



IDEAL - Democracy Index in Latin América: Theory, Method and Demonstration

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IDEAL - Democracy Index in Latin América: Theory, Method and Demonstration

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Abstract

This article outlines the creation of a Democracy Index for 19 Latin American countries from 1900 to 2022, offering a comprehensive assessment of democratic trends over a century. By meticulously examining historical records, political systems, and socio-economic indicators, the index captures the complexities of democratic governance. It considers key factors like electoral processes, civil liberties, political participation, and government accountability. Employing diverse data sources and robust statistical methods, the index serves as a valuable tool for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to analyze the evolution of democracy in Latin America. It enables comparative studies and provides insights into democratic consolidation, backsliding, and resilience. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of democratic development, highlighting both progress and challenges in the region's pursuit of democratic ideals. Ultimately, the Democracy Index enhances understanding of the historical and contemporary realities of democracy in Latin America, informing efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and practices.

Introduction

Indexes are fundamental tools for measuring and comparing different aspects of a data set or a specific situation. In general terms, these instruments allow for identifying variations, behavioral patterns, trends, and dynamic processes, providing subsidies for understanding and decision-making based on complex and detailed information in a faster and more efficient way. Furthermore, indexes enable relative comparison between analyzed units, allowing for standardization and equivalence between different contexts and time periods.

In the field of political science, the political democracy index stands out as an indicator that assesses a country's democratic quality based on a set of institutional, political, and civil liberties variables. The relevance of this type of measurement lies in the possibility of comparing different nations with each other and analyzing their evolution over time, allowing governments and citizens to understand and act on improving democratic quality. It is common for such indexes to be developed by independent organizations, researchers, and academic institutions, each adopting different methodological criteria for their compilation, which contributes to greater analytical robustness but also generates divergences in the selection process of dimensions, variables, measurement, and data aggregation.

However, the literature points to significant challenges related to the use of these indexes. Efforts to establish causal relationships often neglect essential questions about the quality and composition of the analyzed data. To a large extent, two initial problems can be diagnosed: the first concerns evaluations carried out in a simplified manner, without due consideration of the origin and reliability of the data set used; the second relates to the superficiality of discussions about the quality of data related to democracy, a problem identified decades ago in the literature (BOLLEN, 1991).

Most empirical studies investigating the determinants of democracy mechanically employ one of the available political democracy indexes without, however, paying due attention to how these indexes are constructed. This is particularly problematic because such indexes are developed for different purposes and often aggregate different variables to maximize their explanatory power for specific situations (MUNCK and VERKUILEN, 2002). Given this scenario, it is essential to analyze the evolution of the main democracy indexes, identifying their methodological

characteristics and comparing their main dimensions to select a more suitable and robust set of indicators for the present investigation.

This study aims to provide a political democracy index specifically tailored to the Latin American reality, considering the historical, cultural, and geographical particularities of the region. Covering 19 Latin American countries between 1900 and 2022, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive assessment of democratic trends over more than a century. The meticulous analysis of historical records, political systems, and socio-economic indicators makes it possible to capture the complexities of democratic governance in the region. Key factors such as electoral processes, civil liberties, political participation, and government accountability are considered, employing diverse data sources and robust statistical methods. Thus, the proposed index constitutes a valuable tool for academics, policymakers, and professionals interested in the evolution of democracy in Latin America, enabling comparative studies and providing insights into democratic consolidation, setbacks, and institutional resilience. By understanding the historical and contemporary realities of democracy in the region, the study aims to contribute to strengthening democratic institutions and practices.

Theoretical framework

The causes of unreliability

Despite the high correlation among major democracy indices (PALDAM, 2021), significant differences arise due to the diverse methodologies employed in their construction. These methodological discrepancies generate three primary challenges: measurement uncertainty in gray areas¹, difficulties in defining the upper anchor², and weak equidistance³ among index values.

¹ The gray measurement zone is the zone of equally good indices. Where the uncertainty is added that the indices use different subsets of indicators and classify the chosen indicators differently. Such an aggregate of data can estimate the width of the gray zone and thus differentiate the indicators.

² When defining a democracy index, first, an achievable range for both indices must be defined. The maximum and minimum points of this range are called the upper and lower anchors, respectively. Therefore, by imperfectly defining the upper anchor, many countries can be overclassified, indicating that there is full democracy even in visibly autocratic countries; or subclassified indicating imperfect democracy even in the most democratic countries.

³ Equidistance is equality of distance between various points within the anchors. Therefore, if these points do not have symmetry we may have a problem in the set of variables.

Moreover, although data generation is influenced by numerous interrelated factors, political democracy indicators frequently incorporate institutional characteristics that may not be directly related to democracy or its fundamental attributes, thereby potentially distorting empirical analyses (BOESE, 2019).

Criticisms of democracy indices are well-documented in the literature (MAINWARING, BRINKS, and PÉREZ-LIÑAN, 2000; MUNCK and VERKUILEN, 2002). For instance, the Freedom House Index, despite its widespread use, has been criticized for potential biases against economies reliant on international trade and for its tendency to exhibit negative bias toward socialist regimes, left-wing governments, and non-American allies (PAPAIOANNOU and SIOUROUTIS, 2007). Additionally, because its evaluation process is based on peer review, the index is susceptible to subjective assessments of liberal democracies (BOLLEN, 1991). From a methodological standpoint, the Freedom House assessment scale has been questioned for its lack of sensitivity in distinguishing between democratic and autocratic regimes (CAMPBELL, 2008). Its aggregation rule, though explicit, is overly simplistic, relying on a mere summation of component scores. This process introduces several measurement issues, including a lack of theoretical coherence among components (RYAN, 1994), inappropriate equal weighting of components despite their varying significance (MUNCK and VERKUILEN, 2002), and insufficient data transparency at the disaggregated level⁴, which prevents full replicability of the index.

Similarly, Polity IV faces limitations regarding its classification of political regimes, particularly given its emphasis on democratic transitions. Additionally, the index exhibits reduced applicability to smaller nations. Another methodological concern involves redundant components within the index, leading to double counting that may distort results (MUNCK and VERKUILEN, 2002). While Polity IV employs weighted attributes to reflect the relative importance of different components, no clear justification is provided for the chosen weighting scheme (BOLLEN, 1991).

The Democracy Breakdown index is criticized for its strictly dichotomous classification scheme, which forces intermediate cases into binary categories. This classification approach lacks the

⁴ Disaggregation-level data is only available on the official website from 2013 onwards.

granularity needed to distinguish nuanced regime variations. The subjective nature of these dichotomous classifications further compounds the issue, as their conceptual necessity and methodological appropriateness remain debatable. Additionally, the use of binary variables in aggregation introduces substantial measurement errors (BOLLEN, 1991).

In summary, democracy indicators differ significantly in terms of their scale and aggregation methodologies, making conceptualization, operationalization, and aggregation crucial factors that affect index estimates. Variations in methodological choices lead to systematically different values, particularly for observations at the extremes of the autocracy-democracy spectrum (GRÜNDLER and KRIEGER, 2022). The use of imprecise dependent variables can undermine model significance due to classical measurement errors, while also producing biased estimates if measurement errors correlate with explanatory variables (MUNCK and VERKUILEN, 2002).

Given these challenges, it is essential to formulate a democracy index that ensures methodological rigor by incorporating multiple, equivalent variables aligned with the system and data. A robust index should provide a clear justification for variable selection and ensure sensitivity to contextual variations. To achieve this, this study proposes the development of an index with an expanded scale, offering a continuous measure that enhances the precision of empirical analyses. The construction of this index will be guided by three key methodological dimensions—conceptualization, operationalization, and aggregation—while adhering to the six conventional measurement standards proposed by Bollen (1991). This approach will strengthen the robustness and reliability of democratic assessments, thereby contributing to a more precise evaluation of democratic trends and institutional dynamics.

Conceptualization

The assessment of the validity of political democracy measures must begin with a rigorous theoretical definition of the concept. It is essential to recognize that democracy is not a singular, universally agreed-upon theory, model, or concept, but rather a pluralistic construct shaped by diverse ideological traditions and contextual applications. Given this inherent diversity, achieving a universally accepted definition is impractical. Instead, this study adopts a metacognitive approach, wherein the concept of political democracy is framed around three core principles: (1) popular sovereignty, (2) political equality, and (3) individual freedom. Consequently, democratic norms should be evaluated based on their adherence to these fundamental principles, positioning

democracy as an integrative framework derived from these foundational elements (KIMBER, 1989).

From this perspective, democracy should be understood as a modern conceptualization, reflecting the evolution and adaptation of Western values such as citizenship, the expansion of sovereignty, and the pursuit of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Over time, these values have been reformulated and modernized, resulting in contemporary democratic theories that, while inspired by the Athenian model, have moved beyond historical social stratifications to embrace more inclusive and egalitarian principles.

This conceptualization aligns with the theoretical framework proposed by Bühlmann et al. (2008), who argue that democracy is structured upon three essential dimensions: equality, freedom, and institutional control. These elements serve as the fundamental determinants of democratic governance, reinforcing the notion that democracy is not merely an institutional arrangement, but a dynamic and evolving process rooted in the continuous interaction of these principles.

