



# Five Political Regimes in Latin America, Internet Freedom and Mechanisms of Control

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# **Five Political Regimes in Latin America, Internet Freedom and Mechanisms of Control\***

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## **Abstract**

Since 2010, there has been a trend towards establishing internet control and securitization policies (Freedom House, 2016). The literature on the subject indicates that the mechanisms of internet control vary according to the type of political regimes. The objective of this work is to verify if the policies of control of internet in Latin America vary according to the type of prevailing political regime. For the study were selected five Latin American countries that are categorized as examples of different political regimes: Chile, Mexico, Ecuador, Venezuela and Cuba. For each case, the indicators related to freedom of expression on the internet are reported in accordance with the data provided by «Varieties of Democracy». «Freedom on the Net» categorizations are used as a complement. The results indicate that there is a correlation between political regime (measured by polyarchy index) and internet freedom. Indeed, the more autocratic the regime is, the more first-generation internet controls are observed, with censorship of contents and violations of users' rights. While in hybrid regimes second-generation controls are more commonly observed, which involve obstacles to access, without customary content blocking and network outages.

# I. Introduction

There is a diversity of ways of organizing, within the framework of a national society and State, the access, exercise, ratification and/or withdrawal of political power. Political regimes encompass a continuum, at one end there is greater autonomy and citizen rule and in the other the concentrated and non-responsive power of *caudillos* (strong men), parties and/or cliques. Thus, quality democracies, low-performing polyarchies, delegative democracies, hybrid regimes (competitive authoritarianism), closed authoritarianism, and totalitarian regimes make up the spectrum of political regimes.

Contemporary democracies are regimes that encompass, as basic elements, the characteristics-fair, free, and competitive elections; political pluralism; citizens' rights to organize, information, expression and mobilization rights; mechanisms of accountability and control of public servants-which Robert Dahl (1989) has identified as constituents of polyarchies-truly existing democracies. Nonetheless, these elements can be expanded to include broad civil, political, and social rights and a state apparatus of high capacity, where the exercise of citizenship is protected and empowered (Tilly, 2010 ). Thus, contemporary democracy brings together both the conquests and demands aimed at greater equity and participation in public affairs, as well as the better quality of political representation and deliberation.

Hybrid regimes (Levitsky & Way, 2010) are those where formal elements of democracy are maintained - elections with a minimum of competition, legal opposition, rights to demonstration, independent media - but within a ruling that gives the rulers- often in the form of a dominant party and a charismatic leader - greater control of institutional, material, communicational resources, which allow them to tilt the field in their favor to the detriment of the opposition.

The autocracies adopt historically diverse clothes, being the types more recognized by the political science: the military dictatorship, the regime of unique party, the sultanism and hybrid modalities of these. In addition, as a result of the experience of the twentieth century, autocracies are subdivided into a majority of authoritarian regimes - with limited pluralism, conservative character and official mentalities - and some totalitarianism - monist, revolutionary and ideological - in both cases opposed to the liberal republics of the masses (Pérez-Liñán, 2017) commonly called democracies.

## II. Political control of the internet

As Internet penetration has increased and the growing importance of its political uses has become evident, regimes of all kinds (democratic, hybrid and autocratic) have established policies of increasing internet control and securitization, as reflected in reports of "Freedom on the Net" (Freedom House, 2016). The most obvious control practices are internet blackouts, content filtering by keywords and DNS URL blocking. As of 2009, second-generation controls are beginning to become generalized, such as: temporary restriction of connectivity in regions where protests occur, just-on-time blocking of mobile applications, informal removal of content by ISPs and website administrators, slowing of connections in times of high political unrest and establishment of high costs of services to limit access to the internet (Deibert & Rohozinski, 2010; Pearce & Kendzior, 2012; Puyosa, 2015).

In the literature on internet control, evidence is also reported that countries with authoritarian regimes tend to limit the development of internet access infrastructure and increase controls over service providers (Drezner, 2009). Likewise, there is evidence of control and securitization practices that do not require technical mechanisms, but are based on police, judicial or administrative mechanisms such as: taxes on the use of the internet, administrative requirements for access providers, routine police reports of citizen activity on the internet and prison for political expression on the web (Drezner, 2010, Kerr, 2014 and Puyosa, 2015). Finally, there are practices of mass monitoring (sometimes publicized by the government itself), use of information published online to harass or legally accuse political activists, use of botnets and other forms of automated propaganda, as well as cyber attacks against activists opponents or "patriotic hacking" (Deibert & Rohozinski, 2010, Drezner 2010, Kerr, 2014, Puyosa, 2015, Puyosa, 2017b).

Taking into account the "digital dictator's dilemma" model (Kerr, 2014), it is hypothesized that the traditional mechanisms of keyword filtering and website blocking only become prominent under authoritarian regimes. The mechanisms of first-generation control, keyword filtering and content blocking are considered to be very costly in terms of international reputation and internal legitimacy, and are therefore avoided by more democratic regimes. Hybrid regimes only use first-generation control mechanisms in times of high political unrest, especially if massive protests that threaten their stability and are amplified by the use of social media.

The model also hypothesizes that the use of second generation control mechanisms is more likely under hybrid regimes and competitive authoritarianisms. Growing internet penetration and increasing political usage by the population operates as a trigger for the establishment of second generation control policies (Kerr, 2014; Puyosa, 2015). Hybrid regimes

restrict access to content and applications that can help expand online protest or mobilize citizens for offline collective action. In addition, botnets armies are deployed to inundate social media platforms with pro-government comments, influence online discussions, report or attack anti-government commentaries, or simply to post disinformation content (Puyosa, 2015, Puyosa, 2017c, 2017b, Marwick & Lewis, 2017, Puddington, 2017).

