

**National Mechanisms of Direct Democracy and  
Citizens' Perceptions of External Efficacy  
Across Latin American Countries**

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## **Abstract**

It is important that citizens have positive thoughts on the power of the vote to change things. Lack of legitimacy can be especially dangerous in a region where coups and coup attempts are not unusual in recent history.

Mechanisms of Direct Democracy (MDDs), i.e. plebiscites, referendums and citizen-initiated votes, have the majority of citizens' approval. If participation in MDDs is mainly considered a good thing after their occurrence, as in the countries under analysis here, it is a sign that people appreciated the opportunity of having more access to the political decisions, and they may feel a growth in their influence on what government does.

This study focus on citizens' external efficacy perceptions in 18 Latin American countries. Data come from Latinobarometro surveys held from 2003 to 2005 and in 2009. Considering another institutional variable (MDDs) to explain people's opinions is interesting because it is easier to change institutions than alter cultural and socio-economic structures. If some type of institutional design works better in lessening some kind of dissatisfaction with democracy, it can be used more often or instead of others.

This study also relies on rational choice theory assumptions which state that citizens can make informed and rational judgements as to whether or not their regime meets their standards of how it should work, while still considering the various influences of diverse contextual and institutional factors.

MDDs give citizens the opportunity to decide on issues rather than just candidates, and allow citizens to continue to be proactive in the democratic process and/or veto players after elections have been held. Their evaluation can be different depending on the type of MDD used, on the amount of issues involved, the salience of the issues and whether national elections are simultaneously held. In addition, citizens' perceptions of the importance of the vote can be influenced by other common cultural and government performance explanations for political support, therefore they are included as control variables.

In order to answer whether MDDs affect citizens' perceptions of political efficacy, multilevel models in which individual-level variables are relate to macro-level data are used. The macro-level data mitigates the explanatory importance of individual-level characteristics. These models allow the analysis of several countries in few different years without violating statistics assumptions.

The results indicate that MDDs have a little more positive impact on citizens' perceptions of external efficacy than national elections and that certain kinds of MDDs combined with the number of issues and their relevance are more likely to influence people's feelings about the vote.

**Key-words:** Direct Democracy, External Efficacy, Latin America, Multilevel Analysis.

# **National Mechanisms of Direct Democracy and Citizens' Perceptions of External Efficacy Across Latin American Countries<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

Regardless the academic concerns, Mechanisms of Direct Democracy (MDDs) have the majority of citizens' approval.<sup>2</sup> If participation in MDDs is mainly considered a good thing after the occurrence of these mechanisms, as in the countries under analysis here, it is a sign that people appreciated the opportunity of having more access to the political decisions, and they may feel a growth in their influence on what government does.

It is important that citizens have positive thoughts on the power of the vote to change things. If citizens believe things will not improve when they vote, the regime has low legitimacy. This can be especially dangerous in a region where coups and coup attempts are not unusual in recent history (Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005). This study focus on citizens' external efficacy perceptions – its dependent variable –, i.e., their thoughts on how government responds to them, in 18 Latin American countries. Data come from Latinobarometro surveys held from 2003 to 2005 and in 2009.

MDDs, i.e. facultative and mandatory plebiscites, referendums and citizen-initiated votes, give citizens the opportunity to decide on issues rather than just candidates, and allow citizens to continue to be proactive in the democratic process and/or veto players after elections have been held. The independent variables of the models presented here are: the cumulative number of MDD in the last decade, its occurrence by the time the surveys were held, the types of MDDs (who initiated it, whether it is mandatory by law or not), the issues involved in the polls (its amount and its relevance), and whether elections happened simultaneously. Some common cultural, government performance and institutional explanations for citizens' support for democracy are tested as predictors.<sup>3</sup>

Considering another institutional variable to explain people's opinions is interesting because it is easier to change institutions than alter cultural and socio-economic structures (Norris 2008). If some type of institutional design works better in lessening some kind of dissatisfaction with democracy, it can be used more often or instead of others.

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2 The use of MDDs is endorsed by the majority of the people in almost every country it has been asked – in Latin America countries (Latinobarometro 2009), European countries, United of States, Canada and New Zealand (Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2007; Donovan and Karp 2006; Dalton 2004; Dalton, Burklin and Drummond 2001). The only exceptions are Hungary and Slovenia (Bowler, Donovan and Karp 2007).

3They remain in the models if they make sense (based on the expected sign) or are statistically significant at the 5% level (Gelman and Hill 2007).

It is also assumed that citizens are capable of making informed and rational assessments about whether regimes meet standards of transparency, accountability, effectiveness, social justice, and participation, exemplified by the perceived fairness of elections, the responsiveness and accountability of elected representatives, and the honesty and probity of public officials (Norris 2001). Therefore, besides relying on the assumption that institutional rules can structure attitudes and looking for the institutional effects of MDDs, this study rely on rational choice theory assumptions that citizens can make these judgements. The rational choice theory can take into account how different contextual and institutional factors influence individuals' behaviors – rational people always make decisions under such constraints (Levi 1997). These contextual factors are considered by the multilevel analyses carried out here.

In order to answer the question “do MDDs affect citizens' perceptions of political efficacy?”, it is used a multilevel analysis where individual-level variables are relate to macro-level data. This analysis allows macro-level data to mitigate the explanatory importance of individual-level characteristics. It was clear in the comparison with the complete pooling models.

The results indicate that MDDs have a little greater positive impact on citizens' perceptions of external efficacy than national elections. Certain kinds of MDDs combined with the number of issues and their relevance are more likely to influence people's feelings about the vote – not exactly the type theory have indicated. Some of the cultural and the government performance control variables have shown strong relationships with people's perceptions of the importance of the vote.

## **Changes in citizen's perceptions of democracy and the dependent variable**

The most common explanations to what is related to citizens' thoughts, feelings and behaviors towards democracy are:

1) cultural aspects – lessening of social capital (social/interpersonal trust and civic engagement/activity in voluntary associations) and emergence of post-materialist values (Putnam 1995, Newton 1999, Inglehart 1997) – these theories focus upon the demand-side, the cultural shifts among the citizens (Norris 2011). More educated generations, new values, different roles in society, all this is embedded here;

2) government performance – some researches focus more on economic performance – aggregated indexes or citizens' economic evaluations (McAllister 1999, Miller and Listhaug 1999), and some studies focus on political performance – policies, corruption, etc. (Mattes and Bratton 2007, Arancibia 2008) or governance/ government management in general (Dalton 2008);

3) institutional design – institutions rules can structure behaviors and attitudes, leading to different outcomes whether the system is parliamentary or presidential, depending on the number of

political parties, the electoral systems, whether the state is federal or unitary, especially because of the way winners and losers in the elections are treated during the terms (Norris 1999, Anderson and Guillory 1997, Linde and Ekman 2003, Henderson 2004).

Some researchers explore more than one of these explanations at the same time (as Colen 2010, Booth and Seligson 2009, Moisés 2008, Mishler and Rose 2005).

Looking for institutional effects, this research follows Anderson et al. (2005) proposal of inverting the causality of most political behavior research: to focus on the elections, in our case MDDs, as the independent variable and attitudes, as trust in the political system, in our case citizens' perceptions of external efficacy, as the dependent variable, in order to integrate the study of political behavior with the study of democratic institutions and democratic stability.

Anderson and his colleagues made this suggestion because they came to the conclusion that although citizens who voted to a losing party in the national elections exhibit more negative attitudes toward the democratic institutions, different institutions shape how much they lose<sup>4</sup> – the extent to which they are included in the decision-making process – and affect their opinions.

