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POLITICISING INEQUALITY: THE POWER OF IDEAS

Dr. Alice Evans

A contemporary challenge is inequality. This paper illustrates why ideas matter, and how they can change over time. Inequalities are reinforced when they are taken for granted. But this can be disrupted when marginalised people gain self-esteem; challenge hitherto unquestioned inequalities; and gain confidence in the possibility of social change. Slowly and incrementally, social mobilisation can catalyse greater government commitment to socially inclusive economic growth. This is illustrated with ethnographic research from Latin America, where income inequality has recently declined. Clearly, however, no single paper can provide a comprehensive account of political change in an incredibly diverse region. By highlighting some ways in which ideas matter (and the limitations of alternative hypotheses about increased fiscal space and democratisation), this paper merely seeks to persuade political economists to go beyond 'incentives'. Future efforts to tackle inequality might harness the power of ideas: tackling 'norm perceptions' (beliefs about what others think and do); publicising positive deviance; and strengthening social movements.

Introduction

This paper explores the drivers of income inequality, and its abatement. Some political economists argue that income inequality persists if there are weak constraints on political elites, who resist redistribution for self-interested reasons (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; World Bank, 2003). Accordingly, inequality is likely to wane with democratisation, as ruling parties permit some redistribution to placate the poor majority and ensure re-election. Others emphasise patron-clientelism: poor people support political patrons to secure their own material survival (e.g. employment and services). These rational coping mechanisms entrench ruling elites by curbing public critique and horizontal associations (Auyero, 2000; Putnam et al, 1993; Weyland, 1996). Perhaps autonomous resistance could be enhanced by state-led redistribution, guaranteeing poor people's material security (Weyland, 1996: 6-7). These explanations of inequality all assume that behaviour is primarily self-interested.¹ But ideas also matter – as increasingly recognised (Kaufman, 2009; Rodrik, 2013; World Bank, 2014). This paper contributes to this literature by exploring how shifts in ideas contributed to the recent fall in inequality in Latin America. Complementing earlier analysis, this paper synthesises ethnographic research to illustrate the significance of self-perceptions, stereotypes, distributive beliefs, and norm perceptions. It further details how these ideational shifts came about: through association, protests, social movements, critical media, strategic framing, iterative state-society reforms, transnational networking and regional diffusion. Going forwards, it suggests how to harness the power of ideas, and politicise inequality.

This paper takes a historical approach because egalitarian social change is slow, incremental, frustrated by setbacks, and often conflictual. It does not occur within a project cycle. To learn from what works, we need to look at the *longue durée*: to see how people come to reject stereotypes, contest hegemonic discourses, and gain confidence in the possibility of social change (see also Kaufman, 2009: 366). This premise contrasts with a tendency to focus on external interventions: big 'D' Development (Hart, 2001). The *World Development Report 2015: Mind, Society and Behaviour*, for instance, exclusively refers to short-term 'antipoverty policies and programs', such as 'self-

¹ This reflects a wider tendency in Development to assume self-interested motivations and focus on financial incentives: the Centre of Global Development's *Cash on Delivery*, the World Bank's *Results-Based Financing* scheme.

esteem talks' in Peru (World Bank, 2014: 85, 90). It neglects long-term ideational change. Research on social accountability likewise concentrates on donor-funded programmes, not historical shifts. '[B]y treating social accountability initiatives like widgets to improve services, we ignore the broader socio-political context within which these widgets work or do not work – the history of the long-term processes of political bargaining, public–social movement alliances, previous experiences of citizen engagement and the networks within which collective actors (the agents for social accountability) are embedded' (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012: 154; see also Fox, 2014; Hickey, 2009). Going beyond 'widgets', this paper explores how income inequality has been increasingly politicised and tackled in Latin America.

This paper is divided into three sections. Section 1 presents the theoretical framework. It articulates how different kinds of ideas can perpetuate inequalities, and pushes for more attention to 'norm perceptions' (beliefs about what others think and do). Section 2 explores why inequality fell in Latin America, between 2000 and 2010 – considering the role of fiscal space, democratisation, and social movements. Section 3 draws out some policy implications for development co-operation: strengthening social movements, and tackling norm perceptions by showcasing positive deviance.

Section 1: How Do Ideas Perpetuate Inequalities?

This section provides a theoretical framework that: articulates how wider social practices influence individual behaviour; distinguishes between different kinds of ideas; and illustrates how ideas can reinforce inequalities. This framework draws on concepts developed by psychologists and sociologists (Bicchieri, 2017; Diekmann et al, 2005; Ridgeway, 2011; Tankard and Paluck, 2016),² illustrated with insights from anthropology.³ This nexus reveals the significance of (i) self-perceptions; (ii) internalised stereotypes; (iii) unquestioned acceptance of the status quo distribution; and (iv) norm perceptions (about what others think and do). Such analytical clarity finesses political analyses of inequality, which tend to conflate these disparate concepts (amalgamating them as 'ideas', 'culture' or 'social norms'). All beliefs are common in two respects. First, they are all developed, reinforced, and revised through people's observations, interactions and experiences of the world. Hence they are maintained by labour markets, politics, media representations and geography. Second, they exert unconscious influence on our behaviour; we are rarely aware of our own stereotypes, assumptions and norm perceptions. These connections and contingencies are detailed below.

(i) Self-perceptions

'Self-perceptions' refer to how an individual sees themselves, e.g. as less competent or less deserving of status. These beliefs are learnt through direct observation, hegemonic discourses and media consumption. If marginalised groups see only white, able-bodied, heterosexual men monopolise in socially valued roles, they may doubt their own potential (Ridgeway, 2011; Twenge, 2001). If people like them predominate in low-status positions, they may have low self-esteem, underestimate their abilities, not thinking themselves capable or deserving of anything better. Live-in domestic workers, associating only with their *patronas*, accustomed to servitude and daily reminders of their inferiority, may come to regard themselves as worthless (Gálvez and Todaro, 1989; Schellekens and van der Schoot, 1989: 298-301; SINTRASEDOM, 1989: 375). When marginalised groups are explicitly reminded of their stigmatised identities, they can become less confident and underperform (Hoff and Pandey, 2014; Ridgeway, 2011; Steele, 2010; World Bank, 2015).

² But uses slightly different terminology.

³ Regrettably, this paper is only informed by English-language publications, omitting a wealth of knowledge.

Self-perceptions may also perpetuate inequalities if disadvantaged groups do not identify with one another. These socially constructed divisions impede horizontal solidarity. Instead of capitalising on their greatest asset (numerical strength), marginalised groups may rely on vertical ties of elite patronage and guidance. If domestic workers do not interact, they may not develop solidarity (Gálvez and Todaro, 1989; Schellekens and van der Schoot, 1989: 298-301; SINTRASEDOM, 1989: 375). Similarly in Bolivia, before the 1980s, ethnic groups in the lowland and highland regions did not always identify as 'indigenous': they did not perceive themselves as relevantly alike. These self-perceptions were partly shaped by geography: rural isolation, together with scarce transport and communications networks, limited interactions and association (Jackson and Warren, 2005: 551). Atomisation and fragmentation are also said to curtail Peruvian coca growers' collective strength to contest neoliberalism at national level (Rice, 2012: 98-99). Given these debilitating and divisive self-perceptions, government provision of social protection might not reduce clientelism (contrary to Weyland, 1996).

