



## RECENSÃO

*Civil Society and Political Representation in Latin America (2010-2015): Towards a Divorce Between Social Movements and Political Parties?,*  
de Adrián Albala (ed.),  
por João Terrenas

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After the growing interest in democratic transitions during the 1980s and 1990s, the agenda of democratization studies started to shift its focus towards the challenges of democratic consolidation. In this context, one of its main objects of research has been the role that civil society can play in strengthening the quality of democracy. Despite some important differences, most of these studies agree that the development of a strong civil society is crucial to increase the accountability and responsiveness of political leaders and, as a result, improve the levels of political trust. The volume '*Civil Society and Political Representation in Latin America (2010-2015): Towards a Divorce Between Social Movements and Political Parties?*', edited by Adrián Albala, offers an important contribution to this debate by shedding new light into the distinctive features of the 'crisis of representation' in Latin America.

Divided in two parts, the book provides a detailed analysis of the complex relationship between civil society and political parties across Latin America. Specifically, the chapters help us to understand why some of these countries have experienced a divorce between their

social movements and political parties while others have not? While the first part explores four countries where social movements have become increasingly autonomous from political parties – Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico – the second delves into four cases in which this relationship has become particularly strong in the last few decades – Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Uruguay.

The book starts with an introductory chapter by Adrián Albala. Providing a comparative analysis that ties the remaining chapters together, the author concludes that the two main factors contributing to strengthen the relationship between civil society and political parties in Latin America are the existence of strong political cleavages and the high level of state intervention in socio-economic development. Crucially, the author points, in Latin America there is little or no correlation between the existence of a strong democratic culture and the type of relationship between political parties and civil society.

Co-authored by Soraia Marcelino Vieira, Michelle Fernandez, and Nuno Coimbra Mesquita, the first case study uses the protests of 2013 as an entry

point to explain the historical distance between social movements and political parties in Brazil. According to the authors, the autonomy of civil society in Brazil results first and foremost, from the characteristics of the Brazilian political system. By promoting the recurrent use of instrumental coalitions and enabling a large number of parties to enter congress, the Brazilian party system makes it extremely difficult to create a stable and durable relationship not only between voters and political parties, but also between political parties and social movements. In the following chapter, Victor Tricot and Adrián Albala assess the growing autonomy of contemporary social movements in Chile. They show that, in this particular case, the disconnect between parties and movements is the outcome of three central factors: the low level of state interventionism, the growing ideological convergence of the main political parties, and the fact that, up until 2009, political power was mostly in the hands of the parties with a stronger capacity to foster social mobilization.

Characterized by one of the lowest rates of political trust in the region, Colombia is the focus of the following chapter, written by Esther Parra Ramírez and Eduardo Guevara Cobos. For them, up until recently, the hegemonic position of the two main political forces not only dictated the patterns of political competition, it also excluded potential alternatives from entering the system. However, and despite the criminalization of protests during the 1990s, the modification of electoral rules in 2002 opened

up the political space to some minorities and ultimately reshaped the traditional patterns of political competition in Colombia. Nonetheless, they point, it was the expansion of middle class and the governmental changes carried out in 2010 that fuelled the recent wave of protests in the country. Importantly, most of these protests sought to criticize the neoliberal posture of the government and bring into question its capacity to provide an adequate response to some of the most salient issues for the electorate, such as public security, environmental degradation, or social inequality. A similar pattern can be observed in the following chapter, focusing on Mexico. To Alejandro Natal, the distance between social movements and political parties in this country is explained by two factors: first, the predominance of corporativism in Mexican politics and the inability of the major political parties to construct strong ideological cleavages; second, the recurrent instrumentalization of social movements by major political forces. For him, it is against this backdrop that we can understand the growing salience of social movements like the *Yo Soy 132*, which embody the search for a new political identity in Mexico and reflect a growing generational cleavage within society.

The second part of the book explores four cases wherein the relationship between civil society and political parties was strengthened in the last few years. It starts with a chapter by Sebastián Mauro, who explains how social movements and political parties have become increasingly close in Argentina, especially after

the election of Néstor Kirchner. As he explains, Kirchnerism not only benefited directly from the growing polarization of Argentinian society but also, and more critically, utilized strategically its relationship with social movements to secure its authority. Similarly, in the following chapter, Clayton Cunha Filho shows how the realignment between parties and social movements in Bolivia is umbilically connected to the rise of Evo Morales. Despite the growing number of protests during the late 2000s, not only did these rarely seek to bring his authority into question, they also ended up reshaping political opposition. These two countries have thus some important similarities. First, the fact that their culture of non-traditional political participation emerged out of the widespread rejection of the neo-liberal policies implemented during the 1990s. Second, in both cases anti-neoliberal protests opened up the space for the emergence of political leaders that were able to capitalize on collective mobilization in order to strengthen their authority and discredit the opposition.

In the following chapter, Santiago Basabe-Serrano explores the Ecuadorian case to test the theoretical argument that a strong party system requires a strong associative capacity. For him, it is through collective association that individuals can translate their personal interests into common demands, thereby enabling political parties to identify the main social concerns and translate them into policy. However, political participation and civic association cannot be simply stimulated from the top-down, as it happened in this

case. In Ecuador, he argues, the weakness of the party system is the direct outcome of social movements' incapacity to articulate their demands publicly and from the bottom-up, which inherently contributes to weaken political parties and render them unable to represent different social groups. Following from this, Inés Pousadela explores the paradigmatic case of Uruguay, one of the most stable democracies in the region. After discussing how the major political party was able to establish strong links with important social movements, she demonstrates how the success of the most progressive movements led to the emergence of numerous counter-movements which, more often than not, complicated the relationship between the dominant party and civil society. For her, however, the most salient characteristic of social movements in Uruguay is their ability to mobilize demands directly through institutional channels rather than street politics.

Following a different logic, the last chapter offers a comparative analysis of electoral perceptions and political trust in Latin America. Written by José Moisés and Gabriela Carneiro, this chapter connects the previous discussions to broader dynamics that underpin the patterns of political support and contention within the entire region. Seeking to understand the main factors that contribute to party legitimacy in Latin America, they put forward three main arguments: first, that the existence of a large number of political parties reduces the level of political identification; second, that education is more important than socialization to

explain individual identification with political parties; and third, that the recurrent corruption scandals have had significant impact in the decreasing levels of political trust in Latin America.

Overall, the book offers a major contribution to the literature concerned with the crisis of representation in Latin America. It shows that, despite some important nuances within the region, civil society and social movements have been an important factor in reshaping political competition during the last few decades and will likely continue to do so in the future. In addition to that, some chapters provide an in-depth analysis of specific social movements, making the

book particularly interesting for both political scientists and sociologists alike. Ultimately, this book is of utmost importance for anyone interested in understanding the current challenges faced by democracy in Latin America and the role that civil society can play in that process.

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