

**Can Democratic Innovations Improve the Quality of Democracy?
A Response from Latin America**

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Assessing the quality of democracy became a central concern in a landscape of increasing political disaffection and disenchantment with democratic institutions. Regardless of various existing explanations for the perceived decline of public trust in institutions like parties and parliaments (Dalton 2003; Inglehart 1997; Norris 2002), the conviction that reforms are necessary is shared by scholars and governments alike (Dalton, Scarrow and Cain 2003). What is not yet clear, however, is which model of “good democracy” can better countervail political disillusionment and enhance the quality of democracy everywhere it has grown roots.

In a major work, Diamond and Morlino (2005) concluded that a particular type of democracy seems better suited to higher democratic quality, namely, one that generates and facilitates high levels of participation and competition. That the latter perform as the “engines of democratic quality” (Morlino 2011) indicates that Dahl’s (1971) concept of polyarchy still remains central to measurements. The question, however, is not whether high participation and competition can boost the quality of democracy, but *how* this result can be attained. Reflecting on this, the scholars point to a crucial problem: “Is it enough to financially support representative channels, such as parties, and have a constitutional design and an electoral system that allow for participation and competition? Or do we need new and more creative recipes?” (2005: xxxvii).

This paper assumes that new and more creative recipes for democratic quality are indeed necessary, and seeks to investigate them in representative channels that include more than political parties, as well as in constitutional designs that allow for participation and competition beyond elections. I will thus turn to the so-called “democratic innovations”, new institutional designs that aim at increasing citizen participation in the political decision-making process (Goodin 2008; Smith 2009). These innovations lie at the core of democratic governance programs (Gaventa 2002; Fischer 2011) and have been increasingly implemented around the world, although with diverse institutional designs and scopes (Johnson and Gastil 2015). The varying success achieved by democratic innovations points to questions scholars have not yet been able to answer: what makes democratic innovations effective? And what impact (if any) they have on the quality of democracy?

This paper will address this problem. That democratic innovations are a response to political disillusionment (Dalton, Scarrow and Cain 2003) and a possible cure for the malaises of representative democracy (Selee and Peruzzotti 2009; Geissel and Newton 2012) are not new arguments. The potential of democratic innovations to deepen democracy (Fung and Wright 2003) or to improve its quality (Geissel 2009; Geissel and Joas 2013) is also not an unknown claim. However, scholarships on democratic innovations and on quality of democracy have grown divorced (Geissel and Mayne 2013), and each presents shortcomings that hinder joint efforts to creatively devise new recipes for coping with democratic deficits.

On the one hand, there is little comparative empirical research on the impact of democratic innovations, and the relative few existing case studies are mostly limited to small-scale, local level

experiments. Democratic theory has been overly concerned with how the institutional design of participatory innovations realizes the values of deliberation, overlooking their outcomes and consequences on democracy at the macro level (Pogrebinschi and Ryan 2014). Moreover, no standards to gauge the actual impact of democratic innovations on the several dimensions of the quality of democracy have yet been developed, as there are yet no objective criteria to assess the diversity of institutional designs evolved in very different political systems and social contexts. This leaves open the question of whether democratic innovations may impact on macro-level politics, and thus have an effect on the quality of democracy.

On the other hand, assessments of quality of democracy consistently disregard the existence of democratic innovations and the role they play on political systems, especially when interacting with the institutions of representative democracy. Most measurements and indices simply do not account for political reforms undertaken by national and sub-national governments with the aim of expanding opportunities for citizen participation. Several of these reforms institutionalized democratic innovations, or redesigned institutions so as to further include citizens in the policy process. These new designs and institutional changes are not grasped by most indicators, which still measure participation mainly based on electoral turnout and voting rights, in addition to standard forms of association, protest or petition signing. Without a more comprehensive and updated understanding of participation, existing measurements cannot properly estimate the actual weight of this “engine of democratic quality”, as well as gauge its relation to other democratic qualities, like competition, responsiveness or equality.

This paper aims at contributing to fill the gaps mentioned above, bringing together democratic innovations and quality of democracy research agendas. It proposes an analytical framework to assess the impact of participatory innovations on the quality of democracy. In order to do that, I offer first some indicators to assess the institutionalization of democratic innovations, and argue that in order to impact on the quality of democracy the latter must institutionalize non-electoral participation by meeting three criteria: feasibility, inclusiveness and effectiveness. I will then argue that once democratic innovations expand the institutional opportunities for non-electoral participation, they may impact on different dimensions of the quality of democracy. Relying on evidence from some Latin America countries, I will finally look specifically to three of these dimensions: responsiveness, competition and equality. The paper concludes with the claim that participatory innovations may only be a recipe of political reform able to increase the quality of democracy if the new non-electoral means of participation are institutionalized within the representative system.

Recasting Participation

As citizens expect more from democracy and its institutions, governments seek ways of devolving decision-making into society, and the political landscape becomes more favorable to participatory ideals (Warren 2002). Aiming at enhancing participation, democratic innovations have been multiplying across continents and countries displaying an enormous variety of new institutional designs. The most known and studied innovations include citizens’ assemblies (Canada, Ireland, Finland, United States, United Kingdom, Estonia, Iceland), citizens’ juries (Australia, United States, Germany, Canada, France, etc.), citizens’ parliaments (Australia, United Kingdom, Ireland, etc), e-

parliaments (Brazil, Argentina, etc.), citizens panels (Denmark, England, Germany, Canada, Mexico, etc.), citizens initiatives (Switzerland, Germany, Uruguay, Brazil, etc.), citizens monitoring (Mexico, Argentina, Dominican Republic, etc.) consensus conferences (Denmark, Germany, Japan, United States, etc.), community councils (Venezuela, Colombia, United Kingdom, etc), deliberative pooling (United States, England, Australia, etc.), neighborhood governance councils (United States, France, Uruguay, etc.), participatory budgeting (Brazil, Argentina, Portugal, Spain, Italy, etc.), digital participatory budgeting (Brazil, Argentina, etc.), participatory urban planning (India, Brazil, Germany, Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, etc.), public policy conferences (Brazil), policy councils (Mexico, Brazil, etc.), referendum (Switzerland, Italia, Uruguay, etc.), e-democracy processes (Sweden, United States, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Panama, etc.), crowdsourcing legislation (Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Argentina, etc.), public policy workshops (Ecuador, El Salvador, etc.), rural development projects (Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, etc.), recall (Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, etc.), plebiscites (Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, Indonesia, Denmark, Ireland, Switzerland, etc.), and social audits (Mexico, Argentina, India, etc.), among many other new institutional designs not yet covered by the scholarship and existing databases.

