

Democratic Innovations in the Hands of Strong Presidents: Latin American Democracies in Peril*

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Abstract

Latin America is a region that served to experiment with participatory governance through democratic innovations. During the pink tide, Presidents changed the constitutions and open spaces to increase voice and representation further. The LATINNO dataset collects over 3700 democratic innovations throughout 18 Latin American countries from 1990 to 2021. According to Pogrebinschi (2013), these innovations grouped into five categories (deliberation, director voting, e-participation, and citizen representation) should increase a particular end of democratic dimensions such as accountability, responsiveness, political inclusion, social equality, and the rule of law. However, the outcomes of democratic quality in the Latin American region have been mixed, even after implementing these innovations in citizen participation. In this study, a reassessment of the effect of these democratic innovations shows that they not only increase democracy but can also have the opposite effect of diminishing it. A panel analysis suggests that leaders might use these innovations to increase their power further and diminish constraints on them, which goes against the normative expectation of these participatory mechanisms. These results show that these innovations will only be authoritarian in the hands of aspiring or consolidated autocrats. anticipate that by using participatory innovations, autocrats controlling the implementation process can dismantle democracy and provide an opposite intended outcome.

Keywords: Political Innovations, Presidentialism, Democratic Backsliding, Latin American Politics.

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1 Introduction

In the intricate landscape of Latin American democracies, the interplay between political innovations and democratic backsliding has become a central topic of scholarly inquiry (McNulty 2020; Pogrebinski 2018, 2023).¹ Venezuela stands as both an illustrative case and a cautionary tale (Jiménez 2021; Gamboa 2017; Corrales 2015). The rise of Hugo Chavez, followed by Nicolás Maduro, was marked by radical political reforms aimed at transforming state-society relations by enhancing citizen participation and accountability. However, this democratic experiment quickly devolved into heightened presidentialism and militarism, weakened horizontal accountability, restrictions on the opposition, and a decline in individual rights. In contrast, Brazil is often highlighted as a successful case of democratic innovation. Following the Workers' Party's victory in the 2002 presidential election, Brazil implemented extensive participative practices, significantly enhancing citizen and civil society involvement in the policy process (Fung 2011; Baiocchi 2003; Baiocchi et al. 2020).² Figure 1 shows these contrasting cases underscore the complex effects of institutional innovations on democracy. The central question remains: why do some innovations improve democratic governance while others do not?

Our research aims to assess whether democratic innovations enhance institutional quality and create formal channels for citizenship participation in politics. On one hand, democratic innovations are anticipated to improve institutional quality by creating new avenues for citizen engagement. These innovations reflect a societal drive to democratize state practices, expand citizenship, and distribute public goods more effectively, thereby fostering greater government responsibility and accountability. On the other hand, the effectiveness of these democratic innovations is influenced by the nature of the presidential system, particularly the concentration of power in the executive branch. When power is overly centralized in the hands of a strong and unrestrained president, these leaders can undermine the intended

1. We use political, institutional, and democratic innovations interchangeably for stylistic purposes.

2. Despite the 2016 impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, these participatory mechanisms have been credited with improving governance and democratic quality.

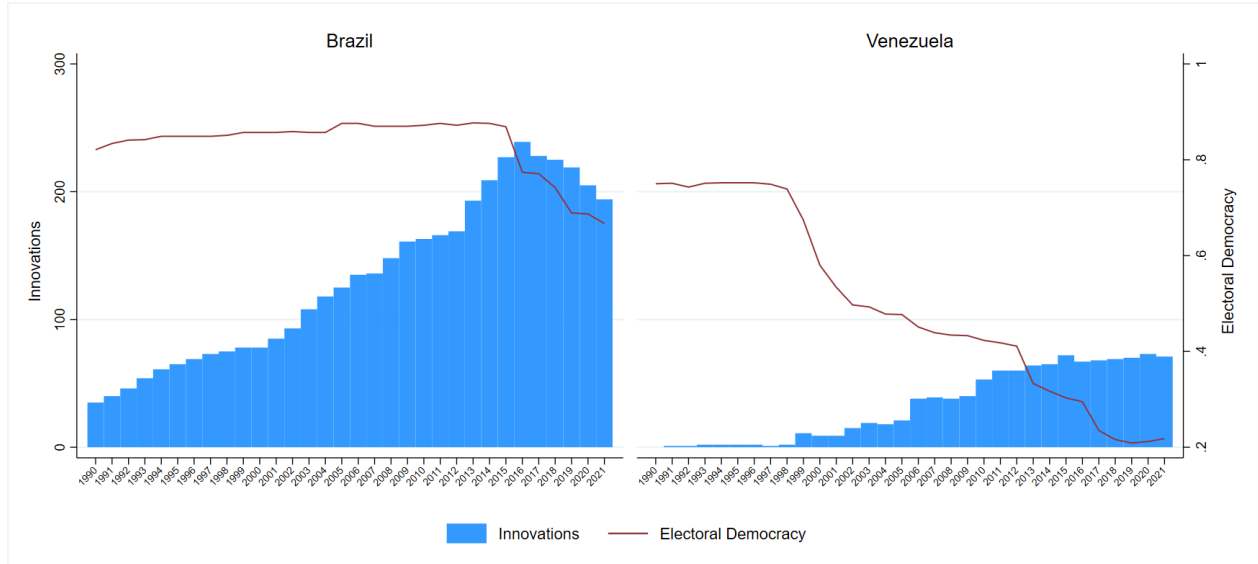


Figure 1: Innovations and Democratic Quality in Brazil and Venezuela, 1990-2021

benefits of democratic innovations. By circumventing democratic norms and institutional constraints, they can ultimately diminish democratic quality and weaken the very foundations of governance these innovations aim to strengthen.

This paper builds on the literature on democratization and regime consolidation in Latin America (Pogrebinski 2018), the rise of populist regimes and their consequences (Cammack 2000; Absher et al. 2020), and the expectations surrounding institutional changes, including new Constitutions and a surge in elections and referendums in the region (Stoyan 2020; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013). We confront the expectations of democratic innovations against the complex reality of political dynamics, navigating the intricacies of cooptation, disempowerment, and the potential dual roles played by these innovations in shaping the democratic trajectory of the region. More generally, our findings contribute to the literature on democratic backsliding and authoritarian institutions that have mostly focused on political parties and legislatures to explain regime survival (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Svoblik 2012). We offer a complementary mechanism that helps explain the institutional choices incumbents make to concentrate power and organize and mobilize civil society against elite-level constraints.

To test our hypotheses, we utilize the LATINNO dataset, which offers comprehensive data on democratic innovations in Latin America from 1990 to 2021 (Pogrebinschi 2021a, 2023). Latin America, with its history of authoritarian regimes, rich democratic experiences, and varying degrees of presidentialism, provides a diverse context for examining the institutional strategies employed to enhance democratic consolidation. We aim to determine whether the nature of the presidency influences the effectiveness of these innovations on the overall quality of democracy.

Our analysis reveals a heterogeneous effect of political innovations. First, we found that while these innovations enhance electoral democracy, they fail to significantly impact other dimensions, such as participatory, deliberative, liberal, and egalitarian democracy. Second, our analysis indicates distinct impacts based on the type of innovation. Deliberative innovations positively influence all dimensions of democracy, whereas voting innovations generally harm democratic quality, with their exception on political participation. Third, we examined the interaction between innovations and presidentialism, finding that this dynamic only affects the electoral dimension of democracy. Fourth, our investigation into how strong presidents manipulate innovations shows that they exploit these institutions to tilt the electoral field in their favor. This manipulation undermines the electoral process' integrity of the electoral process and distorts democratic competition, raising concerns about the misuse of these innovations under concentrated executive power. Lastly, the case of Venezuela illustrates how Hugo Chávez used Consejos Comunales to enhance citizen engagement while simultaneously co-opting and mobilizing his supporters for electoral and political gains.

The paper proceeds as follows. The second section provides a brief overview of the literature on democratic backsliding and the role of political leaders in eroding democratic institutions. The third section builds on Pogrebinschi's (2023) work on democratic innovations in Latin America to posit that innovations are likely to enhance democratic quality with the caveat that strong leaders can, and often do, mitigate this effect. The third section introduces our research design and describes the LATINNO dataset in more detail. The

fourth and fifth sections report our results, analysis, conclusions, and future research.

2 Democratic Quality in Latin America: An overview

In examining the impact of institutional innovations in Latin America, we navigate a complex landscape shaped by authoritarian legacies, political reforms, unique socio-economic challenges, and influential leaders with ambitious agendas (Lehoucq and Pérez-Liñán 2013; Stoyan 2020). These democracies grapple with the task of institutionalizing structures to meet citizen demands and internal pressures for redistribution, often characterized by weak horizontal accountability, informal practices, and low-intensity citizenship (O’Donnell 1994).³ These institutions often lack the agility to adapt rapidly during social and economic crises, providing an opportunity for an outsider to disrupt a country’s formal political process or delay democratic consolidation (Brinks et al. 2020).

The third wave of democratization in Latin America ushered in a significant increase in political participation that reshaped state-society relations across the region (Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005; Haggard and Kaufman 2016). However, Latin American democracies have struggled with representation and legitimacy crises due to several factors, including underperforming economies, high levels of economic inequality and corruption, and historical patterns of authoritarianism that have undermined trust in democratic institutions (Zmerli and Castillo 2015; Seligson 2002). These structural regional characteristics resulted in a growing disconnect between the political elite and the general population that led to widespread disenchantment and political apathy (Valenzuela 1993). Recent studies have highlighted the decline of military coups, executive-legislative conflicts, or the rise of populist regimes with ambitious programs in the region to explain new political developments (Pérez-Liñán 2007; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013, 2014, 2023).

Starting in the 1990s, Latin American societies experimented with new forms of participation beyond elections, voluntary associations, and protests, aiming to address these crises

3. Guillermo O’Donnell (1998) develops the concept of delegative democracy, where a dominant leader, elected to represent the majority’s will, weakens other state institutions and agencies, thereby undermining horizontal accountability.

by mobilizing, organizing, and including citizens, social movements, and NGOs in policy-making processes (Pogrebinschi 2021a). These innovations, ranging from local participatory budgeting initiatives to national reforms mandating greater transparency and accountability, aim to strengthen the democratic fabric by fostering greater citizen involvement.⁴ These political reforms aimed at including marginalized groups, reducing corruption, and improving government responsiveness to citizens’ demands (McNulty 2020).

A key mechanism influencing institutional malleability in the region is the concern that executives may use their democratic mandates to reduce checks on their power and overcome political rivals, potentially leading to democratic backsliding (Svolik 2014; Dresden and Howard 2015; Bermeo 2016; Waldner and Lust 2018; Svolik 2020).⁵ The classic work of Juan Linz (1970) identifies this mechanism with clarity, noting that the dual claim for legitimacy creates potential conflict in presidential systems, where executives and assemblies vie for supremacy. This situation is compounded by the paradoxical need for strong executives and a profound distrust of their power. The lack of mechanisms to resolve disputes between the executive and legislative branches, such as votes of confidence or censure common in parliamentary systems, can result in minority presidents, divided governments, and deadlocks, increasing the likelihood of resorting to extraconstitutional means to resolve their differences. Consequently, presidential regimes are prone to instability and potential dissolution (Linz 1978; Stepan and Skach 1993; Linz and Stepan 1996).

