

## **Populist Citizenship in the Bolivarian Revolutions**

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the contours of populist citizenship as an alternative to neoliberal models of citizenship as consumption, and to liberal models that protect pluralism. It compares how political, socioeconomic, civil, collective, gender, and GLBT rights were imagined and implemented in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. It explains why despite the expansion of some rights, populists' use of discriminatory legalism to regulate the public sphere and civil society led to the displacement of democracy toward authoritarianism.

**Key words:** citizenship, populism, rights, democratization, authoritarianism.

Populism is a form of political incorporation to the political community based on rhetorical appeals to and the mobilization of the people (de la Torre 2000). Populists use a Manichaeian rhetoric that confronted the people against the oligarchy understood as self-serving and foreign-oriented elites that marginalized the plebs from political, socioeconomic, and symbolic resources and benefits. Populist challenges to the exclusion of the people, and their promises of inclusion and even redemption took place during episodes of mobilization and contentious collective action (Jansen 2015). During populist events the meanings of the term "the people" and who belonged to this category are contested. Several actors such as politicians, activists, and leaders of social movements claim to be the voice of the people. Politics becomes a struggle over who could claim to talk on behalf of the people and to represent their interests.

Populism is also a model of citizenship conceived as the active participation of the people in politics (Spanakos 2008; Rein 2013). Populists mobilize their followers and occupy public spaces. Classical populist of the 1930s and 1940s like Juan Perón and José María Velasco Ibarra struggled against electoral fraud and to expand the franchise. Free and open elections became the decisive moment of the populist representative contract (Peruzzotti 2013: 75).

Radical populists like Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa legitimized their governments by winning elections. Venezuelans voted in 16 elections between 1999 and 2012, Bolivians in 9 between 2005 and 2016, and Ecuadorians in 6 between 2006 and 2014. In addition, these leaders promised to fix the participatory and representative deficits of liberal democracies by creating participatory bodies at the local level, by incorporating forms of direct democracy, and in the case of Evo Morales by combining indigenous communal with liberal democracy.

Populist citizenship was also understood as the socioeconomic inclusion of the excluded, and the expansion of the consumer capacity of the poor in the market. Because populists conceived politics as the antagonistic confrontation between two camps, they were anti-pluralist and disdained some of the basic premises of liberalism such as the separation of powers and the independence of the public sphere and civil society from the state. Democratic rivals were represented as enemies of the leader, the people, and the nation, and their civil rights were thus curtailed. Populist governments used the legal system in discretionary ways to regulate the content of what the privately-owned media could publish and to curtail the independence of civil society. Despite their democratic promises and the expansion of some rights, these leaders displaced democracy toward authoritarianism.

This article analyzes populist citizenship in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. It explores how political, socioeconomic, civil, collective, gender, and LGBT rights were imagined and implemented as alternatives to liberal models that protect pluralism, and neoliberal models of citizenship as consumption. The article is divided into six sections. The first describes the insurrections against neoliberalism and corrupt politicians that led to the rupture of the institutional systems of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. The following five sections compare the implementation of political, socioeconomic, civil, collective, and gender and LGBT rights in these nations.

## **Populist Insurrections**

The rebirth of leftwing populism in Latin America was the outcome of widespread popular resistance and rebellions against neoliberalism. On February 27, 1989, the Venezuelan Caracazo—a massive insurrection against the hike in the price of gasoline and transportation—took place. “Many cities were paralyzed by the multitudes who blocked roads and looted thousands of commercial establishments” (López Maya and Panzarelli 2013: 244). The state responded brutally killing at least 500 citizens. This rebellion undermined and buried the legitimacy of Venezuela’s two-party democracy. Hugo Chávez who led a failed coup in 1992 was elected with the promise to get rid of neoliberalism and the cartel of corrupt politicians, and to convene a participatory constituent assembly.

From 2000 to 2003, Bolivia underwent a cycle of protest and political turmoil that resulted in the collapse of the party system established in 1985 and of the neoliberal economic model (Dunkerley 2007). Coalitions of rural and urban indigenous organizations, coca growers, and middle class sectors fought against water privatization, increasing taxation, the forced eradication of coca leaves, and surrendering gas reserves to multinational interests. The state increasingly relied on repression, in turn radicalizing protestors. “Neither Morales nor the MAS was actively involved in these uprisings, which were instead the result of grassroots organizing” (Postero 2010: 14). The insurgents accomplished their goals of getting rid of the neoliberal model, and defending Bolivia’s national resources. In 2006, Evo Morales was elected with an anti-neoliberal platform.