(ii) Internalised stereotypes

Inequalities can also be reinforced through internalised stereotypes descriptive or normative assumptions about a person because they are a member of a group (a gender, race, caste, ethnicity, region, nationality, sexual orientation or religion). People acquire stereotypes through interactions, observation, and validation by trusted peers. If disadvantaged groups internalise these stereotypes, they may support privileged groups as leaders, perpetuating inequality. Such beliefs are difficult to dislodge. We tend to pay more attention to information that confirms our assumptions, so disregard occasional outliers (Bicchieri, 2017; Ridgeway, 2011; Steele; 2010; World Bank, 2015).

Habituated to hierarchy, many elites in republican Bolivia saw themselves as ethnically and culturally different from indigenous peoples, so excluded them from national development (Fabricant and Postero, 2013; Postero, 2007: 55). Thus, the behaviour of white elites was not only motivated by economic self-interest, but also their socially-constructed identities and consequent reluctance to share with 'the other'. Pejorative stereotypes may also curb empathy and compassion. '[My *patrona*] does not see us as human beings of flesh and blood, who feel hunger and thirst', observed one Peruvian domestic worker (Schellekens and van der Schoot, 1989: 299).

In authoritarian contexts, where critique is quietened by fear of repression, political leaders may 'view the urban poor with contempt, as passive recipients of social welfare programs rather than as active participants in recent history' (Ciccariello-Maher, 2016: 42 on Venezuela). Such stereotypes can curtail support for democratic reforms. Elites may resist participatory processes if they regard indigenous groups as 'obstacle[s] to progress': 'savage', 'immature', 'passive' and 'unknowledgeable' (as in Bolivia and Ecuador – Fabricant and Postero, 2013: 191, 204; Radcliffe, 2015: 53, 113, 133). Such discrimination is not the preserve of wealthy elites, it can also prevail within leftist organisations (as in Ecuador – Rice, 2012: 61). Further, even if participatory reforms are introduced, stereotypes may constrain marginalised groups' political participation. For example, the Law of Popular Participation in Bolivia was marred by the colonial legacy of racist, infantilising discourses in participatory processes. Paternalistic elites assumed they knew best (Postero, 2007: 147). Widely-shared stereotypes thus curbed the transformative impact of participation.

Without interacting as knowledgeable equals, we may fear the unknown other. In 1989, enraged, violent mobs from Venezuela's barrios descended upon the city, encroaching upon high-income neighbourhoods. "The hills came down" – or so it seemed to wealthy elites (Ciccariello-Maher, 2016). The urban masses (struggling with neoliberal reforms, job losses and plummeting wages) were protesting transport price hikes (following the removal of gas subsidies). The Government's response was influenced by their stereotypes of the dangerous other: they called in the army to

‘restore order’, and permitted mass killings (Ciccariello-Maher, 2016; Velasco, 2015: 195). Similarly in Santa Cruz (Bolivia), white and mestizo elites have tried to galvanise support for regional autonomy and free market capitalism (resisting an encroaching, redistributive state) by tapping into people’s racist fears of highland and Andean people (Fabricant and Postero, 2013: 193).

(iii) Unquestioned acceptance of the status quo distribution

Unequal distributions may be taken for granted – by disadvantaged and advantaged groups alike.⁴ If people have low expectations of the government, they may not demand better services. In Bolivia, ethnic domination was historically naturalised, through everyday acts of humiliation and paternalism. Education for indigenous communities was regarded as a privilege, not a right (Postero, 2007: 25; see also Evans, forthcoming).

Marginalised groups may not question unequal distributions if not exposed to alternative possibilities or discourses. Such exposure may be curbed through physical isolation: living in remote rural communities (Evans, 2017; McClintock, 1989: 70); labouring as live-in domestic workers, only interacting with bourgeois patrons (Schellekens and van der Schoot, 1989; Gálvez and Todaro, 1989: 316-317); having limited access to critical media; or being housebound with multiple children, few labour-saving technologies, a high volume unpaid care work, and thus limited to narrow social circles (Evans, 2015a; 2017).

Policy-makers may also regard inequality as unproblematic: a just outcome and/or inevitable. Structural Adjustment Policies did not even *seek* to reduce inequality (which increased markedly during this period, across Latin America – Gasparini and Lustig, 2011). Elites may also resist redistribution or affirmative action if they regard the poor as culpable for their poverty (through laziness, dependency, and profligate expenditure). Agrarian elites in Santa Catarina (Brazil) opposed state-led agrarian reform partly because they believed existing land distributions to be just: reflecting hard-work, ingenuity and legitimate market transactions. They saw landless people’s campaign for state intervention as evidence of their laziness. Their unquestioned acceptance of the status quo and neoliberal solutions delegitimised state-led agrarian reform (Carter, 2015: 405; Wolford, 2005: 254; see also Reis, 2011 on attitudes to race and poverty among Brazilian elites). These pro-market attitudes may be reinforced by hegemonic media discourses and recent decades of neoliberalism (support for redistribution is lower in countries where people are less accustomed to it – Corneo and Gruner, 2002).

Parallels can also be found in employment. Piketty (2014: 24) suggests that high earnings at the top reflect not market forces and productivity but social acceptance of their ‘power to set their own remuneration’. Meanwhile, widespread devaluation of care work (seeing it as unskilled) perpetuates low wages therein, and gender pay gaps more broadly (Perrons, 2014: 674-675; Schellekens and van der Schoot, 1989: 299). In sum, the uncritical acceptance of inequality may curb contestation, disruption and redistribution.

(iv) Norm perceptions

The above sections (i-iii) refer to individuals’ internalised ideologies. We also need to consider wider social norms. Many scholars refer to social norms as aggregate features of a given society (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2016; Pearse and Connell, 2016). Instead I suggest we focus on *individuals’* ‘norm perceptions’: beliefs about what others think and do (see also Bicchieri, 2017; Tankard and Paluck, 2016). Through observation and interaction, we develop beliefs about which behaviours are widely

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supported in our social networks. If we observe widespread compliance, we infer that there is widespread support. We further anticipate that we will be liked, accepted and respected according to the extent to which we conform to these norm perceptions, and so moderate our conduct. So, even if we do not privately endorse these practices, we are nevertheless motivated to conform – because we do not wish to be reprimanded, reproached, or violently repressed.

Norm perceptions are developed through first-hand exposure, peers' narratives, and media consumption. While individuals have idiosyncratic encounters and interactions, these experiences are shaped by wider political and economic structures. For example, under an authoritarian regime, people may be scared to speak out and be openly critical. Accordingly, their compatriots may not realise widespread dissatisfaction. While trade unions *could* provide spaces to hear alternative perspectives and see workers' collective strength, they may be hampered by military repression or neoliberal deregulation – augmenting informalisation, short-term contracts, turnover and instability (Fernandes, 2010: 260; Rice, 2012: 9, 15, 41, 89; Roberts, 2014). Further, if concerted strikes fail to secure concessions, then unionised workers may lose hope and give up (as in Peru, in the early 1990s - Arce, 2008: 44-45).