### III. Case analysis

Since the objective of the study is to explore if the policies of internet's control in Latin America vary according to the type of political regime prevailing in each country, a methodology of sample of typical cases was adopted. Five Latin American countries were selected as examples of different types in the continuum of political regimes: Chile (a high quality democracy), Mexico (a low quality democracy), Ecuador (a delegative democracy), Venezuela (autocracy, in transit from competitive authoritarianism to hegemonic authoritarianism) and Cuba (a recent post-totalitarianism). For each case, the type of internet control policies and practices in force are reported according to the data provided by the Varieties of Democracy<sup>1</sup> project database and the Freedom on the Net<sup>2</sup> annual report.

In this section of the study, a brief description of the political regime prevailing in each of the selected countries is first presented. Together with the qualitative categorization, we report the V-Dem polyarchy additive index. Second, the data of the V-Dem project on the indicators are presented: i) Government censorship of the internet; (ii) government media censorship; (iii) harassment of journalists; (iv) academic and cultural freedom of expression; (v) repression of civil society organizations in the period 2006-2016. Third is the categorization and score obtained by the country in the Freedom on the Net report (2016), as well as a summary of current policies or practices of major importance and impact<sup>3</sup>.

#### Variable description

To verify quantitatively the political regime, we are using the additive index of polyarchy of V-Dem. This index responds to the question: To what extent is the electoral principle of democracy achieved? The criteria are that the electoral principle of democracy seeks to achieve

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<sup>1</sup> The V-Dem project is co-organized by the Department of Political Science of the University of Gothenburg (Sweden) and the Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame (USA). The project is a collaboration between more than 50 worldwide specialists and 2,800 country experts. It generates a database annually updated with measurements of variables and indicators related to seven principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, egalitarian, majority and consensual.

<sup>2</sup> Freedom on the Net is an annual report on the state of the internet by Freedom House and a network of local researchers in 65 countries.

<sup>3</sup> Chile is not included in Freedom on the Net reports.

responsiveness and accountability between leaders and citizens through the election mechanism. This is supposed to be achieved when the right to suffrage is extended; political organizations and civil society organizations can function freely; elections are clean and not manipulated by systematic fraud or irregularities; and the chief executive of the country is selected (directly or indirectly) through elections. The scale is interval.

To examine freedom and control of the internet, the study takes data corresponding to the following questions from the V-Dem project (Coppedge et al., 2017):

Question 13.2: Does the government directly or indirectly attempt to censor the print or broadcast media?

Clarification: Indirect forms of censorship might include politically motivated awarding of broadcast frequencies, withdrawal of financial support, influence over printing facilities and distribution networks, selected distribution of advertising, onerous registration requirements, prohibitive tariffs, and bribery.

We are not concerned with censorship of non - political topics such as child pornography, statements offensive to a particular religion, or defamatory speech unless this sort of censorship is used as a pretext for censoring political speech.

Responses:

0: Attempts to censor are direct and routine.

1: Attempts to censor are indirect but nevertheless routine.

2: Attempts to censor are direct but limited to especially sensitive issues.

3: Attempts to censor are indirect and limited to especially sensitive issues.

4: The government rarely attempts to censor major media in any way, and when such exceptional attempts are discovered, the responsible officials are usually punished.

Scale: Ordinal, converted to interval by the measurement model.

Question 13.3: Does the government attempt to censor information (text, audio, or visuals) on the internet? Censorship attempts include internet filtering (blocking access to certain websites or browsers), denial-of-service attacks, and partial or total internet shutdowns. We are not concerned with censorship of topics such as child pornography, highly classified information such as military or intelligence secrets, statements offensive to a particular religion, or defamatory speech unless this sort of censorship is used as a pretext for censoring political information or opinions. We are also not concerned with the extent of internet access, unless there is absolutely no access at all (in which case the coding should be 0).



Responses:

- 1: The government successfully blocks internet access except to sites that are pro-government or devoid of political content.
- 2: The government attempts to block Internet access except to sites that are pro-government or devoid of political content, but many users are able to circumvent such controls.
- 3: The government allows Internet access, including to some sites that are critical of the government, but blocks selected sites that deal with especially politically sensitive issues.
- 4: The government allows Internet access that is unrestricted, with the exceptions mentioned above.

Scale: Ordinal, converted to interval by the measurement model.

Question 13.8: Are individual journalists harassed -i.e., threatened with libel, arrested, imprisoned, beaten, or killed --by governmental or powerful nongovernmental actors while engaged in legitimate journalistic activities?

Responses:

- 0: No journalists dare to engage in journalistic activities that would offend powerful actors because harassment or worse would be certain to occur.
- 1: Some journalists occasionally offend powerful actors but they are almost always harassed or worse and eventually are forced to stop.
- 2: Some journalists who offend powerful actors are forced to stop but others manage to continue practicing journalism freely for long periods of time.
- 3: It is rare for any journalist to be harassed for offending powerful actors, and if this were to happen, those responsible for the harassment would be identified and punished.
- 4: Journalists are never harassed by governmental or powerful nongovernmental actors while engaged in legitimate journalistic activities.

Scale: Ordinal, converted to interval by the measurement model.

Question 10.2: Is there academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression related to political issues?

Responses:

- 0: Not respected by public authorities. Censorship and intimidation are frequent. Academic activities and cultural expressions are severely restricted or controlled by the government.

1: Weakly respected by public authorities. Academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression are practiced occasionally, but direct criticism of the government is mostly met with repression.

2: Somewhat respected by public authorities. Academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression are practiced routinely, but strong criticism of the government is sometimes met with repression.

3: Mostly respected by public authorities. There are few limitations on academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression, and resulting sanctions tend to be infrequent and soft.

4: Fully respected by public authorities. There are no restrictions on academic freedom or cultural expression.

Scale: Ordinal, converted to interval by the measurement model.

Question:

Does the government attempt to repress civil society organizations (CSOs)?

Responses:

0: Severely. The government violently and actively pursues all real and even some imagined members of CSOs. They seek not only to deter the activity of such groups but to effectively liquidate them. Examples include Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, and Maoist China.

1: Substantially. In addition to the kinds of harassment outlined in responses 2 and 3 below, the government also arrests, tries, and imprisons leaders of and participants in oppositional CSOs who have acted lawfully. Other sanctions include disruption of public gatherings and violent sanctions of activists (beatings, threats to families, destruction of valuable property). Examples include Mugabe's Zimbabwe, Poland under Martial Law, Serbia under Milosevic.