Between 1997 and 2005, the three elected presidents of Ecuador—Abdalá Bucaram (1996–1997), Jamil Mahuad (1998–2000), and Lucio Gutiérrez (2003–2005)—were deposed after massive protests against neoliberalism and political corruption. Sociologist León Zamosc (2013: 265) interpreted these uprisings as instances of popular impeachment that applied “the

ultimate accountability sanction for a president: removal from office.” Rafael Correa, a college professor who never belonged to a political party, was elected in 2006 with a platform to reverse neoliberalism, convene a constituent assembly, and restore national sovereignty.

These insurrections politicized the political economy and showed how supposedly technical neoliberal policies benefited local and foreign elites. Insurgents also developed alternative notions of democracy and citizenship. In Venezuela, intellectuals, politicians, and activists argued that participatory democracy could complement liberal models solving its problems of representation, participation, and lack of legitimacy. Indigenous intellectuals and activists in Bolivia and Ecuador created notions of communal democracy as an alternative to representative forms (Patzí 2004; Rivera Cisucanqui 1990). Communal democracy was based on the principles of horizontal practices of face-to-face interactions and deliberation, permanent consultation, imperative mandates, and rotation of officers. Participation was not reduced to voting, and representation to the delegation of power to representatives. Leadership was considered a duty and rotated among community members. All members of the community deliberated until they reached a consensus and made a decision. Representatives named at the local level were held accountable to their constituents and had to implement what was decided by their collectivities.

Citizens rebelled against politicians and neoliberal elites that surrendered national sovereignty to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and to the U.S. government. Venezuela, for instance, changed its pro third world foreign policy, becoming an advocate of neoliberal reform and free trade. Bolivia underwent social strife and human rights abuses as the military unsuccessfully followed U.S. policies of forceful eradication of coca leaf production. In a desperate move to stop hyperinflation in 2000, the government of Jamil Mahuad gave up the Ecuadorian sucre for the U.S. dollar, and allowed the United States to establish a military base to monitor illegal immigration and drug trafficking. Populists promised to bring back the interest of

the nation state, and to build a multipolar world. As Rafael Correa (2012: 104) argued in a long interview with the *New Left Review* it was time that Latin Americans moved “from the Washington Consensus to the consensus without Washington.”

### **Citizenship as Active Political Participation**

Chávez, Morales, and Correa used three strategies to engage the active participation of their citizens: regime change by constitution making, permanent elections and campaigns, and establishing institutions for participatory democracy at the local level.

Social movements, intellectuals, and politicians in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador demanded constitutional assemblies to get rid of neoliberalism, improve the quality of democracy and citizenship, and to include the excluded. Margarita López Maya (2011) shows how the idea of participatory democracy that became enshrined in the constitution of 1999 had its origins in proposals of leftwing catholic intellectuals and politicians, reformed Marxist parties, and social movement activists. Since 2002, indigenous social movements from the lowlands of Bolivia demanded a constituent assembly as the mechanism to radically reform the state and to include indigenous peoples and their cultures (Postero 2015: 404–405). Ecuadorian social movements and the left were dissatisfied with the Constituent Assembly of 1997 that they perceived as exclusionary and dominated by traditional rightwing parties. They demanded a new constituent assembly that would be truly participatory.

Constitution making became the utopia for the construction of a more participatory and equal society, and the strategy to change the institutional framework of society. Constituent power was understood as a revolutionary force that ought to be permanently activated to revamp all the corrupt political institutions of constituted power that served the interests of foreign powers and local elites. Constitution making would refound the state to make it more inclusive, and would establish a true democracy (Bernal 2014: 442–443).

The process of drafting the new constitutions in these nations were participatory and involved social movements. The new Venezuelan, Bolivian, and Ecuadorian constitutions were approved in referenda. These constitutions expanded rights, and established a different kind of democracy based on elections and also on a new constitutional order that concentrated power in the hands of the president. “Mechanisms of horizontal accountability by other branches of government and an independent press were replaced by a variant of vertical accountability involving frequent elections, referenda, and plebiscites” (de la Torre & Arnson 2013: 10).

Populist presidents convened numerous elections to consolidate their power, displace the opposition, and to create new hegemonic blocks. All these elections were plebiscitary referenda on their presidents. By constantly campaigning populist presidents strengthened their charismatic links with their constituencies. They relentlessly traveled around their countries, had an overwhelming presence in the media, and distributed resources to followers and potential voters.