[...] we define freedom, equality and control as the three fundamental principles of democracy. To qualify as a democracy, a given political system must guarantee freedom and equality. Furthermore, it must optimize the interdependence between these two principles through control. Control is understood as control by the government, as well as government control (BÜHLMANN, MERKEL and WESSELS, 2008, p.15).

Expanding upon the conceptualization of democracy, Tavares and Wacziarg (2001) define it as a system of practices and procedures that govern the transfer of political power while safeguarding citizens' freedom of decision-making. According to the authors, a robust democratic framework must empower individuals to have an active voice in governance, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of social, economic, or political standing, can influence the political process. This inclusivity mitigates discretionary decision-making in both power structures and public policies, thereby enhancing transparency and reinforcing the legitimacy of political transitions.

Similarly, Diamond and Morlino (2004) emphasize that despite the diversity of democratic interpretations, an optimal democratic system must adhere to several foundational principles: civil and political liberties, popular sovereignty, political equality, and standards of good governance. Beyond these pillars, a well-functioning democracy must be grounded in the rule of law, wherein all individuals are fundamentally free and equal under a legal framework that ensures impartiality

and justice. Essential characteristics of such a system include universal adult suffrage, fair and competitive elections conducted regularly, the presence of multiple legitimate political parties, and access to diverse and independent sources of information. These elements collectively contribute to the stability and effectiveness of democratic institutions, fostering an environment where governance is both accountable and representative.

Popular Sovereignty

Popular sovereignty is a fundamental political principle asserting that the ultimate authority within a state or nation resides with its people. This concept underscores that all governmental power originates from the collective will of the citizens, who exercise their sovereignty either indirectly through elected representatives via voting mechanisms or directly through participatory instruments such as plebiscites, referenda, and popular initiatives.

John Locke, a pivotal figure in the development of the idea of popular sovereignty, argued that governmental authority is derived from the consent of the governed. According to Locke, individuals possess the inherent right to select their rulers and to hold them accountable for their actions. If a government fails in its fundamental duty to safeguard the rights and freedoms of its people, then the populace retains the legitimate right to dissolve that government and institute a new one that better serves their collective interests.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau offered a distinctive interpretation of popular sovereignty, diverging from Locke and other democratic theorists. He contended that sovereignty must reside directly with the people rather than be delegated to elected representatives. Rousseau's concept of the "general will" posited that true sovereignty is expressed through the collective and active participation of citizens in governance. He championed the universalization of suffrage as a means to strengthen democratic ideals, ensuring that government decisions reflect the common good rather than serving the interests of an elite minority.

Montesquieu also recognized popular sovereignty as a cornerstone of a just and stable political order. He maintained that the ultimate authority to determine the structure of governance must rest with the people. In his view, free and fair elections were essential for citizens to choose their representatives, and he emphasized the necessity of government accountability to the electorate as a safeguard against tyranny.

In a contemporary perspective, Robert Dahl (1989) revitalized the classical notion of self-governance inherent in the principle of popular sovereignty. He defined sovereignty as the prerogative granted to individuals with full political rights to actively participate in decisions that shape their communal and civic life. Dahl's framework underscores the necessity of inclusive and participatory political institutions to uphold democratic legitimacy and ensure the effective realization of popular sovereignty.

Soares (2014) defined popular sovereignty as:

[...] the ideal of popular sovereignty can be understood as equivalent to ensuring the prerogative, granted to every adult with political rights, that this citizen can take part in collective decisions, consistent with life in common under a political community. In this sense, universal suffrage and voting equality are fundamental elements (although not sufficient) for this goal to be achieved to some degree (SOARES, 2014, p.4).

Therefore, the idea of popular sovereignty implies that the people have the right to participate in the political process and to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. It is also closely related to the concept of individual rights, as it recognizes that the rights of the individual are the basis of a free and fair society. Expressed through a system of representative government, in which elected representatives are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the people. This system is designed to balance the conflicting interests of different groups and to ensure that the government remains accountable to the people.

In general, popular sovereignty is a fundamental principle of modern democracy, emphasizing the importance of individual rights and the power of the people to shape their own destiny. And it allows people to participate freely in the political process, including the right to vote freely for different alternatives in legitimate elections, run for public office, join political parties and organizations, and elect representatives who have a decisive impact on public policy and are accountable to the electorate.

Political Equality

Political equality is the dimension in which all individuals must have the same rights and political opportunities, regardless of their social or economic condition, sex, race, ethnicity, religion or any

other characteristic. This means that each person's vote should carry equal weight and that all citizens should have an equal chance to participate in the political process, run for office, and make their voice heard. From this perspective, the dimension of political equality involves an equitable decision-making process, where there are equal opportunities for everyone involved.

John Rawls believed that political equality was a crucial component of a just and impartial society. And that it was essential to ensure that all citizens have an equal voice in the political process and that the government serves the interests of all citizens equally, rather than favoring one group over another (RAWLS, 1971).

Dahl (1989) also emphasized the importance of political equality in a democratic society. He argued that democracy requires not only the right to vote, but also the ability to participate meaningfully in the political process. This means that citizens must have equal access to information, the opportunity to organize and express their opinions.

According to Beitz (1989), the idea of political equality could be conceived from two perspectives. The first, theoretical-normative, refers to procedural equality, that is, it values political participation as a fundamental resource for promoting this equality. The second values egalitarian criteria that serve as regulators for the improvement of political processes, that is, it is a vision that proposes the distribution of equal opportunities for influence.

Political equality requires that individuals have equal opportunities to participate in the political process, regardless of their social status or economic position. This includes equal access to the ballot box, equal access to information about political issues, and equal opportunities to run for public office. Furthermore, it also emphasizes the importance of equal representation in the political process. This means that the opinions and interests of all individuals must be represented in political decision-making, thus compromising the distribution of political power in electorally stable democratic regimes.

Individual freedom

Individual freedom is a fundamental principle that encompasses an individual's capacity to act, think, and express themselves autonomously, without unwarranted restrictions or coercion. It entails the inherent right to make choices regarding personal beliefs, actions, and associations, free from undue interference by external entities, including governments, institutions, or other

individuals. These rights are inalienable and serve as safeguards against oppression and excessive governmental control, forming the cornerstone of democratic governance and human dignity.

The scope of individual freedoms extends across various domains, including but not limited to freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly. Additionally, individual freedom incorporates the right to a fair trial, protection against arbitrary searches and seizures, and the guarantee of due process, ensuring equitable treatment under the rule of law.

Within the broader spectrum of individual freedoms, political freedoms constitute a crucial subset, specifically relating to the rights that enable citizens to actively participate in political processes and exercise political influence. These freedoms are vital for the sustenance of a democratic society, as they empower individuals to engage in political discourse, influence public policy, and hold governing bodies accountable. Political freedoms encompass the right to vote and participate in elections, freedom of expression and assembly, the right to petition the government for redress of grievances, and the right to establish and join political organizations. Additionally, they include access to information regarding governmental actions, facilitated by a free and independent press, which ensures transparency and accountability.

Arendt (1961) emphasizes that individual freedom is not merely the absence of external constraints or the unrestricted pursuit of personal desires. Instead, she conceptualizes true freedom as an active engagement with the world, characterized by the ability to innovate and contribute to societal evolution. According to Arendt, individual freedom is intrinsically linked to plurality—the coexistence of diverse perspectives and ways of life within a society. She contends that a truly free society is one that fosters and values diversity, allowing individuals to express themselves authentically and pursue their aspirations without the threat of persecution or discrimination. This perspective underscores the interdependence between individual freedom and a political culture that promotes inclusivity, deliberation, and the protection of fundamental rights.

Method

Operationalization

The first step in constructing a dataset consists of selecting indicators that operationalize the dimensions of a conceptual tree. As there are no strict rules for choosing valid indicators, this

process is often considered one of the most complex challenges in the social sciences. To minimize the inherent difficulties in this selection and ensure greater methodological consistency, the method proposed by Munck and Verkuilen (2002) was adopted, providing guidelines for the selection, aggregation, and validation of indicators.

In this study, multiple indicators are employed for each conceptual dimension to capture the various empirical manifestations associated with each concept and ensure structural equivalence between different measurement systems. Data were obtained from the Varieties of Democracy Project (COPPEDGE et. al., 2023a; PEMSTEIN et. al., 2023), an interdisciplinary academic initiative aimed at measuring and analyzing different aspects of democracy worldwide. The V-Dem database contains more than 450 indicators covering various dimensions of democratic regimes from 1789 to the present (COPPEDGE et. al., 2023b; 2023c).

To construct a representative index of democracy in Latin America, 20 countries were analyzed over the period from 1900 to 2022. The selection of indicators followed a hierarchical organization process, moving from the most abstract to the most concrete aspects. Initially, the fundamental principles⁵ constituting each conceptual dimension and structurally interrelated were identified. Each fundamental principle was then broken down into constituent components, which were separately measured through specific indicators. This approach allowed for the establishment of a vertical organization of indicators according to their level of abstraction⁶.