The tasks assigned to citizens are as varied as the new institutional designs. Lay people and civil society organizations are entitled to set the policy agenda along with governments, giving recommendations or making decisions on public expenditure prioritizing, reallocation of budgetary provisions, management of local resources, policy planning, design and implementation of urban and rural development projects, and the like (Cameron, Hershberg and Sharpe 2012; Fung 2011; Geissel and Joas 2013; Selee and Peruzzotti 2009; Smith 2009). The ascribed aims of enhanced citizen participation are also multifarious, yet democratic innovations usually revolve around addressing failures of specific administrative organs, monitoring and improving institutional performance, fixing the delivery public goods and services, enhancing transparency and social accountability, defining public budget priorities, including affected citizens and minority groups in public decisions, among many others.

Accordingly, a large volume of scholarship ranging from democratic theory to public administration have been claiming that participatory and deliberative models of democracy find in the new institutional designs a chance to correct the purported flaws of liberal, representative democracy. While theorists have over the last years redefined the concepts of participation and representation in order to meet the new challenges posed by democratic innovations (Mansbridge 2003; Urbinati 2006; Urbinati and Warren 2008; Saward 2008), comparativists have not yet paid sufficient attention to the need to revise how participation is conceptualized and measured as an indicator of democracy and its quality. Most democracy surveys and indices still lack a concept of participation that acknowledges its non-electoral dimension and the variety of new participatory designs implemented around the world.

Neglecting the existence of participation beyond elections, concepts of participation used in democracy measurements amount to a minimalist (Schumpeter 1942) or, at most, pluralist (Dahl 1956) model of democracy. Aiming at moving further from Dahl, Altman and Pérez-Liñán (2002) claim that participation and competition should be evaluated not merely as rights but as effective exercise of rights, and propose a new measure to capture effective participation, which nevertheless consist in redefining electoral turnout as the number of voters over the voting-age population. Levine and Molina (2011) also measure participation by quantifying electoral participation (voting

turnout), but add to the account the existing opportunities to vote, participation in political organizations, and the representativity of institutions. Diamond and Morlino (2005) concede that voter turnout rates “captures only one aspect of democratic participation”, however their definition of participation does not comprise more than the kind of activities facilitated by membership in parties and political organizations. It does not account for the worldwide spread of participatory innovations, underestimating their impact on the very institutions of representative democracy.

Morlino and Katz gave an important step forward by considering forms of participation “with regard to specific policies and deliberative democracy arenas” (2013:14). They advance a quite broad definition of participation as “the entire set of behaviors, be they conventional or unconventional, legal or borderline vis-à-vis legality, that allows women and men, as individuals or a group, to create, revive or strengthen group identification or to try to influence the recruitment of, and decisions by, political authorities (the representative and/or governmental ones) in order to maintain or change the allocation of existing values” (Idem). Their definition allows for empirical assessment of conventional (elections, referendum, membership in political organizations and associations) and non-conventional forms of participation (strike, demonstrations, riots). But it tends to equal non-electoral forms of participation with non-conventional forms of participation, which implies to equal participation in demonstrations or riots, for example, with participation in “deliberative democracy arenas”. The latter modality of participation, however, entails a specific institutional design, which, regardless of its various possible forms (Fung 2006), cannot be equaled to borderline participation in protests, riots and the like.

Following the scholarship, almost all measurements of democracy and its quality rely on a very narrow concept of participation. Most democracy indices and surveys define participation as meaning primarily voting. Electoral turnout and exercise of political rights are the main and most usual indicators, present in all measurements. Many indices also include assembling and organizing among their indicators of participation, measuring access to government offices and membership in political parties and civil society associations. The widely used Freedom House index only takes into account the former type of membership, leaving aside membership to organizations other than political parties. Fewer measurements consider protesting and demonstration a form of participation. Examples are the World Values Survey and the European and Latino Barometers, which measure participation also by asking citizens whether they sign petitions, join boycotts, or attend demonstrations. The European Social Survey asks citizens a couple of questions about how they rate their ability to participate and influence politics, but don’t give them a chance to say exactly how. The non-electoral means of participation are listed in a separate question as “ways of trying to improve things or help prevent things from going wrong” (ESS7 Main Questionnaire, questions B11 to B17), and comprise no more than forms of association, campaigning, petition signing, demonstration and boycott. The use of direct democracy mechanisms is rarely comprised by surveys and measurements. The Democracy Barometer is an exception, as it takes participation in referendums along with elections as a form of effective institutionalized participation. It reduces, however, the scope of the concept of participation it advances by considering only demonstrations and petition signing as forms of effective non-institutionalized participation.

The debate has moved considerably forward with Coppedge, Gerring et al (2011), and their recent Varieties of Democracy Project. The V-Dem presents itself as a new approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy, distinguishing between seven principles of democracy.

Among these are the participatory and deliberative principles, which are expected to capture the impact of democratic innovations. The V-Dem asks its thousands of country experts in separate questions the extent to which the ideals of participatory democracy and deliberative democracy are achieved. It makes clear that the participatory principle of democracy “emphasizes active participation by citizens in all political processes, electoral and non-electoral” (Coppedge, Gerring et al 2015: 31). As for the deliberative principle, it takes into account that democracy “requires more than an aggregation of existing preferences. There should also be respectful dialogue at all levels – from preference formation to final decision – among informed and competent participants who are open to persuasion” (Coppedge, Gerring et al 2015: 32). While the V-Dem intent to include participation and deliberation in the measurement of democracy is a blow of fresh air, its highly abstract and quite normative conceptualizations may present some operationalization problems and fail to capture the empirical experiments with democratic innovations.