MDDs can improve the working of the three main foundations of democracy accordingly Dalton, Scarrow and Cain (2003): access to the political process (or the opportunities citizens have to participate in politics and the frequency of the citizens use of these opportunities over the time – the processes of representative democracy, direct democracy, and advocacy democracy can provide additional channels of access)<sup>5</sup>, accountability (citizens' impact on policy outcomes), and transparency about policy-making (the availability of political information about the policy choices and the methods of policy-making). These features were especially assigned to study democracies in a context of spread dissatisfaction with the institutions and processes of representative democracy, decline of electoral participation, but also with the expansion of new participation forms (signing petitions, joining citizen interest groups, and engaging in unconventional political actions) and with increasing demands for reforms to widen citizen and interest group access to politics in new ways and restructure the process of democratic decision-making.

An increase in access can help to raise accountability because if citizens can participate more often in the political process they may have more impact on the process of governance. One way of raising citizen's perceptions of accountability is increasing the external efficacy (whether the

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4 Proportional electoral rules, greater number of veto players/parties in the government and federalism afford greater opportunities for both winners and losers to be represented in the political arena and to implement their preferred policies. Norris (2011), working on different datasets in a more current period (2005–7) and making her assessments based only on satisfaction with democracy, did not find the same: 'winners' were indeed more satisfied than 'losers', but power sharing institutions per se failed to determine overall levels of democratic satisfaction (not a specific institution of democracy) in any society.

5 Booth and Seligson (2009), following the same direction, take citizens participation as essential democratic feature in politics. To measure the support for democratic principles, they focus on questions about the political participation approval by the interviewees. For the inclusion to direct democracy in assessments of democracy see Peterlevitz (2011) and Altman (2012).

government is responsive to them). These perceptions are usually measured through the agreement with the idea that people like them (the interviewees) have a say about what government does (Bowler and Donovan 2002). Here the external efficacy is assessed through the agreement with the statement that the vote can change things, since vote is the most common “say” in a democracy. This concept is defined in contraposition to internal efficacy, the positive attitudes citizens have about their abilities – resources and skills – to influence the political system.

The external efficacy is the dependent variable of this research and it is drawn from Latinobarometro. It can be expected that MDDs – as they afford wider access to the political process, increase transparency and accountability – make citizens' evaluations and perceptions of democracy in general and of the vote and external efficacy in particular more positive than when people do not have these kinds of polling opportunities. Even when citizens choose not to participate in this extra chance of deciding about political issues, they may still feel that the government is more responsible to them if a MDD is held and that they have more information about politics as a result of the campaigns. Unlike the retrospective mechanisms of accountability characteristic to representative democracy, MDDs provide citizens with opportunities for prospective influence on policies and in some cases on the decision-making agenda.

### **Mechanisms of direct democracy: definition, types and issues**

A Mechanism of Direct Democracy is:

a publicly recognized institution wherein citizens decide or emit their opinion on issues – other than through legislative and executive elections – directly at the ballot box through universal and secret suffrage. [...] MDDs are composed of those mechanisms through which, after the representatives and the government are elected, the citizenry continues to be – voluntarily or involuntarily, explicitly or implicitly – a veto actor or a proactive player in the political process. (Altman 2010, p.7)

This study cases were selected based on Altman research (2010), excluding the events which were not held at national level. Out of the 18 Latin American countries, only in nine countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela) such events occurred in this decade, despite of the fact of MDD not being referred only in the National Constitutions of Dominican Republic and Mexico (Zovatto 2004)<sup>6</sup>.

In 2009, a Latinobarometro question asked about how people felt to participate in plebiscites or popular consultations. In this question, the average for the 18 countries of “very good” answers was 20.1%, of “good”, 47.7%, and “average” 21.4%. Therefore, only 10.7% thought it is a bad or very

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<sup>6</sup> Just the inclusion of MDDs in the constitutions already generates opportunities for these to have a central role in politics (Lissidini, 2007a).

bad thing. Besides this question, there is no other question for these countries which addresses directly MDDs.

There are dissimilar conceptualizations of how the different types of MDDs should be classified and differentiated. The classification proposed by Altman (2010) is used because it accounts to important aspects – such as whether the MDD is required to be held by the Constitution or law or not<sup>7</sup>, who triggered the MDD, and if the idea is a new proposal or the revocation of one. Therefore, the MDDs under study here are classified as:

1) *Popular initiatives*: they are non-obligatory and proposed by a group of citizens. They are also called “bottom-up” or “citizen-initiated”. In this type, citizens (or organized groups) have the power of agenda setter. The proposers of a specific measure have to gather a minimum number of signatures from the electoral body (each country has a different threshold) and send them to the electoral authority. If the number of signatures is validated and passes the legal thresholds, the electoral authority implements the mechanism.

These MDDs can be a powerful synchronization between politicians and citizens, helping prevent over-institutionalization. The 2004 Uruguayan popular initiative on water as a public good is one example. In countries where the political system is not stable, they can serve as “safety valves against perverse or unresponsive behavior of representative institutions and politicians. Facing delicate political stress, it may let steam out of the boiler” (Altman 2010, p.195). For instance, the 2010 Peruvian popular plebiscite on refund for those who had contributed with a housing fund that President Fumijori had dissolved and not payed the contributors back. However, they can also be manipulated by strong corporations or powerful groups depending on the rules of the game, or be used by current popular leaders that cannot or do not wish to call for an unregulated plebiscite, as the case of Colombia, in 2008, when a collection of signatures attempted to allow the president to run for re-election a second time, which was against the law<sup>8</sup>.

Lijphart (2008) says that the popular initiative is a majoritarian instrument that may be used

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<sup>7</sup> Leduc (2002), for instance, don't differentiate MDDs concerning this feature. He calls “referendum” or “constitutional referendum” only when a vote is initiated by governing body such as legislature and the result is legally binding. When such votes are not binding on the authorities that initiate them, these might have been called “plebiscites” or “consultative referendum”. When votes come through a petition of citizens are called “initiatives” or “citizen-initiated referendums”. Finally, the “abrogative referendum” or “popular veto” happens when citizens, by petition, force a public vote on a law which has already been adopted.

Rial (2000) also distinguishes between mandatory and facultative procedures.

<sup>8</sup> Although popular initiatives are incorporated into most Latin American constitutions, in most countries they are not regulated yet (they still do not have a specific law to make effective the provisions), they may not refer to tax or budgetary matters, and they are binding only in Colombia, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. In some countries as Brazil and Guatemala, this mechanism is filtered by another institution, as the Congress, that decides whether or not to proceed with the measure (Altman 2010).

The same differentiation between referendums (citizen-initiated MDDs) and plebiscites (top-down MDDs) is made by Frey and Stutzer (2006), and is criticized by Breuer (2009a), who prefers to call it facultative govern-initiate referendums, so that it would not carry the negative connotation cause by the napoleonic referendums held without a pre-existing legal basis at the discretion of a particular political agent, very distinct from constitutionally regulated popular consultations, which are triggered by governing authorities.

against minorities. The 2006 Bolivian popular initiative on departmental autonomy is one example. Why should a group of citizens have more legitimacy to propose a vote than the government elected by the majority, for instance? Bottom-up initiatives have helped only organized citizens in Uruguay because of the enormous amount of social, political and economic resources needed to stage a national campaign for a popular vote (Altman 2010).

2) *Facultative plebiscites*: they are non-obligatory and proposed by political establishment (the executive or the legislature) – this is the reason why they are some times called “top-down”. Where the party system is stable and institutionalized, they may serve as: a) legitimizing tools for tough policies from governments which want to avoid the political price for adopting conflictive policies; or b) as a safety valve for governing elites facing a threat of citizen-initiated MDD – as the 2007 Costa Rican case, where the collection of signatures against the Free Trade Treaty had been allowed, thus President Arias anticipated himself and demanded the Parliament to hold a plebiscite (C2D, 20013).