Populist citizenship was thus lived as an antagonistic struggle against internal and external enemies (Spanakos, 2008: 527; Rein 2013: 301). Populist polarization and emotional discourses on behalf of the poor, exalted as the soul of the nation, created strong popular identities. These identities allowed for the mobilization and active participation of common people in mass rallies, demonstrations, and in elections where they voted for their leaders. Populist followers had the sensation and the feeling of being actors and shapers of their own political destinies. They were struggling against their oppressors and for their own liberation. Populist polarization, however, transformed rivals into enemies, restricted spaces for dialogue and compromise, and reduced democracy to the plebiscitary acclamations of leaders. Differently from liberal model of citizenship that protected pluralism, populists conceived “the people” as an organic and homogenous whole that shared one interest and identity that could be embodied in a leader.

Chávez, Morales, and Correa differed in how they established institutions of participatory democracy at the local level. In order to account why a bottom-up participatory populism was established in Bolivia, a technocratic populism with little participation beyond elections was created in Ecuador, and a top-down participatory populism in Venezuela, I focus on the strength of social movements.

Evo Morales came to power at the peak of indigenous-led popular protest against neoliberalism and “pacted democracy.” His party was the political instrument of strong social movements. Participation in Bolivia was to a large extent grounded in communitarian traditions where all participated and deliberated until a decision was made. Leaders at all levels were accountable to their social base. Participation under Morales was more bottom-up, and organizations of the subaltern had the capacity to force the government to reverse policies (Crabtree 2013; Mayorga 2014; Postero 2015). In 2011, indigenous people from the lowlands, for instance, marched to La Paz to resist plans to build a road that would go through the TIPNIS national park. In December 2010, the price of gasoline was increased by 75% and social movements forced Morales to reverse the hike.

Differently from Morales, Rafael Correa came to power when the indigenous movement’s capacity to engage in sustained collective action had diminished. If in the 1990s and the earlier 2000s, Ecuador had the strongest indigenous movement in the Americas that staged widespread insurrections against neoliberal reforms and helped to overthrow two elected presidents; by 2005, it was in crisis. The leadership of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), and their political party Pachakutik, took part with colonel Lucio Gutiérrez in a failed coup d’état in January 2000. They were part of the coalition that elected Gutiérrez in 2002, and served under his government. By 2006, Pachakutik was considered by many citizens to be just another traditional political party. For the leadership of CONAIE it became difficult to mobilize the rank and file because their successful demands for cultural recognition were not accompanied by

socioeconomic distribution. Correa felt no obligation toward the indigenous or other social movements, and considered CONAIE a dangerous contestant that needed to be deactivated. Technocratic social distribution became the main tool to bypass indigenous organizations and other social movements and to directly link the grassroots with president Correa. His government coopted some indigenous leaders, while those who resisted his policies were accused of terrorism and sabotage (Martínez Novo 2014).

In Venezuela, corporatist arrangements between the organized sectors of society and the state bypassed the growing informal sector of the economy. When Hugo Chávez came to power social movements were dispersed and did not have the organizational structures to engage in sustained collective action (Gómez Calcaño 2009: 18). His regime tapped the opportunity to organize and to mobilize the excluded—understood as those without work in the formal economy, the poor, and those without formal education. Chávez organized his followers from the top down, and created a series of participatory institutions such as the Bolivarian Circles, and the Communal Councils. For those who actively participated it meant a new sense of dignity and inclusion (Fernandes 2010). Participation in Chavista institutions was partisan, and citizenship was conceived as “a project based on antagonistic struggles of the pueblo” against its enemies (Spanakos, 2008: 529). Involvement in Bolivarian institutions and the constant confrontation against enemies created strong loyalties to Chávez that were partially transferred to his successor Nicolás Maduro. Chávez’ charismatic leadership set the limits for popular autonomy, as the Bolivarian Revolution was centered on his figure, his wishes, and even his dreams.

### **Populist Socioeconomic Rights**

Leftwing populists understood socioeconomic citizenship as the reversal of neoliberal models of citizenship as consumption based on the individual’s capacity in the market. Differently from the neoliberal model based on the privatization of social services, the reduction of the size of the state, and decentralization they enacted postneoliberal policies that strengthened the state and

its role in the economy as the main engine of growth (Elwood, Bond, Martínez Novo, & Radcliffe 2016). They used the state to reduce inequalities, redistribute wealth, and to increase the consumption of the poor in the market.

Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador were rich in hydrocarbons and reaped huge benefits from the commodity boom of the 2000s that sent oil and natural gas prices to record levels. As a result of enhanced revenues, public investment and social spending skyrocketed and poverty rates and, to a lesser extent, inequality, fell. World Bank figures indicated that the poverty rate fell from 55.4% of the population in 2002 to 28.5% in 2009 in Venezuela. Poverty in Ecuador was reduced from 37% in 2006 to 29% in 2011. In Bolivia, it dropped from 60% in 2006 to 50.6% in 2009, with an even greater decrease in levels of extreme poverty (de la Torre & Arnson 2013: 28).