While the V-Dem asks country experts the extent to which the *ideals* of participatory and deliberative democracy are achieved, it may fail to grasp where and how those ideals have been materialized. The new institutional designs that aim at enhancing citizen participation and promoting deliberation often do so by adapting the once normative principles behind their creation. Democratic innovations often combine the ideals of both participatory democracy and deliberative democracy, and such combination can happen in a quite pragmatic way, that is through the adjustment of those ideals to the existing institutions of representative democracy (Pogrebinschi 2013). This means that the ideal of participatory democracy, in real existing democracies, will not necessarily be translated as an “uneasiness about delegating authority to representatives” or the fact that “direct rule by citizens is preferred wherever practicable”(Coppedge, Gerring et al 2015: 32). Most existing participatory innovations are result of co-governance processes, where elected representatives or public administrators include citizens and civil society organizations in the political process. There is no direct rule by citizens, and those depend on the authority of representatives to have the outcomes of participatory processes turned into binding political decisions. The V-Dem will thus fail to capture the richness of citizen participation if it only focuses on “engagement in civil society organizations, direct democracy, and subnational elected bodies” (Idem). V-Dem’s country experts must be aware of the vast array of new participatory designs that most of the times grow within the boundaries of representative democracies by pragmatically adapting the participatory ideal.

The same is true for the “deliberative principle”, which according to the V-Dem “focuses on the process by which decisions are reached in a polity” (Idem). However, in real existing democracies the deliberative principle is actually often converted into a method of will-formation/opinion-formation within the new participatory designs. The quantity of democratic innovations that use a form of deliberation as a method for arriving at decisions is considerable (citizens assemblies, panels, juries, policy councils, participatory budgeting, etc.), but fewer do reach conclusions without additionally employing a form of voting. Moreover, a number of the new participatory designs that engage citizens in deliberation do not aim exactly at a decision, and even less are entitled to take binding decisions. Although V-Dem’s definition of deliberation as processes “in which public reasoning focused on the common good motivates political decisions as contrasted with emotional appeals, solidary attachments, parochial interests, or coercion” (Idem) do translate well the very normative requirements of deliberative democracy theory, its measurements will certainly fall short of capturing the quite pragmatic use of deliberation that are found today in the new participatory

designs. In many cases, when citizens and government representatives seat together to discuss problems, priorities, suggestions and solutions, as well as to collaboratively implement a certain policy or program, deliberation is assumed to take place.

Participation today thus comprises deliberation and do also encompasses forms of “citizen representation” (Brown 2006, Warren 2008). It amounts to more than voting, assembling, protesting, and lobbying. It also entails more than petitioning and demanding justification. Participation implies likewise more than just to validate or veto a previously framed policy, such as happens in most referendums and plebiscites. It is also not just about choosing candidates and holding them accountable through elections. Participation is also about *engaging* in policymaking, *having a say* on policy formulation, and *taking part into* policy implementation. In several countries today, participatory innovations allow citizens to become directly involved in public administration and governance, having a role in the design, implementation, and control over public policy. Without acknowledging all of those contemporary dimensions of participation, research on quality of democracy will be “increasingly subject to the limitations we should expect when nineteenth-century concepts meet twenty-first century realities” (Warren 2001).

Institutionalizing Democratic Innovations

A more comprehensive and updated concept of participation should take into account its non-electoral dimension. However, such non-electoral dimension does not imply that participation is necessarily and exclusively “unconventional”, “informal” or “non-institutionalized”, as most democracy indices assume. These labels may appropriately fit protests, demonstrations, riots, sit-ins, boycotts, advocacy campaigns, and petition signing, which are typically forms of contestation that often arise spontaneously and oppose political decisions or representative institutions. They may also sometimes be suitable to assess participation on civil society organizations, social movements, social accountability networks, and other forms of social organization and engagement. However, what is called today democratic innovations involve specific institutional designs that are distinguished for enhancing participation beyond elections. They are not mechanisms of contestation, and are not devised around the wish to oppose political decisions or representative institutions. Au contraire, those designs seek new and innovative ways for citizens to have a larger role on the decision-making process that takes place within representative systems, and thereby enhance democracy. They can be more or less institutionalized, but they must be considered on assessments of participation. Table 1 distinguishes between the electoral and non-electoral dimensions of participation, as well as the institutionalized and non-institutionalized dimensions of the latter.

Table 1: Dimensions of Participation

Participation	Electoral	Electoral turnout, voting rights, membership in political parties and other political organizations (interest groups) and associations	
	Non-electoral	Institutionalized	Citizens’ assemblies, citizens’ panels, policy councils, citizens’ initiatives, e-democracy processes, e-parliament, crowdsourcing legislation, participatory budgeting, participatory investment planning, governance committees, community councils, etc.
		Non-Institutionalized	Protests, demonstrations, strikes, riots, sit-in, boycott, advocacy campaigns, petition-signing Membership on civil society organizations, social movements and social accountability networks

Avritzer highlighted the importance of differentiating participation and participatory institutions. Defining participation as “an outcome of institutions designed to promote participation” and what “takes place within specially designed institutions” (2009:4), he argues that democratic theory misses the institutional dimension of participation and proposes a theory of participatory institutions. According to him, participatory institutions have four main characteristics: they operate simultaneously through the principles of participation and representation; they transform the voluntary features of civil society into forms of permanent political organization; they interact with political parties and state actors; and they have an institutional design which is relevant to their effectiveness (2009:8). Certainly, not all of those characteristics apply to all democratic innovations. But they call our attention to the institutional dimension of non-electoral participation and of the new participatory designs, what is crucial to assess the potential impact of the latter on the quality of democracy.

It is reasonable to expect that the opportunities for participation created by democratic innovations will have a more significant impact on the quality of democracy to the extent to which they are institutionalized. But how should one assess the institutional dimension of non-electoral participation? I propose five criteria for that: formalization, representativeness, scope, scale and decisiveness. First, institutionalized democratic innovations tend to display some degree of *formalization*. Participatory practices have been increasingly turned into more formal designs or incorporated within the existing institutions of representative democracy. When democratic innovations are not inscribed in laws or constitutions, they are often backed up by governmental policies, political reforms or parties’ platforms. Second, institutionalized democratic innovations enjoy some degree of *representativeness*, as they tend to work within or along with representative institutions, and are frequently implemented or sponsored by elected governments with varying degrees of input from civil society. They also frequently revolve around one issue or policy, what allow for consistent group organization and the representation of collective interests, in contrast to individual ones. Third, participation in the public policy process seems to be the main *scope* of institutionalized democratic innovations. The opportunities the latter provide citizens with consist in taking part in at least one of the stages of the policy cycle, that is, problem definition, agenda

setting, policy development, policy implementation and policy evaluation. Fourth, the more participatory innovations are institutionalized, the more they are not constrained by *scale*. Non-electoral participation is no longer limited to the local level and the small-scale. The new institutional designs have been gathering a growing number of participants and many have been institutionalized at the national level in recent years. As they institutionalize, democratic innovations must be able to impact on macro politics and on national policymaking even if they take place at the local-level or on the small scale. Lastly, as they institutionalize, many democratic innovations tend to yield *decisions* as a conclusion of deliberative processes, although those decisions are not always binding. Table 2 specifies some indicators to assess how non-electoral participation is institutionalized through democratic innovations.

