

# The Impact of elite political culture and political institutions on democratic consolidation in Latin America: a comparative study of Colombia and Venezuela<sup>†</sup>.

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### **Abstract.**

This paper will assess, from a comparative perspective, the incidence that changes in elite political culture might exert over political institutions as an alternative approach to explain the democratic consolidation in two Latin American countries: Colombia and Venezuela. Because these two countries have taken opposite democratic paths during the last 15 years, we will claim that in order to understand this phenomenon it is necessary to study this observed occurrence from a different view point. That is, rather than focusing on the attitudes of the general public, we will concentrate on the attitudes of the elites. This of course will imply that instead of taking the Political Culture approach and the Institutional Approach as divergent bodies of theory, we treat them as complementary frameworks that will have effects on explaining the political changes faced by these polities. Additionally, this study will argue that, unlike developed countries, people from developing countries are characterized by having materialist values because their struggle for economic and security survival are their main concern. Under this context the role of political elites is quite important because they have a greater opportunity and ability to shape the structure and functionality of key political institutions and will influence the kind of regime a country may have, as opposed to that of the general public. Therefore, this study suggests that we pay special attention to the attitudes of elites when thinking about new political culture models that are interested on studying the processes of democratization in developing countries. Precisely, this is the line of criticism this research will take in order to test the hypothesis suggested in this paper.

**KEYWORDS:** Political culture, democratic consolidation, Institutions

*“One of the things that everyone knows, but no one can quite think how to demonstrate is that a country’s politics reflect the design of its culture”*  
Clifford Geertz.

## **1. Introduction.**

Almost four decades have gone by since the so-called “third wave of democratization” reached Latin America. Such spread of democracy throughout the region has generated a wealth of research on the processes of democratic transition and consolidation (Schmitter 1988, 1995; Schneider 1995; Linz, et. al. 1996; Schedler 1998, 1998b). For instance, some scholars claim that for first time in Latin American history, democracy is the dominant form of government now, and that every country in the region, with the exception of Cuba, has elected civilian presidents in a generation (UNDP 2004, 13). From 1930 until 1980, all the countries in the region (including Cuba<sup>1</sup>) underwent 277 changes of government, with 104 of those (38% per cent) being by military coup. However, this trend changed, and by the end of the 1990’s the change of administration that took place through military intervention occurred in only 7 of the 37 countries in the region (Palmer 1996, 258).

It has been argued that the countries of the region also satisfy Dahl’s (1989) minimum conditions of democracy as has been confirmed by qualified groups such as Freedom House. This organization have made positive assessments about the region’s progress in guarantying Political Rights and Civil Liberties to their citizens by classifying these countries among “free” and “Partly Free” (Freedom House 2006). Mainwaring argues as well that since 1978 the number of democracies in the region has increased sharply at the expense of authoritarian regimes and that “by 1990, virtually every government was democratic or semidemocratic” (Mainwaring 2000, 11).

However, since the end of the 1990’s the process of democratic consolidation in the region have been experiencing detours which have affected the democratic performance of some countries creating, at the same time, intellectual tensions in contemporary academic work. In fact, the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marked a slow and heterogeneous pace in the process of democratization characterized by ,among other things, a decline in the levels of

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<sup>1</sup> Cuba’s last experience with political democracy occurred in the period between 1940 and 1952.

public support for democracy, and a changing and less clear attitude toward the democratic regimes in the region. Despite these new and challenging detours, most Latin American scholars are still trying to explain these setbacks based on traditional approaches that are mostly related with political structures and economic preconditions for democracy (Bollen 1980; Bollen and Jackman 1985; Coppedge 1997; Coulter 1975; Dahl 1971: 62-80; Diamond 1992; Lipset 1960; Lipset et. al. 1993; Przeworski et. al. 1996; Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Although it is unquestionable that economic development has been the engine of major changes on politics at both the institutional and individual levels, this paper argues that it is also important to take into account the role that both changes in political attitudes and its effect on the functioning of political institutions have played in order to evaluate the extent of democratic consolidation in these developing countries.

Analysts of Latin America have paid rather little attention on how political culture might affect the democratic consolidation in the region. Thus, it can be said that from a theoretical perspective the cultural thesis has been unattainable for both structural determinists who regard the very concept of political culture as epiphenomenal and superfluous, and by those who find its sources more varied, its nature more plastic and malleable, and its effects less decisive than the cultural thesis allows (Diamond, et. al., 1999b).