However, the usage of military coups or irregular power transfers has diminished in Latin America, prompting inquiries into how executives and assemblies resolve their disputes.⁶ The literature on authoritarian politics and democratic backsliding provides insights into how democratically elected presidents may use their mandates to erode democratic quality

4. Democratic innovations refer to the “institutions, processes, and mechanisms whose end it is to enhance democracy through citizen participation in at least one stage of the policy cycle” (Pogrebinschi 2023, 9)

5. This inquiry is nuanced by the stance of Little and Meng (2023) against overly simplistic survey-based measurements and their implications for democratic backsliding.

6. The question of democracy failure in Latin America was a synonym of military involvement in politics. However, the decline of coup sponsorship in the post-Cold War era, as well as the adoption of democratic norms, explain why irregular power transfers became rare events in the region. See: Lehoucq and Pérez-Liñán (2013).

(Lührmann 2021). These executives are often outsiders who exploit the temporal progression of illiberal sentiments to garner political support among those dissatisfied with democracy to get elected to the highest office in the country.⁷ Once in power, these leaders exacerbate polarization through their rhetoric and ambitious agenda, building a contentious context that justifies using innovative mechanisms to dismantle horizontal accountability or those institutions that limit their executive power.⁸

Executive aggrandizement is a contributing factor to the onset of backsliding (Svolik 2014). For instance, executives often sign symbolic statements to dialogue with Congress about the extent of their power (Ostrander and Sievert 2012). Leaders may use tools of direct democracy (e.g., ‘consultas,’ referendums, and initiatives) that can enhance participation but can be used to harm and circumvent formal institutions such as the Congress (Barczak 2001). Leaders often pursue institutional change from within and outside of officially sanctioned channels. For example, Stoyan (2020) shows that some Latin American leaders used their institutional and mobilizational leverage to convince the Judiciary or Electoral bodies to allow a referendum to form a Constituent Assembly, explaining one channel through which power concentrates on leaders with ambitious reforms.

Scholars on authoritarian politics provide some ideas on why backsliders undermine yet do not replace instances of political representation in their regimes (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Svolik 2012). These quasi-democratic institutions do not necessarily intend to foster legitimacy and accountability; instead, they address the power dynamics among the leader, ruling elites, and the citizenry.⁹ In addition to these institutions, autocrats foster diffuse political support or trust in regimes via a positive performance evaluation of institutions

7. Low economic development, economic performance, governance problems, and weak institutions are causes of democratic erosion. Financial and security difficulties lead to legitimacy crises that undermine popular support for democracy.

8. Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013) identify “radical policy preferences” of political actors as a major cause of polarization in Latin America. Often, political leaders holding a “radical” preference toward one pole of the policy spectrum implement intransigent strategies that antagonize other actors in the system, showing an unwillingness to compromise or even a willingness to subvert the law.

9. Svolik (2012) argues that leaders exercise a balancing function to solve (i) the problem of power-sharing that addresses the relationship between the leader and the winning coalition and (ii) the problem of authoritarian control that directly addresses the relationship between the leader and the citizenship.

and policies, ideology, and the leader’s person (Gerschewski 2018; Tannenbergs 2021).

In the next section, we will emphasize how presidents (a) promote institutional innovations to correct shortcomings and biases of existing democratic institutions without changing the fundamental logic of the institutional order itself and (b) these innovations do not enhance democratic quality. Instead, they help leaders bypass elite competition and accountability efforts by invoking the fundamental principle of a democratic regime: the power of the people.

3 Democratic Innovations meet Strong Presidents

3.1 *The Unconditional Effect of Democratic Innovations*

Despite their attempts to address internal challenges, Latin American democracies still suffer from political systems that fail to represent diverse social groups and governments with low levels of state capacity to resolve societal demands. The importance of innovations is that they are perceived as means for bringing together the public under the assumption that “better” institutions can redress the challenges weakening the legitimacy and credibility of domestic political systems. For example, scholars have proposed that rewriting the constitution can serve as a purposeful mechanism to address democratic deficits in societies by enhancing political representation, improving economic systems, or removing authoritarian legacies from the country’s body of laws (Heiss 2020; Torre Rangel 2018; Corrales 2018).

The starting point in our discussion about political innovations is that these institutions are perceived as a necessity to improve democracy and advance progressive agendas or institutional fixes to the problems of democracy. These innovations cannot only change the dynamics between executives and legislators but also introduce participatory forms of governance, enhancing the inclusion of excluded groups in policy-making processes (Mayka 2019; McNulty 2020; Wampler et al. 2019). These new forms of governance include participatory budgeting, policy councils, citizenship councils, and monitoring committees, all of which have the potential to improve transparency, participation, economic redistribution, and social welfare (Avritzer 2017). Most of these institutions suppose (at least a partial)

transfer the state’s social responsibilities to individuals, civil society, and the private sector and create a joint-framework to address citizen grievances (Dagnino and Teixeira 2014).¹⁰ Other than pursuing these high-minded goals, democratic innovations have the potential to limit executive power by creating local powers or introducing recall referendums against incompetent officials.

Therefore, democratic innovations are crucial for regime consolidation as they hold the potential to strengthen institutional resilience against the current wave of democratic backsliding (see Merkel and Lührmann 2021). These innovations are expected to (i) prevent or reverse the capture of democratic institutions from special interest or political parties and (ii) promote more inclusive and responsive forms of governance, which is essential for sustaining democratic norms and practices. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Democratic innovations improve the quality of democracy.*

3.2 The Conditional Effect of Democratic Innovations

While the objective behind democratic innovations emphasizes positive changes in an effort to enhance citizen participation and advance social goals, these institutions are still the result of political processes or interests that could mediate their intended effects.¹¹ Considering democratic innovations as an institutional choice, the question is why power-maximizer presidents pursue and encourage high levels of citizen participation if they can introduce additional constraints on their power. This idea is counterintuitive if we assume that leaders’ and ruling coalition’s interests do not necessarily mirror general social welfare (see e.g., De Mesquita et al. 2005; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2023).

We argue that innovations have heterogeneous effects depending on the context in which they are used. First, democratic innovations are primarily intended to correct shortcomings and biases of existing formal institutions, especially when legitimacy crises undermine

10. This shared responsibility is often framed in terms of “dialogue,” “co-responsibility,” “sharing power,” and “working together.” See: Dagnino and Teixeira (2014)

11. For example, at the macro level, Constitutions are often the result of founding fathers or constitutional designers.

support for democracy. That is, excluded groups want to participate in policy discussions aiming to improve the status quo to better represent the interests of the majority. Suppose the introduction of deliberative councils. These councils, on average, create an alternative forum to collect citizens' preferences on a particular issue, improve civic capacities, promote trust, and enhance the fairness of public policies in the long term. However, although these councils may produce more legitimate decisions, they still leave the underlying decision-making logic of representative political systems unchanged if those decisions do not change the role of elected officials as mediators between local groups and national instances.

Second, assuming that innovations will positively impact democracy overlooks the varied effects they can produce, depending on the strength of presidents and their agendas, the strength of the civil society, and party systems. That is, strong presidents can promote reforms to reinvigorate their power, co-opt citizens, weaken dissent, or tilt the electoral landscape in their favor. Suppose the introduction of direct voting instances that determine whether countries will write new Constitutions, remove politicians from office through a recall referendum, or remove term limits on presidents. These instances create incentives for shortsighted presidents to co-opt and repurpose them to safeguard their positions and, if possible, bypass political and non-political elite constraints.

Following the literature on the perils of presidentialism, we put forward that strong executives pose a threat to democracies, potentially leading to incumbent takeovers (Svolik 2014). Executives can disable checks on their powers gradually and largely through the introduction of unconventional yet formal institutions that weaken horizontal accountability. More precisely, incumbents can justify their takeovers using “the will of the people” as a morally superior argument to circumvent the formal political process vis-a-vis the legislature and adopt radical reforms that may hurt democracy (see Corrales 2018; Stoyan 2020). Building on this insight, we argue that innovations are not necessarily window-dressing a leader's anti-democratic aspirations but certainly provide the means to build a robust coalition to erode democratic institutions in the long term. As pointed out above, unrestrained

and powerful leaders can exploit the weaknesses of the opposition and accountability mechanisms to pursue a dangerous agenda that does not maximize social welfare nor contribute to democratic resilience.

To summarize, we propose that an executive can attempt to disable checks on their powers gradually and largely through formal institutions by simultaneously attempting to weaken horizontal and vertical accountability. Strong executives undermine democratic accountability by introducing institutional reforms, decrees, legislation, or constitutional amendments that enhance their power and, more concretely, extend their time horizons in office. We introduce into the president’s toolbox the idea of democratic innovations. By increasing civic engagement and the instances where citizens cast their votes, executives can attempt to bypass elite-level constraints and initiate a dialogue with the legislature from a position of strength. Therefore, we posit that democratic innovations can be used to erode democracy at the hands of strong presidents.¹²

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Strong presidents mitigate the positive effects of democratic innovations on the quality of democracy.*

4 Research Design

To test our hypotheses, we created panel data for 18 Latin American countries from 1990 to 2021, following the scope of the LATINNO dataset (Pogrebinski 2021a). The dataset includes Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The level of analysis is country-year. We used two-way fixed effect models and lagged the independent and control variables by one year. Although we do not claim causality, the use of fixed effects and lagged independent variables strengthens the inference by controlling for unobserved heterogeneity and ensuring a temporal order that mitigates the risk of reverse causality.

12. By looking at innovations as a tool to erode democracy at the hands of strong presidents, we subscribe to the notion that democratic backsliding is a process rather than an abrupt change in institutions.

We proceed in three steps to empirically test the effect of political innovations on the quality of democracy. First, we use a naive model to assess the effect of overall innovations in a given country and year on the quality of democracy; this step helps test hypothesis 1. Second, we use a set of models that interact innovations with presidentialism to test hypothesis 2 and delve into the statistically significant dimension of democracy. Finally, we use Brazil and Venezuela as country cases to illustrate more specifically how the differences in presidentialism and innovations can impact democratic quality.

4.1 Explanatory variable: Democratic Innovations

For this project, the primary data source is the LATINNO dataset curated by Progrebin-schi (2021). Additionally, we utilize data from the 13th version of the Varieties of Democracy dataset (Coppedge et al. 2023). Other datasets include the Characteristics of National Con-stitutions (Elkins and Ginsburg 2022), the Colpus Dataset (Chin and Kirkpatrick 2023), the Global Leader Ideology dataset (Herre 2023), and the Voter Turnout Database (Inter-national IDEA 2024). These datasets collectively provide a comprehensive set of variables and measurements for our research. Below, we offer a brief explanation of the variables used, both dependent and independent, along with the logic behind their transformation and measurement.

4.2 Dependent Variable: Quality of Democracy and meso and low-level components of Elec-toral Democracy and Clean Elections

The main independent variable is the quality of democracy and is measured using V-Dem’s dataset highest level of democracy: (i) electoral democracy index, which encompasses free and fair elections, uncertainty in the election results, and overall peaceful developments between elections; (ii) participatory democracy index, a more direct approach to democracy where citizens are more active in both electoral and not-electoral processes; (iii) deliberative democracy index, where a broad and public effort to reach the common good through de-liberation and open channel of discussions and debate are available for citizens; (iv) liberal democracy index, which follows the principle of protecting private citizens against the force

of the state and the tyranny of the majority, by taking a negative view of power which measure how much constrained the state is; and (v) egalitarian democracy index, every citizen is equal before the state in the rights and economical dimensions, that is, law is applied equally and resources are distributed equally as well (Coppedge et al. 2023). Figure 2 shows the intersection between episodes of democratization and autocratization in Latin America with the number of innovations per country and year. From this, it is not clear whether innovations can hinder or promote democratization as they are present in both; at the beginning of the 1990, fueled by the international influence of the third wave of democratization, 14 countries experienced episodes of democratization in the last decade of the 20th century. In the first two decades of the 21st century, while still under the presence of innovations, countries started experiencing democratic erosion, with Nicaragua and Venezuela fully transitioning to more autocratic regimes.

