

2 A Latin spring

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Literature review

The democratizing role of mass media

Conventional wisdom suggests that mass media – and media diffusion – are important for public deliberation, and play an important role fostering and maintaining democracy and stable societies. Research from political science and mass communication also stresses the democratizing role on media. Both press freedom and press and speech freedom are credited with public debate on – and criticism of – government officials and their decision-making (e.g., Bennett, 1998) and from a normative point of view, mass media, and news media in particular, are expected to hold authorities accountable, contribute to public discourse, and provide citizens with the means to make informed decisions (e.g., Esser and D’Angelo, 2006; Grabe and Bucy, 2008; Norris, 2000; Habermas, 1989; Waisbord, 1996). Indeed, the diffusion of traditional mass media have been linked to the development of institutionalized democracy and nation-states (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Waisbord, 1996), and over the years, the introduction of new media technologies tends to be paired with a narrative that celebrates their potential for democratic growth (Groshek, 2009; Spinelli, 1996). One only needs to see the narrative regarding the Green Revolution in Iran – labeled a “Twitter revolution” – and the ousting of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt to realize this kind of narrative is pervasive and used in reference to Internet and mobile technologies, despite the lack of concrete evidence showing their democratizing potential.

Indeed, the details of the links between media and democracy are somewhat unclear. Groshek (2012b), for instance, underlined the scarcity of empirical evidence supporting the idea that media are prerequisites of democratic growth. Results from his 1946–2003 time-series analysis of 122 countries showed that mass media are important, but not a universal requirement of democracy augmentation, and that the democratizing impact of media is greater in countries with higher sociopolitical instability. Furthermore, while the results supported the idea that media diffusion precedes – rather than follows – democratic growth, the impact also seemed to be reciprocal, with certain forms of mass media benefiting from increased democracy levels. After all, and as critical scholars have long

stressed, mass media reinforce the social, political, and economic structures within which they operate (Altschull, 1995; Gitlin, 1980).

Conversely, past research has long established the positive relationship between media use for news and political engagement (e.g., Flanagan et al., 2006; Livingston and Markham, 2008; McLeod, Scheufele and Moy, 1999; Shah et al., 2005). Traditional news media use, when there is trust in the information offered by media organizations, has been shown to foster discussion and engagement in civic and political behavior, especially voting behavior, in a “virtuous circle” – at least in Western democratic societies (Norris, 2000; see also Verba et al., 1995). Information is one of the key resources for mobilization and recruitment (Klofstad, 2007; Verba et al., 1995), and thus media provide knowledge to aid citizen participation. Along these lines, Internet optimists see in new technologies a democratizing force (e.g., Aouragh, 2008; Kahn and Kellner, 2004; Marmura, 2008), as the information about politics and engaging in public affairs is no longer an expensive or difficult to obtain commodity (Bimber, 2001; Tewksbury 2006).

Recent evidence, however, has further suggested that the way in which citizens engage in public affairs is changing. Younger cohorts, for example, are not necessarily interested in traditional electoral politics or trust in institutions and authorities (Bennet, 2008; Dalton, 2008); their media consumption favors entertainment over information (Bimber, 2001; Shah, Rojas, and Cho, 2009), which may have a negative effect on participatory behaviors (e.g., Putnam, 2000).

New technologies and mobilization

In addition to the traditional link between news consumption and participation, there is growing empirical evidence on the impact of new information and communication technologies on participation and public debate (e.g., Bouilianne, 2009). Online forms of communication such as blogs, social media, and user-generated content have allowed people to engage in activities – online and offline – aimed at influencing government and policy (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela, 2011; Bachmann et al., 2012; Rojas and Puig-i-Abril, 2009; Williams and Tedesco, 2006), and, for instance, social media are credited with organizing protesters in countries like Guatemala (Harlow, 2012; Harlow and Harp, 2011) and mobilizing individuals in Chile (Valenzuela, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2012). Further, following online news on politics has been found to increase both voting and online participation (Calenda and Meijer, 2009), and just seeking information in social networking sites showed to be a positive, significant predictor of participatory behaviors (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). Those who embrace digital media are, indeed, involved in public affairs – just perhaps in different ways than traditional media users (Bachmann and Gil de Zúñiga, forthcoming; Shah et al., 2002).