However, where the party system is inchoate or fluid, they can be used to: a) overcome other state institutions as democratic bodies (often the Congress is bypassed by the executive), exiting laws or constitutional rules – the 2004 Bolivian on hydrocarbons/gas is one example and the 2007 Ecuadorian for convening a Constitution Assembly another; b) increase legitimacy of leaders, turning the politician the vote subject, not the issue that should be voted – sometimes it ends up exacerbating divisions and political conflict, as in 2008 in Bolivia on the President and Governors mandate revocation; c) serve as consensus builders if two different bodies are in charge of triggering the unregulated plebiscite (as in 2003 Colombian Constitution reform on 15 proposals voted separately). Another example of this kind of MDD is the 2005 Brazilian vote on guns prohibition. Because of all these features “plebiscites have produced a deeper aversion than any other type of MDD” (Altman 2010, p.138).

3) *Mandatory plebiscites*: also labeled “obligatory” or “regulated”, they are required to be held by law and usually accompany constitutional reforms. In stable and institutionalized party systems they serve as a legitimization tool for constitutional changes and as a synchronization mechanism between politicians and citizens – the 2009 Uruguayan on the vote rights for migrated citizens is one example. When this is not the case, they still can be used as a window of opportunity for challenging executive leaders or constitutional reforms: “mandatory plebiscites do not facilitate the approval of new constitutions more than without them, as cases of reform happen without this type of MDD. Thus, at the very least, outcomes may be the same in the absence of an MDD” (Altman 2010, p.194). The main example of attempt to reform the Constitution via mandatory plebiscite that failed is Venezuela in 2007 (69 propositions voted in two blocks). The other examples of this type are: 2006 Panamanian mandatory plebiscite on the enlargement of the Canal; 2008 Ecuadorian and



2009 Bolivian both on a new constitutions, and 2009 Venezuelan on the possibility of unlimited reelection.

Lijphart (1999) also says that if majority approval in a referendum is the only procedure required for constitutional amendment, the referendum serves as a majoritarian device (however, the only example of this kind was President de Gaulle's extraconstitutional use of it in France); if the referendum is prescribed in addition to legislative approval, amendments are actually harder to adopt, then it serves as an anti-majoritarian device.

4) *Facultative referendums (recalls included*<sup>9</sup>): The difference between popular initiatives and facultative referendums is that the latter try to get back to the status quo recently changed by revoking a law just approved. Only in Uruguay this kind of MDD was held<sup>10</sup>. One example is the 2003 facultative referendum on the recovery of the state fuel monopoly. However, some popular initiatives held in this country were to revoke a passed law, as a referendum – but because the exclusive domain of the executive power (such as taxation, budget, etc.) and the “price” in terms of signatures (constitutional reform demands 10% and referendum, 25%), they end up being classified as Popular Initiative (Altman 2008). An example of this is the 2009 vote on the Annulment of the Amnesty law. Consequently, in this study this will be classified as Facultative Referendums. A recall happened in Venezuela in 2004 on the President Chavez mandate.

In these facultative referendums, a small minority of voters calling a referendum to challenge a law passed by the majority of the representatives may boost power sharing. Even if it fails, it forces the majority to pay the cost of the campaign; therefore the possibility of calling a referendum is a stimulus for the majority to be wary of minority views (Lijphart 2008).

MDDs offer a different arena where those who feel as though they have lost in the political game can win some political battles. This may explain why Uruguay has not experienced a large social crisis: “they created a channel through which citizens could express themselves and protest – for example, the neoliberal policies – in a formalized institutional framework” (Altman 2010, p.198).

However, the problem is that if democracy moves towards greater citizen input and influence, especially if the threshold to trigger a popular initiative is low, it might reinforce the fragmentation of political interests. More public interest groups pressing for their specific policy concerns through popular initiatives exacerbate the tensions of complex governance. Contemporary democracies suffer from a lack of institutions and processes that can aggregate and balance divergent interests

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<sup>9</sup> The recall is an institution that allows citizens to dismiss and replace an elected authority. Altman (2010) classified this as Popular Initiative. However, recalls have the same revocatory idea as facultative referendums. Therefore, in this study they are categorized as referendums.

Smith and Tolbert (2004) classify the bottom-up MDDs in the same way: initiative, referendum and recalls.

<sup>10</sup> There are effective provisions for them only in Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela. In other countries, the constitutions do not specify the terms of their implementation and they do not have a specific law for this (Altman 2010).

into coherent and acceptable policy programs (Dalton 2004).

The MDDs can be “binding” or “consultative<sup>11</sup>” whether its decision does not allow further dispute or if another institution has the final say on that topic. Here both types are analyzed as long as the non-binding MDDs were held officially, i.e. a state agency was responsible for them.

Another delimitation of the sample is the MDDs level: just the events held at national level were selected since state level MDDs are more difficult to track and because, considering that people generally have low levels of information about politics and the greater media attention is to the national level, people are more likely to answer survey questions thinking about the national sphere (Dyck and Lascher 2009).

Differing from Altman (2010), questions about diverse items asked in the same day, if they were triggered by the same type of MDD, are considered as one event. Many questions asked separately in the same MDD can involve less issues than a new constitution approval, which in Altman's classification counts as only one MDD. The way Altman weights the cases ends up giving much more relevance to the questions asked separately: the 2003 Colombian MDD counts as 15 MDDs (15 questions were asked); but the 69 reforms proposed by the 2007 Venezuelan MDD, because the issues were grouped in two questions, count as two. In addition, even though the questions asked in the same day are about unrelated issues (the same way different parts of a new Constitution are related to diverse issues), these questions are linked to the same campaign period and have the same political, social and economic context.

In order to assess the importance of the issues voted, counting its number and evaluating its salience through media coverage are two options that have been employed (Lacey 2005). The empirical data of this research have MDDs involving two issues or less and MDDs involving three or more issues. Many issues can bring a greater change and increase citizens perception of the vote as really capable of changing things. Instead of looking for media coverage for assessing saliency (because if only one issue is voted in a day, the front page of the main newspapers will mention it and use a good amount of lines for this even if it is not such a salient issue), previous case studies by different authors about the MDDs were used to assess the relevance of their issues for the people. This study also incorporates Zovatto, Lizarro, Marulanda and Gonzales (2004) differentiation of the kind of subject voted: if the MDD is related to a person/politician – in this category it is included the vote for convene a Constituent Assembly as well, because the decision in this case is not related to any specific measure – or an issue. In the former cases, it may look like another election and it is expected that MDDs will have a greater effect on the citizens' perceptions of the democratic procedures than elections.

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<sup>11</sup> The only consultative is the MDD held in Ecuador, in 2006. Zovatto (2004) says that the use of this kind of mechanism can damage the political stability if they are not implemented. However, it is also true concerning a lot of presidential proposals that never become a reality.

## **Effects of MDDs on external efficacy**

The relationship between MDDs and democracy support in Latin America or between MDD and citizens' perceptions of external efficacy has not been explored yet. Breuer (2007, 2008b), for instance, assesses the accountability potential of MDDs through the constitutional provisions for direct democracy in Latin American countries. In West European countries, Setälä (2006) studies the accountability of representatives and parliamentary and public deliberation.

Actually, this relationship between MDD and external efficacy has not been approached cross-nationally by the citizens' perceptions side. However, studies carried on in some specific countries helped to build this research hypothesis: Stutzer and Frey (2006) studied the effects of direct democratic participation possibilities on belief of political effectiveness (through the question: "How much influence do you think someone like you can have on government policy?") using Swiss cross-regional data. They found that people believe they wield more political influence in jurisdictions with more extended political participation possibilities.