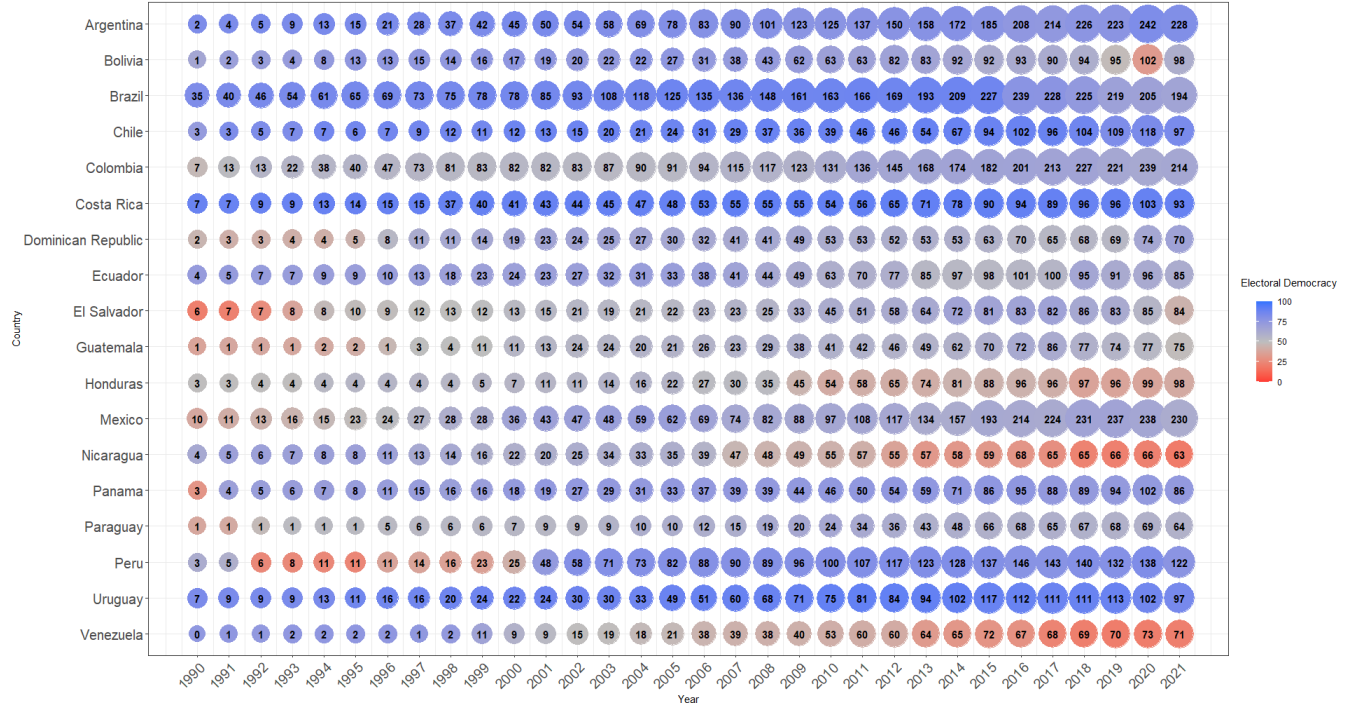


Figure 2: Number of innovations by electoral democracy index and autocratization per country and year in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

This variable is transformed from its original 0 to 1 range into a 0 (less democracy) to

100 (more democracy), given that the main independent variable is a count variable. We believe these measurements of democracy capture different dimensions of democracy that allow us to test how innovations are potentially capable of affecting them or if there is any area in particular where they perform better.

Following the initial results, we delve into the electoral dimension of democracy and use its mid-level components, which include Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association, Clean Elections, and Elected Officials. Finally, another set of dependent variables is included as the low-level components of the Clean Elections index are used as dependent variables. These include EMB Autonomy, EMB Capacity, Election Voting Registry, Election Vote Buying, Election Other Voting Irregularities, Election Gov't Intimidation, Election Other Electoral Violence, and Election Free and Fair. The goal of adding these additional mid and low-level components of electoral democracy and clean elections is to better understand where, within the complexity of the political system, innovations and their interaction with presidentialism may produce changes in the quality of democracy.

4.3 Independent Variables: Political Innovations

The main independent variables of this study are political innovations. The variable innovations is a count variable that will count how many innovations are occurring in a given country-year. Given that the LATINNO dataset is at the country-innovation level, a transformation was required to generate the panel-level data that served as a base for this project. Since every observation that contains the information for a single innovation of the more than 3700 listed in the LATINNO dataset has a start year and an end year, we expanded the observations so it can cover every year in a given country (Pogrebinschi [2021a](#)). Secondly, we collapsed the innovations with a count variable that will measure how many innovations may or may not occur in a year; this variable goes from 0 to 242 at the country-year level. Since the LATINNO dataset provides a plethora of characteristics for each innovation, we also produced four other variables that will include each type of innovation characterized by the mean through they are implemented: (i) deliberation (ranging from 0 to 138), (ii)

direct voting (ranging from 0 to 9); (iii) citizen representation (ranging from 88), and (iv) e-participation (ranging from 0 to 79), more information about these types can be see on appendix A.

4.4 Control Variables

The set of control variables chosen for this study is related to democratization or autocratization processes. First, the presidentialism index from the V-Dem dataset is utilized in order to capture how much a president is constrained; again, this was recoded to range from 0 to 100, being 0 less powerful and 100 more powerful (Coppedge et al. 2023). More specifically, for this study, a categorical variable was coded that goes from 0 or low (when the presidential index is between 0 and 33), 1 or medium (when the index is between 34 and 66), and 2 or high (between 67 and 100), by doing this we can capture nuances between three different levels of presidentialism and their effect on the quality of democracy. Second, mass mobilization is included through an index that captures between 0 (lowest) and 100 (highest) how much citizens mobilized in a given year (Coppedge et al. 2023). Third, constitutional changes are an important piece; the categorical variable *eventtype* from the CNC dataset provides information on whether, in a country year, there was a constitutional change and to what extent, coding one (1) for amendments and (3) for a new constitution, when no change occurred this variable takes the value of four (4) (Elkins and Ginsburg 2022). Fourth, the ideology of the president and the cabinet by extension is measured using the ideology variable from the GLI dataset, and it takes the value of one (1) for centrist leaders, two (2) for leftists, three (3) for rightists, and finally, four (4) when there is no information on the ideology of the head of state (Herre 2023). Figure 3 shows a trend where more innovations were put in place by the government from the pink tide still. At the onset of the third wave of democratization, it is clear that rightist and centrist governments also implemented innovations when they were in the executive office.

By using the voter turnout data, it was possible to code whether, in a given year, there was an election either presidential or parliamentary with a one (1) or not with a zero (0).

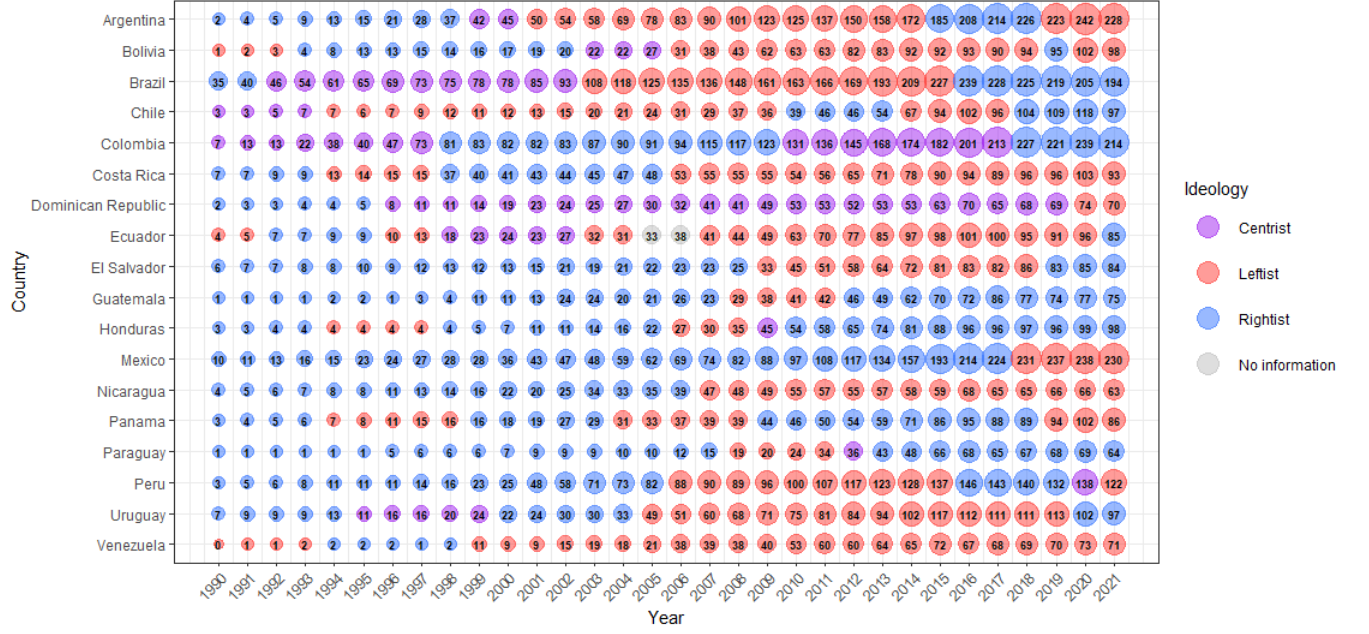


Figure 3: Number of innovations by ideology of the head of the state per country and year in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

Similarly, the coup variable is a binary variable that was coded with a one (1) if there was either an attempted or a successful coup in a given country-year or not, taking the value of zero (0) (Chin and Kirkpatrick 2023). Finally, the V-Dem dataset provides a latent variable of gross domestic product per capita that will be used as a control; this variable goes from 1.19 to 24.98 (Fariss et al. 2023).

5 Results: Political Innovations on Quality of Democracy

As mentioned in the research design section, the first models employed the total number of innovations as the independent variable on the five dimension of democracy proposed by the Varieties of Democracy project. In this sense, results for the first five models can be seen in figure 4. Innovations, as a whole, are only statistically significant in the electoral dimension of democracy, while mass mobilizations, which are linked to civil unrest, are statistically significant but with a marginal effect, as shown in the magnitude of the coefficients. With ideology, something interesting happened as the results show that leftists and rightist ideologies in the president tend to be less democratic than centrist leaders, especially for

the electoral, liberal, and participatory dimensions of democracy. The variable that retains the greatest statistical power and effect over the quality of democracy in all its dimensions is presidentialism, which is somewhat not surprising given the recent history of democratic backsliding, especially in Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega) and Venezuela (Hugo Chávez), and potentially in El Salvador with Nayib Bukele. As expected, GDP per capita is statistically significant and positive, which goes in hand with the expectation from modernization theories that provide a theoretical foundation for the idea that economically developed countries tend to be more democratic over time. The variables shown in figure 4 were selected due to their statistical significance in addition to political innovations, which is the main independent variable put to the test in this study. The full specification models that assess the effect of political innovations on the quality of democracy can be seen in table 1 in Appendix A. Given these first batch of results, there is insufficient proof in favor of hypothesis H1, innovation does not necessarily, in a broad sense, improve the quality of democracy.

