Research Note

Youth Politics and Culture in Contemporary Latin America: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Youth politics in contemporary Latin America diverge from those of previous generations. Increasingly decoupled from parties, unions, and the state, young people glide seamlessly across previously assumed boundaries: culture and politics, individual and organization, subjectivity and collectivity, virtual and "real." This article presents findings from a systematic review of research on youth politics and demonstrates the new direction through three main categories: repression, incorporation, and exclusion, relationships between state institutions and youth identities; generational, cultural, and digital lenses, the innovative trends for theorizing current patterns of youth politics; and unsettling politics, the fusion and diffusion of youth political dexterity. The article concludes by highlighting current strengths and proposing future steps to build on this new direction.

Young people's political participation in contemporary Latin America diverges from that of previous generations. Youth practice glides seamlessly across previously fixed boundaries between culture and politics, individual and organization, subjectivity and collectivity, virtual and "real." Their actions are increasingly decoupled from parties, unions, and the state. Global cultural repertoires intersect with localized and territorialized interests. Activism extends beyond the traditional site, the university, to marginalized sectors of urban and rural society, feminist and indigenous politics, sexuality, and cyberspace. These changes are crucial to understanding not just political systems but also "economic, social, and cultural practices that might engender a democratic ordering for society as a whole" (Álvarez et al. 1998, 2).

Young people's political subjectivities and practices signal the region's emergent trends (see, notably, Oliart and Feixa 2012). Some, such as digital media, cultural

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politics, declining interest in electoral and party activities, and new social movements, have been documented across global regions. Nevertheless, the particularities of the Latin American experience—rapid urbanization; the coexistence of premodern, modern, and postmodern social organization; the legacies of conquest and imperialism; the historical role of university students in social change; the newness of democratic institutions; and the persistence of high levels of inequality—inform how young people endeavor to reimagine the social order.

Violence and marginalization mark the everyday experiences and life chances of poor youth (Imbusch et al. 2011; World Bank 2011). However, polling data show that the region's youth, across socioeconomic statuses, are personally optimistic but socially pessimistic about the future (Galambos and Loreto Martínez 2007). The growth of the middle class (Ferreira et al. 2012) and democratically elected left and center-left governments (Blanco and Grier 2013) present new conditions. Unique forms of cultural politics have emerged in light of young people's diverse aspirations, values, investments, and interests shaped by gender, ethnicity, cultural practices, and spatial relationships.

This article presents findings of a systematic analysis of contemporary literature on youth politics and culture in Latin America. Using the search engines EBSCO, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (ProQuest), Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y el Caribe, España y Portugal, and Google Scholar, we looked for publications that included three terms or their synonyms: youth, politics, and Latin America (or individual country names). We selected more than 75 research publications—journal articles, monographs, and edited volumes—in Spanish and English published since 2000. We read each publication, synthesizing the content into categories and subcategories. Consistent with the literature reviewed, youth is defined here less as a chronological age than a "material basis associated with age" (Margulis and Urresti 1996, 3) before full participation in adult economic, familial, political, and professional roles.

Our review captured three main categories that together clearly show the new direction of research on youth politics. The first is repression, incorporation, exclusion: relationships between state institutions and youth identities. This provides historical and contextual explanations for current patterns of youth politics. The second category is youth politics through generational, cultural, and digital lenses. It comprises the innovative trends for theorizing current patterns of youth politics. The final category is unsettling politics: fusion and diffusion of youth political dexterity. It encompasses the shifting foci for investigating youth politics, practices, and underlying meanings. The article concludes by highlighting the strengths of current literature and proposing future steps to build on this new direction.

Repression, Incorporation, Exclusion

The review captured five distinct historical and contextual legacies in the relationships between state institutions and youth identities that oscillate between repression, incorporation, and exclusion. They are students demanding reform, targeting of youth culture, revolutionary incorporation, neoliberal exclusion of youth politics, and criminalization of youth bodies. Youth activism reflects engagement with key struggles, whether to end oligarchy and create a pan-Latin American identity (in the early twentieth century; see Faletto 1986) or to confront emergent technologies of neoliberal exclusion (in recent decades; see Vásquez and Vommaro 2009).

