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**THE RISE OF TECHNOPOPULISM IN SOUTH
AMERICA**

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To my family, my biggest fan.

I love you deeply with all my heart.

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents an overview of the rise of a new structuring logic of contemporary democratic politics in South America: the “technopopulism”. The way in which political actors operate within existing democratic regimes, and the kinds of outcomes generated by political systems, have undergone significant changes in the past thirty years. In particular, what we have observed in the region is a transformation in the logic of political competition. For most of the history of modern democracy, political competition was structured primarily by the ideological divide between the left and the right. Although this mode of political competition has not entirely disappeared, it has progressively been supplanted by a new logic dominated by populism and technocracy. In fact, candidates for office compete in terms of opposing claims to embody the “popular will” and to possess the necessary skills and competence for achieving the technocratic concept of “common good”. In sum, they compete on a political terrain based on competence to govern rather than any ideologically inspired programme. Populism and technocracy have therefore become constitutive elements of a new political logic: they complement each other rather than functioning as opposites of one another. This new logic has profoundly altered the *modus operandi* of political actors, as well as the political results they lead to. The dissertation explores a number of examples of technopopulist regimes in the Latin American region and provides an overview of the main characteristics of this new political logic. The main argument is that the rise of technopopulism in South America has its origins in the separation between society and politics, which has weakened the mechanisms of intermediation between them and has accelerated the erosion of institutionalised forms of political representation. Consequently, new patterns of connection between political and social actors, parties and citizens have been forged and a new structuring logic of contemporary democratic politics based on populist and technocratic forms of discourse and modes of political organization has emerged.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary democracy in Latin America has gone through a process of transformation since the end of the past century. Many long-established parties have disappeared and other are in decline. The reason is that party systems have been transformed by the emergence of new political actors and party types, and that citizens have increasingly been dissatisfied with specific political actors, political parties and organizations.

The idea that democracy is somehow in crisis has become prevalent. However, what we are observing is neither the “death” nor the “end” of democracy, but rather a transformation within existing democratic regimes, in particular in the logic of political competitions. In fact, historically democratic political competition was structured by ideological division between the left and the right. This means that candidates for office competed with one another by proposing alternative ideological visions of the society and of rival interests within it to be promoted.

Although this mode of political competition has not entirely disappeared, it has progressively been supplanted by a new logic dominated by populism and technocracy. In fact, candidates for office compete in terms of opposing claims to embody the “popular will” and to possess the necessary skills and competence for achieving the technocratic concept of “common good”. Populism and technocracy have therefore become constitutive elements of a new political logic. They complement each other rather than functioning as opposites of one another. The concept that captures this pattern of developments is that of “technopopulism”, defined as a new logic of political action based on the combination of populist and technocratic traits. This new logic has profoundly altered the *modus operandi* of political actors, as well as the political results they lead to.

The concept of technopopulism is discussed in the first chapter. The term “technopopulism” refers to a new logic in the political action where political actors adopt both populist and technocratic modes of discourse and organization, as they have increasingly freed themselves from two kinds of constraints: the representation of particular ideologies and particular interests within society. In this sense, the relationship between populism and technocracy has completely overthrown the one between left and right.

As a consequence, many contemporary political actors and organizations display characteristic features of both. This suggests that the most salient differences between the main protagonists on the contemporary political scene do not lie in their substantive ideological profiles but rather in the specific way in which they combine both populist and technocratic traits with one another. Therefore, the lines of conflict and struggle that structured political competition appear less evident and increasingly blurred since substantive ideological commitments have lost their centrality on politics.

Two aspects of this overarching thesis are worth highlighting. First, populism and technocracy do not function merely as opposites of one another within this new political logic. Appeal to the will of the people and appeals to competence need to be considered as complements rather than opposites. Both advance an unmediated conception of the common good. Far from clashing with one another, technopopulist political strategies involve combinations of populism and technocracy in multiple and complex ways.

The second important point is that populism and technocracy should not be seen merely as characteristic features of a specific category of actors. Instead, they have become constitutive elements of a new political logic that has influence on the behaviour of all competing contenders for electoral offices in contemporary democratic regimes. They adopt both populist and technocratic forms of discourse and modes of political organization. Politics is increasingly about competing claims to represent the people as a whole and to possess the necessary competence and expertise to translate its will into policy.

The second chapter explores the origins of technopopulism in Latin America and the consequences of the phenomenon on the contemporary democratic regimes. Technopopulism and its claims to competence and expertise, as well as the populist appeals to the people, are possible only because of the gradual shrinking of the ideological discourse and disagreements over the way in which society should be run. Indeed, ideologically driven conflicts of interest and value have no longer centrality in the political debate. The emergence of technopopulism is thus the result of a historical process. In a nutshell, my argument is that technopopulism has origin in the long process of separation between society and politics, which has undermined the mechanisms of intermediation between them.

Traditionally, political parties and ideologies had the role of mediating the relationship between society and politics, by articulating particular interests and values. Their capacity to do so was

undermined by a number of deep sociological transformations. The consequences of the absence of any effective mechanisms of mediation between society and politics were the demand for a closer connection between them, the political dissatisfaction from which the individualization of the people resulted, and the rise of technopopulism through its populist appeals to the “common good” and the technocratic idea that there is an objective “political truth”. Moreover, as a consequence of the informal and personalistic modes of political organization, which rely on the direct linkage between the political actors and the population, technopopulist actors and movements end up having a thin organizational apparatus. In this scenario, the political parties are those who paid the highest price for the technopopulist emergence, and their work for mediation, moderation and the search for compromise was seriously affected.

What appears indisputable is that the market for participation is now more open and varied than in the past. The individualism and the process of “cognitive mobilization” have created a substantial number of apertisans, leaving the political parties without any roots. Consequently, the electoral strategy of appealing to the interests and values of specific groups within society has become less viable. Moreover, new groups and social movements are increasingly important in setting the political agenda and governments are apparently more responsive to their demands.

Among the results of this change in the nature of political debates, it is worth highlighting the process of “desubstantialization”. As the political debate is becoming increasingly hostile and confrontational and concrete policy and value differences are being progressively marginalised, other themes of discussion are gaining importance, such as the personal characteristics of the politicians involved, their personal history, the way they employ modern means of communication. The political debate is thus deprived of substantive content.

Furthermore, technopopulist political actors present a much thinner organizational apparatus than in the past. As said, the appeals to the electoral base rely on claims to competence and expertise and on populist appeals, bypassing intermediary bodies which pay the highest price.

The third chapter explores the historical patterns of technopopulism in the specific cases of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. It examines the main features of the technopopulist regimes in these countries, such as the nature of the technopopulist discourses and appeals, the

organizational forms, the politics pursued, the origins of these regimes and the national contexts.

Chavismo in Venezuela is a prime example of Latin American technopopulism. Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías was president of Venezuela from 1999 until his death in 2013. His spectacular rise to power at the end of the twentieth century was the result of a number of crises in Venezuela. These crises caused a growing people's dissatisfaction with political representation and the demand for change and social transformation. Invoking the legacy of the nineteenth-century liberator Simón Bolívar, Chávez portrayed himself as the leader of the "Bolivarian Revolution," understood as the second and definitive fight for independence. A fight fought through elections. *El Comandante* ran a self-described revolutionary government for more than thirteen years with the support of all those not satisfied with, or excluded from, the previous established order. The main reasons for such longevity were: (1) the use of permanent campaigns; (2) massive use of mass media communication strategies to link directly Chávez with Venezuelan citizens; (3) use of oil revenues for the adoption of technocratic top-down policies.

Alberto Kenya Fujimori Inomoto inaugurated technopopulism in Peru. Since his rise to political prominence in 1990, three technopopulist features have been constant: the absence of institutionalised forms of political mediation between the leader and his followers, a personalistic style of leadership, the lack of ideological definition. His electoral campaign based on populist appeals and on the images of efficiency and technocratic modernization was more effective than any ideological motivation. The lack of ideological definition was ideal for attracting unattached lower-class voters. Fujimori's Japanese heritage was also helpful, rather than being an obstacle, in the process of image building. It allowed him to benefit from popular stereotypes of the Japanese immigrant community: he was considered by voters as a hardworking and resolute. Fujimori portrayed himself as a political outsider of humble origins who had risen through personal talent and initiative. This image was also created exploiting his past experiences as professor and engineer. Economic crises and institutional weaknesses allowed Fujimori to portray himself as the savior of the nation.

The notion of technopopulism describes also the specific type of populism manifested by Rafael Correa, who served as President of Ecuador from 2007 to 2017. Like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Correa used to speak of himself as leading the citizens' revolution, aiming at

achieving a radical change in the Ecuadorean society. Correa positioned himself as a left-of-centre politician with a special concern for the poor and marginalised classes, a populist with a technocratic aptitude though. In fact, the global boom in oil allowed him to hire many bureaucrats and launch ambitious infrastructure projects and social programs, including income redistribution and subsidies to the poor, provided in a clientelist fashion. As did Chávez, Correa uses the media to bond directly with his electors and citizens. He used populist rhetoric that divided society into two antagonistic parts: the people versus the oligarchy. Correa made a large use of radio and television for his propaganda, impoverishing the political debate, combining charismatic and technocratic appeals.

The last technopopulist regime considered is that of Álvaro Uribe Vélez, who served as President of Colombia from 2002 to 2010. His regime can be considered as a peculiar form of technopopulism: while Uribe presented many typical populist features, his technocratic appeals were different from that of other technopopulist Latin leaders. In fact, while technocratic appeals usually focus on economic and financial measures, or on social programs in the case of Latin America, Uribe's electoral and political platform centered on a different topic which was causing a serious crisis in Colombia: the war against "*los violentos*", the FARC, the main Colombian guerrilla movement. In this sense, the appeal to the expertise of technocrats concerned the ability to put an end to the era of violence which had characterised Colombia since the mid-1960s. The president did not present himself as the leader of the poor and of the excluded classes as Chávez in Venezuela or Correa in Ecuador. Instead, Uribe portrayed himself as the leader of many terrorised Colombians, who could put an end to the fear of violence. Uribe made active use of populist style of discourse, creating a dichotomy good-evil in the Colombian society: *los violentos* on one side, the people fighting them on the other.

My work has also implications for the debates about the quality of democracy in Latin America. In this regard, the emergence of technopopulism has often been perceived as dangerous to the quality of democracy in the region. Core aspects of democratic elections and of the democratic government are certainly called into question. Along the already cited desubstantialization, increasing conflictuality and hostility among political competitors, and the marginalization of intermediary bodies are more and more evident. Latin American electors have become more receptive to both populist and technocratic appeals: they are interested in the technical qualities of policymaking and in the goals achieved.

In short, Latin American region, or at least a part of it, lives in a technopopulist age. Technopopulism is not an alternative to democracy. Instead, it is just the form that democratic politics assume today. If in the past political competition was characterised by the ideological struggle between left and right, nowadays we should think about it instead as the opposition between alternative ways of making appeals to the people, to the common good and to the expertise. Thus, the political logic remains competitive but without being oppositional.

1. THE CONCEPT OF TECHNOPOPULISM

As a form of government, democracy has been practiced in different forms for over 2,500 years, since the time of the ancient Greeks. During this period, both the theory and the practice of democracy have undergone profound changes. Currently, the idea that democracy is somehow in crisis has become prevalent. However, what we are observing is neither the “death” nor the “end” of democracy, but rather a new transformation within existing democratic regimes. Many long-established parties have disappeared and other are in decline. The reason is that party systems have been transformed by the emergence of new political actors and party types, and that citizens have increasingly been dissatisfied with specific political actors, political parties and organizations. The main consequence is that the logic of political competitions is no longer structured by ideological division between the left and the right. In fact, although this mode of political competition has not entirely disappeared, it has progressively been supplanted by a new logic of political action, that of “technopopulism”. This is a new concept that captures this pattern of developments based on the combination of populist and technocratic claims. Populism and technocracy have therefore become constitutive elements of a new political logic. They complement each other rather than functioning as opposites of one another. Populism and technocracy are better understood as modes of political action, which can be combined with one another in multiple and creative ways. Many contemporary political actors and organizations turn out to display the characteristic features of both. This new logic has profoundly altered the *modus operandi* of political actors and the political results, and consequently, the democratic regimes.¹

1.1. A Definition of Technopopulism

That of technopopulism is a relatively new concept. The term was first coined by Arthur Lipow and Patrick Seyd in the 1995 article entitled “Political Parties and the Challenge to Democracy:

¹ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, “*Technopopulism: The New Logic of Democratic Politics.*”, Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 2-3.

From Steam Engines to Technopopulism”. The prefix “techno-“ in the original article referred to the concept of technology. More recently, the prefix has been used to refer to the notion of technocracy rather than technology.² Despite recent technological developments have undoubtedly played an important role in the emergence of technopopulism, the role of technology is here considered just to the extent that it helps explain how populism and technocracy are related to one another in the contemporary political landscape.

While some authors have used the concept of technopopulism to describe particular types of political actors, others have used it to define particular types of political regimes. Lorenzo Castellani, for example, has proposed a definition of technopopulism as a political regime characterized by “an interaction between global capitalism, technocratic institutions, and new populist political movements”.³ Indeed, technopopulism cannot be reduced merely to a category of political actors since it also concerns the relationships amongst political actors. The political scientist Carlos de la Torre used the notion of technopopulism to describe the specific type of populism of the former Ecuadorean president, Rafael Correa, who by using “technocratic reason—with its claim to be true and scientific—replaced the give-and-take of democratic debate over proposals”⁴.

It can also be affirmed that technopopulism cannot be described as an ideology. In fact, one of the defining features of this political logic is precisely the rejection of the traditional ideological differences among parties. Therefore, there is a distinctively anti-ideological dimension to technopopulism.

For all these reasons, technopopulism is better understood as an organizing logic of political competition and a new logic in the political action in which political actors adopt both technocratic and populist modes of discourse and organization, as they have increasingly freed themselves from a certain constrain: the representation of particular ideologies and particular interests within society. In fact, for most of the history of modern democracy, political competition was structured primarily around the left-right ideological divide. This means that candidates for office competed with one another by proposing alternative visions of the way in which society ought to be governed, which encapsulated different value systems and rival

² *ivi*, pp. 18-19.

³ Castellani Lorenzo, “*L’era del Tecnopopulismo*”, in *Le Grand Continent*, 6th December 2020, available at: <https://legrandcontinent.eu/it/2020/12/06/lera-del-tecnopopulismo/>

⁴ de la Torre Carlos, “*El Tecnopopulismo de Correa*”, in *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 48, January 2013, p. 30.

interests within it. Although this mode of political competition has not entirely disappeared, it has progressively been supplanted by a new logic where candidates for office compete primarily in terms of rival claims to embody the “people” as a whole and to possess the necessary competence for translating the “popular will” into policy. Populism and technocracy have therefore become the main structuring poles of contemporary democratic politics.⁵

Furthermore, technopopulism cannot be defined as an entirely new phenomenon. In this sense, political leaders in the history of modern democracy have always claimed to represent the interests of the people as a whole and to possess the necessary competence and skills to reach solutions for the problems they face. However, it is worth noting that not all political leaders or parties have appealed to the people in order to gain electoral support and political legitimacy. Indeed, historically speaking, political parties presented themselves as the political exponents of a specific part of society, and consequently they used to promote a very different conception of the general interest compared to the concept of the populist “popular will” which claims to represent the mass as a whole. Political parties offered a particular interpretation of the “common good”, based on a specific set of values and interests, and most important, recognizing the legitimacy of other competing interpretations from other political parties. In contrast, a hallmark of technopopulist discourse is the claim to “exclusive representation” of the popular will through pervasive appeals to competence or expertise, which leaves little or no space for the recognition of the legitimacy of political opponents.⁶ In this sense, other interpretations are not recognized as legitimate.

