.

⁶⁵ Inaugural speech of the President of the Republic, Evo Morales, January 22, 2006.

⁶⁶ (<http://www.pacification.gov.bo>)

⁶⁷ Mariano Aguirre, Isabel Moreno, 2007, p. 13.

⁶⁸ 65 percent of Bolivia's exports come from the east of the country.

⁶⁹ *El País*, Madrid, 03/04/2007, based on the poll findings of Equipos Mori.

⁷⁰ International Crisis Group, *Bolivia's Reforms: The Dangers of New Conflicts*, Latin America Briefing n° 13, 08/01/2007.

by the four provinces in the eastern “crescent”, and rejected by the majority party MAS, the government and most inhabitants of La Paz.

Control of natural resources. The May 2006 decree on hydrocarbons, which stipulated greater state control over and profits from the country’s energy resources - the state now claims 82 percent of profits - generated a conflict with eastern leaders, particularly those from Santa Cruz and Tarija, where the largest reserves of natural gas are to be found. Meanwhile, this initiative also unsettled major foreign investors in Bolivia, including Brazil’s Petrobras and Spain’s Repsol.⁷¹

Yes to coca, no to cocaine. Evo Morales legalised coca - a sacred plant for indigenous people - and has supported making productive use of it, following the example set by former president, Jaime Paz Zamora (1989-1993). Coca production and sale, for both licit and illicit purposes, is a means of subsistence for most indigenous peasants. Evo Morales’ “yes to coca, no to cocaine” slogan is supported by his electoral base, but has brought him into conflict with the US government and its crop eradication policy.

Evo Morales is changing the priorities in Bolivia’s foreign relations, with a shift towards South America and away from the United States and Europe. The close alliance between Evo Morales and Hugo Chávez supposedly accounts for the financing of part of the former’s electoral campaign. Although Bolivia is still part of the Andean Community, it has also joined the Venezuelan initiative ALBA.

Argentina: Peronism consolidated

“We want an Argentina that is socially just, economically free and politically sovereign”
(Juan Domingo Perón, “The Twenty Truths”, October 17, 1951)

Argentina is not following the path blazed by *chavismo*, since it is Peronism itself that has helped

⁷¹ Petrobras controls 43 percent of the gas reserves, and Repsol 23 percent.

mould the Venezuelan president. In this country, Peronism, which was born in 1946 through the first presidential term of Juan Domingo Perón, is almost a synonym for politics.⁷² Since that time, populism has become a dominant feature of political life. Through Peronism, Argentina has created a political system of its own, which came into existence in the 1940s and has lasted until today.⁷³ Although its support base is different, Chávez’s project and that of historical Peronism are in many respects quite similar.

Compared with historical Peronism and today’s *chavismo*, President Kirchner, who is to be succeeded by his wife Cristina, represents a “light” or democratic variant of populism, without its military components or its drift towards authoritarianism. Nor is it a refoundational initiative; for in contrast to Ecuador and Venezuela, Argentine populism has not had different spiritual leaders: its sole guiding light is that of Juan Domingo Perón. Even so, Kirchner represents a left-wing nationalist Peronism, which shares certain characteristics with *chavismo*, above all in the field of economic policy.

At the national level, Kirchner is closer to the historical breed of populism rather than the neo-populism of Carlos Menem. The governments of Carlos Menem and Néstor Kirchner prove that Peronism can shelter political models from right and left, in such a way that “being Peronist” seems more of a personal conviction than a political or ideological bearing. In contrast to Venezuela, over the course of the “three waves” that Argentina has experienced, populism has been reshaped from a revolutionary-authoritarian project into a political tradition working within a framework that is largely democratic.

Peronism’s historical populism. The popular mobilisation of the *descamisados* (shirtless ones) and

⁷² Steven Levitsky, “Argentina: Democratic Failure amidst Economic Failure”, in Frances Hagopian/Scott Mainwaring, *The Third Wave of Democratisation in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp 63-90.

