

# 10 Keys To Understanding Populist Propaganda In Latin America

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## Abstract

An analysis of the main characteristics that distinguish populist propaganda in Latin America is presented. There is a context of democratic immobility, in which the transition processes did not materialize in several nations, which has brought disinterest and institutional vacuums. Populism appears as an electoral offer that does not depend on a specific ideology but on a claiming myth, which is always disruptive, anti-system, Manichaeian and nationalist. When populism becomes a government, the project is embodied in a person who will try to modify the institutions to preserve their target.

**Keywords:** Latin America, populism, propaganda, marketing, democracy.

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## INTRODUCTION

On Thursday, September 15, 2022, a video appeared on social networks where Nayib Bukele, president of El Salvador, announced that he would seek reelection in that country. The situation would not be controversial if the figure of reelection were recognized by his own Constitution but, in fact, there is a video from 2013 where Bukele stated that reelection did not exist as a possibility. How did he achieve it? In 2021 he generated a propaganda strategy with which he discredited the judges of the Supreme Court of his country, dismissed them and imposed five new like-minded judges; these in turn, issued a ruling in September of that same year, where immediate reelection is allowed.

Bukele's presence in the new configuration of strident leaderships in the region is not new. This character has followed in the footsteps of other highly popular leaders such as Chavez and Evo Morales, to change the constitutional rules and thus adjust the rules to his convenience. This was pointed out by Juan González, advisor to the White House when referring to the actions developed by Bukele (BBC, 16.09.2022).

On the same September 15, in the center of the Mexican capital, the Independence Day celebrations were held, where President López Obrador gave the "Cry of Independence" before a crowd cheered by the illusion of the end of the covid19 pandemic. For entertainment, the government hired the Tigres del Norte musical band, who sang the song "El jefe de jefes", a melody whose lyrics allude to a mafia boss who boasts of being the most powerful.

López Obrador will be recognized in the future as one of the Mexican political figures with the greatest media exposure. Daily morning conferences were his communication model since the year 2000 when he was elected Head of Government

of Mexico City. The purpose was to set the political agenda for the media to replicate his message, by mixing his political opinion with the administrative issues of the city. The exercise was retaken since 2018, year in which López Obrador obtains the Presidency.

What are the implications of the use of propaganda, rather than political marketing in the current Latin American political communication model? Several Latin American nations are going through a situation of institutional uncertainty; such vacuum generates in people the need to find referents that show them what to believe in and where to go. Propaganda, as we shall see, turns out to be the most common communicative method, but not the healthiest, in contexts of democratic anomie.

It should be considered that the last quarter of the decade between 2010 and 2020 closed with protests in Ecuador, Colombia and Chile in 2019, focusing on economic, security and discrimination failures. Different elections in the region favored controversial candidates in El Salvador, Mexico, Peru and Colombia. In Peru and Mexico, there is also a weakening and even territorial disappearance of traditionally competitive parties in the face of new agglutinating forces. The study of the phenomenon of populism in Latin America has been engaged in a conceptual debate for more than fifty years, since the first texts by Gino Germani (1962) and Torcuato Di Tella (1965) appeared, documenting the Peronist regime, analyzing its similarities with Cardenismo in Mexico and the leadership of Getulio Vargas in Brazil. Few new approaches will be obtained if we continue to focus on the what, instead of the how.

Ontologically, populism belongs to relativism, where there are many possible truths and facts depend on the interpretation of the observers (Cooper and Burrell, 1988; and Cunliffe, 2001). Epistemologically, it is a social construction, not objective, which only takes on meaning through the interpretation of the people who analyze the subject (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; and Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012).

The study of populism has a long history in Latin America. According to Salmorán (2021: 39 and 40), it has been identified as such to various movements, parties and governments in the Central and South American region between the 1930s and 1970s. For example, it was considered as such to the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico and the sectorization of the then Party of the Mexican Revolution (1934 to 1940); to Getulio Vargas in Brazil (1945 to 1954); to Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina and the Justicialist Party (1946-1952, 1952-1955 and 1973-1974); Peru with the foundation of the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance in 1924; the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement in Bolivia (1942); Carlos Ibáñez del Campo's government in Chile (1952-1958); the militarist government of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala (1951-1954).

Studies on Latin American populism focused on developing theories to explain its existence. For Salmorán (2021: 43), it can be distinguished that the works of Germani and di Tella are based on the theory of modernization; the work of Octavio Ianni (1975) is neo-Marxist in nature and the contributions of Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto (1972) refer to the theory of development and economic dependence.

Most of the works on populism seek, first, to clarify the concept and, subsequently, to define whether a certain leadership or regime can fit within its standards. In this paper, we are more interested in specifying the role of political propaganda as a tool of choice for leaderships and regimes categorized as populist. For this reason, this paper begins by defining the nature of propaganda as opposed to the discipline of political marketing, which offers a different communicative model. It then describes how propaganda is used to present the populist offer as a desirable political option. Finally, it analyzes how propaganda, turned into a government mechanism, has been used to preserve power.

## 1.- Propaganda, marketing and democracy

What role does the debate between propaganda and marketing play in the phenomenon of populism in the first quarter of the 21st century in Latin America? In the study and clarification of the success of populism in Latin America, this differentiation is highly relevant and explains to a large extent why there is a social predisposition to disdain democracy in favor of extreme and disruptive options. Currently, marketing is a concept that has been abused, believed to have incredible properties to obtain publicity, sales/votes and power.

