



SPECIAL REPORT

The protests are here to stay: Social change and mobilisation of citizens in Latin America

Madrid, october 2013

d+i LLORENTE & CUENCA

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LLORENTE & CUENCA

1. INTRODUCTION

Chile hit the world headlines in 2006 and 2011 with student protests that put in a tight spot both centre-left governments such as that headed by Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010) and centre-right executives such as that headed by Sebastián Piñera (2010-2014).

The saucepan-bashing demonstrators took the streets of Buenos Aires in 2012 and in 2013 it was Dilma Rousseff's Brazil's turn. Just when the country was celebrating the FIFA Confederations Cup, a prelude to the World Cup 2014, there was a wave of protests in the principal cities of the country. And the protests in Sao Paulo, Río de Janeiro and Brasilia had scarcely ended when the streets of Lima were also filled with demonstrators protesting against Ollanta Humala's government.

The question that comes to mind is whether Latin America is entering an era marked by the turmoil of urban protests and social demands. The seeds of such phenomena have already been experienced in other countries such as Uruguay and Costa Rica and similar situations are expected to arise sooner rather than later in Mexico and Colombia.

These social protests in Chile, Brazil and Peru have a number of very special features, unprecedented in the region. They occur in a triple context of:

- Economic growth (not crisis, as in other times in the history of these countries or the current situation in Europe),
- Social change (emergence of heterogeneous urban middle classes) and
- Situation of clear dissatisfaction with the inefficient functioning of the State, the public administrations and delegitimation of the parties and political class.

This report characterises these protest movements, studies their local dynamics in each country and makes a prospective analysis: where are they going and what effect could they have in the short term.

“In the past, these waves of protests occurred at times of crisis and accumulated political and socioeconomic tensions”

2. COMMON FEATURES OF THE PROTEST MOVEMENTS

The participants in these movements, which have spread throughout Latin America, are from the new emerging classes, especially the urban middle classes and younger strata of the population. At first sight at least, there is no clear leadership and they are pragmatic movements (seeking specific improvements, rather than political utopias) although there is a certain presence of radical or ultra-left groups (such as the Communist Party in the student protests in Chile). Moreover, naturally, the new social networks (Facebook and Twitter) play a decisive role in their origin and development and almost certainly in their prolongation over time.

So all these movements have three basic features in common, which can be summed up saying that the economic situation prevailing in the region as from 2003 produced a social change that has had serious, direct political repercussions:

They occur in situations of economic stability

The first characteristic of all these movements is an unprecedented phenomenon. They take place in a situation of economic stability and even relative prosperity, with economic growth of over 4%.

That same continuous, constant growth of the GDP in the region is behind many of the social changes that have happened (reduction of poverty and inequality and a significant growth of the middle classes) and which are related with the current protests.

In the past, these waves of protests occurred at times of crisis and accumulated political and socioeconomic tensions. For example, the closest in time were the protests in the late nineties and beginning of the following decade, which brought down the governments of Raúl Cubas (1999) on Paraguay, Fernando de la Rúa (2001) in Argentina, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (2003) in Bolivia and Lucio Gutiérrez (2005) in Ecuador, among others. All these governments collapsed following massive citizen protests (then called “golpes de calle” [street uprisings] –massive demonstrations that brought

GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IN LATIN AMERICA

Country	2010	2011	2012	2013*
Argentina	9.2	8.9	1.9	3.5
Bolivia	4.1	5.2	5.2	5.5
Brazil	6.9	2.7	0.9	2.5
Chile	5.8	5.9	5.6	4.6
Colombia	4.0	6.6	4.0	4.0
Costa Rica	5.0	4.4	5.1	3.0
Cuba	2.4	2.8	3.0	3.0
Ecuador	2.8	7.4	5.0	3.8
El Salvador	1.4	2.0	1.6	2.0
Guatemala	2.9	4.2	3.0	3.0
Haiti	-5.4	5.6	2.8	3.5
Honduras	3.7	3.7	3.3	3.0
Mexico	5.3	3.9	3.9	2.8
Nicaragua	3.6	5.4	5.2	5.0
Panama	7.5	10.8	10.7	7.5
Paraguay	13.1	4.3	-1.2	12.5
Peru	8.8	6.9	6.3	5.9
Dominican Republic	7.8	4.5	3.9	3.0
Uruguay	8.9	6.5	3.9	3.8
Venezuela	-1.5	4.2	5.6	1.0
Sub-total Latin America	5.7	4.4	3.0	3.0

“The underlying cause of the current social unrest is not economic (as in the eighties or between 1997 and 2003), but rather political and social”

about the downfall of those governments—) and occurred in that economically adverse five-year period called the Lost Half Decade between 1997 and 2002 (which witnessed the fall of the Ecuador governments of Abdalá Bucaram in 1997 and Jamil Mahuad in 2000).