Subsequently, the most concrete indicators were isolated and categorized to serve as a basis for subsequent aggregation efforts. The second stage of the methodological process involved verifying the composition of each indicator's score. In this regard, fundamental aspects were examined, such as the formulation of the question used to obtain the data, the scoring scale adopted, the measurement parameters employed, the degree of generalization or specificity of the research, and the availability of values for all analyzed countries. Within this scope, the components were then grouped according to the established conceptual dimensions, allowing for a coherent and

⁵ This approach encompasses several basic principles: electoral, liberal, majoritarian, consensual, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian. Each Principle is represented by a separate index and each index is considered a separate result in the proposed study.

⁶ Although rarely addressed in standard methodology discussions, this task has an impact on data generation, affecting the two subsequent challenges of measurement and aggregation (MUNCK and VERKUILEN, 2002).

systematic structuring of the data. Appendix 2 identifies the indicators and explains how they were created and how to replicate them.

Aggregation

Once the measurement process is completed and the appropriate values are assigned to each conceptual variable, it becomes necessary to reverse the disaggregation process—carried out during the conceptualization and measurement stages—and initiate a regrouping stage to consolidate the disaggregated data into a single score.

To effectively perform the aggregation, it is crucial to begin at the highest possible level to avoid any loss of information. The use of a common metric or lower aggregation levels, such as averages or scales (e.g., Guttman⁷), may only capture the phenomenon in a unidimensional manner. This can diminish the strength of the phenomenon at a multidimensional level, ultimately weakening the validity of the results. Therefore, this study employed Factor Analysis as the aggregation tool, which is well-suited for contexts involving multidimensional data. This technique enables the construction of indices while preserving essential information regarding the behavior of the variables (MINGOTI, 2007).

Factor Analysis is a statistical method designed to reduce the complexity of a set of variables—represented by covariance, variance, and correlation matrices—into a smaller set of underlying factors (including common factors, specific factors, and random error terms) that account for the observed variation in the data. These factors are derived from linear combinations of the original variables, with each factor explaining part of the total variation.

The model's assumptions are as follows: (I) the covariance and mean error of the common factors are zero, and they are independent of the specific factors and random errors; and (II) the variance of the common factors is equal to 1, with the covariance between them forming an identity matrix, indicating that the common factors are uncorrelated.

⁷ The problem with the mean and the Guttman scale is that they can only be constructed if the multiple components move together and measure the same underlying dimension (MUNCK and VERKUILEN, 2002).

Given the complexity of this technique, several considerations must be considered to ensure the correct implementation of the Factor Analysis process. Accordingly, this study focused on eight key stages, outlined as follows:

Database normalization

Database normalization is a process that organizes data into relational cells to eliminate redundancies and inconsistencies, ensuring that the data is accurate, complete, and consistent. Given that the variables were measured using different types of measurement scales—namely, ordinal scales with three and five options, and interval scales ranging from 0 to 1—the normalization process standardized all data using a ratio scale, which adheres to the interval from 0 to 1. This approach ensures that the differences between the variables are consistent, maintains a specific order between the options, and recognizes the significance of an absolute zero value.

Model specification

In the model specification stage, the factor extraction method is determined. In this study, we selected Principal Component Analysis (PCA) as the extraction method, which aims to identify a smaller set of factors that account for most of the total variance in the data. The PCA extraction process consists of two steps. First, the correlation matrix is calculated, which quantifies the magnitude and direction of the relationships between the variables. Second, the principal components are extracted by identifying linear combinations of the variables that explain most of the total variance in the data. These components are ordered in decreasing importance based on their explanatory power.

Determination of the number of factors

To determine the number of factors to be extracted, we employed Kaiser's criterion (KAISER, 1960). This criterion is based on eigenvalues, which represent the magnitudes of variance explained by each factor. It recommends retaining only those factors with eigenvalues greater than one, while factors with eigenvalues less than one are regarded as noise or measurement errors and are discarded. However, the Kaiser criterion is merely a guideline and should not be the sole basis for

deciding the number of factors to retain. Consequently, the interpretation and theoretical relevance of the factors were also considered, along with other statistical criteria, such as the screeplot⁸.

Rotation process

The factors obtained through PCA are often difficult to interpret, as each factor tends to have non-zero loadings on many of the observed variables. This can make it difficult to determine which variables are most strongly associated with each factor. To facilitate the interpretation of the factors and to simplify the factor structure, the extracted factors are rotated to make them more interpretable. Thus, the varimax rotation method was used, which is a type of orthogonal rotation, that is, it seeks to produce factors that are not correlated with each other, therefore, maximizing the variance of the squared loads within each factor, while minimizing the variance of the squared charges between the factors, thus, alters the factor loadings for better interpretation of the data, keeping the common factors constant.

Model quality testing

To assess the sampling adequacy and the quality of the Factor Analysis model, we applied the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO test evaluates the degree of interrelation among variables in a data set, which is crucial for Factor Analysis, as the method assumes that variables are correlated. The test produces a statistic ranging from 0 to 1, where values closer to 1 indicate that the variables are highly correlated and thus appropriate for Factor Analysis. Values below 0.5 suggest that the data are not suitable for this analysis.

Bartlett's test of sphericity assesses whether there are significant differences between the variables in a data set. The test calculates the determinant of the correlation matrix and compares it to the chi-square distribution, with degrees of freedom equal to the number of variables. If the determinant significantly deviates from what would be expected by chance, the null hypothesis of homogeneity of variance is rejected. This suggests that the variables are sufficiently correlated and suitable for Factor Analysis.

⁸ The screeplot is a line graph of the eigenvalues of the factors or principal components in a factor analysis. Widely used to determine the number of factors to be maintained in a factor analysis with principal components (PCA) (CATTELL, 1966).

Factor Estimation

The estimation of factors is performed based on the weights of the variables in the original variance matrix, using the multiple linear regression method with Ordinary Least Squares (OLS). Once the weights are estimated, the observations of the five principal components—selected based on eigenvalues greater than 1, according to Kaiser's criterion—are multiplied by the corresponding regression coefficients.

The extracted factors are interpreted by analyzing the correlation patterns between the original variables and the factor loadings. Each factor represents an underlying dimension of the data, with the variables that exhibit the highest loadings being the most relevant in explaining the respective factorial dimension.

Normalization of factor scores

The values were normalized so that the highest value obtained the indicator equal to 1 and the lowest value obtained the indicator equal to 0, according to the equation:

$$(1.1) \quad Re - escalamento = \frac{(X_i^t - Xmin_I^{base})}{(Xmax_I^{base} - Xmin_I^{base})}$$

where, X_i^t are the observed values of the new variable for each country, Xmi_I^{base} are the minimum values of the sample and Xma_I^{base} are the maximum values of the sample. Thus, it is expected that countries that present high relative values in the democratic variables will be positioned at the top of this indicator.

Sizing

After consolidating the indicators into their respective common factors, the sizing stage involves grouping these factors into the predefined dimensions established during the conceptualization

phase. This grouping is conducted using an arithmetic mean. Finally, the dimensions are aggregated into a single composite index, resulting in the Index of Democracy in Latin America (IDEAL).

Results and Discussion

Democracy indices play a fundamental role in promoting democratic governance, supporting political reforms, and fostering public understanding and engagement in democratic processes. The term "democracy index" refers to a diverse set of tools and measures used to assess regimes, governments, or the political context of a country. These indices aim to provide quantitative and qualitative data that help policymakers, researchers, and society understand and compare political dynamics across different nations through a systematic and objective evaluation of the state of democratic governance.

Various existing indices measure different aspects of democracy according to their methodological strategies. Among the evaluated dimensions are electoral processes, civil liberties, political participation, and the rule of law, among others. By quantifying and classifying these indicators, indices enable the identification of similarities, differences, and trends, allowing for cross-country comparisons over time. The objective of this study is not to replace existing indices, as each differs in its conceptualization, operationalization, and aggregation of information. Instead, this research seeks to construct a robust index that facilitates the measurement, comparison, and evaluation of the proposed objectives. Thus, it is not assumed that the measurement level adopted here is inherently superior or inferior to other approaches, as the appropriateness of democracy measurement depends on the specific research objectives (COLLIER and ADCOCK, 1999).

To aggregate the dimensions and generate general democracy scores, we followed the conventional measurement standards proposed by Bollen (1991), which are specifically designed for analyzing necessary and sufficient conditions in this study, in addition to avoiding problems identified in previous research. After applying the Factor Analysis procedures, factor loadings and factors were obtained and used to construct the composite democracy index. Based on the Kaiser criterion and the statistical scree plot criterion, five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted. The results indicate that these five factors capture approximately 82.19% of the variation in the twenty-seven analyzed variables (Table 1).

Table 1: Model adjustment by explained variance, 1900-2022

Factor	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained by the Factor (%)	Accumulated Variance (%)
1	16.007	59.29	59.29
2	2.22	8.24	67.53
3	1.69	6.28	73.81
4	1.26	4.7	78.51
5	1.003	3.68	82.19

Source: Search results

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test presented a value of 0.9450, indicating a high intercorrelation among the dataset variables and, therefore, suitability for Factor Analysis. Bartlett's test rejected the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix between the variables is an identity matrix. Thus, both tests confirm that the variables are jointly valid and significant for the Factor Analysis model.