Moreover, when electoral competition was structured primarily around ideological confrontation, populism and technocracy were far less salient as modes of political action. In the past, ideology really mattered since candidates for office tended to present themselves as champions of particular interests and values. Instead, technopopulist leaders present themselves as ideologically neutral providers of good public policies. The current political salience of populist appeals to the people’ as a whole, technocratic claims to competence or expertise as grounds for political legitimacy is possible only because of the gradual loss of importance of ideologically driven conflicts of interest and value, which are out of the spotlight. These are the

⁵ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁶ *ivi*, p. 7.

reasons which allow us to affirm that technopopulist political logic is a relatively new historically specific phenomenon.

1.2. The Technopopulist Logic of Electoral Competition

As stated above, technopopulism presents a new logic of electoral competition. In the past it was oppositional in the sense that competing candidates for office used to take different substantive positions on social cleavages based on region, social class and religion, and then struggle to win votes on that basis. Even though these traditional social cleavages have not entirely disappeared, they have changed as a consequence of the emergence of multiple new social divisions, as well as a consequence of the broader social processes of individualization and cognitive mobilization. The electoral strategy of appealing to the interests and values of specific groups within society has therefore become less practicable since these social formations are more fragmentary, inconsistent and fragile.

The means of political mobilization available to contemporary contenders for electoral office are also very different from those which were available in the twentieth century. The first thing to note is that contemporary contenders for electoral office frequently portray themselves as representatives of the interests of the mass, of the society as a whole. In fact, their claims take the form of the populists' notion of the "popular will".⁷ Moreover, their claims also take the form of "political truth", exploiting the fact that people are nowadays focused just on the results of policies. In this sense, technopopulist competitors use pervasive appeals to competence or expertise as grounds for political legitimacy and present themselves as competent at achieving results or delivering effective and good public policy.

Contemporary salience of both populist and technocratic modes of representation is the consequence of a different kind of political logic, which remains competitive but without being oppositional. The difference between "political competition" and "political opposition" is that the former does not necessarily involve opposition. The idea of political competition without substantive opposition is essential to understand the way in which the technopopulist logic

⁷ *ivi*, pp. 35-36.

works in contemporary democracies. This is in fact significant because the distinctive feature of the technopopulist political logic is precisely that it encourages all competing contenders for electoral office to adopt both populist and technocratic forms of discourse and modes of political organization, independently of their substantive policy goals. In this sense, one of the effects of the technopopulist logic is exactly that of shifting the principal axis of political competition from the horizontal dimension of the left-right ideological struggle to the vertical dimension of the struggle between the “people as a whole” and the parts, in which the former appears superior *a priori*. This shift gives legitimation to the way in which we move from an acceptance of the legitimacy of political opponents and substantive ideological differences to a situation where one of the sides of the conflict is considered illegitimate, due to the objective superiority of the other side.

Both populism and technocracy are characterized by personalistic modes of political organization, which consists of direct bonds of trust between the leadership and the people. As a consequence, contemporary political actors and organizations end up having a much thinner organizational apparatus than in the past, which is meant to appeal as broadly as possible across the electorate by relying on easily identifiable personalistic cues. Instead of partisan bonds with a particular section of the electorate based on loyalty and on a specific ideology, technopopulists appeal to a wider section of the electorate through personalistic cues that bypass intermediation of the party or other institutionalized bodies. The emphasis on direct relationships between technopopulist leaders and followers undermines and exploits the weakness of institutionalized channels of political representation.

Furthermore, the contemporary means of mass communication and information technology are widely used in the electoral competition. Charismatic leaders dominate the political scene through the channels of mass communication which allow them to access a wide range of political targets. Through the use of these instrument which spread an anti-elitist rhetoric, the anger and the frustration of electors are channeled towards traditional parties. Anti-establishment discourse allows for mobilizing ideologies that are directed against the traditional politics and the institutions, as well as economic elites. The mediatization of democracy increases disaffection with the established order through the use of conspiracies and the manipulation of

negative events, such as economic crisis, political scandals and natural disasters, exploiting the emotionality of humoral masses.⁸

In sum, contemporary contenders for electoral office face a powerful set of incentives to adopt both technocratic and populist forms of discourse and modes of political organization, as a consequence of the political and social changes within democratic regimes. In the technopopulist era, the appeals to specific interests and to the traditional social cleavages in order to mobilize particular groups within society find less and less space in the electoral competition.

Therefore, it can be affirmed that technopopulism presents four main characteristics:

1. a personalistic and paternalistic modalities of political leadership;
2. a top-down process of political mobilization that bypasses institutionalized forms of mediation and institutional representation through direct linkages between the leader and the masses;
3. exclusive representation of the “people” by the leader rather than acceptance of representation by other actors;
4. use of discourses that exalts anti-elitism and anti-establishment, and of claims to expertise and competence. Technopopulists are prone to political marketing.

1.3. An Overview Over Populism and Technocracy

As stated above, in the technopopulist era contemporary political actors adopt both populist and technocratic forms of discourse and modes of political organization, at the expense of more substantive ideological orientations. At this stage it is worth recalling the concepts of populism and technocracy.

The notion of populism has always been the topic of much attention and disagreement. Most existing studies on populism agree in defining it as a particular mode of political action. It is not defined as a substantive set of policy or value commitments, but rather as a particular way of acting politically. There are two main approaches in order to define the distinctive features

⁸ Castellani Lorenzo, *op. cit.*

of this particular mode of political action. The first is the “ideational approaches” to populism stress the use of a certain kind of language and discourse focused on the opposition between people and elite. In this sense, the populist rhetoric is based on the representation of “the people” as a homogeneous group and on the inclusion of underprivileged classes. Secondly, the “organizational approaches” focus on a distinctive mode of political organization, involving a direct appeal by a personalized leader to the electorate, bypassing the intermediation of institutionalized intermediary bodies.

Under populism, politics takes the form of an ethical battle between good and evil. The figure of the personal leader seeks direct legitimation from a disorganized mass developing a discourse that opposes the people as a whole to a corrupt elite. Populists usually identify their rivals as enemies of the people and, consequently, of the nation.

Populist leaders claim to be the only ones that can adequately represent the masses. This enables them to bypass all forms of intermediation with the individuals they claim to represent, promoting a more direct form of identification between them. Adopting this approach, Carlos de la Torre defined populism as "a Manichean discourse that divides politics and society as the struggle between two irreconcilable and antagonistic camps: the people and the oligarchy or the power block."⁹

Moreover, according the political scientist Müller Jan-Werner, “populists are always anti-pluralist”, in the sense that “populists claim that they, and only they, represent the people”. In fact, implicit in this definition of populism is a conception of political representation as a mode of incorporation of a unified mass¹⁰. We see this anti-pluralism at work in two other distinctive features of populism. The first is a focalisation on the figure of the leader, who gives voice to the people’s unitary and homogenous will. The second is the rejection of any possible “compromise” with other political forces.¹¹

Thus, it can be said that representation under populism is based on the paternalistic relationship between personalist leaders and their heterogeneous mass of followers, and it is associated with the “deinstitutionalization” of political authority. The concept of deinstitutionalization refers to

⁹ de la Torre Carlos, "*Populism in Latin America*", in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press., 2017, pp. 195–213.

¹⁰ Müller Jan-Werner, "*What Is Populism?*", University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2016, p. 45.

¹¹ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, "*‘Techno-populism’ as a new party family: the case of the Five Star Movement and Podemos*", in *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 21st May 2018.

the breakdown of institutionalized forms of political representation. This breakdown often occurs during periods of social and economic upheaval.¹²

In sum, populism is a mode of political action that consists of:

1. an ideational component, which designs a divided society consisting of “good common people” and of a “corrupt elite”, where the former has a right to govern itself in the name of popular sovereignty;
2. an organizational component, consisting in a claim to exclusive representation of the people by a personal leader, through direct appeals to the mass, bypassing intermediary bodies.

It can be useful at this point to recall the analysis of Roberts Kenneth, according to whom populism, intended as a strategic style or as a way of doing politics, has the following four defining attributes:

1. a pattern of personalized and paternalistic political leadership;
2. a multi-class support coalition based on popular sectors, be they urban or rural;
3. a form of vertical political mobilization “top-down” that circumvents or subordinates conventional mechanisms of political mediation;
4. an anti-elitist and anti-establishment ideology.¹³

With regards to technocracy, whereas “democracy” literally means “rule by the people”, the term “technocracy” refers to a form of “rule by experts”. The origins of the concept of technocracy can be traced as far back as the political philosophy of Plato. The philosopher made a radical critique of democracy based on the ancient Greek notion of “*techne*”, which can be translated as “art”, “craft”, “competence” or “skill”. Plato affirmed that since the majority generally lack the competence and the skills required for a good governance, the few experts that have them must be invested of the political power. In his thought, the philosophers were the experts who possessed the necessary competence or skill for governing and, consequently, the resulting form of government was the one ruled by the philosophers. In this sense, this type of government can be seen as a form of technocracy.¹⁴ In the same way, technocrats are

¹² Roberts Kenneth M., “*Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case*”, in *World Politics* 48, no. 1, 1995, pp. 82–116.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

understood as those political actors who can deliver good policy decisions by virtue of their competence or expertise. In this sense, it can be affirmed that the *techne* is put to the service of the people.

Generally speaking, technocrats are charged to deal with complex issues that *políticos* lack the ability to address successfully and, in fact, technocrats have a “technical autonomy” which is due to several factors:

1. Policy complexity, which together with the asymmetry of information between experts and politicians and the uncertainty about the potential consequences of adopting certain policies increases the autonomy of technocrats. Due to their lack of knowledge and of comprehension of technical aspects, politicians rely heavily on experts to deal with complex policies, loosening their own political control.
2. The costs of a bad policy performance, such as the negative political consequences of making bad policy decisions that affect the population and societal actors.
3. Consensual expertise, which refers to the degree of technical consensus that exists among experts in a given policy area. There is little space for political intrusion in those policy sectors where a strong consensus among experts already exists about what constitutes adequate policy.
4. The risk of affecting the interests of a variety of powerful political, economic, and international stakeholders.

More recent definition of technocracy within democratic regimes is often associated with the concepts of “depoliticization” and “politicization of experts”. The former refers to the idea that empowering technocrats leads to a form of depoliticization, in the sense that specific policy areas are removed from the domain over which politicians have direct authority. Technocrats do not engage in ideological debate or democratic consensus-building practices. The latter focus on the way in which electoral contenders for office use the claims to competence and expertise in their struggle for votes with one another to gain legitimacy and consensus. As stated by Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, “when a political actor appeals to expertise in his or her attempt to win political power, or governs on this basis of politicized expertise, a conflict emerges between rival claims to *techne*: that of independent institutions or the skills of

established state bureaucracies, challenged by claims to competence made by politicized experts.”¹⁵

Through the claims to expertise and competence the technocratic view of the world lacks any notion of contestability. It is based on the assumption that *techne* can address successfully any issues and that there are “right” and “wrong” solutions to specific policy problems, regardless of partisan contributions. In this context, political competitors are elected according to whether they are likely to successfully address the collective problems societies face, or in other words, their capability to generate “right answers”. In this way, as stated by Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, “the political decision-making process becomes similar to problem-solving methods employed in corporations, where the criteria for a legitimate proposal are its presumed capability and effectiveness to solve specific problems”¹⁶.

For the political scientist Centeno, any political actor can be considered a technocrat when legitimacy is claimed for what they are doing on the basis of an appeal to expertise, independently of the nature of that competence. Therefore, just as populists claim to directly embody the “people” as a whole and the “popular will”, technocrats claim to possess specific skills, competences or expertise, which qualify them as better suited to govern. Moreover, according to Centeno, in this context even the electors-citizens have been transformed into experts. In fact, they choose and evaluate their representatives on the basis of their achievements.¹⁷

Another influential definition of technocracy is the one proposed by Caramani, who describes it as a form of political representation based on “trust” rather than “delegation” type of relationship between the representative and their constituency.¹⁸ Caramani’s own definition of technocracy has its basis on the existence of an unmediated relationship between those who offer trust and those who enjoy it. The implication is that, like populism, technocracy also can be defined by its two dimensions: an organizational dimension which involves a direct relationship of trust between the technocrats who possess specific competences claiming trust

¹⁵ *ivi*, p. 30.

¹⁶ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, “‘Techno-populism’ as a new party family: the case of the Five Star Movement and Podemos”, in *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 21st May 2018.

¹⁷ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Caramani Daniele, “Will vs. Reason: The Populist and Technocratic Forms of Political Representation and Their Critique to Party Government”, in *American Political Science Review*, 111(1), 2017, pp. 54-67.

and those who offer it; and an ideational dimension which consists in the claim to a particular type of competence or expertise that qualify the technocrat as a legitimate actor.

1.4. Technopopulism as a Synthesis of Populism and Technocracy – Are They Compatible?

Populism and technocracy are usually considered as opposed to each other, not as complements. The conflict between technocracy and democracy takes us back to Plato, who argued that those with the skills are expected to be in charge of running a *polis*. Empowering those experts seems to imply the disqualification of the majority, of “the people”.¹⁹

However, between the two extremes of claiming to be a populist standing against technocracy there is a whole range of possible ways of combining them with one another. In fact, according to some commentators, populism and technocracy could be balanced with one another within contemporary democratic regimes to obtain a healthy equilibrium between positive results from good and efficient policies and more responsible and responsive governments.²⁰ In this way, populism and technocracy can work as effective remedies for one another: while populism can be considered as a corrective for technocracy because it could avoid the risk of depoliticization due to the transfer of power from elected politicians to independent experts, technocracy can limit the risks coming from populist governments.

However, the previous considerations can be misleading, since they rely on the assumption that the equilibrium between populism and technocracy would be zero-sum. In fact, the two approaches can be considered complementary. In this sense, they can also go hand in hand considering some elements of complementarity between them. For Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, “there is no a priori contradiction either in the idea of using populist discourse to advance a technocratic political agenda, or in the use of technocratic means to foster the

¹⁹ Bickerton Christopher J., “*The rise of the technopopulists From Macron’s En Marche! to the Conservatives’ “Get Brexit Done”*: how populists embraced the language of science and expertise”, in *The New Statesman*, 21st October 2020.

²⁰ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

presumptive interests of “the people” as a whole.” Thus, populism and technocracy can also not function as antidotes for one another but just be complementary.²¹

It is not a case that the appeals to both “the people” and to competence and expertise, around which political competition in advanced democratic states today is increasingly ordered, are combined in multiple and complex ways. We can no longer say that one party or a leader is populist or technocratic. Rather, in the contemporary context political strategies involve various combinations of both populism and technocracy. In sum, contemporary political strategies are based on the technopopulist logic.