Cell phones and other mobile technologies are also part of this equation, as they can become effective political organizational tools (Hermanns, 2008). Suárez (2006), for instance, highlighted the impact of mobile messages in voter turnout in the 2004 Spanish general elections. Similarly, in a Colombian setting, Rojas and Puig-i-Abril found that using cell phones to mobilize and recruit contacts to support

social or political causes has a similar outcome to digital media use – offline participation – and Kim and Hopke (2011) concluded that mobile technologies foster social capital by supporting personal relationships and self-expression, especially among younger individuals (see also Ito, 2005; Ling, 2008).

Focusing on the 2011 Egyptian revolt, Groshek (2012a) found statistical support for the idea that Internet and mobile phone diffusion was related to the initiation of the revolt that led to Mubarak's resignation – albeit personal interviews suggested skepticism among Egyptians that the revolt had been an Internet-facilitated event.

This skepticism is shared by cyber-pessimist researchers, who argue that there is more hype than evidence on the democratizing capacity of new communication and information technologies (e.g. Morozov, 2011; Van de Donk et al., 2004), and point to the negative aspects of the Internet, such as surveillance and content control (e.g., Etling et al, 2010). Along these lines, in a multinational analysis of 72 countries Groshek (2010) concluded that Internet diffusion was not a specific causal mechanism of national-level democratic growth for the years 1994–2003.

Youth bulges and democracies

The changes within political behaviors and the media landscape are paralleled with the increasingly dominant role of younger generations in political action, especially in the so-called third wave democracies (Valenzuela et al., 2012; Zúquete, 2011). In this context, it is fitting to consider youth bulges and their importance in political upheaval and social instability.

Youth bulges are large young cohorts – ages 15 to 24 – relative to the either the total or the adult population (Ginges, 2005; Urdal, 2004, 2006). While these young cohorts have been historically associated with political crises and social disorder (Goldstone, 1991, 2001), their willingness to participate in political transformation stems from their need to compensate and fix economic, political and/or social inequalities (Hart et al, 2004; Urdal, 2004, 2006). Youth-saturated societies are also likely to introduce strains on the labor market, the educational system, and other institutions (Hart et al., 2004; Urdal, 2006) and if the political and economic structures fail to meet their needs, these youth bulges have been shown to openly clash with the government – not necessarily in a violent fashion – as they are among more aggrieved individuals in a nation (Urdal and Hoelscher, 2009). Youth bulges can herald political transformations (Ginges, 2005), especially under conditions of economic stagnation (Urdal, 2004) or lack of political rights, such as the absence of democratic institutions, minority representation or self-governance (Urdal, 2006).

Indeed, Urdal's (2004) multinational analysis concluded that an increase in youth bulges of one percentage point is associated with an increased likelihood of unrest of around 7 percent. A state characterized by social and political instability further fosters mass mobilization by the youth (Ginges, 2005; Urdal and Hoelscher, 2009).

Still, not all unrest connected to youth bulges is destructive, and a body of scholarship has positioned informed and mobilized youth as agents of development. Youth-saturated communities can engage in constructive forms of political activity – including activism, social change, and democratization (Hart et al., 2004). Poor and weak countries, however, may lack the institutions and resources to effectively channel anti-state grievances, which increases the risk of outbreak of conflict along political transformation (Hart et al., 2004; Urdal and Hoelscher, 2009).

The Latin American experience

Latin America includes more than 20 culturally cohesive yet distinct republics, each one with its own sociopolitical dynamics. After multiple and widespread experiences with authoritarian and military regimes in the 20th century, democratic government and the rule of law seems now to be an enduring feature in almost all countries, with leaders elected by popular vote and strengthening democratic institutions – Cuba the most notable exception (Harp et al., 2012; Hopenhayn, 2003; Weyland, 2004). On the whole, the region has gone through overall economic stabilization, although political conflicts related to poorly distributed income, high unemployment and lack of opportunities for young and indigenous people persist in most of the countries (Hopenhayn, 2003).