Students Demanding Reform

From the 1918 Córdoba reform movement in Argentina (Tunnermann 1998) to the 2012 #YoSoy132 protests against the Mexican media and political establishment, university students have led calls for democratization and modernization of national institutions, including higher education (Liebman et al. 1972). In the early twentieth century, university students from the economic elite were cast as the primary protagonists in societal transitions to modern state forms and liberal democratic structures (Feixa 2010, 14). The terms *student* and *youth* became synonymous as student movements formed the intellectual center of modernizing (Faletto 1986) and marked the emergence of youth as a "vanguard of future society," involved in a cultural revolution as much as a political one (Feixa 2000).

Targeting of Youth Culture

Youth culture, defined by the consumption of cultural commodities, such as film, music, and clothing, has long been viewed with suspicion by adult-run institutions. When it emerged in the mid-twentieth century, youth culture faced suppression from dominant conservative sectors, which stigmatized and even criminalized what was being accepted by modern society as "rebellious youth" (González 2012; Guy 2008). Similarly, in early twentieth-century Argentina, children and youth with nonnormative behavior and living conditions were criminalized, defined as perverts and anarchists, and regularly removed from their families (Guy 2008; also see Rizzini 2011). Military dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s continued to target youth. Modifying previous repressive civil practices, the Argentine dictatorship removed teenage children from parents and homes (Guy 2008).

Revolutionary Incorporation

Revolutionary states have made focused attempts to engage youth from all backgrounds (not exclusively university students) as political actors. Revolutionary states such as Nicaragua and Cuba incorporated youth participation through mobilization efforts in, for example, literacy campaigns, coffee harvests, and women's organizations (Domínguez 2006; Petrie 1993). By the early twenty-first century, revolution-

ary states balanced earlier ideals with demands of the globalized market logics present in daily life (Domínguez 2003). Young people in Venezuela, Cuba, and Ecuador have organized as youth in coalition with state actors to resist the harmful effects of neoliberalism (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011).

Neoliberal Exclusion of Youth Politics

Political and economic neoliberalism redefined the relationship between the state and civil society, including youth. Beginning in the 1990s, intense privatization and marketization created varying effects on social mobility, liberal technical expertise delegitimated government social welfare, and political parties rejected the responsibility of protecting vulnerable populations, including young people. The escalation of social violence disproportionately affects working-class and poor youth (Reguillo 2003b; Celis and Sánchez 2011). However, the local and civil society initiatives that have replaced state-provided services offer few guarantees to improve the lives of youth (Maclure and Sotelo 2004). Meanwhile, neoliberal political culture emphasizes values of consumerism, individualism, and commodification (Oppenheim 2003). Neoliberalism's narrow view of civil society's role in political action and social change coincides with the emergence of "noninstitutionalized youth politics" (Oppenheim 2003).

Criminalization of Youth

By the latter decades of the twentieth century, struggles over inclusion and exclusion of youth had displaced earlier conflict between the traditional and the modern (Faletto 1986). The literature critiques criminalization of youth as endemic to neoliberal state apparatuses that attempt to deflect social conflict and curtail expressions of dissent. Specifically, being in public spaces as a young person, the leisure time resulting from lack of work, dissent practices that young people have developed, and engaging in youth-centered forms of sociality have become "judicialized" and made illegal (Vásquez and Vommaro 2009, 57). This individualizes and criminalizes the harmful effects of neoliberal policies on youth. De la Cuadra (2007) refers to Chile's deployment of hypergovernability techniques to suppress secondary school protests so as to achieve the appearance of a stable, harmonious economic environment.

Nevertheless, state exclusion through violence shifts according to the targeted youth's social location (Celis and Sánchez 2011). Salazar (2008) also shows this in her comparison of Chilean secondary school protests with that of a group of street children harboring three young runaways. The secondary school protesters met with unusual repression, suggestive of the Pinochet era, generating media and public critique of law enforcement and support for the protesters. Helping young escapees from abuse, the street children experienced the same repression they encountered on a daily basis, and the public and media saw them (as usual) as criminals deserving such treatment.