Technopopulism is something different from populism and technocracy, and it is not an alternative to democracy. It is the form that democratic politics takes today in contemporary democratic regimes. While in the past democratic politics and thus the political competition were characterized by the struggle between left and right, now we are witnessing to political and electoral competitions on rival ways of combining appeals to “the people” and appeals to expertise.²²

The political scientist Muller has gone further affirming that populism and technocracy are “mirror images of each other”. In fact, as for technocracy there is only one correct policy solution, in the same way populism claims that there is only one authentic will of the people aiming at the common good. Therefore, he concludes, “one might pave the way for the other, because it legitimises the belief that there is no real room for debate and disagreement: after all, there is only one correct policy solution, just as there is only one authentic popular will”.²³

In sum, two aspects are now worth highlighting since they imply significant transformations in the contemporary democratic politics:

1. First of all, populism and technocracy should not be seen merely as characteristic features of a specific category of actors. Instead, all political actors in contemporary democratic regimes assume some of the features of populism or technocracy because of the incentives and constraints of the contemporary political context in which they act.

²¹ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-180.

²² Bickerton Christopher J., “*The rise of the technopopulists From Macron’s En Marche! to the Conservatives’ “Get Brexit Done”*: how populists embraced the language of science and expertise”, in *The New Statesman*, 21st October 2020.

²³ Muller Jan-Werner, “*The People Must Be Extracted from within the People. Reflections on Populism.*”, in *Constellations* 21 (4), 2014, pp. 483–493.

2. Secondly, within contemporary democratic regimes, populism and technocracy do not function merely as opposites or remedies of one another. Instead, there is a deep affinity between them although the appeals to the “the people” and to competence are often considered at odds. In fact, they both advance an unmediated conception of the common good, even though through two different forms of claims.

1.5. Conclusion

Technopopulism is distinguished by the manner in which populist, anti-system and anti-elitist elements are combined with an apparently incompatible technocratic discourse that insists instead on the expertise, the delivery of good policies and the resolution of practical problems. Despite the fact that their combination seems a “negative contribution” to political debate, because of the opposition to the existing political class through populist claims, as well as by construing ad hoc solutions to specific problems that deny any possible confrontation between different competing visions of society, the rise of technopopulism is undeniable.

The relationship between populism and technocracy has completely overthrown the one between left and right in the electoral competition. The traditional ideological categories of left and right have become historically exhausted and a new dimension of political confrontation emerged between “the people” on one hand, and the elite classes on the other.²⁴

In this sense, the driving force behind technopopulism is political, not ideological. In fact, the relationship between populism and technocracy is not the same as that between left and right, since the latter is rooted in conflicting value systems and interest groups within society. Instead, the lines of conflict and struggle that structure today the political competition appear increasingly blurred. What distinguishes competing candidates for office and determines their chances of electoral success is substantially the specific way in which they combine both populist claims to popularity and technocratic claims to expertise, rather than their particular ideologies, values or interests. The adoption of these new modes of discourse and organization is the consequence of a new system of incentives and constraints that political actors face, which

²⁴ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

is increasingly unchained from the representation of particular interests and values within society, and which remains competitive but without being oppositional.

Therefore, technopopulism is not an alternative to democracy. Instead, it represents a distinctive development within democratic regimes. Although technopopulism profoundly alters the *modus operandi* of political actors, as well as the political outcomes they lead to, and the modes of political organizations, its emergence is neither the “death” nor the “end” of democracy as such.²⁵ To the extent that populism and technocracy are means for political legitimacy, they do not threaten the democratic life of institutions. In fact, technopopulism never bring an institutional transformation and formal democratic procedures remain in place. The real risks concern the quality of representation.

The emergence of populism and technocracy as main organizing logic of contemporary democratic politics is essential for understanding the erosion of institutionalized forms of political representation and the rise of technopopulist leaders in Latin America in the last decades.

²⁵ *ibid.*

2. TECHNOPOPULISM IN LATIN AMERICA

This chapter explores the origins and some of the consequences of the rise of technopopulism as the new structuring logic of contemporary democratic politics in many Latin American democratic regimes.

In the last thirty years, democracy has been transformed and new trends have emerged. Technological progress, economic crisis, globalisation, social changes, have generated two major phenomena which, in turn, have modified the structure of liberal democracies: technocracy and populism. Their synthesis, the technopopulism, stems from a broad process of separation between society and politics, on one hand, and the logic of electoral competition on the other.

In fact, till the last decades of the past century, society and politics were closely connected to one another by the mediating action of political parties and ideologies. Partisan divisions were a mirror of underlying conflicts of interest and value within society. Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the social and historical conditions that had supported the left-right ideological division started to be significantly eroded. This occurred because of transformations in the socio-economic structure, which have undermined the traditional class distinction between proletariat and bourgeoisie. As a consequence, existing party system based on that class division lost its roots and, in turn, citizens did not recognize themselves in them anymore. In absence of any effective mechanisms of mediation between them, and with a decline in popular party attachments and a generalised process of cognitive mobilisation, society and politics ended up being increasingly disconnected.

With regards to the analysis of the consequences of the rise of technopopulism, it is divided in two parts: while in the first, the effects that technopopulism tends to have on the domain of electoral competition are analysed, the second part focuses on its broader effects on other domains of Latin American society and politics.

With the shrinking party identification and the inauguration of the age of atomized citizens, ordinary people became able to participate in politics without the mediation of now outmoded institutions such as political parties. Consequently, the relationship between the social and the

political took the form of a mass of disaggregated social interests and values, on the one hand, and unitary conceptions of the “popular will” or the “common good”, on the other.

The prominence of competence and expertise in our political vocabulary also had its origins in the rise of this atomization. The political logic that emerged from this unmediated relationship between society and politics was that of technopopulism.

Technopopulist political actors were able to intercept discontent, scepticism and anger of the people towards institutions, building a strong personality and a direct, intimate, immediate relationship with them. Personalisation emerged as a key element in this phase. The personal characteristics of the politicians, their personal history, their origins, their particular style of communication, as well as their competences and skills increasingly assumed central stage, at the expense of the substantive content of their policy proposals.

To the extent that both populism and technocracy involve claims to represent society as a whole, they undermine the political competition based on alternative political projects. In this way, political projects became more consensual and indeterminate, in order to avoid any conflicts with specific societal sectors. In sum, the political offers became substantively more and more similar to one another. This phenomenon, called “desubstantialization of electoral competition”, is one of the main consequences of the rise of technopopulism. The different ways of doing politics, rather than what is actually being done, gained prominence in electoral competitions.

2.1. The Origins of Technopopulism in Latin America

The rise of technopopulism as the main structuring logic of contemporary democratic politics is related to the complex evolution of the relationship between societal divisions and partisan politics over the course of the past century.

During the first half of the twentieth century, society and politics were tied to one another by a variety of powerful instances of mediation between them, such as parties, trade unions, civic associations, religious organizations, and the information and opinion media. Until the final decades of the twentieth century, democratic politics revolved around the opposition between

rival ideologies - the left and the right. These ideologies were not instrumentally used by cynical politicians. Ideologies used to divide society: the partisan ideologies, both the left and the right, were the mirror of the society as they represented the specific values and interests of the groups within it. Ideologies, in turn, gave societies their substance and structure. As a reflection of societal cleavages, while communist and social democratic parties were usually expressions of the aspirations of the organised labour movement, in contrast, the conservative parties largely represented the interests and values of the elite class. Ideologies were more than political rhetoric and used to outweigh the populist appeals to the people or to the competence of technocrats.

Over the course of the decades, the close relationship between societal divisions and partisan politics progressively broke down. The main reason of this loss of correspondence was the erosion of the role of the intermediary bodies between the two of them, such as the political parties. This erosion occurred during the critical juncture at the end of the twentieth century. The expression “critical juncture” refers to the periods of political, economic or social change, which have broad effects over society as whole, including the political institutions. These changes usually provide opportunities for the emergence of new competitors, and are troublesome for established party systems.²⁶

The critical juncture that marked Latin America’s transformation in the 1980s and 1990s is usually called “the lost decade”. It refers to the economic crisis suffered in Latin America which consisted of unpayable external debts, taxes, and volatile inflation and exchange rates.²⁷ This period left a debt crisis with devastating effects for the whole continent. Therefore, Latin America walked into the 1990s with a fragile democratic system and in debt and recession. The increasing inequality within society was the result of several fiscal adjustments, trade opening, and privatization measures. All these factors also undermined the traditional class distinction between proletariat and bourgeoisie. In this context, the great challenge was how to go through this socio-economic crisis while defending basic democratic rules and endorsing the social agenda at the same time.

²⁶ Roberts Kenneth M., “*Parties and Populism in Latin America*”, in *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, by de la Torre C. and Arnson Cynthia J. (eds). Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, p. 43.

²⁷ Schamis Hector E., “*From the Peróns to the Kirchners: Populism in Argentine Politics*”, in *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, by de la Torre C. and Arnson Cynthia J. (eds). Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, p. 148.

Socio-economic changes, initiated even before the lost decade, transformed the class structure, which, in turn, had repercussions on the conditions of political competition. Whereas politics had been dominated by class clash, in particular the one between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, by mid-century these class divisions had been eroded. The “middle class”, created by the processes of industrialization and urbanization, became the largest social class, progressively incorporating former proletariat and bourgeoisie classes. Thus, the previous class system increasingly disappeared.

The traditional parties and the established party systems were incapable of reflecting the new social cleavages since they were the product of a previous and deeply ideological age. Trade unions, religious organizations, and other civic associations which had served as intermediary bodies, retreated into the private sphere, defending their particular interests and values. The new political demands and aspirations stemming from the new societal dynamics could not be adequately addressed by the political system in place. The growing disjuncture between societal dynamics and the new logic of electoral competition overwhelmed the traditional forms of politics.

From the new social and political context a process of individualization started. Because of the detachment from partisan identification, voters became interested in the policy-oriented and problem-solving aspects of representation. They were no longer interested in the party-related dimensions of politics, and politicians were considered primarily in their ability to deliver policies, thus we can say in policy terms, rather than for their partisan identification. It follows that voters became self-sufficient in politics. This process took the name of “cognitive mobilization”.²⁸ In his work on the relation between cognitive mobilization and partisan alignment, the political scientist Dalton Russel stated that the more cognitively mobilized citizens would be, the less they are likely to take part in traditional forms of partisan activity. For this reason, he talked about “partisan dealignment”.²⁹

A variety of new leaders and movements took this opportunity to gain electoral advantage by challenging the traditional political parties, using the classic populist themes of the past such as those of redistributionism, anti-elitism and anti-American nationalism, among others. Also leaders who were part of the old system and had made their careers within political parties, such

²⁸ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

²⁹ Dalton Russel, “*Cognitive Mobilization and Partisan Dealignment in Advanced Industrial Democracies*”, in *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 46, February 1984, p. 270.

as Álvaro Uribe in Colombia, denied their links to the old parties, condemning them as corrupt, and created new personalistic electoral vehicles.

Moreover, technocratic responses from the political class were evoked by the citizens, who demanded “good policies”.³⁰ In this sense, the transformation of voters who were accustomed to supporting traditional parties took place. They were electorally converted through rhetorical attacks on the political establishment based on the dichotomy between the party elites, i.e. the oligarchy, and “*el pueblo*”, whose political redemption come only from outside the old established system. The populist and technocratic appeals led to a great salience of unmediated conceptions of the common good, such as the idea of a unified “popular will” and the idea that there is an objective political “truth”. Therefore, it can be affirmed that this period cleared the way for the rise of populism and technocracy as the main structuring poles of contemporary democratic politics. Under conditions of ideological disorientation and economic duress, populism and technocracy often emerged as the dominant modes of political action.

Taking advantage of the persistence of extreme poverty and inequality, technopopulist leaders mobilized the previously politically excluded marginal sectors of the population in the electoral arena. These sectors were made up of the new middle and working classes and the rural poor, including in many countries the indigenous populations.

The conversion of voters was also achieved by technopopulist leaders through their track record of success in their professional career before entering into politics, and through technocratic appeals to competence. In Latin America, these kinds of appeal are usually really effective because of the widespread bureaucratic weakness. With their claims of skills and expertise, technopopulists send clear signals of responsibility to both domestic or external actors, and promote policies that other politicians and bureaucracies are perceived as incapable of handling.³¹

The new parties emerging after the critical juncture in the end of the twentieth century, such as the Peronist party in Argentina, the “Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana” (APRA) and the “Cambio 90” (C90) in Peru, the “Acción Democrática” and the “Movimiento Quinta República” (MVR) in Venezuela, challenged traditional elites through populist discourses, mobilizing appeals to traditionally excluded working and lower classes, and technocratic claims

³⁰ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

³¹ *ivi*, p. 12.

to expertise and competence. Technopopulists in government weakened the ideological content of politics supporting projects in favour of the society as a whole. Consequently, there was no space for initiatives aiming to endorse particular interests or other visions. Therefore, the emergence of technopopulist actors was consistent with a decline in the substantive competition between political parties. It can be affirmed that incentives to the substantive competition were increasingly replaced by positive incentives not to compete, retreating into the state and sharing the benefits of public office.³²

Moreover, instead of arguing for the improvement of democratic representative institutions, these leaders have deepened the distance between representative and led, although never abandoning this kind of institutions. In this sense, technopopulism presents itself both as subversive of the existing *status quo* and as a starting point for a new order. Elections are the means used to replace the traditional political elites and the previous system, and create new hegemonic blocks. The confrontational rhetoric against the elite and the oligarchy need to keep alive the political mobilization of the people, which is often engaged in a “permanent revolution”, as in the case of Venezuela and the Bolivarian Revolution under Chávez, or in Ecuador with the Citizens’ Revolution guided by Correa.

In sum, the ideologies which in the past had provided the glue to keep social groups and political representatives together were increasingly marginalized. As a result, politics did no longer mirror the social structure and the values and interest of the different classes, creating a wall between voters and representatives. Technopopulism is a consequence of this void: it can be considered as a way of filling it.³³ Technopopulist actors and movements have been inclusionary in Latin America, contributing to the political and socioeconomic incorporation of the popular sector; but at the same time they have questioned the accompanying institutional forms and political styles that frequently undermined the rule of law and representative mediations. This institutional erosion, together with citizen atomization and the tendency of societies to deepen inequality rather than reverse it, have been characteristic features of the Latin-American regional reality.

³² *ivi*, p. 9.

³³ Bickerton Christopher J., *op. cit.*

2.2. The Effects of the Emergence of Technopopulism on the Electoral Competition

As stated before, the rise of technopopulism as the new structuring logic of contemporary democratic politics corresponds to a loss of importance of the previous ideological divisions, and to the desubstantialization of the content of the policy proposals. It is therefore not at the level of substantive policy differences that the effects of the emergence of technopopulism on electoral competition are likely to be most visible. Rather, it is at the levels of the forms, of the modes of organizations and of the communication that the consequences of technopopulism are most visible.

