

Politeja

No. 6(81), 2022, pp. 15-42

<https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.19.2022.81.01>

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DECONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY IN 21ST CENTURY LATIN AMERICA

ABSTRACT The first decades of 21st century are a difficult time for Latin America and the Caribbean. This is also evident in the area of democracy and its consolidation. Particularly recent years have brought significant problems and challenges in functioning of democratic regimes. As a consequence, it is justified to talk about the process called deconsolidation of democracy in this region. In the article, the present condition of democratic regimes in Latin America and the Caribbean is presented. It is followed by an analysis of basic challenges and finally explaining potential risks for the process of consolidation of democratic regimes in the region.

Keywords: democracy, consolidation, deconsolidation, crisis, Latin America and the Caribbean

INTRODUCTION

The turn of a decade is usually a good moment for different kinds of summaries and conclusions about various phenomena or attempts to forecast possible scenarios of development in various areas. This article is aimed to analyze certain changes that were taking place in Latin American and the Caribbean in the sphere of politics with a special focus on democracy and its condition in the 2010s. In the early 1980s, difficult and complex process of the collapse of authoritarian regimes and establishing of democratic ones began in this region. These changes were met with a great enthusiasm and the hope that it was the moment of significant transformations that would permit Latin American countries to find the ultimate solution to its decades-long problems. However, in a pretty short time it was obvious that neither the appearance of new authorities elected in free and just elections nor the neoliberal reforms introduced by these new authorities were the universal and effective panacea for the social, economic and political problems of the region. It should be emphasized already at the beginning of this analysis that the third wave of democratization, as Samuel Huntington referred to the political transitions at the turn of the 1980s, was the effect of many factors that coincided at the same time and appeared in many places, including Latin America. One of these factors was undoubtedly a degeneration of sorts in which authoritarian regimes of Latin America were plunging.¹ Based on the import substitution strategy that was the absolutely dominating model of economic development in Latin America after the World War II, the authoritarian regimes at the turn of the 1980s were completely unable to confront challenges that appeared at that time. Among those challenges it is worth mentioning, in first order, the human rights crisis that was a consequence of repressive nature of many of the authoritarian regimes. This was accompanied by the persecution of the political opposition that was demanding, in a more and more determined way, the democratization of political systems. Then, there was a huge debt crisis and economic breakdown. Corruption should be mentioned, too. With its decades-long tradition, the size of corruption during the authoritarian regimes of the 1970s became unprecedented. Finally, there was an international pressure related to the strong critique of undemocratic forms of government and the demands of democratization.²

Hence, one may venture to say that at least to a certain degree, democratic transitions in Latin America were the result of the failure of previously governing dictatorships and the existing model of economic development in the form of an import substitution strategy. Observing the crisis that had touched Latin American countries,

¹ See S.P. Huntington, *Trzecia fala demokracji*, transl. by A. Dziurdzik, Warszawa 1995; R. Roett, "The Debt Crisis and Economic Development in Latin America," in J. Hartlyn, L. Schoultz, A. Varas (eds), *The United States and Latin America in the 1990s: Beyond the Cold War*, Chapel Hill 1992, pp. 131-151; J.S. Fitch, "Democracy, Human Rights and the Armed Forces in Latin America," in J. Hartlyn, L. Schoultz, A. Varas (eds), *The United States and Latin America...*, pp. 181-213; M. Reid, *The Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul*, New Haven 2007, pp. 106-158.

² H.J. Wiarda, *Dilemmas of Democracy in Latin America: Crises and Opportunity*, Lanham 2005, p. 14.

political elites – in many cases they were also representatives or armed forces – decided to retreat and to allow for democratic elections. As similar processes had taken place in all countries of the region with the exception of Cuba, it seems that Huntington's term of the third wave of democratization is by all means correct. To confirm this, the percentage of democratic governments that collapsed in the last decades can be referenced: between 2009 and 2019 it was 18 percent, meanwhile in 1996-2006 it was less than 11 percent.³

Four decades later, the academic debate over the progress of transformations and the condition of democracy in the countries of the region is still open and not less important than at the beginning of the 1980s. One could expect that forty years is enough to consolidate already established democratic regimes. However, as shown by the example of Latin America – and not only this region – the task of democracy building is a particularly difficult challenge affected by numerous factors. Recent years have brought a broad spectrum of problems and challenges that young democracies are unable to overcome to retain the process of democracy building. The spectacular collapse of the Venezuelan democracy, the political crisis in Bolivia after the presidential election in 2019 and the removal of Evo Morales from power as the result of military pressure, growing political repressions in Nicaragua, praises of military dictatorship repeated by Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, all these are just a few examples of the situations in which the functioning of democracy failed or was in a significant crisis. Also, in view of the global tendencies to criticize and question democratic rules and values, it is worth pondering if in the last years the third wave of democratization is not being replaced by the third wave in the opposite direction, as Samuel Huntington used to describe the situation in which democratic regimes are replaced by a growing number of authoritarian ones. So, is it just a crisis of democracy in Latin America, which some discerned as early as the very beginning of the 21st century, or rather a growing tolerance for the introduction of undemocratic solutions and the abandonment of democracy in favor of authoritarian systems?

THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY

Latin America started the 2010s in a relatively good condition in terms of democracy. With the exception of Cuba, as well as Nicaragua and Honduras where undemocratic changes appeared, cyclical, fair and free elections were taking place in the rest of the republics. Also, there were pluralist party systems. Basic civil rights were respected and the transitions of power were taking place in accordance with generally accepted democratic rules.⁴

³ L. Diamond, "Breaking Out of the Democratic Slump," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2020), p. 37.

⁴ S. Gómez Tagle, W. Sonnleitner, "Introducción," in *idem* (eds) *Mutaciones de la democracia. Tres décadas de cambio político en América Latina (1980-2010)*, México 2012, p. 15.

To analyze the condition of democratic regimes in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, it is worth looking into the data for a specific comparative research. This opportunity is possible thanks to, among others, the Index of Democracy published since 2006 by *The Economist*. In 2020, the Index included 165 countries. It is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. Based on its scores on a range of indicators within these categories, each country is then itself classified as one of four types of regimes: 'full democracy,' 'flawed democracy,' 'hybrid regime' or 'authoritarian regime.' According to the 2020 Index, only three Latin American countries are classified as full democracies. These are Uruguay (15), Costa Rica (17) and Chile (18). The following 13 countries of the region are classified as flawed democracies: Panama (40), Trinidad and Tobago (41), Jamaica (42), Colombia (46), Argentina (48), Brazil (49), Suriname (51), Peru (57), Dominican Republic (63), Paraguay (67), Ecuador (69), Mexico (72), and Guyana (75). Five countries of the region are classified as hybrid regimes: El Salvador (77), Honduras (88), Bolivia (94), Guatemala (97), and Haiti (106). Finally, three countries, that is, Nicaragua (120), Cuba (140), and Venezuela (143), are in the category of authoritarian regimes.⁵

Table 1. Latin American and Caribbean countries in Democracy Index 2020

Rank	Country	Score	Category
15	Uruguay	8.61	Full democracy
17	Chile	8.28	Full democracy
18	Costa Rica	8.16	Full democracy
40	Panama	7.18	Flawed democracy
41	Trinidad and Tobago	7.16	Flawed democracy
42	Jamaica	7.13	Flawed democracy
46	Colombia	7.04	Flawed democracy
48	Argentina	6.95	Flawed democracy
49	Brazil	6.92	Flawed democracy
51	Suriname	6.82	Flawed democracy
57	Peru	6.53	Flawed democracy
63	Dominican Republic	6.32	Flawed democracy
67	Paraguay	6.18	Flawed democracy
69	Ecuador	6.13	Flawed democracy
72	Mexico	6.07	Flawed democracy

⁵ *Democracy Index 2020: Democracy Index 2020: In Sickness and in Health?*, The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021.