After estimating the factor scores, the highest scores were assigned to their respective factors. Consequently, each score was grouped into its common factor, and the factors were named according to the variable grouping (Table 2).

Table 2: Grouping of estimated factor loadings.

Factor 1 Political Freedoms	Factor 2 Suffrage	Factor 3 Civil liberties	Factor 4 Political equality	Factor 5 Direct Democracy
Torture	Election Transparency	Autonomy of the electoral management body	Capacity of the electoral management body	Referendums allowed
Political assassinations	Multiparty elections	Free Election Campaign Media	Power distributed by socioeconomic position	Plebiscite allowed
Transparent laws with predictable application	Intimidation of the electoral government	Freedom of religion	Power distributed by social group	
Rigorous and impartial public administration	Election boycotts	Freedom of foreign movement	Power distributed by gender	
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	Free and fair election	Property rights	Power distributed by sexual orientation	
Access to justice	Election losers accept the results	Freedom of domestic movement		
Freedom of discussion	Elected takes office			

Source: Estimated factor loadings after varimax orthogonal rotation

In the scaling phase, the factors were organized according to theoretical criteria: factors 1 (Political Freedoms) and 3 (Civil Liberties) were combined to form the Individual Freedoms dimension; factors 2 (Suffrage) and 5 (Direct Democracy) constituted the Popular Sovereignty dimension; and

factor 4 (Political Equality) remained as the homonymous dimension, Political Equality. The combination of these three dimensions resulted in the formulation of the Latin American Democracy Index (IDEAL), which provides continuous democracy values ranging from 0.00 to 1.00 for each country-year in the region.

Patterns in the data

Table 3 presents the correlations between IDEAL and the primary democracy indices commonly employed in empirical studies. The results indicate a strong correlation among all measures, a finding that was anticipated given that, despite differences in scale, anchoring, and conceptualization, these indices share fundamental elements of political democracy—such as freedom, equality, suffrage, and democratic transition. Consequently, the specific methodologies and assessment criteria used by each index are as significant as their conceptual distinctions.

Table 3: Correlations between IDEAL and the main democratic indices, 1900 to 2021.

Index	Correlation	Period
Deliberative Democracy Index	0.86	1900 - 2022
Freedom House ⁹	0.81	1972 - 2021
Democratic breakdowns	0.72	1900 - 2020
Polity IV	0.34	1900 - 2013

Source: Freedom House (2022), Teorell, et al. (2021), Marshall e Jagers (2004), Boix, et al. (2022).

Figure 1 illustrates the annual average democracy scores in the region from 1950 to 2020, using the four democracy measures discussed in this study. For comparative purposes, the scores were normalized to a 0-to-1 scale, with necessary inversions applied to ensure that higher values correspond to greater democratization.

⁹ To facilitate comparison, I combined the two Freedom House scores and reversed the scale by subtracting the total from 15. This transformation resulted in a continuum ranging from 1 (least democratic) to 14 (most democratic).

The results indicate that the period between 1975 and 1979 represented the lowest point for democracy in the region. From 1980 through the early 2000s, the data reveals significant progress in democratic levels, highlighting a remarkable democratization process, particularly between 1980 and 1989. According to the findings, democracy in the region peaked between 1999 and 2002. Contrary to arguments suggesting a decline in Latin American democracy during the 1990s (DIAMOND, 1996), the IDEAL measure demonstrates that democracy levels remained relatively stable and only began to decline around 2002. These findings provide empirical support for the assertion that democratic regression in Latin America occurred primarily in the early 2000s and was not as pronounced as some analyses suggest.

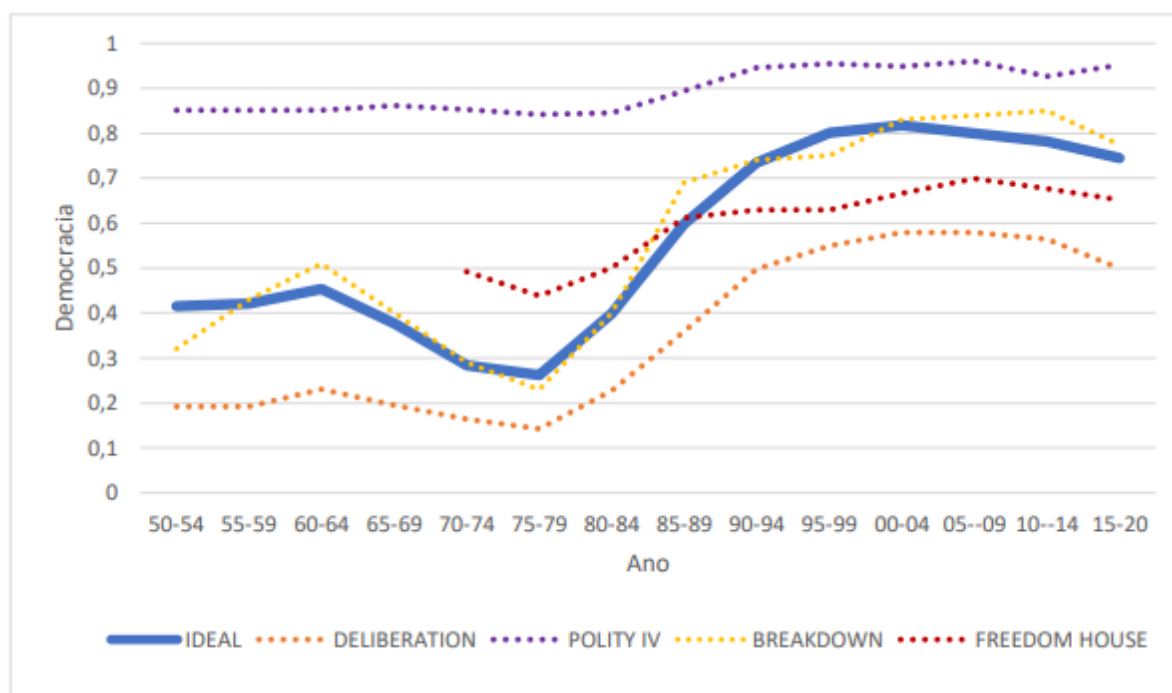
Despite broad alignment among the results, the four democracy measures present distinct perspectives on the region's democratization trajectory. The IDEAL scale registers an intermediate level of democracy relative to the other indices and highlights a clearer contrast between the more democratic 1990s and the preceding authoritarian era¹⁰.

Among the alternative indices, the Deliberative Democracy measure (TEORELL, COPPEDGE, et al., 2021) follows the same general trend as IDEAL but at consistently lower levels, indicating less dramatic democratic progress. The Democracy Breakdown index (BOIX, MILLER, and ROSATO, 2022) closely mirrors IDEAL estimates across the observed period. Freedom House results begin with a higher democracy estimate than other measures but conclude with a lower estimate, resulting in a less pronounced trajectory. Due to the tightening of coding standards over time, Freedom House's average trend gradually converges with the other assessments, including IDEAL, intersecting in 1989 and falling below in the mid-1990s. The Polity IV measure (MARSHALL and JAEGGERS, 2004) presents the highest democracy estimates but exhibits minimal variation and does not effectively capture critical periods in the region's political history.

In summary, discrepancies between the IDEAL scale and other democracy indices are likely attributable to differences in information sources, which in turn shape distinct interpretations of Latin American political dynamics.

¹⁰ The IDEAL measure is found between the Freedom House and Breakdown measures (at the top) and Deliberative (at the bottom).

Figure 1: Average democracy in Latin America, 1950-2020.



Source: Study results, Freedom House (2022), Teorell, et al. (2021), Marshall and Jaggers (2004), Boix, et al. (2022).

While strong correlations exist among the measures, this does not imply full equivalence, as methodological variations lead to differing conclusions—particularly regarding the democratization wave of the 1980s and the gradual democratic erosion in the 2000s. The choice of one index over another can have significant implications, as these differences are not random but stem from decisions regarding coding, operationalization, and data aggregation. For instance, a minimalist definition or an operationalization shaped by political bias could generate high correlations even if a given measure systematically overestimates a country's level of democratization (MAINWARING, BRINKS, and PÉREZ-LIÑÁN, 2000).