Overall, Latin American states too often respond to youth through "marginalization, rendering invisible, or controlling" rather than inclusion or the granting of rights (Alvarado and Vommaro 2010, 12). Youth are frequently ignored until their problems "are at the point of explosion, when little can be done" without public structures in place able to address the tensions at hand (Cordera Campos and Lerner 2006). Dominant public discourses viewing youth as a "social problem" typically lead to state repression whereby social inequality is reproduced and market interests protected.

These historical and contextual legacies in the relationships between state institutions and youth identities shape youth politics today. Youth nowadays prefer non-institutionalized forms of politics, such as those linked to "territory" within urban popular, rural, and indigenous movements. The territorialization of politics (Vásquez and Vommaro 2009) blurs distinctions between productive and reproductive identities, focusing instead on place, such as neighborhoods and communities, and on friendship ties (Llanos Erazo and Unda Lara 2013). Young people and their advocates are forced into a context of self-management of state tasks, in which civil society performs tasks previously managed by the state, such as social welfare and health. This leads to the emergence of new identities as youth develop new meanings and practices, as local social networks politicize everyday life and as routine antagonisms (i.e., with law enforcement) become the source of political analyses.

In these local spaces embedded in social networks, youth favor direct action as activists (*militantes)* in newly politicized fields (Vásquez and Vommaro 2009).

Youth Politics Through Generational, Cultural, and Digital Lenses

The review captured three innovative trends for theorizing current patterns of youth politics. Generational transformation—the social importance of how each age cohort encounters unique historical conditions at a different chronological point in life—almost takes for granted the incorporation of youth into political change. The globalized circulation of commodities and ideas, combined with underfunctioning state institutions, renders culture a focal site for social organization of political change and citizenship. Furthermore, an emergent literature theorizes how youth transform political activism in the virtual world through digital technologies (or Internet communication technologies, ICTs).

Generational Transformation

The theme of youth generations holds significant theoretical currency in Latin American youth studies (Feixa 2000; Bermúdez and Martínez 2010). Leccardi and Feixa (2011) argue that the concept is "one of the few Spanish [from Spain] contributions to universal sociological thought." Drawing from the work of Ortega y Gasset (1923) and Mannheim (1952), generation is theorized as a central social divide that drives historical events. Youth is not an obvious natural category of the

human condition but instead is significant only when framed by time and space (Cogo and Barsi Lopes 2011; Bonvillani et al. 2008, 49). The centrality of the concept in Spanish-language youth studies orients the field toward a strong association between youth agency and social change (cf. Gordon and Taft 2011).

The theoretical centrality of generation in Latin American scholarship and journalism reflects a logic closely tied to the region's political history. Each successive age cohort intersects with a different political and societal context, creating new social generations (Mannheim 1952). Students acted as the political vanguard in the early twentieth century, coinciding with the university's emergence as a primary social institution during the modern formation of Latin American nation-states (Aguilera 2009). Students at midcentury imagined change inspired by the Cuban revolution and the Alliance for Progress and grappled with the issues of human rights in authoritarian societies, modernization, limited socioeconomic mobility, and ideologies of scientific progress (Faletto 1986). In each era, youth subjectively construct identity with certain criteria that make a recognizable "we," including a break or rift with previous generations. Accordingly, a political generation implies a rejection of the existing political order and an intention to change the nation's political course (Bonvillani et al. 2008).

The social, communicative, and political particularities of contemporary youth generations are a central framework for exploring societal change. Martín-Barbero (2002) argues that the region's post-1960s youth have experienced time and sociality differently; they are the first generation to live in a peer-normed, as opposed to parent- or ancestor-normed, culture. They share with youth globally the status of "time immigrants" who "arrive at a new era from diverse temporalities, but all sharing the same legends" (of mass culture) and models for the future. The contemporary cohort has formed new relationships with digital technologies, has erased traditional gender boundaries, and has been exposed to cultural globalization that "by necessity requires new forms of social exclusion on a planetary scale" (Portillo et al. 2012, 141). Since the 1990s, identity work conditioned in aesthetic reflexivity and multiple narratives has generated political action that is deinstitutionalized and territorialized in local, everyday conditions (see Guaraná de Castro 2008 on rural Brazil; Molinari 2006 on Argentina).

