Title
National Mechanisms of Direct Democracy and Citizens' Perceptions of Vote Efficacy in Latin America

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Introduction

Mechanisms of Direct Democracy (MDDs), i.e., facultative and mandatory plebiscites, referendums and citizen-initiated votes, have the majority of citizens' approval. If participation in MDDs is mainly considered good after their occurrence, it shows that people appreciated the opportunity of having more access to the political decisions, more influence on policy outcomes and more information about the policy choices and the methods of policy-making (Dalton, Scarrow and Cain 2003).

MDDs give citizens the opportunity to decide on issues rather than just candidates, and allow citizens to continue to be proactive in the democratic process and/or veto players after elections have been held. It means that MDDs can strengthen Dahl's (2005) two dimensions of democracy: contestation, through revocatory MDDs, and participation.

The different types of MDDs, together with other institutions, can lead to a more majoritarian or consensus democracy (Lijphart 1999, 2008), depending on how many and which veto players are considered in the decision-making (Hug and Tsebelis 2002).

It is important that citizens have positive thoughts on the power of the vote to change the future. If citizens believe the situation will not improve whether they vote, the regime has low legitimacy. This can be especially dangerous in a region where coups and coup attempts are not unusual in recent history, as the Paraguayan case, in 2012. This study focuses on citizens' perceptions of vote efficacy in 16 Latin American countries. Data come from Latinobarometro surveys held from 1996 to 2009.2

The independent variable of interest is tested in different ways: the long-term and the short-term effects of the MDDs, the MDD type and the relevance of the issues involved in the polls. Some common cultural, government performance and institutional explanations for citizens' support for democracy are also tested as predictors.

Considering another institutional variable to explain people's opinions is interesting because it is easier to change institutions than alter cultural and socio-economic structures (Norris 2008). If a type of institutional design works better in lessening some kind of dissatisfaction with democracy, it can be used more often or instead of others.

It is assumed that citizens are capable of making informed and rational assessments about whether regimes meet standards of transparency, accountability, effectiveness, social justice, and participation (Norris 2011). Therefore, this study also relies on rational choice theory.
assumptions that citizens can choose appropriately, despite the fact they do not have complete information on all issues.

Citizens count on shortcuts, such as politics commentators, politicians, candidates, interest groups, parties, ideology, friends etc., people who have depth knowledge and share the same kind of interests the citizens have (Dalton 2008; Lupia and Johnston 2001). In a MDD, it is necessary that the citizen knows whether the question on the ballot improves or worsen the status quo.

Choices that apparently are not optimized or unreasonable may indicate the presence of other arenas which have influenced or determined the institutional design detail that led to those choices (Tsebelis 1990). For these reasons, the presence of other institutions are considered (such as federalism and proportional representation) as well as the effects of other arenas (national elections).

In the first decade of the 21st century, Latin America seems to have found a path to recover part of its democracies legitimacy. Citizens' confidence in the legislature, Presidential approval rates and the perception of the vote as an efficient instrument to change the future show a growth trend. The economic facts were not enough to explain how during the financial crisis initiated in United States in September 2008 the confidence in the institutions kept its upward trend.

In order to answer the question “do MDDs affect citizens' perceptions of vote efficacy?,” multilevel analysis is used. These models are an alternative when it is not possible to run a time-series cross-country analysis because there are not a reasonable number of observations throughout time. The hypothesis is that MDDs make citizens feel that they have more influence on what the government does when they have this additional opportunity of participating in the decision-making, expressing directly their points of view on important issues.

This paper is organized as follows: the next section presents the common explanations for the change in the citizen's perceptions of democracy, the concept of political efficacy and the literature findings on the relationship between MDDs and external efficacy. The third part shows the type and the nature classification of the MDDs. The forth brings the definition of the variables and the justification for using multilevel models. Section five shows the models analyses and the discussion on the impact of MDDs on citizens' perceptions closes the paper.

Changes in citizen's perceptions of democracy and the sense of political efficacy

The most common explanations to what is related to citizens' thoughts, feelings and behaviors towards democracy are:

1) cultural aspects – lessening of social capital (social/interpersonal trust and civic engagement/activity in voluntary associations) and emergence of post-materialist values (Putnam 1995, Newton 1999, Inglehart 1997). These theories focus upon the demand-side, the cultural shifts among the citizens (Norris 2011): more educated generations, new values, different roles in society, etc.;

2) government performance – economic performance, be it macroeconomic indicators or citizens' economic evaluations (McAllister 1999, Miller and Listhaug 1999), political performance, i.e., policies, corruption, etc. or governance in general (Mattes and Bratton 2007, Dalton 2008);
looking for institutional effects, this research follows anderson et al. (2005) proposal of inverting the causality of most political behavior research: to focus on the elections, in this case mdd’s, as the independent variable and attitudes, as trust in the political system as the dependent variable, in order to integrate the study of political behavior with the study of democratic institutions and democratic stability.

anderson and his colleagues have come to the conclusion that although citizens who voted for a losing party exhibit more negative attitudes toward the democratic institutions, different institutions shape how much they lose – the extent to which they are included in the decision-making process – and affect their opinions. with a mdd, those who feel they lost the political war still can win some battles. this could explain why uruguay did not have a serious social crisis: “they created a channel through which citizens could express themselves and protest in a formalized institutional framework” (altman 2010, p.198).

even when citizens choose not to participate in this extra chance of deciding about political issues, they will still have more information about politics as a result of the campaigns. mdd’s provide citizens with opportunities for prospective influence on policies and in some cases on the decision-making agenda, giving them the sense of external political efficacy.