Propaganda and marketing are not the same thing. Although people may think that both disciplines seek to impose a perception in order to achieve and dominate power, the reality is that they have different origins. The purpose of propaganda is to implant doctrines or beliefs in people, in order to legitimize the power of a person or organization; in its case, marketing seeks to add value to the relationship between an organization and individuals, based on the satisfaction of products or services.

Returning to Gramsci's perspective (1971 [1935]), propaganda is an artifact that uses public media to promote and maintain hegemony in power. Political marketing, on the other hand, seeks to intervene from persuasion in the public discussion, to generate positive criticism in the targeted social segments. Authors such as Stanley (2017 [2015]) and Baena (1998: 57), point out that propaganda has been used as an artifact of power in authoritarian governments, as they seek to dominate the public space through a prevailing vision towards the political subject and intolerant to its criticism. One of the great ideologists of American propaganda was Bernays, who defined propaganda as the method by which beliefs and doctrines are disseminated on a large scale through organized efforts (2005 [1928]: 48). Propagare was the concept inaugurated by Pope Urban VIII, so that from 1627 onwards the different orders would teach and disseminate the Catholic ecclesiastical mission. For his part, Joseph Göbbels, the Nazi Minister of Public Instruction and Propaganda, was a great admirer of the works of Le Bon (2018 [1895]), Lippmann (2018 [1921]) and Bernays (2010 [1923] and 2005 [1928]) in their respective works on the mass, public opinion and propaganda; from their reinterpretation he generated what would ultimately become known as the principles of Nazi propaganda. His decalogue of propaganda did not seek

the generation of a simple favorable opinion, but the control of a people in order to subdue others, whom they considered adversaries.

Propaganda is used by germinal democracies as well as by consolidated democracies. Propaganda can stand as the major mechanism of control over public opinion. For Chomsky and Herman (2003 [1988]), it is visible that capitalism has directed opinion through the great intermediaries that happen to be the mass media corporations. According to these authors, the press was one of the great businesses of the twentieth century, serving as a monitor and executor of the government.

Bernays had already warned that the term "propaganda" would be criticized for an allegedly sinister meaning, since it was known that since his work *Propaganda* was written in 1928, at least 50% of the news in newspapers was paid (2005 [1928]: 49 and 53). Evidently, this draws the attention of those who assumed that all news were events that were genuinely important for society. Propaganda implies ethical dilemmas when used in democratic contexts, because it can call into question the very values on which its actions are based (competition, balances, tolerance, alternation, scrutiny, according to Woldenberg, 2019 [2017]: 31).

Political marketing starts from a totally different nature, since it is actually a tool of the market, that is to say that it possesses a liberal idiosyncrasy. Marketing is a market tool, which starts from the relationship between two subjects: a producer or supplier of a service and a consumer population. This was the way in which marketing or marketing was defined in 1912 by Arch Wilkinson Shaw, because at that time there was concern that there were inconsistencies between the generation of goods and their placement. Thus, marketing sought to focus production directly on demand, and not on whims.

For Kotler (1972) there are at least five points that characterize marketing: 1) there are at least two parties; 2) each party has unsatisfied needs, which produces a tension that generates competition to satisfy such needs; 3) each party generates a value offer; 4) each party communicates and delivers its offer; and 5) each party is free to accept or decline the offer options.

Marketing starts from a competitive scenario. Marketing originally conceives that there are different options in the scenario where the different parties can offer. Propaganda goes in the opposite direction, since it seeks to nullify the other offers. Modernization theory shows that this factor of "competitive urgency" has been one of the triggers of development in Western democracies (Jepperson and Meyer in Powell and DiMaggio, comp, 1999 [1991]: 267 and 291).

What is democracy? "It is that institutional system, for arriving at political decisions, in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the vote of the people", this is Schumpeter's conception of democracy (1996 [1942]: 343). This definition is one of the most detailed to be taken into account; from where the definitions of Lipset (1963 [1959]), Dahl (2012 [1998]), and Bartolini (in Bobbio, et al, 2015) start. There are three conditions agreed among these authors to consider the prevalence of a democratic system: 1) The freedom to compete in politics, 2) that opposition exists, and 3) to recognize the will of the citizenry.

## 2.- Unfinished transitions

Why was democracy not consolidated in all the countries that tried to make the transition in the last quarter of the twentieth century? Huntington (1994 [1991]: 33 and 34) considered that at least 30 countries were on the road to becoming democracies, among them Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Chile, Panama, Nicaragua and Haiti belonged to the Latin American representation. But Huntington also warned that democratizing waves could be followed by counter-waves involving bureaucratic-authoritarian regressions.

The process of the third wave - in the mid-1970s - began with much encouragement from the nations themselves, the United States and academics. For many Latin Americans the primary goal was to enjoy free elections and in most cases this was achieved. When democracies fail to mature and remain in an intermediate state, instead of becoming participatory democracies, they end up stagnating in delegative democracies where the citizen does not assume an active role in the system and abandons the use of power to the fate of the political elite (O'Donnell, 1994).

According to Przeworski (2019), the process took place in an unrealistic way in Latin America: promises were made that would be difficult for democracy to achieve just by organizing recurrent elections. The idea was sold that democracy was a method of progress and economic development per se. It was never realized that it would be a long process and that it did not depend on a specific act such as going to vote; it depended more on the development of a participatory civic culture that would require the institutionalization of public organizations.