Given the history of Latin America with presidents that extend their tenure and extra-limit their constitutional duties and power, figure 5 shows the interaction effect of innovations with presidentialism. The results shown in models (11) to (15) give foundation to the idea that presidents are the main drive of democratic backsliding in the region. Similar to the results shown in figure 4, there is no statistical significance of innovation as the statistical power remains within presidentialism again. It does not seem the interaction between innovations and presidentialism renders a negative impact on any of the dimensions of democracy except on the electoral one; again, this seems to be a marginal effect compared to the larger one that has medium and high levels of presidentialism alone. The full specification of the models with the interaction between innovations and presidentialism can be found in table 3 in Appendix A.

According to these results, it is safe to assume that there is limited evidence in favor of hypothesis H2; the interaction between innovations and strong presidents does not seem to have an important effect over most of the dimensions of democracies except on the electoral

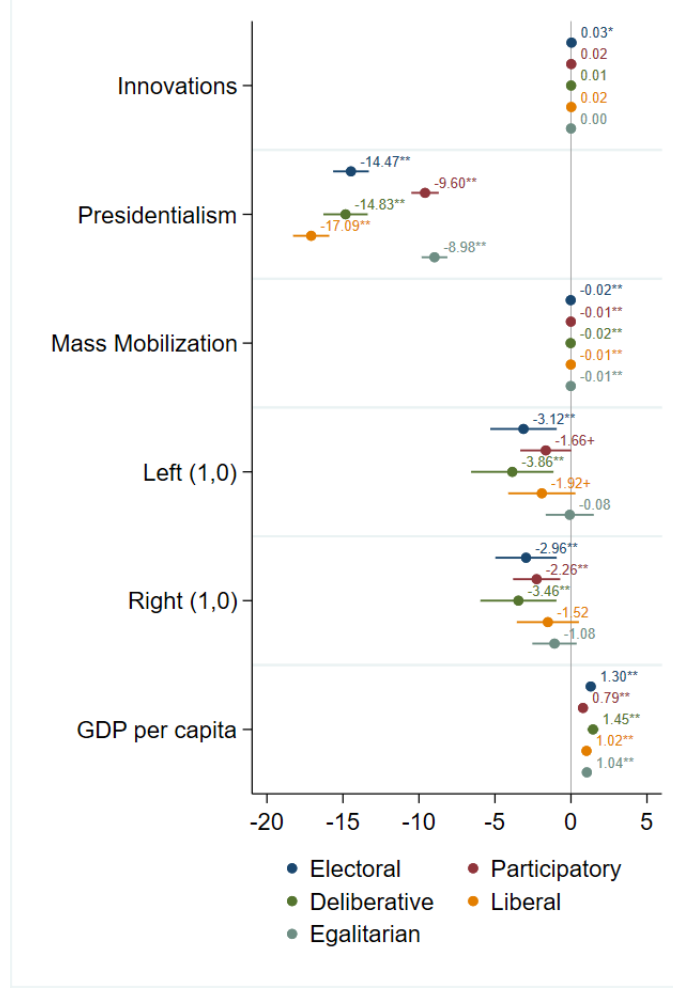


Figure 4: Cross-time fixed effects models of the effect of innovations on different dimensions of democracy in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

dimension. Other interactions were also attempted in order to fully grasp the effect of innovation in tandem with other political aspects like ideology and mass mobilization; similar to the results obtained with presidentialism, none of them rendered any statistical significance. In order to delve more into the interaction effects of innovation and presidentialism, given the results shown in figure 5, the clean elections mid-level component of electoral democracy is shown to be affected by the interaction. The next logical step is to continue analyzing the components of electoral democracy according to the index built by V-dem, which are (i) Freedom of Expression, (ii) Freedom of Association, (iii) Clean Election, and (iv) Elected Officials. Figure 6 shows that, again, of the four components of the electoral democracy index,

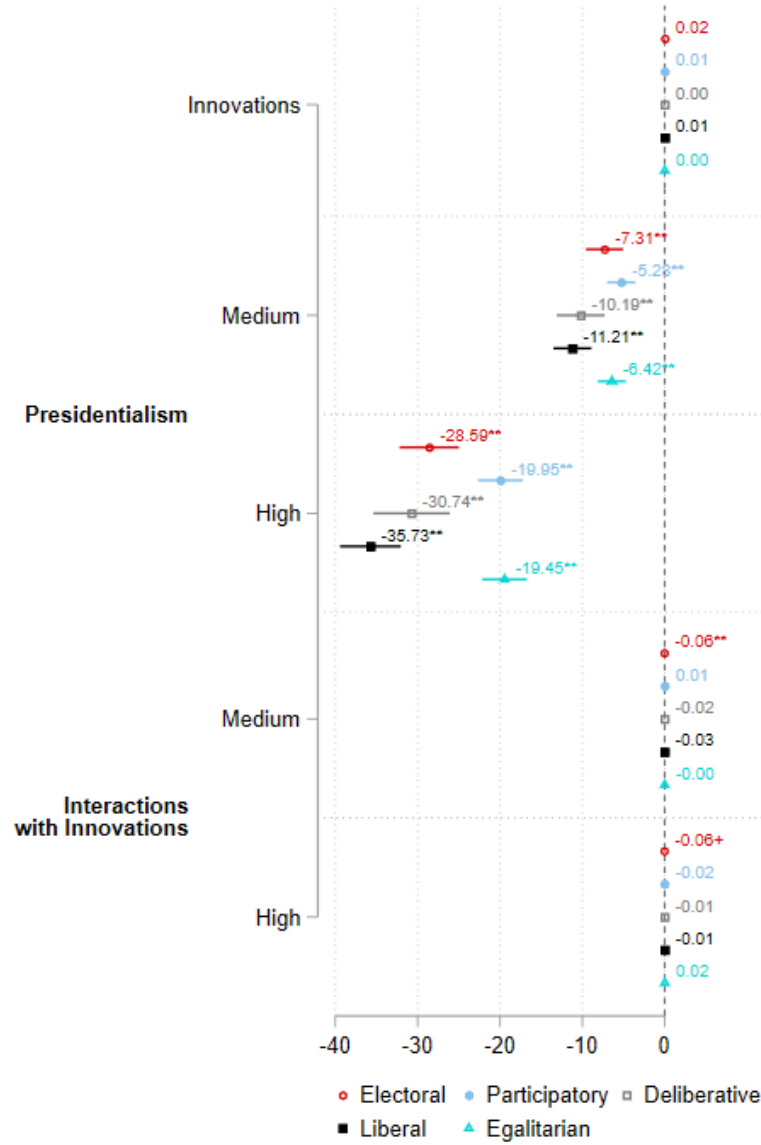


Figure 5: Cross-time fixed effects models of the interaction effect between innovations and presidentialism on high-level dimensions of democracy in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

it is precisely the clean election component, which is statistically significant and negative for both medium and high levels of presidentialism.

Finally, repeating the same logic as in previous steps, figure 7 shows the low-level components of the clean election index from electoral democracy. In this case, the interactions across eight low-level components show that vote buying and government intimidation are the two components from the clean elections index that are most affected negatively by

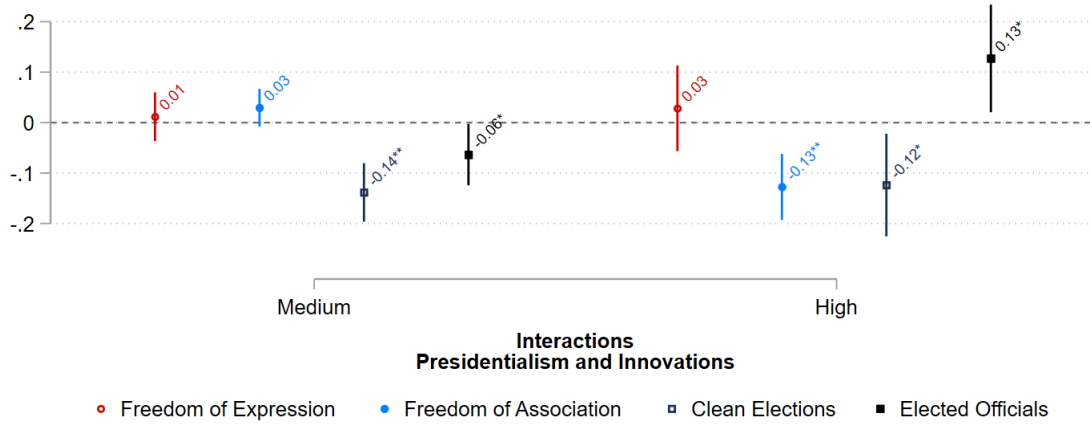


Figure 6: Cross-time fixed effects models of the interaction effects of innovations and presidentialism on mid-level components of Electoral Democracy index in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

strong presidents. The complexity of the democratic system can be unraveled using the V-Dem measurements from the high to low-level components, which allowed us to understand exactly where strong presidents are using innovations to subvert the political process in order to increase their power and prolong tenure in office.

6 Illustrative Examples

Our argument posits that democratic innovations possess a dual nature, presenting both opportunities and challenges. While they hold the potential to enhance citizen participation and foster accountability, they can also be utilized as instruments of cooptation, enabling incumbents to manipulate the electoral landscape to their advantage. This dichotomy becomes apparent in contexts where strong leaders enact institutional reforms, fostering high levels of citizen engagement and social mobilization to circumvent traditional elite constraints. We illustrate this phenomenon through an analysis of democratic backsliding in Brazil and Venezuela.

6.1 Brazil: Workers' Party and Innovations

Brazil's transition to democracy and the 1988 Constitution created the foundations for citizen participation through plebiscites, referendums, and popular legislative initiatives.

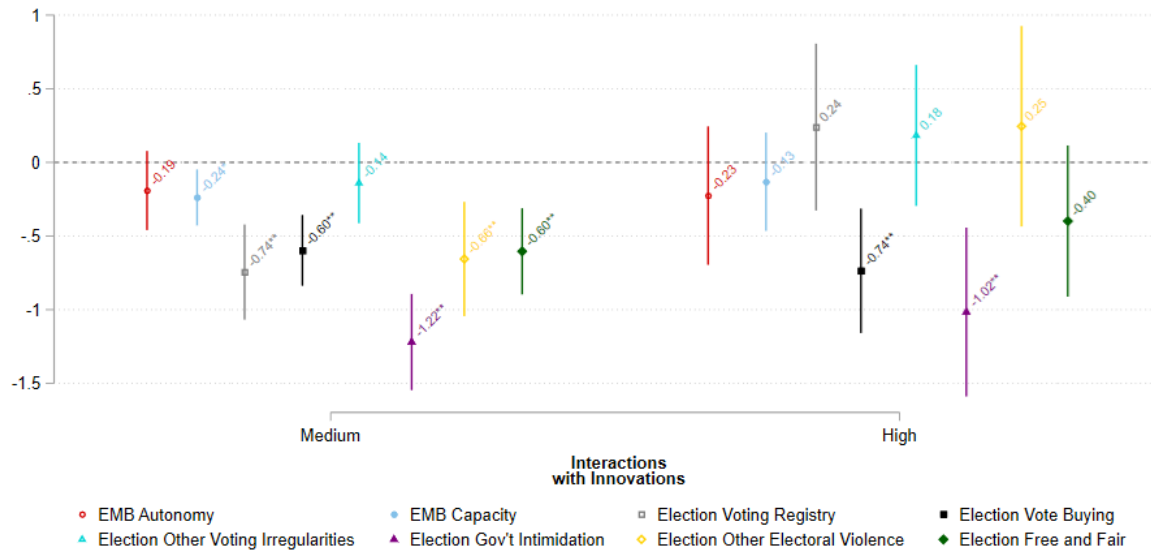


Figure 7: Average marginal effects of the interaction between political innovations and presidentialism on clean election components in Latin America.