People may also underestimate public resistance to inequality and support for redistribution if television, radio and newspapers are largely controlled by oligarchies allied to neoliberal regimes: representing upper-class white men as powerful authorities; rarely showing strikes, protests or roadblocks; portraying critics as dangerous radicals; ridiculing leaders with African or indigenous features; not providing platforms to discuss diverse perspectives; and if this media is not held accountable for disinformation (Buono, 2010; Fernandes, 2010: 118-120, 168; Hughes and Prado, 2011; Vanden, 2014).

If everyone else seems to comply, we assume collective approval – not recognising that others may be privately critical. We only revise our norm perceptions when we witness behavioural change (or hear of it from trusted sources). But behavioural change is impeded by the costs of unilateral deviation – disapproval, mockery and punishment. For example, if men think that others will mock them for sharing care work, they may be reluctant to publicly perform such work. This invisibility reinforces widely-shared norm perceptions that men do not share care work (Evans, 2016). If disadvantaged groups rarely see 'people like them' in prestigious positions, they may expect discrimination, so not put themselves forward as leaders (Evans, 2015; Montegudo, 2017). If *latifundia* endure for centuries, peasants may doubt that government will ever expropriate land or that owners could ever relinquish their claims. "It never crossed our minds that this plantation could be touched", explained Prado (an elected commune spokesperson in El Maizal, Venezuela – Ciccariello-Maher, 2016: 86).

Norm perceptions can also deter use of government services, accountability mechanisms, and bottom-up pressure for reform. In Latin America, domestic workers often presume that government will not tackle labour violations, so do not report them (Blofield, 2012:75-76; Palacios et al, 2008: 56). Without seeing successful mobilisation, domestic workers may be fatalistic, pessimistic about reform, reluctant to join a union or initiate labour claims (as suggested of Chile and Colombia – 342; Gálvez and Todaro, 1989: 317; Leon, 1989: 342). Likewise, women may be reluctant to report gender-based violence or local corruption if they believe that the police will be unsympathetic (Evans, 2017). People may remain quiet if they presume that government officials and political leaders will ignore their demands (Krishna, 2011). Activism may also be deterred by expectations of brutal repression. So, even if citizens are provided with information about resource flows and service delivery outcomes, they may not mobilise for reform if they lack confidence in collective mobilisation, as well as the state's capacity and inclination to respond positively (Fox, 2014; Lieberman et al, 2014; Moore and Putzel, 1999: 14-15). Given the risks of overt defiance,

marginalised groups may feign compliance but subtly resist – by pilfering and reducing productivity (Eckstein, 1989: 14; Scott, 1986). Likewise, governments may not feel compelled to reform if they do not anticipate backlash, if they doubt the public's capacity for independent political action (as suggested of Venezuela in the 1980s – Velasco, 2015: 9).

By clearly articulating how wider social practices influence individual behaviour, this concept – 'norm perceptions' – can explain path dependency. People conform to the status quo partly because they think deviation will be unsupported by peers. These expectations thus inhibit social change. The costs of unilateral deviation from norm perceptions also create a collective action problem – the need for a coordinated change in beliefs and behaviour (Bicchieri, 2017: 111). This helps explain why norm perceptions persist over time. By contrast, conceptualisations of 'norms' or 'ideas' as aggregate features of a given society struggle to elucidate how these influence individual behaviour.

Echoing this emphasis on norm perceptions (rather than internalised ideologies), Joshi and Moore (2000) argue that poor people will mobilise when the state is tolerant, credible and acknowledges their rights. They further claim that people are more likely to invest their time in learning and activism when programmes are predictable (not limited to a single project cycle). Joshi and Moore suggest that development co-operation should merely build an enabling environment for autonomous collective organisations of the poor. But there is a further question here: how to foster enabling environments? This will be discussed in the remainder of this paper.

To recap, inequalities can be reinforced through four different kinds of ideas: (i) self-perceptions; (ii) internalised stereotypes; (iii) unquestioned acceptance of the status quo distribution; and (iv) norm perceptions (about what others think and do). This theoretical framework finesses previous conceptualisations of 'ideas', which tend to amalgamate the lot. To explore the importance of ideas, and how they change over time, the next section explores recent dynamics in Latin America.

Section 2: Declining Income Inequality in Latin America

In Latin America, the average Gini index declined by 13% between 2000 and 2012 (Székely and Mendoza, 2017; see also Figure 1; Birdsall et al, 2012: 159; Gasparini et al, 2016; Lustig et al, 2013: 130; Messina and Silva, 2018). Inequality fell especially sharply in countries that experienced a commodities boom (World Bank, 2015: 33). But growth is not the sole factor – for this also occurred in the 1990s (by 3.1 percent, compared to 3.2 percent during the 2000s), yet did not dent inequality (Cord et al, 2015).

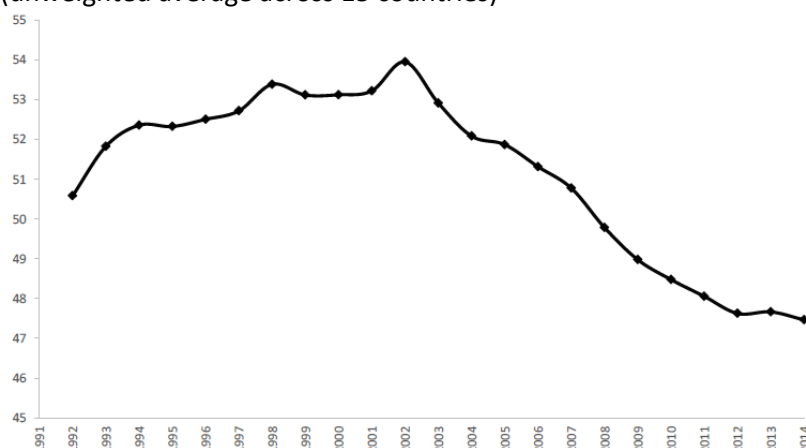
This section discusses Latin America's decline in income inequality, and possible, complementary explanations. These include more fiscal space for redistribution (i.e. increased state capacity); ongoing democratisation (increased incentive for ruling elites to favour the poor majority); and social movements (disrupting ideas about income inequality). Together, these capture different plausible interpretations of socio-political change. My modest suggestion is that ideas have been influential, and should be more widely recognised by political economists. Though clearly there are no monocausal explanations, and the relative salience of each factor varies over time and by country.

Generalising across Latin America, both labour and non-labour income inequality have reduced. In Brazil, the Andes and Southern Cone, wages grew significantly across all types and sectors of employment, especially for unskilled and low-skilled workers (World Bank, 2015:27-31). This wage growth was markedly higher in countries that experienced a commodities boom (which fuelled demand for unskilled labour) (Cornia, 2014a; *ibid*: 33). Declining labour income inequality also reflects a declining skills premium: falling returns to tertiary education, relative to primary

education. Economists have attributed this to the greater supply of skilled workers (facilitated by increased government investment and rising enrolment in education in the 1990s and 2000s); declining demand for skilled labour; as well as active labour market policies (Azevedo et al. 2013; Cornia, 2016; Gasparini et al, 2016; Lustig et al, 2013). These include strengthening labour market institutions, enforcing labour laws (especially in Argentina and Brazil), and increasing the minimum wage (especially in Argentina, Brazil, Honduras, Nicaragua and Uruguay, though not El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay or the Dominican Republic) (Keifman and Maurizo, 2014).