the concept of "sense of political efficacy" means, according to campbell and colleagues (1954), the feeling that individual political action has, or can have, an impact on the political process. it is the feeling that individual citizen can play a role in the political and social changes.

this concept can be decomposed into internal and external political efficacy. the latter relates to theories about the persistence of the system and the former, to the theories of participatory democracy. internal efficacy comprises individual characteristics, skills and resources to influence the political system. external efficacy concerns the responsiveness of the system, or whether the government is responsive to the citizens, which affects the support for the regime (bowler and donovan 2002).

the perceptions of external efficacy are usually measured through the agreement with the idea that people have a say about what government does (bowler and donovan 2002). here it is assessed through the agreement with the statement that voting can change things, since the vote is the most common “say” in a democracy.

although data on which aspect of the regime performance is more important to latin-americans are not available, hibbing and theiss-morse (2001) found that perceptions of americans lack of accountability has more to do with the process – how decisions are made – than with policies: the distance between the perceived and the desired process is greater than the distance between the perceived and desired public policy. a large majority believes that the elect politicians have too much influence in decision-making. mdd’s can modify this situation.

the relationship between mdd’s and democracy support or citizens' perceptions of external efficacy in latin america has not been explored before. actually, the relationship between mdd and external efficacy has not been approached cross-nationally from the citizens' perceptions side. however, studies carried on in some specific countries helped to build this research hypothesis: stutzer and frey (2006) studied the effects of direct democratic participation possibilities on belief of political effectiveness using swiss cross-regional data.
They found that people believe they wield more political influence in jurisdictions with more extended political participation.

Smith and Tolbert (2004) and Hero and Tolbert (2004) have shown some educative by-products of the bottom-up initiated MDDs in US states. One of them is that citizens residing in states with frequent exposures to ballot initiatives are more likely to perceive that government is responsive to their needs.

Bowler and Donovan (2002) have found, in United States as well, that the exposure to more frequent use of state-level direct democracy (treating citizen-initiated MDDs effect as cumulative) cause citizens to be about 11% more likely to claim that people like them have a say about what the government does and that public officials care about what people like them think. Mendelsohn and Cutler (2000), observing the thirty-one days of the campaign period during the 1992 referendum on the Charlottetown Constitutional Accord in Canada, have found that there is a noticeable increase of about ten points in the citizens' external efficacy over the first week of the campaign. This made them consider that the real increase comes from the simple awareness of the referendum's existence.

Morrell (1999) made an experiment and found that citizens' short-term perceptions of participatory process were influenced most by whether they voted for what was approved or not, but with extended participation, the participatory structures significantly made citizens' evaluations more positive.

Altman (2013) proposed an index for measuring the degree of democracy in the countries which also considered the possibility of direct democracy. The author tests whether where there are MDDs in Latin America, the levels of democracy support and satisfaction with democracy are higher. However, he works with questions that mention the word “democracy” – concept that has different meanings to citizens in different places (Dalton, Shin and Jou 2007) and, therefore, make it difficult to determine what exactly is being measured. Also he uses time-series analysis despite of the small number of observations (15 in each country).

In the next section, the MDD classification used in this research is presented.

**Mechanisms of direct democracy: definition, types and nature**

A Mechanism of Direct Democracy is:

a publicly recognized institution wherein citizens decide or emit their opinion on issues – other than through legislative and executive elections – directly at the ballot box through universal and secret suffrage. [...] MDDs are composed of those mechanisms through which, after the representatives and the government are elected, the citizenry continues to be – voluntarily or involuntarily, explicitly or implicitly – a veto actor or a proactive player in the political process. (Altman 2010, p.7)

Considering seriously the claim that institutions matter, it is evident that different types of MDDs lead to different impacts. Popular initiatives in Swiss and American states which ask regularly not very salient issues (and therefore often have a turnout of less than half of the electorate), should not be compared with the referendums initiated by governments on matters of national importance (Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000). The classification proposed by Altman (2010) is used
because it accounts to whether the MDD is required to be held by the Constitution or law or not, who triggered the MDD, and whether the idea is a new proposal or the revocation of one. Therefore, the MDDs under study here are classified as:

1) **Facultative plebiscites**: they are non-obligatory and proposed by the executive or the legislature – also called “top-down”. They may serve as: a) a legitimizing tools for governments which want to avoid the political price for adopting conflictive policies, i.e. they work as politically mandatory MDDs (Altman 2010, Leduc 2002); b) a safety valve for governing elites facing a threat of citizen-initiated MDD; or c) a solution for internal divisions in the coalition / ruling party (Morel 2001).

   However, they can also be used to: a) overcome other institutions as democratic bodies, exiting laws or constitutional rules; b) increase legitimacy of leaders, turning the politician the vote subject; or c) build consensus if two different bodies are in charge of triggering the unregulated plebiscite (Altman 2010, Morel 2001).

   Because of these features “plebiscites have produced a deeper aversion than any other type of MDD” (Altman 2010, p.138). However, it is important to keep in mind that the government was elected by the majority of citizens, so it should have more legitimacy to propose MDDs than the small group of citizens or interest group proposing a popular initiative, for example. Also, politically binding plebiscites, which may be positive for democracy, constitute half of facultative plebiscites studied by Morel (2001) in consolidated democracies.

   Just as in Latin America, in consolidated democracies the MDDs initiated by the government are the dominant form of MDDs (Morel 2001). In the region and period covered by this research, however, the mandatory plebiscites were used in equal number.