A generational framework also imposes limits on theorizing youth political practice. As a common-sense framework, it obscures other, actually occurring youth political identities (Bermúdez and Martínez 2010). Moreover, generations coincide and overlap (Aguilera 2009; Leccardi and Feixa 2011), and perhaps globalization processes produce nonlinear biographies whereby being young no longer structures social or political cleavages as in previous periods (Rossi 2009, 2010). Transformed collective action in contemporary societies discourages "strong identities" and instead fosters precarious, fragmented, and ephemeral political solidarities. However, this flexible, dexterous approach to politics might itself be understood as a generational location, presenting "certain definite modes of behavior, feeling and thought" (Mannheim 1952, 291) that emerge from the social organization of everyday life. Youth encounter fluid, multisited, and deinstitutionalized political con-

texts. Despite its constraints, generation as a concept has created rich terrain through which to debate the relationships among youth, biography, and historical social change.

Culture, Politics, and Citizenship

A convincing argument emerges about why culture should be a central theoretical principle in the study of youth politics. We readily acknowledge our own suspicions that "reading resistance into culture" threatens to impose a theoretical and ideological agenda on activities that do not change state policies or that other actors do not view as political. Feixa (2010) counterargues that culture is a central space for social innovation. He makes an important distinction: a focus on political participation is fundamentally adult-centric and politics-centric, spaces and activities from which youth are excluded. In contrast, a cultural focus yields a more precise understanding of the public sphere, which is created through cultural practice. Furthermore, a cultural framework transcends a single age cohort, in which "the rules of the game are not presupposed, but rather created in action across generations" (Feixa (2010, 16). This approach aligns with the definition of cultural politics from Álvarez et al., "the process enacted when sets of social actors shaped by and embodying different cultural meanings come into conflict with one another" (1998, 2).

Bonvillani et al. (2008, 50) argue that if a political generation implies a rupture with the existing political order, then broader criteria are required to capture practices not viewed as "doing politics" in the existing order. Youth draw from their own subjectivities rather than from political parties or student movements, as Roatta Acevedo (2007) notes, referring to Garavito's concept of micropolitics (2000). Micropolitics address social practices from which state structures and legal authority emerge. Macropolitics emphasize the institutional power of the state, government authorities, and the law; micropolitics address the influence and capacity that develops or exists prior to these. Youth also create a politics of event whereby youth, through their music, aesthetics, and lifestyles, make their very existence a form of politics (Martínez 2008, 166; see also Osorio Venegas 2003).

Scholars also draw from performativity theories, in which the body is a form of biopolitical resistance. Youth politics cannot be understood as deviant but rather as a politics of demodernization, moral anticipation, and micropolitics (*política de la vida)* (Muñoz Gaviria and Martínez Posada 2007). These new political forms are characterized by freedom (freedom to adopt plural or multiple paths, as well as biographization), using one's own life as a means for political action, and reliability (placing importance on trust in relationships with others) (Muñoz Gaviria and Martínez Posada 2007).

Cultural politics in Latin America entail resignifying "the very meanings of received notions of citizenship, political representation and participation, and as a consequence, democracy itself" (Álvarez et al. 1998, 2). *Cultural citizenship* is a widely used term for imagining new relationships to the nation-state, in contrast to seeing citizenship only in formal political activity. Reguillo (2003a) and Martínez

Posada and Muñoz Gaviria (2009), among others, use the term to overcome previous problematic descriptions of the relationship between youth and the state. Previously, youth were constructed as under the tutelage of the state, as "not yet citizens," as only a dangerous problem to be managed, or as a vulnerable group in need of assistance. Cultural citizenship centers on new forms of political participation based in daily practice. The concept "recognizes other spheres of citizenship and the political related with music, artistic expression, different forms of inhabiting the city and the body, etc. Youth citizenship from this view would be performativity that takes on new forms of social and political incursion and articulation" (Herrera and Muñoz Gaviria 2008).