Indeed, in the last decades both neoliberal economics and populist politics have coexisted in several Latin American countries, for both left- and right-leaning governments. Weyland (1999; see also 2001, 2004) argued that this particular cohabitation has to do three commonalities between neoliberalism and populism: both favor party weakness, as they have an adversarial relationship with any intermediary organization; both focus on a powerful presidency that concentrates power as a means to boost personal leadership and/or to enact acute reforms; and both see in deep crisis an opportunity for their goals: populists need to prove their charisma and enhance their personal leadership, whereas neoliberals want to discredit state intervention models and uphold economic liberalism efficiency. In both cases, they need concentrated power. Arguably, the adoption of market economics has exposed Latin American countries to the international pressures of sustaining democracy (Weyland, 2004), but has also undermined democracy by weakening leftist parties, trade unions, and interest associations, which ultimately depresses political participation (Weyland, 2001, 2004; see also Hopenhayn, 2003).

While in general the region is stable, there are several critical issues in Latin American countries and demand-making individuals and communities are increasingly sharing their social struggles, especially young people, indigenous groups, LGBT movements, and women's rights organizations (Salazar, 2002; Valenzuela et al., 2012; see also Weyland, 2004). Latin America has one of the highest rates of income inequality in the world, and poverty and unemployment among young people are twice, and even three times the overall rate, although young people are more educated than their parents (Hopenhayn, 2003). Currently, young people (between the ages of 15 and 24) represent almost 18% the

total population in Latin America, and about 12% of young people are not integrated into the education system or the job market, and according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, employment and income levels among Latin American youth are in most countries worse now than they were in the 1990s.

Internet technologies began spreading rapidly but unevenly across Latin America in the mid-1990s, with an important digital divide between Latin American countries and other nations in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, and within Latin America itself, following the lines of income distribution (Hawkins and Hawkins, 2003).

The poorest populations of the region are thus generally excluded, as they usually cannot afford regular access to information communication technologies. Cell phones, however, seem to be bridging the gap, as mobile technologies are cheaper and growing at fast rates in the region – reaching users who traditionally did not have access to landlines – to the extent that mobile phone penetration across Latin America is currently close to 90% (Castells, 2007; Kim and Hopke, 2011).

Following from this literature, as well as the work of Ang et al. (2012), which tracked the interaction of youth bulges with mobile phone and Internet diffusion to political protests, the following research questions are posed:

- RQ1: Have youth bulges predicted (a) increased sociopolitical instability and (b) institutionalized democratic growth in Latin America?
- RQ2: Does increased mobile phone and Internet diffusion predict (a) increased sociopolitical instability and (b) institutionalized democratic growth?
- RQ3: Considering population and technological diffusion trends, should a “Latin Spring” of political upheavals and democratic transitions be reasonably expected?

Method

Data were gathered from several key sources: Banks’ Cross-Polity Time-Series database (hereafter “Banks”; NSD, 2013), the International Telecommunication Union (“ITU”), the Polity IV database (“Polity”), and the World Bank database of World Development Indicators (“WDI”), and then compiled into one complete dataset of 22 countries from 1946 to 2009.¹ Variables were selected on the basis of being identified in previous, similar macro-level research (see Weaver et al., 1985 and Groshek, 2009) as well as general availability. Certain limitations were present in this regard, notably that education enrollment figures as well as broadcast and print media were not sufficiently updated through 2009 for inclusion in the study reported here.

Analyses and variable identifications

The panel data here extend for 64 years and are viable for conducting a number of time-ordered regression models. The first is a relatively straightforward series of fixed-effects linear-log ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression models that are applied to

sociopolitical instability as well as institutionalized democratic growth. This model incorporates i state as well as t time fixed-effects to control for variations that may have been present across the differently constituted groupings of countries and trends over time. All independent variables were also lagged one year ($y - 1$) to account for serial autocorrelation within the variables, thereby minimizing the risk of omitted variable bias and heteroskedascity. In short, these models apply the Beck and Katz (1995) econometric “standard” of panel-data analyses with time and region fixed effects with one-year lags in predictor variables and panel-corrected standard errors.

Owing to the bounded nature of the Polity IV democracy measure applied here, it was most prudent to apply the linear model when setting democracy level as the independent variable (and pre-tests also indicated a good fit). However, when considering sociopolitical instability, it was more appropriate to apply identically constructed fixed effects but log–log OLS regression models. These set all dependent and independent coefficients in relation to one another (where a percentage change in a dependent variable corresponds to a certain percentage change in an independent predictor variable), and thus can be considered a measure of elasticity around sociopolitical instability as related to particular variables of interest, notably mobile and Internet diffusion.