Rank	Country	Score	Category
75	Guyana	6.01	Flawed democracy
77	El Salvador	5.90	Hybrid regime
88	Honduras	5.36	Hybrid regime
94	Bolivia	5.08	Hybrid regime
97	Guatemala	4.97	Hybrid regime
106	Haiti	4.22	Hybrid regime
120	Nicaragua	3.60	Authoritarian
140	Cuba	2.84	Authoritarian
143	Venezuela	2.76	Authoritarian

Source: own study, *Democracy Index 2020: In Sickness and in Health?*, The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021.

The presence of Uruguay and Costa Rica among fully democratic political regimes is not a surprise, although the advancement of Chile can raise certain doubts. The reaction of president Sebastian Piñera to the protests that erupted in Chile in the last months of 2019 was quite firm and the police forces used violence on a large scale while repressing demonstrations. The fact of using strong police forces and violence against peaceful protesters brought back the worst memories of Pinochet's dictatorship with its huge brutality against the opposition. On the other hand, 13 countries were placed in the category of flawed democracies. If one adds the 5 countries described as hybrid regimes, there are 18 countries that have problems with the functioning of the democratic system. It cannot be forgotten that at the end of the 2010s there are three authoritarian regimes in Latin America. It should also be considered as alarming that 2020 was the fifth consecutive year in which the general result of the region was worse. In 2015 the score for Latin America was 6.37 meanwhile in 2020 it was 6.09. There is no doubt that this is the result of the consolidation of authoritarian regimes in Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela. The ousting of Evo Morales from power in 2019 is reminiscent of the worst periods of *coups d'état* and military dictatorships in Latin American countries. Also, the situation in El Salvador, which resulted in the moving of this country into the group of hybrid regimes in the Index, should also be mentioned. Reforms and changes that are introduced by President Bukele create a favorable environment for undemocratic practices. The political changes in Guatemala and Haiti are also far from optimistic.⁶

It is worth to analyze the situation of democratic regimes in countries of the region by taking a deeper look into the particular categories of the Index of Democracy. It is worrisome that a decrease can be observed in two categories for the past few years. These are 'electoral process and pluralism' and 'civil liberties.' Assuming that the minimum conditions for democracy are free elections and civil liberties and one of the

⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

elements that defines the term ‘liberal democracy’ is respect for human rights and civil liberties, it seems that worries about the state of democracy are justified.⁷ It is also worth drawing attention to the fact that protests that erupted in 2019 and 2020 in several countries of the region – Ecuador, Chile and Colombia among others – can be proof of the growing engagement of citizens in political affairs, which gives better results in the category ‘political participation.’

Table 2. Latin American countries in the Democracy Index according to the political regimes in 2006 and 2020

Political regime	Number of countries		% of countries	
	2006	2020	2006	2020
Full democracies	2	3	9.1	13.6
Flawed democracies	15	13	68.2	59.1
Hybrid regimes	4	5	18.2	22.7
Authoritarian regimes	1	3	4.5	13.6

Source: own study based on: *Democracy Index 2006: A pause in democracy's march*, The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007 and *Democracy Index 2020: In Sickness and in Health?*, The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021.

The above analysis gives the picture of Latin America as a region where the processes of democratic transitions in their majority did not result in establishing consolidated democratic regimes. Even more, one can observe that the 2010s has been a particularly difficult time for strengthening democracy in the region and existing problems allow us to speak about the process of its deconsolidation. The term was used by Yascha Mounk to describe difficulties encountered by democratic regimes in contemporary world.⁸ Recently, more states have maintained actions that are contrary to democratic regimes than there are states that have taken steps toward strengthening and consolidation of democracy. This is confirmed by the Freedom in the World 2019 report published by the Freedom House. According to the authors, 2018 was the thirteenth consecutive year in which the reduction of liberties and democratic values in the world was noted.⁹ Facing this kind of tendency, it is difficult to avoid an impression that democracy as a form of political regime has been in the phase of significant crisis or, as Mounk writes, deconsolidation in the last years. The authors of the report indicate several areas in which unfavorable symptoms that undermine the functioning of democratic system are visible. Elections – as it was in the case of Democracy Index – were mentioned.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Y. Mounk, *Lud kontra demokracja. Dlaczego nasza wolność jest w niebezpieczeństwie i jak ją ocalić?*, transl. by K. Gucio, Warszawa 2019, pp. 127-165.

⁹ *Freedom in the World Report 2019*, Freedom House, 2019, p. 4, at https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019_FH_FITW_2019_Report_ForWeb-compressed.pdf – 15 September 2020.

It was emphasized that authorities that have certain authoritarian inclinations show bigger abilities to control electoral processes. So, although the elections are regular and political competition seems to be undisturbed, a discrepancy with democratic norms that can influence the final result of elections can be observed in a growing group of states. Another closely related phenomenon is the manipulation of acting authorities in the case of tenure restrictions. Latin American countries are the perfect example of this. One of the first who tried to use the instrument in the form of the cancelation of the tenure limit was Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. The progressive concentration of power in the hands of the president resulted in his desire to abolish the tenure limit. He proposed an amendment to the constitution that would cancel the tenure limit and was presented to the citizens together with a large number of other amendments in the referendum in 2007. Unexpectedly, this was the first significant defeat of Hugo Chavez in popular voting. Until this referendum, he was winning all kinds of elections and popular votes.¹⁰

A similar solution was sought by President Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua in 2014. The limit of presidential terms was cancelled on the grounds of the National Assembly's decision. That gave Daniel Ortega the possibility to run for the office multiple times. In recent years, the cancellation of the tenure limits was also attempted by Evo Morales in Bolivia. Despite ensuring that he would not make any changes in this respect, in 2016 he ran referendum about the amendment that would permit him the third tenure. Surprisingly in light of the president's popularity, he lost. Despite this defeat, the Supreme Court, dominated by judges nominated by the President, decided to cancel the limit of the number of terms. The argumentation was rather doubtful, as the Supreme Court justified its decision by explaining that this would limit the President's civil rights. His candidacy in the presidential election 2019 and many other irregularities during the election led Bolivia to one of the most serious political crises in contemporary Latin America.¹¹

The above mentioned examples show clearly the tendencies that are taking place in the most recent years in Latin American countries. Democratically elected presidents win reelection democratically. And then, at a certain point they decide to change constitution in a more or less legal way. This is undoubtedly the consequence of negative processes in governing that were present in these countries since their independence. *Hyper-Presidentialism* was partially the consequence of a huge concentration of power in the hands of the heads of executive power, a growing control of executive power over the others branches of power and over institutions¹² that should be independent. These are just a few of the processes that characterized the Latin American political systems for decades. With the wave of democratic transitions at the end of 20th century it seemed that they would be forgotten. However, as it is seen in last years, in many cases this did not happen. Undemocratic practices in the countries of the region are still

¹⁰ Y. Stavrakakis et al., "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America: Leadership, Horizontalism, and Postdemocracy in Chávez's Venezuela," *Latin American Politics and Society*, vol. 58, no. 3 (2016), p. 61.

¹¹ L. Diamond, "Breaking Out...", p. 39.

¹² P.H. Smith, M.R. Ziegler, "Liberal and Illiberal Democracy in Latin America," *Latin American Politics and Society*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2008), p. 31.

present. If during the last three decades doubts have arisen regarding Francis Fukuyama's thesis about the end of history, which was formulated during the third wave of democratization, the beginning of the 21st century confirmed that they were well grounded. After President Hugo Chavez was removed from power for several hours in April 2002, did anyone suggest that *coups d'état* might occur again in Latin America? Meanwhile in 2019 in Bolivia the circumstances of ousting Evo Morales brought back the worst memories of the 1960s and 1970s. It brought the memories of military coups and brutal dictatorships. Even if one assumes there was no coup in Bolivia in 2019 (the fact is that Morales announced his resignation), the armed forces and the pressure that the militaries exerted on Evo Morales was something that does not belong to democratic standards that function in countries with democratic political systems.