Table 2: Measuring the Institutionalization of Democratic Innovations

	Low	Medium	High
Formalization	Not backed up by legislation or constitution nor by governmental policy or program	Backed up by governmental policy or program	Backed up by legislation or constitution
Representativeness	Implemented outside the realm of institutions of representative democracy	Implemented within the representative system, but does not work together with existing institutions	Implemented within and together with elected bodies or officials
Scope	Does not involve participation in the policy cycle	Involves participation in at least one of the stages of the policy cycle	Involves participation in more than one of the stages of the policy cycle
Scale	Institutional design prevents it from scaling up	Institutional design does not hinder scaling up	Institutional design induces scaling up
Decisiveness	Does not yield decisions	Yields non-binding decisions	Yields binding decisions

If democratic innovations are expected to impact on the quality of democracy, they are expected to match these criteria at least to some extent. The higher their institutionalization, the greater are the opportunities provided by innovations for citizens to participate, and the higher are the chances that such participation will generate political outcomes. However, the institutionalization of democratic innovations should not undermine their experimental character. Institutionalization does not prevent nor hinder experimentation. But it does raise the chance of impact.

The more the new participatory designs are institutionalized *within* or in connection *with* the representative system, the higher are their chances to have an impact. Institutional innovations that allow participation through deliberative, direct or electronic means are not categories that stand outside of or compete with representative democracy. The same is true for the new institutional venues of citizen representation that do not rely on an electoral authorization, but that result from

delegation or devolution from representative institutions. Democratic innovations expand the opportunities of participation beyond elections, but not outside the realm of representative democracy.

Assessing Democratic Innovations

Once enjoying at least a low level of institutionalization, democratic innovations can be assessed by means of three criteria: feasibility, inclusiveness and effectiveness. These dimensions differ from other evaluation frameworks, such as for example those proposed by Smith (2009), Geissel (2012) or Geissel and Mayne (2013). While Smith (2009) focus on the goods to be realized by democratic innovations (inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgment and transparency), Geissel (2012) on input-legitimacy, democratic process, effectiveness and civic education, and Geissel and Mayne (2013) concentrate on the qualities of the citizens (political capacities and democratic commitments), I focus not exclusively in the input nor in the output. The framework presented in Table 3 follows Goertz’s (2006) methodological insights on “three levels concepts”, namely, the main concept, the secondary level and the indicator/data level. The third level of each concept refers to evidence, that is, the data to be used to evaluate the fulfillment of the criteria proposed to assess democratic innovations.

Table 3: Criteria and Indicators for Assessing Democratic Innovations

Main Concept	Secondary Level	Indicators
Democratic Innovations	Feasibility	Rules and Procedures: Access and selection rules, publicity; degree of State and civil society involvement; level of civil society organization and social capital; degree of expansion and replication
	Inclusiveness	Opportunities for Participation: Absolute and relative numbers of participants accordingly to social class, gender, education level and other social indicators; opportunities for expressing and changing preferences, quality of deliberation
	Effectiveness	Success and Impact: Quantity and quality of laws and policies enacted which are congruent with democratic innovation’s decisions or recommendations; support by political parties and interest groups

Beginning with *feasibility*, the concept refers to the *rules and procedures* of democratic innovations. The assumption is that in order to be feasible – and therefore work not only under specific conditions given by a particular context – democratic innovations should be open to participation, engage state and civil society actors, and be backed up by legislation. Saying that democratic innovations should be open does not imply that they should not use a method of recruitment like random selection to gather participants. Experiments using random selection have proved to be quite feasible (as it is the cases of the British Columbia Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform and the Icelandic Constitutional Council). It also matters for the feasibility whether a given democratic innovation implies a top-down process or a bottom-up one, or rather a combination of both through the conjoint engagement of state and civil society actors. Finally, different types of

legislation and policies may back up a democratic innovation, and the important thing here is that the institutional design can be replicated and have continuity. At the indicator level, evidence should determine who can participate and in what ways, and how open the process is to citizens and civil society organizations. The data to be assessed here should refer to access rules, publicity, as well as rules and criteria of selection of participants, when that is the case. Evidence should also capture whether the experiment is organized by the state or by civil society; if by the latter, then it should indicate if alone or along with the state, and to what extent the state supports the innovation. Data should therefore indicate the degree of state and civil society involvement and support, the degree of social capital and of civil society political organization, as well as the rules and procedures of convening and implementing the innovation. Lastly, data should provide information whether the democratic innovation is backed up by law or depends on the will of governments and/or political parties. The evidence should comprise rules and other legal acts that indicate the enforcement and implementation's frequency of the innovation, as well as its ability to be expanded and replicated.

The second criterion for assessing the impact of democratic innovations is *inclusiveness*, criteria that refers to the *opportunities for participation* made available by a given democratic innovation. The assumption here is that democratic innovations allow for a more inclusive participation than the one achieved by elections, making room for low-educated and low-income citizens (as achieved by participatory budgeting in Brazil, for example), as well as for a larger presence of minority groups such as indigenous peoples (as accomplished by community organizations in Bolivia, for example). It is also expected that democratic innovations offer a more dynamic arena for the expression and transformation of citizens' preferences than elections do (planning cells in Germany, as well as deliberative pools, are examples of that). On the indicator level, evidence should show who participates, whether the participation of historically excluded and disadvantaged groups has been assured, whether citizens participate alone or in groups, and whether underrepresented groups take part in the democratic innovation. Data should indicate the absolute and relative numbers of participants accordingly to social class, gender, education and other social and cultural indicators. Organizational procedures should provide evidence of opportunities for expressing and changing preferences, as well as of the quality of deliberation itself, when such is involved.