Populist social programs had the advantage of rapidly targeting the poor, boosted the popularity of presidents, and functioned as instruments for maintaining power. Populist presidents were portrayed as the providers of social benefits to the poor. In some cases, like in Venezuela, major social spending coincided with elections. Populist parties mobilized beneficiaries of social programs to attend rallies and to show gratitude to their benefactors. These programs, at the same time, suffered from major flaws in design. They were haphazard and politicized, lacking in efficiency, transparency, and institutionalization. The fiscal foundation of social programs, especially those that rely so heavily on oil and other windfall commodity rents, were unsustainable in the long run (Weyland 2013b). Falling prices of oil led to an increase of poverty in Venezuela. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America it jumped from 24% in 2012 to 32% in 2013. Another study concluded that 75% of Venezuelans were poor according to their income in 2015 (Arenas 2016: 19).

The economic policy of Chávez-Maduro, Morales, and Correa shared a commitment to strengthening the state and abandoning neoliberalism. Yet Morales and Correa did not follow

Chávez's policies of expropriation of private property by the state in the name of socialism of the twenty-first century. "Chávez re-nationalized oil production in 2001 and nationalized the country's steel, telecommunications, and electric industries in 2007 and 2008" (Hetland 2016: 9). Differently from Chávez, Morales's "governance has been more radical in rhetoric than in reality" (Madrid 2011: 240). His economic policy expanded the role of the state in the economy, increased the royalties for the state from foreign-owned mining companies, and diversified trade partners. Morales respected private property and practiced fiscal discipline. Even though he increased social spending, his social programs like the cash transfer program for education Juancito Pinto, were "relatively inexpensive and targeted rather than universal" (Madrid 2011: 250).

Correa is a pragmatic technocrat with a graduate degree in economics from a U.S. university. He put the state at the center of his developmental strategies, but respected private property. His administration built infrastructure, increased spending in health and education, augmented the minimum wage, expanded public employment, and improved the salaries of public servants. When the prices of oil were high, Ecuadorians of all social classes benefited from his policies. It is unlikely, however, that with the collapse of oil prices he can continue with his developmental and social policies.

As Anthony Spanakos (2008: 535) and Ranaan Rein (2013: 297) note, the right to consume, especially to consume food, is a fundamental component of populist citizenship. In addition of readdressing the consumption deficits of the poor, populists aimed to give them access to the symbols of status regularly enjoyed by the middle class. Chávez, for example, launched the "Great Housing Mission" during his 2012 presidential campaign. His objective was not only to solve housing deficits; it was also to give the poor access to houses of middle class status in modern apartment complexes similarly to those where the middle class live. His housing mission was complemented with the Mission "Mi Casa Bien Equipada" that sold electro

domestics at subsidized prices to the poor. The message was that Chávez's government was providing consumer goods associated with middle class status to the very poor.

The expansion of consumption and new lines of credit, undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of Bolivarian presidents. Yet prosperity lasted as long as the boom of the economic cycle, and the economic crises provoked by the collapse of the prices of commodities might led to the resentment of recently incorporated consumers who could lose their feeble middle class status as fast as they attained it.

Despite their rhetoric of changing the economic matrix of natural resource exploitation and oil and mineral rent, these governments increased state spending without altering the structural dependencies on minerals of their economies. The percentage of Venezuela's export earnings derived from oil increased from 68.7% in 1998 to 96% in 2016 (Hetland 2016: 9). In Bolivia, the exports of extractives rose from 41.8% in 2001 to 74% in 2009 (Schilling Vacaflor and Vollrath 2012: 128). In Ecuador, oil exports increased from 41% in 2002 to 58% in 2011, and Ecuador opened its doors to large-scale mining interests. By 2007, "2,8 million hectares were granted to mining companies, half of which were for the extraction of metals—a heavily polluting activity" (Martínez Novo 2014: 118).

### **Restriction of Civil Rights and the Colonization of Civil Society**

A vast literature has shown that civil rights were not always respected in Latin American democracies. Rights were selective enforced, and in many nations, there was a duality between the enshrinement of civil rights in constitutions and in official discourse and the limited upholding of these rights in everyday life. The rule of law was tenuous at best, and at worst the law appeared to serve the interests of the powerful few. Getulio Vargas's famous maxim "for my friends everything, for my enemies the law!" continues to characterize the selective enforcement of civil rights in the region.

