



# Journal of Intercultural Management and Ethics

## JIME

ISSN 2601 - 5749, ISSN-L 2601 - 5749

published by

Center for Socio-Economic Studies and Multiculturalism  
Iasi, Romania  
[www.csesm.warter.ro](http://www.csesm.warter.ro)

## Special Editor

### **Drs. Huib Wursten**

Hofstede Insights Group, Netherlands

E-mail: huibwursten@gmail.com

### TABLE OF CONTENT

Editorial .....	3
Huib Wursten	
Brexit and the Joy of Democracy .....	5
Berwyn Davies	
Culture and Brexit: A Catastrophic Partnership .....	19
Stephen I. P. Martin	
Democracy and the Need for Autonomy .....	25
Huib Wursten	
The Avatars of Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe. How Could Citizens Strengthen Democratic Integration in the European Union?.....	33
Anton Carpinski	
Democracy and Lifelong Learning, the Forgotten Sides of the Same Coin .....	45
Joseph Kessels	
The Great Indian Democracy .....	57
Divya Susan Varkey	
Democracy in Latin America .....	73
Fernando Lanzer Pereira de Souza	
Of Wise Old Men and Rebellious Youth.....	79
Adnan R. Husain Cornelissen, Loes B. Husain-Cornelissen	
Democracy in Africa and Ubuntu.....	91
Luc Zwaenepoel	

## DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

Fernando Lanzer Pereira de Souza  
LCO Partners, Brazil  
E-mail:fernando.lanzer@hotmail.com

### Abstract

People and pundits pontificate about Democracy as if it were something universal. Nothing could be more wrong. In practice, when Democracy is debated as a form of government, the debaters are usually thinking about a particular version of Democracy, one that is dearest to their hearts... and one that has been shaped by their own culture.

When we look at Democracy around the world, we can see that, in fact, there are practically no two countries with exactly the same model of Democracy: they are all quite different.

The Economist has recently stated that Democracy is in crisis, all over the world. There are fewer democratic governments in 2019 than there were 10 years ago; and even those who claim to be democratic are, as we write this, being questioned about how really democratic they are.

In Latin America, as in other parts of the planet, the forms of government are shaped by culture. And the cultures in Latin America are all Social Pyramid styles of culture, as Huib Wursten has described in his published articles.

Social Pyramid cultures are hierarchical, collectivistic, and high on Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI).

The styles of government, and the styles of Democracy functioning in these countries, are all heavily influenced by these characteristics.

**Key words:** Culture, Latin America, Democracy, Hofstede, Pyramid cultures.

### Introduction

The Economist (a weekly magazine) has stated that Democracy is undergoing a crisis period all over the world (The Economist, 2019). The enemy of Democracy, according to the magazine's editors, lies within Democracy itself: elections in recent years have led to the appointment of populist figures to leading governments, and these leaders have spoken and acted against Democracy, in quite authoritarian ways.

This phenomenon should not be regarded as surprising when it is observed in cultures that Huib Wursten has described as Social Pyramids (Wursten, 2000; Wursten & Lanzer, 2013); such cultures are notoriously hierarchical and show a natural tendency towards autocracy as a form of government.

Social Pyramid cultures are hierarchical, collectivistic, and high on Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI). Some of them are a bit higher on Masculinity (Performance Orientation), others a bit lower (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

### Hierarchy above everything else

With the notable exception of Costa Rica, all cultures in Latin America are Social Pyramid cultures. Their political regimes are not only hierarchical (high Power Distance), but sometimes quite autocratic (while still claiming to be democratic).

Venezuela comes to mind. Hugo Chávez was democratically elected in 1998 and reelected in 2000, 2006 and 2012; and after his death in 2013, Vice-President Nicolás Maduro took over and was later elected in the same year. The Venezuelan regime has been

characterized, since Chavez's first term in office, by a gradual but steadily increasing restriction of individual freedoms: private companies were taken over by the government, opposition leaders were prosecuted and imprisoned, the press was shut down when it criticized the government, even Congress was suspended and federal judges were removed from their positions, all because they acted contrary to the President's wishes.

All these restrictive actions were carried out while continuing to claim that they were done with the purpose of defending Democracy; while the objects of such actions were deemed to be enemies of Democracy serving the interest of foreign nations wishing to topple the democratically elected government.

The majority of the Venezuelan population continued to support the regime, which became known internationally (and locally) as "Chavism;" simply because its main characteristic was an idolization of Hugo Chávez as a political icon. Despite his authoritarianism, most people continued to support the President (first Chávez, then Maduro) demonstrating that the population of Venezuela can be quite content with an authoritarian form of government, as long as they believe that whoever is in power is looking after the common good. Restricting individual freedoms is not regarded as a problem per se, as long as people feel that their own interests, and the interests of the groups they belong to, continue to be a priority.