As we already know, populism and technocracy both claim to stand for and endorse the interest of the society as a whole, as opposed to any interest of specific parts within it. While in the case of populism the claim takes the form of the “popular will”, in the case of technocracy it is the “objective political truth” which technocrats claim to have access to in virtue of their competence or expertise. Correspondingly, the political opponents are considered by both populists and technocrats as representatives of specific groups within society, whether in the form of the corrupt elites for populists, or in the form of particular interests contrary to the common good for technocrats. If one claims to have political legitimacy by representing the people, then anybody who advance a different interpretation or endorse particular interests can only appear to be mistaken. since the interest of the whole society is superior to that of its parts.

It follows that political policies supported by the opposition must be considered as illegitimate. As stated by Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, “when populism and technocracy become the dominant modes of contemporary democratic politics, political opponents are increasingly perceived as enemies rather than adversaries”.³⁴ Politicians that do not recognize each other’s legitimacy because of their substantive disagreements attack each other more violently. The implication is that the rise of technopopulism can be expected to be accompanied by an increasing conflictuality within the electoral and political competition.

Therefore, it can be said that, as a consequence of the emergence of technopopulism, political competition has become increasingly hostile over the past few decades, resulting in the

³⁴ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

breakdown of political confrontation and debate. In his article for the New York Times, the author Ignatieff Michael states that “an adversary is someone you want to defeat, whereas an enemy is someone you have to destroy; what we are observing today is what happens when a politics of enemies supplants a politics of adversaries.”³⁵

Besides the distinction between political “adversaries” and “enemies”, this breakdown is also reflected in the increasingly coarse language used by politicians. Rival contenders for office increasingly misrecognize each other’s democratic legitimacy and therefore discredit each other personally. As highlighted by the political scientist Cas Mudde, populist discourse also implies a distinctively “moralizing component”, since the traditional political class and elite are seen as as “morally bankrupt”.³⁶ Thus, there is a categorical opposition between good and evil, the society as a whole and the elites or those who support specific sectors, without the possibility of compromise and dialogue between them. The only possible way to deal with dishonest and corrupt adversaries is to defeat them.

Another relevant effect of the rise of technopopulism on the electoral competition is the increase of importance of the personal characteristics of the political representatives. Both populism and technocracy attribute great importance to this. In the case of populism, all the personal factors, such as the leader’s charisma, the class or ethnic background, the life history, and the personal achievements are supposed to validate the claim to represent the popular will. Similarly, in the case of technocracy, formation, education and professional experiences are supposed to validate the claim to possess the necessary ability to govern effectively and advance efficient policies for the common good. Thus, in both cases, the personal life of the individual validates the political legitimacy and the political standing. This suggests that the rise of technopopulism has played a relevant role in the increasing personalization and “spectacularization” of contemporary democratic politics.³⁷

Furthermore, the same level of personalization is found in the organizational dimension. As highlighted by Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, different varieties of technopopulism have emerged in Europe and in Latin America. While in the Old Continent there is a great variety in the models of technopopulist regimes, in Latin America the predominant model is that of

³⁵ Ignatieff Michael, “*Enemies vs. Adversaries*”, in The New York Times, 16 October 2013, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/17/opinion/enemies-vs-adversaries.html>

³⁶ Mudde Cas, “*Populism: An Ideational Approach*”, in Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser and others (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford Handbooks, 2017, p. 29.

³⁷ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

“technopopulism through the leader”.³⁸ This model is characterized by the personalization of political power and the centralized organization built around the leader. The citizens are considered as bearers of problems and the leader as the one who can put a remedy to them. Political organizations and activists have a marginal and secondary role, just functioning as vehicles for leaders. Two good examples include Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Rafael Correa in Ecuador, who used their political parties, respectively, the “Movimiento Quinta República” (MVR) and the “Alianza PAIS - Patria Activa y Soberana”, as personalized campaign vehicles during elections.

Therefore, representation under populism is based on the paternalistic relationship between personalist leaders and their heterogeneous mass of followers; whereas in the case of technocracy, the organizational dimension involves a direct relationship of trust between the technocrats who possess specific competences claiming trust and those who offer it. This implies that in both cases there is a direct connection between the leadership and the voters, mainly relying on easily identifiable personalistic cues and their capacity to advance good policies, instead of partisan bonds based on loyalty and on a specific ideology. On this point, it can be useful to recall the article of Ilvo Diamanti on Silvio Berlusconi, where the political scientist proposed the concept of “politics of doing”. According to him, the politics has ceased to be about “what is to be done”, and instead has increasingly become about “who does it” and “how it is done”. Politicians are not evaluated for the particular policy goals they pursue, but for their capacity to deliver these policies.³⁹

In sum, with the emergence of technopopulism, the language of contestation has become therefore moral, leaving little room for political disagreement and debate. In technopopulist logics, the struggle between legitimate different interests and values has been abandoned in favour of an unmediated conception of the common good. Moreover, the personal characteristic and the expertise of the political representatives take the prominence over partisan bonds.

³⁸ *ivi*, pp. 59-60.

³⁹ Diamanti Ilvo, “*L’Ideologia del Fare*”, in *La Repubblica*, 21 February 2010, available at: <https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2010/02/21/news/ideologia-fare-2380694/>

2.3. The Broader Effects of the Emergence of Technopopulism

As already stated, neither populist nor technocratic appeals are in principle bound to any particular interests or values within society. In this sense, they are both “unchained” from the duty to follow a specific policy agenda. Consequently, technopopulist actors and movements are prone to changing their substantive policy commitments more often compared to traditional ideologically driven politicians. Substantive policy commitments started losing the centrality they had in the past in the electoral competition as soon as technopopulism became the main structuring poles of contemporary democratic politics. In fact, when all candidates for electoral office claim to represent the popular will and the interests and values of the people, they are compelled to make their political programme appear as consensual and broadly appealing as possible. In this way, candidates for electoral office avoid any conflicts that might arise with specific groups within the society. The substantive policy goals, and thus “what is done”, have no longer centrality in the political debate. This phenomenon is called “desubstantialization”.⁴⁰ Despite the habitual personal attack to each other, contemporary contenders for public office do not actually disagree on much when it comes to the substance of their proposals.

According to the same logics, since the traditional partisan logics represent interests and values of a specific portion of the society, the classical partisanship is not in accordance with the technopopulist logics. Representing just a portion is not in line with the pursuit of the interests of the people as a whole. Instead, the technocratic pursuit of the good policies and of the good governance, and the populist appeal to represent the popular will, are complementary and move in the same direction. The populist idea of collective decisions reassures atomized citizens and their demand for inclusion in the political sphere; technocratic measures based on the expertise of politicians are seen as effective and efficient policy delivery.

The constant reference to the “common sense” by politicians to validate the political proposal is another consequence of the rise of technopopulism. The notion of common sense consists in the claim that the proposal advanced corresponds to an objective truth. Therefore, the notion has a connotation of immediate validity and objective reasonability, and consequently it is used as a mode of justification. This emphasis on common sense can also be considered as a form of

⁴⁰ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

popular expertise. In this sense, the reference to common sense suggests that the political proposal advanced is the best choice for the people, giving credibility to it. As such, the political use of the notion of common sense operates a synthesis between the main characteristics of both populist and technocratic discourses.⁴¹

A further set of consequences concern the closure of the horizon for radical political change. Despite the anti-establishment appeal, a striking feature of the technopopulist political logic is the refusal to envisage radical transformations to existing social and political systems. While technopopulists have no aspirations of a total revolution of the *status quo*, they are interested in making the existing social and political systems work better. In this sense, it can be affirmed that technopopulism has a conservative dimension. Technopopulist political actors do not promise to overthrow the *status quo*.⁴² Despite their anti-oligarchic discourses and anti-establishment political mobilization, they gradually turn into conservative pillars of the political order. They cannot be compared to revolutionary political movements. Instead, their modes of political action remain within the horizon of democratic electoral politics and claim only to make the existing system work better.⁴³

Another consequence of the rise of technopopulism as the new structuring logic of contemporary democratic politics concerns the perception of the political system by society at large. The activity of political mediation between society and politics, which was normally carried out by intermediary bodies such as political parties, trade unions, churches, and other civic associations, played a key role in giving citizens a sense of inclusion and effective political representation. Without such an intermediate level of intermediation, in particular by party political organisations, atomised individuals are unable to make their views and interests count in decision-making process. Consequently, levels of trust in politicians and of satisfaction with the quality of democratic representation have been declining in Latin America since the “lost decade”. Furthermore, populism and technocracy tend to exacerbate this generalized crisis of representation of intermediary bodies, of which they are an expression themselves. It can be affirmed that contemporary democracies present a new relationship between citizens and their representatives based on the principle of delegation rather than participation or representation.

⁴¹ *ivi*, p. 77.

⁴² Roberts Kenneth M., *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁴³ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

As stated by Casaleggio Gianroberto, this means that “the relationship between voters and their representatives is exhausted by the vote”.⁴⁴

One of the consequences of this kind of representation is the emergence of alternative forms of political participation. In fact, as a result of all these transformation at social and political levels, the market for participation is now more open than previously. New groups and social movements has been gaining importance in setting the political agenda and governments are more responsive to their demands. For instance, it is claimed that many contemporary issues, such as protection of the environment or protection of consumers' and womens rights, owe more to groups than parties.⁴⁵ It is also asserted that atomized citizens now are more informed about politics than in the past, and recognise that pressure groups offer greater rewards in achieving political objectives than parties. Consequently, they channel their activities into pressure groups and social movements rather than in a political party.

Taking all these consequences together, one obtains a picture of a politics that is deeply confrontational and insubstantial. Democratic dialogue and exchanges are less common than in the past since the public sphere has become less civil. In this scenario, the political parties are those who paid the highest price for the technopopulist emergence. In fact, their work for mediation, moderation and the search for compromise has been seriously affected.

2.4. Conclusion

Party forms, forms of communication, relations between representatives and those represented, as well as relations between information and politics, have changed during the course of the past century.

Before the 1980, in Latin America ideological politics was rooted in a relationship between society and politics that was mediated by a wide variety of actors, such as political parties, trade unions, civic associations and religious organizations. The germs of the technopopulist logic

⁴⁴ Casaleggio Gianroberto, “*Web Ergo Sum*”, Sperling & Kupfer, Milano, 2004, p. 23.

⁴⁵ Lipow Arthur & Seyd Patrick, “Political parties and the challenge to democracy: From steam-engines to techno-populism”, in *New Political Science*, vol. 17:1-2, 1995, p. 299, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07393149508429755>

were present once, as a result of a complex historical process, ideologically polarized forms of politics had given way to societies characterized by high levels of individualization, atomization, and disaggregation.⁴⁶ This process of separation between society and politics, that undermined the mechanisms of intermediation between them, was in fact a consequence of the “lost decade”. With this expression, we refer to the critical juncture consisting of economic and social crisis, that determined economic and social upheavals in the whole continent. At the end of the twentieth century, societies were no longer organized around the traditional social cleavages. They were no longer organized on the traditional axes of the past. The critical junctures provoked a shift in the socio-political alignments of Latin American party systems.

The origins of technopopulism as a political logic lie therefore in this process of separation between politics and society. More precisely, it can be affirmed that technopopulism emerged as a consequence of all these factors:

1. The processes of economic and social reforms which undermined the traditional class distinction between proletariat and bourgeoisie.
2. The fall of ideologies rooted on the left-right dichotomy, leaving the floor to technocratic and populist discourses, based on a combination of anti-elitism, anti-establishment, fight against corruption and the appeal to the “common sense”.
3. Breakdown of institutionalized forms of political representation that occurred during periods of social and economic upheaval. Intermediary bodies between politics and society lost their role as mediator, causing their gradual separation.
4. People’s dissatisfaction with the performance of political institutions and of their representative which were considered as distant from the citizen and society and their problems. This dissatisfaction led to the public cynicism towards politics and disenchantment from political actors. Citizens demanded the replacement of the old political elite in favour of outsiders.
5. Social atomization, caused by the new societal cleavages and the loss of sense of intermediary bodies. Citizens became politically self-sufficient through the process of cognitive mobilisation.

⁴⁶ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

6. Chronic institutional weakness. The accumulation of unresolved social, political and economic problems removed the legitimacy of the institutions and left them defenceless against the destructive advance of technopopulism.

Therefore, technopopulism emerged when institutions started being perceived by the people as unrepresentative and the electoral instability opened political space for new electoral competition logics. Thus, the rise of populism and technocracy as the new structuring poles of contemporary democratic politics can be seen as stemming from the separation between an atomised and politically powerless society, on the one hand, and a political class that seeks electoral validation by appealing to the “common good”, on the other hand. Both the populist conception of representing the popular will and the technocratic assumption that there are objectively political solutions are examples of such notion of the common good. In this sense, as stated by Castellani Lorenzo, technopopulism “present itself as the point of contact between the bottom-up pyramid of populism and the top-down pyramid of technocracy.”⁴⁷

A new paradigm in the relationship among representatives and those represented originated from the rise of technopopulism. As a result of this change in the nature of political debates, other factors have assumed a greater relevance in the contemporary political landscape. The most evident are the personal characteristics of the politicians. In fact, a direct relationship of embodiment and trust between the leader and the electoral base, rooted in the assumption that the former possesses personal qualities and professional qualifications, was cultivated. The emphasis on honesty, anti-elitism and policies mirroring the popular will was complemented by a parallel concern for efficiency, competence and the delivery of objectively right policy solutions, independent of particular interests or values. The legitimacy of these political actors was mainly bound to the deliver right policies. Politics was no longer mostly political, but it was increasingly seen as a matter of administration, of good governance. The consequence is that democracy became depoliticized. Political parties compete no longer with one another for gain the vote of specific sectors of the electorate. Instead, they prefer to share the benefits of public office.

The increasing conflictuality between those competing for electoral offices is another consequence of the rise of technopopulism. Contemporary politicians treat each other more as enemies rather than as opponents. In fact, once one claims to represent the whole society and

⁴⁷ Castellani Lorenzo, *op. cit.*

the popular will, or to possess some sort of political truth, anyone who disagrees can only appear as representative of the interests of a portion of a minority or as completely in error.⁴⁸ Moreover, the credibility of the political opponents is undermined through the use of coarse political language, which is more and more violent and toxic. All this makes cooperation between the candidates with different opinions more difficult.

While the logic of democratic politics is becoming increasingly hostile and confrontational, its substantive content is being progressively marginalized. Technopopulist political actors dismiss their political opponents as politically ignorant or malicious about what the common good actually consists of.

Finally, the rise of technopopulism contribute to further exacerbating the widespread sense of political dissatisfaction from which it stems in the first place. Instead of contrasting the crisis of confidence and trust in politicians and institutions, technopopulism ultimately deepened and strengthened it further.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

3. A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE - CASE STUDIES

The third chapter explores the historical patterns of technopopulism in the specific cases of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. It examines the main features of the technopopulist regimes in these countries, such as the nature of the technopopulist discourses and appeals, the organizational forms, the politics pursued, the origins of these regimes and the national context.

The critical juncture that marked Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s undermined many traditional party systems. The failure of representative institutions like political parties and labour unions to mediate between citizens and the state opened political space for a variety of new leaders and movements, mostly coming from outside the old system. However, also leaders who had made their careers within political parties, such as Álvaro Uribe in Colombia, denied their links to the traditional parties, condemning them as corrupt, and created new personalistic parties or movements. These new actors carried on the mobilization of heterogeneous, fragmented, and disorganized masses in the electoral arena, relying on their charismatic personality and personalist appeal for legitimation and aggregation.