So, the condition of democracy in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean at the beginning of the 2020s seems to be rather grim. Therefore, it is natural to ask about the causes of such a deep crisis, which in many cases has already taken the form of a deconsolidation of democracy.

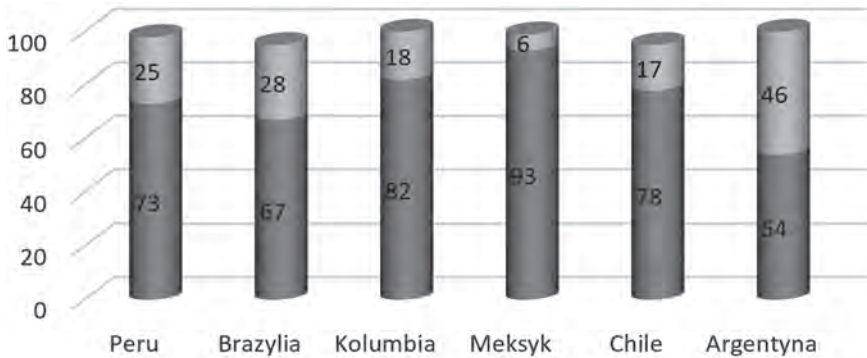
WHY?

In looking for answers about the causes of deconsolidation of democratic political systems in Latin America and the Caribbean, one can examine factors that led to the beginning of democratic transitions. The failure of authoritarian-bureaucratic regimes and other dictatorships in Latin America can be perceived as one of these factors. With the import substitution strategy as a foundation of their economic development, the citizen's expectations of improvement of their lives in the consequence of the adoption of a democratic regime were a huge driving force of these transitions. This is clearly visible from the research of citizens' attitude to democracy at the end of the previous century in comparison to their attitude at the end of the 2010s. The support for democracy in Latin America is the lowest it has been for years. According to studies conducted by the Pew Research Center in October 2017, merely 1 among 5 inhabitants of Latin America is devoted to democracy (19%). This percentage is markedly lower than in the Middle East (27%), and comparable to the level of inhabitants devoted to democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa (18%). Simultaneously, Latin America – and the Middle East – is the region in which the citizens are the least content with the results of the functioning of democracy. The medium for the region is 73% of dissatisfied citizens in comparison to 25% that declare their contentment with the functioning of democracy. A dramatically low rate of satisfaction with democracy was noted in Mexico, where 93% of respondents declared a lack of satisfaction with democracy meanwhile only 6% declared contentment. The situation is slightly better in this aspect in countries like Colombia, Chile or Peru.¹³ It is not an easy task to consolidate a democratic regime in

¹³ R. Wike et al., *Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy*, Pew Research Center, 2017, p. 6, 13, at https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/10/Pew-Research-Center_Democracy-Report_2017.10.16.pdf – 15 September 2020.

a situation when the majority of citizens are dissatisfied with this regime. while analyzing the situation of Latin America in this case, it is worth noting that disappointment in democracy – relatively high as it is in this region – is nothing exceptional. A similar tendency is observed on a global scale. In the abovementioned research, the Pew Research Center pointed out that in 36 analyzed countries the percentage of citizens satisfied with the functioning of democracy is 42%. This means that the majority of citizens in these countries are dissatisfied with democracy.

Graphic 1. The level of satisfaction of citizens with democracy in selected countries of Latin America



Source: own study based on: R. Wike et al., *Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy*, Pew Research Center, 2017, at https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/10/Pew-Research-Center_Democracy-Report_2017.10.16.pdf – 15 September 2020.

In the situation of countries in which the attachment to democratic tradition and norms is relatively young and poorly consolidated, it can lead to the weakening of the bonds with the democratic system. As a result, the tolerance of undemocratic solutions may ensue. To give an example, in Mexico only 9% of interviewees declare their attachment to democracy, meanwhile 48% declare a weak attachment, and 27% tolerate undemocratic practices.¹⁴ A global tendency can, undeniably, be observed in this respect. This is particularly well visible in the countries described as mature democracies. In the United States, almost 25% of young people – Millennials – perceive democracy as a bad form of political system. In the last years disappointment from democracy also grew in Great Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden. Similar trend can be observed in the case of citizen's tolerance of the possibility to establish an undemocratic form of government, for example, a kind of military dictatorship.¹⁵ In this context, it should not be a big surprise that in the region of Latin America, where democratic tradition is not long and the existing democratic systems can be considered as consolidated only in a few cases, the endorsement for military regimes is still quite strong. According to the

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁵ Y. Mounk, *Lud kontra demokracja...*, pp. 136-140.

research, in 2010-2016 the percentage of persons that would admit this kind of solution in the situation of a high corruption level fluctuated between 38 and 41%.¹⁶

There are a lot of internal factors that lead to the deconsolidation of democracy in Latin America, however it is worth drawing attention to certain unfavorable changes in the situation of democratic regimes on a global scale. This is important as international actors played an important role in the beginning of democratic transitions in the region. Both the United States and Western European countries were undertaking multiple actions that were aimed at promoting democracy and supporting efforts in establishing democratic political systems. The policy of human rights promotion and the export of democratic values by the administration of Jimmy Carter, changes in the US Latin American policy initiated by the administration of George W. H. Bush at the turn of the 1990s, finally the pressure of European Communities on Latin American countries had a significant impact on the eruption of the third wave of democratization in the region. Furthermore, the example that flowed from other regions should be added. The collapse of authoritarian regimes in southern Europe (Portugal, Spain, Greece) followed by the decline of socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the adoption of democratic regimes by these countries undoubtedly constituted a significant encouragement for Latin American prodemocracy forces to initiate similar political transformations. The end of cold war, the collapse of dictatorships that constituted the Soviet bloc, the disintegration and collapse of the Soviet Union and the victory of the so called democratic world resulted in democracy being perceived as 'the only game in town,' to use the term created by Larry Diamond and Juan Linz.¹⁷ Democratic rules became accepted almost universally. One can say that at the turn of the 1990s democracy became 'trendy.'

Thirty years later the situation has been reversed. It can be said that democracy nowadays has become 'passé.' As is seen in research, there is an increase of cases where democracy already is not 'the only game in town.' It is particularly important that alternatives toward liberal democracy in the form of non-democratic approaches are more accepted also by the societies that are commonly perceived as a core of liberal democracy. The change of priorities in US foreign policy, the so called 'war on terror,' challenges formed by the wave of immigration to Europe and the United States, the economic crisis of 2008 and its consequences resulted in the fact that at the beginning of the 2020s, democracy and its functioning are playing a secondary role.

The perfect example of changing the priorities in US foreign policy and marginalized US promotion and support for democratic governments in the Western Hemisphere have been total inactivity in the case of Nicaragua and Honduras in recent years. Already in the 1980s Ronald Reagan said that the US has vital interests in Central America and he maintained a huge effort to prevent the Sandinista government

¹⁶ M. do Socorro Sousa Braga, G. Avila Casalecchi, "Legitimidad y compromiso democrático. Impases contemporáneos en América Latina," *Anuario Latinoamericano: Ciencias Políticas y Relaciones Internacionales*, vol. 7 (2019), p. 222.