Now, however, the economic growth figures of Latin American countries are not only high, but moreover consolidated since 2003, with the sole exception of 2009. The region got over the world crisis without any great difficulty.

Therefore, the underlying cause of the current social unrest is not economic (as in the eighties or between 1997 and 2003), but rather political and social, although the effects of economic growth have been a very important variable in triggering transformations of that nature.

Led by emerging middle classes

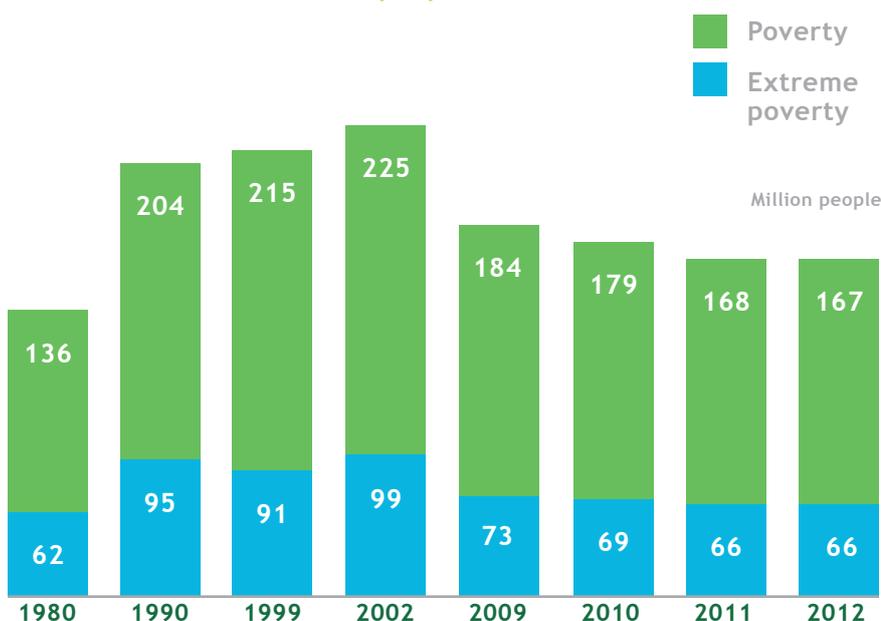
As mentioned earlier, these demonstrations were led mainly by the emerging and consolidated urban middle classes in Latin America.

These ten years of high, continuous growth in the region accompanied by social policies, especially conditioned transfers, have brought a significant reduction of poverty (from 225 to 167 million people between 2002 and 2012) and extreme poverty (from 99 to 66 million).

According to figures published by the World Bank, “the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita on the continent rose at an average rate of 2.2% p.a. between 2000 and 2010. In six countries (including Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Panama and Peru), the annual growth rates of over 3% per capita were produced during this period... The combination of sustained growth (albeit far from spectacular) and the reduction of inequality led to a considerable lowering of the absolute poverty figures. The rate of moderate poverty in Latin America was lowered from 44.4% in 2000 to 28% in 2010, in spite of the global financial crisis in

POVERTY IN LATIN AMERICA

Poverty continues to fall in the region, but still affects 167 million people



Source: Cepal y AFP

“The World Bank defines the Latin American middle classes as ‘urban, with better education levels, mostly employees in the private sector and with beliefs and opinions which, in general, coincide with those of their poorer and less educated compatriots’”

the last two years of the decade (World Bank, 2011). This reduction of poverty meant that there were 50 million fewer Latin Americans living in poverty in 2010 than 10 years earlier. If compared with 2003, the reduction in absolute figures is even greater: 75 million.”

75 million people who have moved out of poverty to join the different strata of middle classes (heterogeneous and highly diversified), which have grown and over the same years.