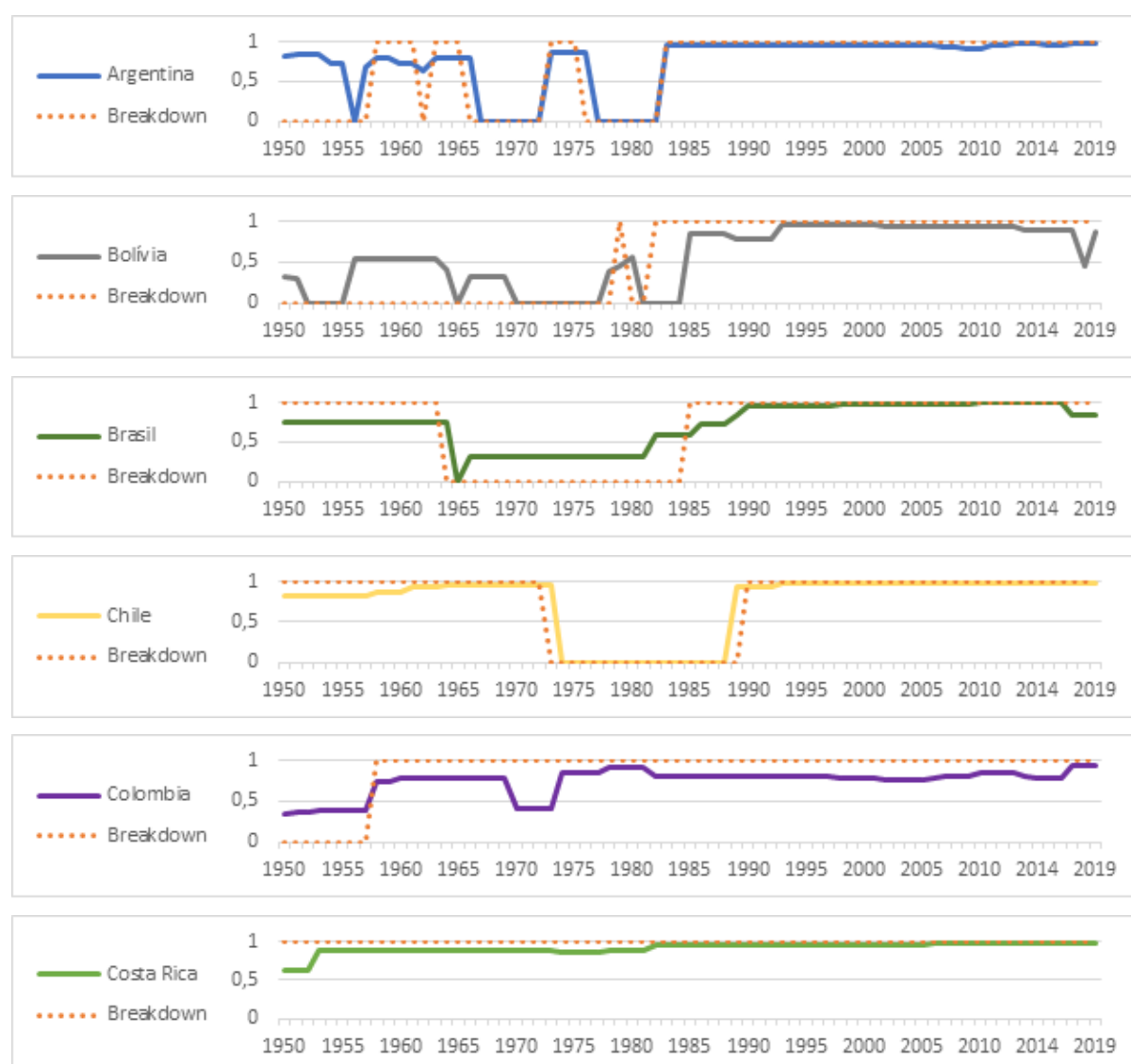
Implications for theory

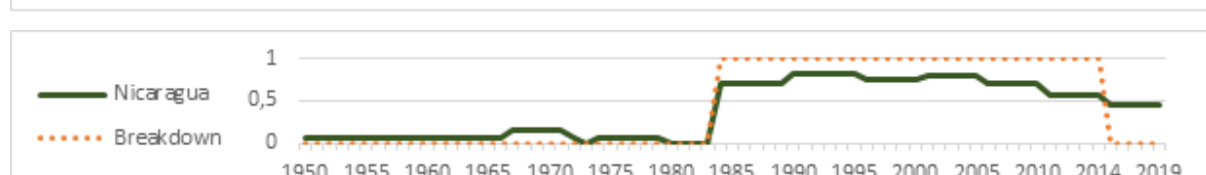
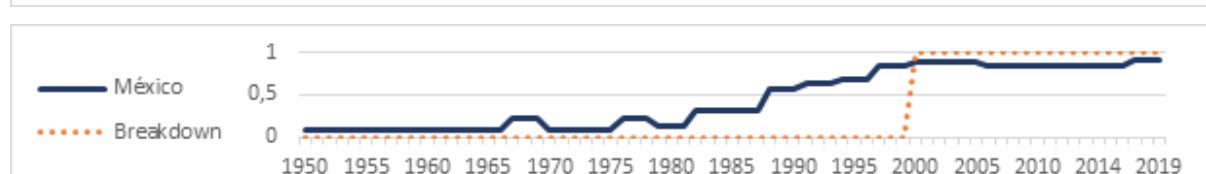
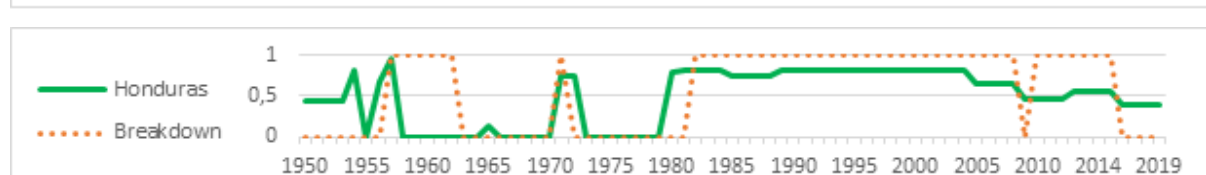
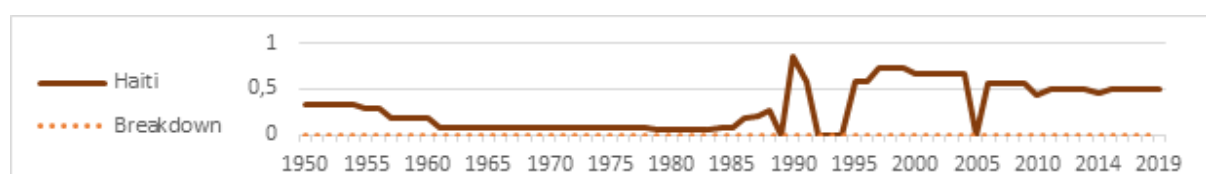
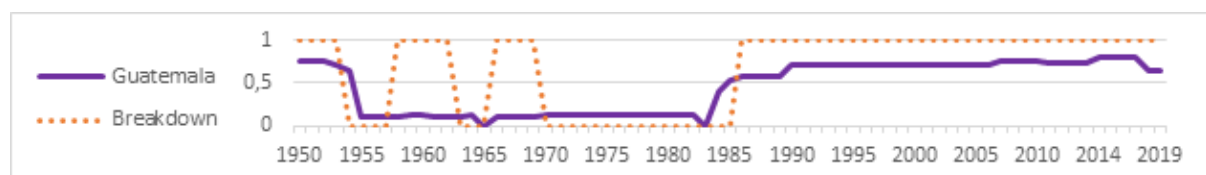
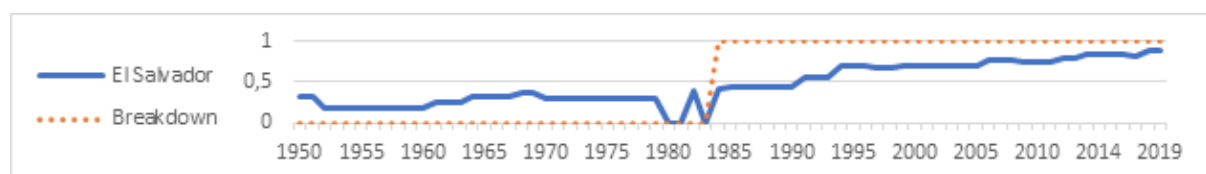
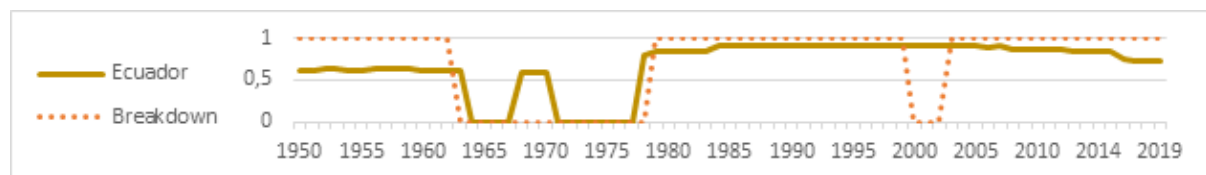
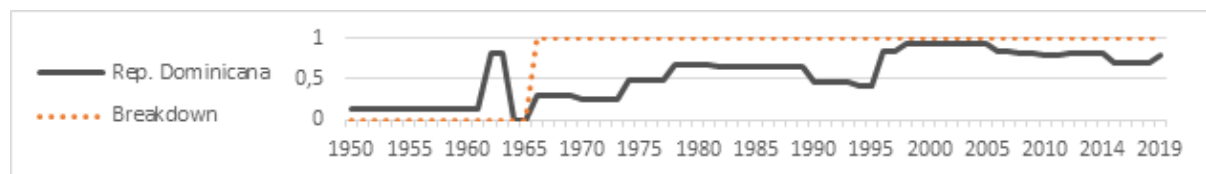
Comparisons between contemporary democracy indices enable an assessment of the validity and reliability of the IDEAL index for studying Latin America. By coding each country annually, this approach facilitates the identification and analysis of regime transitions. Moreover, the longitudinal coding of democracy levels allows for the detection of significant regional trends, providing insight into the timing of democratization waves and their potential reversals. While not the primary focus

of this study, the alignment of the index with democratic transitions in each country ultimately reinforces the validity of the results in causal analyses.