The realization of democracy implied understanding that, although a big step was the organization of free elections, something more was required. Luis Villoro points out that one had to move to an expanded democracy, where citizens become accustomed to participate in decisions, scrutinize and get involved at least at the level of their community (2005 [1992]: 115 and 116). This is what the construction of a modern and competitive social-organizational fabric really refers to (Jepperson and Meyer in Powell and DiMaggio, 1999 [1991]). Most Latin American nations have learned to demand their political freedoms, to protest, many times to shout; unfortunately, they have not learned the most important thing in democratic culture: to practice the "art of associating" (Huntington (2015 [1968]: 16). In 2002, Thomas Carothers wrote a text in which he warned that the paradigm of transitions had come to an end. The article is a response to and critique of Huntington's (1994 [1991]) work on the third wave and O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead's (1986) extensive research on transitions from authoritarian governments. According to Carothers, of the approximately 100 countries that were in

this transition process at the beginning of the 1990s, only 20 were able to stay on the road to democratic consolidation; among the Latin American countries: Uruguay, Chile and Costa Rica.

Many Latin American countries in transition remained stranded in a gray zone. In this, Carothers (2002) does agree with Huntington (2015 [1968]) and even with Alcántara (2013 [1999]), pointing out that these nations began to have certain political freedoms, but limited so that people were not interested in democratic participation.

Jepperson and Meyer's analysis points out that in the transition to organizational modernization, there were societies with civic deficits that have remained stagnant (in Powell and DiMaggio, 1999 [1991]). These are societies with segmented structures; that is, in the conception of the state, society is not assumed to be part of it.

Carothers (2002: 11 to 13) notes that in these countries stranded in the gray zone of transition, there are two persistent models: 1) Irresponsible pluralism: Nations with insufficient reforms where institutions are unable to face the problems of corruption, health, education and other social welfare tasks (for example: Honduras, Guatemala or Ecuador). 2) Dominant power: Where the hegemonic power of a movement, party, family, or leader persists, controlling the system and restricting the possibility of alternation; in such contexts, the party in power takes possession of state resources to ensure its leadership (for example, Peronist Argentina, PRI Mexico and Chavista Venezuela).

### 3.- Democratic anomie

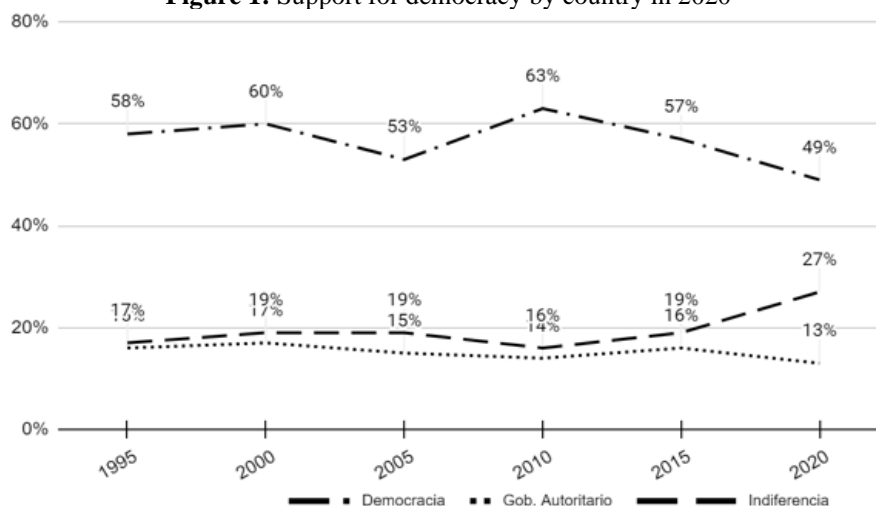
We live in a depressive situation. People are looking for strong emotions in the face of the insipid digitalized lives after the pandemic that started in 2020. A social pandemic that turns out to be chronic. The decline of democracy, or the crisis of democracy, shapes a series of studies quite developed in the Western literature (Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, 1975; Offe, 1984; Dorna, 2003; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2021 [2018]; Przeworski, 2019; Echeverría, 2019; Applebaum, 2020).

The regressive route has an orderly path: it starts from a decadent democracy, a populist offer arrives and may culminate in an authoritarian regime, if the institutions are flimsy. Now, it must be assumed that most Latin American nations that did not conclude their democratic transition start from a limited civic culture; where the known institutionality depends largely on the legacy of their autocratic regimes (Carothers, 2002: 18). Therefore, they are in a pendulum where their citizens still consider the possibility of returning to an "iron fist" regime, if their democracy does not give the expected results, or if they perceive that they are worse off. It is no longer possible to affirm that all Latin American countries are still in a process of democratic transition; in fact, we do not know where many of them are headed.

What is anomie? That state of mind where the absence of norms and value structure is perceived on the part of a social group, the subject disconnects his impulses to end up with a sterile and self-absorbed spirit (McIver cited in Merton, 2002 [1949]). Durkheim, in his study on suicide, discovers that the suicide rate increases when there is an economic crisis; but the phenomenon is not due to the crisis but to the perception of a lax or null moral normativity coming from society and its institutions (2002 [1897]: 211). In other words, it is required that people care about the individual so that he does not commit the act.