⁷³ See, among others, Joel Horowitz, “Populism and Its Legacies in Argentina”, in Michael L. Connif (ed), *Populism in Latin America*, Tualoosa/London, 1999, pp 22-43.

personal charisma were the chief characteristics of the populism of Juan Domingo Perón (1895-1974). His second wife Eva Perón, “Evita”, became a power behind the throne and the leading symbol of the president’s social commitments. Perón introduced a series of electoral, social and labour laws - against the interests of the traditional oligarchy - which brought about greater inclusion of workers and trade unions in the political system.⁷⁴ The hidden face of Peronism was its authoritarianism, the repression of the opposition and its affinities with Italian fascism. Perón was the first president to secure a constitutional reform (in 1949) that allowed for his indefinite re-election. His economic policies favoured national industry and state intervention. In the field of foreign policy, he distanced himself from the United States and defended a “third position” between capitalism and socialism. Perón changed fundamental aspects of society and politics: his Justicialist Party became the leading political force, unions graduated into key political actors, and the state began to grow.

Neo-populism and right-wing Peronism. Formerly a governor of La Rioja, Carlos Menem proclaimed himself a disciple of Perón. His two presidential terms (1989-1999) signalled the return of historical populism, including a constitutional reform that allowed him to stand for re-election, while also permitting his abusive use of emergency decrees (545 of which were approved under Menem), and institutional changes⁷⁵ to strengthen the executive branch. His slogan, “follow me, I won’t let you down”, was a clearly populist message, as were his emotionally and religiously charged speeches.⁷⁶ But unlike Perón, Menem chose to apply a neo-liberal economic policy. Under his government, almost all state-run firms were privatised, the public sector was cut in size, and the “convertibility law” was approved, laying the foundation for parity between the

US dollar and the Argentine peso. His foreign policy saw a rapprochement with the United States, with whom Menem wished to establish “carnal relations”. His mandate ended in 1999 amid a vast array of corruption scandals and an economic recession. The incoming government of Fernando de la Rúa then watched over the collapse of the by then fictitious dollar-peso parity. The government froze bank deposits and declared a default. Popular protests and looting followed, forcing the president to resign and provoking the greatest political crisis in the country’s history at the end of 2002, under the popular slogan “everybody out!”. In January 2002, the Peronist Eduardo Duhalde was appointed caretaker president until the elections of April 27, 2003.

Left-wing Peronism. His nationalism, socio-economic policies, anti-imperialism and his authoritarianism place the Peronist Néstor Kirchner firmly within the tradition of historical populism. His slogan “Argentina First” and his own political party, The Front for Victory, won the presidential elections almost by accident. He was proclaimed president on 25 May 2003, after Carlos Menem withdrew from the second round of the election. Unlike Perón and Menem, Kirchner began his mandate with a low level of popular support, given that only 22 percent of the Argentine electorate voted for him in the first round. At the time he became president, the former governor of the far-flung province of Santa Cruz was a Peronist outsider, who was practically unknown in the rest of the country. In addition, the candidate of 2003 was reputed to be boring and lacking in charisma. A number of critical observers cited the authoritarian methods he had used as governor, among them control of the press, the appointment of friendly judges, and the efforts he had made to secure the right to stand for re-election indefinitely.

His reputation and his image are now radically different. By the middle of his term in office, Kirchner had the support of around 75 percent of the Argentine public, and by the end of his presidency was still backed by over half the population. Although Kirchner did not stand in the presidential elections of 29 October 2007, he personally appointed a loyal successor: his wife, the

⁷⁴ Alfredo Silletta, *La patria sublevada: una historia de la Argentina Peronista 1945-2002*, Latinoamericana Editora, Buenos Aires, 2002.

⁷⁵ These included the expansion of the Supreme Court, which grew in size from 5 to 9 members through the appointment of justices loyal to Menem.

⁷⁶ Sebastián Barros, *The Discursive Continuities of the Menemist Rupture*, in Francisco Panizza, 2005, pp 250-275.

Senator Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who proceeded to win the October poll. The Kirchner-to-Kirchner line of succession will guarantee the continuity of his political programme.