Though Venezuela is a prime example of "an authoritarian Latin American Democracy," similar dynamics have been spotted in other parts of the region, over the last 50 years; and a surge of authoritarianism has been seen in Brazil as a result of its 2018 elections. Some have said that while Nicolás Maduro claims to be socialist and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil claims to be a right-wing free-market economy advocate, neither of them is true to what they claim to be. They are really just despots holding onto power, and their ideology (if they have one) is an afterthought. At the same time, both the Venezuelan and the Brazilian populations continue to support their respective authoritarian regimes. Why? Because these regimes are consistent with high-Power Distance values. In both countries, people believe that an authoritarian leadership style is necessary to maintain order. According to their perspective, when there are egalitarian debates and the free exchange of ideas, chaos ensues. When confronted with the examples of democratic discussions in North America and Northern Europe, Latin American pundits are quick to point out that "we are not Europe; those things will never work here."

In Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro was elected in 2018 with a conservative and nationalist campaign, highlighted by the slogan: "*Brasil acima de tudo; Deus acima de todos.*" (Brazil above everything; God above all). The hierarchy (high-PDI) implication could not be clearer: there is a hierarchy, and the nation stands in it on top of anything else; except for God Almighty, who stands above all of us. The implied statement is also strong: "I stand above all other candidates by representing these traditional values; I stand defending our traditional hierarchical culture against the threats of foreign values, globalisation, chaotic egalitarianism, and the loss of our historic identity."

As such, Bolsonaro is a stark example of populism: he represents people's need to have a leader that will care for them, protecting them against the perceived threats of a modern world that they struggle to come to terms with.

In Contest cultures there is usually a clear and definite enemy: in the UK of Brexiteers, the enemy is Brussels, or the European Union. In Donald Trump's America, the enemy is China; Trump is constantly naming various specific countries (Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, or the European Union) as enemies against the United States must fight.

Latin American countries do not use specific countries so often as clearly identified enemies; consistent with their Social Pyramid paternalistic cultures, emphasis is placed on a parental figure that will protect the people against "the modern world," a world in which

progressives use technologies that simple folk cannot understand, gender identities are challenged, and everything is changing so fast that nobody can keep up with all that is changing.

### **Authoritarian Democracies**

Of the 20 countries in Latin America, only Surinam has a parliamentary regime; all the others are democracies with presidential governments, largely imitating, on paper, the American model. That is to say: the President is elected independently from the legislative branch of government, and is not responsible to the legislature.

This is consistent with the high scores on Power Distance (with the exception of Costa Rica 35, the lowest PDI in Latin America is Uruguay with 61; and the highest is Guatemala with 95) (Hofstede, 2003) found in the region's cultures. Democracies in Latin America have power heavily concentrated on the President, who acts typically with a rather authoritarian style (by comparison with low PDI cultures) consistent with a hierarchical culture and power structure.

Although they are, indeed, democracies, in the sense that the head of state is elected directly by the people (rather than by the legislative body, or by an electoral college, as is the case in the United States) the fact remains that Latin American cultures are hierarchical, and this shapes the way these democracies function.

One can speak, as Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address speech did, of "a government of the people, by the people and for the people," but that is an egalitarian ideal. The high-PDI Latin American ideal is to have a strong and benevolent "parental" government that will take care of the people and enforce rules to ensure stability and security.

Many Latin American countries have a long history of dictatorial governments and of power being seized by the military through force. The egalitarian perspective regards these military dictators as oppressors who remain in power solely because they have weapons and ammunition. The real story is that all Latin American dictators have always been backed by a significant part of the population and especially by business leaders who manage the means of production.

In high-PDI cultures people have tended to favor strong governments, whether they are democratically elected or not. In recent years we have seen large segments of Latin American populations openly advocating that a populist leader should shut down Congress and the Supreme Court, ruling as a full-fledged dictator. This has happened in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Peru and Ecuador, to name a few. The paradox is that the biggest enemies of Democracy are within the system itself. We have seen democratically elected officials threatening to shut down the other two branches of government, with increasing support of the population.

This has happened both with left-wing socialist governments (Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia) and with right-wing governments (Argentina, Brazil, Chile). The common denominator is that the people replace an unpopular strong government with a different strong government. One might question whether any of these governments is actually strong. They are all maintained and toppled by the people, either by elections or by military actions, but always with the support of the population.

What is then the correct way to act, when the people want a parental figure to take care of them and govern them, releasing them from the responsibilities of citizenship? Some pundits may denounce this as an "infantilization of the population," reducing the people to a childish position of submission; but how do you help people become responsible adult citizens in a culture that reinforces paternalistic relationships in the family, in business and in politics?

We must realize that democracy in Latin America (Social Pyramid cultures) is certainly something different from democracy in Contest, Well-Oiled Machine and Network cultures. (see Wursten...) It also entails more centralization at the top, in each level of government (federal, state and city), in terms of decision-making and allocation of resources.

### **People, not politics**

Latin American cultures are all quite collectivistic and this is a strong influence in shaping the dynamics of political relationships.

Basically, many different groups are formed and fight with each other for political dominance. Since the premise of equality is diminished, due to high Power Distance, what we can see is a constant struggle among groups to be at the top of the political pecking order.