The innovation of Bolivarian leaders was to transform the historical patterns of selectively enforcing laws into tools to secure their hold on power by punishing critics. Chávez, Maduro, Morales, and Correa transformed Vargas's old maxim into policies of discriminatory legalism, understood as the use of formal legal authority in discretionary ways (Weyland 2013a: 23). New laws were created in these nations to restrict civil liberties such as the rights of free information and freedom of association. In the name of upholding the law citizens were deprived of their rights, as when protest was criminalized and opposition politicians and social movement leaders were charged with terrorism and sabotage. These governments abused the law as when the legal system was used to impose astronomical fees to journalists and owners of the privately-owned media. Laws were not always enforced as when electoral boards allowed incumbents to use state resources in their political campaigns.

In order to use laws discretionarily populist presidents packed the courts, and institutions of accountability with loyal followers. After drafting the new constitution, the Venezuelan Assembly created a transitory council that governed legislative affairs between the approval of the constitution in December 1999 and the election of the new congress in August 2000. By controlling this council, Chávez put trustworthy authorities in charge of the National Electoral Council. In 2004, Chávez put the highest judicial authority, the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, in the hands of loyal judges. By 2006, hundreds of lower court judges were fired and replaced by unconditional supporters (Hawkins 2015: 11). Correa followed Chávez's model of convening a transitory council after the assembly drafted the new constitution. The "congresillo" was tasked to name the new judicial authorities and the people in charge of the institutions of accountability such as the Ombudsman and the Comptroller. In 2011, Correa created an ad hoc Consejo de la Judicatura charged with appointing the members of the National Court, the highest judicial authority. Gustavo Jalkh, who was Correa's personal secretary, was named head of the Consejo. Similarly, Morales gained control of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (Madrid 2012: 182). Between

2006 and 2009, Morales's "administration dismantled the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Tribunal, gaining control of the courts after 2010" (Mainwaring and Pérez Liñán 2015: 117).

Discriminatory legalism was used to colonize the public sphere and civil society. Populists were convinced that the media had a great influence in the population's ideology and collective consciousness (Waisbord 2013: 45). President Correa (2012: 100) for example asserted: "the media have always been one of the de facto powers that have dominated Latin American countries." He claimed that a few families from the oligarchy controlled the media, and that because they were losing old privileges they had mounted campaigns to discredit leftist regimes at the national and international level. Journalists, according to Correa's analysis, reproduced what the owners of media outlets dictated.

Populists argued that the private media acted as an opposition political party. Morales, for example, in several occasions said that the media is his "number one enemy" (Madrid 2012: 181). Control and regulation of the media by the state was at the center of the populist struggle for hegemony. Chávez led the path in enacting laws to control the privately-owned media. In 2000 the Organic Law of Telecommunication allowed the government to suspend or revoke broadcasting concessions to private outlets when it was "convenient for the interest of the nation." The Law of Social Responsibility of 2004 banned "the broadcasting of material that could promote hatred and violence" (Corrales 2015a: 39). These laws were ambiguous and the government could interpret their content according to its interests. Correa's government emulated Chávez. In 2013 the National Assembly controlled by his party approved a communication law that created a board tasked with monitoring and regulating the content of what the media could publish. According to the administration, such a regulatory mechanism was needed in order to assure that the private media delivered information objectively. Their argument was that since the privately-owned media, like privately owned banks, provided a public service, they needed to be regulated by the state. The Superintendence of Communication SUPERCOM initiated 269 processes

against journalists and private media outlets. Most of these processes resulted in sanctions that included fines, written warnings, public apologies, and rectification of previous statements (Burbano de Lara 2016: 27).

To challenge the power of the private media, Chávez's government used discriminatory legalism, and took away radio and television frequencies from critics. The state became the main communicator controlling 64% of television channels (Corrales 2015a: 41). In Bolivia, media concessions were equally divided between the state, the private sector, and popular and indigenous organizations. Correa followed Chávez in using discriminatory legalism to take away radio and television frequencies. He created a state media conglomerate that included the two most watched TV stations, as well as several radio stations and newspapers (de la Torre & Ortiz 2016: 231). Without a tradition of a public media, and in the hands of governments that did not differentiate their interests from those of the state, these outlets were put to the service of populist administrations.

Chávez and Correa used and abused mandatory broadcasts that all media venues were forced to air, and created their own TV shows, *Aló Presidente*, and *Enlaces Ciudadanos*. Every Sunday Chávez addressed the nation for four to six hours, and Correa talked every Saturday for two to three hours. They set the informational agenda as they announced major policies in TV shows where they also sang popular tunes, talked about their personal life and dreams, and mercifully attacked opponents and journalists. Chávez and Correa became ever-present figures in the daily life of Venezuelans and Ecuadoreans. They were always talking in the radio and on television, billboards with their images and propaganda of their governments adorned cities and highways, and citizens became polarized by deepening divisions between loyal followers and enemies.