As pointed out by the World Bank, “After decades of stagnation, the middle class population in Latin America and the Caribbean has grown by 50% from 103 million people in 2003 to 152 million (or 30% of the population of the continent) in 2009. During this period, as household income grew and inequality tended to diminish in most countries, the percentage of poor population fell considerably, from 44% to 30%. Consequently, the percentages of middle class population and poor people in Latin America are currently equal. This situation contrasts with the situation prevailing (for a long time) up to almost 10 years ago, when the percentage of poor population was equivalent to approximately 2.5 times that of the middle class.”

There are at the same time marked differences and close parallel in the mass student protests in Chile in 2011, the saucepan-bashing protests in Buenos Aires in 2012 and the protests against the increase

in public transport in Brazil in 2013. That heterogeneous urban middle class we are describing is strongly present in all of them. The Brazilian example is significant in this regard, since around thirty-five million Brazilians have moved out of poverty since 2003. Whereas in the 1990s up to 25% of the Brazilian population lived in extreme poverty, that number was reduced to 2.2% by 2009.

But what do we understand by middle class?

There is no consensus in the academic world of what is understood by middle classes, since the definitions given from the points of view of sociology (a lifestyle), psychology and economy (income brackets ranging from 10 to 50 dollars a day per capita) do not always coincide. The World Bank defines the Latin American middle classes as ‘urban, with better education levels, mostly employees in the private sector having beliefs and opinions which generally coincide with those of their poorer and less educated compatriots’.

This segment of population is now the most important link in the regional economy owing to its purchasing power and many experts consider that its sudden appearance is the greatest social change in the history of the region since the migrations from country to city in the fifties and sixties. But it is a very heterogeneous middle class, as shown in the following graph. It includes sectors half way between poverty and the middle class (those with incomes

“The World Bank has warned of the growing unrest of the middle classes over the fact that ‘the middle classes are increasingly required to pay for services which are provided free for others’”

of 4-10 dollars a day) and within the middle class itself there is a broad spread between the lowest incomes (10 dollars a day) and the highest incomes, which do not fall far short of the lower end of the elite (50 dollars a day).

This appearance and growth of the middle classes contributes towards the shaping of more modern, but also more complex societies. The Secretary General of SEGIB, Enrique Iglesias, has been warning about this for some time: “We are going to have a new society of middle classes. We are already seeing evidence of this. Societies of middle classes that are difficult to govern. Certain of their features require a change in the way we do politics; they are middle societies which demand new services, new ways of participating and good quality services; this is the case of education.”

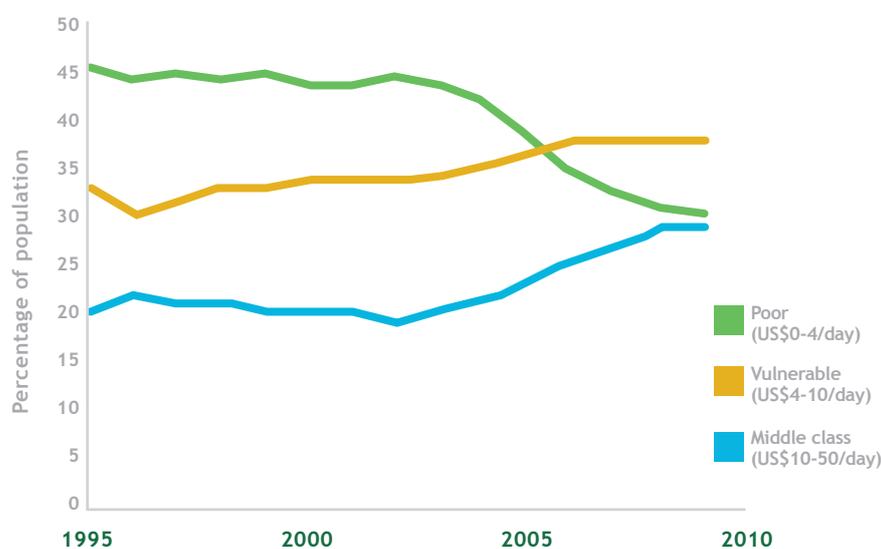
That complexity mentioned by Iglesias arises because the middle classes feel left out of a system that does not take them into account or provide any solutions to their most urgent claims. Andas mentioned in the World Bank report, the governments are running up a double deficit in respect of the demands of the middle classes:

They do not incorporate “*the objective of equal opportunities, especially in public policies.* This is fundamental to ensure that the middle classes feel that they live in a society in which it is worth making an effort and where merits are rewarded, instead of a society that favours the privileged groups.”