These groups are regarded as political parties. However, they are more often organized around specific persons, rather than around political ideals. They have been historically branded by imitating European political parties; so, they call themselves Socialist, Social Democratic, Liberal, Republican, Labor, Conservative, etc. However, they were all formed around the leadership of a specific person, and there is enormous dependency on that person, due to high PDI and low IDV (Collectivism).

In whichever direction the leader turns these groups will follow. There is little, if any, fidelity to political ideas and concepts; and total loyalty to the charismatic persona of each political leader. Frequently, we have seen dissident leaders leave a political party and set up another one, soon joined by those who followed that leader in the previous party. Political ideas are but an excuse to join a political party in Latin America. What really matters is the person leading it, and the web of personal relationships that extend from that leader throughout the group.

Dissidents may join a different party that (allegedly) stands for ideas that represent almost the exact opposite of what that leader so staunchly defended just a few days ago. It is all about relationships and shifting loyalties to people, not politics.

Sérgio Jockyman (Jockyman, 1971), an author who published several comments on the workings of Brazilian society, once said (in the 1970's), that the discussions around forming new political parties in Brazil were misguided, because they eventually boiled down to this: there will be one party in power; there will be another party leading the opposition; there will be a third party formed by those who wanted to be in power, but were for some reason not allowed in the first party; there will be a fourth party formed by intellectuals who profess a certain disdain for the politicians in the other three parties, but who will secretly woo the members of the first and the second party, forming an alliance to their own convenience when the time comes, either with one or the other. And there will be a fifth party formed by opposition radicals who will always oppose whoever is in power. All of this, of course, regardless of any sort of political ideals whatsoever.

### **Legal institutions and the pillars of democracy**

In terms of the rule of law, this is a concept frequently side-stepped when involving politics and politicians. There is, for instance, in Brazil, a popular saying that goes: "*aos amigos tudo; aos demais, os rigores da lei.*" (To friends, everything; to others, the rigors of the law). Basically, this means that the law is not for everyone, it is not universal. In practice, those who hold power, and their friends, are above the law.

Political institutions are distorted and used to benefit those in power and their friends. Although on paper there are three branches of government (Executive, Judicial and Legislative), in practice personal relationships and power games override the interactions among all institutions.

In the period from 1980 to 2010 there was a certain strengthening of the institutions and of true democratic spirit throughout Latin America. Military governments were replaced by democratically elected ones in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, for instance. In Mexico, where the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* had remained in power for seven decades, we saw a different political movement win the elections only in 2000. The idea of democracy as a system where there is a certain alternation in government between different parties became a reality. However, in more recent years we have seen the rise of populism; and with it, a trend towards the past, with more authoritarian governments supported by the population, whether right-wing or left-wing. The overriding values of hierarchy (Power Distance) and relationship-based group alliances (Collectivism) once again prevail.

### Conclusion

Democracy is often debated in English language texts with an implicit reference to the Anglo-Saxon notion of Democracy: a system where there are three independent branches of government (Executive, Legislative and Judicial), with basically two main political parties opposing each other and alternating in power through elections.

Curiously, in the United Kingdom the government is elected by Parliament; therefore, there is no direct voting by the people on the Head of Government. And in America, the President is elected through an Electoral College. Although people do vote for President, the so-called “popular vote” does not determine who is appointed to that role, as was recently demonstrated in the 2016 elections.

In Latin America, practically all countries have Presidential regimes, in which people vote directly for President, and the Head of the Executive has no responsibility toward the Legislative (unlike the UK, for instance). Yet, because of cultural reasons (high Power Distance, Collectivism, high Uncertainty Avoidance and high Long-Term Orientation), the political democratic regimes in Latin America are typically oligarchies, more authoritarian and subject to personal relationships among key players, much more, by comparison, than what one sees in more egalitarian cultures.

Therefore, we can say indeed that in Latin America Democracy is different. It is heavily influenced by culture, as in every country in the world, but it is different because it is more authoritarian and collectivistic than its counterparts in Northern Europe and North America. Although some people may refer to Democracy as if it were a universal concept, the fact is that no two democracies are exactly alike. They are all influenced by culture, and this has an impact on how institutions are designed (in slightly different formats) and how they operate (in very different ways).

### References:

1. Hofstede, G. (2003). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*. New York: Sage Publications.
2. Hofstede, G. H., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: software of the mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
3. Jockyman, S. (1971, April 24). Os novos partidos. *Folha da Tarde*
4. Wursten, H. (2000). Mental Images. The Influence of Culture on (Economic) Policy. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/22402813/Mental\\_images\\_The\\_influence\\_of\\_culture\\_on\\_economic\\_policy](https://www.academia.edu/22402813/Mental_images_The_influence_of_culture_on_economic_policy).
5. Wursten, H., & Lanzer, F. (2013). The EU: the third great European cultural contribution to the world. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/22416977/The\\_EU\\_the\\_third\\_great\\_European\\_cultural\\_contribution\\_to\\_the\\_world](https://www.academia.edu/22416977/The_EU_the_third_great_European_cultural_contribution_to_the_world).

6. The Economist(2019, August 31). *Democracy's enemy within*.