In the wake of the deep crisis that shook the country between 2001 and 2002, the appeal to nationalism and his social programmes were the strongest sources of support for Kirchner. This marks a resurgence of the tradition of national populism from the 1940s, although his lack of charisma and the crafting of a political programme that tends towards the left distinguishes him from Perón. At the start of his term in office, the president repealed two immunity laws, Final Point and Due Obedience, thereby enabling the courts to restart prosecutions related to the crimes against humanity committed during the last military dictatorship (1976 to 1983). Furthermore, he ordered a reorganisation of the armed forces and a reform of the judicial system. As for social policy, Kirchner's administration prepared 13 "Government Plans" in the areas of employment policy, health and education, the names of which - "Heads of Households", "Hands to Work" and "the Argentina Birth Plan" - were reminiscent of the era of Juan Domingo Perón.

Above all else, Néstor Kirchner embodies the return of economic national populism. Proof of this can be found in the state control of prices, renegotiation of the foreign debt (totalling 120 billion dollars), and the defence of national industry against the interests of multi-national business. From the seat of the presidency, Kirchner has boycotted certain national companies that he has identified as adversaries of his plans, which are in part hostile to the free market and the oligarchy. Within the post-crisis context, these are popular policies, supported by many Argentines who suffered the consequences of devaluation and the rise in prices following the privatisation of state companies.

The undoubted achievements of Kirchner's government (and of his former economy minister, Roberto Lavagna) include renegotiation of the debt, stabilisation of the economy and stimulation of national industry. Since 2003, the Argentine economy

has been growing at rates of between 7 and 8 percent a year. The greatest risk that the government faces is inflation, and awareness of this led to the dismissal on the president's orders in February 2007 of an official from the National Statistics and Census Institute (INDEC) who had disclosed inflation figures above the expected level. The government proceeded to lower the inflation rate. The president's tendency to take unilateral decisions is also apparent in other areas: Kirchner has made extensive use of the right to apply emergency decrees, and less than a third of new laws have been approved by parliament.

His government has also effected a shift in Argentine foreign policy towards South America, and has strengthened its ties with Brazil, on one side, and Venezuela on the other. This latter country has bought a large share of the new bonds in Argentine foreign debt, and is considered an ally. Argentina was thus one of the first countries to support Venezuela's application to the sub-regional bloc MERCOSUR. Argentina's South American priorities and its alliance with Venezuela have entailed a marked chill in relations with the United States. The origin of this change in position goes back to the financial crisis, when Washington's passive response demonstrated that "carnal relations" with Argentina did not exist in practice.

Comparisons and preliminary conclusions

Top-down and bottom-up populism

Comparative analysis of these four cases serves to show that populism can flow vertically from above, in a top-down fashion, or bottom-up via popular protests. While top-down or "presidential populism" characterises the governments of Argentina and Venezuela, whose success and legitimacy are based

above all on economic growth, bottom-up or “people’s populism” can be observed in Bolivia and Ecuador, where indigenous people and their demands are a more important political factor than the personality of the president. The economy is the main risk factor for presidential populism, while “people’s populism” is threatened by popular demands.

Bottom-up populism. In Bolivia and Ecuador, the “ethnic barrier” separating the white and mestizo elite from indigenous people explains the political and social transformations that have occurred over recent years. One factor linked to this is the “geographical frontier”, which in Bolivia takes the form of differences between the highlands and the lowlands (or La Paz versus Santa Cruz de la Sierra), and in Ecuador the rivalry between the coastal region and highlands and the Amazon (or Quito versus Guayaquil). In both cases, “ethno-populism” and high levels of popular mobilisation are phenomena that are intrinsically linked to the process of state and democratic institutional construction, which is still weak.

Both cases also show that the balance of power between popular movements and the leader tends towards the former, which decides its success or failure. People’s populism is primarily a movement that rises up and maintains its distance from the respective leaders that it supports. One sign of this is the frequent protests and national strikes in both countries, where occupation of public space⁷⁷ tends to substitute representative democracy. This is particularly marked in the case of Bolivia, but also applies to Ecuador, where the danger of a rupture in the ties between the popular leader and his popular base are larger, given that in contrast to Evo Morales, neither Rafael Correa nor his leading allies are indigenous.

Top-down populism. Presidential populism forms part of the political culture of Argentina and Venezuela. In both countries, top-down populism is linked to a long democratic tradition (compared with Bolivia and

Ecuador), and to strong states that provide jobs and social services. Both Argentina and Venezuela draw on a long tradition of state intervention in the economy, which in the case of Venezuela has given rise to a rentier state. Following this tradition, both Chávez’s government and that of Kirchner have increased the size of the public sector and state spending.