Citizenship as defined by notions of liberal democracy is also challenged by youth politics. Youth rework the category to include multiple identities through their relationships to global commodities. They struggle for rights rather than for liberal democracy. "Youth construct a notion of citizenship, or better said, of politics, that combines equality and difference" (Alvarado and Vommaro 2010, 10). Reguillo (2003a) argues that cultural citizenship, a category based on recognition used successfully by LGBT and racial and ethnic groups, is a viable strategy for creating political, social, and economic citizenship. Citizenship, in this assessment, includes much more than electoral politics and extends to include protests, working in community activities, and joining others to solve common problems. To do much of this work, youth have turned to digital media (Arriagada and Schuster 2008).

Digital Technologies

Digital communication technologies (often referred to as ICTs, or Internet communication technologies) constitute a rapidly shifting online media ecosystem in which youth build peer cultures (Martín-Barbero 2002). Being under age 30 is one of the largest predictors of social media use (Portillo et al. 2012; Valenzuela 2013), and technological competency is characterized as "a gift with which to place oneself into the speed of the era" (Martín-Barbero 1996, 2). In 2013, youth inhabited an online media ecosystem which included social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Orket, Twitter), YouTube, gaming sites and systems, microblogging and blogging sites (Tumblr), and interactive online news (from both print newspapers and new journalism). ICT technology shifts youth from being information consumers to information producers (Arriagada and Schuster 2008).

Authors overwhelmingly endorse Martín-Barbero's 2002 call to create a cartography of communication realities embedded in conditionalities rather than absolutes (Padilla de la Torre and Flores Márquez 2011). Unlike often-leveled accusations of "slacktivism" (see Christenson 2011), Spanish-language scholarship frequently cites the "digital optimists," particularly Martín-Barbero (2002) and Livingstone (2008), who emphasize opportunities for community engagement, self-expression, new socialities, and emergent literacy skills. Questions about the role of online and mobile platforms in citizen action have moved from whether social media foster

social protest (e.g., Gladwell 2010 vs. Howard et al., 2011) to "how and under what conditions" (Valenzuela 2013, 921).

The social inequalities that affect youth political participation offline do not disappear in the virtual world (Pedrozo 2013). Legacies of authoritarian regimes and disillusionment with democracy manifest themselves in the dominant role of youth and accompanying social media usage (Cogo and Barsi Lopes 2011; Valenzuela et al. 2012). The urban-rural gap in youth access is significant (Dos Santos 2009). Activist strategies strongly embedded in digital technologies become a way to subvert the antidemocratic tendencies found in traditional political and communication institutions (Candón Mena 2013). Mexican university students in the #YoSoy132 movement (Díaz Alba 2013; Rodríguez 2013) fused a range of activities to contest the illegitimacy and corruption of the 2012 presidential elections and media complicity. The combination of demonstrations organized online and extensive social media and Internet videos produced new connections across public and private universities and connections with emergent digital antineoliberal movements globally (Alonso 2013).

Young people's intensive ICT use makes the development of broadband access a youth citizenship issue. Cuba, Colombia, Chile, and Honduras have instituted youth technology programs (Cristancho et al. 2008). Online cultures blur the lines between consumption and politics (Martín-Barbero 2002; García Canclini 2001), creating novel ways to encourage even traditional electoral participation (e.g., on Venezuela and voter turnout, see Vila 2010).

Online, young people have easier access to contacts, which facilitates offline mobilization (Harlow 2012; Valenzuela et al. 2012). The Internet becomes a space for youth expression of aspirations, which leads to alternate framings of the world to be addressed through politics (Galindo Ramírez 2012; Harlow 2012; Vandegrift 2015). Youth throughout Latin America use technology to expand the public sphere and construct new citizenship practices. Educational institutions and supranational organizations promote online initiatives that they hope will combat "undesirable" youth behaviors, such as apathy toward electoral politics and engaging in delinquency (Blasco and Hansen 2006). However, we see a richer vein of inquiry stemming from the ways young people themselves creatively deploy online technologies that coincide with the "cultural turn" and other transitions in political action.

Unsettling Politics: Fusion and Diffusion of Youth Political Dexterity

The review captured four major foci in empirical studies of youth politics: problematizing youth's relationship with formal politics, theorizing how youth politics fuses the political-cultural dichotomy, exploring new practices and meanings underlying youth politics, and identifying social hierarchies as influence on practices and meanings.