2) **Popular initiatives**: they are non-obligatory and proposed by a group of citizens – also called “bottom-up”. In this type, citizens (or organized groups) have the power of agenda setting. The proposers of a specific measure have to gather a minimum number of signatures from the electoral body.

   These MDDs can be a powerful synchronization between politicians and citizens. They can serve as safety valves against unresponsive behavior of representative institutions and politicians (Altman 2010). However, they can also be manipulated by strong corporations or powerful groups depending on the rules of the game, or be used by current popular leaders that cannot or do not wish to call for an unregulated plebiscite.

   Lijphart (2008) says this is a majoritarian instrument that may be used against minorities. Either way, however, policies should be closer to average citizens' opinion than the status quo to be approved. In Latin America, although the use of this particular MDD is quite rare, opposition parties mostly support it.

3) **Mandatory plebiscites**: they are required to be held by law and usually accompany constitutional reforms – also labeled “obligatory” or “regulated.” They serve as a legitimization tool for constitutional changes and as a synchronization mechanism between politicians and citizens. They can be used as a window of opportunity for challenging executive leaders or constitutional reforms: “mandatory plebiscites do not facilitate the approval of new constitutions more than without them, as cases of reform happen without this type of MDD. Thus, at the very least, outcomes may be the same in the absence of an MDD” (Altman 2010, p.194).
Lijphart (1999) says that if a MDD is prescribed in addition to legislative approval, amendments are actually harder to adopt, then it serves as an anti-majoritarian device. Actually, there is some consensus on the use of mandatory plebiscite as a good source of legitimation of constitutional reforms, international treaties or territorial changes (Serdült and Welp 2012). Hug and Tsebelis (2002) argue that “a majority of voters will not be worse off due to required referendums, because required referendums rule out elements of the parliamentary win-set that are worse than the status quo for a majority of voters.”

4) Facultative referendums (recalls included): the difference between popular initiatives and referendums is that the latter try to get back to the status quo recently changed by revoking a law just approved.9

In this situation, a small minority of voters challenging a law passed by the majority of the representatives may boost power sharing. Even if it fails, it forces the majority to pay the cost of the campaign; therefore the possibility of calling a referendum is a stimulus for the majority to be wary of minority views (Lijphart 2008). This means that, similar to mandatory plebiscites, the threat of referendum makes the policies passed by the Legislature to be closer to the preference of the median voter.

The recall, in turn, is an institution that allows citizens to dismiss an elected official. Altman (2010) categorizes it as popular initiatives. However, recalls have the same revocatory idea as referendums, the reason this study categorizes recalls as referendums.10

However, the problem is that if democracy moves towards greater citizens' and interest groups influence, especially if the threshold to trigger a bottom-up MDD is low, it might reinforce the fragmentation of political interests. Contemporary democracies suffer from a lack of institutions and processes that can aggregate and balance divergent interests into coherent and acceptable policy programs (Dalton 2004). The disproportionate use of these MDDs, however, is not a problem in Latin America. Even Uruguay, the only case with more than one occurrence in 15 years, had only four of these bottom-up MDDs, nothing compared to the dozens of ballot propositions that Californian's citizens vote every election.

Differing from Altman (2010), questions about diverse items, if triggered by the same type of MDD, are considered as one event. Many questions asked separately in the same MDD can involve fewer issues than a new constitution approval, which in Altman's classification counts as only one MDD.11 In addition, even though the questions asked in the same day are about unrelated issues (the same way different parts of a new Constitution are related to diverse issues), they are linked to the same campaign period and have the same political, social and economic context.12

Considering several questions as a single event, however, does not mean that the number and salience of the issues voted on should not be taken into account. Instead of looking for media coverage for assessing saliency (Lacey 2005), previous case studies by different authors about the MDDs were used. This study also incorporates Zovatto and colleagues (2004) differentiation of when what is being voted is not an issue but it is related to a person (a recall).

Many issues can bring a greater change, therefore, they can increase citizens perception of voting as really capable of changing the future. Not so much if the MDD is about few issues that do not affect most of the people (or that are not framed as such by the main actors – politicians, parties, media, important social movements, interest groups etc.).

The methodological options of this research are explained in the next section.
Definition of the variables and the multilevel models

The individual level variables were drawn from Latinobarómetro (LB). This is an annual public opinion survey that involves about 19,000 interviews in 18 Latin American countries. Honduras and Dominican Republic were not included because of the lack of data for some years or some variables. Out of the 16 selected nations, MDDs occurred in nine from 1996 to 2009. In total, there were 28 MDDs, showed in the table bellow, according to their types:

Table 1. Types of Latin American MDDs held from 1996 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Facultative Plebiscite</th>
<th>Popular Initiative</th>
<th>Mandatory Plebiscite</th>
<th>Referendum</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>2004*, 2008</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2005*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>2003*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>2007*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td></td>
<td>1999*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1998*, 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data from Altman (2010) and Center for Research on Direct Democracy (C2D) database.

Note: The asterisk indicates that the expected effect of the MDD occurrence on the surveys is in the next year, since the surveys had taken place before the MDD was held.

The other countries which did not hold MDDs in the period are Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru. Next to this time frame, only Peru had a MDD three years before the analyzed surveys.

The MDDs impact on the vote efficacy perceptions is tested in five different ways:

1) Cumulative number of MDDs: repeated experiences with MDDs may help people to learn how direct democracy processes work and to appreciate participating in them (Morrell 1999). Therefore, many MDDs held during the last decade should make citizens' perceptions concerning voting more positive than if they were in a country which has held just one. The creation of an index is also interesting for cases where more than one MDD was voted in the same year in a country, as the case of Ecuador: the 2006 MDD has effect only on the 2007 opinion polls (the
2006 surveys had taken place before the facultative plebiscite was held), together with the 2007 MDD.