These policies have been made possible by rapid growth rates as the result of high international prices for raw materials (oil for Venezuela, farm products for Argentina). Consequently, both governments are vulnerable to changes in the international economy and to rises in interest rates. The responses of Kirchner and Chávez to the second threat have been as simple as they are intrepid: the former changed the inflation rate in his favour, and Chávez will remove three zeroes from the national currency in 2008. As one of their main power resources, the economy is also a primordial risk for the presidential populisms of Kirchner and Chávez.

Direct democracy versus representative democracy?

With the exception of Argentina, populist governments have maintained an ambiguous and conflict-ridden relationship with representative democracy and its institutions. While Argentina represents the continuity of Peronism within an institutional and democratic framework, the populisms of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela have chosen similar routes towards control or removal of institutions, and the imposition of their refoundational plans. Following the path of Chávez, they tend to exercise a “dictatorship of the majority” in the name of direct democracy:

In **Venezuela**, Hugo Chávez follows the principle of “L’État, c’est moi”, and stands for a programme that is increasingly authoritarian and military, thus copying the tradition of historical national-populism. Military features and “hyper-presidentialism” characterise *chavismo*, which has progressively veered from representative democracy by imposing its own political project and controlling the opposition. At the same

⁷⁷ Carlos de la Torre, “The Resurgence of Radical Populism”, in *Constellations*, vol. 14, n°3, 2007, pp. 384-397, p. 386.

time, it is the sole populist government with regional ambitions. Military officers are key allies of Chávez, who also draws on the support of the left and marginalised urban communities. Thanks to his flow of petro-dollars, his model has gained in strength both inside and outside Venezuela.

In **Ecuador**, Rafael Correa has crafted a similar political plan of action to that of Chávez, but without its military components and, for the moment, he is also operating within the democratic framework. On one side, he is tracing the steps towards Venezuelan-style institutional control and concentration of power, as well as adopting a nationalist economic policy. But on the other hand, Correa's populism is more intellectual, and has no place for the army.⁷⁸ His main allies are the left, the marginalised, and part of the indigenous movement, whose perceptions of direct democracy are based on the belief system of the *ayllus*, namely the traditions and values of local communities, which take precedence over individual rights.

In **Bolivia**, this conflict between the indigenous cosmivision and the "Western" values of representative democracy is even more virulent. Evo Morales is the figurehead of a popular indigenous revolution that demands a different sort of state, identity and democracy. Before he took power, an ethnic and demand-led populism⁷⁹ had already risen up from below. Evo Morales' programme is focused on the (re)foundation of the state in indigenous people's interests.⁸⁰ Although Evo Morales is attempting to position himself between the two poles, his plan is more revolutionary than reformist, and his support base more rural than urban.

In **Argentina**, Kirchner's populism is short of charisma, and does not seek a direct relationship with the people; yet it does magnify the socio-economic role of the (Peronist) state. In contrast to the three

previous cases, Kirchner's main allies are two intermediary institutions of democracy: the Justicialist Party and the unions. As a result of its institutional base and its long periods in power, Peronist populism is the most consolidated and democratic of the four. One outstanding feature of Peronism is the prominent role of women, from Eva Perón to Cristina Fernández, the president-elect and wife of Kirchner. Although this handover of power is faithful to the Peronist tradition, and strengthens the system of presidential rule, it has respected the democratic rulebook.

As a result, in the scale of hybrid regimes between democracy and authoritarianism, *Chavez'* populism is the most authoritarian, Bolivia's the most revolutionary and popular, Ecuador's the most ambiguous,⁸¹ and Argentina's the most democratic. Even acknowledging these subtleties, these government are all "hybrid populist regimes", which display the five characteristics mentioned above in the first section: a lack of definite ideology and political programme, a particular relationship between leader and people (which is less evident in Argentina), a political outsider with an anti-elite posture, high levels of popular support, and a weakening of checks and balances.

As for democratic institutions, it must be recalled that the bodies that carry out democratic control of the executive branch, the judicial system and the legislature, are the most discredited in Latin America. Representative political parties that are recognised and accepted by the public have also failed to take root in many of the region's countries, and according to *Latinobarómetro*, have become instead the institutions with the worst reputation, alongside parliaments. The problem here is that legislative and judicial authorities are precisely those that stand as pillars of a democratic state based on the rule of law.