By cross-referencing IDEAL's results with data from Democracy Breakdown (BOIX, MILLER, and ROSATO, 2022), it was possible to integrate the information provided by these indices and compare them with the political and historical events experienced by each nation. This comparison offers a deeper understanding of the historical trajectories that shaped Latin America (Figure 2). The selected time frame for this analysis spans from 1950 to 2019, as it aligns with the macroeconomic analysis period utilized in this study.

Figure 2: Democracy in Latin America, by country, 1950 – 2020.







Source: Composite Index of Democracy in Latin America – IDEAL and Boix, et al. (2022).

Based on the results presented in figure 2, the values generated by the IDEAL index hold significant implications for understanding Latin American politics and interpreting the findings of the macro model. The composite Index of Democracy in Latin America closely follows the historical evolution of the region, reflecting fluctuations in democratic transitions throughout the 20th century. This period was characterized by numerous military coups, authoritarian regimes, and, later, the early democratization processes of the 21st century (MCKOY, MICHAEL K. and MILLER, MICHAEL K., 2012).

Conclusion

The present study on the Latin America Democracy Index (IDEAL) represents a significant methodological advancement in assessing democratic quality in the region. The use of factor analysis for variable aggregation, standardized data normalization, and a longitudinal approach enabled a more precise and contextually relevant measurement of democratic dynamics over time.

The calibration of the index specifically for the Latin American reality allowed for overcoming the limitations of traditional indicators, providing a more refined understanding of regional democratic processes.

The creation and application of the IDEAL index offers a transformative approach to evaluating democracy in Latin America, advancing both theoretical and empirical research. The comprehensive methodology adopted ensures that this index not only reflects democratic structures but also captures the intricate socio-political realities of the region. The results highlight the evolving nature of democracy, demonstrating its responsiveness to historical transitions, economic conditions, and institutional developments.

The study's findings reveal distinct patterns of democratization and autocratization cycles that challenge conventional narratives. Contrary to prevailing claims of a continuous decline in democracy since the late 20th century, the IDEAL index reveals a more nuanced trajectory, where democracy experienced significant advancements during the 1980s and 1990s, followed by a gradual erosion beginning in the early 2000s. This perspective allows for a reconsideration of policy strategies, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to sustain democratic progress.

The analysis of IDEAL data has brought new interpretations that contribute to understanding democratization and democratic regression in Latin America. Firstly, it was observed that democracies with greater civic participation and direct participation mechanisms tend to show greater resilience to political crises. The presence of referendums and plebiscites, for example, correlates positively with institutional stability. Moreover, the data suggest that the assumed linear trend of democratic backsliding is not entirely sustained, as the region experienced a period of stability in the early 2000s, followed by a more evident erosion from the mid-2010s. This finding points to the necessity of considering both global and regional contextual variables when assessing democratic evolution.

Another significant finding relates to the discrepancy between formal rights and effective rights. While many countries achieve high scores in institutional indicators, the persistence of political inequality and limited equitable access to justice indicate that substantive democracy still faces structural challenges. This distinction reinforces the importance of public policies that strengthen not only institutions but also the guarantee of fundamental rights.

The cross-validation with other democracy indices strengthens the reliability of IDEAL, demonstrating its robustness in capturing democratic variations across different contexts. The statistical validation techniques employed, including factor analysis and comparative assessments, ensure that the index is both methodologically sound and empirically relevant. This statistical approach, combined with historical and institutional contextualization, allows for a more refined understanding of democratic dynamics in the region.

From a policy perspective, these findings underscore the importance of strengthening democratic institutions, protecting political freedoms, and ensuring active civic participation. The insights provided by this study contribute to the broader discourse on governance and democratization, offering a critical tool for researchers, policymakers, and international organizations engaged in promoting democracy in Latin America.

Given these considerations, the IDEAL index not only broadens the understanding of democracy in Latin America but also provides an analytical framework for academic research and a practical instrument for public policy formulation. By bridging historical analysis with contemporary political developments, this study advances the understanding of democracy in the region and opens new avenues for future research.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Historical-Democratic Context of Latin America

The 20th century was marked by significant democratic instability in Latin America, characterized by political upheavals, coups d'état, authoritarian regimes, and economic challenges. One of the main factors contributing to this scenario was the legacy of colonialism and the subsequent struggle for independence. Although most Latin American countries achieved emancipation from European powers in the early 19th century, the development of stable democratic institutions was often hindered by internal divisions, fragile economies, and external interference. These conditions created a fertile environment for political instability and frequent changes in power.

Another determining factor was the deep social and economic inequality that has historically characterized the region. The concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small elite resulted in significant socioeconomic disparities, fueling instability and driving popular movements against established political orders.

Political instability manifested in various nations throughout the century. In the Dominican Republic, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina's dictatorship began in 1930 and lasted until his assassination in 1961. Following this period, Juan Bosch was democratically elected, but his government was interrupted by a military coup led by General Elías Wessin after only seven months. In 1965, the Dominican Civil War and U.S. intervention led to a new electoral process in 1966, resulting in the democratic election of Joaquín Balaguer. In Nicaragua, the Somoza family's dictatorship began in 1934 after a coup by Anastasio Somoza García and lasted until the Sandinista Revolution in 1979. In Peru, General Manuel Odría led a coup in 1948 and remained in power until 1956. In Venezuela, the military took control of the government in 1945, maintaining power until January 1958, when General Marcos Pérez Jiménez was forced to leave the country.

Political instability in Latin America was also influenced by the geopolitical context of the Cold War, which intensified the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union for global hegemony. The United States directly intervened in the region, often supporting authoritarian regimes under the pretext of containing the communist threat. A notable example was the intervention in Guatemala in 1954 through Operation PBSUCCESS, which resulted in the overthrow of the democratically elected president Jacobo Árbenz. That same year, Paraguay,

already weakened by decades of political crisis, came under the rule of dictator Alfredo Stroessner, who remained in power until the general elections of 1988.

Instability was also evident in Honduras, where, starting in 1955, the country experienced successive military governments during the period known as Military Reformism. That year, President Julio Lozano Díaz was deposed in a coup. In 1963, General Oswaldo López Arellano took power after ousting Ramón Villeda Morales, ruling until 1971. After a brief civilian government led by Ramón Ernesto Cruz, López Arellano staged another coup in 1972, extending military rule until 1981, when Roberto Suazo Córdova was elected by popular vote, marking the beginning of a new democratic era in the country.

The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were particularly marked by the rise of military dictatorships in several Latin American countries. In Argentina, after the ousting of Juan Domingo Perón in 1955, a new coup in 1966 established the dictatorship known as the Argentine Revolution, which, unlike previous regimes, did not present itself as a transitional government but rather as a permanent model of governance.

During this period, long-lasting military dictatorships were established in countries such as Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Paraguay. In Brazil, the military coup that deposed President João Goulart occurred in 1964 and remained in effect until 1985, when José Sarney assumed the presidency, marking the beginning of the New Republic. In Bolivia, the 1964 coup led to a succession of three distinct military regimes: the government of René Barrientos, followed by Hugo Banzer, and later the narco-military dictatorship of Luis García Meza. In Chile, a military dictatorship was established in 1973 following a coup led by General Augusto Pinochet, which overthrew the democratically elected president, Salvador Allende. This regime remained in power until 1990. In Uruguay, a coup in 1973 led to a military dictatorship that lasted until 1985.

Despite this history of instability, it is important to highlight that, in recent decades, Latin America has made significant progress toward democratic consolidation, with most countries establishing more stable institutions and more resilient political systems.

Appendix 2: Democracy indicators

POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY			
Indicator	Definition	Question	Answer

Plebiscite allowed	Measures put to a vote by the legislative and/or executive.	Is there a legal provision for plebiscites?	0: Not allowed. 1: Allowed, but not binding (or with institutional veto intervention). 2: Allowed and mandatory.
Referendums allowed	Measures put to a vote through a citizen petition process, not by the legislative or executive branch.	Is there a legal provision for referendums?	0: Not allowed. 1: Allowed, but not binding (or with institutional veto intervention). 2: Allowed and mandatory.
Clean elections	Free and fair denotes the absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, intimidation of the opposition by the government, vote buying and electoral violence.	To what extent are elections free and fair?	Between 0 (low) and 1 (high)
Autonomy of the electoral management body	The election management body refers to any body (or bodies) tasked with administering national elections.	Does the Electoral Management Body have government autonomy to apply electoral laws and administrative rules impartially in national elections?	0: No. The EMB is controlled by the incumbent government, the military, or another de facto governing body. 1: A little. The EMB has some autonomy on some issues, but on critical issues influencing the outcome of elections, the EMB is partial to the de facto governing body. 2: Ambiguous. The EMB has some autonomy, but it is also partial, and it is unclear to what extent this influences the outcome of the election. 3: Almost. The EMB has autonomy and acts with impartiality almost all the time. It can be influenced by the de facto governing body in some minor ways that do not influence the outcome of elections. 4: Yes. The EMB is autonomous and impartially applies electoral laws and administrative rules.
Capacity of the electoral management body	The election management body refers to any body (or bodies) tasked with administering national elections.	Does the Election Management Body have sufficient staff and resources to administer a well-run national election?	0: No. There are evident staffing, financial, or other resource deficits that affect the organization throughout the territory.