¹⁷ See J.J. Linz, A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore-London 1996.

in Nicaragua and leftist guerrillas in other countries of the region from taking power. Meanwhile, since taking power in Nicaragua in 2006 by Daniel Ortega and the growing authoritarian tendencies in this country, the presidential administrations of George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump and it seems that also Joe Biden have been totally passive. In the effect, the contemporary political system in Nicaragua is much more authoritarian than the Sandinista government in the 1980s.¹⁸ Quite a similar apathy of the United States can be observed in Honduras when militaries have ousted President Manuel Zelaya. In the outcome of the democratic election Juan Orlando Hernández became president. However, his presidential term was a real disaster as a result of the huge level of corruption, contacts with organized crime and undemocratic practices.¹⁹ The citizens' conviction that the democratic system is unable to solve problems faced by particular countries is progressing. In this case, one can also refer to the example that flows from European countries and the United States. Developing contestation of a democratic regime on a global scale leads to a continuous debate, also in Latin America, over the solutions to contemporary urgent problems. However, political leaders seem to act and to be convinced that democracy is no longer the only game in town.²⁰

One of the answers to the progressive crisis of democracy is a growing interest of the citizens in populist proposals. These kinds of leaders and movements offer what seem to the citizens at the first glance simple solutions to very complicated problems and challenges. Simultaneously, they draw from the increasing social discontents with the functioning of the democratic system. Many times, one of the main 'leitmotifs' of populist leaders is the promise of the re-establishment of a true democracy and the increase of citizens' participation in the decision making process. Contrary to the original promises, the assumption of power by populists often leads to a further decay of the democratic order. This can be manifested by a growing centralization of power, the violation of minorities' rights, securing their own access to power or the attempts to limit political pluralism. Although there are some elements of populism that, especially in the Latin American context, can lead to an increase in level the political participation, it seems that populism brings more risks for democratic regimes than real opportunities to make it better. In view of a long tradition of populist regimes in Latin American countries, it is hardly surprising that societies in this region are vulnerable to these kinds of political leaders at present.

Coming to the contemporary populist governments in Latin America, it is difficult to deny the fact that in many cases populist regimes succeeded in the incorporation of social groups that were marginalized in public life previously. In the case of Venezuela, the unquestionable success of the Chavez governments was the inclusion of economically marginalized masses. Evo Morales was able to significantly increase the level of

¹⁸ S. Levitsky, L.A. Way, "The New Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2020), pp. 54-55.

¹⁹ F.D. Colburn, A. Cruz S., "Latin America's New Turbulence: Trouble in the 'Northern Triangle,'" *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2016), pp. 80-81.

²⁰ L. Diamond, "Breaking Out...", pp. 46-47.

social participation of the indigenous majority of the Bolivian society. This is the consequence of placing the rule of people's sovereignty in the center... However, there are fundamental differences between populist leaders and liberal democratic governments. The latter assumes the existence of a representative democracy in which citizens exercise power through their representatives. That rule holds both in legislative power (in the form of parliaments) and executive power (presidents in presidential systems and government in parliamentary systems). Appealing to the idea of people's sovereignty, populist leaders proclaim the necessity to limit or totally abolish the representation rule and to increase the direct participation of individuals in political life. That is why one of the most popular demands of populist leaders is the idea of direct democracy or participatory democracy. In the case of populism, a sovereign people is perceived as a form of a collective entity in which mutual relations are based on the contestation of the existing status quo which is identified with political elites. These political elites should be rejected. As opposed to a liberal democracy, meaning one that is based on the concept of the rights of individuals, populist leaders raise the idea of collective rights.²¹ This is, among others, the element which undermines the rights of minorities.

Referring to the example of Latin American countries, it is worth paying attention to the fact that populism that appeared in this region in the 21st century was based on the contestation of social failure of neoliberal reforms that were introduced in the consequence of the Washington Consensus. It seems that it was the dispute over the neoliberal model of economic development that became the foundation of the ideological debate that has been taking place in the region since the beginning of the present century. Simultaneously, it should be emphasized that this dispute and debate refer not only to the economy. One of the most important elements of both is the dispute over the nature of the democratic regime.²²

As mentioned above, contemporary Latin American populists present participatory democracy as an alternative toward liberal democracy. Since Hugo Chavez's victory in 1998, the idea of growing participation of people in political life is permanently present in the programs of populist leaders and movements, particularly those that have close ties with the left. They emphasize the necessity to increase the activity of the social masses and end their marginalization and exclusion in public life. Representative democracy is criticized as one that serves political elites, which usually have little in common with the masses. It should be stressed that this idea as such is not contradictory to strengthening the democratic regime. In light of the peculiarity of the region and various forms of exclusions in individual countries, the desire to limit them is a step in a right direction. What causes doubts is the fact that populist leaders treat this form of democratization of political life in an instrumental way. First of all, in implementing the idea of participatory democracy, attention is only paid to one aspect of

²¹ F. Panizza, R. Miorelli, "Populism and Democracy in Latin America," *Ethics and International Affairs*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2009), p. 41.

²² G.L. Munck, "Building Democracy... Which Democracy? Ideology and Models of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America," *Government and Opposition*, vol. 50, no. 3 (2015), p. 369.

the democratic system: the rule of the majority, meanwhile forgetting about the other element of democratic regime: respecting the rights of minorities.

Consejos comunales, existing in Venezuela since 2005, can be used as an example. They definitely increased the participation of citizens in public life. They can be perceived as civic schools where the inhabitants learned how to function as conscious citizens through the participation in making decisions by particular *consejos*. However, over time, it was observed that the *consejos* became a place where negative practices were developing, as for example clientelism or corruption.²³ Likewise in Bolivia, the idea of citizens' direct participation in decision making processes – in theory justified and required – in the final account shall be judged as a failure. Evo Morales and the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) started to use institutions based on the rule of participatory democracy to increase their political domination. The control of these institutions by MAS members turned them, *de facto*, into President Evo Morales's instrument.²⁴

It is rightly emphasized that the idea of a participatory democracy brought hope for implementing the required reforms that were perceived as an alternative toward liberal democracy. According to some commentators, changes introduced in the effect of populist experiments with direct democracy are the second wave of incorporation of the previously excluded social masses (the first wave being the inclusion of the working masses into political life in the mid-20th century).²⁵

It is obvious that the pursuit of the high level of citizens' participation in political, social and economic life is highly required from the democratic point of view. Declarations of introducing participatory democracy were perceived in this way. However, as it is displayed by the example of Venezuela during the Chavez period and currently under the leadership of Nicolas Maduro, or Bolivia during the presidential terms of Evo Morales, or Nicaragua under the presidency of Daniel Ortega since 2006, appealing to the support of the masses can also lead to the deconsolidation of democracy. The risk of turning this kind of political system into the dictatorship of majority was already mentioned. It must always be remembered that democracy is the rule of the majority combined with respecting the minority's rights. In the Latin American context, where heavy-hand governments have a long history and are additionally strengthened by the tradition of caudillismo, the efforts to introduce participatory democracy produced opposite results to those expected. The participation of citizens became more and more illusory as the institutions based on this rule were consequently marginalized. In many cases, party leaders were taking control over these institutions and political organs and their further functioning led to the strengthening of top-down dependencies. In this situation decisions were taken by the President or his direct subordinates.

²³ B. Goldfrank, "The Latin American Left's Missed Opportunity to Deepen Democracy," *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 71, no. 1 (2017), p. 153.

²⁴ J. Wolff, "Towards Post-Liberal Democracy in Latin America? A Conceptual Framework Applied to Bolivia," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1 (2013), p. 45.

²⁵ Y. Stavrakakis et al., "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism..." p. 53.

The previous attempts to establish a system that would be an alternative to the representative democracy, in many cases, led to the centralization of power in the hands of presidents.²⁶ Undoubtedly, a long tradition of personalist dictatorships contributed to this kind of political phenomenon. Guillermo O'Donnell noticed this danger as early as the first years of the third wave of democratization in the region'. He indicated the tendency of transmitting – or 'delegating' in O'Donnell terms – too much power in the hands of the chief of the executive power. This led to the violation of the foundation for presidential systems rule of checks and balances and, in consequence, to establishing authoritarian regimes.²⁷ In this situation the chief of the executive power can hold power in a way they personally see as fit. They are restricted only by the number of presidential terms.