If MDDs held more than ten years ago were considered as still having effect on people’s opinions, then a lot of the citizens surveyed would not have participated in the MDDs (because they were too young) or would have forgotten much about the experience. Vatter (2009) also considers a decade for his analysis. Besides, Bowler and Donovan (2002) taking into account the initiatives of the last 12 years had the same results than summing up the number of MDD occurrences since they started to be used in the United States.\(^{16}\)

In a study about how direct democracy affects turnouts, Dyck and Seabrook (2010) differentiate long and short-effects of MDDs. The long-term effects are related to participatory democratic theory: citizens who are exposed to the initiative process regularly are in an educative environment that empowers citizens. The short-term effects, in turn, are related to partisan campaign mobilization, conflict and social context: the saliency of the initiatives on the ballot, partisan homogeneity or heterogeneity of individual voters' social networks, the existence of strong partisan campaign messages and elite cues in the informational environment surrounding the election. The authors conclude that the short-term effects substantively swamp the long-term ones. These ideas probably can be extended to other effects on citizens, as their perceptions of vote efficacy. For assessing short-term effects, the next two variables are used.

2) **MDD occurrence:** studies that try to connect the presence and usage of direct democracy and internal/external efficacy improvements have been criticized because they do not make the link with broader research on political psychology. As Zaller (1992, p.79-80) has already found, mass political preferences have a fundamental property: “a tendency for people to be ambivalent and to deal with this ambivalence by making decisions on the basis of the ideas that are most immediately salient”. It means that when asked to assess vote efficacy, citizens are more likely to take the MDDs into account if not much time has passed since the vote, i.e., if it is considered under the MDD influence the answers on the next closest opinion poll.

Out of the 28 MDDs, two MDDs were held in a same year in three nations, and one of them has the expected impact only in 2010 surveys. In addition, ten others have their effect expected to a year when the question about vote efficacy was not part of the survey. Thus, when the occurrence of MDDs is considered a binary variable with effect on opinion polls conducted after the vote, there would be 14 variations.

The next variable attempts to make a more accurate measurement of MDD impact.

3) **Weighted effect:** over 15 years of annual surveys of Latinobarometro revealed that when elections are held, democracy support has a big push, but most of this is transitory (Report 2010). The numbers quickly adjust to the common level of the country (Report 2009). The research problem concerns a more concrete dimension of democracy support, but the effect of MDDs can be similar. Therefore, it is considered that the major MDD effect happens when surveys occur around the time of voting, decreasing as the months go by.\(^{17}\)

Considering the limitations of the citizens to store information that does not relate to issues that they daily deal with, when the survey is conducted within the previous two months to the MDD – period that encompasses the campaign for the vote, most media coverage on the subject and more attention from citizens to decide whether and how to vote –, and two months later – when the results are declared, implementation starts, and attention to the subject is still large – it is assigned the value 5. From four to four months, it is considered that the effect
decreases by one point. Assessed in this way, some dynamism is included in the models, and variation exists for more than 17.2% of the cases – compared to 12.5% when MDDs are measured as a binary variable.

4) The type of the MDD held: the MDDs are presented in ascending order of the number of possible vetoes in decision-making, which produces more consensual decisions (Hug and Tsebelis 2002). To differentiate the two cases where a veto-player stays out and the two cases in which all actors are included, it is considered to have more influence on the perception of citizens the MDDs which mobilize people from the beginning, in the collection of signatures for convening the MDD.

5) The nature of the MDDs: with regard to the frequency of the categories, the logic to achieve greater legitimacy is followed. If citizens are called to decide, be it on many subjects. If it is to be on a few topics, so they should be important enough for most of the population, otherwise the effort to gather information to decide whether to vote and in which alternative could not be worth it for the citizens. As for to vote to retain or remove the President, there are elections for this. Within that same category, vote to convene a Constituent Assembly does not give citizens the final say in any concrete policy.

A rival institutional explanation is transformed in control variable: national elections occurrence (presidential or Constituent Assembly elections). Elections also influence people's perceptions of democracy (Report 2006, 2009, 2010) since citizens are choosing the people who will decide on important issues. As a binary variable, the cases that are in the opinion poll after the elections are considered under the influence of elections. However, it is also applied the same logic used to measure the weight of the MDDs months distance from the surveys and MDDs, so that different degrees of influence are taken into account.

Political institutions and public policies are shaped by the wealth of a nation, so it is interesting to focus on economically similar countries. Therefore, it was chosen to work only with Latin American countries. Thus, economic and institutional control variables can prove not significant in explaining the variation of vote efficacy, generating leaner models and more robust results (Vatter 2009, Lijphart 2008).

Control variables for federal state and proportional system, an index built considering both variables, aggregate indicators of democracy (Polity IV) and (Freedom House), electoral volatility had incipient coefficients, therefore, they will not figure in the models.

From the govern performance explanation, the following individual-level variables were used: President approval and the current economic situation of the country – citizens probably think voting changes the future when they approve the government and have a positive assessment of the economy. Also, some country-level economic indicators that directly affect citizens’ well-being and possibly their faith in the regime (Jong-Sung and Khagram 2005) were tested. GDP, unemployment, inflation, GDP growth, Gini coefficient and its change from one year to another had non-significant coefficients, coefficients too small or that did not make sense (based on the expected sign), therefore, they did not remain in the models (Gelman and Hill 2007).