Chávez and Correa suffocated the private media by reducing government advertisement to critical media venues and by manipulating the subsidies for the price of paper (Waisbord

2013). They used discriminatory legalism to intimidate and harass journalists and private media owners. Correa sued the owners of newspapers, and journalists who uncovered cases of corruption. The most notorious cases that were reported worldwide involved an editor and three board members of the largest privately owned newspaper, *El Universo*, who were convicted of defamation and sentenced to three-year terms for publishing an editorial entitled, “No to Lies”; the paper was also fined US\$40 million. Subsequently, president Correa pardoned them.

Bolivarian presidents enacted legislation that used ambiguous language to control, and regulate the work of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In 2010 the Law for the Defense of Political Sovereignty and National Self-Determination in Venezuela barred Non-Governmental Organizations that defended political rights or monitored the performances of public bodies from receiving international assistance (Corrales 2015a: 39). Three years later in 2013, Correa enacted Executive Decree 16. This decree gave the government authority to sanction NGOs for deviating from the objectives for which they were constituted, for engaging in politics, and for interfering in public policies in a way that contravenes internal and external security or disturbs public peace. To set an example, the environmentalist organization Pachama Alliance was closed for deviating from the original organization’s goals and for interfering with public policy and security (de la Torre & Ortiz 2016: 229–230). Morales followed suit by passing legislation in 2013 to revoke an organization’s permit to operate if it performs activities different from those listed in its statute, or if the organization’s representative is criminally sanctioned for carrying out activities that “undermine security or public order” (Human Rights Watch 2015).

In Bolivia and Ecuador, state institutions were created to supervise and control the participation of the organized sector of society. The right to participate was restricted to groups that were recognized and authorized by the state (Zuazo 2010: 134). In Venezuela and Ecuador, social movements were created from the top down to counteract the power of worker’s unions, unionized teachers, students, and indigenous groups. At the same time, these organizations

distributed resources to loyal followers that promoted the interest of their governments (Gómez Calcaño 2009; de la Torre & Ortíz 2016).

Protest was criminalized in Venezuela and Ecuador. Union leaders and striking workers, even when they were sympathizers of Chávez, were charged with terrorism (Iranzo 2011: 28–31). Hundreds of peasant and indigenous activists were accused of terrorism and sabotage in Ecuador (Martínez Novo 2014). Laws were used discretionally to arrest and harass leading figures of the opposition in the Bolivarian nations. The most notorious cases occurred under Nicolás Maduro. Opposition leader Leopoldo López is facing time in jail on trump charges for inciting violence.

By incrementally reducing civil rights, by using the state to regulate the media and civil society, and by harassing the opposition, the governments of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador killed democracy slowly. The adoption of notions and models of revolution were at the heart of these processes of democratic erosion. Bolivarian leaders understood politics as a struggle of us versus them a la Carl Schmitt. Instead of facing democratic rivals, they confronted real or imaginary national and foreign enemies. Traditional political parties, the owners of the privately-owned media, the leaders of social movements, NGOs, journalists, and some economic elites were attacked as enemies of the revolution. The closure of spaces for contestation and the rhetoric of revolutionary confrontation cornered the opposition, whereas power was concentrated in the hands of the presidency.

These leaders were convinced that they were leading long-lasting revolutionary transformations; therefore, they could not be limited by “bourgeois formalities” such as term limits. Chávez’s example of modifying the constitution enacted during his presidency to stay indefinitely in power, inspired Correa to change the constitutions and do away with term limits as well. However, to not rule in a conjuncture of economic crises, he opted to not participate in the 2017

election. Morales lost a referendum in 2016 that would have allowed him to run yet for another term, but will modify the constitution to run again in 2019.

### **Cultural and Collective Rights**

Indigenous and Afro-descendant movements that emerged in the last third of the twentieth century demanded a reconfiguration of citizenship that entailed: “1) constitutional recognition that national identities coincided with ethnic and racial ones; 2) legal recognition that there should be multiple units of political representation, including individual citizens and ethnic communities; and 3) legal pluralism, respecting national and indigenous jurisdiction and jurisprudence—including the right to territorial autonomy” (Yashar 2011: 193). They demanded cultural rights (to language, traditions, and ways of life) and collective rights (to territory and autonomous self-government) (Richards 2013: 10).

The constitution of 1999 recognized the multicultural nature of Venezuela and the rights of indigenous people. Three indigenous representatives were allocated to the unicameral national assembly, and a larger percentage were assigned to local and provincial bodies according to the percentage of indigenous people (Mayorga 2014: 159).