The World Bank has warned of the growing unrest of the middle classes over the fact that ‘the middle classes are increasingly required to pay for services which are provided free for others. A system of dual social protection based on selective assistance for the poor and on insurance (subsidised) for the middle classes might also be inadequately adapted for a large, vulnerable population that is neither poor nor middle class and whose vulnerability will increase if the external environment becomes less favourable than in the past.’

The World Bank also reveals that the public policies have so far not been capable of putting an end to “*the vicious circle of low taxes and poor quality public services which leads the middle and high classes to opt out.*”

TRENDS IN THE MIDDLE CLASSES, VULNERABILITY AND POVERTY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, 1995-2009



Source: World Bank

“The great paradox of these protest movements is, therefore, that they occur in economically successful countries with modernised societies”

Growing political dissatisfaction among citizens

The great paradox of these protest movements is, therefore, that they occur in economically successful countries with modernised societies (the middle classes have grown and poverty and even inequality have been reduced).

“Prosperity cannot buy stability”, –according to the analyst and writer Moisés Naím—. “The greatest surprise of these street protests is that they take place in economically successful countries... Brazil has not only moved millions of people out of poverty, but has even managed to reduce its inequality. In all those countries the middle class is now larger than ever.”

Those economic and social changes are not being channelled by the political system, which has been incapable of adapting to the new circumstances; it still acts in the same way as in the eighties, when democracy returned to the region. There is a growing rift between the State and those middle classes. The World Bank concludes that “The middle classes will not participate in or contribute to an improved social contract if the assets they value so highly (such as protection of civil rights, education, police and the health services) are inadequately provided by the State and if they don’t perceive that the rich are contributing fairly to the social contract.”

This explains the widespread expressions of discontent that

have occurred in Chile, Brazil and Peru, since, being unable to channel their unrest through the political system, all these emerging social sectors have taken it to the streets. The writer Moisés Naím has highlighted the parallel between all these movements and their common political roots: they begin with small incidents which start to grow, the governments react inadequately (with repression, reproach or merely ignoring the protests) and this further fuels the discontent of these social sectors, which have no clear leaders.

Therefore, the political system does not appear to be capable of dealing with the demands of those middle classes, which themselves embody a social but also political change, as stressed by the secretary general of SEGIB, Enrique Iglesias: “A middle class that is practically dominating the world. The figures vary, but almost certainly 50% of the population in Latin American countries are middle class. That is an important phenomenon which must be administered politically, and this task entails a new way of doing politics.”

The political systems have proved themselves inefficient (they do not provide solutions or answers to the social demands for better public services) and do not arouse citizen support, for several reasons:

- **Inefficient State faced with a revolution of expectations**

What these governments actually face is a revolution

“What these governments actually face is a revolution of expectations which they have so far been unable to channel or organise”

of expectations which they have so far been unable to channel or organise: the emerging sectors have moved on to a new stage and they want and demand, above all, more and better public services.

According to Moisés Naím: “In societies going through rapid transformation, the demand for public services grows faster than the governments are able to meet it. This causes a rift that brings people out onto the streets to protest against the government and fuels other highly justified protests: the prohibitive cost of higher education in Chile, or the impunity of corrupt politicians in Brazil.”

As a result of this revolution of unchannelled expectations and consequent unrest, certain governments have lost considerable support, even to the point of electoral defeat, owing to their inability to give a political response to social demands.

This is illustrated with a few examples:

» In Chile, Sebastián Piñera has had very low levels of popular acceptance throughout his term in office: he was elected in the second round with 51.6% of the votes, but over the years of strong student protests citizen approval dropped to below 30%, according

to the Adimark poll, although there has been an upturn in recent times to around 37-39%.

» In Argentina, Cristina Kirchner, re-elected in the first round in 2011 with 54.1% of the votes, has just seen her political party defeated in the principal districts in the local elections, obtaining just 25% of the votes, 30 points down on what she obtained two years ago, before the wave of saucepan-bashing protests were unleashed in 2012.