2: Moderately. In addition to material sanctions outlined in response 3 below, the government also engages in minor legal harassment (detentions, short-term incarceration) to dissuade CSOs from acting or expressing themselves. The government may also restrict the scope of their actions through measures that restrict association of civil society organizations with each other or political parties, bar civil society organizations from taking certain actions, or block international contacts. Examples include post-Martial Law Poland, Brazil in the early 1980s, the late Franco period in Spain.

3: Weakly. The government uses material sanctions (fines, firings, denial of social services) to deter oppositional CSOs from acting or expressing themselves.

They may also use burdensome registration or incorporation procedures to slow the formation of new civil society organizations and sidetrack them from engagement. The government may also organize Government Organized Movements or NGOs (GONGOs) to crowd out independent organizations. One example would be Singapore in the post-Yew phase or Putin's Russia.

4: No. Civil society organizations are free to organize, associate, strike, express themselves, and to criticize the government without fear of government sanctions or harassment.

Scale: Ordinal, converted to interval by the measurement model.

The methodology of "Freedom on the Net" includes 21 macro-questions and about 100 items, in three categories: 1) Obstacles to access: infrastructure barriers and economic barriers to access, legal control and ownership of service Internet providers and independence of regulatory bodies; 2) Limits of content: legal regulations on content, technical filtering and blocking of websites, self-censorship, vitality and diversity of online media and the use of digital tools for civic mobilization; and 3) Violations of user rights: government surveillance, privacy, impact on expression and online activities, imprisonment, extralegal harassment or cyber-attacks. Based on the score in the set of items, Freedom House assigns the following internet freedom ratings: Scores 0-30 = Free; Scores 31-60 = Partially Free; Scores 61-100 = Not free. In this study, we used the categorization and score assigned to each country in the 2016 Freedom on the Net report.

## **Chile**

The Chilean case represents a model of democratic transition and successful economic reform in both its dynamics and its results<sup>4</sup>. A democracy in progressive consolidation for a quarter of a century, articulated around two political-partisan blocs (the center-left nucleated in opposition to the dictatorship versus the neoliberal right) with appreciable levels of governability and with rates of unprecedented growth for the region. Among the antecedents that characterize this country as a special case within the political instability and economic stagnation that has characterized the drift of the Latin American nations. Chile, thus appears as a consolidated democracy capable of achieving lasting governance in a highly volatile and complex sociopolitical context such as the

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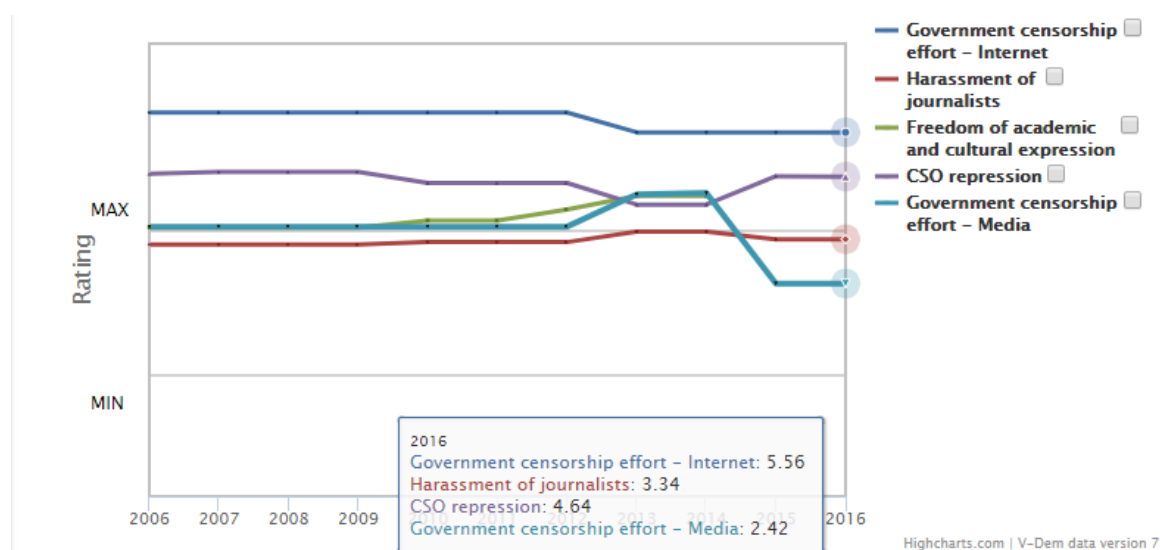
<sup>4</sup> We thank Carlos Durán Migliardi for his contribution to the contextualization of the Chilean case.

context of democratic transitions. However, this consolidation entailed a progressive technocratization of political discourse and its logics of action, challenged by recent social mobilizations for the right of free education, improvements in various public services and changes in the constitution inherited from the dictatorship (Garretón, 2012, Hunneus, 2014, Durán, 2016). The V-Dem polyarchy additive index obtained by Chile is 0.95.

Chile has a population of 18 million inhabitants and an internet penetration of 77% of the population (Internet World Stats, 2017). According to data provided by V-Dem, Chile obtained a score of 5.56 in internet censorship in 2016, implying that the Chilean government allows unrestricted Internet access. The southern part of the country has remained at the highest level of respect for freedom of expression on the internet throughout the period 2006-2016. In contrast, it obtained a score of 2.42 in media censorship in 2016, implying that there are attempts at direct censorship but limited to especially sensitive issues. In this period 2015-2016, Chile receded in respect of the years 2013 and 2014, when V-Dem data reported that the government rarely attempted to censor the mainstream media in any way, and when such exceptional attempts were discovered, responsible officials were punished. With respect to harassment of journalists, Chile has a score of 3.34 in 2016, implying that it is rare for a journalist to be harassed for offending powerful actors and, if this happens, those responsible for harassment are identified and punished; the austral country has remained in this interval throughout the study period.