The new generation of politicians such as Fujimori in Peru, Chávez in Venezuela, Uribe in Colombia, and Correa in Ecuador, exploited the erosion of collective identities to establish vertical, unmediated relationships with atomized masses. Through the appeals to the principle of a sovereign people, they have contributed to the further erosion of political parties, and decaying institutions were replaced with a new institutional order. Since taking power, they have disregarded the democratic procedures, denounced parties, attacked private media outlets and civil society organizations.

The new generation of political leaders coming to power from the 1990s joined a long tradition in Latin American politics adopting the strategies, symbols, and discourses of their populist predecessors. Chávez, Fujimori, and Correa aimed to reanimate the masses and the political institutions of their respective countries by invoking the name and legacy of the nineteenth-century Venezuelan military and political leader Simón Bolívar,⁴⁹ who played a central role in the South American independence movement. For instance, while Chávez promoted the so-

⁴⁹ de la Torre Carlos and Arnson Cynthia J., “Introduction: The Evolution of Latin American Populism and the Debates Over Its Meaning”, in *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, by de la Torre C. and Arnson Cynthia J. (eds). Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, p. 9.

called “*Revolución Bolivariana*”, understood as the definitive struggle for independence of Venezuela and other Latin American countries from imperialism, Correa was the leader of the so-called “*La Revolución Ciudadana*” aiming at the socialist reconstruction of the Ecuadorian society.

Moreover, the new leaders were in a state of permanent electoral campaign, using an anti-elitist, anti-establishment and anti-imperialist discourses, and other communication strategies to link themselves with citizens, bypassing existing institutional channels. Moreover, symbolic elements such as race, socioeconomic background and ethnic origins, have been used by politicians to be perceived by their followers as “one of them” instead of a politician belonging to the traditional political or economic elites. This carries a political message: the leader does not just speak for the people but is one of them. To this end, Chávez’s television show “*Aló Presidente*” and Correa’s show “*Enlaces Ciudadanos*” strengthened the figure of a president who talks without intermediaries to citizens and that is close to them. In the same way, Uribe’s “*Consejos Comunales de Gobierno*” created the image of a direct link between the local communities and the Colombian presidency.

These leaders also employed plebiscitary measures to marginalize the opponents and to increase the power of the executive. Rather than invest in the building of a strong party, they employ their resources, such as the media influence, to destabilize the opponents, resulting in the destabilization of the whole democratic system. This is especially the case in Venezuela, where President Chávez monopolized the executive and gained control over the electoral machinery, while putting a variety of constraints on regime opponents.

It must be highlighted that many of these new governments were sustained by the high request in the end of the twentieth century of characteristic Latin American products in the global markets, such as oil, gold, silver, coffee and bananas. This positive situation in the international trade led to an improvement in the living standards of all classes, giving strong support to these governments.

Moreover, in Latin America the past three decades have also witnessed the weakening of experts in economic, social and other sectors, who were largely used by the new, technopopulist leaders because of two main factors: first of all, the political elites’ need to send clear signals of responsibility at both domestic and external levels; secondly, ordinary bureaucracies are perceived as weak and incapable of handling the new challenges and endorse the policy agenda.

Thus, despite technopopulists had the merit of mobilizing the previously excluded sectors of populations to the political arena, they deinstitutionalized democratic politics in the name of creating better participatory institutions. Through populist appeals and the images of efficiency and technocratic modernization, the new leaders adopted a personalistic style of leadership and strengthened the executive.

3.1. *El Presidente Comandante* Hugo Chávez

The regime and the persona of Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías are the main responsible of the re-emergence of populist patterns in the contemporary politics in Latin America. Chávez was the leader of the *Movimiento V República* (MVR) political party from its foundation in 1997 and served as president of Venezuela from 1999 until his death in 2013. Chávez created and commanded a huge and loyal following among Venezuela's poorest and marginalized social classes. His policies and discourse fostered polarization within Venezuela and throughout the region.

On February 27, 1989, the popular uprising, known as the “*Caracazo*”, broke out in almost all the largest Venezuelan cities and lasted for an entire week in Caracas. The riots and the protests began mainly in response to the government's economic reforms after the fall in oil prices, which caused a severe economic crisis. The announcement of the orthodox economic reform left the poor and working classes feeling betrayed by the president. Oil had stopped being a resource that belonged to everyone.⁵⁰ The *Caracazo* was an unprecedented experience for Venezuelan democracy and caused a permanent separation between a large portion of the population and President Carlos Andrés Pérez. One result of the *Caracazo* was a failed coup attempt three years later by the “*Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200*” (MBR-200) headed by colonel Hugo Chávez. Despite the failure to depose the government, the coup attempt brought Chávez into the national spotlight. He founded the *Movimiento V República* (MVR) political party in 1997 to support his candidacy in the 1998 Venezuelan presidential election which he eventually won with 56.20% of votes. Chávez was re-elected three times: in 2000

⁵⁰ López Maya M. and Panzarelli A., “*Populism, Rentierism, and Socialism in the Twenty-First Century: The Case of Venezuela*”, in *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, by de la Torre C. and Arnsion Cynthia J. (eds). Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, p. 244.

with 59.8% of the vote, again in 2006 with 62.8% of the vote and again in 2012 with 55.1% of the vote.

When Chávez took the lead of the government in 1999, he inaugurated the new power relationships represented by “bolivarianism”, a mix of socialist and nationalist ideals named after Simón Bolívar, the nineteenth-century Venezuelan military and political leader who played a central role in the South American independence movement. Bolivarianism was a socialist project consisting of nationalization and social welfare programs (the so-called “*Misiones Bolivarianas*”), opposing the liberalization reforms. Using increasing oil prices of the early 2000s Chávez made the missions his central priority for his administration. Chávez’s government can be considered as a form of “twenty-first-century socialism”. In 2007, when he founded the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, he also called the organizing units of his new party “*batallones socialistas*”.⁵¹

From the time of his first election campaign, Chávez was confrontational, using a direct, aggressive and strong language against political parties, institutions and elite classes, often even insulting. Moreover, Chávez habitually used a military and warlike language. And in fact, Chávez’s nickname was “*presidente comandante*”, a title used by Cubans for Fidel Castro, whom Chávez ardently admired. The military references emphasized the transcendent narrative and the heroic nature of the struggles of “*el pueblo*” against those political opponents identified as enemies. As stated by the political scientists López Maya and Panzarelli, “the clear intention of Chávez’s polarizing, heroic, and salvationist discourse and symbology was to confront and exclude a power structure and an elite group [...] that he and his movement consider to be imperialistic, oligarchic, and corrupt.”⁵²

Moreover, Chávez also employed exclusionary rhetoric against his adversaries, that he used to name as “*golpistas*” and counterrevolutionaries. In this way, Chávez respected a typical strategy of dichotomization of the social space historically used in Latin America. *El comandante* systematically used this political antagonisms to mobilize his supporters against the “enemies of the people,” including the traditional parties, the economic oligarchy and the U.S. imperialism.

⁵¹ López Maya M. and Panzarelli A., *op. cit.*, p. 249.

⁵² *ibid.*

In addition to the aggressive and polarizing rhetoric, with his discourse Chávez was able to include the lower classes, the poor, which in his opinion were the real protagonists of history and the only agents of transformations. For this reason, Chávez often included the reference to the “*bravo pueblo*”, that is the brave Venezuelan people.⁵³ This strategy stems from both the populist tradition, and thus from the notion of virtuous and oppressed people struggling for social justice, and the military tradition, according to which the people are represented as patriots willing to sacrifice for their country. The objective of this political discourse was that of enhance nationalism, making his followers feel to be part of the struggle for the liberation of the Venezuela, in the same way that Bolívar and the people of Venezuela liberated the country from the Spanish dominion two hundred years before. Also the nationalization of natural resources, such as that of heavy oil projects in the Orinoco Belt, was a strong form of nationalism. In this case, nationalism is based on the idea that all Venezuelan people are owners of the national natural resources and as such they shall not just defend them, but also exploit and administer them.

Furthermore, Chávez had a series of personal attributes that made him attractive to the masses, in particular to the popular classes. As suggested by López Maya and Panzarelli, his physical appearance and his family origin were among these factors. In fact, Chávez “benefited from the popular culture image of the “*llanero*”: a heroic character from the plains, indomitable but also undisciplined and irreverent, whose origin goes back to the independence period.”⁵⁴

Furthermore, Chávez extensively used the media, which were the main channel for communication between the leader and the masses. The communications strategy mainly revolved around two resources: nationwide government broadcasts on television and radio, and the “*Aló Presidente*”, his Sunday talk show program. The “*Venezolana de Televisión*” (VTV) and the “National Radio of Venezuela” (RNV) were the main state-owned television and radio channels, and they were used almost exclusively for direct communication between the leader and the people and to indoctrinate people to socialist values.⁵⁵ His overwhelming presence in audiovisual media, on the radio and on newspapers, allowed the president to become a daily figure in the lives of Venezuelan citizens through. They saw and listened to him constantly,

⁵³ *ivi*, p. 250.

⁵⁴ *ivi*, p. 247.

⁵⁵ *ivi*, p. 253.

with the result of feeling in contact with him, and of taking part in the administration of Venezuela.

The “*consejos comunales*” had a similar function. The *consejos* were local councils composed of elected local citizens that initiate local projects for the community development. They were an effective way to involve citizens in the administration of the state and to give power to community-level decision-making through democratically elected neighbourhood assemblies.

Along with these populist elements, some technocratic traits are visible in Chávez presidency and the political *modus operandi*. From the time of his first election campaign, he presented himself as the one who could put a remedy to the severe debt crisis and social inequality through technocratic *ad hoc* measures, including the nationalization of several industries as part of its policy of wealth redistribution and reducing the influence of multinational corporations. And in fact, nationalization, in particular that of the oil industry, were a vital source of income for the Venezuelan government, creating, at least during the first years of his presidency, a favorable social and economic scenario. Enormous amounts of government money were used for the social programs.

Moreover, the choice of the ministers suggests the attempt to put on Chávez’s government technocratic clothing: the mechanical engineer Rafael Ramirez was appointed as energy minister. He was also appointed as president of state oil company “*Petroleos de Venezuela SA*” (PDVSA); Elias Jaua, former university professor, became minister of the presidency and agriculture minister; Chávez decided to leave Maritza Izaguirre, an appointee of the former president Rafael Caldera, and a proponent of neo-liberal measures, in charge of the Finance Ministry. Izaguirre’s appointment, in particular, has a different specific weight. It was meant to signal to creditors and economic agents that the administration sought to maintain some stability during one of the worst economic crises the country had ever experienced.⁵⁶

In sum, Hugo Chávez’s spectacular rise to power in Venezuela at the end of the twentieth century was the result of several crises in Venezuelan economic, political and social life. These crises led to a technopopulist rupture as an instrument for change and social transformation, which involved all those not satisfied with, or who were excluded from, the former established

⁵⁶ Barrenechea R. and Dargent E., “*Populists and Technocrats in Latin America: Conflict, Cohabitation, and Cooperation*”, in *Politics and Governance*, Volume 8 (4), 17 December 2020, pp. 509–519, available at: <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance/article/view/3333>

order. Parties shrunk in importance in comparison with the MVR headed by the *presidente comandante* which, instead, became the prominent party, serving to administer public services, to defend Chávez himself, and to mobilize the *chavista* bases at election times.

Chávez had enormous personal charisma and established profound emotional connections with the electorate through a personalist and nationalist propaganda. Chávez legitimized himself by employing two types of discourses. First of all, *el comandante* used a populist and nationalist discourse which invoked the legacy of the nineteenth-century liberator Simón Bolívar and featured themes of anti-elitism and anti-establishment as well as a certain level of mistrust of foreign corporations and powers. Moreover, *chavismo* also promoted the discourse of nationalization of industries as a remedy to inequality and social injustice. The oil revenues financed his constant electoral campaign and accelerated the advancement of the Bolivarian missions, strengthening the political loyalty and the support of large social classes.

In conclusion, considered all these elements, here it is suggested that Chávez can be considered a technopopulist since, although being commonly recognized as a pure populist, his regime presents the main features of technopopulist political logics.

3.2. El Fujimorismo in Peru

Alberto Kenya Fujimori Inomoto was President of Peru from 28 July 1990 until 22 November 2000 when, after a series of scandals he was forced to resign and self-exile to his home country, Japan. A very popular president, Fujimori's longevity was largely the result of his administration's success in ending hyperinflation and reducing the levels of political violence which had characterized the 1980s. However, these successes have come at a high price for the country's democratic institutions and norms. In 1992, a *coup d'état* took place: Fujimori suspended the constitution and closed the Congress, claiming that such measures were required in order to stop the insurgency of "*Sendero Luminoso*", a terrorist and communist guerrilla group.

Fujimori, an almost unknown professor and engineer at the time of his first political rise, won the political election as candidate of the right-wing political party "*Cambio 90*" (C90). Fujimori

won the election at a delicate time for the Peruvian economy. In fact, the country was on the verge of bankruptcy and hyperinflation, after that the economic crisis had worsened during the former government of Alan García Pérez. Fujimori's government, surprisingly, adopted severe neoliberal austerity measures, known as "*fujishock*", in order to restart and help the country's economy, and was characterised by an authoritarian political style.⁵⁷

Such kind of regimes as the one of Fujimori usually rise in societies where economic crises and institutional weaknesses allow the emergence of personalist leaders who pose as saviors of the nation.⁵⁸ In the Peruvian case, the context of social atomization and political deinstitutionalization allowed the emergence of a broad technopopulist project. In fact, Alberto Fujimori entrance on the political scene after the critical juncture represented by the "lost decade" marked the rise of technopopulism in Peru. From the time of his first election campaign, four populist features have been constant: a personalistic style of leadership; a heterogeneous widespread lower-class support; appeals to the people and anti-elitist rhetoric; and the absence of institutionalized forms of political mediation between the leader and his followers.

Before his victory at 1990 political elections, the former president Alan García Pérez had resisted the adoption of neoliberal policies and battled the "Washington Consensus" and the International Monetary Fund, ending his term with his country's economies and society in crisis. All of Peru's political parties and democratic institutions were discredited and weakened. At first, the 1990 elections were expected to be won by the neoliberal candidate and famous writer Mario Vargas Llosa.⁵⁹ But many Peruvians were worried by his alliance with traditional rightist parties, and by his neoliberalist approach to the economy. Fujimori exploited the popular frustration and resentment to gain voters and legitimacy.