It seems that in the 2010s elements of participatory democracy have started to permeate those of delegative democracy. Presidents that are elected in democratic elections are appealing to the support they received in the elections or they are conducting referendums in which voters decide to give them new competencies that lead to the progressive centralization of power and, *de facto*, restrictions of democratic practices. Attempts to increase the number of presidential tenures or even cancel any limit on them at all can serve as an example.²⁸ In effect, one sees a progressive deconsolidation of democratic system in certain countries of Latin America that appear to be reduced to the electoral process and acquire the nature of a plebiscite. As O'Donnell noted, this kind of understanding of democracy is significantly different from its original concept. The latter is much more extensive than just a minimalist condition of electing authorities. In consequence of this kind of hybridization of the democratic regime, there arise questions about the responsibility of the leader – particularly if they hold a presidential post – which is an essential element of democratic systems. Venezuela under Chavez and even more so during the Maduro devastating period can be presented as a model example of the deconsolidation of a democratic regime. The crisis Venezuela is in is not only of a political nature but it also became a humanitarian one. As a result of the crisis, more than 5 million Venezuelans have left the country in the recent years.

Restricting democracy solely to the electoral process is an easy path to the establishment of non-democratic regimes. They can assume the form of a majority dictatorship, but they can also evolve into other forms of authoritarian systems. Much more than free and just elections is required to consolidate a democracy. There is a necessity of changes in social structure, social relations, political culture that would permit the formation of more egalitarian societies. There is the requirement of respecting the rights and liberties of all citizens, pluralism and the highest possible level of political participation. It is a fact that building democratic regime is a long-term and, especially in recent years,

²⁶ L. Whitehead, "Alternative Models of Democracy in Latin America," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2010), p. 81.

²⁷ G. O'Donnell, *Contrapuntos. Ensayos escogidos sobre autoritarismo y democratización*, Buenos Aires 1997, p. 290.

²⁸ L. Whitehead, "Alternative Models of Democracy..." p. 81.

endangered process. Even mature democracies – known also as consolidated – can be vulnerable to a more or less progressive deconsolidation.

Talking about causes of deconsolidation of Latin American democracies that have been taking place in last decades, one cannot omit socio-economic issues. There is no doubt that democratic governments suffered a huge failure in the area of struggle with social and economic inequalities.²⁹ Democratic transformations were closely combined with the introduction of neoliberal reforms recommended by the so called Washington Consensus. The broad program of reforms included the liberalization of international trade and the opening of markets. This was accompanied by significant reforms of national economies with the objective of their growing integration with global market. An essential element of the reforms was a far-reaching reduction of the role of the state in the functioning of individual economies, especially concerning the elimination of restrictions on the movement of capital.³⁰ While the 1990s was a decade of an enthusiastic reception of both liberal democracy and neoliberal recipes for a rapid improvement in the economic situation and an even faster developmental leap of individual Latin American countries, the present century has brought first a decisive reduction of enthusiastic implementation of the Washington Consensus, and then its strong criticism and a search for alternatives. The 2010s showed that the model of economic development based on neoliberal reforms that was proposed thirty years ago does not work. This is particularly true when it comes to the efforts toward the decrease of social inequalities and the improvement of the situation of the poorest sectors of Latin American societies.

Although it is difficult today to state that Latin America has successfully found an alternative, one may conclude that in the 2020s the region entered in a post-neoliberal period.³¹ It is still hard to predict direction the new developmental conception will evolve in. The model based on the idea of the socialism of the 21st century failed and the humanitarian catastrophe in Venezuela only confirms this. Attempts to unite socialist sensibility with limited market-oriented reforms proposed by President Ignacio Lula da Silva in Brazil accelerated the process of social advancement of the poorest masses and strengthening the middle class by those who leaving the stratum of poverty, however, they did not succeed in lowering inequalities. Considering the presidential victory of Jair Bolsonaro, one can expect that the idea of these kinds of reforms is put aside, at least for some time. The efforts to implement neoliberal reforms in Central American republics, mostly Guatemala and Honduras, led to the significant deterioration of the social situation of the citizens and massive migrations to the United States in the second half of 2010s.

²⁹ D. Grassi, V. Memoli, "Democracy, Political Partisanship, and State Capacity in Latin America," *Italian Political Science Review / Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2016), p. 62.

³⁰ W.I. Robinson, "Promoting Polyarchy in Latin America: The Oxymoron of 'Market Democracy,'" in E. Hershberg, F. Rosen (eds), *Latin America after Neoliberalism: Turning the Tide in the 21st Century?*, New York 2006, p. 103.

³¹ C. Figueroa Ibarra, "America Latina en el umbral del posneoliberalismo," *Metapolitica*, vol. 12, no. 59 (2008), p. 57.

The idea that ‘democracy neither lives nor dies because of bread’³² seems correct, although the high level of inequalities shall be perceived as a factor that does not strengthen the democratic system. When people have problems with sustaining of their basic needs, their political choices can be liable for changes that will not serve the strengthening of the democratic regime. In this context, the view that individuals who do not need to worry about sustaining their primary needs (that is, those indispensable to survive) are much more pro-democratic in their political choices may be perceived as true. The fact that authoritarian regimes and democratic breakdowns often appear in moments of economic crises can serve as a confirmation of the above. These regimes usually tend to citizens difficulties in satisfying their needs. Taking into account the economic situation of the countries in the Latin American region in the 2010s and the fact that there are few cases of reducing the stratification of Latin American societies (and if there are, then the pace of reducing inequality and poverty is definitely far from satisfactory), one can claim that the process of deconsolidation of democratic regimes in Latin America is closely related to the socio-economic situation of the countries.

Table 3. GDP per capita compared to the level of support for the democratic regime and tolerance for the introduction of an authoritarian regime in selected countries of Latin America in 2018

Country	GDP per Capita (2018)	Support for democracy (%)	Tolerance for authoritarian regime (%)
Uruguay	23,572	61	16
Chile	25,222	58	23
Argentina	20,610	67	14
Mexico	19,844	38	11
Peru	14,418	43	18
Boliwia	7,873	53	12
Guatemala	8,462	28	20
Honduras	5,168	34	10
America Latina and the Caribbean	16,590	48	15
Haiti	1,866	No data available	No data available

Source: own study based on: GDP per capita: www.worldbank.org; democracy support and authoritarian acceptance: *Informe 2018*, *Latinobarómetro*, at www.latinobarometro.org.

It is easily seen that in countries that suffer economic problems where the level of GDP per capita is the lowest (as Guatemala and Honduras) the level of support for democracy is the lowest as well. A significantly low level of this support appears also in Mexico, however, in the case of this country it shall be emphasized that this is due to deep problems with the huge expansion of insecurity, violence and organized crime.

³² P.H. Smith, M.R. Ziegler, “Liberal and Illiberal Democracy...,” p. 43.

A surprisingly high level of support for democracy is noted in Venezuela despite the economic catastrophe this country suffered a few years. In this case, similarly to Nicaragua, there is an authoritarian regime. So, the high level of support for democracy can be explained by its lack in practice. The 2010s has brought a decline of the support of democracy on the scale of the whole region. According to the data published by *Latino-barómetro*, this kind of support was declared by 59% of the inhabitants of Latin America in 2009 meanwhile just 48% in 2018. Confronting this with the economic situation of the region, it is easy to see that the decrease of support for democracy coincided with the worsening of the economic situation.