Finally, in 2016, Chile scores a 4.64 score in repression against CSOs, implying that civil society organizations are free to organize, associate, strike, express and criticize the government without fear of sanctions or government harassment; the country has remained in this interval throughout the study period. In the years 2015 and 2016, V-Dem did not measure academic freedom and freedom of expression in Chile; in 2013 and 2014, this country had been in the maximum range, i.e. the data reported that there were no cases of restrictions on academic freedom or cultural expression (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Indicators V-Dem Chile (2016)



Source: V-Dem data version 7

## Mexico

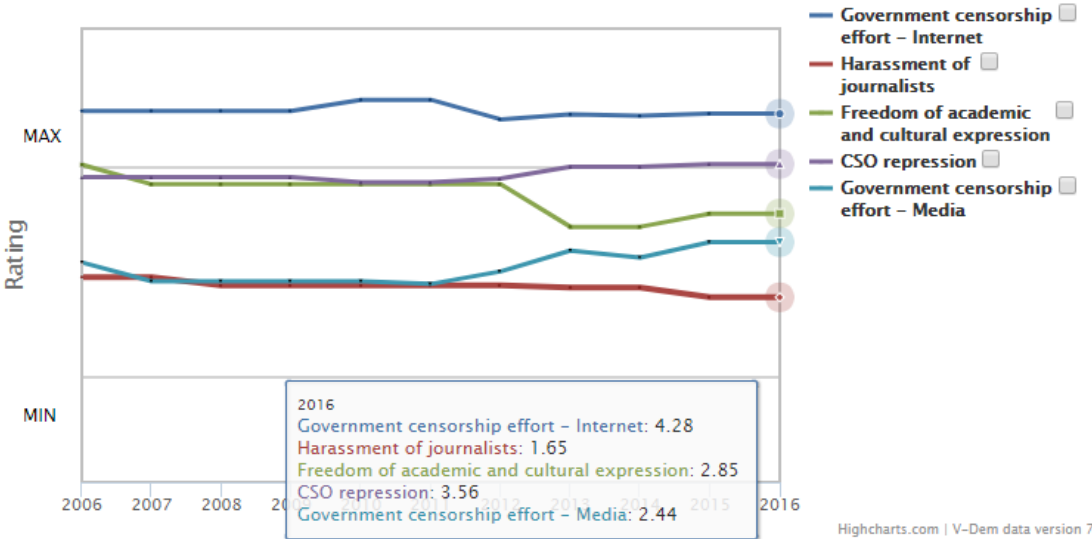
In Mexico, the political regime emerging from alternation after 2000 can be formally classified as a polyarchy, although with deficits in central dimensions such as the electoral sphere and the quality of party life. Frequently, its dominant actors (in particular the parties) operate in oligarchic ways, limiting the active participation of its members, capturing the national political agenda and restricting citizen demands and participation, while presenting somewhat undifferentiated political programs. We see, at the federal or national level, a limited pluralism and a low quality democracy. At the state level, we see subnational political regimes ranging from delegative democracy - with powerful governors imposing the pattern of regional political life - and punctual expressions of electoral authoritarianism, with their share of repression and use of violence. In some regional and local governments, the political alternation and the civil ways of exercising the power resent, there is control of the press and the public employees (Marti, Ortega, Somuano & Wright, 2014; Loza & Méndez, 2016, Somuano & Nieto, 2016). The V-Dem polyarchy additive index obtained by Mexico is 0.85.

Mexico has a population of 127 million inhabitants and its internet penetration of 57% of the population (Freedom House, 2016). In the data provided by V-Dem, Mexico obtains a score of 4.28 in Internet censorship in 2016, implying that the government allows unrestricted access. In addition, the country has maintained the highest level of respect for freedom of access to the net throughout the period 2006-2016. On the other hand, it achieves a score of 2.44 in media censorship in 2016, which implies that there are direct censorship attempts, but limited to

especially sensitive issues. Mexico has been in this range since 2011, advancing from the early years of the century when V-Dem data reported that attempts at censorship were routine, albeit indirect. With respect to harassment of journalists, Mexico scores a 1.65 score in 2016, implying that journalists are severely harassed and sometimes suffer major attacks - which can lead to murder, being the country with the most murders of journalists in the region - until they are forced to stop publishing on matters that may disturb the powerful. Mexico has remained in this interval throughout the study period.

In relation to academic freedom and freedom of expression, Mexico scores 2.85, implying that academics and intellectuals routinely exercise their rights and freedoms, but strong criticism of the government may sometimes lead to forms of repression; the country has remained in this range since 2013, previously it was in a higher interval and data indicate that there were few limitations to academic freedom and cultural freedom of expression with infrequent government sanctions. Finally, in 2016, Mexico scores 3.56 in repression against CSOs, implying that the Mexican government uses administrative sanctions to dissuade CSOs from acting or expressing themselves and GONGOS may occupy spaces of independent organizations; the country has remained in this interval throughout the study period (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Indicators V-Dem Mexico (2016)



Source: V-Dem data version 7

The report on "Freedom on the Net 2016" reports that Mexico is a country where the internet is partially free and the press is not free. Mexico receives a score of 38 points out of 100 and registers its worst indicators in the dimension of Violations of Users' Rights (see Chart 1). The main negative indicator is that at least three journalists who covered sensitive stories in

online media were killed between 2015 and 2016. Internet users are also arrested for their publications or online expression.

Despite pressure from civil society in 2016, Mexico's Supreme Court confirmed new data retention requirements and real-time geolocation provisions approved in 2014, but ruled that it is necessary for the authorities to obtain a court order to access user metadata. This extends the surveillance capabilities of the Mexican State and violates users' privacy and anonymity rights. With respect to technical attacks, at least three news sites suffered cyber-attacks in June 2016, during state elections in Puebla, thus disrupting voters' access to information at a critical time.