Other than enshrining participatory democracy, the resulting presidential system is characterized by a weak executive who needs to build cross-party coalitions to implement major policies (Mainwaring 1997). Moreover, the fragmented party system, strong federalism, and the concentration of power in the executive branch –often referred to as coalitional presidentialism– reinforces the dispersion of power and horizontal accountability as constraints on executive power (Power 2010; Samuels 2000).

In this context, institutional innovations were implanted at both the local and national levels. For example, at the local level, Porto Alegre’s participatory budgeting created in 1989 constitutes the primary example of successful innovations in Brazil and Latin America (Fung 2011; Wampler 2010; Avritzer 2009).¹³ These innovations allowed citizens to allocate resources and seek a fairer distribution of the municipal budget. At the national level, the National Councils and the National Public Policy Conferences combined deliberation and participatory mechanisms through which civil society constantly interacted with government members throughout the public policy cycle (Pogrebinschi and Samuels 2014).

13. Porto Alegre’s participatory budgeting was labeled as “best practice” by the United Nations in 1996. The Porto Alegre program was later implemented in other cities in Brazil and around the world.

These institutions expanded during the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) governments of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (2003-2010), followed by Dilma Rousseff's presidency (2011-2016), covering new policy areas to promote social equality and political inclusion. The PT governments implemented initiatives to form policy councils and online platforms to construct collective decisions, identify priority issue areas, and formulate public policy strategies – that is, these innovations gave excluded groups a voice in the drafting of relevant policies and elevated recommendations to the national government. The sheer number of institutions, mechanisms, and processes to incorporate civil society grew significantly in this period, covering a wide range of themes ranging from food security to cultural policy (Dagnino and Teixeira 2014; Pogrebinschi and Samuels 2014).

Although the quantitative evidence supports the argument that democratic innovations were pursued by the national government, qualitative evidence contextualizes this support in several areas. The characteristics of the presidential system incentivize executives to privilege governability over deep reforms of the state, suggesting that negotiations with civil society often transformed into hearings that did not incorporate citizen concerns on projects with strong economic and political stakeholders (Dagnino and Teixeira 2014; Bruera 2015). Therefore, the PT government's struggle to achieve a balance between participation, and governability contributed to the expansion of participatory mechanisms but also were constrained by elite-level imperatives.

6.2 *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez and Innovations*

Venezuela transitioned to democracy in 1958 through a consensual power-sharing deal that functioned between the fall of the military junta and the late 1980s. However, due to its dependence on global oil prices, the country failed to generate prosperity and include disenfranchised groups in the political arena, resulting in the collapse of the party system (J. L. McCoy 1999; Ellner 2001). In this context, the rise of Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) and later, his successor, Nicolás Maduro (2013-present), precipitated significant institutional shifts, ranging from drafting a new constitution to establishing and consolidating parallel

forms of governances known as *poder popular* (popular power, in English) (Corrales 2005).

The rewriting of the Constitution served as a critical junction where the new government, through a Constituent Assembly, disbanded Congress and other political institutions. This event also allowed the executive to use his mobilization leverage to rebuild political institutions to his liking, effectively bypassing traditional elite constraints and promoting a shift from 'representative' to 'participatory' democracy (Corrales 2018; Stoyan 2020). While the new Constitution introduced recall referendums, judicial reviews, and local elections that created constraints on the executive power, the same Constitution introduced new executive powers allowing it an increasing ability to control the oil industry and, with the elimination of the Senate, concentrated power over the military in the executive.

Whether because of the new Constitution or his radical agenda, Venezuela entered a period of growing political instability that included a coup attempt, national protests, electoral boycotting, a recall referendum against Hugo Chavez, and even a failed attempt to amend the Constitution.¹⁴ This political environment heightened the risk of a revolution or a coup against a leader who, at that moment, did not have a strong political party and, therefore, lacked the organizational capacity to withstand any further attempts against his tenure.¹⁵ Even though the first years of Chavismo were marked by high levels of instability, the national government promoted legislation to encourage local participation.

Notoriously, Chávez initiated the Comunal Council (*Consejos Comunales*, in Spanish) program in early 2006, empowering small communities to form local organizations tasked with governance functions.¹⁶ The Chavez administration mobilized its followers, including

14. Cross-national regime indicators such as the Autocratic Regime Data Set and Freedom House scores identify the years 2004 and 2005 as the moment of the political transition. In 2004-2005, the recall referendum was met with the deployment of state resources to support the pro-Chávez campaign. See: J. McCoy (2005) and Corrales and Penfold-Becerra (2007)

15. Scholars have identified mass organizations -such as the Bolivarian Circles and the *Movimiento Quinta República* (MVR) at the beginning, and later the ruling *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (PSUV)- as well as distribute the spending on expansive social programs -like the Bolivarian Missions- as key factors contributing to regime durability in Venezuela (Handlin 2016; Hetland 2017). However, beyond these factors lies the critical role of democratic innovations in constructing a resilient and parallel institutional framework that allowed Chavismo to (i) circumvent non-political elite constraints and (ii) mobilize and monitor its electoral base, attempting to consolidate dominance over the political sphere.

16. Chávez announced the communal councils in 2003. The Communal Councils Law was first approved

military officers and the government party created in 2007, to create these local councils. ¹⁷. These innovations spread to more than 30,000 localities with an impact over an estimated 8 million participants by 2009 (Pogrebinschi 2021b, 68), receiving state funding to implement community development projects (Garc a-Guadilla 2008; Wilde 2017). On paper, these communal councils were intended to amplify political participation, promote decentralization, and enhance government responsiveness to citizens' demands. More concretely, the Chavismo regime encouraged citizen engagement through the creation, formal recognition, and state funding of local assemblies, strategically employed to reshape state-society dynamics and address the flaws in traditional representative institutions.

In practice, however, this innovation deviated from its intended goal in two meaningful ways. First, the communal councils were a state-controlled program in a vertical relationship between local groups and the national government that restricted their intended autonomy and made them dependent on the state's allocation of financial resources. Scholars have documented that the consejos enabled corruption, sporadic citizen participation, and frustrations with the state bureaucracy (Wilde 2017). Second, the communal councils' program was a state-managed model of participatory democracy designed (i) to manage, co-opt, and, if needed, suppress civil society and (ii) to create a network of state patronage that complemented and reinforced the functions of the government party PSUV.

While ostensibly designed to empower citizens and foster democratic values, these initiatives were swiftly coopted by Chavista leaders, who framed them as integral components of the Bolivarian revolution. These innovations became closely affiliated with the ruling party, engaging in partisan activities such as PSUV membership drives, voter mobilization, and political rallies. All in all, the PSUV capitalized on political brokers within these communal councils to co-opt and instrumentalize them for partisan ends (Handlin 2016).

in 2006, ratified in 2009, and later modified in 2012. It is noteworthy that Chavismo tried to amend the Constitution to include the "popular power" as a fifth branch of the state, but this initiative was rejected in a national referendum.

17. See: L pez Maya (2023)

7 Discussion

From a normative perspective, innovations in Latin America have been seen as a way in which the political system may include large sectors of the population; the impact of innovations in the overall development of the democratic process in Latin America appears to be limited to certain areas. After the evidence presented here, it seems that innovations' impact on the quality of democracy may be hindered by strong presidents; this may seem possible because of three main reasons: first, all of the case of studies across the Latin American geography are presidential; second, presidential power vis-a-vis civil society interact in an asymmetrical relationship; and third, it is the most relatively free of interference with government action and policy implementation, deliberation do not imply citizen will have an actual influence in the outcome but still is an open channel where elected officials and society have a debate regarding policy preferences and needs. It is a conundrum to find that innovations, when compared with other factors like presidentialism and economic development, do not have enough influence on the quality of democracy. They do not act in a vacuum, as they require a significant amount of coordination, especially if they are born out of the initiative of civil society.

The results here show that they may act in intersection with presidentialism to either harm or improve democracy. In figure 8, the interaction between innovation and presidentialism shows mixed effects on electoral democratic quality. On one hand, there is a small but positive effect between the intersection of low levels of presidentialism with innovations, meaning that a not-too-powerful president may make use of democratic innovations in order to improve democracy overall. On the other hand, and running contrary to low levels of presidentialism, the intersection between medium and high levels of presidentialism has a slight negative effect, which may imply that presidents in need to renew their mandates will employ innovations as a way to control and reduce the fairness and competitiveness of elections (Thompson 2021; Cleary and Öztürk 2022; Mettler et al. 2022). The results are interesting in the sense that the interaction only rendered significant in the dimension of

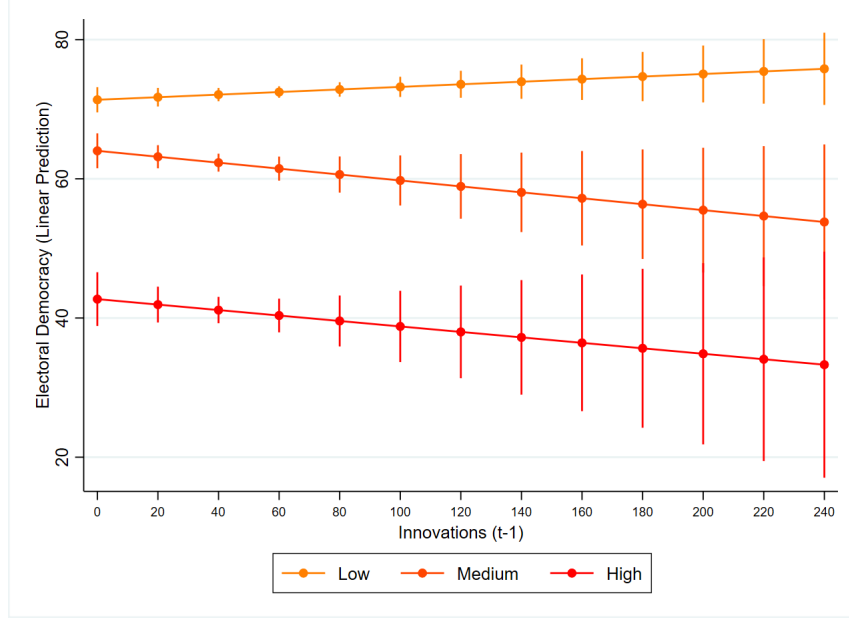


Figure 8: Average marginal effects of political innovations on electoral democracy by the level of presidentialism in Latin America.

democracy that may put an end to the tenure in power of presidents. Following this logic and acting rationally, presidents, especially those with medium to high power, will want to stay in power, making use of any tool necessary, and innovations come in handy as a need to control the electoral process without interfering directly in the electoral process.

This also poses the question of whether innovations need to be supported by the government at any level in order to be possible to affect the overall development of the democratic process in a given country. What is clear from these results is that presidents with enough power may distort the intended purpose of innovation to their advantage, especially in the electoral arena, which is the one that matters because it represents the continuation in office. In this sense, is that we claim there is partial support for hypothesis H2, as innovations are not something that comes entirely from the civil society nor the government but can be a channel to hear grievances and supply demands from the population, especially during electoral years where through clientelism and campaign, incumbents would have the incentive to gather popular favor in order to remain in office.

8 Conclusions and Future Research

While this research showed limited support for the overall improvement of democracy and its basic dimensions so far, this is an early attempt to assess the effect of innovation in a political system. The scope of this study has been limited to the main macro-level dimensions of democracy, and there is little to no effect of innovations when compared vis-à-vis other proven determinants of democratization and autocratization like presidentialism, mass mobilization, and economic development. Presidentialism in Latin America is very important, not only because it is the form of government but the historical roots of the independence and the birth of the republic where *caudillos* ruled almost unchecked. It is not surprising that presidentialism in Latin America is one of the main drivers of autocratization processes as they want to remain in power and extra-limit their powers.