Unlike those analysts, this paper claims, along with Harrison (2000) and other scholars, that “Culture Matters” especially when it comes to assess the consolidation of some political regimes in Latin America. Particularly, this paper will focus its attention on the cases of Colombia and Venezuela as a case study to understand the reasons behind why these countries have taken virtually opposite democratic paths during the last 15 years. According to some scholars, Colombia today can be regarded as a democracy in process of consolidation<sup>2</sup> (Mainwaring 2006, Harlyn and Dugas 1999, Posada-Carbó 2006), whereas, for the Venezuelan case, scholars have started claiming that this regime has become ‘... a

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, the new 1991 Constitution marked the formal democratic transformation of a more open democratic polity which made commendable commitments to reinforce a form of government characterized by having more checks and balances. Indeed, the new constitution allowed the transformation of the executive-legislative relationship in the sense that it placed limits to the extraordinary powers that until then the executive branch of the Colombian government had. It also outlawed the appointment of legislators to other public offices or cabinet, and established a legislative check on the executive through a ‘motion of censure’ against cabinet members (Harlyn, et al. 1999). In short, the 1991 constitution brought about an indisputable improvement in balancing the power among the political institutions of government becoming its democracy a more liberal, autonomous, and independent one.

populist, anti-American style of leftist that hankers back to an earlier authoritarian era' (Puddington 2007, 126).<sup>3</sup> The recent divergent democratic process that came about between these two countries has broke down what once was called a close partnership between "brotherhood Republics" which used to share a common political culture, and a long-lasting relationship not only at the political level but also at the social, economic, and cultural level.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to assess two theoretical perspectives on democratic consolidation; namely, the *Institutional* approach (Lijphart 1969-1999) and *Cultural* approach (Almond and Verba 1963; Inglehart 1990). The paper will claim that separately these theories fall short in explaining the aforementioned opposite democratic paths of the nations under study, and goes on by arguing that rather than consider them as divergent bodies of theories, it is necessary to merge them in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding on the way by which democracy has performed in those countries. The paper consider this novel approach as intellectually important, at least for the Latin American context, as a tool to explain the unexplored linkage between elite political culture, political institutions, and democratic consolidation. The relationship among these three variables is a key element to understand why the once stable and consolidated democracies of Colombia and Venezuela have taken divergent democratic paths over the past 15 years.

At this point, it might be worthy to pause and make two conceptual and warning notes. First, as section three will emphasize, this paper deems democratic consolidation as the dependent variable of analysis. Following Schedler's conceptualisation, democratic consolidation under this context means '...the challenge of making democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual 'reverse waves'' (Schedler 1998, 90) or simple as the process to 'achieve[d] levels of democratic rule against authoritarian regression' (ibid, 103). In this sense, then, democratic consolidation should be

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<sup>3</sup> In the same line as Puddington, Hidalgo also argues that the "democratic" model established by president Hugo Chavez in Venezuela is characterized by a high concentration of power, the elimination of boundaries between the military and civil sectors, low accountability, weak rule of law, and a growing loss of institutional autonomy that over the years have been subordinated to the president and his lieutenants (Hidalgo 2009, 79). He also claims that "[Venezuela] is shifting toward a competitive authoritarianism and therefore belonging outside the ranks of liberal democracies (Ibid, 79).

consider not as a definition for democracy *per se*, but as the continuous process which different types of regimes wish to achieve. As a consequence, being this the second conceptual note, democracy is understood here using the procedural definition put forward by Robert Dahl for liberal democracies. That is, a polity can be regarded democratic when civil and political rights plus fair, competitive and inclusive elections are present in the day-to-day basis (Dahl 1971). In this sense, a democracy qualifies as consolidated when it suffices the minima criteria of liberal democracies. In other words, as Schedler puts it: 'a democracy qualifies as consolidated as soon as its probability of breakdown appears to be very low, or the other way around, as soon as its probability of survival appears to be very high' (Schedler 1998b, 3)

In this order of ideas, this paper will be organized in four sections, being this introduction the first of them. The second section will discuss the two theoretical frameworks on which this paper is grounded. Section 2.1 will describe the Institutional approach and its focus would be mainly on the central contribution made by Arend Lijphart in this field. Both the validity of Lijphart's findings as a theoretical model to explain the type and performance of different democratic systems, and also its more immediate criticism will be presented here.

Section 2.2 moves to the contribution that scholars such as Ronald Inglehart have made in the field of Political Culture. He argues that society's mass values have the stronger causal effect in strengthening democracy because values such as trust, tolerance, and feelings of efficacy represent 'Civic Virtues' that enable democratic regimes to function effectively. Using this framework, Inglehart concludes that the political culture model is based on the assumption of unidirectional causation, meaning that civic culture has an effect on democracy.

Section 2.3 will analyze a central issue within the school of political culture about the importance in differentiating between mass and elite values. This issue plays a transcendental role in supporting the inclusion of elites rather than mass political culture into the three variable relationship described in the previous paragraph. This paper agrees with Aberbach, et. al., when they argue that "although elites have an important role in advances democracies, their political influence may be even greater where social inequalities exist" (Aberbach,et. al., in Bishin, et. al., 2006, p. 1197). In fact, political

attitudes in developing countries, such as the Latin American ones, are still dominated by, what Inglehart called, 'materialist values'. Because these kind of values are held by the masses, elites might enjoy a disproportional share of political power to the extent that they are able, through elite settlements, to lead the transformation of political institutions that, in turn, will allow for a gradual evolution either toward the consolidation or non-consolidation of a political regimen.

The third section will describe the intellectual and political significance of merging the institutional and political culture approaches by arguing that the former approach does not take into account considerations of cultural factors, and that the main focus of the latter approach is mainly based on mass values rather than elite values, this section will propose that in order to evaluate the current democratic performance of Latin American countries in general, and Colombia and Venezuela in particular, it is necessary to merge these two traditionally contenders theories as a theoretical and empirical tool to explain the consolidation of these polities.