Crisis or stagnation in the economy positively influences the appearance of populist leaders who focus on those sectors of society that suffer the worsening of the economy the most. These are the basis on which they build their political position. It is even more dangerous from the democratic point of view as populists usually question democratic institutions, promoting personalist leadership. Individuals often blame institutions for economic troubles and they desire to replace them by populist leaders who are able to convince citizens of the validity of their ideas and uselessness of the current practices based on democratic values and norms.³³

In the analysis of the causes of the deconsolidation of democracy in Latin America, it is important to pay attention to one more factor, namely, corruption. In the case of Latin American countries, it can be said that it is a phenomenon *per se* – it has existed in the region since at least the establishment of European colonies in the New World. It is not the objective of this article to explore this phenomenon, however, it should be taken into account in any study of the functioning of democratic systems in the region in the 21st century. Already at first glance the political affairs in the past few years show how important the influence of corruption on the political situation is, Guatemala, Peru, and Brazil are perhaps the examples that illustrate in the clearest way that corruption scandals involving the highest government officials can turn a country's political situation topsy-turvy. And these were not the only countries shaken by massive corruption scandals in the 21st century.

In light of the Table 4, it should be mentioned that corruption is not limited to high state officials. It is present at the level of both central and local authorities, in state institutions, as for example the health system, police or judicial system. It can be safely said that this phenomenon directly touched the majority of Latin American citizens as confirmed by the results of research made for the *Global Corruption Barometer* report published by Transparency International. According to it, 21% of citizens that use basic public services like education, the health system or judicial system found themselves in a situation in which they were forced to give a bribe. This means that in 18 countries that were included in the research, 56 million people were participants of an act of corruption.³⁴ It is hard

³³ A. Toledo, "Democracy with Development," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2010), pp. 7-8.

³⁴ *Global Corruption Barometer: Latin America and the Caribbean 2019 – Citizen's Views and Experiences of Corruption*, Transparency International, at <https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/global-corruption-barometer-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-2019> – 15 September 2020.

to overestimate the role of corruption in the process of weakening a state's institutions. Additionally, its negative influence on economic development and the functioning of societies in general cannot be forgotten.

Table 4. Corruption scandals that involved the president or vice-president in selected countries in Latin America in 2000-2020

Country	Year	President/vice president	Actions	Accusations
Guatemala	2017	Jimmy Morales	Massive protests	Financial abuses during the presidential campaign
	2015	Otto Perez Molina	Resignation from the post of president and arrest	Corruption accusations and huge customs frauds
Honduras	2019	Juan Orlando Hernandez	Protests and demands of actions toward limitation of corruption	Accusations of bribing presidential brother Juan Anotnio Hernandez by Mexican and Colombian drug cartels
El Salvador	2018	Antonio Saca	Sentenced to prison after completing the presidential term	Illegal financial support for the political party
Paraguay	2019	Mario Abdo Benitez	Failed impeachment attempt	Accusations of illegal activities for one of the Brazilian companies active in Paraguay
Ecuador	2020	Otto Sonnenholzner (vice-president)	Resignation from the post of president	Accusations of using presidential post to prepare for the presidential campaign in 2021
	2018	María Alejandra Vicuña (vice-president)	Resignations from the post of vice-president	Corruption accusations
	2017	Jorge Glas (vice president)	Removed from the post and sentenced to 6 years of jail	Accusations of participation in the Odebrecht scandal
Peru	2000	Alberto Fujimori	Resignation from the presidential post rejected by Congress, which later adopted the resolution about his removal from the post	'Videotapes scandal': the chief of the secret service Vladimiro Montesinos recorded when handing a bribe to a congressman from the opposition party
	2017	Pedro Pablo Kuczynski	Failed impeachment attempt	Accusations of participation in the Odebrecht scandal

Country	Year	President/vice president	Actions	Accusations
Peru	2018	Pedro Pablo Kuczynski	Resignation from the presidential post	Previous accusations and the 'Kenjivideos' scandal' that showed the president's lawyer during an attempt to corrupt one of the congressmen
Brazil	2015	Ignacio Lula da Silva	Arrested after completing presidential term	As a consequence of the 'Lava jesto' operation accused of lobbying in favor of the Odebrecht enterprise; accusations of illegal practices and corruption connected with the financial support of its political party

Source: own study.

At the same time, it is not an easy task to define corruption's relationship with the democratic system. On the one hand, it is a system based on the transparency rule. Officials that have the possibility to compete for reelection can be less vulnerable to corruptive practices. Freedom of speech, which also lies at the heart of democracy, means that corrupt practices can be freely disclosed to the public, thus contributing to a greater awareness among citizens of the importance of electing right representatives.³⁵ However, experience shows that democracy does not guarantee not only the elimination of corruption but even its significant restriction. Even mature democracies cannot liberate themselves from corruption and countries that are at the stage of its consolidation are much more vulnerable to this phenomenon. However, it is hard to see the democratization process and the establishment of democratic institutions and principles of state functioning as a guarantee of reducing the scale of corruption. In many cases, the beginning of democratic transitions can lead to the increase of corruptive practices. Weak institutions are unable to combat these practices. This is partially the effect of the situation in which many more opportunities to undertake corruptive acts can appear in democratic systems, which often leads to the increase of corruption in the context of weak young and immature democratic institutions and legal norms. This level usually decreases with the strengthening of the democratic regime.³⁶ A confirmation of this trend comes from the fact that in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, countries with the lowest levels of corruption include Uruguay, Costa Rica and Chile, which

³⁵ N. Zucker Boswell, S. Rose-Ackerman, "Corruption and Democracy," *Proceedings of the ASIL Annual Meeting*, vol. 90 (1996), p. 83.

³⁶ E. Drapalova et al., *Corruption and the Crisis of Democracy: The Link between Democracy and the Weakening of Democratic Institutions*, Transparency International, 2019, p. 5, at https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep20482#metadata_info_tab_contents – 15 September 2020.

at the same time have the most consolidated democracy.³⁷ Meanwhile, highly dysfunctional states do not only suffer a high level of corruption but it assumes the form of an organized system that serves to derive benefits by those who hold public positions.³⁸ Latin American and the Caribbean region perfectly confirm this insight. The last huge corruption scandals, the Lava Jato operation and the Odebrecht affair, among others, are probably the most famous examples in recent years.

The huge scale of corruption is also reflected by the moods among Latin American societies. This phenomenon is commonly perceived as the most important or one of the most important challenges in particular countries of the region. According to the research, 85% of inhabitants in Latin America declared corruption among the authorities to be a significant problem. The scale of the problem is seen even better if one focuses on particular countries. According to the Global Corruption Barometer, 96% of Peruvians perceive corruption among the governmental functionaries as a big problem. In Colombia the percentage of the likewise-minded is 94%, in Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Chile it is 93%, and 91% in El Salvador.³⁹ This has a direct impact on citizens' confidence to those who govern. According to the above-mentioned report, only 1/5 of Latin America's citizens declare confidence to the representatives of government (21%). In countries like Venezuela, Peru or Guatemala, 90% of citizens declare a low confidence or its total lack.⁴⁰ This leads to the fundamental question: how to build a stable democratic system if the majority of citizens do not trust the government?

There are plenty of examples in Latin American countries that show how difficult it is to establish stable democratic systems in the context of high level of corruption. In recent years, one of the most 'popular,' but also the most fateful, examples is the Odebrecht scandal. This particular case has shown not only the incredible size of corruption involving the highest officials in several countries of Latin America but also how fragile the democratic regime in the region really is. Hundreds of millions of dollars were transferred in corruption proposals for the highest state officials in Mexico, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia,

³⁷ *Corruption Perception Index 2019*, Transparency International, at https://www.transparency.org/files/content/pages/2019_CPI_Report_EN.pdf – 15 September 2020. In the same report Uruguay was placed at position 71, Chile 67, and Costa Rica at 56. Among 87 classified States the worst results among Latin American States were achieved by Venezuela (18), Haiti (18) and Nicaragua (22) – countries that are perceived as the least democratic in the region. The lowest position in the index, the lowest level of corruption in a country. The index is constructed on the ground of rating of all States in respect of several factors. The Americas achieved an average level of 43 points. In comparison, the European Union and other western European countries achieved 66 points, Asia and the Pacific 42, the Middle East and North Africa 39, Eastern Europe and Central Asia 35, finally, Sub-Saharan Africa 32 points.