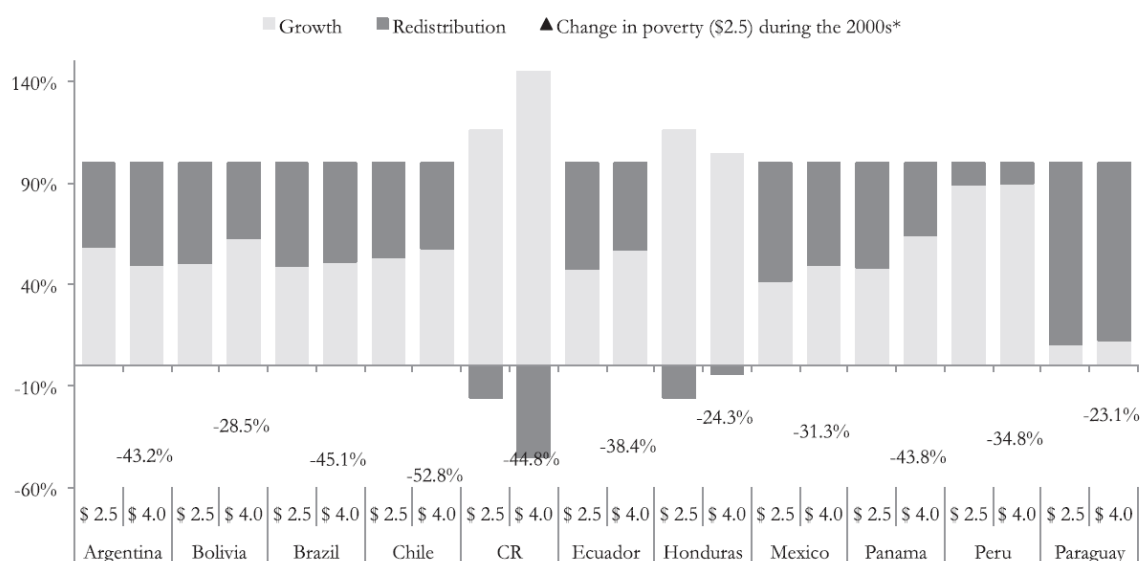
Falling income inequality was not only due to wage growth; redistribution also played a role (though its importance varies by country, and was much less significant in Peru; see Figure 2). Declining non-labour income inequality in Latin America is attributed to increased public expenditure on health care, education and social protection; improving both coverage and quality. Wider access to education (in conjunction with increased relative demand for low-skilled labour) also enabled more inclusive wage growth in the 2000s (Bird and Zolt, 2015; Cornia, 2014b; 2016; Cruces et al, 2014; ECLAC, 2017: 14; Ordóñez et al, 2015).

Figure 1: Gini coefficient, Latin America, 1991-2014
(unweighted average across 15 countries)



Source: Gasparini et al, 2016

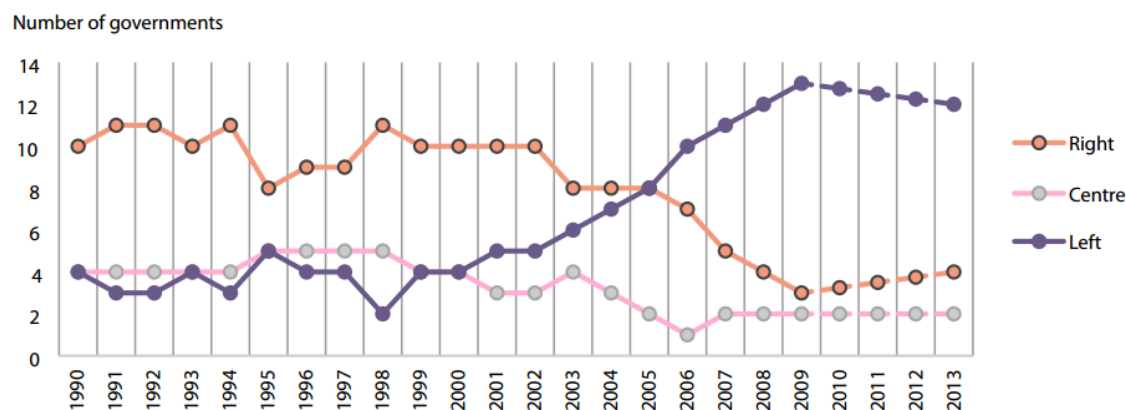
Figure 2: Decomposing the changes in poverty into growth and redistribution in Latin America



Source: Lustig et al, 2013: 131

Such quantitative analysis raises a further question: why have (most) Latin American governments increasingly redistributed wealth and enforced the minimum wage? Further, why has there been growing electoral support for leftist presidents, as shown in Figure 3? In 2010, left governments headed ten Latin American countries, two-thirds of the continent's population (Weyland et al. 2010).

Figure 3: Trends in ideological orientation of eighteen Latin American governments, 1990-2013



Source: Cornia, 2016

(i) Increased fiscal space for redistribution

Arguably, redistribution increased and inequality declined due to improved fiscal circumstances (i.e. more state capacity, not more political will). During the 1980s and 1990s, redistribution was not feasible given high debt, inflationary crises and pressure from global financial markets (credit restrictions, capital flight and debt-relief conditions). But, in many Latin American countries, the fiscal space for public social expenditure increased from the early 2000s with the 2003-2007 commodity boom, improved terms of trade, economic growth, increased tax/GDP ratio, debt cancellation, reduced dependence on the United States and IFIs (and their policy conditions), as well as growing official development assistance for the MDGs (Cornia, 2016; Kaufman, 2011; Levitsky and Roberts, 2011; Murillo et al, 2011: 54; Postero, 2013: 40; Remmer, 2012). Meanwhile, many oil-importing Central American countries experienced trade deterioration in the 2000s.

Arguably, increased fiscal space enabled Leftist parties to 'govern on the left' (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 10; Sandbrook, 2014: 183). When commodity prices fell and terms of trade deteriorated, Dilma Rousseff's government reintroduced fiscal austerity to ensure macroeconomic stability (Saad-Filho, 2015; Cornia, 2016:204; Gasparini et al, 2016). Similarly in Bolivia, Morales cut fuel subsidies when gas prices fell⁵ (Postero, 2013). Many redistributive policies seem contingent upon increased government revenue. There has been less progress where resources are strictly finite, such as land (see Postero, 2013: 41 on Morales' reluctance to pursue land reform, for instance).

The case Venezuela illustrates the importance of fiscal circumstances. Chávez was first elected in a context of low oil prices. With limited fiscal space, he limited monetary expansion, maintained fiscal discipline and did not nationalise domestic industry – despite political pressures for redistribution (e.g. strikes and demonstrations in 2002) (Kaufman, 2011: 104; Murillo et al., 2011: 55). However, with increased petroleum prices in 2003 (in conjunction with his control over revenues from Petr leos de Venezuela, Venezuela's national oil company), Ch vez could finally increase public

⁵ Though Morales rescinded after widespread protests.

expenditure on health, education and food delivery (Kaufman, 2011: 104). This was jeopardised when oil prices fell in 2014 (Alarcón et al, 2016).