Merton further elaborates on the sociological concept of anomie, considering it to be a dislocation between ends and the availability of means (2002 [1949]). The cultural structure imposes standards or stereotypes that are admired and tried to be met by individuals, but in practice the social structure sometimes prevents the means from being open to all. Frustration, rebellion or eventual abandonment then arises because either they do not understand the goal, or they see it as so unattainable that they prefer not to strive any further, or, in their case, they will prefer to break the rules in order to meet those imposed cultural objectives.

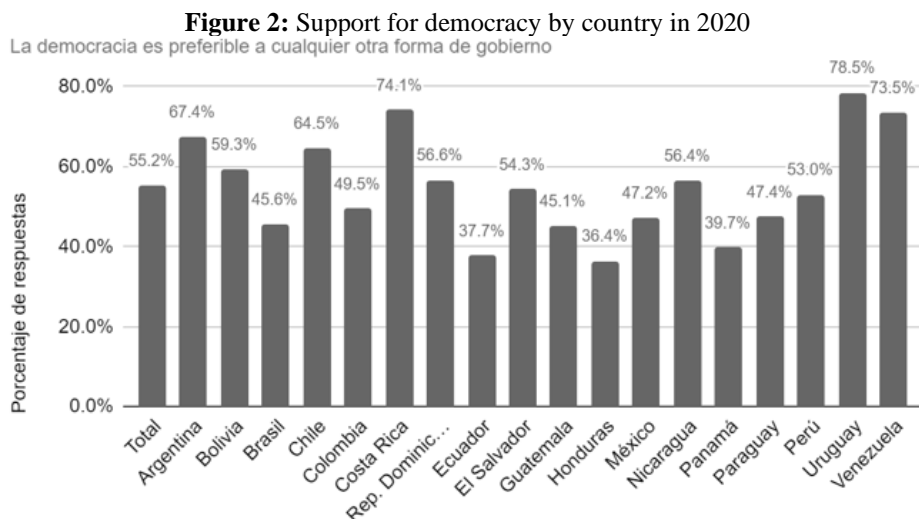
**Figure 1:** Support for democracy by country in 2020



Source: Own elaboration with data from Latinobarómetro 2020.

Democratic anomie consists of the erosion of democratic principles, causing people to no longer consider their existence necessary or to opt for other methods that help to achieve their goals. Democratic anomie means an uneasiness in the absence of institutional responses, to such a degree that citizens may sacrifice their fundamental democratic rights because they no longer care. There is nothing more demotivating for human beings than to invest efforts in something that does not progress (Durkheim, 2002 [1897]: 212; Amabile and Kramer, 2012: 206 and 248).

A trend of generalized disillusionment with democracy is perceived in Latin America; and an increase in indifference. Latinobarómetro indicates that when people were asked about the preference of democracy over other forms of government, Latin Americans responded in favor of democracy by 63% in 2010 and 49% in 2020. While in the period from 2000 to 2010 democracy was considered to be taking shape in most countries in the region, the period from 2010 to 2020 shows the return of disinterest.



Source: Own elaboration with data from Latinobarómetro 2020.

But, this happens the other way around as well, as the statistics of support for democracy have shown, in 2020 and recent years, Venezuelans have more appreciation for democracy because they have lost it. Their level of predilection for democracy as a form of government is 73.5%, responding almost the same as Costa Rica or Uruguay, which are stable democracies in the continent. Democratic political culture has to be reproduced or it runs the risk of being undervalued where institutions are weak in delivering results. Does democracy really have to be lost to be valued?

This is not the first time that a relationship between anomie and democratic decline has been detected. In fact, Almond and Verba described that the totalitarianism that emerged after World War II brought with it many doubts about the stability of democracy; the reason: a destruction of social ties, which generated a mass anomie (1989 [1963]: 20). This mass anomie is the cause of societies going through moments of discredit and apathy, becoming susceptible to being seduced by demagogic leaderships and authoritarian fashions.

People generate ideas and fantasies about the greatness of their societies. People want to believe that there is a better future, but they do not want to be involved or responsible. Democratic anomie occurs in these contexts, where a large part of the population is disengaged from politics. Woldenberg explains to a teenager disenchanted with democracy that she has every right not to get involved in politics, but warns her that if she does not do it, someone else will; that is where authoritarian backlashes come in and there is no turning back (2019 [2017]: 11).

#### 4.- Ideology and populist offer.

It has become a cliché or justification to begin any analysis on populism, claiming that the term has been used more as a pejorative concept, a value judgment and not as a well-defined category of analysis. For Islas, modern political science is aimed at promoting institutional stability; therefore, populism appears as a concept contrary to epistemological normativism (2020: 166). The standard of the optimum or the desired, then, is democracy (Bobbio (2009 [1999]), no political offer is presented as "antidemocratic".

In terms of propaganda then, it is convenient that any political aspiration, regardless of its underlying intention, is offered as the true democratic option. The first thing we must make clear is that populism appears in contexts where there is a weak or supposedly consolidated democracy, because it has the possibility of competing legally.

What is populism? According to Laclau, it is a way of articulating politics based on the conflict between the people and the dominant classes (2005). However, another broader perspective tells us that populism implies a personalist and paternalistic model; alliances with multiclass policies based on vertical mobilization without taking into account the institutional forms for the achievement of their objectives; they have an amorphous ideology that goes against those at the apex of power; and to ensure their support, it is based on a policy of redistribution or clientelism (Roberts, 1998: 381).