» Dilma Rousseff, who had 58% approval in March, saw her popularity fall by 20 points in June – following the wave of protests coinciding with the Confederations Cup – sliding to 30% according to a Data folha poll in July.

» The Peruvian Ollanta Humala has faced the protests in Lima just when his popularity was falling, as observed in an Ipsos poll, showing that her acceptance fell from 54% in February to 33% in July.

¿What are those middle classes asking of the political class? Better public services and a less corrupt, less patronage political system. Enhanced public services (education, health, transport and citizen security) lead to improved purchasing power,

“Those middle classes, mostly politically disorganised, have a significant political influence because their demands put pressure on governments which are not usually ready to respond quickly”

since fewer funds need to be tied up in private medical insurance, private education or private security.

As reflected by Michael Shifter, president of Inter-American Dialogue, “[all that unrest] is a product of economic and social progress and the expansion of the middle class in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Colombia. Many young people in the middle classes in Latin America (students in Chile and Brazil, teachers and lecturers in Uruguay) are disenchanted with traditional politics, both right-wing and left-wing. They want the governments, which now have more funds, to provide higher quality services and they are tired of corruption and mistaken spending priorities.”

That dissatisfaction with deficient public services, sometimes –as in Brazil– exacerbated with heavy tax burdens, explain much of what has been happening in Latin America. Indeed, those middle classes, mostly politically disorganised, have a significant political influence because their demands put pressure on governments which are not usually ready to respond quickly.

As indicated by Ludolfo Paramio, lecturer at the CSIC (Spanish Scientific Research Council), “Owing to the very nature of the middle classes, both old and

new, with their aims and ambitions, they increase their demands on the State. The consolidated middle classes can continue using private education or health systems, but the new middle classes need improvements and more accessible public systems to be able to consolidate their status. Moreover, the middle classes that miss out on globalisation would also benefit from a general improvement of the public systems.”

This reflection coincides with the figures of the Americas Barometer, which indicates, for example, that “in the last decade, the Brazilians are among the Latin American citizens most dissatisfied with the welfare services provided by the government. Much of this situation is probably due to the high taxes paid by Brazilians (around 36% of the GDP) and the perception that they are paying taxes at rich country levels in exchange for services more fitting of poor countries.”

The ten most dissatisfied countries include, apart from Brazil (third), Chile (fourth) and Peru (sixth), two nations that have suffered this type of social protests. The protests in Chile in 2006 and 2011-12 focused on education and, above all, on how to rebuild the university system and finance higher education. According to Micheal Read, editor of *The Economist* specialising in

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Latin America: “In all cases they are expressions of the discontent of citizens who are less poor, less worried, at least for the time being, about the economic situation and much more demanding as regards what they want from the State and political system. Although the specific demands are different, they have that in common.”

- **Loss of legitimacy of the system**

A revolution of expectations that have not been adequately met has a direct political repercussion: the system losses its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens, who see that the State is incapable of providing them with physical or legal security, or adequate public services and sometimes, as in the case of Venezuela and Argentina, even controlling inflation. As also mentioned in the Americas Barometer, “in 2012, around 65% of Brazilians perceived that the political system was corrupt... and (Brazil) was twenty-second out of 26 countries in the Americas in 2012 in support for the national political institutions.”

Those two circumstances, dissatisfaction with the governments’ public policies and little attachment to the institutions, are present in

the protests that have taken place in recent years in the region. Chile set the protest ball rolling with the “penguin revolution” in 2006-07, the unrest over the inadequate operation of Transantiago (the public transport system in Santiago) afterwards and in this decade the university protests in 2011, which caused Sebastián Piñera so many headaches.

Behind them all was a “revolution of expectations” of the middle classes not met by the State. “Part of this problem is caused by the success of the Concertación¹: in 20 years it managed to open up access to education considerably. Secondary education was made universal and university education grew. But with a loan system with interest rates at 10% p.a., the problem blew up. And it has done so now because the students are now finishing their university studies. In 1990, one out of every five Chileans in university age got into higher education; now it is one out of every two”, comments Patricio Navia, lecturer at the Diego Portales University.