Although the global commodity boom reduced external constraints, it only created permissive conditions for increased expenditure. We still need to explain why some governments *chose* to spend mineral and oil wealth on redistribution, rather than enriching the elite. Further, if fiscal space matters, why is redistribution not higher in wealthier Latin American countries, like Chile? Also, why did Chile make greater progress towards universalism *after* (not during) its high growth years (1990-2000) (Pribble, 2013)? And why did increased social spending in Brazil precede the commodity boom of 2003 (de Melo et al, 2016: 155)? Why did economic growth not dent income inequality in Latin America during previous decades (De Janvry and Sadoulet, 2000)? And why has redistribution not increased in other countries that experienced economic growth and commodity booms (such as in Asia)? To answer these questions, we need to consider political dynamics: such as democratisation, social movements, interests and ideas.

(ii) Democratisation

Perhaps declining inequality is partly due to democratisation (in conjunction with increased fiscal space). Increased democratic accountability, multipartyism and institutional reforms arguably: (a) reduced the opportunity cost of leftist organising; (b) incentivised governments to listen to marginalised voters; (c) especially if large in number; and (d) lowered the entry costs for political party formation. Notably, none of these rational-choice explanations presume a shift in ideas.

First, growing freedom of association and expression reduce the opportunity cost of leftist organising, as compared to violent political repression under military dictatorships (Bellinger and Arce, 2011; Eckstein, 1989: 39; fiOrtiz, 2015). Second, in unequal contexts, the median income voter has an economic incentive to vote for redistribution. If the system is competitive, they should be courted by political parties (as argued by Melo et al, 2014; Meltzer and Richard, 1981). Since inequality enables a constituency for the Left, democratisation should increase redistribution (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 8). Third, the larger the relative size of disadvantaged groups, the more they should be favoured under democratisation. One might anticipate greater electoral success for ethnic parties in democratic countries with relatively large indigenous populations. Fourth, it has become easier for ethnic parties to register and engage politically – with the 1994 decentralisation law in Bolivia, as well as reserved legislative seats in Colombia and Venezuela (Van Cott, 2005: 8).

Despite the intuitive plausibility of these interest-based hypotheses of how democratisation curbs income inequality, they do not seem to provide a full explanation. For starters, Acemoglu et al (2015) find no robust evidence that democracy reduces inequality. Tenorio (2014) similarly records that democracy does not increase social spending in Latin America. Second, the poorest do not necessarily vote for left-wing parties. Analysis of Latinobarometer data shows no association between socioeconomic position, political orientation and perceived unfairness (Kaufman, 2009). Demands appear to be conditioned by ideas, and cannot be inferred from economic standing alone. In Chile, people are more likely to protest if they believe the state should redistribute resources – regardless of individual income (Castillo et al, 2015). Such evidence casts doubt on interest-based hypotheses that democratic competition in unequal countries will yield more redistributive policies. Third, as Van Cott (2005:3) observes,

successful ethnic parties formed in countries with minuscule indigenous populations (Colombia, Venezuela) and performed poorly or failed to form at all in several countries with large populations (Peru and Guatemala). Ethnic parties are not a natural result of

democratization in the 1980s and 1990s since this occurred almost everywhere, but successful ethnic parties were formed in a minority of countries.

Fourth, it is important to distinguish between the formation and electoral success of indigenous parties. Institutional reforms may help explain their formation (by lowering barriers to entry, reducing opportunity costs), but not their electoral successes, nor sub-national variation in performance (Madrid, 2012: 11).

Like increased fiscal space, democratisation does not entail reduced income inequality, at least not immediately. But one problem with cross-sectional studies of democratisation and inequality is that they neglect lagged effects. When we look at the *longue durée* in Latin America, such as over a twenty year period, democracy *is* associated with increased social spending and reduced income inequality (as found by Huber and Stephens, 2012; Niedzwiecki, 2015). Perhaps democratisation *enables* important further factors, such as leftist organising and the consolidation of centre-left parties (as suggested by Huber and Stephens, 2012; Tilly and Wood, 2012).

(iii) Social Movements and Ideas

One long-term process – benefitting Leftist parties – is the slow, iterative and often conflictual process of social mobilisation. There were 281 protest movement campaigns in Latin America and the Caribbean between November 1995 and March 2001 (Almeida, 2007: 128).

Cross-national analysis suggests that social mobilisation increases the subsequent likelihood of pro-poor parties and spending. Indigenous parties have performed better in countries with stronger, more unified indigenous social movements (such as in Ecuador and Bolivia, as contrast with Guatemala and Peru, where indigenous movements are fragmented and weaker (Madrid, 2012: 14; see also Cleary, 2006; Rice and Van Cott, 2006: 710; Van Cott, 2005). In Argentina, falling wage inequality coincided with increased union activism, as supported by government (Lustig et al, 2013: 134; Silva, 2009: 99). Indeed, between 1970 and 2007, across Latin America, strikes exert a long-term positive effect on social security spending (Tenorio, 2014). Interestingly, it is only with organised labour protests that democratisation increases such spending (ibid). Labour strength even seems to increase social spending during periods of state retrenchment (1980-1999). This effect is even larger during periods of state expansion (2000-2010) (Niedzwiecki, 2015). Such analysis indicates positive synergies between increased fiscal space, democratisation and effective leftist organising. Clearly these are just two of many modes of pro-poor social mobilisation in Latin America. Besides indigenous groups and labour, demonstrations have also been led by neighbourhood associations, landless people, unemployed workers, coca growers, domestic workers, women's organisations, pensioners, and students.

If we accept that social movements have played a role in promoting redistribution, the next question is how? Economic self-interest has clearly been important: triggering mobilisation and hastening state response. Price increases, mining projects, wage freezes, mass lay-offs, privatisation, economic stabilisation and mineral extraction have triggered mobilisation by increasing the *opportunity cost* of inaction (as argued by Almeida, 2015). Indeed, in Latin American democratic and semi-democratic contexts, 'collective political activity rises with economic liberalisation' (Bellinger and Arces, 2014: 699).

Self-interest could also explain state response. When indigenous groups in Colombia physically closed the Pan American Highway (demanding improved infrastructure and services), they paralysed the economy and jeopardised elite interests. This may explain why the state yielded to their demands (Gow, 2013: 86-88; see also Zamosc, 2004: 131 on similar dynamics in Ecuador).

Marginalised groups have also used international media attention to push governments to act – thereby harnessing self-interested reputational concerns (Richard, 2013: 157).

Opportunity costs may trigger initial mobilisation and hasten state response, but there are further questions about how protestors gain confidence in the possibility of social change, become inspired to take on more challenges, and secure wider support. For example, public resistance to health care privatisation in El Salvador grew between 1997 and 1999 (Almeida, 2006). As dissent increased so did the demonstrations. After 50,000 participants marched, the government stopped privatisation. How did the movement gain support over time? What strengthened solidarity?

Has there been ideational change? Remner (2012) cites Latinobarometer data showing no change in self-placements along the left-right ideological spectrum between 1996 and 2007. However, there are four reasons for caution here. First, analysis of this data finds a high share of non-responses (20%); stated confusion of terms used; and instability of individuals' self-reported left/right ideological orientations (Ames and Smith, 2010; Arnold and Samuels, 2011: 35). Second, other datasets *do* suggest an ideological shift. For instance, support for neoliberal policies declined between 1998 and 2003 (Madrid, 2008). This harmed incumbent regimes and undermined the credibility of neoliberal policies (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 10). Third, these surveys only show internalised ideologies, not norm perceptions. This distinction is important in understanding the rising electoral success of Leftist parties: people may become more inclined to vote for Leftist parties if they believe they are likely to win. Fourth, I suggest Remner's (2012) focus on a single decade is a fairly short time-frame, given centuries of socio-economic exclusion in Latin America. I suggest we take a step back.