Smith and Tolbert (2004) have shown some educative by-products of the initiative process (bottom-up initiated MDDs) in American states. One of them is that citizens residing in states with frequent exposures to ballot initiatives are more likely to believe that government is responsive. While the electoral context was found to be important concerning voting and citizens' engagement (the effect was significant in midterm and noncompetitive elections), the effect of initiatives on external efficacy was found in the midterm and general elections of the 1990s. In another study, using basically the same data, Hero and Tolbert (2004) also have found evidence that citizens in states with frequent exposure to direct democracy are more likely to perceive that government is responsive to their needs. Besides this, direct democracy has not shown a detrimental impact on racial and ethnic group attitudes towards government in general.

A study by Bowler and Donovan (2002) in the United States as well, with data from 1992, found that the exposure to more frequent use of state-level direct democracy (considering the number of citizen-initiated MDDs in 33 states and treating its effect as cumulative) causes citizens to have more positive attitudes about how government responds to them, i.e. external efficacy. Citizens residing in higher-use initiative states are more likely to claim that people like them have a say about what the government does, and are more likely to claim that public officials care about what people like them think. A history of high initiative use is associated with an external efficacy score about 11% beyond the average.

In the same direction, observing the thirty-one days of the official campaign period during the 1992 referendum on the Charlottetown Constitutional Accord in Canada, Mendelsohn and Cutler (2000) have found that there is a noticeable increase of about ten points in the citizens' external

efficacy over the first week of the campaign, which made them consider that the real increase in efficacy comes from the simple awareness of the referendum's existence. Interesting to note that these results have nothing to do with the current government approval. By this time, the conservative federal government was tremendously unpopular.

Morrell (1999) made an experiment and found that citizens' short-term perceptions of participatory process were influenced most by their majority or minority status (if they voted for what was approved or not), but with extended participation, the participatory structures significantly affected citizens' evaluations, making them more positive. Anderson et al. (2005) also found that the winner–loser gap in the confidence in Parliament and support for the democratic principles (being the winners more positive than the losers on national elections), is more prominent in newly democratized and democratizing states, where losers have not yet learned to lose.

Considering all that has been said so far, it is possible to define the variables of this research models in the following section.

### **Definition of the variables and methodology**

The individual level variables were drawn from Latinobarómetro (LB). This is an annual public opinion survey that involves about 19,000 interviews in 18 Latin American countries.<sup>12</sup> Latinobarómetro Corporation is a non-profit and non-governmental organization that researches the development of democracy, economy and society, using indicators of opinion, attitudes, behavior and values. Its results are used by social and political actors, international organizations, governments and the media (Latinobarometro 2012). The first year that Latinobarometro held surveys was in 1995, but only in eight countries. In 1996, all the other got into de sample, except by Dominican Republic, which was added later on, in 2004. In 1999, the organization did not hold any surveys.<sup>13</sup>

The dependent variable is a dummy variable, i.e. each answer scores zero or one. The question is worded like this: “Some people say that one vote can change things to be different in the future. Others say that independently how they vote, nothing is going to change in the future. Which one represent best your way of think?”. The answers were coded as 0 for “nothing is going to change in the future” and 1 for “vote can change things to be different in the future”. Total, 78,669 citizens were surveyed from 2003 to 2005 and in 2009. Excluding “no answer” and “I don' know”, it has

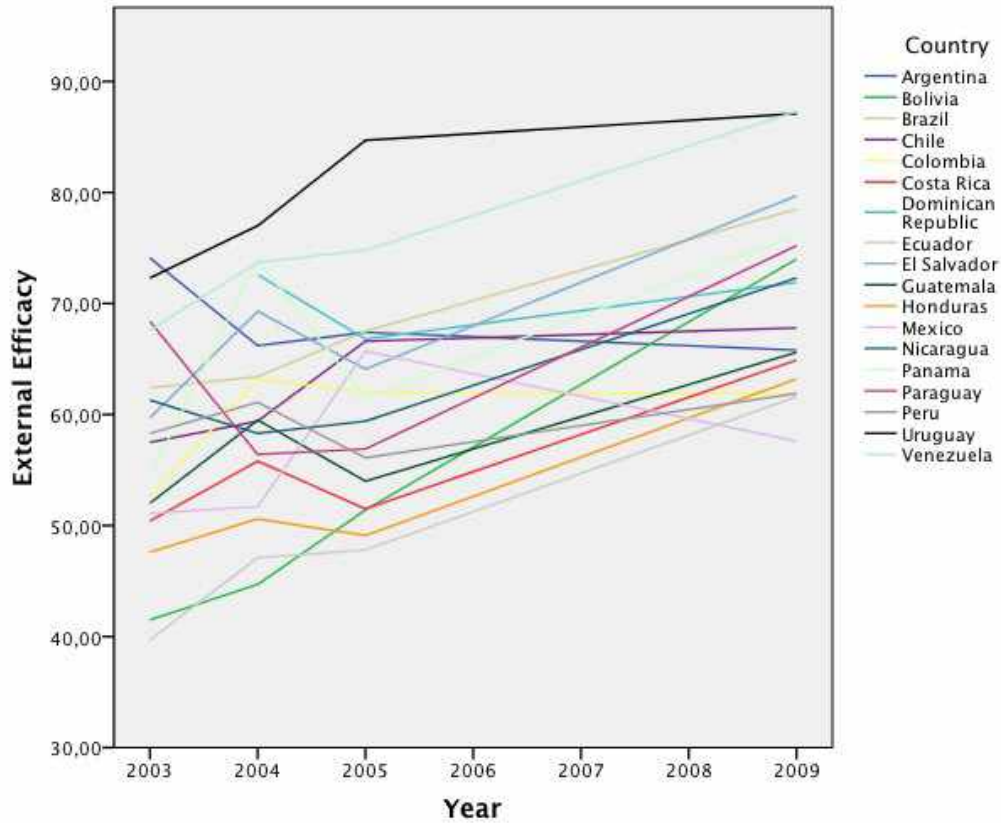
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12 Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.

13 Data analyzed in this paper were collected by Means Corporacion Latinobarometro, which is solely responsible for the data distribution and it is not responsible for the views expressed by the user of the data. The author appreciate the assistance in providing data. The views expressed herein are the author's own.

remained 73,815 for analysis<sup>14</sup>. Because of missing data from the control variables, the sample ended up with 15.4% of the answers of the surveyed people not included in the analyses.

**Graph 1.** Percentage of answers coded as “vote can change things to be different in the future”.



Graph generated from 2003 to 2005 and 2009 Latinobarometro data.

For dealing with these type of variable, dichotomous dependent variable, a logit link is used. The log odds<sup>15</sup> of the outcome is modeled as a linear combination of the predictor variables.<sup>16</sup> The logistic regression model is a type of generalized linear model that extends the linear regression model by linking the range of real numbers to the 0-1 range.

Since there are data available for the 18 countries mentioned in the years 2003-5 and 2009, and only a small number of MDDs were held each year, a multilevel (generalized linear) model is run so that the data for the four years can be included in the same model. Multilevel analyses can distinguish individual-level effects from country and year-level effects. This research data have a cross-classified structure, i.e., the year in which the survey was held affects citizens' perceptions (they are nested within years) and the country citizens reside affects their opinions (they are also

14 A table with these data can be seen in the appendix.

15 The odds ratio is the ratio of the odds/probability of an event occurring in one group (answer coded as one, for instance) to the odds of it occurring in another group (answer coded as zero).