While expected to have a major political impact and open channels for citizens' participation in new and different ways that before were not possible, it seems that this does not translate directly into an improvement of democratic quality, at least at the macro level, maybe their possible venues for improvement at the meso or individual levels of the political process in particular countries. While this innovation may be introduced by national governments, it can be used to affect the electoral process in order to favor reelection, as presidents will have the rational incentive to remain in power, thus harming the fairness and competitiveness of elections.

8.1 Future Research

This research opens the compass for future developments regarding innovations and their effect on political systems, as this is a relatively new feature studied in comparative politics. The first thing we should grasp is the types and sub-types of innovations, not studied in depth here, as there are 20 that fall under the four types of innovations (deliberation, citizen representation, digital engagement, and direct voting); maybe there is one sub-type that is more effective in improving democratic quality than others. There are also a plethora of characteristics in the LATINNO project dataset not included in this study, like the geographical

scope, level of government involved, if any, the initiator of the innovations, and also if the private sector in tandem with civil society organizations is involved. In the intersection with public policy, the cycles of public policy, these innovations may affect one particular phase of it or the overall process; it will be interesting to analyze which area is more important for democracy and if there is a link between them (Pogrebinschi [2021a](#)).

More related to democratic processes, it will be interesting if these political innovations may be responsible for the onset of democratization and autocratization processes, as they are intended to create novel channels for participation, like mobilizations, it may be used in favor or against democracy, but more broadly, if they can be initiators for episodes of democratic or autocratic transition.

While the Latin American countries are presidential republics, there is a plethora of institutional arrangements that escape the goal of this paper and can be explored further. For instance, the level of federalism and decentralization a given country may provide a more feasible terrain for the onset of innovations as we seen in Latin America, there are stark differences in the number of innovations implemented from country to country (Willis et al. [1999](#); González [2008](#)).

Moving far from the institutional and country levels, it will be interesting to think about the potential influences of innovations at the individual level. If by participating in them or at least being in contact with them can be a potential source of trust in democracy in their polities. Especially in Latin America, a region that is characterized by the varied trust in democracy demonstrated by citizens over time (Corporación Latinobarómetro [2023](#)).

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Appendixes

A Models of Political Innovations in Latin America and their effect on Democratic Quality

Table 1: Cross-time fixed effects models of the effect of innovations on different dimensions of democracy in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Dimensions of Democracy</i>				
	(1) Electoral	(2) Participatory	(3) Deliberative	(4) Liberal	(5) Egalitarian
Innovations	0.034* (0.015)	0.017 (0.011)	0.010 (0.018)	0.020 (0.015)	0.002 (0.011)
Presidentialism	-14.472** (0.598)	-9.600** (0.460)	-14.830** (0.742)	-17.090** (0.606)	-8.978** (0.433)
Mass Mobilization	-0.019** (0.004)	-0.009** (0.003)	-0.024** (0.005)	-0.011** (0.004)	-0.012** (0.003)
<i>Constitutional Changes</i>					
Amendment (1,0)	0.366 (0.752)	0.768 (0.578)	1.004 (0.933)	0.682 (0.762)	0.752 (0.544)
New Constitution (1,0)	-0.661 (1.704)	0.905 (1.310)	-1.987 (2.113)	-0.774 (1.725)	-1.404 (1.232)
<i>Ideology</i>					
Left (1,0)	-3.124** (1.112)	-1.657+ (0.855)	-3.861** (1.379)	-1.917+ (1.126)	-0.082 (0.804)
Right (1,0)	-2.957** (1.027)	-2.259** (0.789)	-3.457** (1.274)	-1.521 (1.040)	-1.084 (0.743)
Election (1,0)	-0.003 (0.583)	0.045 (0.448)	-0.084 (0.723)	-0.086 (0.590)	-0.013 (0.421)
Coup (1,0)	-2.183 (1.951)	-0.439 (1.499)	0.620 (2.419)	0.711 (1.975)	-1.328 (1.411)
GDP per capita	1.300** (0.150)	0.789** (0.115)	1.448** (0.186)	1.020** (0.151)	1.043** (0.108)
Constant	66.734** (1.948)	43.039** (1.497)	51.845** (2.416)	52.429** (1.972)	38.791** (1.409)
Time FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Country FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	538	538	538	538	538
Countries	18	18	18	18	18
F-test	24.122***	18.661***	17.929***	26.534***	19.678***
Within R^2	0.668	0.609	0.599	0.689	0.621
Between R^2	0.572	0.494	0.536	0.636	0.467
Overall R^2	0.603	0.520	0.553	0.643	0.470
Panel-level SD (σ_u)	9.378	9.153	12.307	11.881	14.467
SD of Errors (σ_u)	5.816	4.469	7.211	5.886	4.206
ρ	0.722	0.807	0.744	0.803	0.922

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2: Cross-time fixed effects models of the effect of innovation types on different dimensions of democracy in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Dimensions of Democracy</i>				
	(6) Electoral	(7) Participatory	(8) Deliberative	(9) Liberal	(10) Egalitarian
Deliberation	0.058* (0.029)	0.052* (0.022)	0.175** (0.035)	0.106** (0.029)	0.039+ (0.021)
Direct Voting	-0.461* (0.231)	-0.227 (0.179)	-0.768** (0.278)	-0.399+ (0.233)	-0.314+ (0.168)
Citizen Representation	-0.018 (0.041)	0.021 (0.032)	-0.078 (0.050)	0.013 (0.042)	0.000 (0.030)
E-Participation	0.063 (0.040)	-0.024 (0.031)	-0.117* (0.049)	-0.074+ (0.041)	-0.035 (0.029)
Presidentialism	-14.225** (0.602)	-9.491** (0.465)	-14.424** (0.724)	-16.892** (0.606)	-8.835** (0.436)
Mass Mobilization	-0.019** (0.004)	-0.008** (0.003)	-0.021** (0.005)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.011** (0.003)
<i>Constitutional Changes</i>					
Amendment (1,0)	0.225 (0.748)	0.731 (0.578)	0.785 (0.900)	0.605 (0.754)	0.697 (0.543)
New Constitution (1,0)	-0.543 (1.699)	1.133 (1.313)	-1.311 (2.045)	-0.321 (1.712)	-1.161 (1.232)
<i>Ideology</i>					
Left (1,0)	-3.468** (1.121)	-1.980* (0.866)	-5.308** (1.349)	-2.658* (1.130)	-0.443 (0.813)
Right (1,0)	-3.602** (1.044)	-2.576** (0.806)	-5.035** (1.256)	-2.225* (1.051)	-1.483+ (0.757)
Election (1,0)	0.002 (0.579)	0.047 (0.447)	-0.022 (0.697)	-0.066 (0.583)	-0.011 (0.420)
Coup (1,0)	-2.302 (1.943)	-0.624 (1.501)	-0.338 (2.338)	0.232 (1.958)	-1.521 (1.409)
GDP per capita	1.231** (0.151)	0.762** (0.116)	1.290** (0.181)	0.957** (0.152)	1.008** (0.109)
Constant	67.661** (1.959)	43.319** (1.513)	53.622** (2.358)	53.079** (1.974)	39.190** (1.421)
Time FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Country FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	538	538	538	538	538
Countries	18	18	18	18	18
F-test	22.998***	17.553***	18.911***	25.618***	18.659***
Within R^2	0.675	0.613	0.630	0.698	0.627
Between R^2	0.548	0.479	0.465	0.610	0.435
Overall R^2	0.588	0.510	0.510	0.627	0.445
Panel-level SD (σ_u)	9.634	9.266	13.246	12.127	14.722
SD of Errors (σ_e)	5.774	4.459	6.947	5.817	4.186
ρ	0.736	0.812	0.784	0.813	0.925

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3: Cross-time fixed effects models of the interaction effect of innovations and presidentialism on different dimensions of democracy in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Dimensions of Democracy</i>				
	(11) Electoral	(12) Participatory	(13) Deliberative	(14) Liberal	(15) Egalitarian
Innovations	0.018 (0.014)	0.014 (0.011)	0.004 (0.019)	0.013 (0.015)	0.000 (0.011)
<i>Presidentialism</i>					
Medium	-7.306** (1.144)	-5.278** (0.870)	-10.187** (1.478)	-11.206** (1.175)	-6.418** (0.863)
High	-28.592** (1.830)	-19.949** (1.392)	-30.741** (2.365)	-35.731** (1.879)	-19.445** (1.380)
<i>Interactions</i>					
Medium Presidentialism \times Innovations	-0.061** (0.021)	0.007 (0.016)	-0.015 (0.027)	-0.026 (0.021)	-0.003 (0.016)
High Presidentialism \times Innovations	-0.060+ (0.036)	-0.024 (0.028)	-0.012 (0.047)	-0.008 (0.037)	0.016 (0.027)
Mass Mobilization	-0.017** (0.004)	-0.007* (0.003)	-0.022** (0.005)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.011** (0.003)
<i>Constitutional Changes</i>					
Amendment (1,0)	0.396 (0.711)	0.940+ (0.541)	1.089 (0.920)	0.760 (0.731)	0.798 (0.537)
New Constitution (1,0)	-2.151 (1.624)	-0.087 (1.236)	-2.890 (2.100)	-1.856 (1.668)	-1.798 (1.225)
<i>Ideology</i>					
Left (1,0)	-3.278** (1.061)	-1.368+ (0.807)	-3.799** (1.372)	-1.916+ (1.090)	-0.053 (0.800)
Right (1,0)	-3.409** (0.972)	-2.489** (0.740)	-3.752** (1.256)	-1.912+ (0.998)	-1.267+ (0.733)
Election (1,0)	0.119 (0.550)	0.159 (0.419)	-0.003 (0.711)	0.003 (0.565)	0.016 (0.415)
Coup (1,0)	-2.453 (1.841)	-0.586 (1.401)	0.399 (2.380)	0.405 (1.891)	-1.504 (1.389)
GDP per capita	0.948** (0.153)	0.584** (0.116)	1.247** (0.197)	0.775** (0.157)	0.958** (0.115)
Constant	66.240** (1.840)	42.516** (1.401)	51.354** (2.379)	51.822** (1.890)	38.448** (1.388)
Time FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Country FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	538	538	538	538	538
Countries	18	18	18	18	18
F-test	26.763***	21.677***	17.766***	28.121***	19.423***
R^2 within	0.707	0.661	0.616	0.717	0.636
R^2 between	0.517	0.440	0.517	0.588	0.450
R^2 overall	0.580	0.483	0.541	0.603	0.449
Panel-level SD (σ_u)	9.835	9.778	12.682	12.932	14.862
SD of Errors (σ_e)	5.479	4.169	7.083	5.628	4.133
ρ	0.763	0.846	0.762	0.841	0.928