The remainder of this section illustrates how social movements have enhanced marginalised groups' self-esteem and self-efficacy; cultivated their collective solidarity; destabilised hegemonic narratives (government policies and paradigms); demanded recognition and redistribution; politicised inequality; fostered confidence in the possibility of social change; and in this way built support for socially democratic parties (see also Escobar, 1992: 69; Roberts, 2014: 61-62).

As mentioned in Section 1, marginalised groups' capacity to push for redistribution can be impeded by socially constructed ideas of difference. Across Latin America, indigenous groups developed the collective strength to militate for change by celebrating and affirming indigeneity, developing horizontal identities, and thereby forging alliances across disparate ethnic groups (Bottazzi and Rist, 2012: 531; Fabricant, 2012; Lazar, 2008). This has occurred through working together in preparing collective kitchens, joining popular fiestas, sharing experiences of daily struggles, recognising common grievances, exchanging ideas with diverse groups, learning about national politics, analysing their situation and contemplating alternatives (Canessa, 2012: 211; Fabricant, 2012; Fernandes, 2010; Lazar, 2008: 144; Nash, 1989; Postero, 2007: 24, 204). Between 2000 and 2008, the percentage of Bolivians who identified as indigenous increased by ten percentage points (Moreno Morales et al. 2008: xxxiii). This shift in self-perceptions likely aided indigenous political parties.

As discussed in Section 1, inequalities are reproduced if poor people internalise stigmatised identities. But, through association and exposure to egalitarian discourses, people may come to revise their self-perceptions and believe they deserve dignity. Creuze Oliveira started domestic work at the age of ten. She was routinely psychologically, physically and sexually abused. Until age 21, she only received clothes and food, not pay. Creuze Oliveira assumed her situation was unchangeable. But, by chance, she came to hear about domestic workers' rights on the radio, subsequently gathered with activists in church, and started mobilising collectively. Slowly and incrementally, she came to believe she could change her circumstances, and would be supported by others. Creuze

Oliveira became President of the National Federation of Domestic Workers in Brazil, helping to secure progressive legal reform (Cornwall et al, 2013; see also León, 1989: 333-334).

Similar processes of association, political socialisation and collective consciousness have been central to Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST), which has in the past 30 years enabled 146'000 families to secure five million hectares of land (Fernandes, 2005: 321; Wittman, 2009). Workers may be indecisive about land occupations, or fearful (feeling like 'cannon fodder'), so it is important to galvanise commitment, confidence and solidarity. 'The more that the masses attach themselves to their symbols, their leaders, and the organization, the more they fight, the more they mobilize, and the more they organize themselves' (Wolford, 2010: 87; see also Zibechi 2014: 57 on the formation of solidarity in Mexico; and Dixon 2014 on black cultural politics in Brazil). In Argentina, collective identities and commitments to solidarity were forged through gathering at roadblocks, developing resistance tactics and negotiating strategies. These beliefs helped dismantle the vertical clientelist politics that had hitherto impeded redistribution. Piqueteros insisted negotiations take place at the roadblocks, thereby undermining the role and power of distrusted political intermediaries (Silva, 2009: 74). Likewise in Ecuador, '[w]e are waking up from a long dream of being oppressed and enslaved. We allowed ourselves to be ordered around, and now we have realized we should act together' – explained one indigenous peasant women, who had joined a two day march two days to Quito (cited in Silva, 2009: 183). As Lazar (2015: 246) observes in Bolivia, '[f]estivals, parades, and demonstrations are a means for individuals to define and physically experience the collectivity, creating a shared sense of identity through movement'. While protests may be triggered by opportunity costs, the *embodied* process of *physically* coming together appears to strengthen and sustain social movements, enabling further collective action.

Besides fostering unity, coming together, seeing strength in numbers, also seem to shift norm perceptions about collective resistance to inequalities. Adelinda Díaz Uriate (a former leader of the Peruvian domestic workers' movement in Peru) similarly narrated her joy in seeing seven hundred domestic workers gather together, in 1975: 'This made me very happy... it gave me courage to continue... It was decided to expand the union organization to other departments' (1989: 403). High turnout at gatherings and rallies may thus inspire further action. Norm perceptions may also shift through hearing others shout angry, rebellious slogans, like '*que se vayan todos*' [they all must go] which reverberated down the streets of Buenos Aires in December 2001 (Di Marco, 2016). At the inauguration of Bolivia's 2006 Constituent Assembly, thousands of indigenous people carried placards declaring, '*nunca mas sin nosotros*' (never again without us - Fabricant and Postero, 2013: 192). By congregating in large groups, sharing ideas, all avowing defiance, these collective processes can thus overcome the co-ordination problems inherent in changing norm perceptions (discussed in Section 1).

Shifts in interests, ideas and performances appear to have synergistic effects, often enabling positive feedback loops. For example, Argentina's sovereign debt default triggered widespread factory closures and job losses. To ensure basic survival, men and women seized factory control, and formed co-operatives. Besides necessity and pragmatism, workers were also inspired by collective memory of successful factory occupations in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Emboldened by beliefs about what was possible in Argentina, they rallied support: 'occupy, resist, produce'. Workers' confidence in their collective capacities for autonomy and resistance further increased when they actually achieved these goals for themselves (Di Marco, 2016; Rossi, 2015). As E.P. Thompson (1963) suggested of the English working class, such horizontal identities, collective mobilisation, and redistributive demands cannot be inferred from economic position. They are socially constructed through collective experiences.

These synergistic, collective shifts in interests, ideas and performances are also shaped by geography. For example, anti-austerity protests were particularly prevalent in countries with large urban populations (Walton: 1990: 315; Walton and Ragin, 1990). This is partly due to the opportunity costs of inaction: job losses, wage cuts and price hikes fell especially hard on the urban working class (Rice, 2012: 10). It also reflects the disruptive capacities of cities. People living in interconnected, heterogeneous, densely populated areas, with greater access to mass communications, are perhaps more likely to hear alternative, critical discourses; listen to community radio sharing positive narratives about marginalised groups; see slogans of resistance emblazoned in street art; and learn about successful activism from their large, diverse social networks. Such exposure shifts norm perceptions, enabling positive feedback loops. By seeing their peers pushing for change, people may become more confident in the possibility of collective resistance and join forces. Urban-based anti-austerity riots were also enabled by decades of local networking and activism – which is harder in more isolated areas (see also Evans, 2017; Marx, 1852; McClintock, 1989: 70-72; Rice, 2012:9-10; Velasco, 2015: 11).⁶

Social movements have also broadened their support bases through strategic framing. In Argentina, organisations sought to mobilise disparate actors and amplify their collective power by framing unemployment as symptomatic of the broader economic context, rather than a personal failing (Silva, 2009). Had workers blamed themselves for job loss, they may not have demanded state response, or secured wider support. Likewise, inclusive ethnopopulist rhetoric (anti-establishment, anti-neoliberal) was arguably key to indigenous parties' electoral success in Latin America. It enabled them to appeal to a broader range of voters, especially lower and struggling middle classes (Madrid, 2008; Postero, 2004: 207; Silva, 2009: 137; Van Cott, 2005: 90). Ethnic parties that did not use inclusive rhetoric or forge ties to diverse groups failed to gain broader electoral support (Madrid, 2008; see also Blofield, 2012: 89, 132-133 on domestic workers' strategic framing in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay). Mass mobilisation and strength in those numbers appear to be forged through building a shared narrative, to which many relate. Pro-poor social movements have also been legitimised by widely-respected authorities, such as the Catholic Church and international human rights standards (Banck and Doimo, 1989; Eckstein, 1989: 30-32;; Rice, 2012: 45).

