

5 biggest challenges to democracy in Latin America



Three experts discussed the five biggest challenges to democracy in Latin America as part of the first **Latin American Conference on Social Sciences and Government** organized by [La Tríada](#).

La Tríada is an alliance formed in 2018 by [Tec de Monterrey](#), the [University of Los Andes in Colombia \(Uniandes\)](#), and the [Pontifical Catholic University of Chile](#).

The following dignitaries took part in this discussion:

- **Edna Jaime**, *Dean of Tec de Monterrey's School of Social Sciences and Government;*
- **Mariane Krause**, *Dean of the Catholic University of Chile's Social Sciences Faculty; and*
- **María Margarita Zuleta**, *Director of the School of Government at the University of Los Andes.*

According to the panelists, it is essential to tackle the issue **from a multifactorial viewpoint** to understand the **current challenges in both the process and the perception of democracy** in Latin America.



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*“**Why is trust in democracy being lost?** We have to take historical factors into account both as a region and independent states to help us understand this phenomenon,” Edna explained.*

*“It is important for us as educational institutions to **understand what we are up against** to be able to define what we should and could do,” she said.*

*“In **Latin American** countries like Chile, the **popular vote can be powerful enough** to overthrow a dictatorship or to pave the way to a radical government,” Krause remarked.*

*“Latinobarómetro data has shown that **citizens in general are weary; they no longer believe in the power of the vote** and we should be talking about why they feel this way and what is causing it,” she added.*

The five biggest challenges for democracy in Latin America

The academics **explained the five main challenges facing Latin American society** in terms of democracy and citizen participation in electoral and mobilization issues.

1. Loss of a sense of collectivity and civil community

Krause explained that **twenty-first century Latin American populations** have bolstered their sense of **individualism**, which has now taken precedence over the idea of **seeking the “common**

good.”

“In sociology, we call this the **individualization process**, in which **weakening ties to the community** result in a stronger sense of individualism,” she explained.

“This leads to **feelings of loneliness and distrust**, which is the rot at the heart of every culture because it doesn’t let us see **future solutions to problems** like inequality or poverty that we have in common,” she said.

The expert goes on to explain how these feelings are reflected negatively in the **perceptions of leaders and the community itself** concerning their ability to improve their living conditions.



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2. Fragmented opinions and political polarization

Both Krause and Zuleta agree that **political divisions**, exacerbated by party-representative relations, bring about **fragmentation of public opinion**.

“A major threat has to do with the **positions we adopt as individuals** on very serious issues **like climate change** and what we can do as a society to deal with them,” Zuleta stressed.

“**Fragmented opinions concerning common challenges** of this nature generate a number of polarizations, which are then nourished by **disinformation campaigns** that lead to a loss of trust,” she remarked.

Zuleta cites the examples of **initiatives implemented in Colombia to combat organized violence** and the different perspectives seen in Mexico on the subject of how to address the issue of **drug trafficking**.

“We need more and better politicians whose multitude of voices can reach out to Latin American society.” Edna Jaime

3. De-legitimization of democratic processes

Zuleta also highlights a **problem concerning the speeches of political leaders**, often on the campaign trail, who choose to **de-legitimize the government and the democratic system** in an attempt to win public sympathy.

*“This is evident in **comments rejecting the electoral process or the constitution itself** which have the effect of lambasting democratic institutions,”* she explained.

*“This happens when people on the campaign trail focus on their political objectives and try to win votes **without being cognizant of the great harm** they are doing to democracy,”* she pointed out.



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4. Disconnection with political parties and representatives

From the Mexican perspective, Edna points to a **disconnect between the younger members of the population and current political representatives**, which commonly results in young people's **absolute refusal to participate in democratic processes**.

*“An attempt is being made to **understand and deal with new paradigms in old, familiar ways**; there seems to be no room for new players to connect with new generations,”* explained the dean.

*“Some people still cling to the idea that the president is omnipotent and the party is omnipresent when this is **no longer the case**. It is an outdated mentality that causes a loss of connection with the people,”* she said.

This being the case, the speaker also stresses the importance and current **lack of a more horizontal leadership** capable of building bridges that span generations.

5. Lack of a multitude of voices and diversity

While the experts underscore the **role of polarization and fragmentation** as the most pressing challenges in the Latin American scenario, they also point to the **lack of diversity of voices**.

*“We need more and **better politicians whose multitude of voices** can reach the Latin American society,”* said Edna.

*“It is also imperative to include **non-political stakeholders, such as universities, in the democratic dialog** because at the end of the day knowledge is what transforms the panorama,”* she concluded.

The Latin American Conference on Social Sciences and Government

This event's purpose was to reflect on and learn about proposals concerning the challenges facing democracy in Latin America, the discussion of alternatives among relevant stakeholders, knowledge transfer, and *networking*.

The conference was held on November 22 to 24 at the Tec's **School of Government and Public Transformation** in San Pedro Garza García, Nuevo León.

During the meeting, academics addressed the different **challenges facing democracy** in Latin America, such as **inequality, poverty, and violence**.

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