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 4: Cross-time fixed effects models of the interaction effect of innovations and presidentialism on low-level components of Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Components of EDI</i>			
	(16) Freedom of Expression	(17) Freedom of Association	(18) Clean Elections	(19) Elected Officials
Innovations	0.034* (0.017)	0.052** (0.013)	0.029 (0.020)	0.026 (0.021)
<i>Presidencialism</i>				
Medium	-9.770** (1.356)	-6.314** (1.048)	-5.423** (1.629)	2.139 (1.706)
High	-34.777** (2.170)	-19.850** (1.677)	-22.836** (2.606)	-8.843** (2.730)
<i>Interactions</i>				
Medium Presidentialism \times Innovations	0.012 (0.025)	0.029 (0.019)	-0.138** (0.030)	-0.064* (0.031)
High Presidentialism \times Innovations	0.028 (0.043)	-0.127** (0.033)	-0.124* (0.052)	0.127* (0.054)
Mass Mobilization	-0.017** (0.004)	-0.024** (0.003)	-0.026** (0.005)	0.011+ (0.006)
<i>Constitutional Changes</i>				
Amendment (1,0)	0.940 (0.844)	-0.499 (0.652)	-0.515 (1.013)	-0.695 (1.062)
New Constitution (1,0)	-2.643 (1.926)	0.236 (1.489)	-1.129 (2.313)	-6.591** (2.423)
<i>Ideology</i>				
Left (1,0)	-1.374 (1.258)	-3.258** (0.973)	-4.364** (1.511)	-1.204 (1.583)
Right (1,0)	-1.444 (1.153)	-0.467 (0.891)	-4.676** (1.384)	-1.054 (1.450)
Election (1,0)	-0.044 (0.652)	0.294 (0.504)	-0.031 (0.783)	0.759 (0.821)
Coup (1,0)	0.096 (2.184)	1.817 (1.688)	-1.243 (2.622)	-8.659** (2.747)
GDP per capita	1.013** (0.181)	0.832** (0.140)	1.625** (0.217)	0.071 (0.228)
Constant	79.664** (2.183)	80.312** (1.687)	65.439** (2.621)	99.799** (2.746)
Time FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Country FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	538	538	538	538
Countries	18	18	18	18
F-test	21.954***	24.806***	14.511***	1.672***
R^2 within	0.664	0.691	0.567	0.131
R^2 between	0.563	0.554	0.493	0.097
R^2 overall	0.598	0.606	0.518	0.119
Panel-level SD (σ_u)	7.243	5.803	12.527	2.510
SD of Errors (σ_e)	6.498	5.023	7.803	8.175
ρ	0.554	0.572	0.720	0.086

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 5: Cross-time fixed effects models of the interaction effect of innovations and presidentialism on mid-level components of democracy in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Mid-Level Components of Democracy</i>				
	(20) Electoral	(21) Participatory	(22) Deliberative	(23) Liberal	(24) Egalitarian
Innovations	0.039* (0.016)	0.032** (0.010)	0.036 (0.024)	0.005 (0.011)	0.027+ (0.014)
<i>Presidencialism</i>					
Medium	-14.718** (1.270)	-2.325** (0.838)	-12.230** (1.933)	-4.675** (0.856)	-4.902** (1.104)
High	-43.298** (2.032)	-8.234** (1.340)	-29.863** (3.093)	-10.020** (1.370)	-23.190** (1.767)
<i>Interactions</i>					
Medium Presidentialism \times Innovations	0.046* (0.023)	0.105** (0.015)	0.076* (0.035)	0.065** (0.016)	-0.074** (0.020)
High Presidentialism \times Innovations	0.045 (0.040)	0.031 (0.027)	0.011 (0.061)	0.117** (0.027)	-0.080* (0.035)
Mass Mobilization	-0.004 (0.004)	0.002 (0.003)	-0.031** (0.006)	-0.008** (0.003)	-0.016** (0.004)
<i>Constitutional Changes</i>					
Amendment (1,0)	0.741 (0.790)	1.180* (0.521)	1.326 (1.203)	0.884+ (0.533)	0.107 (0.687)
New Constitution (1,0)	-1.609 (1.804)	1.847 (1.190)	-3.894 (2.745)	-2.018+ (1.216)	-2.327 (1.568)
<i>Ideology</i>					
Left (1,0)	-0.622 (1.178)	0.633 (0.777)	-4.814** (1.793)	2.474** (0.794)	-3.429** (1.025)
Right (1,0)	0.598 (1.079)	-0.745 (0.712)	-3.673* (1.643)	0.506 (0.728)	-3.241** (0.939)
Election (1,0)	-0.063 (0.611)	0.251 (0.403)	-0.168 (0.930)	-0.131 (0.412)	0.241 (0.531)
Coup (1,0)	3.691+ (2.045)	1.481 (1.349)	3.395 (3.112)	-2.119 (1.378)	-4.554* (1.778)
GDP per capita	0.669** (0.169)	0.232* (0.112)	1.807** (0.258)	0.980** (0.114)	0.931** (0.147)
Constant	70.176** (2.044)	54.694** (1.348)	68.608** (3.111)	44.812** (1.378)	72.232** (1.777)
Time FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Country FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	538	538	538	538	538
F	29.809***	7.490***	12.699***	7.434***	22.991***
R^2 within	0.729	0.403	0.534	0.401	0.675
R^2 between	0.717	0.190	0.526	0.468	0.520
R^2 overall	0.712	0.257	0.524	0.421	0.577
Panel-level SD (Σ_u)	9.657	6.541	10.392	15.650	8.470
SD of Errors (Σ_e)	6.085	4.013	9.261	4.102	5.291
ρ	0.716	0.726	0.557	0.936	0.719

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 6: Cross-time fixed effects models of the interaction effect of innovations and presidentialism on Legislative and Judicial Constraints on the Executive in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Horizontal Accountability</i>	
	(25) Legislative Constraints	(26) Judicial Constraints
Innovations	0.009 (0.023)	0.053** (0.020)
<i>Presidencialism</i>		
Medium	-20.160** (1.846)	-16.103** (1.602)
High	-55.510** (2.954)	-52.740** (2.563)
<i>Interactions</i>		
Medium Presidentialism \times Innovations	-20.160** (1.846)	-16.103** (1.602)
High Presidentialism \times Innovations	-55.510** (2.954)	-52.740** (2.563)
Mass Mobilization	-0.003 (0.006)	0.006 (0.005)
<i>Constitutional Changes</i>		
Amendment (1,0)	0.472 (1.149)	1.126 (0.997)
New Constitution (1,0)	-1.333 (2.622)	-1.939 (2.275)
<i>Ideology</i>		
Left (1,0)	-1.759 (1.713)	1.371 (1.487)
Right (1,0)	3.214* (1.569)	-0.088 (1.362)
Election (1,0)	0.189 (0.888)	-0.035 (0.771)
Coup (1,0)	9.258** (2.973)	3.437 (2.580)
GDP per capita	0.232 (0.246)	0.659** (0.214)
Constant	73.627** (2.971)	70.020** (2.578)
Time FE	Y	Y
Country FE	Y	Y
N	538	538
Countries	18	18
F-test	26.216***	24.534***
R^2 within	0.703	0.689
R^2 between	0.503	0.805
R^2 overall	0.561	0.744
Panel-level SD (Σ_u)	16.669	12.338
SD of Errors (Σ_e)	8.846	7.676
ρ	0.780	0.721

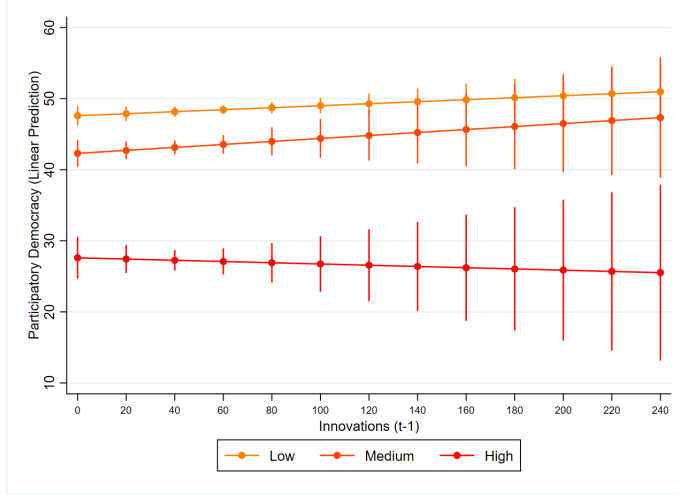
Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 7: Cross-time fixed effects models of the interaction effect of innovations and presidentialism on accountability index and its low-level components in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

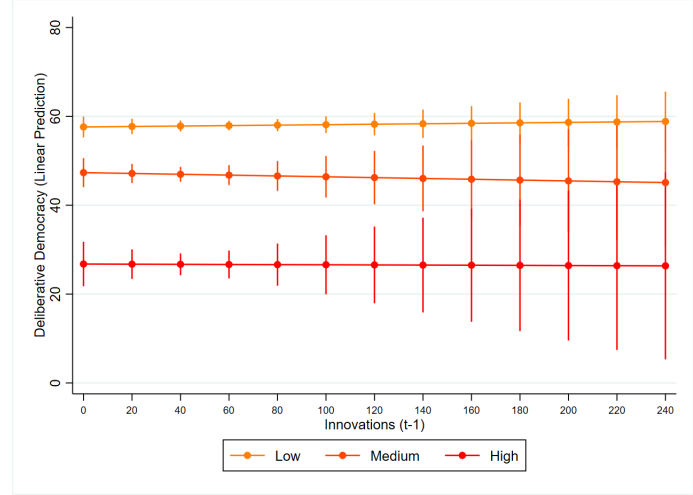
<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Accountability</i>			
	(27) Accountability Index	(28) Vertical Accountability	(29) Diagonal Accountability	(30) Horizontal Accountability
Innovations	0.089* (0.043)	0.072* (0.033)	0.119* (0.050)	0.025 (0.071)
<i>Presidencialism</i>				
Medium	-30.098** (3.406)	-15.353** (2.655)	-29.069** (4.023)	-50.846** (5.647)
High	-93.653** (5.449)	-48.961** (4.248)	-86.154** (6.437)	-165.045** (9.035)
<i>Interactions</i>				
Medium Presidentialism \times Innovations	-0.041 (0.062)	-0.215** (0.048)	0.101 (0.073)	0.112 (0.102)
High Presidentialism \times Innovations	-0.195 ⁺ (0.108)	-0.168* (0.084)	-0.240 ⁺ (0.128)	-0.074 (0.180)
Mass Mobilization	-0.048** (0.011)	-0.035** (0.009)	-0.062** (0.013)	-0.004 (0.019)
<i>Constitutional Changes</i>				
Amendment (1,0)	1.612 (2.119)	-0.866 (1.652)	3.613 (2.503)	4.575 (3.513)
New Constitution (1,0)	-3.590 (4.837)	-2.913 (3.771)	-3.621 (5.714)	-1.845 (8.020)
<i>Ideology</i>				
Left (1,0)	-8.709** (3.160)	-5.930* (2.463)	-12.379** (3.733)	-5.378 (5.240)
Right (1,0)	-4.505 (2.895)	-4.657* (2.257)	-9.262** (3.420)	7.772 (4.800)
Election (1,0)	0.657 (1.638)	0.420 (1.277)	0.779 (1.935)	0.155 (2.716)
Coup (1,0)	9.455 ⁺ (5.484)	2.647 (4.275)	6.940 (6.478)	27.579** (9.092)
GDP per capita	3.263** (0.454)	3.517** (0.354)	2.616** (0.537)	1.180 (0.754)
Constant	99.297** (5.481)	94.741** (4.273)	104.120** (6.475)	70.488** (9.088)
Time FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Country FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	538	538	538	538
Countries	18	18	18	18
F-test	30.337***	20.046***	21.873***	23.800***
R^2 within	0.732	0.644	0.663	0.682
R^2 between	0.623	0.612	0.451	0.568
R^2 overall	0.656	0.622	0.528	0.588
Panel-level SD (Σ_u)	28.676	21.429	31.707	49.878
SD of Errors (Σ_e)	16.318	12.721	19.277	27.056
ρ	0.755	0.739	0.730	0.773

Note: ⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.01$.

