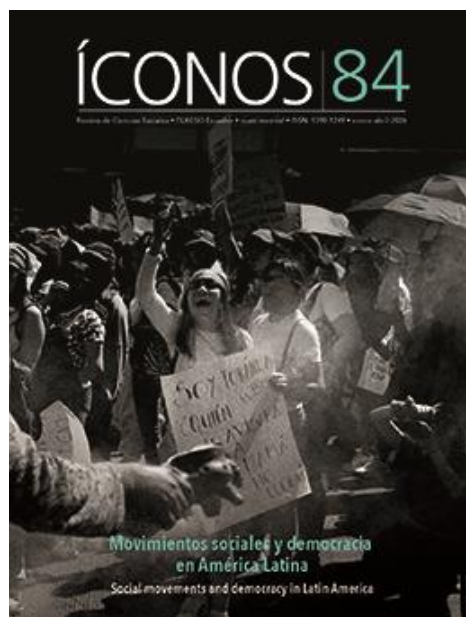


**ÍCONOS**  
**Revista de Ciencias Sociales**

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

**Social movements and democracy in Latin America**



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With the arrival of leftist governments to power, the research agenda on the relations between social movements and political systems in Latin America shifted towards the analysis of the dynamics of social mobilization in this new phase, its rhythms and impacts, as well as towards struggles for the defense and control of natural resources and their translation into constitutional norms, as in the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador.

The shift to the left that characterized much of the region in the first decades of the 21st century has given way to a shift to the opposition. This process has developed in a context in which competitive elections have become common practice, and the peaceful alternation in power between governments and oppositions reflects a significant advance in the institutionalization of democracy in the region.

Although democracy has now established itself as the predominant political ideal in much of Latin America and the Western world, it faces several significant challenges. In this sense, although democracy has no competition – which does not mean the existence of a single model of democracy – democratic regimes are being “attacked” from different angles by different actors and it is in this paradox where the most important political problem of our time resides. At the same time, the more we have insisted on the classic formula of low-intensity democracy or liberal democracy, the less we have been able to explain the paradox that the extension of democracy in Latin America has brought with it a significant degradation of its practices.

Among the most notable threats are the growing political polarization, the spread of disinformation, the rise of populism, the concentration of power, corruption, and dissatisfaction with political representation. These factors, combined with social and economic malaise, generate an environment in which democracies can be vulnerable to citizen disaffection and the temptation of authoritarian alternatives.

On the other hand, the institutionalization of democracy in the region has not led to a decrease in social mobilization, but rather, in many cases, has coincided with a process of normalization of protest. Instead of being an exceptional phenomenon linked to crises or moments of profound instability, it has become a common form of political participation and expression of social demands in Latin American democracies.

In this context, the objective of this dossier is to analyze the relationship between social movements and democracy in Latin America at this new political conjuncture. While recognizing the importance of research that has addressed the emergence of social movements, the current call proposes a different approach. Instead of focusing on explaining social mobilization, its continuities and changes through the various governments that have succeeded one another in the region, the dossier seeks to examine how social movements interact with the paradoxes mentioned above. Some key issues that this dossier could address include the following:

- The organization of distrust as a democratic practice: Instead of distrust of institutions turning into apathy or total rejection of democracy, social movements channel this unease and transform it into collective proposals and actions. In this way, movements act as watchdogs of power, demanding greater transparency, accountability, and participation, which can improve the legitimacy of the democratic system.
- Social movements as democratic counterweights: In a context of a crisis in trust, social movements can function as counterweights to the excesses or failures of the political system. By organizing and mobilizing, these actors can put pressure on institutions to respond more effectively to citizen demands and correct their authoritarian, corrupt, or ineffective drifts.
- The democratic value of critical mobilization: Mobilized citizens do not simply express dissatisfaction. They also have a critical and proactive attitude towards politics. These citizens are not satisfied with the deficiencies of the system, and so they actively seek its improvement through mobilization and participation in the public sphere. This gives them a more democratic quality than those who frustratedly withdraw from political life.
- Democratic resilience in the face of declining trust: The *Latinobarómetro* report, over the last 13 years, has reported a steady decline in support for democracy in Latin America. Against this backdrop of eroding trust in institutions, social movements offer a way to reactivate participation and encourage greater citizen involvement in politics.

- Social movements as defenders of democracy: Social movements are not only actors that demand specific changes; in many cases, they become defenders of democracy when they perceive authoritarian or regressive threats.
- Conservative social movements: These movements do not deny democracy; on the contrary, they give it a new meaning in an interpretative key that understands the legal limits of the democratic rule of law, such as the restriction and censorship of conduct that violates rights and freedom of expression.

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