The third and last criterion is *effectiveness*, concept that refers to the *success and impact* of democratic innovations. The idea here is that democratic innovations are effective if to some extent they impact on policies, empower citizens and groups, activate old or engender new forms of representation, and somehow improve the lives of the citizens concerned with it. Different democratic innovations may match them to different degrees, and one same democratic innovation may match them differently accordingly to variables like context and time. One example is the participatory budgeting, which achieved variable levels of effectiveness in different countries where it has been implemented (Goldfrank 2007), as well as within one same country (Avritzer 2009; Wampler 2009). It is also relevant for effectiveness whether democratic innovations are only consultative or deliberative, if they only issue recommendations or if they take decisions, and whether the latter are binding or not. The channels through which democratic innovations' recommendations and decisions are communicated to representative institutions are also important. On the indicator level, evidence should indicate whether laws and policies reflect citizen's deliberations and decisions, an indicator that democratic innovations may increase issue congruence. Data should include bills introduced in the Legislature as a result of citizens'

deliberations, corresponding laws passed that match citizens' demands, as well as policies enacted and implemented by the public administration following citizens' deliberations. Indications of support by political parties and interest groups are also relevant to measure the effectiveness of democratic innovations, as well as the existence of rules ensuring the communication and consideration of deliberative results to representative institutions and other governmental bodies.

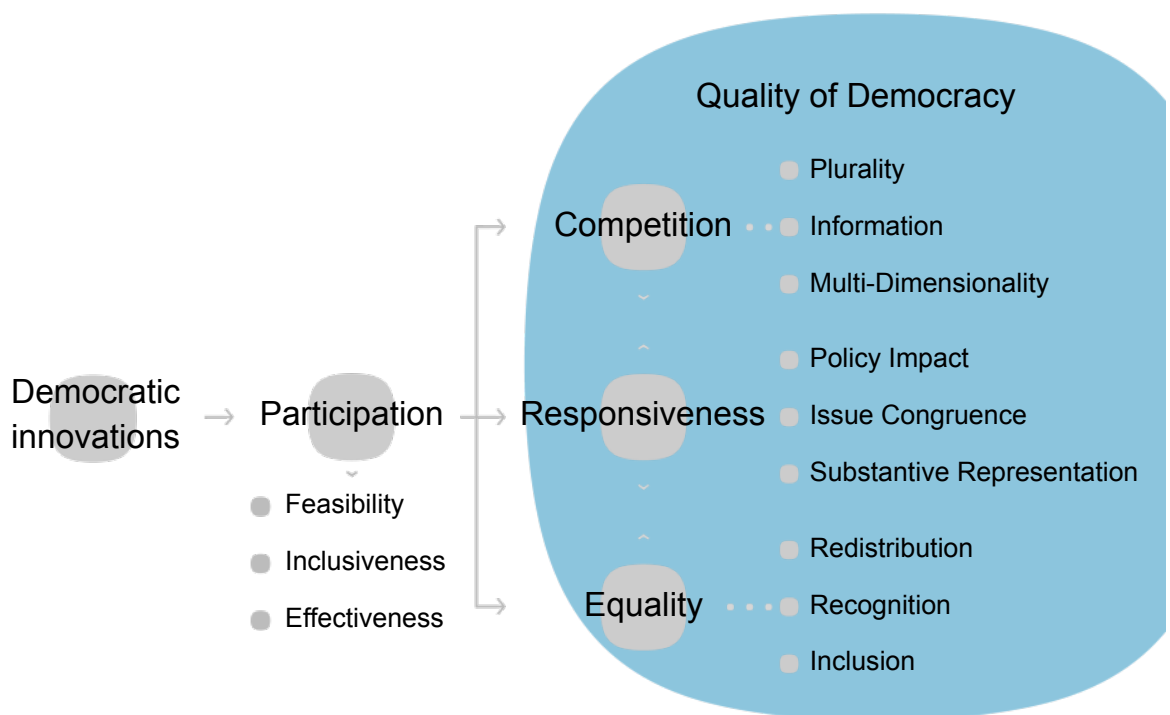
If a democratic innovation is *feasible*, then it can be replicated, that is, it may work in different contexts, and the criteria provided in the first row of table 3 allow for comparative studies among diverse experiments or diverse countries or cities that implement them. If a democratic innovation is *inclusive*, then it does fulfill its aim of bringing citizens in and allowing them to deliberate on policies that may affect their lives. In this regard, the criteria provided in the second row of table 2 allow assessments of how democratic innovations are indeed participatory and deliberative, as they usually aim and claim to be. Finally, if a democratic innovation is *effective*, then it does somehow affect policymaking, bringing about consequences on democracy. The criteria displayed in the third row of table 2 should allow case studies and comparative research to assess the impact of democratic innovations on the macro-political level, and not isolated from the representative system to which they belong. If democratic innovations prove to be feasible, inclusive and effective, they do certainly trigger non-electoral participation, and may therefore impact on quality of democracy, as I will argue in the next section.

Assessing the Impact of Democratic Innovations on the Quality of Democracy

A more comprehensive and updated concept of participation should make clear its connections with the other dimensions of the quality of democracy. If democratic innovations trigger participation, could they also enhance competition and responsiveness, for example? I suggest that, as democratic innovations turn opportunities for participation higher, the latter may increase the opportunities for competition and the chances of responsiveness, and these may also bring about more equality. The question is how to, on the one hand, achieve higher participation through non-representative channels and, on the other hand, use those channels to improve the representative channels themselves? It is crucial to assess the ability of non-electoral means of participation to make the traditional institutions of representative democracy more competitive and responsive, as well as to assess their ability to contribute to a more equal society.