Finally, from the cultural explanation, interpersonal trust was added to the models. The relationship between this and political support is highly controversial (Newton 1999, Inglehart 1997). Also, greater educational levels can lead to more postmaterial values, growing skepticism
and rejection of authority figures – the vote might be affected also because it serves to elect authorities (Inglehart 1997).

The dependent variable is worded like this: “Some people say that one vote can change things to be different in the future. Others say that independently how they vote, nothing is going to change in the future”. The answers “vote can change things to be different in the future” were coded 1.

This question took part of the interviews in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2009 – eight years in total. As 16 countries are in the sample, it is possible to evaluate 128 country-year observations.

Comparing surveys of the nine countries in the years that they had occurrence of MDDs with the rest of the sample, the mean difference between the two groups is 10 percentage points: in the first surveys that happened after a MDD occurrence, an average of 70% of the citizens thought vote could change the future. When there was no MDD occurrence, an average of 60% of the citizens believed in the vote efficacy. The numbers turn into almost the same if all the years of the countries that held MDD are considered and compared with the countries which never had a MDD. This points to a stronger short-term effect, instead of a cumulative one.

Multilevel models make it possible to distinguish individual-level effects from country and year-level effects. The justification for using them is the fact that the countries and years averages are different. The variation goes from just over half the population (51%) believing in the power of the vote in Bolivia and Ecuador to 78% in Uruguay. The variation between years is somewhat lower, ranging from an average of 58% in 1996, 1998 and 2003 to 71% in 2009, but still, an increase of 13 percentage points.

The use of a logit link is required when it is necessary to explain a binary variable. However, the estimation of quasi-likelihood means its estimates should be carefully interpreted. The variance of the level 1, of the individual-level variables, is rescaled each time variables are included in the model – which affects the variance of level 2, country and year-level in this research. Therefore, analyzing the reduction of the variance in successive configurations of predictors that are added to the model can be misleading (Heck, Thomas and Tabata 2012).

The multilevel analysis aspires intraclass variation of 20% or more. When this ratio is less than 10%, generally, it is considered that the value added by multilevel modeling is small considering the increased complexity (Booth and Seligson 2009). However, although the variation found in the following models is low, it is significant, so multilevel models were maintained because they are closer to the reality by considering that each country and each year intercept (averages) is different.

The effects of individual-level variables and MDDs on citizens' perceptions of vote

Government performance and cultural explanations

In this first multilevel model, two hypotheses considering only individual-level variables are tested: 1) the effect government political and economic performance on the citizens' perceptions of the vote efficacy. 2) the impact of cultural variables on people's opinion concerning the power of voting for changing the future.
The reference categories of the independent variables are zero. Thus, the interpretation takes place considering a very young person, with the lowest level of education, who does not trust other people, etc.

Table 2. Individual-level variables in the vote efficacy model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-.361</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of trust in parties</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some trust in parties</td>
<td>0.406</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>1.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little trust in parties</td>
<td>0.293</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Approval</td>
<td>0.336</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of trust in Congress</td>
<td>0.291</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some trust in Congress</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little trust in Congress</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61+ years</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 to 60</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 40</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good country's economic situation</td>
<td>0.230</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good country's economic situation</td>
<td>0.323</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About average country's economic situation</td>
<td>0.187</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad country's economic situation</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal trust</td>
<td>0.320</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete high education</td>
<td>0.448</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete high education</td>
<td>0.379</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete secondary school</td>
<td>0.262</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete secondary school</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete primary school</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete primary school</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.072</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The model has 64% accuracy. The coefficients shown in the table are compared with the reference categories, i.e., no trust in parties and in the Congress, 18-25 years old, very bad country's economic situation and illiterate.
Compared to those who do not have any confidence in the political parties, those who have confidence, ranging from little to a lot, have from 34 to 51% more chances to believe in the vote efficacy. Concerning the trust in Congress, from 10 to 34%. Those who approve the President, are 40% more likely to see the vote as a tool for changing the future. Interpersonal trust is almost as important as the Presidential approval (38%). Those citizens who have a university degree have 56% more chances to have the vote in high regard, compared to illiterates. This finding contradicts the expected results from the cultural explanation. Old generations are a little more likely to see the vote as an efficient tool (6 to 8%). A more positive evaluation of the country's economic situation can make more likely the vote efficacy perception from 20 to almost 40%.

**Institutional explanations**

In the following models, the third hypothesis is tested: the impact of the MDDs, measured in five different ways, on citizens' perceptions of vote efficacy. As the coefficients of individual-level variables remain virtually the same in all models, they are omitted in next tables. The estimates presented below have to be interpreted with caution because the small number of MDDs held in the period and data availability.

**Short-term effects: occurrence**

In these models the impact of the MDDs and elections in the next surveys that have taken place after these events occurred are tested.

**Table 3. Vote efficacy models with MDDs occurrence and elections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.371</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.690</td>
<td>-0.381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDDs Occur.</td>
<td>0.223</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.250</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections occur.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDDs Occur. * Elections Occur.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Altman (2010), Latinobarometro and C2D database.

*Note:* The models have 64% accuracy.
The MDDs coefficients are the biggest in the models with interactions, when the direct effects of MDDs have its importance increased by around 10%. That is, when a MDD happened isolated from elections, citizens are 35% more likely to believe in the effectiveness of voting compared to citizens that had no chance to vote on MDD. When elections are held without the presence of a MDD, they increase this chance only in 12%. It makes sense: MDDs are rarer events and produce quite different results from conventional elections, i.e. decisions on specific issues, so this type of event causes the citizens’ perception about government responsiveness to be more positive.