16 When used with a binary response variable, OLS regression errors (i.e., residuals), from the linear probability model, violate the homoskedasticity and normality of errors assumptions of OLS regression, resulting in invalid standard errors and hypothesis tests. In: Logit Regressions. UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group. <http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/spss/dae/logit.htm> (accessed December 2nd, 2012).

within countries). Besides, because this study is mainly interested in the effect of national MDDs which are still rare, the country-year interaction effect was also tested. Adapting from the example found in Fielding and Goldstein (2006), it was supposed that the marginal effect of residence in a particular country might differ according to which special year the citizens were interviewed or vice versa – whether a MDD was held or not, for instance. In other words there could be something about particular combinations of countries and years which might make the additive contribution of a country effect and year effect for a particular cell (where the interviewees are located) simplistic. As the authors noticed, although interaction terms allow for greater flexibility and specificity not many applications have arisen in the literature, possibly because the additive characterization has proven adequate for most purposes. The tests have shown the same for this research: the best fit models were without the interaction term, i.e., they have shown a smaller -2 log pseudo likelihood<sup>17</sup>. Also, some of the test presented a warning<sup>18</sup>, probably suggesting redundant covariance parameters<sup>19</sup>. Not considering all these effects on the data could lead to an underspecified model. This structure described the random effects of the models analyzed here.

Multilevel models work with fixed and random effects: if a variable, such as MDD occurrence, affects the population mean, it has fixed effect. If an effect is associated with a sampling procedure (e.g., country or year), it is random. Country samples were weighted so that countries with 1,200 interviewees would not have more influence than countries with 1,000 people samples.

The multilevel models predicting the external efficacy are shown in the next section: one is the null model, the second model has as explanatory variables the cumulative number of MDD, the occurrence of MDDs and national elections plus individual-level variables accounting for government performance and cultural shifts, the third model is the same but it does not consider the cumulative number of MDD, and in the fourth the interaction of the type of MDD used and the issues involved replaces the simple MDD occurrence variable. After presenting the institutional country-level variables, each model specification is discussed.

Therefore, from the *institutional explanation*, the main expectation here is that MDDs have impact on the external efficacy perceptions because:

1) The cumulative number of MDDs: it is possible that repeated experiences with MDDs help people to learn how direct democracy processes work and to appreciate participating in them (Morrell 1999). For this reason, the cumulative experience can have effect on citizens' perceptions. A great number of MDDs held during the last decade<sup>20</sup> should make citizens' perceptions

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<sup>17</sup> Tables with these tests are shown in the appendix.

<sup>18</sup> “The final Hessian matrix is no positive definite although all convergence criteria are satisfied. The procedure continues despite this warning. Subsequent results produced are based on the last iterations. Validity of the model fit is uncertain” (SPSS 21). Increasing the number of iterations did not solve the problem.

<sup>19</sup> Not all random intercepts were significant, suggesting the models for level 2 were overparametrized.

<sup>20</sup> Altman (2010) and Center for Research on Direct Democracy (C2D) provide these numbers. Ten years ago from the time the surveys were held is an arbitrary decision. The justification is that more than this, a lot of the citizens surveyed

concerning external efficacy more positive than if they were in a country which has held just one. There are 18 changes in the cumulative MDD numbers used in these research models. There were 20 events total in the period (2001-2010) but Uruguayans voted two different MDDs in 2009 and the 2010 Peruvian MDD was not considered because the last data collection of external efficacy have been done in 2009. This variable was centered, after the dataset had been weighted, so that that it would make sense interpret its coefficient in a model which has also a MDD occurrence. It ranges from zero to six, has a mean of 0,95 and a standard deviation of 1,482. It is not possible a situation where the cumulative number was zero and there was a MDD occurrence, however, if the cumulative number of MDD is 1, about the mean used to center the variable, then interpreting the occurrence of a MDD is possible.

2) MDD occurrence: it is more likely that citizens would remember a MDD experience when answering the question about the vote providing said citizens evaluations were surveyed during the campaign (generally one month before the MDD occurrence) or within 12 months from a MDD. Through available data it is possible to assess the effect of nine MDDs held in four countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Studies that try to connect the presence and usage of direct democracy and internal/external efficacy improvements have been criticized because they do not make the link with broader research on political psychology. Dyck and Lascher (2009) say that given people's inattention to political constructs as ideology, it is doubtful that many respondents have given much prior thought to political efficacy. As Zaller (1992, p.79-80) have already found, mass political preferences have a fundamental property: "a tendency for people to be ambivalent (even though perhaps unconsciously so) and to deal with this ambivalence by making decisions on the basis of the ideas that are most immediately salient". For the cases under study here, it means that citizens asked about the democratic procedures are more likely to take the MDDs into account to choose their answers if not much time has passed since the vote.

In another study about how direct democracy affects turnouts, Dyck and Seabrook (2010) differentiate two effects: 1) short-term – related to partisan campaign mobilization, conflict and social context: the saliency of the initiatives on the ballot, partisan homogeneity or heterogeneity of individual voters' social networks, the existence of strong partisan campaign messages and elite cues in the informational environment surrounding the election, and 2) long-term – related to participatory democratic theory: citizens who are exposed to the initiative process regularly are in an educative environment that empowers citizens. This idea probably can be extended to other kind of MDDs and to other effects on citizens, as their perceptions of external efficacy. They conclude that the first effect substantively swamps the second.

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would not have participated in the MDDs (because they were too young) or would have forgotten much about the experience.

3) The type of the MDD held: for the reasons mentioned above, referendums (type 4) and mandatory plebiscites (type 3) should have more positive effect on the citizens perceptions while popular initiatives (type 1) and facultative plebiscites (type 2) should have a smaller one<sup>21</sup>.

4) The issues involved: many issues encompassed by a MDD vote probably brings a lot of changes and at least some of them should be relevant, consequently, this may increase citizens' perceptions of influence on what the government does. Not so much if the MDD is about few issues that do not affect most of the people (or that are not framed as such by the main actors – politicians, parties, media, important social movements, interest groups etc.). The issues voted were classified in: 1 for “person/convene Assembly” (whether it is to maintain or dismiss an office holder or to decide on convening a Constitutional Assembly, it is important, but it resembles elections), 2 for “few less relevant issues” (it can be seen as useless for most of the citizens), 3 for “few relevant issues” (it can bring a big transformation, but it will not be an overall change), and 4 for “many issues”.

*A rival institutional explanation* is transformed in control variable:

5) National elections occurrence (presidential or Constituent Assembly elections). MDDs and elections have more in common than the vote: they also have campaigns that can make more information about policies and the decision-making process available. Although MDDs can make citizens feel one step closer to affecting policies outcomes than when they vote for candidates (Bowler and Donovan 2002), elections also influence people's perceptions of external efficacy since citizens are choosing the people who will decide on important issues.

A model only with cumulative effect would not make sense. Why should be the effects of national elections occurrence on external efficacy controlled and not the MDD? A model just with the MDD occurrence makes sense because the countries which held MDDs in the years analyzed (in Bolivia MDD occurrence had effect in 2004 and 2009, in Colombia in 2004, in Uruguay in 2004, 2005 and 2009 and in Venezuela in 2005 and 2009) are the basically the ones which have greater cumulative MDD numbers (Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay and Venezuela – ranging from three to six). In the last model the interaction between types and issues is tested because based on theory we can suppose that the kind of MDDs can affect more the external efficacy if they involved more important issues.