**Chart 1.** Mexico Freedom on the Net (2016)

Status	Total Score	Obstacles to Access	Content Limits	User's Rights Violations
Partly Free	38	8	10	20

**Ecuador**

Ecuador is a delegative democracy historically weighed down by weak state institutions and political instability<sup>5</sup>. However, in the last decade, important achievements in rights and institutionality were obtained from the newly enacted Constitution, which is among the most innovative in Latin America. In the last decade, with the strength that Alianza País takes as the governing party and the legislative majority that it gets, serious doubts arise about the independence of the State powers. Despite the existence of free, open and competitive elections, the design of the electoral system - the distribution of constituencies, the type of list and the formulas for allocating seats - favors the majority party. Likewise, the executive-legislative relationship favors the former under a hyper-presidential scheme, given all the attributions that the Constitution grants to the president - such as governing by decree and veto capacity. Meanwhile the legislature does not have the capacity to dismiss state ministers. There is, also, a historically weak party system and a belligerent civil society besieged by the ruling party. In addition, given the legislative majority of the governing party, often the choice of authorities for the remaining powers and functions of the state responds to the same dominant political circle (Mantilla & Mejía, 2012, Ortiz, 2013, Ulloa, 2017). The V-Dem polyarchy additive index obtained by Ecuador is 0.82.

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<sup>5</sup> We thank Coralia Barahona for her contribution to the contextualization of the Ecuadorian case

Ecuador has a population of 16 million and an internet penetration of 49% of the population (Freedom House, 2016). In the data provided by V-Dem, Ecuador obtains a score of 3.77 in internet censorship in 2016, which implies that the government allows access to the internet, including some sites that are critical of the government, but blocks selected sites that deal especially politically sensitive issues. The country has remained in this interval in the years 2015 and 2016, after having been in the upper range in the years 2013 and 2014. With regard to censorship of media, Ecuador obtains in 2016 a score of 1.89 which implies that the attempts of censorship are routine, although indirect. The Andean country has been in this interval since 2009, falling from the early years of the century when the V-Dem data reported that censorship attempts were direct but limited to especially sensitive issues. Regarding the harassment of journalists, Ecuador obtained in 2016 a score of 2.32, which means that some information professionals who publish content that annoy powerful actors are forced to stop their publications, but others manage to continue to practice journalism freely in the long run. Ecuador has remained in this interval since 2013, whereas previously, during the 2009-2012 period, data V-Dem indicate that journalists in this country were severely harassed and sometimes suffered major attacks until they were forced to interrupt publications on issues that could bother the powerful.

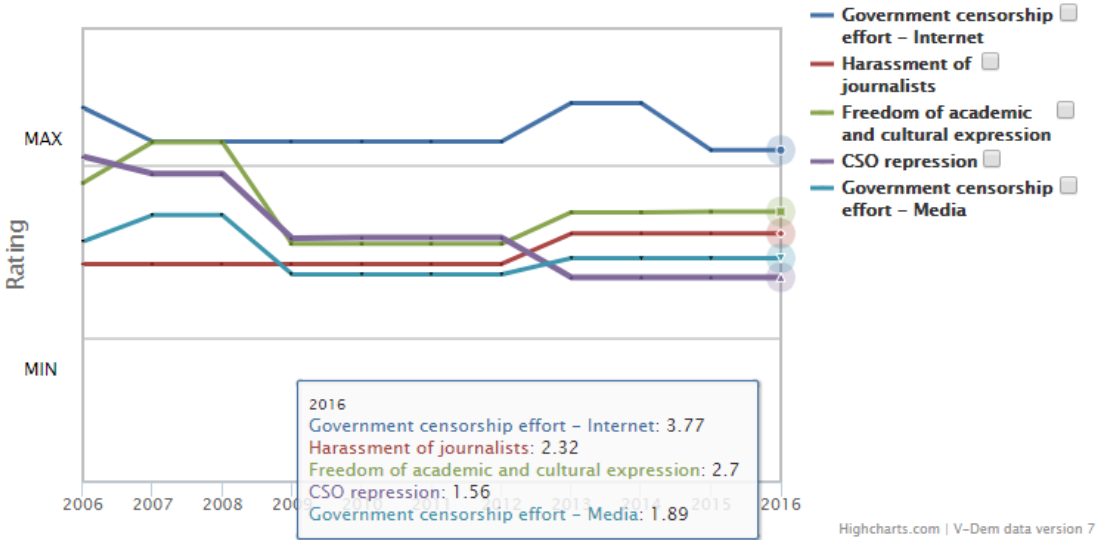
With regards to academic freedom and freedom of expression, Ecuador scores 2.70, which implies that academics and intellectuals routinely exercise their rights and freedoms, but strong criticism of the government occasionally can lead to forms of repression. The Andean country has remained in this interval since 2009, previously it was in a higher range and data indicate that there were few limitations to academic freedom and cultural freedom of expression with infrequent government sanctions. Finally, in 2016, Ecuador scores 1.56 in repression against CSOs, implying that the Ecuadorian government hold, prosecutes and imprisons CSOs leaders and activists who have acted legally. The country has remained in this interval since 2013 (see Figure 3).

The Freedom on the Net 2016 report reports that Ecuador is a country where the Internet is partially free, while the press is not free. Ecuador receives a score of 41 points out of 100 and registers its worst indicators in the dimension of Violations of Users' Rights (see Chart 2). The report gathers evidence that the Ecuadorian government conducts on-line surveillance activities that affect a wide range of individuals (politicians, journalists and activists). Demands for defamation and frequent verbal attacks are used to discourage Internet users from expressing online critical comments about the government. For example, two opposition political leaders were sentenced to 15 and 30 days in jail respectively because of their social media comments.



Several digital media suffered cyber-attacks after publishing information on the links between Ecuador's intelligence agency and the surveillance company Hacking Team; other digital media were attacked after covering anti-government protests in June 2015. Notably, the use of copyright infringement notes has become a commonly used resource for forcing the removal from digital media and social media platforms of content criticizing the government.