A notable feature of *fujimorismo* was its personalism. Fujimori's relationship to his supporters during the campaign was direct and highly personalistic. From the time of his first election campaign, Fujimori made populist appeals, emphasizing his ethnicity and background. A

⁵⁷ Robinson E., "*Fujishock pulls Peru up short*", in The Washington Post, 26 September 1990, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/09/26/fujishock-pulls-peru-up-short/73a5c29d-ceed-47a7-9df8-cfb9594f6ae6/>

⁵⁸ Roberts Kenneth M., *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁵⁹ McClintock Cynthia, "*Populism in Peru: From APRA to Ollanta Humala*", in Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century, by de la Torre C. and Arnson Cynthia J. (eds). Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, p. 220.

former professor and engineer who had no political experience and no real political party, Fujimori was an outsider with no links with the previous governments. Moreover, Fujimori is a Peruvian of Japanese descent. His parents, Naoichi Fujimori and Mutsue Inomoto Fujimori, were natives of Kumamoto, Japan, who migrated to Peru in 1934. His Japanese heritage was a fundamental asset rather than an obstacle in this process of image building. It allowed him to benefit from popular stereotypes of the Japanese/Asian immigrant communities as a hardworking, smart and honest and to portray himself as a political outsider of humble origins who had risen through personal talent and initiative. Fujimori seems physically more like the majority of Peruvians than the country's white-skinned presidents. And indeed, one of the most famous slogans used by Fujimori was "*un presidente como tú*" (a president like you).⁶⁰ Moreover, to highlight his background as an agronomist, he traversed the Andean highlands and urban slums on a tractor, and he ate in public marketplaces among the masses.⁶¹

Furthermore, Fujimori systematically attacked Peru's political elites and the main democratic institutions. In fact, for Fujimori, Peruvian people's main enemy was not the economic oligarchy but the political class and the institutions they controlled, such as the Congress, the judiciary and in particular the political parties. With reference to the latter, Fujimori denigrated not only existing political parties but also the general concept of parties. In fact, he usually defined them as "*palabrería*" (mere verbiage).⁶²

Along the populist propaganda, technocratic claims of expertise and competence were largely employed as well. Fujimori was a former engineer and professor of agronomy, physics and mathematics, and he was also appointed in 1984 to the rectorship of the "*Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina*" (UNALM), which he held until 1989. His campaign slogan of "*honradez, tecnología y trabajo*" (honesty, technology and work) evoked images of efficiency and technocratic modernization, rather than ideological motivation. The commitment on modernization and the lack of ideological definition were perfect for attracting unattached and lower-class voters.⁶³ In this way, Fujimori legitimized the adoption of a wide-ranging neoliberal reforms, known as "*fujishock*", to restore the economic balance of Peru after a period of hyperinflation and economic chaos.

⁶⁰ *ivi*, p. 221.

⁶¹ Roberts Kenneth M., *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁶² McClintock Cynthia, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁶³ Roberts Kenneth M., *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

With the increasingly centralisation of decision-making in the executive, the use of technocrats became imperative to formulate and implement neoliberal measures. In fact, technocrats were employed by the Fujimori government at all levels and in all areas, from the Oxford-trained Minister of Economy, Carlos Bolona, who had worked in private international banks and for the World Bank, to Beatriz Boza, president of the government's promotional agency, PromPeru, who had worked at a major law firm in New York on privatisation issues.⁶⁴ This team of technocrats inside the state bureaucracy provided the president with a loyal following.

In conclusion, as the other leaders emerging after the critical juncture of the “lost decade” in Latin American, Alberto Fujimori was not an institution-builder. Instead, political deinstitutionalization has been a constant feature of his personalist strategy, overcoming intermediary bodies and institutional checks, as in the case of the imposition of *fujishock* neoliberal measures. An increasingly visible role for technocrats in the implementation and formulation of policy accompanied the centralisation of decision making by the executive. The neoliberal revolution imposed by Fujimori did not inherent his populist rhetoric which, along with claims to expertise and competence due to his academic and professional background, guaranteed him legitimacy and popularity.

3.3. *El Correísmo* in Ecuador

Rafael Vicente Correa Delgado served as President of Ecuador from 2007 to 2017. He is the responsible of the process of regime change in Ecuadorian politics which overthrew the so-called “*partidocracia*”, that is the system dominated by political parties. This political regime was born in Ecuador when the country returned to democracy in 1979, and was characterized by long period of political fragmentation and instability economic, as results of economic and political crisis. In fact, Ecuador was ruled by six different governments from 1996 to 2007 since all the elected presidents were forced to finish earlier their mandates because of the popular protests or congressional impeachments. Correa overthrew this political regime, inaugurating a new political era in Ecuador, serving as president for ten years.

⁶⁴ Mauceri Philip, “*Return of the Caudillo: Autocratic Democracy in Peru.*”, in *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 18 (5), 1997, pp. 899–905, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3993106>

In 2006, Correa established a political vehicle, the “*Alianza PAIS—Patria Activa y Soberana*”, which united a disparate group of leftist organizations. Correa won the 2006 election as an outsider. Before his candidature, he was just a college economics professor who had never even belonged to a party. He came to power promising to call for a new constituent assembly and to abandon neoliberal policies, exploiting the anti-liberal sentiments of large parts of Ecuadorian society. His administration strengthened the role of the state, which was now at the centre of development.⁶⁵

Rafael Correa’s administration can be labelled as a case of technopopulism considering the combination of a populist discourse and a governing logic that bases the legitimacy of its actions on the technocratic credentials of its leader. In fact, Correa combined populist rhetoric with top-down technocratic policies. *Correísmo* was mainly characterized by a growing personalization of the political arena, the weakening of representation and the centralization of power in the hands of the executive.

Correa’s high level of approval are mainly due to his administration’s systematic application of marketing techniques to propaganda. Correa was committed in a kind of permanent electoral campaign, which included the systematic use of communications strategies to endorse all government decisions and actions. His discourse were capable of polarizing the political arena, where the political parties and private mass media were represented as “the enemy”. In particular, the press was considered one of Correa’s administration main political opponents and, in fact, the president himself sued journalists and newspapers in several occasions. The most notorious case is the trial against “*El Universo*”, the biggest Ecuadorian newspaper.⁶⁶ In this way, public opinion which opposed Correa was neutralized by the administration’s communications strategy, blocking all possible criticism of the government’s activities.

The government’s communications strategy also included the use of audiovisual communication through radio and TV programs. All the country’s national, regional, and local radio and television stations were forced to broadcast all of the president’s interventions and speeches. Every Saturday, radio and television broadcasted the program called “*Enlace Ciudadano*” (Citizen Connection) for three hours, in which Correa himself appeared. The

⁶⁵ de la Torre C., “*Technocratic Populism in Ecuador*”, in *Journal of Democracy* (24), July 2013, pp. 33-46.

⁶⁶ Montúfar C., “*Rafael Correa and His Plebiscitary Citizens’ Revolution*”, in *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, by de la Torre C. and Arnson Cynthia J. (eds). Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, p. 306.

President used this program not only to inform his citizens of all government's activities but also to directly intervene in the political debate, often attacking his adversaries. Correa also used to invite his ministers to explain a particular law or policy. His Ph.D. in Economics, obtained in the U.S., allowed Correa to master technocratic and scientific languages. Like Chávez in Venezuela, he used to sing, joke, sing chanting slogans against the opposition, that is traditional politicians, privately owned media, social movement groups and external powers.⁶⁷ Political rivals were thus represented as counterrevolutionaries and as enemies of the savior of the nation, and consequently, of the nation itself. Correa often used personal stories about his humble background in order to represent himself as part of the people.

Moreover, the government created a public television station, "*Ecuador TV*", and the newspapers "*El Ciudadano*", taking also possession of "*Diario El Telégrafo*", the most important newspaper in Ecuador.⁶⁸ The main consequence of Correa's war on the media was that the government's messages were considered by the largest portion of Ecuadorian people as the only credible point of reference. Communications hegemony was crucial for the consolidation of the electoral majority and provided him legitimacy, but led to a relevant impoverishment of the political debate.

The left-wing president Chávez had a big influence on Correa, being one of his reference point in the political arena. As the Venezuelan President, Correa set up personal and unmediated links with his electors, who were subject to the constant campaign of their president. In fact, since his opposition was so weak, Correa could spend much of his time as president in campaign, broadening his electoral base. However, unlike Hugo Chávez, Correa never managed to create a participatory institutions at the local level. In this sense, Ecuador never had something similar to the Venezuelan "Communal Councils" or other participatory vehicles. Traditional political mediations and autonomous social organizations in particular were left behind and were not able to promote the participation from the bottom.⁶⁹ The active involvement of citizens or social movements in decision-making process, as well as the participation of civil society groups, were never distinguishing features of Correa's presidency. His administration's legitimacy was mainly the result of electoral victories and communication strategies aiming at the acclamation of the president.

⁶⁷ de la Torre C., *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁶⁸ *ivi*, p. 43.

⁶⁹ *ivi*, p. 45.

On the contrary, Correa favoured rule by experts with civil society demobilized. Correa promoted a state with more power, whose goals did not mirror special interests of corporatist groups. Instead, the state had to work for the whole society's interest, bringing progress and modernity. As highlighted by the political scientist Montúfar, approximately 95,000 new bureaucrats entered the public administration between 2006 and 2009, most of whom in the executive branch. This impressive bureaucrat class was devoted to the president and ready to embrace his mission. In this way, Correa managed to create an entirely new state apparatus run by an army of loyal bureaucrats.⁷⁰

One of the main agencies of the state, the “*Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo*” (SENPLADES) had a prominent role in the direction of the economy, investment and redistribution. SENPLADES was in charge of modernizing the state by managing public planning and investment, eliminating bureaucratic irrationalities, training public servants, and setting the overall goals of social, cultural, and economic policies. SENPLADES' technocrats were drawn from academia.⁷¹ Technocrats transformed Ecuadorian citizens into passive beneficiaries of the redistributive policies which were mostly paid by oil revenues.

Correa used to affirm that he was leading “*La Revolución Ciudadana*” (Citizens' Revolution), a revolution to achieve the socialist reconstruction of the Ecuadorian society, the transformation of the bourgeois state into a popular one. Therefore, *correísmo* was a project whose goal was the transformation of the social, economic, and cultural realms of the Ecuadorian society as a whole. Thus, it was not only a political project. Correa considered his administration not as “just another government”, subject to *partidocracia* and thus to democratic alternation, but as a revolutionary and durable political regime that would inaugurate a new era in the Ecuadorian political history. In fact, he used to affirm to be the leader of the second and definitive independence of Ecuador.⁷²

The private media, social movements, and especially traditional parties were the victims of the Citizens' Revolution. Correa rejected the concept of *partidocracia* and parties. The Citizens' Revolution considered them as irreconcilable with the general and non-particular vision of the leader, since they are the expression of illegitimate interests. According to the *correísmo*, the state must be the unique moral referent of society and, consequently, the main representative of

⁷⁰ Montúfar C., *op. cit.*, p. 316.

⁷¹ de la Torre C., *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

⁷² Montúfar C., *op. cit.*, p. 304.

the state, President Correa, must have the role of leader of the ethical and moral revolutions within the Ecuadorian society.

In sum, in view of Rafael Correa's political practice, discourse, management of government, and use of the media, he can be labelled as a technopopulist. Correa's legitimacy was grounded in the notion of revolution, combining both populist and technocratic appeals. The main features of the *correísmo* were Correa's leadership, his polarizing moral discourse, the cult of his personality, and his confrontation with the status quo. Correa made a large use of radio and television for his propaganda, impoverishing the political debate. Attacks on private media, political parties and social movements were widespread. Moreover, under Correa the main agencies of the state were staffed by the country's top technocrats and experts, with an entirely new state apparatus run by an army of loyal bureaucrats. Similar to Chávez, Correa argued that his mission was to lead a revolution to achieve the second and definitive liberation of his motherland. In contrast with *chavismo*, the *correísmo* was a top-down revolution, not a bottom-up one based on the participation of the civil society; instead, Correa's political success has not come from mobilizing organized sectors of society.

3.4. Álvaro Uribe, a Peculiar Technopopulist

Unlike the majority of countries in the Latin American region, Colombia has not a long populist tradition. The populist style and discourse deployed by Álvaro Uribe Vélez, who served as President of Colombia from August 2002 to August 2010, are a visible anomaly in the country's history.⁷³ In this sense, the populist characteristics of Uribe's propaganda and political *modus operandi* can be considered a deviation from Colombia's traditional political pattern.

Uribe's government is, like most other technopopulist regimes, the outcome of a crisis. However, while in most cases the crisis concern economic recession, hyperinflation, social discontent, political scandal, at the time of the election of Uribe, Colombia was struggling with a deep security crisis, the "Colombian Conflict", begun in 1964. It was a war between the

⁷³ Bejarano A. M., "*Politicizing Insecurity: Uribe's Instrumental Use of Populism*", in *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, by de la Torre C. and Arnson Cynthia J. (eds). Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, p. 324.

government of Colombia, far-right paramilitary groups, and far-left guerrilla groups such as the “*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*” (FARC) and the “*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*” (ELN). The conflict is historically rooted in the conflict known as “*La Violencia*”, a ten-year civil war in Colombia from 1948 to 1958, between the Colombian Conservative Party and the Colombian Liberal Party.⁷⁴ This conflict led to the anti-communist repression in rural Colombia in the 1960s and the rise of FARC and ELN, which claimed to defend the poorest classes in Colombia and to provide social justice through communism. The Colombian government, in turn, claimed to be fighting for order and stability, and to protect the rights and interests of Colombian citizens.

Colombian President Andres Pastrana, Uribe’s predecessor, had engaged in peace negotiations with the largest guerrilla group, the FARC, with the funding and the support of U.S. President Clinton. In fact, the two presidents conceived a direct foreign aid package called “Plan Colombia”, consisting in 2.8 billion dollars aid for Colombia. However, after years of peace negotiations without cease-fires, the country reached one of the worst crime rates in terms of homicides, kidnappings, and all kinds of threats against citizens’ safety. Therefore, the security crisis became the main reason of polarization within society and the axis around which the electoral and political system was built.⁷⁵

The emergence of technopopulist discourse in Colombia stemmed from the people’s exasperation with the spiral of violence suffered since the 1964. Uribe presented himself as an outsider challenging the political establishment, breaking with the Liberal Party, and ran as an independent in the 2002 election. Uribe intensely criticized the weak attitude of the traditional parties against terrorist guerrilla groups. Indeed, the peace process led by the political class guided by the Conservative Party was a failure and the only result was that of widening the distance between the citizens and their political representatives. This crisis delegitimized traditional parties and allowed Uribe to enter the political scene with his agenda on security and eventually to win the elections.⁷⁶ His electoral platform, in fact, centered on confronting Colombia's main guerrilla movement, the FARC and the ELN. Other relevant propositions included cutting the administration's expenses, fighting corruption and drug trafficking. Thus, while technocratic appeals usually focus on economic and financial measures, or on social

⁷⁴ *ivi*, pp. 328-330.

⁷⁵ *ivi*, pp. 327-328.

⁷⁶ Barrenechea R. and Dargent E., *op. cit.*, p. 513.

programs in the case of Latin America, Uribe's electoral and political platform centered on the deep security crisis.

The electorate had in fact become exhausted by that spiral of violence which endless attempts of negotiations were not able to put an end. Colombian people claimed a strong leader that could bring peace, even through the use of the military force. And in fact, following his election in 2002, Uribe led a military offensive against leftist guerrilla groups such as the FARC and the ELN with the endorsement of Bush administrations under Plan Colombia. His severe and repressive policies delivered during his presidency a speedy recovery of most security indicators: terrorist attacks from guerrilla groups declined, and the numbers of killings and kidnappings decreased significantly. The armed forces used to have a strong presence in the main cities and along the country's main roads and highways.