The first idea was to add control variables for federal state and proportional representation because these institutions make power be shared. In the former, different parties with different projects can be ruling the country and states so that citizens have more chances of being represented

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<sup>21</sup> The first idea was having a hypothesis about the results concerning government position (Qvortrup, 2005). both bottom-up MDD kinds had a majority of *anti-hegemonic* outcomes – when the government has campaigned against it – in a ratio of 2 to 1 (66.66%). In the opposite direction, the mandatory and the facultative plebiscites had both almost the same majority of *hegemonic* results (69.23%) – when it is the other way around. Because they correlate with type of MDD, they were not included in the models.



in some sphere. In the latter, more citizens are able to have their stances considered (Anderson et al. 2005), therefore, people can feel their vote is more useful if they elected at least a candidate who represent them in some power level. However, from the 18 countries only Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela are federal states (half of them have had MDD occurrence). The variance in the proportional representation is even lower: only three countries have a mixed system: Bolivia, Mexico and Venezuela (two of them held MDDs), all the rest has proportional representation.

Also, although significant and strong correlations have been found between satisfaction with democracy and aggregate indicators of liberal democracy (Norris 2011), in this research models with constitutional democracy assessment (Polity IV) as control variable were tested but this had a negative sign – the opposite would be expected – and it had worsen the model fit. Therefore, Polity IV was left out of the models. The liberal democracy index (Freedom House) is highly correlated to Polity IV (-,729) so it was dismissed as well. The same happened with Colen (2010) analysis on Latin America with data collected in 2005. She points that it could be a problem generate by the small number of countries we work with or the low variance of the index. There is also the issue of how appropriate these indexes are for measuring democracy in new democracies (Peterlevitz 2011).

Altman (2010) says MDDs could lead to very different situations in stable and institutionalized or inchoate and fluid party systems, as mentioned before. Electoral volatility,<sup>22</sup> which is one way assessing party institutionalization, have shown a significant but inexpressive effect, therefore it is not displayed in the final models. It may have happened because there is not updated data for the last analyzed year.

From the *govern performance rival explanation*, the following control variables drawn from Latinobarometro database as well are used:

1) President approval.<sup>23</sup> Citizens probably think voting changes things when they approve the government of the current President.

2) Personal current economic situation.<sup>24</sup> Although other studies found that people are not egocentric and their takes on the current economic situation of the country are more important for explaining political support to democracy (McAllister 1999, Miller and Listhaug 1999), the models were tested with both, one at time, and the personal situation is a little better predictor.

Also, some country-level economic indicators that direct affect citizens well-being were tested<sup>25</sup>. GDP PPP (the gross domestic product converted to international dollars using purchasing power parity rates) was not significant and presented sign different from expected. Unemployment,

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22 Data retrieved from: <http://americo.usal.es/oir/opal/indicadores.htm>

23 Do you approve or disapprove how the current administration headed by (name of president) is running the country? Asked in: 2002-10 Latinobarometro. 0 for Disapprove and 1 for Approve.

24 In general, how would you describe your present economic situation and that of your family? Would you say that it is (0)very bad, (1)bad, (2)about average, (3)good or (4)very good?. Asked in: 1995-8, 2000-6, 2008-10 Latinobarometro.

25 For a good discussion on these variables, see Altman (2010). Data retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org>

inflation, GDP growth and the Gini coefficients<sup>26</sup> were statistically significant, however with almost insignificant coefficients. The second had the opposite sign than expected. This situation is not completely odd because inflation can raise and so the salaries, therefore, it would not necessarily affect standards of living (Altman 2010). The same with the Gini coefficient: this is intriguing because as the country becomes less unequal, less people would be more likely to believe vote can change things.

Jong-Sung and Khagram (2005), analyzing 129 countries, found that inequality adversely affects people's beliefs about the legitimacy of rules and institutions among other perverse effects. Since the outcomes related to the Gini coefficient could be due to its absolute number. The changes of the coefficient (its difference in points and in percentage) were also tested. Although graphically the Gini coefficients have an upward track<sup>27</sup> (as the external efficacy, but not so sharp as this), the changes in the Gini have shown coefficients statistically insignificant and very close to zero. It is possible that these results would not be the same if there were no missing data of some years in a row. The imputed values in sequence lead to some zeros in these models of Gini change, which may have impaired the analysis. Still, these finding of small effects of macro-economic indicators compared to people's perceptions of economy are not uncommon in studies on political support in all its levels (McAllister 1999).

Finally, for the *cultural rival explanation* mentioned above, the following control variables were used:

1) Interpersonal trust.<sup>28</sup> If citizens trust other citizens they may hope that the decisions made by the majority and by the candidates chosen by them will be reasonable and will change things in a good way. However this relationship is highly controversial (Newton 1999, Inglehart 1997). Contrary to other findings from research on previous years (Power, Jamison 2005), although various of Latin America indicators are getting better (trust in institutions, education, reduction of social inequalities), interpersonal trust seems to remain the same through the decade.

2) Education<sup>29</sup> is added to the models since greater educational levels can lead to more postmaterial values growing skepticism and rejection of authority figures – the vote might be affected also because it serves to elect authorities (Inglehart 1997).

3) Age.<sup>30</sup> New generations with new values and practices might think other paths are capable of changing the status quo in a better manner than the vote.

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26 It measures the inequality among values of levels of income. A Gini coefficient of zero expresses perfect equality, where everyone has an exactly equal income. A Gini coefficient of 100 expresses maximal inequality, where only one person has all the income. Data retrieved from World Bank: <http://data.worldbank.org>.

27 See graph in the appendix.

28 Generally speaking, would you say that you can trust most people, or that you can never be too careful when dealing with others? Asked in: 1996-8, 2000-10.

29 Respondent Education Summary. 0 Illiterate, 1 Incomplete primary, 2 Complete primary, 3 Incomplete Secondary, 4 Complete Secondary. 5 Incomplete higher education, and 6 Complete higher education.

30 Possible answers: 0 for 18-25, 1 for 26-40, 2 for 41-60, and 3 for 61 and more.

Finally, sex<sup>31</sup> is not a cultural explanation variable but since politics is still essentially done by men, despite some advances with some women being elected as president in some countries for the first time in the period analyzed, this demographic variable is also included as a control in the models.

## Analyses

All models shown below, except the null model, have about 65% accuracy, which means the percentage of the correct classifications<sup>32</sup>. A complete pooling model overestimate many of the coefficients, especially those related to MDDs, and have shown a lower accuracy (63.4%).

The estimates presented below have to be interpreted with caution because the small number of MDDs held in the period and the availability of data.

As Table 1 shows, weighting the data and controlling for country-level and year-level variance, the total mean (intercept) of positive external efficacy assessment is 0,547. This changes to -0,261, -0,303 and -0,318 when the independent variables are added and set to zero (the omitted reference categories), i.e., in the worse case scenario predicted from theory: no MDD occurrence, no national elections, a citizen who disapprove the President, thinks her economic personal situation is very bad, does not trust the majority of the other citizens, is illiterate, between 18 and 25 years old and a female. Dividing the coefficients by 4 yields a rough estimate that this woman would be about 6.5 to 7.9% more likely to believe things will not improve in the future no matter how she votes.

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31 It is coded as 0 for woman and 1 for female.

32 Example of the last model specification:

GENLINMIXED

/DATA\_STRUCTURE SUBJECTS=Country\*Year\*ID

/FIELDS TARGET=ExternalEfficacy TRIALS=NONE OFFSET=NONE

/TARGET\_OPTIONS REFERENCE=0 DISTRIBUTION=BINOMIAL LINK=LOGIT

/FIXED EFFECTS= Type\*Issues Elections PresApp CurPersSit PersTrust Education Age Male USE\_INTERCEPT=TRUE

/RANDOM USE\_INTERCEPT=TRUE SUBJECTS=Country COVARIANCE\_TYPE=VARIANCE\_COMPONENTS

/RANDOM USE\_INTERCEPT=TRUE SUBJECTS=Year COVARIANCE\_TYPE=VARIANCE\_COMPONENTS

/BUILD\_OPTIONS TARGET\_CATEGORY\_ORDER=DESCENDING INPUTS\_CATEGORY\_ORDER=DESCENDING

MAX\_ITERATIONS=100 CONFIDENCE\_LEVEL=95 DF\_METHOD=RESIDUAL COVB=MODEL

/EMMEANS\_OPTIONS SCALE=ORIGINAL PADJUST=LSD.