³⁸ S. Chayes, *Corruption and State Fragility*, US Institute of Peace, 2016, p. 3, at <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Fragility-Report-Policy-Brief-Corruption-and-State-Fragility.pdf> – 15 September 2020.

³⁹ *Global Corruption Barometer...*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Peru and Brazil.⁴¹ It was in the effect of the Lava Jato operation that Brazilian investigating officers found the trace of corruption practices between Brazilian giant construction enterprise Odebrecht and the then ruling Workers' Party in Brazil. The first arrests took place as early as March 2014, however it was the detention of the former President Ignacio Lula da Silva that elicited the greatest shock. He was accused, among other things, of illegal lobbying to gain lucrative contracts for the Odebrecht. It can be said that on the ground of Lula's accusations the political opposition had also undertaken attempt to use social moods to oust then-President Dilma Rouseff – Lula's successor and the leader of the Workers' Party. The further consequence was to institute the impeachment procedure that ended with her being removed.⁴² However there were no confirmed accusations of corruption formed against Dilma Rouseff, and the formulated accusations were very weak; this perfectly suited the rightist opposition and was deemed enough to start impeachment proceedings. The ousting of Dilma Rouseff resulted not only in a significant political crisis in Brazil but it also initiated a significant debate over the condition of democracy in the biggest country of Latin America. The President's supporters were talking about the effective coup, which according to them, the impeachment based on very weak evidence was. They were emphasizing that political opposition questioned the results of the presidential election in 2014 since the day one and could not accept its defeat. Since the re-election of Dilma Rouseff, the rightist opposition was doing all it could to undermine the results of the election and the holding of the presidential post by Rouseff. At the same time the odd situation in which the chairman of the Lower Chamber of Congress, Eduardo Cunha, who was the face and the motor of the impeachment, was also accused of corruption.⁴³ Numerous accusations of corruption were formulated also against Michel Temer who was named the provisional president.

Rouseff's impeachment perfectly demonstrates the situation in which the democratic procedure was used for undemocratic objectives. Impeachment *per se* is a commonly known and accepted democratic tool used in democratic political systems. However, in the case of Rouseff (and not only her) it was used in an obviously instrumental way. The goal was not purely to oust the president who committed a crime but to end a long period (since the 2002 presidential victory of Lula) of the Workers Party being in power. The rightist opposition was unable to win the presidential election so it used social anti-corruption moods to reach the goal that it could not carry out through the elections.

The huge impact of corruption on the functioning of the democratic systems in certain Latin American countries can be also confirmed by the case of Honduras. A significant political crisis in the wake of ousting President Manuel Zelaya in 2009 was quickly deepened through corruption scandals in the following months. They broke with the

⁴¹ S. Morales, O. Morales, "From Bribes to International Corruption: The Odebrecht Case," in: *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2019), pp. 8-9.

⁴² See F. Nunes, C.R. Melo, "Impeachment, Political Crisis and Democracy in Brazil," *Revista de Ciencia Política*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2017), pp. 281-304.

⁴³ In the effect of the Lava Jato operation he was accused of number of corruptive crimes; he was sentenced to 6 years in prison and he is the highest State's official that was sentenced in Brazil for corruption.

information about the financial resources smuggled out by the then Honduran leaders from the Social Security Institute (Instituto Hondureño de Seguridad Social, IHSS). These resources were spent on the presidential campaign of Juan Orlando Hernández. Honduras is also a perfect example of how organized crime groups involved in drug trafficking are able to use the weakness of the state's institutions and the high level corruption. In the end of 2018, the US services arrested the president's brother Juan Antonio Hernández Alvarado. He was accused, among other things, of participating in an organized crime group that was smuggling drugs to the United States. In performing his criminal acts, he worked with corrupted police officers in Honduras. A part of the benefits achieved from these illegal acts were used for political objectives, including the activities of the National Party, that is, the party of Juan Orlando Hernández. At the same time Juan Carlos 'El Tigre' Bonilla Valladares, the former Chief of the National Police in Honduras, was arrested.⁴⁴ In consequence of this, independent non-governmental organizations in Honduras and from abroad decided to undertake efforts aimed at the creation of effective mechanisms that would limit corruption in this country. The most important element of these was to form the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (Misión de Apoyo Contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad en Honduras, MACCIH). It was operating under the Organization of American States auspices and was modelled on this kind of institution already active in Guatemala.⁴⁵ Both Commissions ceased to operate in 2020. Undoubtedly, it is an important step backward in the efforts toward restricting corruption in Honduras and Guatemala.

The risks that derive from corruption are commonly known. One can mention its negative impact on the functioning of the state's institutions, on economic growth or on redistribution of wealth. The negative impact on the functioning of democratic regimes cannot be forgotten, either. Several elements will be emphasized here. Firstly, the electoral process. The election of those who govern by those who are governed is the essence of democracy. However, corruptive practices can subvert this process. Buying votes or using public funds as well as those that originate from illegal acts to finance one's own political aims often influence the final result of the elections. In 2019, 25% of voters in Latin America declared that they were offered bribes in exchange for voting for a given candidate. In Mexico, the proportion was as high as 50%, and only slightly lower in the Dominican Republic (46%), and Brazil or Colombia (40%).⁴⁶

However, the electoral process is not only a means of electing authorities. It is also a form of vertical responsibility. Through the election, voters can express their support for those who are already in power and choose them for next tenure or they can express

⁴⁴ D.M. Sabet, *When Corruption Funds the Political System: A Case Study of Honduras*, Woodrow Wilson Center, 2020, p. 19.

⁴⁵ International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala, CICIIG) was established in 2006 in effect of agreement between the United Nations and the government of Guatemala. It was aimed to strengthen the struggle against corruption in this country and contributed to finding out corruption scandals that included President Otto Pérez Molina and Vice-President Roxana Baldetti, in consequence of which both resigned from their posts.

⁴⁶ *Global Corruption Barometer: Latin America and the Caribbean 2019...*, p. 25.

their objection and to choose others. Corruptive practices undermine both these functions. It also seems that they have influence on voter participation in elections in general. A high level of corruption contributes to turn voters away from the political participation. The conviction that political elites – no matter from what side of the political scene – are entangled in corruption results in citizens not wanting to identify themselves with these elites and, in effect, avoid involvement in public life. This brings the risk of the appearance of the so called outsiders and populist leaders on the scene. They can skillfully use social expectations of rejection the previous elites and voters vulnerability toward the influences of new leaders.

On the other hand, it needs emphasizing that social activation and mobilization is required in the efforts to limit corruption. Massive protests often lead to the resignation of the accused officials from their posts or to creating mechanisms that will limit corruption. It is consoling that, according to the research of the Global Corruption Barometer in 2019, more than 70% of inhabitants in Latin America declare that actions undertaken by citizens can effectively help in restricting corruption. Sadly, it should be added that 40% are afraid to denounce corruption acts,⁴⁷ which is the consequence of the fear for the security of their own and their close ones. Considering that corruptive practices are not limited to high official and politicians, it is also necessary to include other sectors and institutions and their representatives. A high level of corruption also affects citizens' rights. It may have bearing on private property or due process of law. If corruption enters the judicial system, there is no guarantee of a fair trial. Meanwhile, rights and liberties are equally important for the proper functioning of the democratic regime. What is more, it is impossible to create a state with the Rule of Law when there is widespread corruption. Vertical responsibility has already been mentioned, but horizontal responsibility, that is, the reciprocal responsibility of particular branches of power, is important, too. The ability to corrupt one of them results in the lack of horizontal responsibility in practice. It cannot be omitted as an element of the Rule of Law at the lower levels of state's authorities. A high level of corruption among the institutions that are responsible for the execution of the law and the protection of citizens (for example, among members of police forces or the judicial system) makes the reality of the rule of law doubtful. Without these elements, the existence of a democratic regime is impossible or at least very difficult.