Democracy

The “Polity 2” score is a multi-component historically informed measure of fair political competitiveness, formalized constraints on the abuse of power, and citizens’ ability to freely exercise civil liberties that is drawn from the Polity IV database to model national-level democracy. These scores range from -10 to $+10$ and have been applied in similar cross-national analyses (see Groshek, 2010; Gurr & Associates, 1978).

Mobile phone and internet diffusion

Mobile cellular telephone subscriptions are made to a public mobile telephone service using cellular technology, which provide access to the public switched telephone network. Post-paid and prepaid subscriptions are included (WDI, 2011). Estimates from the ITU (2011) of Internet users per 100 were used as the measure for the other component of this variable. A simple additive scale made the most of all possible variance, while likewise modeling the likelihood that many individuals would have both mobile and Internet access.

Sociopolitical instability

This variable was derived from the weighted conflict index presented in the Banks’ Cross-Polity Time-Series Database for all years without combination with any other data streams. This data represented an index of domestic stress and was used to approximate sociopolitical instability by including weighted codings of the assassinations, general strikes, guerrilla warfare, government crises, purges, riots, revolutions,

and anti-government demonstrations that took place in each country each year. Mean substitution at the country level was used to replace missing data.

Income

This study employed GDP per capita figures in US dollars from Banks' Cross-Polity Time-Series Database through 2000. Gross national income (GNI) per capita figures, also based on US dollars and compiled by the World Bank Database of World Development Indicators, were supplemented for 2001 to 2003. Since GNI is a similar but updated version of gross national product (GNP), which has become the standard for measuring countries' relative wealth, these figures were highly comparable. Any missing data points were substituted at the country level with the mean of figures for the years immediately before and after the gap.

Urbanism

Fixed landline telephones per capita data were summed with population density figures in a simple additive index. Banks' Cross-Polity Time-Series Database provided fixed-line telephone figures from 1946 to 2008. Missing data were substituted by imputing relevant cases by country before and after the interruption in only two countries. Figures for 2009 from the WDI completed the series where Bank's data was missing. Population density figures were all derived from Banks' Cross-Polity Time-Series Database and based on population divided by the size of the country.

Youth bulges and population

Following the work of Urdal (2006) and Ang et al. (2012), youth bulges are operationalized as the number of 15–24-year-old citizens, relative to the overall population 15 years and older. Data are gathered from the archive World Population Prospects, which is maintained by the United Nations (2011). As data are reported in five-year intervals, gaps were imputed with incremental figures for the purposes of smoothing data and demonstrating trends over time. General population figures were gathered from the Banks' Cross-Polity Time-Series Database and were input unadjusted as controls to optimize regression models.

Findings

The first series of research questions (RQ1a and 1b) were concerned with youth bulges and how those may contribute to sociopolitical instability and national-level democracies. Perhaps the most important finding reported in this study is that unlike the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Latin America is not experiencing a youth bulge phenomenon through 2009. Indeed, as shown in Figure 2.1, the relative youth population in the whole of Latin America has been generally on the decline since the early 1980s. Thus, while peak of this bulge did