Youth's Relationship to Formal Politics

Until the 2000s, scholarship generally worked with predefined notions of youth politics based on what youth were doing in relation to formal political institutions. Low levels of youth involvement in state-linked organizations, processes, and structures were interpreted as political disengagement and apathy, even signs of social disintegration. Since the start of the new millennium, youth's relationship to formal politics is problematized by posing it as a question in need of investigation, thereby challenging assumptions of political apathy or social disintegration (see national reviews from Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, and Chile, respectively, by Chaves and Nuñez 2012; Cubides 2010; Equipo Centro de Estudios en Juventud 2010; and Romero and Moreira 2010; regional compilations by Rodríguez 2013; Alvarado and Vommaro 2010).

In Colombia, Galindo Ramírez and Acosta Sánchez (2008) found that secondary school students held diverse ideological positions, responded to formal political activity (issues, persons), were highly supportive of voting in elections, and proposed solutions to current national problems. However, students explicitly rejected politics because they associated them with corruption, special interests, and privileges, which they scorned. In Brazil, a survey among eight thousand youth found that three-fourths informed themselves about political issues or participated in political activities; over one-fourth participated in a religious, sport, or cultural group; and almost one-fifth had participated in collective action to improve their neighborhood (Silva and Souto 2009; Cerrano 2009). Brazilian youth did not explicitly reject politics altogether, but they rejected formally organized political activity because they lacked trust in its traditional operators; that is, politicians (Cerrano 2009, 21) and they associated it with limited forms of involvement pertaining to the adult world (Dayrell et al. 2009, 29).

In Chile, frequent social media use increased the likelihood that users would engage in citizen activism, including attending demonstrations, contacting media, and meeting with authorities (Valenzuela et al. 2012; Valenzuela 2013). Activists and the larger urban adult population used social media platforms during multiissue, coalitional social protests widely supported by the larger public (Sehnbruch and Donoso 2011). Social media allowed users to express opinions and join causes, all of which were positively and significantly associated with protest behavior. At the same time, Web 2.0 technology use did not always correspond with elite-challenging political positions (Valenzuela 2013).

By problematizing youth's relationship to formal politics, assumptions of youth political apathy or social disintegration are rejected (Bonvillani et al. 2008, 50). Indeed, teenage activists across the Americas reported feeling aggrieved by adult discourses normalizing a "youth apathy crisis." In contrast, teenagers perceived youth political participation as common activity but shaped by a complex scenario of barriers and opportunities produced by class, race, and gender (Gordon and Taft 2011).

How Youth Politics Fuses the Political-Cultural Dichotomy

Having demonstrated that youth are politically engaged, our attention turns to how they are engaged, and especially how they "do politics" differently, such that their actions fuse the dichotomy between politics and culture. Youth do not merely add cultural aspects to existing political forms but instead change the nature of the latter by gliding seamlessly across and fusing different actions, sites, and identities; for example, from subjective resistance to collective mobilizations.

Participants in the Antifascist Radical Anarchist Movement in Bogotá, Colombia subscribed to diverse ideas and practices, such as straight edge and punk, but were united in their rejection of the system, the state, and authority and in their affirmation of emancipatory ideals (Roatta Acevedo 2007). Young activists working on sexual health in Ecuador and Peru employed interconnected strategies ranging from the individual level (developing themselves as activists) to the organizational level (building their own organizations) to the community level (responding to adult allies and changing their peers) all the way to the macro level (influencing policy reform) (Coe et al. 2012). They selected strategies according to the degree to which they succeeded, not in achieving formal political demands but in negotiating alternative notions of "youth" as worthy agents of social change. As in previous generations (Chaves and Nuñez 2012), youth still organize as students, but this looks different today, as the case of the Chilean *Pingüino* movement illustrates. In this case, secondary students moved their tactics between public spaces and school grounds and expanded demands from eliminating a fee for university entrance exams to reducing the commercialization of education (de la Cuadra 2007).