Academic literature has tried to explain the scopes and even the intentions between left and right populist offers when appearing in democratic scenarios (Laclau, 2005; Loaeza, 2007; Rouquié, 2017; Casullo, 2019; Islas, 2020; Vallespín and Bascuñán, 2017; Gratius and Rivero, 2018).

First we will talk about populism as a political offer of the left. For authors such as Laclau (2005) and Mouffe (2018), populism offered a possibility of political regime in practice, an alternative construction to the liberal-cut vision. The critique made by both authors starts from a late capitalism in Latin American nations that sought to optimistically implement liberal democracy, but in the process apparently failed. This is an idea explored and manifested since the 1980s (cf. Sergio Zermeno in Lechner, ed, 1981: 62 to 66). For these authors, left-wing populism arrives in post-democracy, a state of decadence for liberal democracy.

They point out Gratius and Rivero (2018), that left populism tried to identify itself as a possibility to revitalize democracy, since at last the neglected classes would be taken into account. Further, when populism comes linked to a social-communist leftist ideology, its parties have appeared in incipient democracies as "the real democratic options". There it is described that socialists saw democracy as flawed by liberal capitalism and therefore a mere fiction. Real democracy, according to them, would come with the establishment of socialism.

But in Schumpeter's view, the words revolution and dictatorship always flashed as mechanisms to transit to socialism; that is why he defines that a good part of what is known as "left" refers to the Soviet method, that is, to take and retain power by force (1996 [1942] volume II: 309). The European social democratic movements dissociated themselves from that discourse and method; that is how they became electoral bids with low aversion. The debate to which this author refers lies precisely in the limits of ideological systems, because both in democracies and in socialist dictatorships, barbaric and immoral acts can be committed. The difference will be that "true democracy" will ensure freedom of conscience and freedom of thought, justice, decent government, etc. (311).

On the other hand, when populism comes from the right, it takes on reactionary overtones, since it is associated with the promotion of segregationism, xenophobia and racism. The Nietzschean definition of "reactionary" seems to be the most accurate, because it refers to political offers whose motivations stem from a "reactive" attitude of impotence and feelings of revenge in the name of justice (Nietzsche, 2000 [1887]: 119).

In the USA there was the People's Party, considered the first populist party in America. This party had a conservative ideology that refused to accept the conditions of the new industrial society, sought to safeguard the interests of agricultural producers and showed their disagreement with the policies of immigrant reception, this at the end of the 19th century; they had a declared resentment towards the large consortiums and towards the political class for considering that they threatened their way of life. It is evident that this discourse was used in its essence by Donald Trump in 2016 and adapted during his presidency; it seems that social resentments are very difficult to forget.

The conclusion reached by Gratius and Rivero (2018), is that both ideologies in their extreme versions end up resembling each other. It is a paradox, since in both cases they will try to limit democracy but without destroying it altogether, because in such a case they would lose their discursive legitimacy. Both left-wing and right-wing populism are offers that are born within democracies, there is no doubt about it.

In Salmorán's (2021: 149) extensive analysis, populism offers an ideological vision, yes, but not in the classic terms of the left-right dichotomy, but of a vision of what should constitute politics:

- 1) An appeal to the "people" as a unitary political subject.
- 2) A Manichean vision of politics based on the struggle between "the people" and their "enemies".
- 3) The aspiration to reestablish popular sovereignty, through the implementation of a "democracy" without intermediaries.

## 5.- The myth

Myth is a crucial discursive artifact in the populist political offer, because it synthetically conveys beliefs, values, feelings of greatness or phobia, through concepts and symbols (de Saussure, 1951 [1916]). Myths have the capacity to give meaning and represent collective ideas. People like to identify with stories, through which we recognize ourselves, describe ourselves and differentiate ourselves from others. The myth has the capacity to involve even those who are not usually interested in politics, as the narrative envelops them without them realizing its political functionality (Riorda and Rincón, 2016).

Marketers call it storytelling, propagandists call it myth. Bernays, a precursor of propaganda, considered that before launching a campaign, the circumstances that generate a need should be defined (2005 [1928]: 66). The myth of Evo would not exist without the indigenist problem, López Obrador would not have won without the myth of the rotteness of corruption, Pedro Castillo would not have become president of Peru without the need to avoid the return of Fujimorism. Thus, necessity is defined when a lack or threat is identified. This is as valid for private enterprise as it is for politics; necessity triggers an action, in this case the vote or governmental legitimization.

It is crucial to tell simple stories that illustrate complex ideas. In the book *Creativity, Inc.* by Catmull (2016 [2014]), it is illustrated how Walt Disney achieved the success of his cartoons from a simple formula: making them show intentionality. That is, it does not really matter how much detail and quality his animations had, but what they conveyed with their actions and gestures.

Myths are forged in the actions of subjects, who become heroes. Hugo Chávez in Venezuela revived Simón Bolívar; Juan Domingo Perón has been the point of reference for the Kirchners and Alberto Fernández in Argentina; Benito Juárez, supposedly the greatest example for López Obrador in Mexico; Eloy Alfaro, "ahead of his time," according to Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Depending on latitude, these heroes touch on concepts such as freedom, change, justice, revolution, rights and identity.