**Table 1 – Null, MDDcum/MDDoccur, MDDoccur and Type\*Issues variables effects on External Efficacy Models**

Fixed Coef.	I – Null Model		II – MDDcum_C/ occur		III – MDDoccur		IV – Type*Issues	
	Coefficient	Sig.	Coefficient	Sig.	Coefficient	Sig.	Coefficient	Sig.
Intercept	<b>0,547</b>	,000	<b>-0,261</b>	,030	<b>-0,303</b>	,018	<b>-0,318</b>	,009
MDDcum_CW			<b>0,192</b>	,000				
MDDoccur			0,004	,784	<b>0,307</b>	,000		
Elections			<b>0,275</b>	,000	<b>0,290</b>	,000	<b>0,316</b>	,000
MDDoccur*Elections					<b>-0,256</b>	,000		
Type4*Issue3							<b>0,177</b>	,000
Type4*Issue1							<b>-0,085</b>	,006
Type3*Issue4							<b>1,061</b>	,000
Type3*Issue3							<b>0,708</b>	,000
Type3*Issue2							<b>0,225</b>	,000
Type2*Issue4							<b>0,134</b>	,000
Type2*Issue3							<b>0,083</b>	,003
Type1*Issue3							-0,074	,072
PresApp			<b>0,486</b>	,000	<b>0,488</b>	,000	<b>0,501</b>	,000
CurPersSit=4			<b>0,302</b>	,000	<b>0,307</b>	,000	<b>0,311</b>	,000
CurPersSit=3			<b>0,463</b>	,000	<b>0,474</b>	,000	<b>0,466</b>	,000
CurPersSit=2			<b>0,289</b>	,000	<b>0,295</b>	,000	<b>0,292</b>	,000
CurPersSit=1			<b>0,170</b>	,000	<b>0,172</b>	,000	<b>0,172</b>	,000
PersTrust			<b>0,394</b>	,000	<b>0,393</b>	,000	<b>0,392</b>	,000
Education=6			<b>0,345</b>	,000	<b>0,336</b>	,000	<b>0,350</b>	,000
Education=5			<b>0,285</b>	,000	<b>0,277</b>	,000	<b>0,293</b>	,000
Education=4			<b>0,115</b>	,000	<b>0,188</b>	,000	<b>0,123</b>	,000
Education=3			<b>0,067</b>	,000	<b>0,069</b>	,000	<b>0,072</b>	,000
Education=2			0,014	,224	0,016	,151	0,017	,128
Education=1			-0,013	,250	-0,015	,189	-0,008	,486
Age=3			<b>0,079</b>	,000	<b>0,080</b>	,000	<b>0,081</b>	,000
Age=2			<b>0,057</b>	,000	<b>0,057</b>	,000	<b>0,058</b>	,000
Age=1			0,006	,378	0,007	,339	0,006	,365
Male			<b>0,142</b>	,000	<b>0,141</b>	,000	<b>0,142</b>	,000

### *Institutional Explanations*

After controlling for the other variables in the model (II), an additional MDD to the mean of one occurrence in the last ten years (the cumulative number of MDD variable was centered) corresponds to an approximately 4.8% positive difference in choosing the option “vote can change things”. In the case of a national election occurrence, the percentage is 6.8%. A MDD occurrence in the case of one MDD held in the past ten years would not have a statistically significant coefficient and its coefficient would be close to zero anyway.

However, since MDD cumulative number and MDD occurrence are correlated (.659), the next model (III) without the MDD cumulative number shows that MDD occurrence has a little greater effect than national elections on citizen likelihood of choosing the answer that states that voting can change things. Holding MDDs would make positive citizen's opinions on vote 7.6% more likely and elections, 7,2%. In order to assess the conflation of these two short-term effects, the model was run with MDD and national elections interaction as another independent variable. If both happened

together the likelihood of MDD occurrence to positively affect external efficacy goes down to 1.2% and of the national elections 0.8%, i.e., they practically cancel each other. However, this interaction happened only once in Uruguay in 2005 data.

The effect of elections in the last model (IV) is the greatest for this variable – citizens would be 7.9% more likely to believe in the vote if their country recently have held national elections. Mandatory plebiscites (type 3), however, have shown impressive greater effects.

The mandatory plebiscites (type 3) and many issues (4) interaction – the reference category is no type of MDD occurrence – would have the greatest coefficient among all variables (be it institutional, government performance, cultural, national-level or individual-level): 26.5%. Citizens (Bolivians in this case) seem to really enjoy the opportunity of polling when a lot of issues are at stake (a new Constitution), and they do not seem to mind that this is a top-down MDD, although mandatory.

Another mandatory plebiscite (type 3) with few very relevant issues (3) had the second strongest relationship. It accounted for 17.7% of the likelihood of citizens thinking the vote can change things (this MDD was about Venezuelan office holders reelection).

This situation makes sense, in an optimist interpretation, since citizens have elected their governments and they should be legitimate to direct consult people on desirable changes. In a pessimist perspective, considering Latin America history of delegative democracies where the executive has the right and duty to look after the good of the country as he or she sees fit, not considering horizontal accountability (O'Donnell 1998), it is not surprising. Citizens, however, rejected 31.67% of the facultative and mandatory plebiscites in the period (2001-2010). The numbers, although restricted to a small number of 14 cases, are a sign of how uncertain the game of direct democracy can be: these mechanisms, even in the hand of populist leaders, are not a very reliable tool for advancing hegemonic projects. The government does not easily manipulate citizens.

The third MDD which had a considerable effect, but no greater than elections, was also a mandatory one (type 3), but with few less relevant issues (2): Citizens (Uruguayans polling on migrated voting citizens rights) were 5.6% more likely to believe they have external efficacy.

After the mandatory plebiscites, the greater effect on citizens' perceptions of the vote comes from the facultative referendum (type 4), with few very relevant issues (3). Citizens who are in a country which held this MDD in the surveyed year (Uruguayans on State gas monopoly) are 4.4% more likely to believe in the vote as a way for changing status quo.

The MDD which follows is a facultative plebiscite (type 2), but on many issues (4). In this case, citizens (Colombians on Constitutional reforms) are 3.3% more likely to think voting can change things. The other facultative, with few very relevant issues (3) has a still smaller percentage: 2% (Bolivians on gas).

As expected, when the MDD is about a person (issue 1 – in this case the Venezuelan President) it makes the referendum to have a negative sign, i.e., citizens are 2.1% more likely to think that no matter how vote, things will not improve in the future. Popular initiative (type 1) about few very relevant issues (3) had also a negative sign, but it is not statistically significant (this case refers to the Uruguayan MDD on water).

All the other country-level variables fail to improve the models fit, had non-significant coefficients or coefficients too small to have any noticeable effect.

### *Government performance explanations*

Approving the president corresponds to an approximately 12.2% higher probability of thinking voting can change things<sup>33</sup> than those who disapprove the office holder.

Citizens' perceptions of their personal economic situation is important in a particular way for the perception of the importance of voting: those who think their personal economic situation is very good, good, about average and bad are, respectively, 7.6%, 11.7%, 7.3% and 4.3% more likely to believe voting makes a difference compare to the very bad category. This somewhat U-shape relationship, not exactly uncommon in Latina America (Booth and Seligson 2009), is probably due to the fact that those with very good economic situation have their lives less affect by government, so that voting is not that important as is it for those who a good situation. From the average situation downward it was expected that the percentages would decrease.