Youth dexterity across diverse forms of action is especially apparent in social media use (Arriagada and Schuster 2008; Cristancho et al. 2008; Vila 2010). The *Pingüino* activists in Chile built a call for education reform around social media (Portillo et al. 2012; Valenzuela 2013). Young Chilean hip-hop activists countered media stereotypes of marginalized youth by creating alternative videos, publicizing *tocatas* (live music concerts), and communicating more easily with organizations nationwide (Osorio Venegas 2003). Hundreds of thousands of Colombians worldwide were mobilized via Facebook to march against the FARC (Markey 2008); among the key organizers globally, all were younger than 30 (Hernández Vásquez 2014). Colombian student organizations engaged in online discussions of bullfighting (Tamayo Molina and Villa Zapata 2009) and spurred offline activism through Facebook pages in campaigns to defeat cuts in educational spending and to protest the end of education as a right for all citizens (Galindo Ramírez 2012). Youth used online sites for microreporting and other forms of journalism in Mexico and other places where traditional journalism is dangerous (Tolsá 2011). Political organizing against state inaction against crime and violence coalesced online in Facebook groups and real-time reporting on Twitter (Harlow 2012: Alexander 2011).

By theorizing how youth politics fuses the dichotomy between politics and culture, it becomes clear that "youth have not rejected collective action but they act in a different manner" (Calderón 2011, 90).

New Practices and Meanings Underlying Youth Politics

We draw on Galindo Ramírez and Acosta Sánchez 2010, along with Vásquez and Vommaro 2009, who propose *practices* and *meanings* as useful terms for exploring the distinct qualities that underlie youth politics. In Argentina, young people rejected not merely formal politics per se, but more important, the styles of leadership and means of decisionmaking associated with delegated representative power structures (Bonvillani et al. 2008, 50). Youth preferred "protagonistic citizenship," or involvement in decisions about collective action, as well as in direct actions that appropriated public spaces. Two other central features were horizontality in organizing, leadership, and decisionmaking; and autonomy from labor unions, political parties, and government agencies (Bonvillani et al. 2008, 60).

In Ecuador, youth organizations shared a commitment to participatory democracy (Llanos Erazo and Unda Lara 2013). Young activists across the Americas preferred spaces that allowed them to make a difference over merely having a voice, organizations that fostered a collective rather than an elite group, and youth-led rather than adult-supervised actions (Taft and Gordon 2013).

Calderón (2011, 90) uses the term *new politicalness* to capture Latin American youth's preference for participating in small groups engaged in direct actions in their immediate community, actions that offer concrete results and are oriented toward long-term change. Emphasizing difference rather than sameness, young people's notion of autonomy begins with the individual: "youth collective action is distinct today because it values personal autonomy as a collective good and collective orientations value individual autonomy" (Calderón 2011, 79; for Chile see Equipo Centro de Estudios en Juventud 2010).

Rossi (2009, 491) similarly concludes that youth prioritize being faithful to a "cause" and to individual principles rather than to an organization. Indeed, young Colombian activists frame their own subjective action as a source of capacity and power and as the solution to problems, instead of framing recommendations for policy reform (Delgado Salazar and Herrera 2008). As a form of utopia, youth subjectivity is not a future goal to work toward but an inspirational starting point from which to act practically in the present. And youth are well aware of their potential: youth sexual health activists in Ecuador and Peru believe that their own groups and networks have made more progress in transforming gender hierarchies than the wider society and polity (Coe et al. 2013).

The virtual online world further reveals the new qualities of youth politics that emerge from "noninstitutionalized youth cultures" (Portillo et al. 2012, 158). In contrast to schools, electoral politics, and workplaces, where youth sociality is marginalized or criminalized, young people find the Internet an inviting space where

they experience a "modicum of real power" (Winocur 2006, 562). Through digital technologies, youth construct political identities that are recreational and dynamic (Ortega Gutiérrez and Ricaurte Quijano 2010), as evidenced by new online "artistic manifestations" (Portillo et al. 2012), such as posting videos and visual culture in online communities. The Internet contributes to the "carnivalization of power"—protests that take on an element of fun and celebration through the use of humor and music. Moreover, with digital platforms, youth build movements that are more decentralized and autonomous than those of previous generations of university student activists (Osorio Venegas 2003).

By exploring new practices and meanings underlying youth politics, scholars reveal their prefigurative quality, whereby youth actively contribute to constructing alternatives to existing social, cultural, and political structures.