In the next pages, I will propose an analytical framework to assess the impact of democratic innovations on the quality of democracy, and will provide indication of how this has been achieved in Latin America. I will focus on three out of the eight "democratic qualities" or "dimensions of quality of democracy" conceptualized by Morlino (2011) and Diamond and Morlino (2005): responsiveness, competition, and equality. I make use of Dahl's (1972) definition of competition, that is, organized contestation by political parties and organized interest groups, assuming, however, that it happens not exclusively in elections. One of the assumptions that can be verified is whether democratic innovations can raise the level of contestation of the political system by raising the plurality and the multi-dimensionality of governments and parliaments, as well as the level of information available to political parties, elected representatives, interests groups or public administrators. Such a perspective allows the dismissal of trade-offs between competition and participation. Concerning responsiveness, I adopt Powell's (2004) definition, namely, the ability of

democracies to translate citizens’ preferences into policies. Translating preference into policy can be done through elected representatives, competitive political parties, lobbies and interest groups; but it can also be achieved through democratic innovations. If democratic innovations help elected representatives to formulate policies, and if those policies are more congruent with citizens’ preferences or manage to represent groups traditionally underrepresented, then they make governmental institutions more responsive. Lastly, the analytical framework will assume that not only political equality, but also social equality matter for the quality of democracy. If by enhancing political equality democratic innovations are channels through which citizens are more included, minority groups achieve recognition and redistribution is realized, then they certainly enhance the quality of democracy.



Democratic Innovations and Responsiveness

The concept of responsiveness is “predicated on the prior emission of messages by citizens” (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999:9). A government is responsive “if it adopts policies that are signaled as preferred by citizens” (Ibid). Traditionally, those signals are given through votes for particular party platforms. If, however, today’s increasing electoral volatility implies that voters cannot justifiably expect that parties would do what they promise, by means of democratic innovations citizens may expect that their changing preferences are heard even by parties they have not voted for, but who use these non-electoral channels to increase their chances to win new voters. Democratic innovations increase the information available to elected representatives on citizens’ preferred policies, as the latter have more opportunities for signaling the policies they prefer. Furthermore, democratic innovations tend to be more dynamic and frequent as elections, thus

serving as possible means through which parties can more rapidly grasp changes on the preferences of their constituencies.

The impact of democratic innovations on responsiveness can be assessed based on three criteria: policy impact, issue congruence and substantive representation. As for the *policy impact*, what is to be assessed is the ability of governments to implement policies that translate citizens' preferences. If democratic innovations make governments more responsive, then they must impact on policymaking. This impact needs to be congruent with citizens' preferences, that is the content of policies must match that of the preferences citizens voiced through democratic innovations. Evidence on *issue congruence* must gauge the degree of congruence between policies enacted by governments and the outputs and outcomes of democratic innovations, even if their resulting deliberations and decisions were not supposed to be binding. Finally, the *substantive representation* criterion seeks to evaluate the extent to which democratic innovations turn representative institutions more sensitive to demands of minority groups and other under-represented citizens, especially those whose voice and preferences are usually not heard in elections. If democratic innovations prove to be a channel that helps minority group's preferences to be captured by elected representatives and government officials, then they can increase the responsiveness of the institution of representative democracy.

Table 3: Criteria for Assessing the Impact of Democratic Innovations on Responsiveness

Main Concept	Secondary Level	Indicators
Responsiveness	Policy Impact	Implementation of policies that translate citizens' preferences
	Issue Congruence	Enactment of laws and policies which are congruent with the issues deliberated in democratic innovations
	Substantive Representation	Ability of democratic innovations to boost the representation of minority groups and other underrepresented groups that have special needs and demands (such as women, indigenous people, and other racial and ethnic minorities)

In Mexico, participatory innovations have created new channels between citizens and elected representatives, constituting an alternative to clientelism (Selee 2009). The flourishing of participatory efforts in local governments throughout Mexico beginning in the late 1990s resulted in varied experiences with different degrees of success; however, several have reduced clientelism and constructed more public and transparent channels for citizen's voices in local affairs. Selee shows how in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl and Tijuana, for example, elected neighborhood communities and participatory planning bodies helped generate new forms of interaction between citizens and the state. In Tijuana the planning system also produced extensive public deliberation on municipal priorities and made citizens and government officials become closer. New patterns of leadership selection have been engendered, and citizens who undertook an active role in the participatory innovations eventually became part of the public administration (2009: 62-83).

Evidence of participatory innovations turning political parties more responsive is also found in Bolivia and Ecuador. Van Cott (2008) showed that experiences of indigenous parties promoting institutional innovation in local government in those countries helped mayors to establish personal

bonds of loyalty and trust with voters. Establishing participatory and deliberative innovations, indigenous-movement-based political parties achieved greater community control over elected authorities and greater transparency with respect to budgeting and spending (2008: 13). The institutional innovations implemented by the Andean indigenous parties following their own cultural traditions includes regular, frequent and open assemblies, where public spending preferences are freely exposed and jointly prioritized. Committees and working groups reuniting municipal government officials and representatives of civil society also take responsibility for decision making, oversight and implementation (2008:22). One of Van Cott's main findings is that those participatory innovations help to generate new sources of authority for weak local political institutions, as are those existing in the ethnically divided and politically unstable Andean countries (2008: 225).

Another evidence of impact of democratic innovations on responsiveness is found in Brazil. The National Public Policy Conferences (NPPC), a national-level experiment promoted by the federal Executive along with civil society organizations, gather together ordinary citizens, civil society organizations, private entrepreneurs and elected representatives from all three levels of government to deliberate together and agree on a common policy agenda for the country. The NPPCs are reported to have a significant impact on policymaking and lawmaking especially since the Workers' Party took over the federal government in 2003. Pogrebinschi and Santos (2011) found that about 20% of all legislative bills under discussion in the Brazilian federal Legislature in 2009 were congruent with recommendations of NPPCs held in the previous years. In addition to that, Pogrebinschi (2012) found that about 48% of all constitutional amendments enacted by the Brazilian Parliament after the country's redemocratization would have dealt with specific policy issues deliberated and recommended by the NPPCs.