Framing can only do so much, however. Equally important to ideational change are iterative, long-term processes of state-society engagement. By occupying public spaces – asserting their collective presence, entitlements and solidarity – marginalised groups have politicised inequalities. In May 1990, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) organised a ten day mobilisation: blocking roads and occupying churches. Its 'Sixteen points' of national demands articulated a politics of both recognition and redistribution. This was the first national mobilisation of Indians. It catalysed wider protests and demands. Exposure to a critical mass of indigenous protestors may have shifted others' norm perceptions – about the possibility of socio-political change. Through 1990s, CONAIE contested government laws, suggested alternatives, negotiated, and entered electoral politics (Yashar, 2005). By organising horizontally (eschewing individualised, clientelist alternatives), marginalised groups reshaped expected terms of engagement with the state (Cardoso, 1992: 300; De Oliveira and Da Conceição, 1989: 364; Fabricant, 2012: 107; Silva, 2009: 74; Velasco, 2015).

Critical media may amplify norm perceptions of widespread resistance. Cross-national research suggests that support for redistribution is associated with perceived inequality (not actual levels thereof). While people tend to underestimate inequality, they are more likely to support redistribution if their compatriots perceive the country as unequal (Gimpelson and Triesman, 2015). That is, if their friends, neighbours and co-workers are publicly contesting the status quo distribution. This perception could be amplified. Inequality can also be politicised through the media.

⁶ It is notable that urbanisation is much higher in Latin America than other developing regions (UN-HABITAT, 2016).

Media reports of an infant's death from malnutrition in Campinas (one of Brazil's wealthiest cities) amplified support for the city's 1995 minimum income programme. Likewise, media criticism of Cardoso's neglect of social policy arguably spurred the rapid rollout of Bolsa Escola in 2001 (Yonemura, 2005, cited in McGuire, 2013; see also Brysk, 2000: 95; Spronk, 2015: 40 on sympathetic press coverage fostering a multi-class coalition during the Cochabamba water wars). Such critique coincides with a deconcentration of media ownership in the 2000s (Boas, 2013).

But mobilisation and media attention are not enough. People are more likely to expect tolerant, capable, responsive government (i.e. revise their norm perceptions and further engage with government) when it positively *responds* to their demands, and actually *undertakes* sought-after reforms. In Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela, indigenous movements effectively engaged with the state during constitutional reform processes, and their representatives were elected to constituent assemblies. In Bolivia, mobilisation led to the reform of an agrarian law. Immediately after each of these processes of effective engagement, indigenous movements coalesced into political parties. The state's positive response appears to have fostered confidence in the possibility of social change, mobilising further pressure for reform (Postero, 2004: 207; Van Cott, 2005). Brazil's participatory constitution-making process in Brazil (comprising thousands of diverse working groups, from all over the country, and lasting over nineteen months) similarly raised expectations of socially inclusive, open, democratic governance (Alston et al, 2017). Co-operatives and unions have been similarly emboldened by responsive government policy and legislative reforms (Arce, 2008: 44-45; Rossi, 2015). Top-down legitimisation may also improve interactions with front-line civil servants. For example, labour inspectors became more empathetic to domestic workers after Morales's election. This led domestic workers to *anticipate* state support and increasingly report labour rights violations (Blofield, 2012: 91). These examples support Fox (2014), Joshi and Moore's (2000) arguments that poor people are more likely to mobilise when they believe the state to be tolerant, capable and responsive – underscoring the importance of norm perceptions.

If disadvantaged groups *already* contest inequalities and demand redistribution (perhaps as a result of past mobilisation), then state *inaction* may trigger further protests. In Brazil, progressive government reforms, leading to a decline in both poverty and unemployment, as well as a rise in the average real wage – have shifted norm perceptions. Yet material change has not kept pace with demand. Latin American governments have failed to carefully manage commodities booms and rein in corruption. When prices tumbled, [so did these left-wing governments](#). But inequality remains politicised. 'Despite its achievements, the [Workers' P]arty must deal with constituencies that expect more' (Sandbrook, 2014: 165). Paradoxically, the protests of 2013 occurred because of the Government's (partial) success in tackling inequality. Protests may also escalate through frustration with government refusal to reform and violent repression. Seeing the police assault marchers, for instance, triggered public rage and empathy (as in Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico – Magana, 2014: 72; Postero, 2013: 50; Spronk, 2015: 40; Vanden, 2014: 242-247).

Ideas may also shift through transnational networking. Across Latin America, conventions and seminars have enabled coalition-building between diverse groups, often with overlapping membership (Silva, 2009: 51). UN conferences, World Social Forums and World Food Summits enable participants to: learn from each other's experiences; destabilise hegemonic narratives (which portray indigenous alternatives as backward); cultivate a stronger movement (sharing email contacts etc.) (Baldez, 2012: 323; Fabricant, 2012: 109, 115, 126; see also Swords, 2014 on network politics against the Plan Puebla-Panama). By coming together, otherwise isolated indigenous groups have learnt from others' experiences of seeking autonomy and securing territorial agreements (Brysk, 2000: 276). Through hearing stories of resistance, they may come to believe that 'Another World is Possible' (to quote the slogan of the World Social Forum). The (relative) success of Brazil's MST has influenced peasant organizations throughout the Americas. Inspired by marches across Bolivia and

Brazil, Amazonian Indians marched across the Andes: ‘500 kilometres of resistance’, alluding to the continental ‘500 years of resistance’. With others joining in solidarity, their numbers reached 10’000 by the time they had arrived in Quito. The Government accorded them a million hectares of territory (60% of their demand) and hired buses to transport the marchers home (Brysk, 2000: 156). Likewise regional networking strengthened the resolve of women anti-mining activists, thereby sustaining commitment (Jenkins and Rondón, 2015).

Regional diffusion also increased the perceived viability of the Left. Seeing Chávez, Lagos, Lula, and Kirchner maintain economic stability and gain re-election encouraged other leftist leaders (such as Correa and Lugo) and also voters, even in conservative strongholds like El Salvador and Paraguay (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 11). The electoral successes of indigenous movements in Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia arguably emboldened indigenous organisations to form electoral vehicles, such as in Venezuela and Guyana (Van Cott, 2007: 133). Controlling for other variables, Rice and Van Cott (2006) find that indigenous peoples’ parties are significantly more likely to emerge and be electorally successful in the current time period. They suggest this is due to ‘a demonstration effect produced by the prior formation and electoral competitiveness of indigenous parties in the region’ (ibid: 725). Interviewed indigenous leaders in Peru attested to this diffusion effect: the recent success of ethnic parties in Bolivia and Ecuador led them to seriously consider forming ethnic parties for the next national elections (Van Cott, 2005: 226). This is a norm perception and is not reducible to increased fiscal space for redistribution. This regional effect (together with the high level of urbanisation) may partly explain why falling inequality has occurred in Latin America but not elsewhere.