There is no successful populist project that has not clearly identified its myth. The definition of its intention is fundamental, so that people can understand the message in a simple way. The transmission of the crucial idea is often reduced even in vulgar terms, in an attempt to connect with less literate people. Bernays said that the propagandistic offer must identify which are the places of discursive convergence among the different social target groups (2010 [1923]: 151). When these sectors are reached by the populist message, they can be assumed as part of a specific group, even assuming the condition of membership or belonging.

Faced with a myth well adapted by the populist, it is very complicated for other types of candidates to do anything. When traditional politicians try to sell sophisticated concepts or concepts that are far from the foundational myth of the nation, they are usually overshadowed by the simplest offer to understand. In the 2018 campaign in Mexico it happened that López Obrador's rivals, Anaya of Acción Nacional and Meade of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, showed complex offers. To the extent that Anaya promoted on social networks fragments of a conference he gave in French, of course that was liked by the university voter, not the good and noble people López Obrador was talking about. The good people voted for the one who most resembled him, López Obrador spoke to his audience, a macro sector that took him 18 years to profile and educate in his myth.

## 6.- Anti-system disruption

As described, imperfect Latin American democracies have generated a latent state of dissatisfaction among citizens. When personal choices are repetitive and we are suddenly faced with the need to make impersonal decisions in unknown and non-repetitive scenarios, the results are often unexpected (North, 1990: 22 and 25). Undoubtedly, institutions arise to reduce uncertainty, but in societies with aspirations for change, they may be tempted to experiment with non-institutional options based on ideological justifications.

For populism to be an attractive offer, it has to look like a disruptive offer on the outside, but with a conservative background on the inside. The cartelization of parties advocated by Katz and Mair (1995) or Lawson's linkage theory (1980) were outdated in Latin American scenarios, where traditional parties could not consolidate themselves as legitimate intermediaries between society and government. In these contexts, the conditions have arisen for new forces and marginalized sectors to emerge with great reactive power.

The way in which these new political forces have gained ground is precisely by using the parties/movements as vehicles of power. Once installed in government, the exchange takes place directly between the leader and his related sectors, i.e., a clientelistic and personalized form; they can dispense with the institutionalization that a consolidated democracy does require (North, 1990: 34; Stokes, et al, 2013).

In other words, although populism can be presented as a radical left or right option, in practice its offer will be very similar because it will be a reaction movement to whatever the "elite in government" represents at that moment. It is curious, but populism will always seek to overthrow the status quo, and to do so it will simplify the people's opponent with an adjective such as "the caste" in Spain or the "mafia of power" in Mexico.

Then, what really stands out in the populist offer is not its political ideology, but its position as opposition to the establishment (Žižek, 2022 [2000]: 21). Populism positions itself before the public as "the royal road" as Laclau (2005) would say, that pretended aspirational universality that will finally redeem the people. But for this "royal road" to become a tangible objective, it requires a social artifact, it requires a political project embodied in a myth.

## 7.- Polarization or market segmentation?

Electoral campaigns in Latin America have become increasingly complex and difficult to predict. Political offers based on myth are a source of adjectivations that seek a specific objective: to identify the audience. In recent marketing studies, it has been described that polarization always brings good dividends in the recognition of brands with little trajectory (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2017; and Young, 2017). People can go against projects, not their own myths.

Democracy in contexts of low institutional effectiveness is flimsy. Unfulfilled promises and attrition are a breeding ground for the return of those personalities once thought absurd and even dangerous. Thus, society is divided "between two antagonistic camps, the 'people' and the 'elite';" where the people is represented by that strong man who despises pluralism and who abandons the slogan: "with me or against me", "with the revolution or against it," "with our project or against it," "with the nation or against it" (Woldenberg, 2021: 17).

Democracy is weak in the face of this polarization because it does not pose a "you or me" scenario; in real democracy the value of plurality prevails. But, as we have seen, democratic values are in crisis and plurality is less appreciated. The populist offer knows well that the objective is the same as that of the most "loyal" players to the system: to win elections. For this reason, populist propaganda is dedicated to mark the differentiators in the face of political competition, in the most minimalist and aggressive way possible.

Something that populist party-movements take care of evidencing and exaggerating is class consciousness in Marxist terms; their political discourses are usually loaded with definitions such as: "the poor", "the forgotten", "the dispossessed", as opposed to "the rich", "the neoliberals", "the elite", "the dynasty", "the classists".

Freud's work, *The Ego and the Id* of 1923, demonstrates that in the structure of the personality at the level of the "I or ego," the person experiences the external world and learns to feel happiness and pain. A part of the ego is conscious and helps to manage impulses, but another part is unconscious and is where contradictory emotions can be unleashed. The populist discourse seeks to make the unconscious part become explicit and upset even its "id," which is the first rung of the personality, where envy and the desire for revenge are found.

Psychologists such as Festinger (1957) or Cialdini (2007 [1984]) have described that people first choose unconsciously and then try to rationally justify their choice. People will always choose what is more familiar over what is perceived as more distant, people want to belong to the horde, so it is much more common for people to be influenced by imitation when they see the behavior of someone close to them.