**Figure 3.** Indicators V-Dem Ecuador 2016



Source: V-Dem data version 7

**Chart 2.** Ecuador Freedom on the Net 2016

Status	Total Score	Obstacles to Access	Content Limits	User's Rights Violations
Partly Free	41	8	12	21

**Venezuela**

In the Venezuelan case, the rise and subsequent consolidation of the chavism was accompanied by a gradual change of the political regime that tended to personalization and autocratization. A patronage apparatus supported by abundant oil revenues was instrumental to the regimen. From its early phase of delegative democracy (1999-2005), Chavism moved toward a hyper-presidentialism. On several occasions, President Chávez obtained enabling legislation with broad powers to govern by decree on various areas of public policy. The second installment in Chávez's term (2006-2013) corresponds to competitive authoritarianism. At this stage, variables that

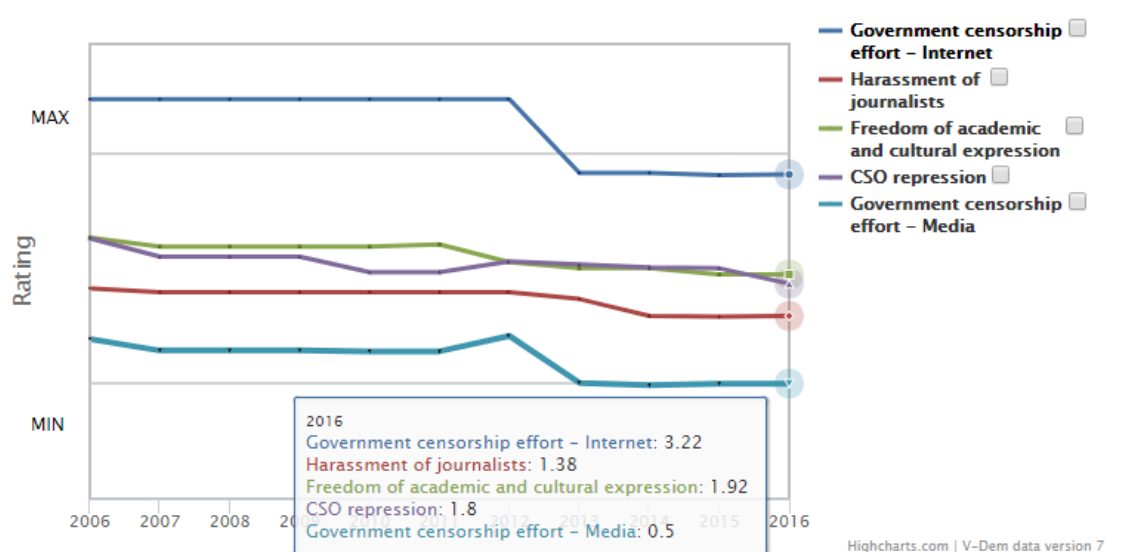
coincide with this model are evident, such as abuse of state resources to finance electoral campaigns, progress towards a hegemonic party model, control of the media and civil society, criminalization of activists and opposition leaders. Finally, from 2014, under the presidency of Nicolás Maduro, authoritarianism has become more akin to the closed variant, putting the opposition on the cutting edge of illegalization and resorting to massive repression of citizen protests.

With the implementation of the so-called National Constituent Assembly, steps are taken towards a further autocratization of the regime, which begins to assume prototypical totalitarian features, in some respects similar to the Cuban regime (Corrales and Hidalgo, 2013, Gómez & Arenas, 2013, Chaguaceda & Puerta , 2015). The Venezuelan V-Dem additive index obtained by Venezuela is 0.61.

Venezuela has a population of 31 million inhabitants and an internet penetration of 62% of the population (Freedom House, 2016). In the data provided by V-Dem, Venezuela obtains a 3.22 score in internet censorship in 2016, implying that the government allows Internet access, including some sites that are critical of the government, but blocks selected sites that deal with especially politically sensitive issues. The country has remained in this interval since 2013, after having been in the upper range in previous years. With regards to censorship of media, Venezuela obtains in 2016 a score of 0.50, which implies that the censorship is direct and routine. The Caribbean country has been in this interval since 2013 and previously it was located in the immediately superior interval in which the censorship was routine but indirect. With respect to harassment of journalists, in 2016, Venezuela gets a score of 1.38, implying that journalists are severely harassed and sometimes suffer major attacks until they are forced to stop publishing on issues that may disturb the powerful; the country has remained in this interval throughout the decade of study.

With regards to academic freedom and freedom of expression, Venezuela scores 1.92, which implies that academics and intellectuals try to exercise their rights and freedoms, but criticism of the government generally leads to repression. The country has remained in this interval since 2015, while previously it was in a higher range and the data indicate that until 2014 more academics and intellectuals were able to express themselves freely without being exposed to government sanctions. Finally, in 2016, Venezuela scores 1.80 in repression against CSOs, implying that the Venezuelan government hold, prosecutes and imprisons CSOs leaders and activists who have acted legally. V-Dem data indicate that detention and imprisonment of activists working within the rule of the law have been common in Venezuela throughout the decade of study (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Indicators V-Dem Venezuela 2016



Source: V-Dem data version 7

The Freedom on the Net 2016 reports that Venezuela is a country where the Internet is partially free, while the press is not. Venezuela receives a score of 60 points out of 100 and registers negative indicators in the three dimensions Violations to the Rights of Users, Obstacles to Access and Limitations of Contents (see chart 3). The report gathers evidence that Venezuelan security forces routinely and arbitrarily arrest digital journalists, confiscate cell phones, and force users to erase images from protests or queues to buy food.

In September 2015, opposition politician Leopoldo López was sentenced to nearly 14 years in prison after prosecutors alleged that he incited violence. As the main evidence in the trial against him, prosecutors presented hundreds of tweets and a video of YouTube in which the leader said the sentence "we have to go out to conquer democracy". Additionally, the key witness of the prosecution was a linguist who analyzed @leopoldolopez's speech to conclude that that Twitter account was used to summon subliminally anti-government demonstrations.

The interception of emails from journalists and opposition activists continues to be a tactic widely used by the Venezuelan government, which has been establishing massive automated surveillance mechanisms on the Internet since 2010. Since June 2014, the National Commission of Telecommunications (CONATEL) established as a routine practice the blocking of web pages that publish currency exchange rates; these and other websites continued to be blocked in 2015 and 2016.