Finally, the fourth section of this paper focuses on closing the main arguments developed in the previous sections. Furthermore, It will hypothesize positive assessments that can be achieved from a theoretical and empirical perspective when merging the aforementioned approaches. I end this paper by encouraging further systematic reflection and analysis about the importance of taking into account the concept of elite political culture in the evaluation of Latin America's progress towards consolidating their democracies.

## **2. Revisiting Institutional and Political Culture approaches, and its link with elite and mass political values.**

In the comparative study of politics, few questions have been as enduring as "What causes democracy?" Democracy, certainly is the favourite dependent variable in political sciences, and has been examined repeatedly by each one of the major theoretical approaches in comparative politics such as those of structuralist, rationalist, and culturalist. However, the cultural approach is considered by many political scientists the black sheep of the family. Particularly in the Latin American context, cultural approaches are dismissed for being vague about the object of study and the units of analysis; for blurring the line between culture and

other categories such as behaviour and institutions (Camp 2001; Lagos Cruz-Coke 2001, 2008; Smith 2005); and for failing to explain political change (Lehoucq 2004). As for the institutional approach, Latin Americanists were over-optimistic about the nature and role that political institutions might play in the transition process towards democracy, and used to see them as a safeguard to overcome the brutal nature of the regimes that had preceded them (Grugel 2007).

In order to highlight that individually these two schools fall short in explaining the current democratic asymmetry between Colombia and Venezuela, the next two subsections aim to make a detailed account of each of them as a way to emphasise its strengths but also its weaknesses when they come to explain processes of democratic consolidation in these Latin American polities. This section will finish by showing that the missing link in connecting these approaches is the elite political culture variable. It will argue that the likelihood of consolidation of democracies in developing societies will depend upon elite settlements led by politicians and shaped by changes in their attitudinal behaviour, rather than on democratic preferences of the masses, as is the general view of many analysts of political culture in developed countries.

## **2.1. Institutional Approach.**

One of the most prominent scholars in this area of comparative politics is Arend Lijphart and particularly his seminal book *Patterns of Democracy* (1999). In this work, he offers a model that differentiates between two ideal types of democracies: consensual and majoritarian which differ from each other through ten institutional criteria. Thus, Lijphart's types of democracies can be regarded as a useful typology, which not only operationalized two very different normative understandings of democratic decision-making, but can also be used to explain the influence that a set of political institutions may have in determining the type and performance of democracy a country might have.

Advocates of this theoretical framework also argue that people learn to value democracy by living under democratic institutions for many years (Rustow 1970). Other scholars claim that one can shape a society by shaping its institutions—which means that political scientists can provide a quick fix for most problems (Welzel and Inglehart 2009). In general, it can be



stated that the institutional explanation postulates that living under democratic institutions causes prodemocratic values to emerge among the public. That is, 'society's prior democratic experience has the stronger causal effect on its mass culture' (Inglehart 2005, 173), and this is the reason by which institutionalists claim that political institutions shape culture.

Figure 1 summarizes the causality model that the Institutional explanation holds in order to support and explain the performance of different political regimes.

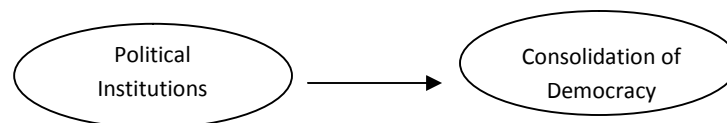


Figure 1. Causality model proposed by Institutional approach to evaluate democratic performance.

Arend Lijphart built a model supporting such causality by showing that consensus and majoritarian democracies differ along two dimensions, each of which has five political institutions or criteria. The first five criteria, belonging to the 'executive/parties dimension', and favour the majoritarian type of democracy, rest on: single-party government, cabinet dominance, a two-party system, a majoritarian electoral system –First-past-the-post (FPTP) system-, and interest-group pluralism. Whilst 'federal-unitary dimension', also for majoritarian democracies, depends on the following factors: a unitary and centralized government, a unicameral legislature, constitutional flexibility, the absence of judicial review, and a central bank controlled by the executive. The opposite criteria promote consensus democracy and altogether favour the creation of multiple checks and balances, as well as the dispersion of power.

Lijphart's determination of distinguishing between consensus and majoritarian democracies was a by-product of his previous work mainly based upon consociational democracy (1977). At that moment, he argued that consociational democracy was the solution for those countries in which majoritarian democracy might not work due to deep divisions in their societies. Accordingly, he defined this concept emphasizing four conditions: government by a grand coalition of political leaders, segmental autonomy, mutual vetoes, and proportionality as the electoral tool of political representation (Lijphart 1977, 25-47).