Since it was mainly based on the war against FARC and ELN, Uribe's double-term presidency politics pictured the populist confrontation between antagonistic projects of society. However, his rhetoric differed from the traditional populism in important ways. For instance, as said Uribe fostered a profound division of society into two camps, but the suggested division did not refer to the traditional class cleavages or to the people against the oligarchy. Instead, the social division Uribe referred to in his discourse and rhetoric had its roots on moral categories such as "good against evil", order against chaos, and thus, the distinction was that between "good citizens" and the "violent ones", the terrorists.⁷⁷ It follows that through his polarizing discourse, Uribe simplified the complexity of Colombian society in two macro groups in opposition to each other, in the attempt to draw a line between good and evil. This kind of rhetoric recalls the "War on Terror" by U.S. President George W. Bush, after the September 11 terrorist attack. Furthermore, it must be noted that with time the notion of enemy grew to include not just the members of the FARC and ELN guerrillas, but also drug traffickers, journalists, intellectuals and anybody who opposed the president and his government, including NGOs focused on human rights and politicians of the opposition parties.

During his electoral campaign, Uribe portrayed himself as an outsider, as someone who did not belong to political parties or to the political class that, instead, he wanted to eliminate and replace. However, his biography affirms the opposite. In fact, the Uribe was undoubtedly part of that class. He held three public administration positions before the election of 2002: first in

⁷⁷ Bejarano A. M., *op. cit.*, p. 334.

Medellín's Public Utilities Corporation in 1976; in 1982 he was appointed mayor of Medellín; in 1994 Uribe was elected governor of his native department, Antioquia, for a three-year period. Despite his personal history as part of the political and party establishment, Uribe cleverly used the populist rhetoric against political parties and the political class to gain a broader electoral base and, once becoming President, to stay in power and have a direct linkage with citizens.⁷⁸

Moreover, Uribe did not actually want to challenge established elites and promote change or radical social transformations. Instead, Uribe was committed to perpetuate the *status quo*, to maintain power in the hands of the political elite. In contrast with what I have defined as technopopulist leaders, such as Chávez in Venezuela and Correa in Ecuador, the Colombian president did not even present himself as the leader of the poor classes and of the ones excluded from the political representation. Uribe became the leader of many terrorized Colombians, who demanded order, safety and security, at any cost. For his political ambitions, he created the image of a protective and skilled father who could save them from terrorism and violence. Therefore, there was no glorification of "the people", but rather of the leader representing the "popular will" to end with violence, the "country's savior".

The glorification of his person and of his government was also achieved through television media, which created political legitimation against events such as terrorism and played a crucial role in the representation of the *violentos*. In addition, Uribe traveled throughout the whole country to meet with governors, mayors, and the local communities, inaugurating a new form of communication with the masses, the *Consejos Comunales de Gobierno* (CCGs). As stated by the political scientist Bejarano Ana Maria, "the CCGs were carefully staged and controlled events. Previous to each CCG, a rigorous selection of the participants was carried out."⁷⁹ All those taking part in the discussion during the CCGs were registered before the event and had to announce the topics they want to discuss. The CCGs thus did not offer true opportunities for participation or opposition. Instead, they were just occasions to communicate the government's agenda and activities while creating the illusions of a direct linkage between the president and the local levels of government, and of a government responsive to the necessities and the requests of the local communities.

⁷⁸ *ivi*, pp. 338-339.

⁷⁹ *ivi*, pp. 342-343.

In conclusion, Uribe made active use of technopopulist strategy and discourse, based on the politicization of citizens' fear of insecurity, through populist appeals and technocratic claims. In this sense, Uribe can be considered as a peculiar case of technopopulist, since although his instrumental borrowing of several elements from both the populist and technocratic traditions, he cannot be considered either as a pure populist or as a pure technocrat. Despite the moralistic, patriarchal, and divisive rhetoric, one of the central elements of populism tradition was missing in this case: the emphasis on class divisions as the central social cleavage, such as those between rich-poor or oligarchy-the people, was replaced by that between good and evil, the good citizens and the terrorists. Moreover, unlike other populist situations where charismatic leadership is able to create a political party to keep vehicle his political ideals, as in the case of the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (PSUV) which succeed Chávez, at the end of Uribe's term there was no institutionalized pro-Uribe party to succeed him.⁸⁰ With regards to technocratic features, while technocratic governments usually focus on economic and financial measures, Uribe's electoral and political platform centered on the security policy against the guerrilla groups, in order to deal with high homicide rates, kidnappings, attacks by armed terrorists and drug trafficking.

3.5. Conclusion

As a result of the critical juncture that marked Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, the traditional party system in Latin America became obsolete and was no longer representative of the societal cleavages. In all the case studies analysed, the ineffectiveness and the weakness of representative institutions and the malfunctioning of mechanisms of political mediation opened political space for a variety of new leaders and movements, mostly coming from outside the old system. In fact, where trust in traditional parties and in the political system was eroded by economic crises, corruption, or inability to resolve social and economic challenges, outsiders can employ antisystem appeals to mobilize voters. And in fact, relying on their charismatic personality and personalist appeal for legitimation and aggregation, the emergent actors carried on the mobilization of heterogeneous and fragmented masses in the electoral arena.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

The spectacular rise of *chavismo* in Venezuela was the result of people's dissatisfaction with political representation and the demand for change and social transformation. Invoking the legacy of the nineteenth-century liberator Simón Bolívar, Hugo Chávez portrayed himself as the leader of the Bolivarian Revolution, understood as the second and definitive fight for independence. Through the use of oil revenues, Chávez adopted technocratic top-down policies both in economic and social fields.

Alberto Fujimori inaugurated technopopulism in Peru. In this case, populist appeals, the personalistic style of leadership, and the promotion of efficiency and modernization were more effective than any ideological commitment. Fujimori made a political use of his ethnicity and of his academic background to legitimate his proposal. In fact, his Japanese heritage and his past experience as professor and engineer were fundamental assets in this process of image building as a hardworking, smart, skilled and honest political leader of humble origins. In this way, Fujimori managed to legitimise the adoption of a wide-ranging neoliberal reforms, known as "*fujishock*".

Rafael Correa in Ecuador used to speak of himself as leading the citizens' revolution, aiming at achieving a radical change in the Ecuadorean society. To achieve this goal, Correa made a large use of radio and television for his propaganda, impoverishing the political debate, combining charismatic and technocratic claims. Every Saturday, radio and television broadcasted the program called "*Enlace Ciudadano*" (Citizen Connection) for three hours, in which Correa himself appeared to inform his citizens of all government's activities but also to directly intervene in the political debate. Furthermore, *correísmo* is a regional and global movement, not merely a local or national political project. The goal was the creation of the "twenty-first-century socialism". His project recalls once again a similar political project in Latin America, the one of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. However, despite the connections with Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution, Correa's project differed from it in the fact that the Citizens' Revolution had not grassroots organizations, communal councils, and other mechanisms of participatory democracy. In this sense, while Ecuadorian revolution was based on a top-down process, the Bolivarian mission had a bottom-up approach. Moreover, Correa, the professor-president, was very different from military persona of Chávez.

Álvaro Uribe Vélez's regime can be considered as a peculiar form of technopopulism since his appeals to competence in a technocratic style did not refer to the expertise to deliver economic

and financial results. Instead, the appeal to the expertise of technocrats concerned the ability to put an end to the war against the main Colombian guerrilla movements, namely FARC and ELN. Uribe became the leader of many terrorized Colombians, who demanded order, safety and security, at any cost. He managed to create for himself the image of the “country’s savior” that could save Colombia from terrorism and violence.

Considering the common elements that characterized their governments, we label Correa, Chávez, Uribe and Fujimori as technopopulists. Their attempt for a total rupture with the past involved the mobilization of the people into politics and the bypass of intermediary institutions, in favour of personalization and authoritarianism. Technopopulist rupture implied the creation of a new order characterized by highly fluid competitive arenas that were not structured around party institutions.

The legitimacy of Chávez, Maduro, Uribe and Correa was mainly grounded in winning democratic elections, that in theory they could lose. They were committed in permanent electoral campaigns and they all made extensive use of various means of communication, mainly television and radio, representing politics as the struggle between two antagonistic poles, usually the people and the elite, or the “good citizens” and the terrorists in the case of Uribe. Their political rivals were represented as enemies of the leader and, by extension, of the people and the nation.

The “citizens’ revolution” marked the replacement of old political elites by new elites, and a new commitment by the state. In fact, the state returned to protect common people from the excesses of the market economy and to reclaim a central role in economic and social policies. The implementation of targeted social programs and welfare benefits, from Chávez’s *Misiones Bolivarianas* to Correa’s Citizens’ Revolutions, consolidated the legitimacy of the new governments and the links between leaders and the society. These vertical connections replaced the mediated traditional ones, usually provided by political parties.

Moreover, all these leaders can be considered as a new generation of “*caudillos*”, the Latin American personalist and military leaders of the previous century.⁸¹ In fact, they intimidated the opposition, attacked the privately owned media and civil society groups with ties to

⁸¹ de la Torre C. and Arnson Cynthia J., *op. cit.*, p. 33.

traditional parties. They were also committed to concentrate more power in the hands of the executive, undermining the separation of powers as a consequence.

In conclusion, as can be seen from the case studies analysed, technopopulism arised from a generalized crisis of representation in Latin American democracies. Despite it often provided alternative forms of democratic leadership that were more responsive to popular interests and sentiments, it was unlikely to resolve the crisis of the democratic representative institutions. Instead, technopopulism just further deepened it.

CONCLUSION

In this work I have presented an overview of the rise of a new structuring logic of contemporary democratic politics in South America: the “technopopulism”. Contemporary democracy in Latin America has in fact gone through a process of significant changes since the end of the past century. As a result of the critical juncture that marked Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, the traditional party system and the traditional political competition structured primarily on the ideological divide between the left and the right became obsolete and were no longer representative of the societal cleavages. More and more dissatisfied and cognitively mobilized individuals wanted to take a more active role in defining the ideological and organizational terms of their political participation, but this request for political participation was not met by the traditional forms of partisan political organization.

Where trust in traditional parties and in the political system was eroded by economic crises, corruption, or inability to resolve social and economic challenges, the climate of profound contestation with the political, administrative and economic classes has grown, facilitating the emergence of new political actors and party types. Individuals have also been inclined to get involved in the political arena through non-partisan modes of political participation such as civil society organizations and social movements. Outsider leaders could employ antisystem appeals to mobilize voters, relying on their charismatic personality and personalist appeal for legitimation and aggregation. As a consequence, many long-established parties and the traditional mode of political competition have increasingly disappeared and have been supplanted by a new logic dominated by populism and technocracy.

It is no coincidence that populism and technocracy dominated the political scene. Both of them represent a rupture with the past. In fact, both populism and technocracy share a hostility towards the party democracy.⁸² The populists and the technocrats consider political parties as illegitimate actors because they are not committed to pursuit the politics of generality in favour of the whole population, but rather they represent specific interests and values of some portions of the society.

⁸² Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, “*La trappola tecnopopulista*”, in *Il Grand Continent*, 19th April 2021, available at: <https://legrandcontinent.eu/it/2021/04/19/la-trappola-tecnopopulista/>

Moreover, populism and technocracy both claim to possess a specific kind of “political truth”, even if in different forms. While for populist this truth takes the form of the conception of the “popular will” and of “the people”, for technocrats it is the expertise and the specific kind of knowledge that they claim to have access to. Both kind of appeals are legitimized by their externality to the principal dynamic within politics, which instead is the struggle for power and follows the interest of specific groups within society. On the contrary, populist and technocratic appeals, as argued throughout this thesis, have in common their generality and function as a critique of the very idea of pursuing particular interests. They are forms of politics disconnected from any particular group within society or any organized interest as such. It is a politics of the “whole”, not of the “parts”.⁸³ It follows that populism and technocracy have an affinity, and consequently, it is not surprising that appeals to the people and to expertise can be combined in a single political offer, that of technopopulism. Using a definition of Castellani Lorenzo, technopopulism is “the synthesis between two escape routes to the crisis of party democracy: one upwards, technocracy, and one downwards, populism.”⁸⁴

Therefore, populism and technocracy need to be considered not as opposites but rather as complementary. In technopopulist regimes, identification with the masses and the promise to enact the “popular will” go hand in hand with the technocratic message to execute, perform and “do the job”. These kind of appeals have increasingly become mainstream in the democratic political culture, and in fact political representatives are now evaluated by electors on their ability to “deliver the job”. Electors have become more receptive to both populist and technocratic registers of appeal, and are more interested in and capable of evaluating the technical qualities of policymaking.

Therefore, the dimensions of affinity and complementarity between populism and technocracy imply that they can be considered parts of the same overarching political logic. However, if we look more closely to their relationship in today's politics, we find that it is much more complex. Indeed, there is something problematic about trying to make the “truth” the foundation of political action, whether it be the truth of the people or the truth that experts affirm to have access to. There is not an actual truth in politics.⁸⁵ And in fact, it is not a coincidence that one of the changes we notice in today's politics is the process of “desubstantialization”, intended as

⁸³ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

⁸⁴ Castellani Lorenzo, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵ Bickerton Christopher J, *op. cit.*

the deprivation of substantial content from the political debate. As the political debate is becoming increasingly hostile and confrontational, with concrete policy and value differences being progressively marginalised, other themes of discussion are gaining importance, such as the personal characteristics of the politicians involved, their personal history, the way they employ modern means of communication. For instance, we have highlighted the importance of the professional career, personal background and family origins in *fujimorismo*. If in the past political competition was characterised by the ideological struggle between left and right, nowadays we should think about it instead as the opposition between alternative ways of making appeals to the people, to the common good and to the expertise. Thus, although the political logic remains extremely competitive, it is no longer ideologically oppositional.⁸⁶

Therefore, what we are observing in the contemporary political landscape, along with the considerable decrease in the set of issues over which partisan political opposition still appears possible, is the increase in the degree of conflictuality in a unsubstantial political competition. What remains the basis for substantive public disagreements are what the political scientist Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti call “morality issues”. With this expression they refer to topics such as the conflicts over the permissibility of abortion, euthanasia or homosexual marriage. It is precisely the high competitiveness and the shrinking in partisan ideologies that transform these questions into purely moral ones and leaves little room for a recognition of the legitimacy of alternative views.⁸⁷

It follows that it is not at the level of substantive policy differences that the effects of the emergence of technopopulism on electoral competition are likely to be most visible. Rather, it is at the levels of the forms, of the modes of organizations and of the communication that the consequences of technopopulism are most evident. As we have stressed throughout this work, technopopulism is not a property of a particular actor or political party, but a political logic that shapes the discursive and organizational dimensions of politics in democratic states. It has become the way in which appeals to the people and appeals to expertise come together into a single political offer; the *modus operandi* where populism and technocracy are used as means for political legitimacy. The cases of Chávez, Fujimori, Correa and Uribe show how the massive

⁸⁶ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁸⁷ *ivi*, p. 192.

use of mass media communication strategies to link directly the leader with the citizens has been important in the electoral competition and to gain legitimation.