What is surprising is that the occurrence of MDDs and elections in the same period has a negative coefficient, decreasing 25% the probability of perception of voting as a tool for change. This interaction happens in six cases, or 42% of this sample. As elections have a general smaller impact than MDDs, the answer of the coefficient behavior probably lies on the type or nature of these specific MDDs, which is discussed afterwards.

**Long-term effects of MDDs: cumulative number**

In these models, the impact of the number of MDDs held in the decade prior the year of the survey is tested. This variable, which takes into account the cumulative number of MDD, was centered in its mean (1.03 MDD),\(^2\) so that it would make sense interpret its coefficient in a model which also has the MDD occurrence variable: it would be impossible a situation where the cumulative number was zero and there was a MDD occurrence. A standard deviation from the mean makes the vote efficacy perceptions grow 7.5%; two standard deviations, what would represent a country which had voted on 4 MDDs in the last decade (like Bolivia, Uruguay and Venezuela at some point), would increase it 15%. Therefore, the maximum effect of accumulated MDDs, when this is the only level 2 variable in the model, would reach a little more than a 22% (less than the short-term effect of MDD occurrence).

The learning effects from having had three or six MDDs should not increase the probability of thinking of the vote as a tool for changing the future in the same rate, however, this variable helps to have a more realistic idea of the MDD occurrence impacts considering the average recent MDD history in Latin American countries. It also makes the model more complete because it adds some effects from other years that are not presented in the models only with the binary variable.

In the model with short and long-term effects, the latter can reach 15% (maximum difference), while the former, increases 17% the probability of citizens seeing the vote as an effective tool. When there is interaction between elections and MDDs occurrence, the increase of one standard deviation in the cumulative number has almost the same effect. The MDDs occurrence, however, gets almost 10 percentage points bigger (26%). In a smaller rate, also elections increase its coefficient (12%).

Therefore, the results show the same relationship concerning long and short-effects that has been found in other studies for explaining turnout in elections (Dyck and Seabrook 2010). The short-term effects are bigger, however, the long-term effects are not absent.
Table 4. Cumulative effects, MDDs and elections occurrences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cumulative number</th>
<th>Cumulative number and Elections</th>
<th>Cumulative number and MDD Occurrence</th>
<th>Ocor.* Cum*Elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.356</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.701</td>
<td>-0.375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>0.867</td>
<td>0.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cum.</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.075</td>
<td>0.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDDs Occur.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cum.* Elections</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cum* MDDs Occur.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occur * Elections</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Altman (2010), Latinobarometro and C2D database.
Note: The models have 64% accuracy.

**Weighted short-term effects**

These models considered the time between the vote and the surveys and also the effect due to more than one of each of these events occurring in the same period. They should be interpreted considering the average of elections (1.43) and MDDs (.62) held, and their change to one standard deviation (2.10 and 1.62). Therefore, the difference of the probability of seeing the vote as an effective instrument among those who are in the position of greatest influence of MDDs is 24% in the first model (10 is the maximum score, so the coefficient should be multiplied by 6). In the second, the difference in the probability among those who are in the position of greatest influence of elections is around 14% (7.5 is the maximum score, so the coefficient should be multiplied by 3).

In the model with elections and MDDs, the maximum effect of both is around 13%.

Adding the interaction, the effect of the variables when they occur simultaneously is null, the group at the greatest MDDs effect is 16% more likely to perceive vote efficacy, while in the case of elections this difference is again 13%. This difference from the models presented in the former tables points to the fact that MDDs probably have longer effect than elections on citizens' perceptions.
Table 5. Vote efficacy models with weighted short effects of MDDs and elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MDDs Weighted</th>
<th>Elections Weighted</th>
<th>MDDs e Elections W.</th>
<th>MDDs*Elections W.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.348</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.706</td>
<td>-0.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDDs W.</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.040</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections W.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDDs*Elections W.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Altman (2010), Latinobarometro and C2D database.

Note: The models have 64% accuracy.

However, the variables presented in the tables above do not consider the effect that the different MDDs types or nature may have. The following sections are about this.

Types of MDDs

In the group of mandatory plebiscites, the 1996 Uruguayan, and the 2009 Venezuelan and Bolivian ones occurred isolated from elections. Citizens in these cases are the most likely to believe in the vote efficacy – 82% more than those who did not vote in any MDD. It was expected that these mandatory plebiscites, along with referendums, were the most important MDDs in explaining the perceptions of voting as a tool for changing the future.

When elections occur simultaneously, however, the probability is negative (40%). The cases in this category account for four out the six cases which were part of the group with negative coefficients in the tables 3 and 4. All of them had the expected effect in 2000, three have failed – if measures were rejected, things have not changed.

In Guatemala, twelve constitutional reforms were voted. They included the peace agreements that ended the civil war in 1996 and 53 other reforms introduced by Congress – which led to the rejection of the plebiscite. It had 80% abstention. In Uruguay, the two questions voted in 1999 dealt with issues that were not considered of wide relevance. In Venezuela, in early 1999 the facultative plebiscite on the Constitutional Assembly was voted, followed by elections for this, and the mandatory plebiscite for the approval of the new Constitution. The President Chavéz was able to maintain the support of 70% of voters in the three 1999 polls, although in the case of the Constitution it meant endorsement of less than a third of the population. Finally, in Panama, the 1998 MDD was rejected (by 65%, with a 63% turnout), which was interpreted as a punishment to Ernesto Pérez Balladares government and its neoliberal policies (Rial 2010).
Concerning to referendums, the 2002 and 2003 Uruguayan ones and 2004 Venezuelan MDD did not have the expected large impact: they increase around 16% the likelihood of perception of the vote as an effective instrument (even though, more than elections –12%). Probably the Venezuelan recall was responsible for the situation: regarding the performance of the system, deciding on the ongoing mandate of the President may differ little from conventional elections and its effects. Also, the 2002 Uruguayan referendum was disabled by the government days before the vote, by derogating the discussed items.