However, it was not until the publication of his book *Patterns of Democracy* (1999) that Lijphart introduced the concept of consensual democracy as a way to broaden the theory and as an expansion of the concept of consociational democracy. That is, the latter concept seems to adapt better only in deeply divided societies, whilst the former concept is recommended for any societal type, divided or not. In general terms, Lijphart (1999) offered a model<sup>4</sup> that differentiates between two ideal types of democracies; namely, consensus (power-sharing) and majoritarian (power-concentrating). On the one hand, the consensual principle points out that democracy must be represented by dispersion of power and that a 'simple majority should not govern in an unfettered fashion' (Mainwaring 2001, 171). That is, given the heterogeneity and conflict of interests that society faces, 'government *'by and for the people'*' must mean not simply government by the majority of the people, but by *as many people as possible*' (Cranenburgh, et al. 2004, 281 original emphases). While majoritarian democracies, on the other hand, concentrates power in few institutions and individuals creating sharp divisions between those who hold power and those who do not.

At the empirical level, *Patters of Democracy* studied thirty-six established democracies classified them either as majoritarian or consensual, and investigated which type of democracy performed best. The findings were mixed, but generally the consensus performed better than the majoritarian ideal type<sup>5</sup>. Lijphart's comparison of the performance of the two ideal types of democracy brought him to the conclusion that consensus democracy is a superior form of democracy, and because of that it 'becomes simply the best model for every country' (Bogards 2000, 414). In fact, Lijphart claims that in terms of policy performance majoritarian democracies do not outperform consensus democracies when it comes to macroeconomic management and the control of violence. Nonetheless, consensus democracies clearly outperform majoritarian democracies when it comes to the quality of democracy. This is what the author referred to as, the 'kindness and gentleness' of their public policy orientation (Lijphart 1999, 301).

Although consensus theory can be regarded as the single most influential typology of modern democracies it has also met a lot of criticism. For instance, Mainwaring argues that

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<sup>4</sup> Such model was first outlined in 1994 by Lijphart in his book *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*; and then further developed in Lijphart 1999.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, from the group of 36 countries analyzed Lijphart found that 24 of them were classified as largely consensual on at least one of the two dimensions (Lijphart 1999, 248).

Lijphart's measurements of his institutional criteria are rather subjective because 'he selects some institutions [criteria] on which consensus democracy has a clear advantage but not one that favours majoritarian democracies' (Mainwaring 2001, 171). In the same line, Amyot (1985) and Schmidt (2000) also suggested that Lijphart's selection of subjective indicators is not only misleading, but also 'idealistic' in the sense that these criteria were assigned the same relative weights in the definition of models of democracy. Andeweg (2001), on the other hand, criticizes Lijphart's main hypothesis that claims that consensus democracy performance is better in stabilizing democracies in both established and divided societies. He argues that Lijphart's way of selecting criteria (which shed the superiority of consensus democracy) is justifying his normative bias toward power-sharing arrangements also for more homogeneous societies. Like Schmidt (2000), Van Cranenburgh, et al. (2004) also claims that the 'distinction between consensus and majoritarian systems overstates the importance of *formal* institutions, especially if applied to the countries in the Third World' (Van Cranenburgh, et. al., 2004, 282 emphasis added). As a matter of fact, their criticism aims to emphasize that less formal political variables are more important than the formal criteria put forward by Lijphart. In addition, they contend that in order to understand how a political system actually works, the formal criteria used to distinguish between the two types of democracy should be given a relative weight (Van Cranenburgh, et al 2004, 294).

Lastly, it is also important mentioning that Lijphart's consociational concept has also been object of criticism. According to Bogaards (2000), this concept is plagued by serious conceptual problems. Specifically, he claims that there is not a clear-cut definition among three of the most important concepts within the Lijphart's theory: the notion of consensus democracy, the narrower and earlier concept of consociational democracy, and power-sharing. Lijphart's reply to Bogaards' critic was that these three concepts are synonymous.<sup>6</sup>

## **2.2. Political Culture Approach.**

This approach states that political culture plays a direct and important role in the development and maintenance (or failure) of democracy. It argues that mass values play an important part in strengthening democracy; that "trust, tolerance, and feelings of efficacy

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<sup>6</sup> For a more comprehensive reading about Lijphart's reply see Lijphart (2000) 'Definitions, Evidence, and Policy: A response to Matthijs Bogaards' Critique', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 4, pp. 425-31.

represent 'civic virtues' that enable democratic regimes to function effectively" (Inglehart 2005, 157). Inglehart also contends that "mass values play a crucial role in the emergence and flourishing of democratic institutions" (2005, p. 2). He showed that independent variables such as: life satisfaction, interpersonal trust, and rejection of revolutionary change are highly correlated not only with economic development but also with stable democracies; and he concludes by saying that "mass political culture may be a crucial link between economic development and democracy" (1990, p. 45).

Beginning in the 1990s, several analysts have endeavoured to reassert the importance of systematic analysis of democratization, and in doing so they have highlighted the central place of political culture in the comparative study of democracy. According to Diamond (2004), culture typically consists of those attitudes, values, beliefs, ideals, and experiences that predominate in a given society, whereas, Political Culture consists of the same components but focuses on how those values are translated into people's views of politics, their assessments of political systems, and their own role in the polity (Camp 2001).