In addition, what emerges from the cases analysed is that technopopulist leaders never bring an institutional transformation and formal democratic procedures remain in place. Technopopulism usually does not threaten the democratic life of institutions. In this sense, it can be affirmed that technopopulism marks the end of the horizon for radical political change. Despite the recurrent anti-establishment and anti-system appeals, a striking feature of technopopulist political logic is the refusal to lead radical transformations to existing social and political systems. Instead, the ambitions of most of technopopulist leaders is to make the existing social and political systems work better, according to their own principles. Technopopulist political actors do not promise to overthrow the *status quo*. They are not revolutionary political movements. Instead, they are modes of political action that remain firmly within the horizon of democratic electoral politics and claim only to make the existing system work better. As such, the horizon of possible political change is restricted to the sphere of reform of the *status quo* is firmly restricted.⁸⁸

The rise of technopopulism has also implications for the debate concerning the quality of democracy and its present status in South America. In fact, generally speaking, the rise of technopopulism is considered as a dangerous trend for the quality of existing democratic regimes, since technopopulism increases the conflictuality of democratic competition, while depriving it of substance at the same time. It diminishes the extent of the democratic legitimacy of the political system as a whole. Several aspects of democratic government are brought into question. In particular, it is discussed whether technopopulism actually includes those groups which are traditionally excluded from the political arena, and whether it generates positive outcomes in the political, economic, and societal spheres.

A possible way of contrasting the deficiencies of technopopulism lies in the revitalization of the mechanism of party democracy and a new connection between society and politics.⁸⁹ In fact, as we already know, technopopulism stemmed from the separation between politics and society and, far from resolving it, technopopulists exacerbate this distance, eroding the foundations of democratic representation. To fight back populism and technocracy together it

⁸⁸ *ivi*, pp. 164-166.

⁸⁹ *ivi*, pp. 188-190.

is necessary to revive a conception of politics as political competition between substantively different visions of the society. A condition for that is to revive the dimension of formal political organization as a way of representing particular interests within society. The specific political institution that has historically had this role is the political party. In fact, the dimension of partisanship itself is not historically obsolete. Instead, what needs to be revived in order to enable political parties to perform this function is the dimension of substantive “goal differentiation”. Moreover, as long as there are different values and conflicts of interest within society, and as long as individuals want to try to make sure that their interests and values are translated into policy, they have to cooperate with organized political organizations to achieve their goals. Only through this revitalization of the political debate and of representation of conflicting social interests and values, political parties can fight the crisis of representation and shrink the distance between society and politics.

As suggested by Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, it would be anachronistic to hope for a revival of the political parties and ideological struggles of the twentieth century. It is not a coincidence that technopopulism stemmed from the inability of that type of party democracy to provide adequate political expression to the emerging social conflicts and divisions after the lost decade. However, also the technopopulist idea that governments have access to some sort of objective political truth that is valid for the whole society, or that there is a popular will to be pursued, is equally fictitious.⁹⁰ For this reason, a modernization of the political party in general is required. In particular, parties have to undress the personalist clothes in favour of a “democratization process”. With this expression, I suggest that contemporary political parties must have a solid party bases, with committed activist members and grassroots political support, in order to become adequate political vehicles for those represented.

Despite in Latin American technopopulism has provided alternative forms of democratic governments more responsive to popular interests and sentiments, it is unlikely to resolve the crisis of the democratic representative institutions. In this scenario, those who pay the highest price for the technopopulist political logics are both those represented and the political parties, which cannot exercise their functions of moderation and search for compromise. Therefore, a more mediated relationship between citizens and political power, ideological diversification

⁹⁰ Bickerton Christopher J. and Invernizzi Accetti Carlo, “*La trappola tecnopopulista*”, in *Il Grand Continent*, 19th April 2021, available at: <https://legrandcontinent.eu/it/2021/04/19/la-trappola-tecnopopulista/>

and partisan competition can be antidotes for both populism and technocracy rather than calls for a more direct representation of the popular will and for more competence in government.

In conclusion, the idea that democracy is somehow in crisis has become prevalent. In this sense, technopopulism is unstable and unappealing since it contributes to further exacerbating the widespread sense of political dissatisfaction from which it stems in the first place, rather than put a remedy to it. Moreover, populism and technocracy can be important accessories to government but cannot be the guidelines of how a society must be governed, because of the risks, respectively, of making policy choices on an emotional and popular wave, and of depoliticization and closure of political contestation. However, what we are observing is neither the “death” nor the “end” of democracy, but rather a transformation within existing democratic regimes, in particular in the logic of political competitions. Technopopulism is not an alternative to democracy. It is an emerging political reality and is likely to be with us for some time to come. Technopopulism is just the form that democratic politics assumes today.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis supports the idea that a new structuring logic of contemporary democratic politics has emerged in South America in the last thirty years: the “technopopulism”. Technopopulism is not an alternative to democracy. Instead, it represents a distinctive development within democratic regimes.

As a result of the critical juncture that marked Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, the traditional party system in Latin America became obsolete and was no longer representative of the societal cleavages. In fact, before the 1980, in Latin America ideological politics was rooted in the relationship between society and politics that was mediated by a wide variety of actors, such as political parties, trade unions, civic associations and religious organizations. The germs of the technopopulist logic were present once, as a result of a complex historical process, ideologically polarized forms of politics had given way to societies characterized by high levels of individualization, atomization, and disaggregation. This process of separation between society and politics, that undermined the mechanisms of intermediation between them, was in fact a consequence of the “lost decade”. With this expression, we refer to the critical juncture consisting of hyperinflation, debt burdens and economic crisis, that determined economic and social upheavals in the whole continent.

The critical junctures provoked a shift in the socio-political alignments of Latin American party systems. At the end of the twentieth century, societies were no longer organized around the traditional social cleavages proletariat-bourgeoisie. The origins of technopopulism as a political logic lie therefore in this process of separation between politics and society. More precisely, it can be affirmed that technopopulism emerged as a consequence of all these factors:

1. The processes of economic and social reforms which undermined the traditional class distinction between proletariat and bourgeoisie.
2. The fall of ideologies rooted on the left-right dichotomy, leaving the floor to technocratic and populist discourses, based on a combination of anti-elitism, anti-establishment, fight against corruption and the appeal to the “common sense”.
3. Breakdown of institutionalized forms of political representation that occurred during periods of social and economic upheaval. Intermediary bodies between politics and society lost their role as mediator, causing their gradual separation.

4. People's dissatisfaction with the performance of political institutions and of their representative which were considered as distant from the citizen and society and their problems. This dissatisfaction led to the public cynicism towards politics and disenchantment from political actors. Citizens demanded the replacement of the old political elite in favour of outsiders.
5. Social atomization, caused by the new societal cleavages and the loss of sense of intermediary bodies. Citizens became politically self-sufficient through the process of cognitive mobilisation.
6. Chronic institutional weakness. The accumulation of unresolved social, political and economic problems removed the legitimacy of the institutions and left them defenceless against the destructive advance of technopopulism.

Therefore, technopopulism emerged when institutions started being perceived by the people as unrepresentative and the electoral instability opened political space for new electoral competition logics. The rise of populism and technocracy as the new structuring poles of contemporary democratic politics can be seen as stemming from the separation between an atomised and politically powerless society, on the one hand, and a political class that seeks electoral validation by appealing to the “common good”, on the other hand. Both the populist conception of representing the popular will and the technocratic assumption that there are objectively political solutions are examples of such notion of the common good. In this sense, as stated by Castellani Lorenzo, technopopulism “present itself as the point of contact between the bottom-up pyramid of populism and the top-down pyramid of technocracy.”

A new paradigm in the relationship among representatives and those represented originated from the rise of technopopulism. As a result of this change in the nature of political debates, other factors have assumed a greater relevance in the contemporary political landscape rather than partnership and ideology. The most evident are the personal characteristics of the politicians. In fact, a direct relationship of embodiment and trust between the leader and the electoral base, rooted in the assumption that the former possesses personal qualities and professional qualifications, was cultivated. The emphasis on honesty, anti-elitism and policies mirroring the popular will was complemented by a parallel concern for efficiency, competence and the delivery of objectively right policy solutions, independent of particular interests or values. The legitimacy of these political actors was mainly bound to the deliver right policies. Politics was no longer mostly political, but it was increasingly seen as a matter of

administration, of good governance. The consequence is that democracy became depoliticized. Political parties compete no longer with one another for gain the vote of specific sectors of the electorate. Instead, they prefer to share the benefits of public office.

The increasing conflictuality between those competing for electoral offices is another consequence of the rise of technopopulism. Contemporary politicians treat each other more as enemies rather than as opponents. In fact, once one claims to represent the whole society and the popular will, or to possess some sort of political truth, anyone who disagrees can only appear as representative of the interests of a minority within society or as completely in error. Technopopulist political actors dismiss their political opponents as politically ignorant or malicious about what the common good actually consists of.

Moreover, the credibility of the political opponents is undermined through the use of coarse political language, which is more and more violent and toxic. All this makes cooperation between the candidates with different opinions more difficult. While the logic of democratic politics is becoming increasingly hostile and confrontational, its substantive content is being progressively marginalized.

Therefore, the relationship between populism and technocracy has completely overthrown the one between left and right in the electoral competition. The traditional ideological categories of left and right have become historically exhausted and a new dimension of political confrontation emerged between “the people” on one hand, and the elite classes on the other. In this sense, the driving force behind technopopulism is political, not ideological. In fact, the relationship between populism and technocracy is not the same as that between left and right, since the latter is rooted in conflicting value systems and interest groups within society. Instead, the lines of conflict and struggle that structure today the political competition appear increasingly blurred. What distinguishes competing candidates for office and determines their chances of electoral success is substantially the specific way in which they combine both populist claims to popularity and technocratic claims to expertise, rather than their particular ideologies, values or interests. The adoption of these new modes of discourse and organization is the consequence of a new system of incentives and constraints that political actors face.

The ineffectiveness and the weakness of representative institutions and the malfunctioning of mechanisms of political mediation opened political space for a variety of new leaders and movements, mostly coming from outside the old system. In fact, where trust in traditional

parties and in the political system was eroded by economic crises, corruption, or inability to resolve social and economic challenges, outsiders can employ antisystem appeals to mobilize voters. Relying on their charismatic personality and personalist appeal for legitimation and aggregation, the emergent actors carried on the mobilization of heterogeneous and fragmented masses in the electoral arena.

Four case studies are considered in this thesis. The spectacular rise of *chavismo* in Venezuela was the result of people's dissatisfaction with political representation and the demand for change and social transformation. Invoking the legacy of the nineteenth-century liberator Simón Bolívar, Hugo Chávez portrayed himself as the leader of the Bolivarian Revolution, understood as the second and definitive fight for independence. Through the use of oil revenues, Chávez adopted technocratic top-down policies both in economic and social fields.

Alberto Fujimori inaugurated technopopulism in Peru. In this case, populist appeals, the personalistic style of leadership, and the promotion of efficiency and modernization were more effective than any ideological commitment. Fujimori made a political use of his ethnicity and of his academic background to legitimate his proposal. In fact, his Japanese heritage and his past experience as professor and engineer were fundamental assets in this process of image building as a hardworking, smart, skilled and honest political leader of humble origins. In this way, Fujimori managed to legitimise the adoption of a wide-ranging neoliberal reforms, known as "*fujishock*".

Rafael Correa in Ecuador used to speak of himself as leading the citizens' revolution, aiming at achieving a radical change in the Ecuadorean society. To achieve this goal, Correa made a large use of radio and television for his propaganda, impoverishing the political debate, combining charismatic and technocratic claims. Every Saturday, radio and television broadcasted the program called "*Enlace Ciudadano*" (Citizen Connection) for three hours, in which Correa himself appeared to inform his citizens of all government's activities but also to directly intervene in the political debate. Furthermore, *correísmo* is a regional and global movement, not merely a local or national political project. The goal was the creation of the "twenty-first-century socialism". His project recalls once again a similar political project in Latin America, the one of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. However, despite the connections with Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution, Correa's project differed from it in the fact that the Citizens' Revolution had not grassroots organizations, communal councils, and other mechanisms of

participatory democracy. In this sense, while Ecuadorian revolution was based on a top-down process, the Bolivarian mission had a bottom-up approach. Moreover, Correa, the professor-president, was very different from military persona of Chávez.

Álvaro Uribe Vélez's regime can be considered as a peculiar form of technopopulism since his appeals to competence in a technocratic style did not refer to the expertise to deliver economic and financial results. Instead, the appeal to the expertise of technocrats concerned the ability to put an end to the war against the main Colombian guerrilla movements, namely FARC and ELN. Uribe became the leader of many terrorized Colombians, who demanded order, safety and security, at any cost. He managed to create for himself the image of the "country's savior" that could save Colombia from terrorism and violence.

Considering the common elements that characterized their governments, we label Correa, Chávez, Uribe and Fujimori as technopopulists. Their attempt for a total rupture with the past involved the mobilization of the people into politics and the bypass of intermediary institutions, in favour of personalization and authoritarianism. Technopopulist rupture implied the creation of a new order characterized by highly fluid competitive arenas that were not structured around party institutions.

The legitimacy of Chávez, Maduro, Uribe and Correa was mainly grounded in winning democratic elections, that in theory they could lose. They were committed in permanent electoral campaigns and they all made extensive use of various means of communication, mainly television and radio, representing politics as the struggle between two antagonistic poles, usually the people and the elite, or the "good citizens" and the terrorists in the case of Uribe. Their political rivals were represented as enemies of the leader and, by extension, of the people and the nation.

The "citizens' revolution" marked the replacement of old political elites by new elites, and a new commitment by the state. In fact, the state returned to protect common people from the excesses of the market economy and to reclaim a central role in economic and social policies. The implementation of targeted social programs and welfare benefits, from Chávez's *Misiones Bolivarianas* to Correa's Citizens' Revolutions, consolidated the legitimacy of the new governments and the links between leaders and the society. These vertical connections replaced the mediated traditional ones, usually provided by political parties.

Moreover, all these leaders can be considered as a new generation of “*caudillos*”, the Latin American personalist and military leaders of the previous century. In fact, they intimidated the opposition, attacked the privately owned media and civil society groups with ties to traditional parties. They were also committed to concentrate more power in the hands of the executive, undermining the separation of powers as a consequence.

Although technopopulism profoundly alters the *modus operandi* of political actors, as well as the political outcomes they lead to, and the modes of political organizations, its emergence must not be considered neither the “death” nor the “end” of democracy as such. To the extent that populism and technocracy are means for political legitimacy, they do not threaten the democratic life of institutions. In fact, technopopulism never bring an institutional transformation and formal democratic procedures remain in place. The real risks concern the quality of representation. Moreover, despite it often provided alternative forms of democratic leadership that were more responsive to popular interests and sentiments, it was unlikely to resolve the crisis of the democratic representative institutions. Instead, technopopulism just further deepened it.

In conclusion, technopopulism is not an alternative to democracy. It has emerged in the last thirty years as a political reality in South America and is likely to be with us for some time to come. Technopopulism is just the form that democratic politics assumes today.