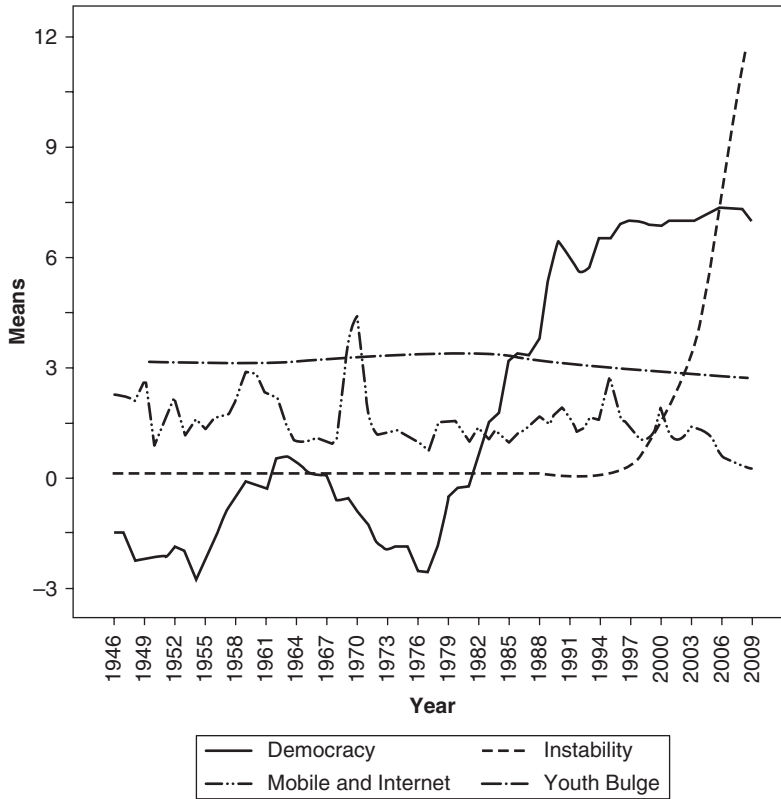


Figure 2.1 Linear plots mapping mean levels of democracy levels, sociopolitical instability, mobile phone and internet diffusion, and youth bulge populations for all included countries, 1946–2009

Note: Youth bulge data begins with 1950. Variables are transformed for scaling purposes [instability*.0001; mobile and internet*.01; youth bulge*10]. $N = 22$ countries with a total of 1376 observations over a total of 64 possible years.

precede and generally coincide with a drastic growth in democracy in the region, contemporary analyses must look elsewhere to explain or predict democratic shifts in the 21st century.

Further analyses of RQ1 identified that, in general, there was no correlation between youth bulges and sociopolitical instability ($r = 0.027$, $p = \text{n.s.}$) and that youth bulges actually negatively correlated ($r = -0.163$, $p < .01$) with institutionalized democracy levels (a complete correlation matrix is summarized in Table 2.1).

Bivariate correlations do not account for factors of time and space, but similar results were also observed when examining if youth bulges have predicted increased instability and democracy in Latin America. Put simply, when lagging independent variables and controlling for a host of germane characteristics, including serial auto-correlation in following the preferred analytic process outlined by Beck and Katz

Table 2.1 Bivariate Pearson correlation matrix for observed variables of research questions

	Democracy	Mob/Int	Youth Blg	GDP/capita	Instblty	Urbanism	Education
Democracy	1.0000						
Mobile and Int	0.307**	1.0000					
Youth bulge	-0.163**	-0.340**	1.0000				
GDP/capita	0.413**	0.650**	-0.492**	1.0000			
Instblty	-0.121**	-0.125**	0.027	-0.144**	1.0000		
Urbanism	0.303**	0.334**	-0.133**	0.398**	-0.127**	1.0000	
Education	0.430**	0.210**	0.073**	0.331**	-0.129**	0.246**	1.0000

Note: $N = 1293$ for all correlation coefficients (Pearson's r) reported. Listwise deletion. (** = $p < .01$)

(1995), there was no evidence that youth bulges have been related positively to instability or democracy over this time period in these 22 countries.

In the fixed-effects regression model that examined sociopolitical instability with panel-corrected standard errors, the youth bulge rate was not statistically significant ($\beta = .507272$, $SE = .5808732$, $p = n.s.$). For full model of factors predicting sociopolitical instability, see Table 2.2. The similarly specified regression model with institutionalized democracy also returned results ($\beta = 1.064947$, $SE = 1.035898$, $p = n.s.$) that were not statistically significant in signalling any appreciable import of youth bulges in democratic growth in Latin America in the post-World War II era represented in these data. The full model that situated national level democracy is summarized in Table 2.3. Altogether, it seems that other factors must be explored in greater detail as explanatory factors in conceptualizing the generally sustained democratic shift observed in Latin America in recent decades.

The second set of research questions take on precisely that task and examine in RQ2a and 2b in an area of increasing visibility and importance – mobile phone and Internet diffusion. Specifically, these research questions propose modeling the relationships between technological diffusion, as it relates to sociopolitical instability and institutionalized democratic growth.