Broadly speaking, this approach states that a society's mass values have the stronger causal effect on its subsequent role in the development and maintenance (or failure) of democracy. In particular, the theory of civic culture proposed by Almond and Verba (1963) and further elaborated by Inglehart (1988, 1990) postulates that the viability of a democratic regime is affected powerfully by attitudes such as beliefs in one's ability to influence political decisions, feelings of positive affect for the political system, and the belief that other citizens are basically trustworthy. That is, "trust, tolerance, and feelings of efficacy represent 'civic virtues' that enable democratic regimes to function effectively" (Inglehart 2005, 157). In this line, they claim that countries with high levels of these civic culture attitudes are expected to be more likely to adopt and sustain democracy over time than countries with low levels, regardless of socioeconomic factors such as the level of economic development.

Along this same line, Eckstein (1996) and Eckstein, et al. (1996) argue that a democratic system will become stable only if people have internalized democratic norms and practice them in their daily relationships. Furthermore, Inglehart (1990 - 2005) suggest that "mass values play a crucial role in the emergence and flourishing of democratic institutions" (2005,

p. 2); and he concludes by suggesting that political culture fundamentally drives economic performance and democratic stability (Jackman, et al. 1996).

In order to explain his findings, Inglehart's model takes three independent variables: (i) the gross national product in 1950, as a proxy of the country's level of economic development; (ii) the percentage of the labour force employed in the tertiary sector, which is interpreted as an indicator of the size of the middle class; and (iii) a composite measure of civic culture over 1981-86 that reflects an average for the general public of its level of interpersonal trust, life satisfaction, and lack of support for revolutionary change. As dependent variable he takes country's years of continuous democracy from 1900 to 1986. Estimates of the model showed that economic development had not significant direct effect on the dependent variable; whereas labour force in services and civic culture variables had a direct effect of +.36 and +.74, respectively (Inglehart 1990, 44). These results led Inglehart to infer "that over half of the variance in the persistence of democratic performance can be attributed to the effects of political culture alone" (p. 46). And he concluded more generally that this evidence "tends to confirm the basic thesis of *The Civic Culture*" (p. 48).

In sum, it can be argued that political culture school has two basic claims. First, it hypothesizes that its causal model is grounded on the assumption of unidirectional causation –that civic culture has an effect on democracy, and that democracy does not have an effect on civic culture (Muller, et. al. 1994, 635). And second, that political institutions and mass values must be congruent in order to produce stable and effective regimes (Inglehart 2005, 157).

Figure 2 summarizes the causality model that political culture explanation holds in order to support and explain the performance of different political regimes.

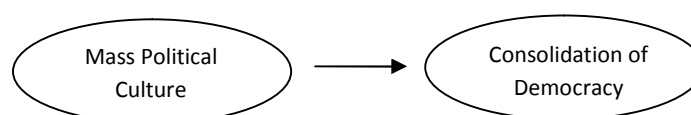


Figure 2. Causality model proposed by Political Culture approach to evaluate democratic performance.

Political culture theory has also been subject to criticism mainly from scholars who defend the reverse causation between democracy and political attitudes. That is, civic culture attitudes are an *effect* rather than a *cause* of democracy. According to this line of argument,

democracy typically is established for reasons other than civic culture attitudes of the general public, and the successful persistence of democracy over time is likely to cause increases in levels of civic culture because high levels of subjective political competence, pride in the political system, and interpersonal trust are a rational, learned response to the experience of living in a country that has a stable democratic regime (Barry 1978, Schmitter, et. al., 1991).

Likewise, Muller and Seligson (1994) have criticized Inglehart's conceptualization of civic culture, arguing that among the three variables that make up his measure of civic culture, interpersonal trust is "unrelated to change in a country's level of democracy" (p. 646). That is, neither high nor low levels of interpersonal trust appear to be an impediment or a guaranty in the promotion of democracy, respectively. This way, they challenge one of the main assumptions of political culture, -defended by prominent scholars (e.g. Almond and Verba 1963; Dahl 1971; Inglehart 1988, 1990)- that of interpersonal trust as an important attitudinal prerequisite of the establishment of stable democracy. Thus, Muller and Seligson's analysis of causal linkages between levels of civic culture attitudes and change in level of democracy showed that these "....are not supportive of the thesis that civic culture attitudes are the principal or even the major cause of democracy" (P. 647).

In addition, Jackman and Miller (1996) argue that political culture approach needs to be recast in institutional terms, acknowledging a more direct role of political considerations in explaining democratic performance (p. 633). This criticism is based upon Inglehart (1990) and Putman's (1993) assumption which claim that political culture approach has identified distinctive sets of subjective attitudes that are highly resistant to change and widely held across individuals over time, which, in turn, are a fundamental generator of economic and political performance. By providing evidence that Inglehart's measure of political culture is influenced significantly by short-term factors (i.e. unemployment and economic growth), Jackman and Miller (1996) question the durable cultural syndrome assumption claiming that there is no evidence to suggest that cultural factors have any systematic effects on political and economic outcomes (p. 653). Instead, they propose to redefine the puzzle of political culture in more institutional terms, in the sense that *objective* conditions embodied in institutions are more crucial than *subjective* cultural attitudes in order to explain processes of consolidation and democratic performance.