This fact, economic success that does not guarantee peace of mind or social satisfaction, merely confirms the change experienced in Chile. As reflected by the

¹ Concert of Parties for Democracy, a coalition of centre-left parties

“Chile is trapped. Trapped by relentless unrest, by a deep mistrust of politicians and institutions, by a sort of persistent melancholy”

Sebastián Edwards

economist and intellectual Sebastián Edwards in the daily newspaper *La Tercera*: “Chile is trapped. Trapped by relentless unrest, by a deep mistrust of politicians and institutions, by a sort of persistent melancholy.” “Politics sucks”, says the man in the street. “There is an institutional crisis”, repeat the women in the supermarkets. “The neoliberal model has failed”, shout the students in their demonstrations.

And he adds: “Chilean families are proud of what each of them has achieved during the last quarter of a century: moving into the middle class, the university degree of one of their daughters, their dream holiday, the grant awarded to their nephew. Personal satisfaction and social discontent coexist in present-day Chile. Many consider this illogical, but that’s the way it is.”

Meanwhile in Argentina, in 2001 during the famous “get them all out”, there was a prelude of that “middle class rebellion.” It has now reappeared in the saucepan-bashing protests of 2012 and 2013 against Cristina Kirchner’s government.

The analyst and historian Beatriz Sarlo agreed with this diagnosis, stressing that “The demonstrators,

who came from that vast, widely diversified sector of the middle classes (who, we recall, start with salaries of 5000 or 6000 pesos), were not protesting only because they could not buy dollars. They also had other slogans and converting them all into a pretext concealing their desire to have foreign currencies at the official price was to disregard them entirely. It is the symmetrical version of those who say that the participants in the anti-Kirchner demonstrations were ‘out for the plan and the choripán?’.”

In Brazil, the demonstrators in the June protests were not poor people uprooted from the shanty towns but from the middle class, which was demanding efficiency and anti-corruption measures from the State.

Long gone are the days of the renowned “he steals, but he acts”, which in the fifties raised to power figures such as Adhemar de Barros, mayor and governor of São Paulo, where people said “Adhemar rouba mas faz” (“Adhemar steals but acts”). Juan Arias, correspondent in Brazil for the daily Spanish newspaper *El País*, considers that “The new middle class is now demanding “first world public services —education, transport, hospitals—”, as

2 a type of sandwich with chorizo [sausage] popular in several Latin American countries.

“There is a narrow but greatly populated purgatory between those two states, characterised by considerable vulnerability and a high risk of sinking back into poverty”

well as “politicians with less corruption and squandering.”

Just as in Chile, in Brazil economic success is ironically the source of the current problems. As explained by Michael Read: “The interesting thing about the recent protests is that they reflect the success of the past 15 years, the socio-economic success that has created almost full employment in Brazil. Real salaries have been rising, up to this year, and there are far more people with more money. But there is a gulf between the size of the State and the services it provides. The tax burden in Brazil is 36% GDP, which is high for any country of that size. However, the level and quality of the public services are rather poor, in education, but especially in health and transport. If we add to this the growing awareness that there is a lot of public money and that a large part of that money is being wasted and squandered, that explains the fury and reveals the reforms that are needed.”

In short, in each of these countries the different internal dynamics and the coinciding general circumstances have converged, bringing about these outbursts. Looking at the situation more globally, we must point out that the ultimate reason, according to Carlos Malamud, researcher at Real Instituto Elcano, is:

that “in the rest of Latin America, part of those middle classes does not receive the subsidies intended for the poorest strata and want a piece of the cake, yet they are not prepared to wait for that fortunate day in the future to receive their share. Consequently, the question ‘what about my part’ is running rife throughout the region, north to south and east to west.”

This is so, undoubtedly, because the public policies have reached the poor segments of society but not so much the vulnerable middle classes with income of “between US\$4 and US\$10 per person a day. They are too well-off to be considered poor, but too vulnerable to be considered middle class. It is certainly not a small group: it covers 37.6% of the population on the continent... Moving out of poverty, –as defined by most countries and international organisations–, is not enough to join the ranks of the apparently well-off and economically secure middle class. There is a narrow but greatly populated purgatory between those two states, characterised by considerable vulnerability and a high risk of sinking back into poverty. As a group, they are probably crucial for designing the social policies of the continent, the political dynamics and the social contract in broad terms.”