			<p>1: Not really. The deficits are not glaring, but they have seriously compromised the organization of administratively well-conducted elections in many parts of the country.</p> <p>2: Ambiguous. There may be serious deficiencies that compromise the organization of the election, but it may also be the product of human errors and coincidences or other factors beyond the control of EMB.</p> <p>3: Mostly. There are partial deficits of resources, but they are not serious or widespread.</p> <p>4: Yes. The EMB has adequate personnel and other resources to administer a well-conducted election.</p>
Election takes office	The winners of the elections take office	After this national election, did the winners take office according to the prescribed constitutional rules and norms?	<p>0: No. The official winner of the election was prevented from taking office by unconstitutional means.</p> <p>1: Partially. The official winner/winning party or the largest vote-getter was forced, at least in part, by unconstitutional means to share power or delay the possession of power for more than 6 months.</p> <p>2: Yes. Constitutional rules and norms were followed and the official winner/winning party or largest elector took office accordingly (or continued in office).</p>
Electoral boycotts	A boycott is a deliberate and public refusal to participate in an election by a candidate or party who is qualified to participate.	In this national election, did any registered opposition candidates or parties boycott?	<p>0: Total. All opposition parties and candidates boycotted the election.</p> <p>1: Significant. Some, but not all, opposition parties or candidates boycotted, but constituted an important opposition force.</p> <p>2: Ambiguous. Some, but not all, opposition parties or candidates boycotted,</p>

			<p>but it is unclear whether they would have constituted a major electoral force.</p> <p>3: Minor. Some opposition parties or candidates boycotted and were relatively insignificant.</p> <p>4: Nonexistent. No party or candidate boycotted the elections.</p>
Free and fair election	<p>The only thing that should not be considered in the codification is the extent of suffrage (by law). Thus, a free and fair election can take place even if the law excludes significant groups (an issue measured separately).</p>	<p>Considering all aspects of the pre-election period, Election Day, and the post-election process, would you consider this national election free and fair?</p>	<p>0: No, not at all. The elections were fundamentally flawed and the official results had little or nothing to do with the 'will of the people' (i.e. who became president; or who won the legislative majority).</p> <p>1: Not really. While the elections allowed for some competition, the irregularities ultimately affected the outcome of the election (i.e., who became president; or who won a legislative majority).</p> <p>2: Ambiguous. There was substantial competition and freedom of participation, but also significant irregularities. It is difficult to determine whether or not the irregularities affected the outcome (as defined above).</p> <p>3: Yes, a little. There were deficiencies and some degree of fraud and irregularities, but this did not affect the final result (as defined above).</p> <p>4: Yes. There was some human error and logistical constraints, but largely unintentional and without significant consequences.</p>
Free election campaign media	<p>The media can be: Printed (magazines, newspapers); Broadcasting (television, radio); Direct mail (catalogs, postcards) or Out of Home (billboards, flyers, gables, among others).</p>	<p>In this national election, did the parties or candidates receive free or publicly funded access to the national broadcast media?</p>	<p>0: No party or only the ruling party has free access.</p> <p>1: Some parties, besides the governing party, have free access.</p> <p>2: All parties receive free access.</p>

Intimidation of the electoral government	Other types of civil violence that are clearly distinguishable, even if politically motivated, during the election period should not be considered when scoring this indicator (it is treated separately).	In this national election, were opposition candidates/parties/campaign workers subjected to repression, intimidation, violence, or harassment by the government, the ruling party, or its agents?	<p>0: Yes. The repression and intimidation by the government or its agents was so strong that the entire period was peaceful.</p> <p>1: Yes, frequent: There was systematic, frequent and violent harassment and intimidation of the opposition by the government or its agents during the election period.</p> <p>2: Yes, some. There was periodic, unsystematic, but possibly centrally coordinated harassment and intimidation of the opposition by the government or its agents.</p> <p>3: Contained. There have been sporadic cases of violent harassment and intimidation by the government or its agents, in at least one part of the country, and directed at only one or two local branches of opposition groups.</p> <p>4: None. There was no harassment or intimidation of the opposition by the government or its agents during the election campaign period and on voting day.</p>
The losers of the election accept the results		Did the defeated parties and candidates accept the result of this national election in three months?	<p>0: None. None of the defeated parties or candidates accepted the results of the election, or all opposition was banned.</p> <p>1: Some. Some, but not all of the defeated parties or candidates, accepted the results, but those who constituted the main opposition force did not.</p> <p>2: Some. Some, but not all opposition parties or candidates, accepted the results, but it is unclear whether they constituted a large opposition force or were relatively insignificant.</p> <p>3: The majority. Many, but not all opposition parties</p>

		<p>or candidates accepted the results and those who did not had little electoral support.</p> <p>4: All. All parties and candidates accepted the results.</p>
Multiparty elections	Was this national election multiparty?	<p>0: No. No party or single party and there is no meaningful competition (includes situations where some parties are legal but all are in fact controlled by the dominant party).</p> <p>1: Not really. No single party or party (defined as above), but multiple candidates from the same party and/or independents vie for legislative seats or the presidency.</p> <p>2: Restricted. At least one real opposition party can contest, but competition is highly restricted --- legally or informally.</p> <p>3: Almost. Elections are multiparty in principle, but one of the main opposition parties is barred (de jure or de facto) from running, or conditions such as civil unrest (excluding natural disasters) preclude competition in a part of the territory.</p> <p>4: Yes. Elections are multiparty, although some fringe parties may not be allowed to run (e.g., far-right/left-wing extremists, religious anti-democratic, or ethnic parties).</p>

POLITICAL EQUALITY			
Power distributed by gender	Difference in political power distributed between men and women	Is political power distributed according to gender?	0: Men have a near monopoly on political power.

			<p>1: Men have a dominant control over political power. Women have only marginal influence.</p> <p>2: Men have much more political power, but women have some areas of influence.</p> <p>3: Men have slightly more political power than women.</p> <p>4: Men and women have roughly the same political power.</p>
Power distributed by sexual orientation	<p>This issue contrasts (A) the political power of heterosexual and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) members of politics who are not open about their sexuality with (B) the political power of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) members of politics who are open about their sexuality. (A) will be referred to as ~heterosexual~ and (B) as ~LGBT~. Note that when comparing the political power of these two groups, we are comparing their power per person. So when we say that LGBT people have less, equal or more power than heterosexuals, we mean in relation to their share of the population (as close as that can be estimated).</p>	<p>To what extent is political power distributed according to sexual orientation?</p>	<p>0: LGBTs are totally excluded from the public sphere and therefore deprived of any real political power (even if they possess formal powers such as voting).</p> <p>1: LGBTs have much less political power than heterosexuals. LGBTs enjoy formal rights to participate in politics, but they are subject to informal norms that often serve to exclude them from the corridors of power.</p> <p>2: LGBTs have slightly less political power than heterosexual citizens.</p> <p>3: LGBTs have roughly the same political power as heterosexuals. Each group enjoys a degree of political power that is roughly proportional to its population.</p> <p>4: LGBTs enjoy slightly more political power than heterosexuals by virtue of greater wealth, education, and a high level of organization and mobilization.</p>
Power distributed by social group	<p>A social group is differentiated within a country by caste, ethnicity, language, race, region, religion, or some combination thereof. (Does not include identities based on sexual orientation or socioeconomic status.)</p>	<p>Is political power distributed according to social groups?</p>	<p>0: Political power is monopolized by a social group comprising a minority of the population. This monopoly is institutionalized, that is, it</p>