Finally, Muller and Seligson (1994), after criticizing the set of variables that Inglehart picked for his index of civic culture attitudes as variables that have no statistically significant effect to explain change in democracy (p. 647). They propose a new direction for future research by shifting the focus from attitudes of the general public to attitudes of elites. Accordingly, they argued that since elites have greater opportunity and ability than the general public to influence the kind of regime a country may have, their attitudes should be given special emphasis in new political culture models. In fact, Dahl (1971) attributes great importance to the attitudes of political leaders as a cause of the consolidation and stability of democracy in developing countries. Even more, Higley and Burton (1989) make a stronger argument claiming that the single critical determinant to evaluate the stability of democratic regimens is consensus among elites and its support for democratic institutions and political values (p. 23).

Overall, it can be argued, that both schools have different interpretations on how to achieve a consolidated democracy. On the one hand, institutionalists argues that through formal and efficient political institutions it is possible to disperse power so that there are multiple veto players in decision making and multiple checks and balances –limiting the power of central governments and causing, at the same time, consolidated democracies in divided societies (Lijphart 1999, Mainwaring 2001). That is, establishing formal and efficient institutions will facilitate the emergence of stable democracies. On the other hand, political culture scholars, claim that democratization requires more than well-designed formal institutions or imposing a right constitution. Thus, they claim that there is a causal linkage between self-expression values and democracy which indicate that “the causal arrow flows mainly from culture to democracy rather than the other way around” (Inglehart 2005, p. 5).

Although these schools have been applied separately in a quite accurate fashion in order to explain processes of democratization in advanced industrial societies, one cannot say the same when it comes to study such processes in developing countries. As was shown before, consideration of cultural factors were dropped from the institutional approach under the argument that this variable does not exert an important influence on stable Western democracies that Lijphart and other scholars picked for their empirical research (Spinner 2007, 23). Therefore, Institutionalists seem to have disregarded the decisive role this variable may have played in explaining the consolidation of non-Western democratic

systems. In turn, advocates of the political culture approach mainly focus its attention on the effects that mass political values may exert on processes of democratization also for developed countries, however, they leave aside the impact that elite political values may have on such processes in developing countries.

Taking into account the main assumptions of the reviewed theoretical approaches, but particularly its criticism, the third part of this section will try to highlight the theoretical and empirical implications of paying special attention to the attitudes of elites when thinking about new political culture models that are interested on studying the processes of democratic consolidation in developing countries.

### **2.3. Elite vs Mass Political Culture**

The issue of differentiating between the concepts of elite and mass political values plays a transcendental role in supporting the central goal of this paper for two reasons. First, it will allow us to understand the reason by which political attitudes in developing countries is still dominated by materialist values. And second, due to in non-western countries human emphasis is on the struggle for economic and security survival, then the likelihood in the consolidation of these democracies will depend upon the establishment of elite settlements among those with political power. These pacts or agreements, in turn, will yield the transformation of political institutions in order to allow for a gradual evolution toward the consolidation of a democratic regimen.

As a starting-point, this paper takes the premise that political culture does not imply that all societies share the same set of political attitudes. That is, values and beliefs are unevenly distributed through the population (Diamond 1999, 163). As a matter of fact, evidence from several cross-national surveys (i.e. World Values Surveys, Freedom House, and Latinobarometro) indicates that the set of values a country may have will depend on their level of socio-economic development. Consequently, the values and beliefs found in developed societies differ strikingly from those found in developing societies.

Inglehart (1988-1990) makes this differentiation even more evident arguing that people within a country or between countries have different scales of cultural values. On the one hand, he argues, poor societies are focused on "*materialist values*" because people's



priorities reflect their socioeconomic conditions, placing the highest subjective value on the most pressing needs. Thus, since material sustenance and physical security are the first requirements for survival, under conditions of scarcity, people in developing countries give top priority to safety goals, subordinating, in turn, their human freedom to social conformity and state authority. On the other hand, rich societies are centred on “*postmaterialist values*”<sup>7</sup> because their citizens –once they have assured their survival needs- have the capacity to focus or devote more attention on other important issues such as sense of community, quality of life, and politics. Thus, under conditions of prosperity, Postmaterialists place markedly less emphasis on economic growth and much more emphasis on issues such as environmental protection, quality of life, and political freedom (Inglehart 1998, 1224).

To sum up, it can be argued that in developing countries people’s values give priority to patriarchy over equality, conformity over tolerance, authority over autonomy, and security over self-expression. Therefore, due to citizens of relatively poor societies are most likely to emphasize materialist values and least likely to emphasize postmaterialist ones their main concern is toward authority and strong leadership and, at the same time, they are more likely to ‘... accept limitations on democratic freedoms for the sake of national order and other instrumental goals’ (Welzel and Inglehart 2009, 131).

Since the cases selected for this study matches with the socio-economic characterization of ‘developing countries,’ it can be assumed that their political culture is still dominated by what Inglehart called materialist values. Therefore, this paper argues that the likelihood of consolidation of these democracies will depend upon elite settlements led by politicians and shaped by changes in their attitudinal behaviour, rather than on democratic preferences of the masses as is the general view of many analysts of political culture in developed countries.