The average speed of broadband does not exceed 2 Mbps, less than 5% of connections are faster than 4 Mbps. According to official figures, Internet penetration remained above 60 percent, although the total number of subscribers has declined and there is a significant gap

between rural and urban areas. Currency controls adversely affect the telecommunications industry, while electricity rationing often prevents users from accessing the internet connection.

**Chart 3.** Venezuela Freedom on the Net 2016

Status	Total Score	Obstacles to Access	Content Limits	User’s Rights Violations
Partly Free	60	18	17	25

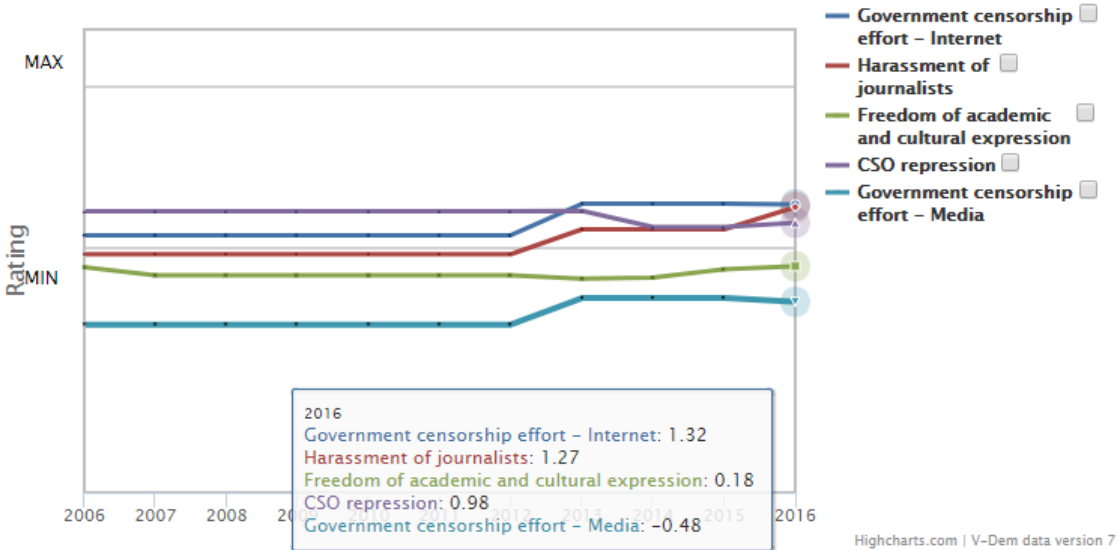
**Cuba**

Cuba is an autocracy. That is a regime where power is concentrated and/or personalized, it is exercised vertically and with varying degrees of arbitrariness. The inhabitants of the nation maintain with the State a relationship of subordination that prevents the exercise of citizenship rights. Belonging to the millenarian and extensive family of autocracies, Cuba is not a traditional dictatorship or a military authoritarianism. Nor is it a mature post-totalitarianism. The regime is still in an early stage of post-totalitarian evolution (Farber, 2011; Rojas, 2015; Chaguaceda and Geoffray, 2015). In an initial post-totalitarianism several totalitarian nuclei (political and police control, state ideology) are still central to the constitution, reproduction, and day-to-day functioning of the political order, and the regimen is prone to relapsing (Pasquino, 2014; Linz, 2000; Linz y Stephan, 1997). However, the leadership switched from charismatic to collegial and bureaucratic. The V-Dem polyarchy additive index obtained by Cuba is 0.38.

Cuba has a population of 11 million inhabitants and an internet penetration of 5% of the population (Freedom House, 2016). In the data provided by V-Dem, Cuba obtained a score of 1.32 in Internet censorship in 2016, implying that the use of the internet is routinely and systematically censored, although generally by means of indirect mechanisms. The island has remained in this interval since 2013, when Internet access for Cuban citizens began to open. With regard to censorship of media, in 2016 Cuba obtained a score of -0.48, implying that censorship of the media is total and systematic and has been so throughout the study period. Regarding harassment of journalists, Cuba has a score of 1.27 in 2016, which implies that journalists are severely harassed and sometimes suffer major attacks to force them not to publish on issues that may disturb the powerful; painfully, this is a slight improvement on the Caribbean island where until 2015 journalists did not even dare to try to report on issues that could disturb the powerful.

In relation to academic freedom and freedom of expression, Cuba scores 0.18, as academic activities and cultural expressions are severely restricted or controlled by the government, and this has been the case throughout the study period. Finally, in 2016, Cuba scores 0.98 in repression against CSOs, implying that the communist government persecutes in a violent and active way all the actual CSOs members and even some falsely assumed to be. The government does not only try to dissuade the activity CSOs, but to effectively liquidate their activists. Paradoxically, the indicators of persecution of Cuban civil society have worsened since 2014 (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Indicators V-Dem Cuba 2016



Source: V-Dem data version 7

The Freedom on the Net 2016 reports that Cuba is a country where the Internet is not free and the press is not free either. Cuba receives a score of 79 points out of 100 and registers negative indicators in the three dimensions: Violations of User Rights, Obstacles to Access and Limitations of Contents (see chart 4).