Democratic Innovations and Competition

The impact of democratic innovations on competition can be assessed through three criteria; namely, plurality, information and multi-dimensionality. Those concepts refer to the theories of pluralism and political information, as well as to multidimensional spatial models for the analysis of legislatures and governments. *Plurality* seeks to assess the extent to which groups organize, mobilize, and become empowered as a result of democratic innovations. This includes not only civil society organizations and social movements, but also political parties. The higher the plurality displayed by different organizations and groups vis-à-vis democratic innovations, the higher the level of contestation the latter rise in the political system. *Information* aims at assessing the extent to which democratic innovations favor "cheap talk" (Crawford and Sobel 1982), raising the level of information for government officials and elected representatives regarding citizen's preferences, thereby solving informational problems. It also aims at assessing the extent to which democratic innovations work as "third-party speakers" (Lupia and McCubbins 1998), providing elected representatives and government officials with information that can raise the level of certainty of their decisions regarding the consequences of policies to be adopted. Finally, the criterion of *multi-dimensionality* serves to verify the extent to which democratic innovations can introduce new issues to the policy agenda and increase the multidimensionality of policies, so that policymaking is not reduced to disputes between coalition and opposition parties (or left or right policy programs) in a one-dimensional space. If democratic innovations help government officials

and elected representative to expand the policy options, bringing new policy issues to attention and shaping new policy areas, it certainly raises the level of the contestation of democracy. As Dahl said, “the greater the opportunities for expressing, organizing, and representing political preferences, the greater the number and variety of preferences and interest that are likely to be represented in policy making” (1971: 26).

Table 5: Criteria for Assessing the Impact of Democratic Innovations on Competition

Main Concept	Secondary Level	Indicators
Competition	Plurality	Creation of new organized groups and empowerment of already existing political parties and organizations
	Information	Ability of participatory innovations to solve information problems and facilitate decision making, raising the level of information of legislatures and governments regarding citizens’ preferences
	Multi-Dimensionality	Ability of democratic innovations to enhance the multidimensionality of governments and legislatures by introducing new issues to the policy agenda; ability to avoid that political parties’ operating exclusively in a single dimension and, therefore, lose members and voters

The extensive use of direct democracy mechanisms for dealing with questions of institutional redesign in Latin America reveals how these direct forms of participation can be used to raise the level of contestation of the political system. Beyond the attempt to correct institutional deficiencies of representative democracy (Altman 2011), forms of direct participation have been the channels through which decisions have been made on length of mandates, frequency of elections, organization of parties, and summing of constitutional assemblies, for example. Uruguay, for instance, the country that has most extensively experimented with direct democracy mechanisms, is today reputed to have the stronger representative system and the better quality of democracy in Latin America. Evidence has shown that political parties have always retained centrality throughout Uruguay’s history of direct votes. The parties’ support would have been crucial for the propositions to reach direct vote, and the initiatives not backed up by at least one party have not made it to the ballot. Lissidini (2011: 174) argues that as a result of the experience with direct democracy mechanisms new party identities have been generated in Uruguay (2011: 174).

The neighborhood communities and participatory planning bodies of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl and Tijuana have shown that the success of democratic innovations in Mexico depended largely in including parties and party-affiliated groups in the process. Sallee (2009) has claimed that these participatory innovations empower citizens, not by bypassing political parties, but by bringing them closer to their constituencies and forcing them to compete for public support. In a highly party-centric political system that for a long time has been ruled by a single party, such outcome indicates a significant potential of participatory innovations to make the representative system more plural and competitive.

The National Public Policy Conferences in Brazil is a case in which a single democratic innovation fulfills all three criteria of plurality, information and multi-dimensionality, contributing to

raise the level of contestation of the political system. The NPPCs are a relevant source of information to the Parliament. Between 2003 and 2010, the latter proposed 1477 bills, enacted 125 laws and 6 constitutional amendments on the same policy issues that have been recommended by citizens in NPPCs. Even if congressmen did not intend to respond to citizens, one can expect that the social mobilization raised their attention to the relevance of certain policy issues. More important, however, is how this information has helped the Legislature to impose its agenda over that of the Executive branch. While about 85% of the entire legislation enacted in Brazil's Legislature since redemocratization have been initiated by the President (Figueiredo and Limongi 1998), out of the legislation that is congruent with the NPPCs' recommendations a surprising 56% have been initiated by the Legislature. When the Congress acts congruently with NPPC's recommendations, it has larger chances to pass legislation and it can more strongly oppose the policy agenda of the Executive. Another interesting evidence of how NPPCs raise contestation is the fact that in the period 2003-2010, while the Workers' Party (PT) was in the Presidency, opposition parties have initiated 31% of the legislative acts congruent with NPPC's recommendations. The main two opposition parties (PSDB and DEM/PFL) have together proposed 23,8% of these, about the same amount than the governing party (PT), which proposed no more than 25,8%. The NPPCs provide evidence of how recommendations citizens and CSOs make in democratic innovations may increase contestation between parties in the Parliament and between government and opposition, makes the policy agenda more multi-dimensional and political representation more plural.

Democratic Innovations and Equality

The impact of democratic innovations on equality can be perceived in three dimensions: redistribution, recognition and inclusion. As for *redistribution*, evidence should indicate how democratic innovations impact on the allocation of state resources, the delivery of public goods, the access to public services, the reallocation of budgetary provisions, and the prioritizing of public expenditure. *Recognition* seeks to assess the enactment of legal and constitutional rights recognizing the identity of new social groups and of minority and historically marginalized groups. Finally, *inclusion* refers to the formulation and implementation of policies addressing disadvantaged groups, as well as the formulation and implementation of social policies and programs envisaging the reduction of poverty and inequality.

Table 4: Criteria for Assessing the Impact of Democratic Innovations on Equality

Main Concept	Secondary Level	Indicators
Equality	Redistribution	Allocation of state resources, delivery of public goods, access to public services, reallocation of budgetary provisions, public expenditure prioritizing
	Recognition	Enactment of legal and constitutional rights recognizing the identity of new social groups and of minority and historically marginalized groups
	Inclusion	Formulation and implementation of policies addressing historically underrepresented groups; formulation and implementation of social policies and programs envisaging the reduction of poverty and inequality

With the extensive decentralization undergone in most of Latin America, the delivery of basic social goods, like health, for example, have in several countries been devolved to the municipalities, where new participatory institutions began to engage state and civil society's actors in the task of converting rights into reality. Municipal councils, notwithstanding important variations in design, seemed at first instance the preferred institutional option of many governments. Empowering the citizens and letting them play a role in the solution of their own problems proved to be a valid method to further develop citizenship, and an effective means of implementing social policies in a local basis. Participatory innovations started to be used as means to achieve equality.