It is important to point out that the concept of elite in this paper refers exclusively to those with political power, that is, to incumbents of the political regime including those

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that “Postmaterialist values” are closely related to the concepts of “emancipative values” and “self-expression values” as described by Inglehart and Welzel (2005), who demonstrate that their measure of self-expression values has an inherently emancipative impetus and use the terms Postmaterialist, self-expression, and Emancipative values interchangeably.

participating in government but forming the opposition. In this sense, as Collier (1999) puts it, political elites should be understood “as the strategic [role] of the ‘ins’ or those already included in the regime, but not to the role of the ‘outs’ or groups excluded by the rules of the regime (i.e.: business, trade unions, military, media, religious, and intellectual), without political rights or accepted institutional avenues of participation” (Collier 1999, 18). As for the concept of elite settlements, this paper follows Higley and Gunther’s definition, which claims that such pacts are the processes ‘in which previously disunified and warring elites suddenly and deliberately reorganized their relations by negotiating compromises on their most basic disagreements, thereby achieving consensual unity and laying the basis for a stable democratic regime’ (Higley, et al., 1992, xi).

According to the above definitions, and taking into account that elite settlements are relatively rare events, scholars have regarded Colombia and Venezuela as “pacted democracies” because their transition to democracy involved explicit pact making on the part of competing elites that had the effect of attenuating previously intense conflicts over policy and office, thereby permitting the establishment of competition within an agreed-upon framework of rules (see for example: Burton and Higley, 1987; Higley and Burton, 1989; Peeler, 1992).

In fact, between the two countries under study, Colombia provides the clearest instance of elite settlement. Its transition toward democracy in 1958 was the outcome of a bargaining process between the two most traditional parties –Liberal Party (PL) and Conservative Party (PC)- which ended up in a political and electoral settlement called *The National Front* (El Frente Nacional). The purpose of this pact was the alternation of power and bipartisan parity in executive, legislative and judicial posts (Hartlyn and Dugas 1999). The National Front formally lasted from 1958 to 1974; however the subsequent governments kept the traditional bipartisan coalitions until 2002 (Posada-Carbó 2006).

Venezuela, on the other hand, also had a clearly defined elite settlement, but not as complex in its formation as the one for the Colombian case. Like Colombia, Venezuela until 1999 had two dominant parties: Democratic Action Party (AD) and Committee for Independent Political Electoral Organization Party (COPEI). For almost half a century these

parties, through alliances and coalitions, won almost every election in Venezuela<sup>8</sup> (Naím 2001). In fact, the consolidation of such alliance was sealed through the signature of the *Punto Fijo Pact* (EL pacto de Punto Fijo) in 1958, which guaranteed alternation of power between the two parties and equal participation of all party members in the executive cabinet of the winning party. However, this consensual picture radically did change when Hugo Chavez rose to the presidency in 1999.<sup>9</sup>

The above analysis allows us to conclude that the selection of cases in this study places them under the umbrella of developing countries with a political culture characterized by having materialist values. Moreover, it also made clear that as people's values are mainly focuses on the struggle for economic and security survival, the role of political elites is quite important because they have greater opportunity and ability than the general public to shape the structure and functionality of key political institutions that will allow to influence the kind of regime a country may have. Therefore, this paper suggest that attitudes of elites should be given special emphasis in new political culture models interested in understanding the processes of democratization in developing countries. Precisely, this is the line of criticism this research will take and develop in the next section of this paper.

### **3. Merging the two approaches.**

The main goal of this paper is to propose a different approach to understand and study democratic consolidation in developing countries. Along this vein, I would like to study to what extent changes in beliefs, values, and attitudes of the political elites have an effect on the structure, functionality, and performance of key political institutions which, in turn, might affect the democratic consolidation of the countries under study. In addressing this question, this section will hypothesize that in developing counties elite political culture *does matter and shape* political institutions and that these “reshaped new political institutions” will indeed have effects upon both the process of consolidation and the type of democracy of the political regime.

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<sup>8</sup> Until 1993, the two dominant parties (COPEI and AD) combined to take over 80 percent of the vote in presidential and legislative elections (Levine and Crisp 1999, 382).

<sup>9</sup> In fact, during the 1990s the traditional parties collapsed and therefore also the Punto Fijo Pact.

In other words, and following Harrison's assertion, I claim that 'Culture is the mother, and institutions are the children [of political change]' (Harrison 2000, xxviii). Adding, however, that politicians are the ones impelling modifications in those institutions to produce such political change.

Under this context, this study stresses that culture is path dependent. That is, as Inglehart puts it: '... distinctive cultural values depend on different value systems developed in different geographical locations' (Inglehart 2000, 80). In fact, culture is influenced by numerous other factors, for example; climate, politics, economics, and the vagaries of history. Furthermore, if culture matters in order to explain the current divergent democratic path of the cases selected by this work, I argue that it matters even more when the disproportionate influence over national affairs held by political elites in the region are taken together with their ability to shape important democratic institutions which, inevitably, will bring consequences in the democratic performance of these polities. To repeat, figure 3 summarizes and explain the model of causality this project will try to assess. It shows that changes in elite political culture causes effects on the structure, functioning, and performance of key political institutions which will influence the process of democratic consolidation a country may have.