Table 2.2 Regression model for sociopolitical instability across all countries and all years

Variables	β	SE
Democracy level	.630635***	.142795
Mobile phone and Internet diffusion	-.390875***	.1102135
Youth bulge rate	.507272	.5808732
Income level per capita	-.525954***	.145878
Urbanized population ratio	-.251731**	.0977509
Educational attainment	-.336082	.4553926
Overall population size	.930371***	.0684958
Constant	-3.31270	4.84

Note: All variables are log-transformed (ln) and all independent variables are lagged 1 year. Coefficients are unstandardized. Panel corrected standard errors. $N = 1271$. $R^2 = 0.172$

$p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2.3 Regression model for democracy level across all countries and all years

<i>Variables</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
Sociopolitical instability	.2024166***	.057346
Mobile phone and Internet diffusion	1.090533***	.3092241
Youth bulge rate	1.064947	1.035898
Income level per capita	1.991788***	.3154979
Urbanized population ratio	.4597594*	.212493
Educational attainment	4.049131***	.8666574
Overall population size	-.7645281***	.1127417
Constant	-17.32758 [#]	9.466685

Note: All independent variables are log-transformed (ln) and lagged 1 year. Coefficients are unstandardized. Panel corrected standard errors. $N = 1271$. $R^2 = 0.317$

[#] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

RQ2a and 2b were also first examined with a visual plot of means of time (see Figure 2.1), and it is clear that mobile phone and Internet diffusion has exploded in the region over a reasonably short timeframe (starting with 1988 and the first identifiable diffusion of mobile phones) to penetration rates of 92.70 and 26.55 per hundred, respectively, for mobile phone and Internet access. When analyzing this trend against that of sociopolitical instability in the region, a negative and statistically significant correlation ($r = -0.125$, $p < .01$) can be observed. Considering that instability has noticeably been declining in the region, particularly since 1988, this finding is not unexpected. It was also unsurprising to find a positive, statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.307$, $p < .01$) between democracy levels – which rose considerably upwards from 1988 to 1989 and generally forged an upward trajectory to an average level of 6.95 by 2009 – and the diffusion of mobile and Internet.

In examining these relationships more thoroughly with the same fixed-effects regression models with panel-corrected standard errors from RQ1a and 1b, the same patterns are emergent, but are more rigorous accounts of comparative trends over time. Specifically, mobile phone and Internet diffusion was negatively related to sociopolitical instability ($\beta = -.390875$, $SE = .1102135$, $p < .001$) to a statistically significant degree when accounting for a host of germane characteristics as well as time and state effects (see Table 2.2). Comparatively, mobile phone and Internet diffusion was positively related to higher levels of democratic governance over time and across states ($\beta = 1.090533$, $SE = .3092241$, $p < .001$), and that relationship was also statistically significant (see Table 2.3). Considered jointly, these findings imply a certain level of tension between instability and democracy, and the intersection of communicative technologies in the process of democratic development.

While RQ3 is not empirically examined with data collected here, a relatively straightforward interpretation of the findings reported in this study makes it seem abundantly clear that a “Latin Spring” is not in the offing. One of the primary considerations that separate Latin America from the MENA region in this regard is the average level of democracy, which by estimations of Polity 2 scores indicated that regimes in the MENA area were still autocracies (with an average

of -2.08) in 2009 whereas the level of democracy in Latin America was comparably robust (with an average of 6.95). Though the diffusion of communication technologies and youth bulge rates between these regions are fairly comparable overall, some key distinctions remain in other characteristics – including democratic baselines as well as religious perspectives, sociopolitical instability, and educational development.

Conclusions

This study examined the role of mobile technology diffusion – mobile phone and Internet – in (re)shaping the political landscape in Latin America. Building on two theoretical traditions – media diffusion and youth bulges – the analysis tried to predict which countries are likely to experience Arab Spring-like political upheavals and democratic transitions, but the results lend little support for such a forecast. The regression models show no significant or consistent impact of large young cohorts in the democracy augmentation seen in Latin America through 2009 – indeed, the countries analyzed here have not even experienced a youth bulge phenomenon in the last decades. Further, while mobile technologies have increased in the region, mobile and Internet diffusion is a negative predictor of sociopolitical instability. If in the MENA region technological diffusion seemed to facilitate the revolts and cause sociopolitical instability, in Latin America the impact of these new technologies is in the opposite direction.