Macro-segmentation, or polarization, has even been seen in Hawkers sunglasses advertising. By accident, the brand discovered that their customers used to post photos of their dogs wearing the glasses, so they replicated it on their social networks. The response was huge, people began to imitate the pattern, to the extent that the brand ended up generating a campaign in which it said: "if you don't like dogs, we don't like you" (Young, 2017). The dangerous thing, of course, is that in politics, once you win, you should not govern only for those who prefer dogs, to the extent of affecting or denigrating those who prefer cats. Therein lies the danger of not knowing how to differentiate between campaign propaganda and the formal exercise of government.

## 8- Love for the nation

When we review the theories on nationalism, it is evident that they fit exactly with the constituent elements of what today is considered populism. Nationalist movements were the precursors of the great revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, justifying themselves in the legitimacy of self-determination and acting from the opposition. Referring to the case of France, Lord Acton (1949 [1862]: 265), points out that the definition of nation was material and in order to avoid territorial and institutional disintegration, it became not only an abstraction but a fiction; the old sovereignty was a source of shame for itself, so the new one was based on the myth of a fraternal and unified people.

Nationalism can be translated as "national sentiment", according to Anthony D. Smith (2000: 303). For this author, nationalist sentiment occurs when large segments of society identify the "nation" with the "people", so that people deduce that the rest of the members of that territory are similar to themselves, even though they probably do not even know the limits of that territory. For this reason, populist propaganda often resorts to nationalism as a source of motivation to promote its offer of change or regeneration; it causes people to reduce their critical capacity to determine whether or not their daily reality coincides with the problems afflicting "others of their own." Nationalism forms natural solidarities, as if it were one big family.

Populist leaders in Latin America have taken advantage of this transfer of power, repeating the discourses of glory and order of yesteryear, based on the reordering of the State through a strong government to confront its threats: globalization, imperialism, neoliberalism and the traitors of sovereignty. Implicit in these discourses is a fervent "love of country," "love of nation," a social construct that becomes an almost pathological disease, according to Elie Kedourie (1961 [1960]). Nationalism then adapted to sovereignism is the mobilizing artifact of populist discourse, because: after all, who can go against his own homeland?

Nationalism comes hand in hand with cultural vindicators. It will always be debated when the nation begins; but the important thing will be to find the elements that reinforce the idea of community and unity of the nation. According to Hutchinson (cited in Smith, 2000: 313), in nations where political institutions are not sufficiently stable, social doubts about the validity of the nation may appear; that is where people tend to look for reinforcers of cultural nationalism that rejuvenate the "frustrated and oppressed community".

In certain contexts, it is not the nation that is in question, but its sovereignty or capacity for self-determination. The most current debate on populism recognizes that much of the phenomenon in countries with high rates of development is not due to doubts about the subsistence of the nation, but to its dependence or subjugation to the interests of other entities. In this sense, populism in developed countries will almost always fall back on the dilemma of sovereignty. An example of this was the arrival of Trump and Brexit.

Fear and feelings of revenge are great mobilizers of the vote. Fear for the future of the nation or for the transgression of sovereignty have been powerful motivators for many political campaigns in Latin America to focus their offers, not on proposals, but on the rejection of the wrong path. For example, Chavismo was presented as the anti-imperialist cause that would correct the neoliberal course Venezuela was taking. In El Salvador, Bukele appeared as a candidate without a defined ideology, but with a great reading that the people, the Salvadoran people, were eager to take revenge on the usual parties, "the irresponsible ones" that had led the nation to stagnate in poverty and violence.

## 9- The project is the candidate

Since the countries of Latin America have experienced democracy, countless candidates with populist traits have run for election. Politicians who claim to represent the interests of the people as a whole, who claim the banner of a myth already accepted by the people, who claim to have answers beyond the institutional paths to the great national problems. Many of the leaders with populist proposals promote themselves as the redeemers of the people.

Analysts of populism mention that these leaders base their power on charisma and justify it with the Weberian source of legitimization. However, I believe it is more valuable to take up the classification of Lasswell, who resorts to the

psychopathology of leaders (1963 [1930]). In his case, this political scientist suggests that there are three types of politicians: theorists, administrators and agitators.

The populist politician tends to be a social agitator who shows himself to be the loudest proposition in an election. This profile has a great command of the stage and has the ability to mobilize large sectors of society, he is shown as a person of good treatment, close to the people and with a belligerent discourse against what he considers unjust for the people.

Lasswell says that the profile of the agitator has an impulsive character with great voids in his "I", certain problems in his life history determine his narcissistic character or have internal pending accounts, which impel them to overcome and fight to vindicate themselves. A populist candidate will not accept that another party colleague be the standard bearer, in his case he will look for another party that will end up nominating him to be able to compete, because the project is him. These are the conditions that motivated leaders such as Lula Da Silva, Hugo Chavez or Lopez Obrador to not give up despite previous defeats and impediments, before becoming presidents. It is very clear how the problem of indigenism in Bolivia is taken up and embodied by one person. In his idea, Evo Morales is the oppressed people, he represents by himself the struggle and the solution already as a government, Evo is the project. Propaganda in this sense is crucial to understand how the people/leader message is unified.

Certainly most political campaigns in Western democracies are shifting to privilege the popularity of the leader, regardless of the weight that the party may have. Bai's study (2004) shows how in the USA the weight of the Republican Party was extremely important both in defining the candidate and in mobilizing the vote; that is how George W. Bush won in 2000. However, Bai recognized that the situation was different in the case of the Democratic Party, which used to be more inclined to nominate candidates based on their personality and popularity. In this sense, Trump's nomination in 2016, evidences that even in a party as solid and traditionalist as the Republican Party, populist personalities can reign.