	<p>Social group identity is defined contextually and is likely to vary between countries and over time. Social group identities also tend to be crossed, so that a given person can be defined in various ways, i.e., as part of multiple groups. However, at any point in time, there are social groups within a society that are understood—by those who reside in that society—to be different, in ways that may be politically relevant.</p>	<p>is not subject to frequent changes.</p> <p>1: Political power is monopolized by various social groups that constitute a minority of the population. This monopoly is institutionalized, that is, it is not subject to frequent changes.</p> <p>2: Political power is monopolized by various social groups that constitute the majority of the population. This monopoly is institutionalized, that is, it is not subject to frequent changes.</p> <p>3: Either all social groups possess some political power, with some groups having more power than others; or different social groups alternate in power, with one group controlling much of the political power for a period of time, followed by another --- but all significant groups have once in the seat of power.</p> <p>4: All social groups have approximately the same political power or there are no strong ethnic, caste, linguistic, racial, religious, or regional differences worth mentioning. The characteristics of social groups are not relevant to politics.</p>
Power distributed by socioeconomic position	<p>All societies are characterized by some degree of economic inequality (wealth and income). In some societies, income and wealth are grossly unequally distributed. In others, the gap between rich and poor is not so great. Here, we are concerned not with the degree of social inequality,</p>	<p>Is political power distributed according to socioeconomic position?</p> <p>0: Rich people enjoy a virtual monopoly of political power. Ordinary and poorer people have almost no influence.</p> <p>1: Rich people enjoy a dominant position in political power. Middle-income people have little to say. The poorest people have virtually no influence.</p>

	but with the political effects of this inequality. Specifically, we are concerned with the extent to which wealth and income translate into political power.		<p>2: Rich people have very strong political power. Middle- or low-income people have some degree of influence, but only on issues that matter less to rich people.</p> <p>3: Rich people have more political power than others. But middle-income people have almost the same influence, and poor people also have a significant degree of political power.</p> <p>4: Rich people have no more political power than those whose economic status is middle or poor. Political power is more or less distributed equally among economic groups.</p>
Rigorous and impartial public administration	<p>This question focuses on the extent to which public officials generally comply with the law and treat similar cases, or, conversely, the extent to which public administration is characterized by arbitrariness and prejudice (i.e., nepotism, nepotism, or discrimination). The issue covers civil servants who deal with the cases of ordinary people. If there is no public administration in operation, the lowest score (0) applies.</p>	Are civil servants strict and impartial in the performance of their duties?	<p>0: The law is not respected by public officials. Arbitrary or biased administration of the law is rampant.</p> <p>1: The law is little respected by public officials. Arbitrary or biased administration of the law is widespread.</p> <p>2: The law is modestly respected by public officials. The arbitrary or biased administration of the law is moderate.</p> <p>3: The law is mostly respected by public officials. Arbitrary or biased administration of the law is limited.</p> <p>4: The law is generally fully respected by public officials. The arbitrary or biased administration of the law is very limited.</p>

INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

Access to justice		Do citizens enjoy safe and effective access to justice?	Between 0 (low) and 1 (high)
Political assassinations	Political assassinations are assassinations committed	Is there freedom from political assassinations?	0: Not respected by public authorities. Political

	by the state or its agents without due process of law with the aim of eliminating political opponents. These deaths are the result of the deliberate use of lethal force by police, security forces, prison guards, or other agents of the state (including paramilitary groups).		assassinations are carried out systematically and are usually incited and approved by the main leaders of the government. 1: Little respected by public authorities. Political assassinations are frequently carried out, and top government leaders are not actively working to prevent them. 2: Little respected by public authorities. Political assassinations are occasionally practiced, but are not typically incited and approved by top government leaders. 3: Most respected by public authorities. Political assassinations are carried out in a few isolated cases, but are not incited or approved by the top government leaders. 4: Fully respected by public authorities. Political assassinations are nonexistent.
Torture	Torture refers to the deliberate application of extreme pain, whether mental or physical, with the aim of extracting information or intimidating victims, who are in a state of incarceration. Here, we are concerned about torture by state officials or other state agents (e.g., police, security forces, prison guards, and paramilitary groups).	Is there freedom from torture?	0: Not respected by public authorities. Torture is practiced systematically and is incited and approved by government leaders. 1: Little respected by public authorities. Torture is often practiced, but it is often not incited or approved by top government leaders. At the same time, government leaders are not actively working to prevent it. 2: A little. Torture is practiced occasionally, but is not usually approved by top government leaders. 3: Most respected by public authorities. Torture is practised in a few isolated cases, but is not incited or endorsed by key government leaders.

			4: Fully respected by public authorities. Torture is non-existent.
Freedom of academic and cultural expression	Is there academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression related to political issues?	<p>0: Not respected by public authorities. Censorship and intimidation are frequent. Academic activities and cultural expressions are severely restricted or controlled by the government.</p> <p>1: Little respected by public authorities. Academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression are practiced occasionally, but direct criticism of the government is usually met with repression.</p> <p>2: Little respected by public authorities. Academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression are routinely practiced, but strong criticism of the government is sometimes met with repression.</p> <p>3: Most respected by public authorities. There are few limitations on academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression, and the resulting sanctions tend to be rare and lenient.</p> <p>4: Fully respected by public authorities. There are no restrictions on academic freedom or cultural expression.</p>	
Freedom of discussion	<p>This indicator specifies the extent to which citizens are able to engage in private discussions, particularly on political issues, in private homes and public spaces, restaurants, public transport, sporting events, work, etc., without fear of harassment by other members of politics or public authorities. We are interested in restrictions from the government and its agents, but also in</p>	Are citizens able to openly discuss political issues in private homes and in public spaces?	Between 0 (low) and 1 (high)

	cultural restrictions or customary laws that are enforced by other members of politics, sometimes informally.		
Freedom of domestic movement	This indicator specifies the extent to which citizens can move freely, during the day and night, on public roads, between regions of a country and establish permanent residence wherever they wish. Please note that restrictions on movement may be imposed by the state and/or by informal norms and practices. Such restrictions sometimes fall on rural residents, specific social groups, or dissidents. Do not consider movement restrictions imposed on common non-political criminals. Do not consider restrictions on movement resulting from crime or agitation.	Do citizens enjoy freedom of movement and residence?	Between 0 (low) and 1 (high)
Freedom of foreign movement	This indicator specifies the extent to which citizens can move freely to and from the country and emigrate without being subject to restrictions by public authorities.	Is there freedom of foreign travel and emigration?	0: Not respected by public authorities. Citizens are rarely allowed to emigrate or travel outside the country. Transgressors (or their families) are severely punished. People discredited by the government are routinely exiled or banned from traveling. 1: Little respected by public authorities. Public authorities systematically restrict the right to travel, especially for political opponents or specific social groups. This can take the form of blanket restrictions on the length of stays abroad or visa delays/denials. 2: Poorly respected by public authorities. The right to travel for major political opponents or specific social groups is occasionally restricted, but ordinary citizens

			<p>encounter only minor restrictions.³: More respected by public authorities. Limitations on freedom of movement and residence are not directed at political opponents, but there are minor restrictions. For example, exit visas may be required, and citizens may be prohibited from traveling outside the country when accompanied by other members of their family.⁴: Fully respected by the government. The freedom of citizens to move to and from the country, as well as to emigrate and repatriate, is not restricted by public authorities.</p>
Freedom of religion	<p>This indicator specifies the extent to which individuals and groups have the right to choose a religion, change religion and practise that religion in private or in public, as well as to proselytize peacefully without being subject to restrictions by public authorities.</p>	<p>Is there freedom of religion?</p>	<p>0: Not respected by public authorities. There is almost no freedom of religion. Any kind of religious practice is prohibited or at least controlled by the government to the extent that religious leaders are appointed and submitted to public authorities, who control in some detail the activities of religious communities.</p> <p>1: Little respected by public authorities. Some elements of autonomous organized religious practices exist and are officially recognized. But significant religious communities are repressed, banned, or systematically shut down, voluntary conversions are restricted, and discrimination or intimidation of individuals or groups because of their religion is common.</p> <p>2: Little respected by public authorities. Autonomous organized religious practices exist and are officially</p>

			<p>recognized. However, smaller religious communities are repressed, banned, or systematically shut down, and/or instances of discrimination or intimidation of individuals or groups due to their religion occasionally occur.</p> <p>3: Most respected by public authorities. There are minor restrictions on freedom of religion, predominantly limited to a few isolated cases. Minority religions face denial of registration, barring foreign missionaries from entering the country, restrictions against proselytizing, or barring access to or construction of places of worship.</p> <p>4: Fully respected by public authorities. The population enjoys the right to practice any religious belief they choose. Religious groups can organize, select, and train personnel; solicit and receive contributions; publish; and participate in consultations without undue interference. If religious communities have to register, public authorities do not abuse the process to discriminate against a religion and do not restrict the right to worship prior to registration.</p>
Proprietary Rights	<p>Private property includes the right to acquire, own, inherit, and sell private property, including land. Limits on property rights may come from the state, which may legally limit rights or cease enforcing them; customary laws and practices; or religious or social norms. This question concerns the</p>	Do citizens enjoy the right to private property?	Between 0 (low) and 1 (high)

	right to private property, not the actual ownership of property.		
Transparent laws with predictable enforcement	This question focuses on the transparency and predictability of the country's laws.	Are the laws of the country clear, well-publicized, coherent (consistent with each other), relatively stable from year to year, and applied in a predictable manner?	<p>0: Transparency and predictability are almost non-existent. The laws of the land are created and/or applied in a completely arbitrary manner.</p> <p>1: Transparency and predictability are severely limited. The laws of the land are often created and/or applied arbitrarily.</p> <p>2: Transparency and predictability are somewhat limited. The country's laws are mostly created non-arbitrarily, but enforcement is quite arbitrary in some parts of the country.</p> <p>3: Transparency and predictability are quite strong. The laws of the land are usually created and applied in a non-arbitrary manner.</p> <p>4: Transparency and predictability are very strong. The laws of the land are created and applied in a non-arbitrary way.</p>

Data Source: Coppedge et al., 2023a