One possible explanation has to do with the particularities of the majority of the Latin American countries, which have sustained democratic regimes for the most part of the last two decades. The story is quite different in the countries that experienced the Arab Spring, where autocratic governments were still the rule in the 21st century. Arguably, shifts in democratic countries would be more likely to be measured rather than major revolutions like the ones that ended up ousting Mubarak in Egypt, and Ben Ali in Tunisia. If anything, many Latin American countries went through those upheavals decades ago, when they transition from military rule to democratic governments. Thus, while Latin America and the MENA area share some similarities, the regions are not really comparable. The demands the citizens may want to make of their governments might be on different scales.

Any consideration of the political agency of mobile technologies in Latin America also has to take into account that Internet and cell phones diffusion is not uniform in the region or even within each country. While widespread, mobiles still do not necessarily reach all segments of the population. For instance, indigenous people – traditionally among the most deprived segments of the population – may not have the financial means or technological know-how to access these new media, and language barriers and outdated infrastructure may further cement their digital exclusion – more so when considering they often live in rural, less developed areas. Further, Internet penetration in Latin America has been linked to socio-economic inequality (Hawkins and Hawkins, 2003) and ICTs in general tend to be more expensive in Latin American countries than in other parts of the world (Hilbert, 2010), which affects the poor's chances of getting Internet access. Countries like Mexico, Chile, and Argentina, for

example, have highly concentrated telecommunication markets, and high access prices are common in contexts of limited competition, so low-income households are precluded from digital access and know-how.

Another possible explanation for the non-significant impact of youth population in instability and democratic development may lie either in disenchantment with democracy or in populist politics that somehow address the economic or social inequalities that often foster the role of youth bulges in political change. On the one hand, researchers like Inglehart and Catterberg (2002) argue that in third-wave democracies, like those in Latin America, protest behavior declines due to individuals' disappointment with the performance of democratic rule. On the other hand, Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Bolivia's Evo Morales, and Argentina's Cristina Fernández, to name a few, have adopted several redistributive policies aimed at benefiting largely marginalized and/or aggrieved parts of the population. These presidents' neopopulist rhetoric also includes demonizing large corporations and private media, positing them as the real culprits of society's grievances and effectively deflecting anti-government revolts.

The lack of significant relationship does not negate the important role of younger generations in political action in Latin America. Recent massive mobilization cases in Chile and Colombia have had high school and college students as protagonists, and in Mexico, the elite-challenging *Yo Soy 132* movement stemmed from a college student-led initiative. Such protests in rather stable and overall democratic countries have demand-making young individuals trying to influence government and policy, although not necessarily reshape the entire political system. Thus, while youth bulges tend to mobilize when the political and economic structures fail to meet their needs, the more recent examples of youth unrest in Latin America come from the middle class population – not the poor, minorities or other marginalized segments of the nation – with access to higher education and with the technological know-how to mobilize fellow citizens.

To a large extent, these previously apathetic groups have successfully replaced political parties and traditional institutions as mobilizers of citizens, demanding extensive policy changes in different areas, and questioning traditional ways of conducting politics. Although this might not be perceived as democratic growth, these movements have accomplished several legal and policy changes while challenging the elites in power, and in doing so they have put pressure on their governments, engaged in civic or political action, and opened up more possibilities for healthy democracies. How parties, governments, and even media organizations respond to this new scenario remains to be seen.

In the past, mass media has influenced and activated democratizing processes in multiple ways – mobile technologies are no exception – especially when they convey and provide content relevant to civil society (Loveless, 2009; see also Groshek, 2012b). The case of Latin America presented here builds on that theoretical tradition while underscoring that mobile and Internet diffusion can be important, but not essential to democracy augmentation and/or sociopolitical instability. Similarly, youth bulges may engage in political and social change, but it has not been the case in the Latin American region through 2009. All in all, this study expands our understanding

of the political agency of mobile and Internet diffusion and youth bulges, although it has limitations, as it cannot take into account all relevant indicators of democracy, let alone define which ones directly boost it.

Note

- 1 These were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, Uruguay, Venezuela.

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