“In the short and medium terms, we could conclude that the social mobilisation of the heterogeneous Latin American middle classes is here to stay”

3. CONCLUSIONS

In the short and medium terms, we could conclude that the social mobilisation of the heterogeneous Latin American middle classes is here to stay, for two basic reasons:

- Firstly, because as we have seen, the public policies of the governments in the region have not been capable of responding to the new demands raised (better public services) by these segments of the population.
- And secondly, because the region is moving towards a less favourable economic climate of deceleration, slowdown and even crisis in some cases. This unfavourable, or at least not so favourable, situation has already been admitted by the governments. In the emblematic case of Peru, the minister of economy, Luis Miguel Castilla, has admitted that “Peru has strengths, but it must urgently carry out internal tasks in order to cope with a less favourable climate.”

As pointed out by the World Bank: “Throughout most of the 2000 decade, the enhanced framework of the policies in Latin America enabled many countries to take advantage of a benevolent external environment to begin an impressive transition towards a middle class society. This created great expectations which run the risk of turning into frustration if

that transition stops. However, the region cannot rely on the external environment continuing to be as favourable as in the recent past to achieve more social and economic benefits. So a much greater effort will be required in designing policies to consolidate and make further progress in the rising mobility, making it more resistant to potential adverse disruptions. In the end, the responsibility will fall on the shoulders of the political leaders and democratic institutions in the region, which face the challenge of redefining their social contract.”

With low economic growth in much of the world (the EU in recession, the USA with weak growth and China approximately two points down in its GDP), exports will fall and, consequently, so will the State income, reducing the margin of public policies and the possibility of extending them to the middle classes. Those middle classes will grow at a slower pace this decade and will be even more vulnerable due to the smaller growth rates.

These protest movements will have three more characteristics in the near future: they will extend geographically and be clearly discontinuous.

- Not only will the protests continue, but there is a good chance they will extend to other countries such as Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela.

“It is a product of economic and social progress and the expansion of the middle class

“The moderate middle class sectors, the backbone of the protests, have been pushed into the background as the more radical and violent groups advance and take over”

in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Colombia”, says Michael Shifter, president of Inter-American Dialogue, adding that “The discontent in Brazil which has surprisingly reached the surface reflects a tendency throughout the region.”

- Moreover they will be (actually they already are) movements characterised by cyclical rises and falls: very marked and active at specific, symbolic times (Confederations Cup, pope’s visit or World Cup) followed by times of less activity, when radical groups might take control of the movement, something which is already happening in Brazil. The moderate middle class sectors, the backbone of the protests, have been pushed into the background as the more radical and violent groups advance and take over. As indicated by Moisés Naím: “The protests will no doubt ease off in these countries. But that doesn’t mean their causes will disappear.”
- As to whether these movements will become institutionalised, organising themselves into parties or forces that embody their message and intentions, at least in the short term it looks as if the old parties or coalitions (such as the Chilean Nueva Mayoría –the successor of the Concertación– led by Michelle Bachelet), politicians having nothing to do with the

governments in decline (such as Sergio Massa in Argentina) or known benchmark opponents such as Marina Silva in Brazil will be able to channel the discontent. In the short term, the possibility of a cheap imitation of the Italian anti-system Five Star Movement appearing on the scene seems unlikely.

That is becoming perceptible in Argentina, for example, where the middle class and emerging middle class vote is being channelled through the tactical vote to candidates such as Sergio Massa (governor and former minister in the Kirchner government, Peronist and now opponent of Cristina Kirchner).

The results of the local elections held on 11 August indicate just that. A report published by the daily La Nación indicates that “Kirchnerism lost votes in all the urban centres of the country, falling 24% on average compared with the 2011 elections. This figure, essential to understand the severe defeat of the government, is especially illustrative of the change of direction of the middle class. According to the analysts, the bad performance of Kirchner’s government in urban centres reflects the impact of inflation, insecurity and corruption. The map includes large towns and cities in which a defeat of the FPV was taken for granted –Mendoza, Córdoba, Rosario and Santa Fe–, but also provincial cities where defeat was not expected, such as Catamarca, La Pampa, San Juan and Corrientes.”