**Chart 4.** Cuba Freedom on the Net 2016

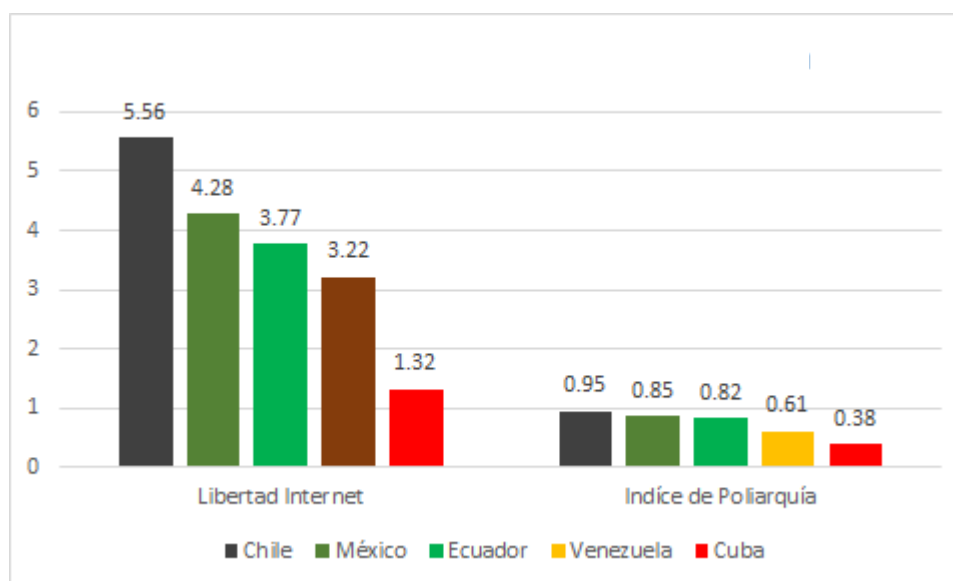
Status	Total Score	Obstacles to Access	Content Limits	User’s Rights Violations
No Free	79	21	26	32

Since the United States and Cuba officially reestablished diplomatic relations, new regulations have reduced restrictions on US telecommunications companies to begin offering services on the island. The Cuban government launched its first public Wi-Fi hotspots in June and July 2015. While these hotspots have become a popular way to access the Internet, limited and costly connections remain a major barrier. Independent bloggers and journalists continue to face censorship, intimidation and arrests. During this period several removals of content were reported in the blog platform sponsored by the government: *Reflejos*. Despite the harsh censorship of content considered as "counterrevolutionary", Cubans have launched a series of independent websites, which offer alternative information on the Cuban reality.

## **IV. Discussion and results**

In this paper we aim to demonstrate that internet control varies in association with existing political regimes. The V-Dem data allows us to make a comparison of the internet freedom score obtained by each of the countries and correlate it with their polyarchy index (see Figure 6). The order obtained by the five countries in the variable "Internet Freedom" and in the "Polyarchy Index" coincides. The Pearson correlation analysis shows that the value of R is 0.9692, with the value  $p = 0.017788$ . The result is significant at  $p < 0.05$ . This is a strong positive correlation, which means that the higher the "Polyarchy Index" the higher the score in the "Internet Freedom" variable. This provides statistical evidence to support the hypothesis that the higher the quality of democracy is greater freedom of the internet, while the greater autocracy is the greater censorship of the internet.

**Figure 6.** Internet Freedom / Polyarchy Index by country



In summary, this exploratory study presents evidence that allows to associate political regime and index of polyarchy with internet freedom. Chile, a high-quality democracy obtained a high Polyarchy Index (0.95) and a high score in the Internet Freedom variable (5.56), with no controls on the circulation of on-line information. Mexico, a low-quality democracy obtains a high Polyarchy Index (0.85) and a moderately high Internet Freedom (4.28) score, with second-generation selective controls on the flow of information on-line. Ecuador, a delegative democracy, obtained a high Polyarchy Index (0.82) and a moderate score in the variable Freedom of the Internet (3.77), with selective second-generation controls to the circulation of on-line information. Venezuela, a newly established hegemonic authoritarianism obtains a median polyarchy index (0.61) and a moderate score in the variable Freedom of the Internet (3.22), with selective controls of first and second generation to the circulation of on-line information. Cuba, an early post-totalitarianism regime obtained a low Polyarchy Index (0.38) and a low score in the Internet Freedom variable (1.32), with systematic first-generation controls to the circulation of on-line information.

While autocratic regimes, such as Cuba, prevent the widespread use of the Internet for fear of breaking the state monopoly on information (Puddington, 2017), hybrid regimes and low quality democracies, such as Ecuador and Mexico, tolerate a moderate rate of Internet penetration due to its importance for participating in the global economy and because it helps them to sustain their international legitimacy. Under competitive authoritarianism and other forms of neo-authoritarianism, as digital media consolidates as a real alternative to traditional news sources, and social media platforms have become crucial tools for the political mobilization of citizens, governments enacted policies to disrupt internet access with second

generation control mechanisms (Deibert & Rohozinski, 2010; Crete-Nishihata, Deibert & Senft, 2013; Puyosa, 2015; Puddington, 2017; Puyosa, 2017c). As countries with already moderately high internet penetration became authoritarian, first generation controls may put in place, as happened in the case of Venezuela, beginning as of 2009 and more so after 2014. Finally, under democratic regimes policies for the protection of users' rights are enacted, there is improvement on the conditions of access, and discussions on net neutrality occur, as happen in Chile.

## V. Conclusions

Since the end of the first decade of the 21st century, coinciding with the global expansion of the Internet political impact, policies aimed at Internet control have spread internationally. It is no unusual that even democratic regimes establish mechanisms for monitoring the flow of information and online communications to prevent phenomena such as terrorism or extremism in its various manifestations. Under hybrid or overtly autocratic regimes, the rulers have expanded not only surveillance and censorship on the internet in order to monitor and to control the dissent regarding, but also they have begun to use the net as a space for promoting official agendas.

We consider, through the analysis of the revised evidence - both the general information of the cases and their disaggregated performance in the studies and indicators of Varieties of Democracy and Freedom on the Net - that there is a relation between the type of control policies and the type of political regime prevailing in each country. In that sense, the more autocratic the regime is, the more first-generation internet controls are observed, including censoring content and blocking access to the internet. Hybrid regimes, on the other hand, favor second-generation controls, which entail obstacles to access without totally blocking the service, and sometimes they criminalize users and providers in order to prevent political usage without conventional censorship.

From the results of this exploratory study it is possible to propose a study that covers all the countries of Latin America and to analyze statistically the correlation between the index of polyarchy and the variables of freedom of expression, as well as the relations between qualitative categorization of the political regime with the adoption of control measures of the first or second generation.



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