### Table 6. Types of MDDs, elections and interactions on vote efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Types and Elections</th>
<th>Types* Elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>Coef.</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.371</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory P.</td>
<td>0.374</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facultative P.</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>0.371</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections * Mandatory P.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections * Facultative P.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Altman (2010), Latinobarometro and C2D database.*
*Note: The models have 64% accuracy. The parameters for country and year in the model with interaction between types and elections are redundant.*

The facultative plebiscite held without the presence of elections increases 24% the probability of positive perception of voting as a way for changing the future. In this category, facultative plebiscites took place in Ecuador (in 1995), in Bolivia (2004) and in Colombia (2003).

When held simultaneously to elections, facultative plebiscites had a negative effect on the probability of perceiving the effectiveness of voting, reducing 39% the chances to see the vote as a tool for changing the future. The only case here is the 1997 Ecuadorean plebiscite, which illustrates the limits of addressing these phenomena quantitatively, at least in a region with high instability such as Latin America. The 1996 elections of Ecuador should have impact in 1997 surveys, however data from this year do not reflect the mandate of the elected President. His
government lasted only 180 days. There was then a severe institutional crisis and high levels of civil unrest. Abdalá Bucaram was removed from office on the grounds of "mental incapacity" with simple majority instead qualified majority vote, and replaced by the President of the Congress, instead of the vice-President (Altman 2010). In this context, the interim President Fabián Alarcón tried to legitimize the removal of Bucaram and his position with the plebiscite (Zovatto 2007).

The popular initiative increases 29% chance of perceiving vote efficacy. Its effect is somewhat larger than the ones from facultative plebiscites. However, this coefficient relates solely to a Uruguayan case in 2004, on non-privatization of drinking water supply and sanitation, which also had the influence of elections where the left-leaning party Frente Amplio won the Presidency for first time.

**Nature of the MDDs**

Calling one MDD to decide the future of the President, as expected, render the lowest coefficient of all: it increases only from 5 to 1.5% the probability of perception of voting as an effective tool. This, however, concerns to a single case: the 2004 recall in Venezuela. It is even smaller than the elections effect (8.5 to 12%).

**Table 8. MDDs nature, elections and interactions in vote efficacy perceptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Issues and Elections</th>
<th>Issues * Elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.376</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few relevant</td>
<td>0.371</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few</td>
<td>0.370</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections * Many</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections * Few relevant</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Altman (2010), Latinobarometro and C2D database.

Note: The models have 64% accuracy. The parameter for year in the model with interaction between issues and elections is redundant.
The MDDs which deal with few not very relevant issues for the general population have just one case: 1999 Uruguayan MDD, about two aspects of the judicial system reform. In the model with interactions, it is likely to change the belief in vote efficacy by 28%. Without them, it increases 45 to 35%.

When issues are few but of greater relevance, the positive perceptions on voting grow 43 to 47%. However, the interaction coefficient shows a decrease of 8% in the probability of believing in the vote efficacy. This is only about the 2004 Uruguayan case. The interesting fact is that in the table before, it was the only popular initiative and had a positive effect (29%). But here this is in a category together with two Uruguayans MDDs referendums and the 2009 Venezuelan mandatory plebiscite.

It was expected that few relevant issues voted would have a smaller effect than when many subjects are voted at the same time, as important reforms or new constitutions, causing major changes. However, the former had an impact seven percentage points bigger. MDDs on many issues increase the likelihood of perception of voting as an effective tool in 1.4 times in the model with interactions. The other models show coefficients that are almost half than this. The difference is due to the three cases out of the nine in which these proposals were voted in the same period of elections: an Ecuadorean case (1997), and the cases of Guatemala and Panama. The interaction decreases 34% the probability of perceived vote efficacy. The MDD held in Ecuador, when corresponded alone for the interaction between elections and facultative plebiscites had a negative effect. Guatemalan and Panama MDDs were also in a negative interaction in the group of mandatory plebiscites.

Conclusions

This research is the first to explore the relationship between MDDs and citizens' perceptions of political efficacy in Latin America. This relationship had not been approached cross-nationally from the people's perceptions side before. The models show that MDDs affect citizens' opinions on the power of the vote as a toll for changing the future. This finding is important because it is easier to change institutions than alter cultural and socio-economic structures. Besides, the institutional design of MDDs that works better in lessening dissatisfaction with democracy can be used more often or instead of others.

Data from the 16 Latin American countries analyzed here, in eight different years, indicate that MDD occurrence have more positive effect on people's perceptions of vote efficacy than elections occurrence (from a little more to almost seven times more, depending on the model). Also, mandatory plebiscites and MDDs on very salient issues are more likely to influence citizens' feelings about the vote than presidential approval, interpersonal trust, trust in Congress and good evaluation of the country economic situation. These MDDs that are mandatory to be held by law have a three times bigger impact on people's perceptions than facultative plebiscites.

The cumulative effect of MDDs accounts for a small raise in the probability of having vote in a high regard, but adding this variable makes the models more complete. As expected, MDDs short-term impacts are more important than long-term effects.