The arrival of populist government serves to weaken them further. The executive branch in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador clashes with democratic institutions, endeavours to control them through its

⁷⁸ On the contrary, Correa has strengthened the subordination of the armed forces to civilian authority.

⁷⁹ Raúl L. Madrid, 2006.

⁸⁰ See Mariano Aguirre and Isabel Moreno, *Re-founding the State in Bolivia*, Working Paper n° 31, FRIDE, Madrid, 2007.

⁸¹ See also the interview with Steven Levitsky, "Not the Populism of Yesterday", in *Harvard International Review*, 22 June 2007.

allies, and has undertaken battles for power with the parliament and opposition political parties. By weakening democratic control bodies and the opposition (which has been excluded in Venezuela, has practically disappeared in Argentina and is under threat in Bolivia and Ecuador), populism represents a threat to liberal democracy.

In all four countries - including Argentina, due to the extensive use of executive powers - there is a common perception that democratic institutions have been weakened to the benefit of a concentration of power in the president's hands. However, this process has reached different stages in the different countries: in Venezuela, democratic institutions are already under the control of President Chávez, and a new foundational Constitution has been approved; in Ecuador, the battle for power between the government, Congress, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and the Constitutional Tribunal is ongoing; in Bolivia, the main conflict is between central and local government, and is played out in the Constituent Assembly; and in Argentina, faced with a strong legislature, the executive branch is tempted to bypass parliament, and can be accused of nepotism.

Furthermore, the governments of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela also strive to control the "fourth estate": the media outlets that are largely opposed to the official political programme. Using the argument of "social responsibility", Chávez as well as Correa have started to impose penalties on those television and radio channels that broadcast programmes which are critical of the government, thus restricting freedom of expression.

Even so, in none of these cases, not even that of Venezuela, can populism be regarded as equivalent to authoritarianism. The four presidents have been democratically elected, they survive on popular support, and they encourage (above all in the three Andean countries) the political and social inclusion of marginalised people. But they are not democratic either. They prefer presidential leadership and personal loyalty to democratic institutions, and they reject

representative democracy. Except for Argentina, where populism has been institutionalised through the Justicialist Party, they contrast their participatory democracy to that of party-led representative democracy. They identify "their democracy" with a leader who unifies and represents the public interest, and "the other's democracy" with liberal institutions and elite interests.

This approach serves to widen political fissures, stir polarisation and exclude enemies or opponents from policy. Instead of seeking political consensus and negotiation, they divide society into two opposing camps, which are at worst in conflict. This practice of imposing instead of negotiating a political programme, and the concentration of power in the hands of the president, leads these governments closer to authoritarianism, yet without forsaking the formal democratic framework. Their defence of a hegemonic and exclusionary political project places them in the wide spectrum between democracy and authoritarianism.

More instead of less state

The populists that are currently in power share a series of features and public policies that serves to identify them as left-wing, and makes their style of government comparable to historical populism. Although they were born in a different historical context, and draw on a popular base,⁸² the four governments represent something of a turnaround in the way they support greater state intervention, reject the "neo-liberal" model, and speak up for the inclusion of marginalised people in political life. In this sense, the third populist wave is a response to the crisis in liberal democracy, which in many countries is an "oligarchic democracy",⁸³ to use the definition of Larry Diamond, that has been unable to satisfy demands for social services and public participation.

Thus, current left-wing populism forms part of the

⁸² See Flavia Freidenberg, 2007.

⁸³ Larry Diamond, 2002, p. 23.

renewed Latin American debate over the role of the state as a provider of social welfare,⁸⁴ and seeks to reverse the trends towards fewer public services and privatisation of security. Left-wing populism strives to strengthen the nation-state: at a cultural level through collective identities and symbols (the unified state), at a political level through a vertical relationship with society (corporatist state), and in the economic arena by state intervention and control over the country's strategic natural resources (the state economy).