Whether providing redistribution of public goods (social inclusion), improving the life conditions of disadvantaged groups (economic inclusion), increasing levels of participation among the less educated and lower-income citizens (political inclusion), or extending rights to minorities and reintegrating historically underrepresented groups in the political process (cultural inclusion), participatory innovations have been increasingly used by Latin American governments as means to inclusion. The extent to which this really happens is contested, and the level of success of participatory innovations varies across countries and even within single countries. The extent to which the expansion of political participation entails the expansion of social and economic equality is not yet quite known.

The participatory budgeting is usually deemed as the most successful of Latin America's democratic innovation precisely because of its demonstrated ability to generate greater equality through a more equitable redistribution of public goods and to increase the levels of participation among disadvantaged groups, the less educated and lower-income citizens. Although the degree of success of the hundreds experiments across Brazil and Latin American cities varies, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1998: 484) has put it, "the redistributive efficacy of the participatory budgeting has been fully confirmed"; the initial achievements of Porto Alegre – where between 1989 and 1996 the participatory budgeting is considered to have doubled the number of children enrolled in schools and increased from 49% to 98% the number of households with access to water – would suffice to show that the participatory budgeting is the "embryo of a redistributive democracy".

This redistributive potential of the participatory budgeting is also endorsed by Baiocchi (2001: 50-52), who shows that Porto Alegre's districts with a higher level of poverty have received significantly greater shares of public investment due to the participatory budgeting. In a period of about ten years (1989 to 2000), sewage coverage has risen to 98% from 46%, the number of functioning public municipal schools has risen to 86 from 29, and in only three years (1992-1995) housing assistance has been offered to about 27.000 families more than in a similar period (1986-1988) before the participatory budgeting has been implemented in the city. Furthermore, the socio-economic profile of the average participant fell below the city's average in terms of education and income, accordingly to a 1998 survey: over half of the participants have households earnings of four minimum wages or below, and over half lack education beyond the eight-grade. In a comparative study, Avritzer (2009: 113) found that, depending on specific configurations of civil and political society, in some cities the participatory budgeting has not achieved so strong redistributive effects as it did others, however, in all cases the poor neighborhoods are those that have benefited the

most, what confirms participatory budgeting's potential to favor the most disadvantaged and lower-income citizens.

Local participatory initiatives are also reported to have improved the economic well being of the average citizens in Bolivia. Laserna (2009) shows that initiatives like the popular participation law, the administrative decentralization law, the national dialogue law, the indigenous territories and environmental and forestry laws, as well as reforms in the electoral system have resulted in a proliferation of channels and mechanisms for participation, creating more opportunities for the representation of citizens and their political empowerment. He found that the poorest and more depressed areas have been favored with more resources, and that previously ignored geographical areas have received increased public spending (ibid: 143). Moreover, the coverage of basic services has been expanded nationally and in rural areas, improving living conditions at a faster pace than before participatory innovations were introduced (ibid: 148).

The national public policy conferences in Brazil can also be claimed to impact on the promotion of social inclusion. They have ensured the inclusion of minority groups by promoting rights and developing corresponding policies to address matters of gender, race, ethnicity, and other minority issues. Pogrebinschi (2012) found that the number of federal policies established by presidential decrees addressing minority and human rights increased from 12 to 224 between 2003 and 2010, a growth of almost 200%. Extensive national policy plans have been enacted in this same period delivering specific policies that ameliorate the lives of minority groups like women, elderly, people with disabilities and racial and ethnic minorities, as a result of the demands voiced by them in the NPPCs (Pogrebinschi 2014). Pogrebinschi and Samuels (2014) found also that the NPPCs on food and nutritional security supported the enactment of Brazil's first comprehensive policy in this area, the Food and Nutritional Security National Plan (PLANSAN), which has been translated into specific actions and programs impacting the lives of millions of Brazilians. One example is the Food Acquisition Program (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos - PAA*), which "provides food for malnourished people and promotes social and economic inclusion in rural areas through improvements in family agriculture". Only in 2011 the PAA attended to the needs of 19.728,731 families, using about US\$233 million in budgetary funding.

Do we need new and more creative recipes?

Although democratic innovations are now a worldwide trend, the new participatory designs seem to have found in Latin America a quite fertile soil to germinate roots. Some of its fruits, in particular the participatory budgeting, have also grown in dozens of other countries in different continents, however often not achieving the same degree of effectiveness (Sintomer, Herzberg, Alegretti, and Röcke 2010). One possible explanation for that is that in Latin America the new participatory designs have been increasingly institutionalized *within* representative systems, providing citizens with opportunities other than voting to express their preferences, and to have a say in the policy process. When contrasted to democratic innovations evolved in Europe (see Font, della Porta and Sintomer 2014, Geissel and Newton 2012, Geissel and Joas 2013, and Smith 2009 for an overview), for example, those flourished in Latin America (see Avritzer 2002, Cameron, Hershberg and Sharpe 2012, Selee and Peruzzotti 2009, and Pogrebinschi 2013 for an overview) offer

distinguishing features, which, regardless of contextual constraints, can provide useful insights regarding their institutional design.

All Latin American governments that undertook participatory reforms, even the more radical left-wing ones, have preserved the basic institutions of representative democracy (Madrid, Hunter and Weyland 2011: 141). Nevertheless, the channels of representation have been expanded, providing citizens with more opportunities to participate. Since Latin America's redemocratization, institutions have adapted themselves to participation (Avritzer 2009: 8).

It is perhaps too early to evaluate whether the new institutions of democracy in Latin America do indeed contribute to the overall improvement of the quality of democracy. It is indeed very difficult to measure the impact of specific participatory innovations in the short term. Moreover, there are also several other relevant variables that play a role in such assessment. A possible correlation between the increase of democratic innovations and the improvement of political and social indicators must still be investigated. However, citizens' expectations towards democracy do seem to be increasingly absorbed by the new institutional designs.

In a recent article, Archon Fung (2011:857) suggests that "many of us may soon turn our eyes to Latin America, and to Brazil in particular, to understand their accomplishments in democratic governance". Asking whether the participatory reforms is an "exceptionalism or a model for the rest of us?" he concludes that as for "the vast range of ambitious and successful democratic reforms (...) there are simply no analogs of similar scale and depth in North America, Europe, Asia or Africa" (867-868). This may be true. But whether democratic innovations may increase the quality of democracy is still an open, empirical question.

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