Finally, when the distance between the votes on the MDDs and the surveys, in addition to the number of votes held in the same period, are considered, the difference of effect between MDDs and elections is the smallest. MDDs, therefore, probably have an impact that last longer
than elections, considering that MDDs have a big difference from elections in the models in which the impact on the next survey is considered the same, independently of them being held a month or one year after the vote.

All these findings indicate that it could be worthwhile to use MDDs with little less parsimony than they have been used in Latin America so far. Also, investing in education and in improving the trust in the political parties has proven to be very important.
References


Endnotes

1 The use of MDDs is endorsed by the majority of the people in almost every country it has been asked – in Latin America countries, European countries, United of States, Canada and New Zealand. The only exceptions are Hungary and Slovenia (Bowler, Donovan and Karp 2007; Dalton 2004; Dalton, Burklin and Drummond 2001). In 2009, a Latinobarometro question asked about how people felt to participate in plebiscites or popular consultations. The average for the 18 countries of “very good” answers was 20.1%, of “good”, 47.7%, and “average” 21.4%. Therefore, only 10.7% thought it is a bad or very bad thing.

2 Retrieved from http://www.latinobarometro.org/latino/latinobarometro.jsp. 2009 was the last year in which the question used as proxy for the dependent variable in this research was inserted in the surveys.

3 Some researches explore more than one of these explanations at the same time (Booth and Seligson 2009, Moisés 2008, Mishler and Rose 2005).

4 What can be complicated to assess thought surveys, since people collect information mainly through the media and its coverage in general targets national issues. Therefore, citizens use to evaluate institutions that exist in different levels, as Legislature or Government, having as reference the national institutions, not the regional or local ones (Dyck and Lascher 2009).

5 The question on satisfaction with democracy is the most used proxy for measuring the performance of the regime, applied in 90 countries (Lagos 2003; Linde and Ekman 2003; Karp, Banducci and Bowler 2003). However, some authors conclude that it assesses democracy as a value and satisfaction with the government together, others say it is just an indicator of support for current government activities, some say that it measures confidence in the system or in the informal structure of the regime. Others say that this question is a midway between the attitudes towards formal structures and authorities, that it is a summary because it captures various levels of political support, and that it is an ambiguous item. There is clear empirical evidence for this latter finding. If it is not possible to know exactly what a question measures, it has no validity or theoretical utility (Canache, Mondak and Seligson 2001).

6 Besides working with constitutional previsions of MDD and disregard plebiscites.

7 Leaving out Switzerland, Australia, Italy and Uruguay.

8 Although popular initiatives are incorporated into most Latin American constitutions, in most countries they still do not have a specific law to make effective the provisions, they may not refer to tax or budgetary matters (Altman 2010).

9 There are effective provisions for them only in Colombia, Costa Rica, Uruguay and Venezuela (Altman 2010).

10 There is, however, one difference: while the referendum is a reaction to Parliament action, the recall is a reaction to the Executive.

11 The 2003 Colombian MDD counts as 15 MDDs (15 questions were asked); but the 69 reforms proposed by the 2007 Venezuelan MDD, because the issues were grouped in two questions, count as two.

12 In a later work, in which Altman (2013) links the citizen support for democracy and satisfaction with the regime to popular initiatives, referendums and mandatory plebiscites, the author says that simply counting the number of MDDs is not reasonable to measure how much direct democracy exists in a country because of the effect that the mere threat of citizens convene a MDD may have.
Latinobarómetro Corporation is a non-profit and non-governmental organization that researches the development of democracy, economy and society, using indicators of opinion, attitudes, behavior and values. Its results are used by social and political actors, international organizations, governments and the media (Latinobarometro 2012). Data analyzed in this paper were collected by Means Corporacion Latinobarometro, which is solely responsible for the data distribution and it is not responsible for the views expressed by the user of the data. The author appreciates the assistance in providing data. The views expressed herein are the author’s own.

Despite of the fact of MDD not being referred to only in the Constitution of Mexico (Zovatto 2004).

Treating states that allow initiatives as as dummy variable also showed significant effect, but was less consistent.

In addition, whether more than one MDD was voted on the same period also is taken into account. The small number of observations, particularly with respect to the years, does not allow data by itself to show how long the residual effect extends, so that the period had to be determined arbitrarily.

When the values are at the boundaries, the value given is the average between the categories.

The initial idea was to specify models with both MDD type and nature of the issues. However, this model is not possible without interaction between these variables. Type will be never different from zero when nature is zero. Adding interactions, there would be a very small number of cases in each interaction. The solution would be to build a type-nature variable. However, as the values assigned in the index do not have direct correspondence with reality, comparing its coefficient with other variables is always complicated.

Data retrieved from: http://americo.usal.es/oir/opal/indicadores.htm. Unfortunately, there were not update data for the last analyzed year.

Small effects of macro-economic indicators compared to people's perceptions of economy are not uncommon in studies on political support (McAllister 1999). Actually, as Booth and Seligson (2009) noted, in most multilevel research combining survey and country-level data, most of the variation in the results is found in the individual-level.

The minimum percentage found in the situation with MDD is 55% of vote efficacy perception, while it goes down to 47% for the rest of the sample. The maximum value is similar between the two groups: 79% and 77%.

Among the countries it is 3% and among the years it is 1.2%. The difference between a model that considers the average of the countries and the years to a complete pooling model, in which the difference between groups is ignore is, actually, negligible (0.3). It is nonetheless an interesting finding: there is a Latin American opinion evolving at roughly the same pace concerning the effectiveness of voting. Booth and Seligson (2009) found no significant differences among the eight countries analyzed. However, their sample was only one year, with a smaller number of countries, and from another data source.

It ranges from zero to six MDDs.