CONCLUSIONS

The first two decades of the 21st century have demonstrated that the third wave of democratization did not produce firm and stable democratic regimes in Latin America. With the exception of Uruguay, Chile and Costa Rica the rest of countries in the region face more or less significant problems which they are unable to solve effectively. The enthusiasm for free elections that was felt in the vast majority of the countries in the region at the end of the 20th century seems to have somewhat dulled the proponents

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

of democratic changes. The consequences are serious. A number of threats that existed in these countries when the democratic system was introduced have not only remained, but actually increased. Meanwhile the state of the 'patient,' that is, unconsolidated democratic system, is worsening since 2021 in the result of the lack of efficient 'medical treatment.' Instead of talking about the promotion of democracy, we need to talk about the protection of the democratic system. New dangers are added to the ones already known.

The eruption of the pandemic related to the expansion of the SARS-Cov-2 virus put the world in a completely new situation. Authorities of countries in various regions of the world have undertaken actions that lead to the weakening of democratic regimes. Researchers united in the V-Democracy think-tank pointed out 6 types of dangers: 1) lack of time limits for extraordinary restrictions, 2) introduction of discriminatory measures, 3) restrictions of inalienable rights, 4) restrictions of freedom of speech through restrictions toward the media, 5) disproportionate limitation of legislative authorities, 6) forced introduction of proposed measures.⁴⁸ Facing this array of risks for democracy that stem from the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, democratic systems in certain countries are in danger. The most frequent seems to be restrictions toward media and the access of citizens to information as well as the marginalization of the legislative power. The latter is best visible in the form of new measures issued by the executive powers in the form of decrees. In effect, the recent years seem to confirm the idea expressed in this article that the process of deconsolidation of democracy in Latin America is taking place.

Numerous negative factors that have been present in individual countries for years are accompanied by new ones. Even those that were perceived at the beginning as favorable ones, today have evolved into dangers. Neoliberal reforms that were the foundations for economic transformation can serve as an example. Far-reaching privatization or decentralization was perceived as one of the factors that supported the process of democratization. Quite often they were perceived as efforts that serve to limit corruption.⁴⁹ However, looking back, it seems that both expectations failed. The lack of a visible improvement of the population's welfare became one of the causes of growing disappointment with democracy and turned citizens' attention toward non-democratic forms of political regime. Meanwhile, corruption has not only remained, but acquired new forms and seems to be an even bigger challenge.

Analyzing the process of deconsolidation of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, it shall be emphasized that this phenomenon is not a regional one. Some of the factors that contribute to the deconsolidation are of a global nature. Other emphasize the economic crisis of 2008 that brought to light the imperfections of neoliberal model of economic development that has dominated the post-cold war world. To a significant degree, in effect of this crisis the poorer groups and the middle class suffered the negative consequences of globalization. Soon, societies faced difficulties related to

⁴⁸ P. Bederke, *International Day of Democracy: Pandemic Challenges*, at https://www.v-dem.net/en/news/international-day-democracy-pandemic-challenges/?edit_off&fbclid=IwAR3EuIE3fJxMbU_F574zJ9xJVqApS45d9GKhia8e77raw9x-RiqwvO1-vHI – 15 September 2020.

⁴⁹ L. Manzetti, Ch.H. Blake, "Market Reforms and Corruption in Latin America: New Means for Old Ways," *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1996), pp. 668-670.

an increasing border openness after the cold war. The migration crisis that struck Europe and other world regions resulted in the appearance of anti-migration moods that are fed by various nationalist leaders and movements. Critical approaches toward the neoliberal order in the post-cold war world were also revealed in effect of the cultural changes, as for example the rights of the LGBT+ minority. The defense of cultural values and objection toward these kinds of changes lead to a critical approach toward liberalism and liberal democracy.⁵⁰

However, there is no doubt that the crucial dangers for the democratic regime have an internal nature. It is the incapacity/incompetence of democratic governments in particular countries that results in a growing disappointment with democracy among their inhabitants. Whereas in the so called mature democracies of the Western Europe democratic values are deeply rooted and standing by them definitely helps in solving crisis situations according to democratic norms, the unconsolidated democracies have a significant problem with that. It is clearly visible in the example of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. In the case of Latin America, the crisis that resulted from the pandemic was preceded by a long array of serious problems that democratic authorities were unable to solve. Growing social stratification, meagre achievements in the struggle with poverty or strengthening of the rule of law, and growing insecurity should be mentioned among them.

To summarize the situation of democratic regimes in Latin America, a growing discrepancy between functioning of democracy and its perception by the citizens should be highlighted. A very interesting and valuable analysis of democracy in the 21st century Latin America was published by Flavia Freidenberg and Camilo Saavedra Herrera. They pointed out an extraordinary change that has happened in Latin America through the last four decades. The third wave of democratization in the region led to Latin American countries being much more democratic than at the turn of the 1980s. This is confirmed by numerous data about the inclusion of groups that were previously marginalized in the political and public life or about the regularity of elections of executive and legislative powers. Elections are not only regular nowadays but their results fulfil democratic requirements. There are certain problems, as for example the cases related to the electoral campaigns and vote buying, but in general they are considered democratic. Speaking of the elections, it is worth saying that in majority they are organized by independent institutions. This is a very important change that makes it much harder to interfere. What is really important – and what was far from automatic – is that the results of elections are, in general, accepted by at least the most important political actors, even when they lose. It seems that democracy may be perceived as ‘the only game in town.’ It also seems that the situation is better in the area of civil rights and liberties. Their range is presently broader than at the beginning of 1980s.⁵¹ In view of the exceptionally broad data gathered by Freidenberg and Herrera, it is hard to disagree with them. However, attention should be paid to two factors.

⁵⁰ W.A. Galston, “The Enduring Vulnerability of Liberal Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2020), p. 9.

⁵¹ F. Freidenberg Andrés, C. Saavedra Herrera, “La democracia en América Latina,” *Segundo Semestre*, no. 30 (2020).

The first one, which was already analyzed in this article and also mentioned by Freidenberg and Herrera, is the distinction between procedural democracy (that is, the real functioning of democratic rules, procedures, institutions) and citizens' attitude to democracy. The latter in Latin America is more and more negative, which is hardly surprising as democratic governments of the past four decades have been incapable of solving problems that directly affect societies. The effect is a growing decrease of positive attitudes toward democracy and the increase of support for undemocratic regimes. The second factor that should arouse concern and that allows us to talk about the deconsolidation of democracy is that those who govern are showing reluctance towards democracy. Multiple examples of open criticism toward democracy come from Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela or Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. This reluctance takes on a more high-minded form, such as impeachment, too. This seemingly democratic procedure is used in instrumental ways as the case of Dilma Rouseff showed.

At the turn of the 2020s, it is evident that Latin American countries face plenty of challenges. One of the most serious is the strengthening of democratic regimes. Undoubtedly, the pandemic is a factor that can strengthen undemocratic practices and solutions. The global crisis of liberal democracy does not facilitate the task, either. And finally, a multidimensional crisis in which the world has plunged in the consequence of the pandemic, with the economic crisis at the top, can fuel undemocratic tendencies, too. Realizing from historical experience that crisis often leads to undemocratic changes and contributes to the establishment of authoritarian regimes, political elites as well as societies should take a particular care in defending the democratic system. Otherwise, its progressive deconsolidation will send the third wave of democratization to history to be replaced by a third wave of authoritarianism.

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