Depending on the context, the populist leader is either assumed as the project itself, as a new option to correct the course, or assumed as part of a predecessor hero. This is the case of the Kirschners in Argentina, who assume themselves as an extension of Juan Domingo Perón's regime. Nestor Kirchner's narrative is based on the 2001 economic crisis that forced De la Rúa to resign, while the solution he promoted in 2003 was to reestablish a nationalist vision. In turn, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, will also build her project from the memory of Perón and then of her husband who died in 2010; the direct and personified heir.

## 10.- Philanthropic Ogres

Rouquié (2017) in his work on Argentine Peronism, describes that autocratic or populist democracies share the following characteristics:

- They concentrate power in a charismatic leader who uses a party, movement or front as an electoral machine.
- Although they arise from electoral legitimacy they have anti-democratic behaviors.
- They limit pluralism and political competitiveness.
- They place under suspicion and sabotage the institutional counterweights that limit the excesses of power
- Fuse the state with the government
- Maintain a constant conflict with the press and business.

They emerge in exceptional socioeconomic contexts.

- Ideology is transformed into a discursive artifact, but at its core are nationalistic and messianic ideas
- Legitimization on the basis of intolerant social polarization.
- Politicization of issues that do not concern the government.
- Clientelism becomes a functional pillar.

In 1979 the Nobel laureate in literature, Octavio Paz, wrote a book that generated a critique of the then entrenched political class in Mexico: *El ogro filantrópico* (2017 [1979]). He describes a being whose head is governed by an oligarchy, this ogre is fickle, he gets angry and punishes; but at other times he is paternal and benevolent. This is still the image of the State that persists in the psyche of Latin American citizens coming from authoritarian governments. There is a love/hate codependency towards the paternalistic ogre.

In the past things were always better, there was more order, young people were more educated, money was enough for more things and authority was respected. It is the discursive myth that is transmitted from generation to generation. As Weber describes it, one of the forms of legitimization of power is based on traditional leadership, on consecrated customs such as folklore, that protection that comes from the past, the belief in the eternal yesterday (2000 [1919]: 9).

In nations with authoritarian resabres, new centers of power are not strengthened as proposed by Carothers (2002: 19); rather, political forces only change their skin in order to agglutinate again the social cleavages configured by the same authoritarian regimes that they usually criticize in their discourse. These nations do not pass to the organization among the society itself, few civil associations are generated.

The philanthropic ogre represents the nostalgia for a paternalistic State, although imperfect, it also represents the comfort of disengaging from politics, because there is someone who "takes charge". It coincides absolutely with the type of parochial culture described in the work of Almond and Verba (1989 [1963]). Parochialism is the intermediate form of civic culture, in which the citizen is no longer a subject, but a parishioner, still believing that social responses depend on

an external, traditional, folkloric entity. Populist regimes seek to eliminate intermediary institutions, such as other political parties and autonomous or oversight organizations, in order to engage in a direct but informal dialogue with society. It must be informal, so as not to be accountable under public-legal scrutiny.

Arellano Gault says that organizations pretend to be these social robots elaborated to satisfy public needs (in Merino, et al, 2013). And the evidence points to the failure of this expanded democracy that Villoro spoke of, is in the neglect of the strengthening of institutions during the transition process. As in these nations the institutions have been built of salt and not of iron, it is thought that only a strong head can give life to that ogre, the legitimate holder of authority.

## CONCLUSIONS

*First, propaganda has remained the preferred method of strategic communication in Western regimes.* As described above, the transition to political marketing is not, as has become fashionable, a discipline that is really valued in political competition scenarios. Let us remember that marketing accepts the possibility of competition and respects the existence of different options, while propaganda in its most extreme version seeks to nullify other voices in a coordinated manner.

*Second, in Latin America there is a stagnation in the realization of democracies because they focused on implementing elections, but not on the inculcation of social participation and institutional strengthening.* For Villoro, this is a failure in the process of expanded democracy. In terms of Meyer and Jepperson, it can be said that several Latin American nations are still immersed in a segmented structure (in Powell and DiMaggio, 1999 [1991]), thinking that the State is an impersonal project that depends on a democracy delegated to the rulers, as suggested by O'Donnell (1994).

*Third, the resurgence of populist offers in the incipient Latin American democracies does not respond to the influence of a left- or right-wing ideology, but to institutional vacuums that generate opportunities for extravagant offers.* As long as governments do not generate institutional responses, needs remain unmet, in such cases, populist leaders burst in with fantastic offers to provide simple solutions to complex problems.

*Fourth, the populist offer is simple and Manichean, based on a foundational myth and proclaims a struggle that goes against the status quo of the conjuncture.* By definition, the populist offer points out that the institutions have not given results, are useless, and will point out culprits or enemies. For the populist discourse to have an effect, the causes of failure are reduced to minimalist and vulgar concepts, so that people with less critical capacity can easily identify the failures and those responsible.

*Fifth, when the populist project comes to power, it is embodied in a person who represents its struggle; the new populist regime will try to entrench itself in power and change the rules to create a non-institutionalized communication with society.* The route of regression from an unfinished democratic government goes through a populism that -with weakened institutions- will try to become a hegemonic democracy and may eventually end up in a totalitarian regime, according to the Venezuelan and Nicaraguan experience.

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