“The middle class lost confidence in the government’s ability to maintain the current levels of spending and well-being, which, without long-term policies, were only sustainable in the official account”

Levy Yeyati

As indicated by the sociologist Liliana de Riz: “The combined furries that were not heeded exploded in the street and ended up making themselves heard through voting.” “The middle class lost confidence in the government’s ability to maintain the current levels of spending and well-being, which, without long-term policies, were only sustainable in the official account”, assures the academician Levy Yeyati.

Similarly, in the presidential elections in Chile this year the vote of discontent will be channelled mostly towards the former Concertación, now Nueva Mayoría, led by Michelle Bachelet, while the protest vote less attached to the traditional trends will be minority and embodied in two independent candidates, Franco Parisi and Marco Enriquez-Ominami, who will each receive around 5% of the votes.

The same thing can be expected to occur in Brazil, where Dilma Rousseff’s PT and the PSDB headed by Aécio Neves will mark the electoral flux in the 2014 presidential elections. If there are any novelties, they would come in the form of increased support for the green candidate Marina Silva, who was the third most voted in 2010, or the moderate socialist Eduardo Campos, hitherto allied with Lula and Rousseff, as governor of Pernambuco.

The scenario might be similar in other parts of the region: in Mexico there will almost certainly

be numerous demonstrations but within a very specific context: the left-wing protests (led by the radical left party of Andrés Manuel López Obrador and the more moderate PRD) against the energy reform promoted by the president Enrique Peña Nieto, aiming to attract private capital to Pemex.

In Venezuela the citizen protests against inflation, shortage of supplies and insecurity (which hit the middle and lower middle classes especially hard) will inevitably be mixed in a high polarized political context (Chavism vs anti-Chavism), local elections on 8 December and emergence of a unified, stronger opposition around Henrique Capriles while the regime faces a difficult transition between the charismatic leadership of Hugo Chávez and the much lower profile of Nicolás Maduro.

In Colombia, the May elections, negotiations in Havana with the FARC guerrillas and the current crisis of the different left-wing movements and parties will keep the protests in check. At present, those protests are more related with the problems of different trades (illegal miners, coffee growers and lorry drivers) than with the demands of the new middle classes.

In other countries (Ecuador and Bolivia, among others), these movements are unlikely to be structured in the short term. The charismatic leadership of Rafael Correa and Evo Morales and the absence of national union and political opposition forces prevent this. In Ecuador,

“A new Latin America is being born in social aspects and the protests demonstrate those labour pains of a more modern, heterogeneous, complex, autonomous society with critical capacity”

just the government’s decision to drill oil in the Yasuni ITT area might be used to induce young people, ecologists and indigenous peoples to challenge the extraction plans of Rafael Correa’s government.

A new Latin America is being born in social aspects and the

protests demonstrate those labour pains of a more modern, heterogeneous, complex, autonomous society with critical capacity. The challenge of the State and political system will be to respond to and channel those demands by continuing to extend the reach and improve the quality of public services.

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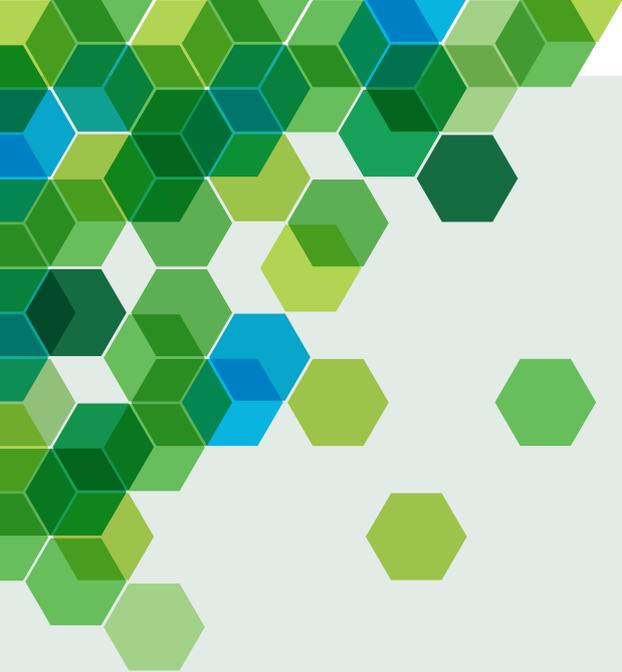
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