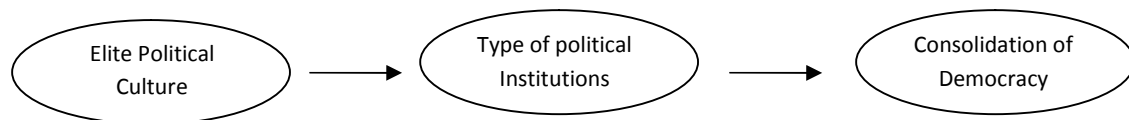


Figure 3. Causality model proposed in this study.

In this model, democratic consolidation is the dependent variable which will be in function of two independent variables; namely, elite political culture, and performance of political institutions. As was mentioned in the introductory section, democratic consolidation should not be understood as a definition of democracy *per se*, but as a nonstop process of 'democratic continuity' to which any polity should follow in order to reach their ideal type of democracy (Schedler 1998b, 2). But, how can we know when the process has finished in order to claim that a country reached such consolidation? This paper assumes that the ideal or arrival point the countries under study should try to reach is the normative definition of democracy known as liberal democracies put forward by Robert Dahl in his seminal work *Polyarchy* (1971). By assuming this, we are also stressing that the Colombian and Venezuelan regimes currently find themselves somewhere behind this ideal point in the one-dimensional

continuum line of democratic consolidation. That is, we argue, as many scholars do (Schedler 2010, Corrales 2011, Hoskin, et. al. 1999, Mainwaring 2006, among others), that these countries today are placed in a point where their regimes can be regarded as either electoral democracies, or participatory democracies, or also close to authoritarian regimes. Therefore, the likelihood the countries under study reach the consolidation of its political regimes will depend upon how the attitudes, beliefs, and values of political elites might affect the transformation and performance of political institutions towards an institutional design that get close to the definition of liberal democracies.

This causality model also shows that by merging or combining the two theoretical models described in the previous section, this paper might contribute to make a novel theoretical and empirical account to explain and understand the political changes faced by the aforementioned two Latin American countries during the last 15 years. The model in figure 3 can be regarded as a novel approach as it might generate a different explanation away from the traditional relationships of causality presented by both the Institutional approach and the political culture approach respectively in developed countries (see figures 1 and 2). That is, unlike most of the literature on political culture whose focus is on the increasingly important role that mass political culture have in shaping the character and viability of democracy in developed societies, this paper critically highlight the surprisingly little understanding about the power and influence political elites have in the Latin American context in order to exert changes over political institutions and thus signalling the type of regime they would like to pursue. From this, it is clear that elite attitudes are important elements in influencing either democratic consolidation or democratic non-consolidation in developing countries, and this is the reason why in the proposed model (figure 3) the concept of elite political culture, rather than the one of mass political culture (as in figure 2), is the missing variable that should be taken into account in order to merge these theoretical approaches.

#### **4. Discussion and conclusion.**

The central claim this paper made is that ‘culture matters.’ However, the paper stressed that it matters even more when elite’s attitudes are taken into account in order to explain the continuous trend toward democratic consolidation in the Latin American context. It also claimed that democratic consolidation or breakdown of the political regimes for the cases under study can best be understood by studying basic continuities and changes in the political culture of national political elites, and its resulting implication on the performance of political institutions. Therefore, by reconsidering the unexplored linkage in the Latin American context between elite political culture, political institutions, and democratic consolidation, this research will contribute to the knowledge in two ways.

First, from a theoretical perspective, this work sought to move away from the traditional relationships of causality presented by the Institutional approach and Cultural approach, which are used separately by them in order to explain processes of democratic consolidation. Instead, this research project introduced a “new” causal relation to explore the extent to which democratic consolidation in contemporary Latin America can be explained by changes in the functioning and transformation of political institutions caused by changes in the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the political elites. In particular, it focused on the incidence that changes in elite political culture might exert over political institutions as an alternative approach to explain democratic consolidation in these two Latin American countries. This relationship has been roughly studied by analysts of Latin America and can be regarded as new and almost innocuous. In fact, those analysts claim, first, that the differences between ethnic groups, social classes, and city versus country dwellers render a generalized concept of Latin American civic culture unattainable. And second, than political behaviour is determined more by economic relationships and political structures than by attitudinal orientations (Lagos, 1997, 127).

Second, from an empirical perspective (not developed in this paper), this study will attempt to produce an original empirical research insofar as to understand the cultural changes on political elites will be necessary to make use of quantitative and qualitative techniques to capture such changes. maybe conducting elite interviews to a sample of Venezuelan and Colombian MPs, and by doing statistical analysis of cross-national data. Therefore, the

empirical component of this research should provide new analytical information that will reveal not only the usefulness of measuring the changes of elite political culture as part of the variables that might influence the structure and functionality of key political institutions, but also will contribute to a further understanding of contemporary studies on democratization.

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