Bolivia was declared plurinational and communitarian in the constitution of 2009. The constitution “distinguishes indigenous rights from other rights by attaching them to a new unitary subject described as the ‘pueblos originario campesinos’” (Albro 2013: 143). The constitution equates autonomy with self-governance, and asserts the recognition of the 36 indigenous languages as official languages of the state. It recognized representative, participatory and direct democracy, and indigenous communal democracy. Even though indigenous representatives were elected in indigenous territories, they were not chosen following the practices of communal democracy. Indigenous representatives were elected through the mechanisms of representative democracy. The state also limited the implementation of collective rights to territory self-

government when it stated that consultation to exploit natural resources in indigenous territories was not binding. The Morales administration “sees indigenous control over natural resource extraction as a threat to its own power” (Postero 2015: 412).

Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorean cultural rights to language, traditions, and ways of life were recognized in the Constitution of 1998. The new Charter of 2008 drafted with the participation of social movements expanded cultural rights, and set limits to collective rights to territory and self-government. The constitution recognized plurinationalism, but “special representation of indigenous nationalities beyond regular democratic representation was not accepted” (Martínez Novo 2014: 113). Indigenous territories were recognized but the process of establishing these territories became difficult to implement. The reason was that “proponents of these territories need to achieve a two-thirds majority in a referendum based on one of the already existing divisions of the state, which are of colonial origin and centered on the distribution of the mestizo population” (Martínez Novo 2016: 37). Even though the constitution established that indigenous people should be consulted on whether to exploit natural resources located in their territories, this consultation was not binding.

Similarly to neoliberal multiculturalism that separated “permitted Indians” from “recalcitrant” ones, given limited symbolic cultural recognition and targeted redistribution to the first and punishing the later, compliance with natural resource extraction sets the limits to the recognition of the “permitted Indian” in these nations (Martínez Novo 2014: 121). When indigenous organizations voice their dissent especially around policies of natural resource extraction, populist administrations used discriminatory legalism to punish critics. In Ecuador, indigenous protesters were criminalized as terrorist, and the state repressed demonstrations in August 2015. The permitted Indian of Correa’s citizen’s revolution is conceived as a passive recipient of redistributive state policies. In Bolivia, due to the strength of indigenous organizations and the origin of the MAS in social movements, indigenous organizations have had more

autonomy in vetoing policies while remaining part of the government coalition (Postero 2015, Mayorga 2014). Similarly, Wayúu indigenous people of the state of Zulia used the language and symbols of the Chávez government to temporarily challenge projects for coal mining (Fernandes 2010, 244).

### **Gender and LGBT Rights**

Participatory constitution making gave opportunities to activists to promote gender and to a lesser extent LGBT rights. The 1999 constitution and legislation passed by the Chávez administration banned discrimination and domestic violence, gave pensions to housewives, and gave breastfeeding protection (Espina & Rakowski 2010: 181). The Bolivian constitution banned discrimination based on sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, color, and pregnancy, and recognized sexual and reproductive rights as constitutional rights (Rousseau 2010: 156–157). The Ecuadorian constitution included an antidiscrimination clause on the basis of gender identity as well as sexual orientation. It guaranteed rights such as “personal integrity and to a life free from violence; equality before the law and to nondiscrimination; equitable political and economic participation; to make free and responsible decisions in one’s sexual and reproductive life; and to equality in education, social welfare, and public policies” (Lind 2012: 257).

Populist presidents included women in positions of visibility in the public sphere, and used gender quotas in the elections of representatives. Their postneoliberal redistributive policies benefited women. Chávez, for example, created the state’s women’s bank, and promoted missions that targeted women. Yet despite gains, there were many contradictions and problems in fulfilling feminist and specially LGBT agendas. Whereas Venezuela under Chávez and Maduro, and Morale’s Bolivia did not move forward in recognizing LGBT rights (Corrales 2015b: 55), LGBT rights with the exception of marriage and adoption were recognized in Correa’s Ecuador. Constitutional gains for LGBT rights were ambiguous at best. For instance, the Ecuadorian

constitution at the same time that changed the traditional view of the family and recognized no kinship-based households stipulated that only a man and a woman could get married. President Correa, a practicing Catholic, voiced his opposition to same sex marriage, to abortion that continues to be illegal, and attacked gender studies saying in his sabinas that “a gender ideology that fails under any academic analysis” (Viteri 2016: 33). Even though a “out” lesbian activist served as Minister of Health, the new director of programs for prevention of adolescent pregnancy is a conservative woman that replaced sex education with the promotion of abstinence.