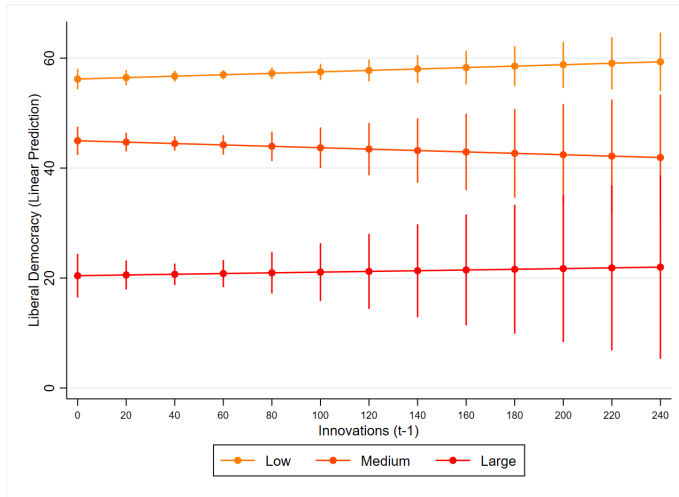
B Average Effect of Political Innovations by Presidentialism Level on Democratic Quality in Latin America



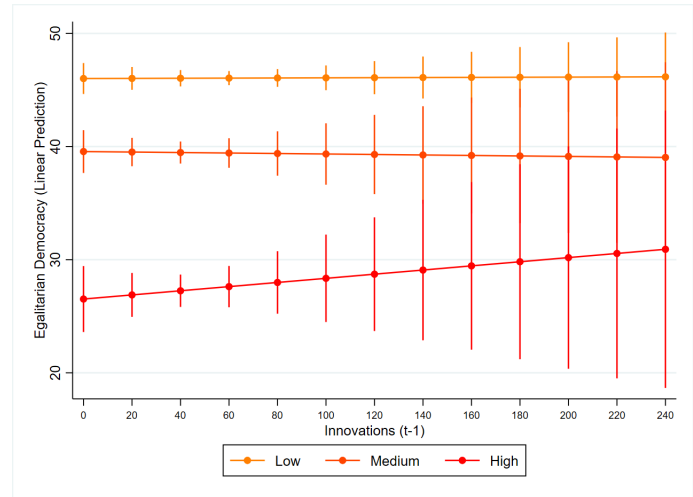
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Figure 9: Interaction effects between innovations and presidentialism on quality of democracy by dimension: (a) Participatory; (b) Deliberative; (c) Liberal; and (d) Egalitarian.

Table 8: Cross-time fixed effects models of the interaction effect of innovations and presidentialism on components of clean election index in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

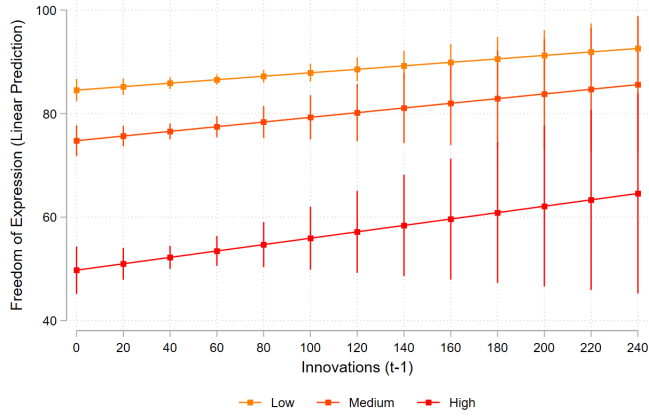
<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Clean Elections</i>			
	(31)	(32)	(33)	(34)
	EMB Autonomy	EMB Capacity	Election Voting Registry	Election Vote Buying
Innovations	0.299** (0.094)	0.266** (0.067)	-0.260* (0.114)	-0.322** (0.085)
<i>Presidentialism</i>				
Medium	-50.943** (7.523)	-11.029* (5.341)	6.257 (9.065)	14.182* (6.761)
High	-135.163** (12.037)	-45.619** (8.545)	-86.502** (14.504)	-8.283 (10.818)
<i>Interactions</i>				
Medium Presidentialism \times Innovations	-0.191 (0.136)	-0.238* (0.097)	-0.745** (0.164)	-0.597** (0.123)
High Presidentialism \times Innovations	-0.226 (0.239)	-0.131 (0.170)	0.240 (0.288)	-0.736** (0.215)
Mass Mobilization	-0.089** (0.025)	-0.029 (0.018)	-0.130** (0.030)	-0.008 (0.022)
<i>Constitutional Changes</i>				
Amendment (1,0)	-3.825 (4.681)	-1.327 (3.323)	2.657 (5.640)	-5.666 (4.207)
New Constitution (1,0)	-7.576 (10.684)	-3.863 (7.585)	-12.390 (12.874)	3.102 (9.602)
<i>Ideology</i>				
Left (1,0)	-10.589 (6.980)	-3.059 (4.955)	-35.678** (8.411)	22.798** (6.273)
Right (1,0)	-1.101 (6.394)	-5.499 (4.539)	-29.315** (7.705)	20.498** (5.747)
Election (1,0)	-1.273 (3.619)	0.199 (2.569)	1.907 (4.360)	3.307 (3.252)
Coup (1,0)	21.932+ (12.112)	2.425 (8.599)	-17.033 (14.595)	10.856 (10.886)
GDP per capita	6.902** (1.004)	4.139** (0.713)	6.413** (1.210)	2.618** (0.902)
Constant	141.744** (12.107)	93.054** (8.595)	81.644** (14.589)	-74.058** (10.881)
Time FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Country FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	538	538	538	538
Countries	18	18	18	18
R^2 within	0.577	0.391	0.354	0.211
R^2 between	0.638	0.420	0.395	0.140
R^2 overall	0.615	0.408	0.376	0.125
Panel-level SD ($\Sigma_{\mathcal{U}}$)	62.508	49.791	61.583	106.697
SD of Errors ($\Sigma_{\mathcal{E}}$)	36.044	25.589	43.432	32.395
ρ	0.750	0.791	0.668	0.916

Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.01$.

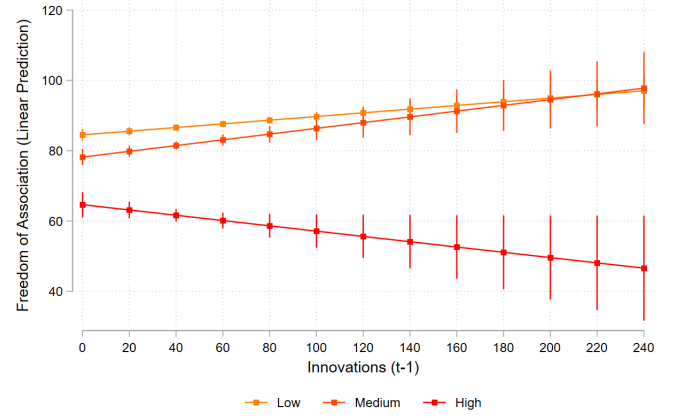
Table 9: Cross-time fixed effects models of the interaction effect of innovations and presidentialism on components of clean election index in Latin America from 1990 to 2021.

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Clean Elections</i>			
	(35) Election Other Voting Irregularities	(36) Election Gov't Intimidation	(37) Election Other Electoral Violence	(38) Election Free and Fair
Innovations	0.398** (0.096)	-0.403** (0.115)	-0.352* (0.137)	0.407** (0.103)
<i>Presidentialism</i>				
Medium	-19.805* (7.659)	-39.940** (9.173)	-27.876* (10.891)	-20.395* (8.214)
High	-87.529** (12.255)	-129.702** (14.677)	-100.368** (17.424)	-83.631** (13.142)
<i>Interactions</i>				
Medium Presidentialism \times Innovations	-0.140 (0.139)	-1.220** (0.166)	-0.656** (0.197)	-0.604** (0.149)
High Presidentialism \times Innovations	0.183 (0.244)	-1.016** (0.292)	0.245 (0.346)	-0.398 (0.261)
Mass Mobilization	-0.023 (0.025)	-0.084** (0.030)	-0.158** (0.036)	-0.078** (0.027)
<i>Constitutional Changes</i>				
Amendment (1,0)	0.449 (4.765)	-1.722 (5.707)	-1.824 (6.776)	0.858 (5.110)
New Constitution (1,0)	-5.604 (10.878)	-6.642 (13.028)	-16.855 (15.467)	-8.926 (11.666)
<i>Ideology</i>				
Left (1,0)	-14.945* (7.107)	-5.421 (8.511)	-3.478 (10.104)	-14.729+ (7.621)
Right (1,0)	-10.865+ (6.510)	-12.438 (7.796)	-5.535 (9.256)	-20.165** (6.981)
Election (1,0)	1.176 (3.684)	-1.278 (4.412)	-7.731 (5.238)	3.715 (3.951)
Coup (1,0)	7.959 (12.332)	6.276 (14.769)	-0.472 (17.534)	-3.911 (13.225)
GDP per capita	10.116** (1.022)	7.224** (1.224)	5.628** (1.453)	10.896** (1.096)
Constant	-13.488 (12.327)	90.516** (14.763)	28.829 (17.526)	51.240** (13.219)
Time FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Country FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	538	538	538	538
Countries	18	18	18	18
R^2 within	0.449	0.545	0.269	0.521
R^2 between	0.372	0.531	0.235	0.565
R^2 overall	0.390	0.537	0.234	0.551
Panel-level SD (Σ_u)	73.459	54.661	106.220	54.450
SD of Errors (Σ_e)	36.697	43.950	52.177	39.354
ρ	0.800	0.607	0.806	0.657

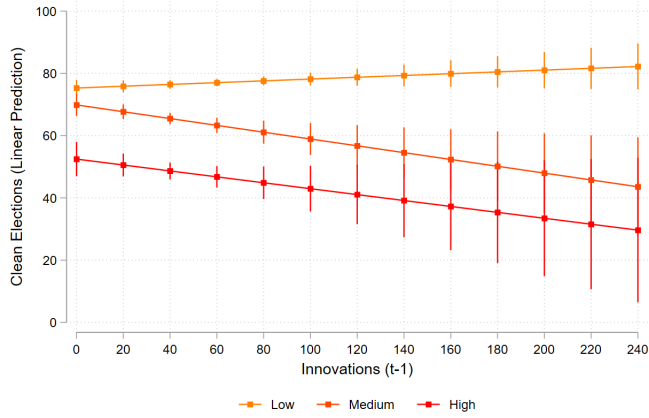
Note: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.01$.



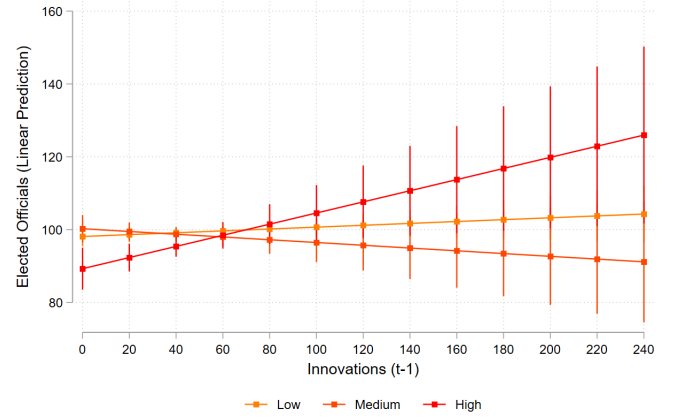
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Figure 10: Interaction effects between innovations and presidentialism on low-level components of Electoral Democracy Index (EDI): (a) Freedom of Expression; (b) Freedom of Association; (c) Clean Elections; and (d) Elected Officials.