It is worth recalling that repayment of foreign debt and neo-liberal policies have reduced the size of the state in Latin America, and with it the resources it can use to implement extended social policies. At the same time, there is a serious revenue problem. The average regional tax burden of 12 percent of GDP - compared with over 30 percent for the European Union - marks clear limits to the creation of welfare states. Due to a lack of resources and of political will among national elites, Latin American still suffers high rates of income inequality and poverty, an excessively large informal sector, few job opportunities, low levels of education, and discrimination on the basis of race, gender, disability and social class.⁸⁵ According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the region experienced economic growth of over 5 percent in 2006. Even so, over 40 percent of the region's citizens still live in poverty, and social inequality has barely diminished.⁸⁶

The concentration of income, land and public goods, as well as the low levels of education, are the social causes that underlie the resurgence of redistributive populism and leaders who promote the inclusion of marginalised people without passing through the slow processes of political compromise and consensus-building, as in Brazil and Chile. The promise of immediate satisfaction of poor people's needs, without passing through a revolution, is the key to understanding the rise of

populisms past and present: "The populist syndrome is built on the promise of immediate satisfaction of popular needs".⁸⁷ Both historical and current populism are redistributive and state-led. At the same time, even in Argentina (within Peronism), this new "populist wave" implies a redistribution of resources from the hands of the traditional elite to a new political class that is starting to run state institutions and wield power.

Following in the footsteps of other variants of historical populism, the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela represent to a certain extent a return to the period of nationalism and state intervention in the economy. They mark an end to the processes of privatisation of state firms, promote national production and reject bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements with the United States. In line with the public policies of national populism, the third populist wave strengthens the state as a supplier of social services, and as the leading economic power.

In countries where the state has been weakened or is endemically weak (Bolivia and Ecuador), populism is a positive force, as long as it entails public policies that work to the public benefit. In other countries, such as Argentina and Venezuela, where state creation is intimately linked to distributive populism, it represents the temptation of a return to the past. In general terms, strengthening the state through populist formulae is positive and negative. It is positive inasmuch as it creates more public policies, drives empowerment and reduces poverty; and negative since it tends to be exclusionary and antagonistic, creating patronage-based states which provide favours instead of rights, and which are hardly compatible with democratic, rule-bound states.

To conclude, the third populist wave suggests that a representative democracy cannot coexist with weak states and institutions, or with political parties that have no connection to civil society; nor can it coexist

⁸⁴ CEPAL, *Cohesión Social. Inclusión y sentido de pertenencia en América Latina y el Caribe*. Santiago de Chile, 2007.

⁸⁵ CEPAL, *Panorama Social de América Latina 2006*, Santiago de Chile.

⁸⁶ CEPAL, *Balance Preliminar de las Economías de América Latina y el Caribe 2006*, Santiago de Chile.

⁸⁷ Flavia Freidenberg, 2007, p. 275.

with high levels of inequality and poverty. For this reason, populism is an adjustment formula for political systems that are based on fragile states, institutions and democracies. Although populism cannot resolve the enormous political, social and economic problems afflicting the region, it represents a stage – perhaps one with more drawbacks than benefits – in Latin

America's long path towards democracy and development. Left-wing populism is thus part of the so-called "third transition", in politics and society, which Latin American has been undergoing since the return to democracy of the 1980s and the economic reforms of the 1990s.

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The return of democracy in Latin America has not brought the end of populism. Indeed populist politics seem to be experiencing a boom at the beginning of the 21st century. In contrast to other parts of the World, Latin America has seen populism take centre stage not only in the streets, but also in the halls of power. Despite its authoritarian tendencies, it coexists with a framework of formal democracy. And thanks to its long history in government, and as a hybrid between democracy and authoritarianism, it can almost be regarded as a political regime in its own right, representing another stage in the process of democracy and state building in the region.

From the perspective of current political realities on the continent, this Working Paper analyses the phenomenon of populism in Latin America and its relationship with democracy. With this aim in mind, the first chapter, which is more general in character, identifies the common elements that define populism and its ambiguous relationship with democracy. The document then differentiates, in terms of public policies and political tendencies, between the three populist “waves” or projects in Latin America and explores the principal characteristics of the governments of Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa, Evo Morales and Néstor Kirchner. The third chapter compares these four cases and finds that the current move towards populism in Latin America is a response to the crises of democracy and the state, which tend to weaken the former and strengthen the latter.

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