The dominant view of womanhood of the Bolivarian revolutions was motherhood. Chávez appealed “to women as mothers and nurturers.” Poor women responded by using “a maternal notion of responsibility to build new spaces of community participation” (Fernandes 2010: 218). Morales, for his part, privileged the role of women as mothers, combatants, and activists for social change, putting leaders of women peasant unions in symbolically important positions (Rousseau 2010: 158–159). For Correa, his revolution “has a woman’s face,” implying that “women as mothers and caretakers would be the political and reproductive foundation of the new socialist nation” (Lind 2012: 255–256).

These traditional constructs of womanhood as maternity, Espina and Rakowski (2010:194) argued, “honors and reinforces both women’s traditional roles as self-sacrificing mothers and wives and their unpaid work as volunteers in their communities.” If women were conceived as mothers, populist leaders were constructed as the fathers of their nations. As Karen Kampwirth (2010: 12) argues, “the father metaphor turns citizens into children” and a politician into someone who understand their interests and needs, and who could punish those who fail to recognize his wisdom.

## **Conclusions**

Populist citizenship was an alternative to liberal models. Instead of voting in elections and delegating power to representatives, populists promoted the active participation of citizens conceiving politics as the antagonistic struggle of the people against its enemies. Citizens participated in constitution-making processes, permanent elections, and new political elites replaced old elites linked to neoliberal policies. Different from liberal understandings that protected pluralism, populist aimed to create popular subjects. The state regulated civil society and the public sphere, and loyal organizations were created from the top down. During populist episodes, the openings of political opportunities, the discourses on behalf of the people, and their mobilization against elites allowed social movement activist to push for their agendas. Their projects sometimes coincided, diverged, or clashed with the views of the leaders that conceived the people-as-one, as a subject with one interest and will. When social movements had the capacity to engage in sustained collective action, as in Bolivia, they resisted populist projects of forging the people-as-one. Social movements in Ecuador and Venezuela had fewer resources and populist leaders became the voice and the embodiment of the homogenous and unitary people.

Populist citizenship was an alternative to neoliberal models of citizenship as consumption that allowed access to social services in terms of the individual's economic resources. A stronger post neoliberal state became the provider of social services, actively reduced inequalities, and increased the consumer capacities of the poor in the market. Yet redistribution was contingent on oil and mineral rent, and social programs could not be sustained after the fall of commodity prices. Populist leaders were portrayed as providers of social services and economic benefits, and relationships of unequal reciprocity, gratitude, and loyalty were expected from the beneficiaries of their redistributive policies.

Bolivarian nations promoted the interest of the nation, challenged imperialism, and aimed to forge a multipolar world freer from U.S. hegemony. During populist episodes, new rights such

as collective, gender, and sexuality rights were incorporated in the new constitutions and laws in the Bolivarian nations. Christian values of the family and sexuality restricted gender and LGBT rights, and the commitment to extraction of natural resources limited the scope of indigenous collective rights to territory and self-government.

The use of discriminatory legalism to punish critics, and the enacting of legislation to regulate the public sphere and the autonomy of civil society led to the slow death of democracy and its displacement toward authoritarianism. Why did populism in power led to authoritarianism? Part of the answer was institutional and contextual. When populist leaders came into power in contexts of discredited political parties and liberal institutions, and when social movements did not have the resources to engage in sustained collective action like in Chávez's Venezuela and Correa's Ecuador, these leaders acted as if they were the embodiment of the people. In Bolivia, Evo Morales was not allowed by his powerful base of strong social movements to act as if he embodied their homogenous will.

Populist authoritarianism was not only the result of weak parties and institutions, fragile civil societies, and weak social movements. It was also grounded in the logic of populism. Unlike democrats who regarded opponents as adversaries whose positions could be debated and even accepted, populists fought against enemies perceived as an evil threat that had to be eradicated. Populists aimed to rupture institutions that excluded the people in order to create new orders. Their language of love to the people and hatred to the oligarchy helped to create powerful adversarial and emotional, yet undemocratic, identities.

Under populism, "the people" was imagined as sharing an identity, interests, and forming a collective body "which is able to express this will and take decisions" (Abts & Rummens 2007: 409). The leader perceived himself not as an ordinary politician elected in a succession of temporarily elected officials. Rather, the leader saw himself as the incarnation of the people that could fill the open space of democracy, staying indefinitely in power. More than destroying

democracy, populists at first disfigured it. They kept some institutions and practices of liberal democracy but used them instrumentally to control civil society, the public sphere, and to win elections. As Guillermo O'Donnell (2011) argued, the systematic erosion of rights and civil liberties, the curtailment of institutions of accountability, and the tilting of the electoral playing field to favor incumbents led to the displacement of democracy toward authoritarianism.

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