### *Cultural explanations*

Those who think they can trust most of people are 9.8% more likely to choose “vote can change things” than those who think that one can never be too careful when dealing with others.

People who have higher education complete or incomplete are from 8.6% to 7.1% more likely to believe in the power of voting than people who are illiterate. People who have complete secondary school are 3.5% more likely to be optimistic about polling, while those in the incomplete secondary school are only 1.7% more likely to think vote can change things than the illiterate reference category. The difference from the illiterate people to those with complete or incomplete primary school is not statistically significant.

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<sup>33</sup> Another research on Latin America (Colen 2010) found that the increase of the political support due to presidential approval has a rational component, i.e. it is not all about populism and charism of the president: part of the citizens evaluate whether the institutions, through public policies, are having positive effects in their well-being, be it economic, political or the ability to fight corruption.

This finding related to education points in a different direction than previous studies (Inglehart 1997). It could be the case that vote is not seen only as a way of electing new authorities, however it does not seem very likely because in half of the countries national MDDs were not held in the period analyzed and in some of them this option is not even available in the Constitutions. It can be that Latin America has specific features and more educational levels do not lead to rejection of authorities, as long as highly educated people judge that authorities are doing a good job (traditional institutions and the Presidents recovered citizens' confidence along the first decade of the XXI century).

Older people (60+ years old and 41-60 years old), as expected, are slightly more likely to believe vote change things: from 2% to 1.4%. Men are 3.5% more likely than woman to think this is the case. Compare to education, which divide people in more groups than age and sex, these percentage are not very meaningful.

*Context effects not controlled by the country-level variables*

**Table 2 – Covariance parameters for the four models**

Subject Specification:		Country	Year
<b>I – Null Model</b>	Estimate	<b>0,139</b>	0,065
	Std.Error	0,048	0,053
	Sig.	,004	,221
<b>II – MDDcum_C/MDDoccur</b>	Estimate	<b>0,141</b>	0,025
	Std.Error	0,048	0,021
	Sig.	,004	,221
<b>III - MDDoccur</b>	Estimate	<b>0,127</b>	0,036
	Std.Error	0,044	0,029
	Sig.	,004	,221
<b>IV – Type*Issue</b>	Estimate	<b>0,144</b>	0,025
	Std.Error	0,049	0,021
	Sig.	,004	,221

The residual components of variance provide an idea of the extent to which variation in outcomes might be attributable to unobserved influences operating at the level of each of the types of unit in the model – individual, country and year-level (Goldstein 1999). Models using logit link do not have such a parameter as residual standard deviation. The logistic probability density function appears bell-shaped, much like the normal density that is used for errors in linear regression. In fact, the logistic distribution is very close to the normal distribution with mean 0 and standard deviation 1.6. We cannot estimate the parameter  $\sigma$  in model because it is not identified when considered jointly with the regression parameter  $\beta$ . If all the elements of  $\beta$  are multiplied by a positive constant and  $\sigma$  is also multiplied by that constant, then the model does not change. Thus, it is standard to resolve this by setting the variance parameter  $\sigma$  to a fixed value (1.6), which is

essentially equivalent to the unit logistic distribution (Gelman and Hill 2007).

The level 2 variance (country-year) is the sum of separate classification variances. The covariance for two level 1 units (two citizens) in the same classification (same country, for instance) is equal to the variance for that classification (i.e. country-level variance) and the covariance for the level 1 units (citizens) which do not share either classification is zero (Goldstein, 1999).

As it can be seen in the Table 2, there is not a statistically significant difference in the between-year variation (when the years should define the citizens). It is unfortunately that data are not more spread over the decade, but they are mainly concentrate in three years in a row from the beginning to the middle and one year in the end of the period. If they were, the result could have been different.

The variance not explained by the country-level, i.e. a measure of between-country variation where countries define subjects ranges from 7.2% (II) to 8.1% (IV). The estimates from Table 2, therefore, suggest that the part of the variability in the importance of vote assessment that is not explained by the fixed effects can be better explained by country-to-country variation than year-to-year variation (although there is a lot of uncertainty concerning the actual size of this effect).

The variance at the individual-level is the greater, but this is consistent with the norm. As Booth and Seligson (2009) noted, in most multilevel research combining survey and country-level data, most of the variation in the results is found in the individual-level.

**Table 3 – Model Summary<sup>34</sup>**

	I – Null Model	II – MDDcum_C/MDDoccur	III – MDDoccur	IV – Type*Issues
Akaike Corrected	3145047,705	2865599,933	<b>2863534,711</b>	2865217,857
Bayesian	3145070,692	2865622,713	<b>2863557,491</b>	2865240,637

For logistic regressions and other discrete-data models, it does not quite make sense to calculate residual standard deviation and R2, because the squared error is not the mathematically optimal measure of model error. Instead, it is standard to use deviance (a measure of error), a statistical summary of model fit, defined for logistic regression to be an analogy to residual standard deviation. Lower deviance means better fit to data (Gelman and Hill, 2007).

The best fit model shown in Table 3 is the III (MDD occurrence only), after comes the IV (type\*issues interaction). Comparing to the null model, the three models with MDD variables performed well – the MDD occurrence better than the MDD cumulative number model.

<sup>34</sup> The finite sample corrected Akaike information criterion is a measure for selecting and comparing mixed models based on the -2 (Restricted) log likelihood. Smaller values indicate better models. The AICC "corrects" the AIC for small sample sizes. As the sample size increases, the AICC converges to the AIC. Bayesian information criterion is a measure for selecting and comparing models based on the -2 log likelihood. The BIC also penalizes overparametrized models, but more strictly than the AIC.



## Conclusions

Multilevel models allow us to pool data from different countries and years together but still considered the between-country and between-country year variances, as a partial pooling model. They provided better accuracy models and especially more precise estimates of the coefficients, particularly the ones related to MDD, which were overestimated in generalized linear complete pooling models.

The effect of the cumulative number of MDDs is difficult to assess due to the data availability. The occurrence of a MDD, however, is more likely to have a greater impact on citizens' perceptions of external efficacy than elections. Comparing to elections, MDDs are another and a better way of making citizens' evaluation of the power of the vote more positive.

Different from what was expected, in Latin America, the type of MDD which had the greater effect on external efficacy was the mandatory plebiscite. It can be related to a general government legitimacy over this period or with the tradition of delegative democracies in the region – although almost one-third of the top-down MDD were rejected by the people, so it does not seem that citizens allow the executive to do whatever it wants and in the way it wants.

The referendum was expected to have the greatest effect and it is placed after the facultative plebiscites. However, none of the two encompassed many issues so that they would be able to promote big changes. The data available provide just one case as an example of interaction between popular initiative and with few less relevant issues. It would be negative, as expected, if it was statistically significant.

The logic of the number/kind and relevance of issues has found some endorsement in the empirical data analyzed – deciding over the future of the mandate of the president was the only one that had a negative impact (statistically significant) on citizens' perception of the importance of the vote. All these effects indications, however, have to be interpreted with caution because only one interaction of type and issues from each type was held.

Presidential approval, from the government performance explanations, and interpersonal trust, from the cultural explanations, are two important predictors to external efficacy in the countries analyzed, despite of the latter being very controversial in literature.

Whether these results stand with broader samples and more MDD occurrences needs further investigation. However, the fact that some types of MDD and contextual facts (as issues salience) could have more positive effects than presidential approval and good evaluation of the personal economic situation for citizens's perceptions of the external efficacy may indicate that it could be worthwhile to use these mechanisms with little less parsimony than they have been used in Latin America so far.

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