In recent decades, marginalised groups have secured high-level validation of their struggles. ILO conventions and UN declarations⁷ may foster confidence in the possibility of socio-political change. Some indigenous groups in Bolivia attested that the 1977 United Nations (UN) conference on discrimination against indigenous people in America legitimised their aspirations (Postero, 2007: 50). Likewise for domestic workers, ILO conventions are said to galvanise networking and activism (Blofield, 2012: 135).

In summary, declining inequality in Latin America was *partly*⁸ due to social mobilisation. While sporadic anti-austerity protests were often catalysed by a shift in interests, those collective processes of coming together seem to – slowly and incrementally – strengthen solidarity, embolden critique, galvanise confidence in collective resistance, thereby motivating government reform. Regional networking further enabled the regional diffusion of ideas. This may help explain why inequality declined across Latin America, but not in other countries that benefitted from the commodity boom (increased fiscal space) and democratisation.

Importantly, mobilisation is only part of a much more complex, internationally varied narrative. Also relevant are public perceptions of government. If people perceive the government as competent and legitimate, they may be more willing to pay higher taxes, to finance redistribution – as has occurred in Brazil (Melo et al. 2014). Indeed, Latinobarometer data suggests a positive association between willingness to pay taxes, satisfaction with health care and education, as well as lower perceived corruption (Daude and Melguizo, 2010). The broader point is that ideas matter.

Section 3: Wider Implications, for Tackling Inequality

Latin America’s recent reduction in inequality provides insights for wider efforts to tackle inequality. Social movements and ideational shifts appear to have been important, in the long run. While we

7 Examples include the ILO Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989, ratified by 14 Latin American states); the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2002); and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007, signed by all Latin American states except for Columbia).

cannot presume such processes will have similar results elsewhere, it may be instructive to take both more seriously. Suggestions include: strengthening social movements; focusing on norm perceptions (rather than internalised ideologies or social norms); and publicising positive deviance (through media and benchmarking). However, these are merely abstract suggestions, needing further analysis and refinement before application to specific locales.

Given the apparent potential of social movements, additional research is needed to explore how (if at all) they can best be supported by the international development community. At present, donor-funded NGOs often focus on small-scale projects (providing services or trainings for poor beneficiaries), rather than collectively pushing for change. This fragmentation is partly a consequence of competition for short-term donor-funding (Green, 2014; Yashar, 2007: 167). While the shortfalls of contemporary aid modalities are widely-recognised, better alternatives are less so.⁹ This knowledge gap does not necessarily reflect the inevitable limitations of external support. It could just reveal hegemonic priorities and donor neglect of trade unions, for example.

Besides directly funding social movements, development programming might harness the power of ideas. A first step would be to distinguish between different kinds of ideas – as proposed in Section 1. Donor-financed NGO campaigns usually focus on internalised ideologies: ‘raising awareness’; encouraging disadvantaged groups to believe they have ‘human rights’; are entitled to government services; should ‘say no’ to corruption; abandon female genital cutting; and for men to share care work. But such interventions may be ineffective if participants anticipate an unresponsive government, illiberal suitors, or neighbourhood condemnation (Evans, 2015b; 2016; forthcoming). Such campaigns may even be counter-productive. For example, by drawing attention to widespread corruption, donor-financed campaigns may reinforce norm perceptions that corruption is widespread. This may lead people to regard it as inevitable and so partake (Burbidge, 2015). Likewise, if campaigns highlight the extent of inequalities, but not widespread disapproval, then viewers may become despondent: doubting the possibility of change, believing the system to be stacked against them.

For practices to change, people need to change their expectations about what others think and do. To tackle these norm perceptions, campaigns could publicise positive deviance, and provide credible reasons for hope. Rather than directly asking people to change their behaviour, it may be more effective to show that their peers *are* increasingly doing so (Mackie and LeJeune, 2009; Tankard and Paluck, 2016; Bicchieri, 2017). This co-ordinated, simultaneous shift is more likely if there is widespread frustration with the status quo and desire for change (recall the above-mentioned synergies between interests and ideas).

Beliefs about what behaviour is normal, feasible and socially acceptable can also be changed through television competitions and soap operas (Glencorse and Parajuli, 2015; La Ferarra, 2015: 23–24). Prolonged exposure to marginalised groups performing socially valued roles may lead people to question their stereotypes, and support behavioural change – creating a positive feedback loop (Evans, 2016). Positive media coverage could also strengthen protest movements: highlighting their presence, viability and strength to outsiders (Brysk, 2000: 95; Spronk, 2015: 40; Tràn, 2013).

Learning about success may embolden others (within government and wider society) to press for change. This could be increased by rural-urban ties and migration; rural electrification and transport links (increasing connectivity); curtailing the influence of media oligarchies; and supporting media diversification (e.g. social media and community radio collectives) (Buono, 2010; Eckstein, 1989: 35; Fernandes, 2010; Hughes and Prado, 2011; Kruks-Wisner, 2018; McClintock, 1989: 72; Vanden,

⁹ Possible exceptions include Nigeria’s SAVI programme, which seeks to build collaborative, reform coalitions, embedding learning and iterative adaption (Booth and Chambers, 2014; Derbyshire et al, 2014).

2014). Trust is essential: people are more likely to revise their norm perceptions if they see behavioural change for themselves, or hear about it from trusted sources (Bicchieri, 2017).

Norm perceptions can also be shifted through regional benchmarking and peer review (e.g. the Millennium Development Goals, and Sustainable Development Goals). Despondent pessimists (within government and wider society) may be inspired and invigorated by seeing achievements in similar districts, sectors and countries. Reputation-conscious agencies may also be anxious to improve, so as to avoid the embarrassment of lagging behind their peers rapidly making progress towards widely-shared ideas of 'Development'. Merely setting standards does not achieve these results, because it does not shift norm perceptions about what others are doing (Evans, forthcoming; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 903-904). The regional element is important here, as people are more likely to conform to the norms of a group with which they identify (Bicchieri, 2017; Evans, forthcoming; Tankard and Paluck, 2016: 196). That said, publicising Latin Americans' collective success in reducing inequality might embolden campaigns elsewhere.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that to amplify progress toward equality we need to learn from the *longue durée*. To this end, it explored why income inequality fell in Latin America, between 2000 and 2010. Together with increased fiscal space and democratisation, social movements appear to have played a critical role: enhancing marginalised groups' self-esteem and self-efficacy; strengthening their collective solidarity; destabilising hegemonic narratives about entitlements; demanding recognition and redistribution; politicising inequality; building confidence in the possibility of social change; and building support for socially democratic parties. But obviously, social movements' gestation, growth and outcomes depend on much more than ideas. Many protests were triggered by a change in material circumstances, arising from neoliberal restructuring. Further, this is not a comprehensive account of complex, heterogeneous political changes in Latin America. This paper merely sought to highlight a regional trend of ideational change, and provide a useful theoretical framework, so as to encourage more scholars to go beyond 'incentives'.

Learning from history, post-2015 efforts to tackle inequality might harness the power of ideas: galvanising progress by strengthening social movements and tackling norm perceptions.

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