Social Hierarchies as Influences on Youth Practices and Meanings

The sources of the new practices and meanings underlying youth politics are varied. Bonvillani et al. (2008) trace the qualities of horizontality, direct action, and autonomy to the territorialization of politics and "new" social movements that emerged in the 1980s, linked to neighborhoods and communities. For example, the flexible association forms preferred by contemporary Ecuadorian youth originate from the feminist movement's earlier break with rigid organizational forms (Llanos Erazo and Unda Lara 2013).

Other authors trace the qualities of subjectivism and difference to the expansion of neoliberalism, consumerism, globalization, and technology since the 1990s (Molinari 2006; Roatta Acevedo 2007). But even though an intersectional approach was seldom used in earlier studies, multiple social hierarchies clearly stood out as a key source of new practices and meanings, just as they also acted as barriers to youth politics. Earlier youth studies focused on how youth politics informed class identities (e.g., Faletto 1986, 189). Contemporary research, in contrast, recognizes social class as one of multiple identities that produce oppression and social action.

Youth organized against ageism—in their case, the systematic placement of children and youth at the bottom of the power hierarchy. Adult control over institutions that young activists aim to access results in the marginalization of youth, the depreciation of youth practices, and overall frustration among engaged youth. Young activists across the Americas perceived that in most formal spaces, adults attempted to steer their learning processes and patronized them (Gordon and Taft 2011). In a civic educational program in Costa Rica, adult facilitators' own lack of active citizenship was found to be a crucial barrier for promoting children's participation (Fonseca and Bujanda 2011). For youth sexual health activists in Peru and Ecuador, the issue was not whether or not adults were involved but how adults treated them, whether adults showed them respect and trusted their abilities (Coe et al. 2012).

Combating ageism becomes an implicit framework through which citizenship rights are claimed. Brazilian NGOs advocated for youth social rights of citizenship

through campaigning against violence in private and public spaces (Guidry 2003) and promoting youth protagonism (Jupp Kina 2012). Local political structures adopted by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas, Mexico ensured youth involvement as autonomous education and health promoters (Barronet 2008). Indeed, local government support has been crucial in changing attitudes toward youth participation, as Cabannes notes in his study of four initiatives in Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela. The scholarship also notes the limitations of adults advocating alone on behalf of what are perceived to be youth issues (Cabannes 2006; Maclure and Sotelo 2004).

Additional social hierarchies based on race, gender, and class require young people to construct political action from different positions in which even the category "youth" has distinct meanings (Guaraná de Castro 2008; Margulis and Urresti 1996). For many youth, the only resistance available is to subvert everyday interactions that constrain their livelihood in the most basic ways. This is illustrated by studies of street children (Salazar 2008; Velosa 2008). In Brazil, where children's rights have been widely promoted (Rizzini 2011), black street children acted out stereotypical perceptions of them as violent criminals, knowing that their rights as children protected them from law enforcement (Velosa 2008). In Chile, where the strong market ideology has produced public tolerance of social cleavages (de la Cuadra 2007), the street children in Salazar's 2008 study knew they had little if nothing to fall back on, leading them to develop a cohesive social identity and shared strategies to navigate repression.

Given that young people construct politics from different intersecting positions, Chaves and Nuñez (2012) propose examining young activists' biographies to capture the particular spaces and places of their action. They illustrate this with two women activists in secondary school in Buenos Aires, who, despite different class backgrounds, channeled their involvement through community organizations and student centers instead of public spaces (i.e. the streets), due to the latter location's masculine connotations. Both biographies reveal that dominant discourses privileged adult spheres for youth political participation. Nonetheless, the activists resisted these discourses differently: the working-class activist remained outside the formal school organization to establish herself as a citizen equal to adults, whereas the middle-class activist participated in the formal school organization but was devalued for being too political, and therefore decided to re-evaluate her activism.

Unequal access to human and social capital development are both replicated and contested online. Issues of concern to elite and middle-class youth, such as security (Harlow 2012), free speech (Vandegrift 2015), and animal rights, have found a launching point in Facebook and Twitter. The *Pingüino* movement focused on calls for relief from high educational costs for middle-class families (Siavelis 2012)—the very youth with high rates of social media use. Although the literature does not analyze these cases as class issues, their success may reflect the uneven contours of digital literacy access to online platforms.

We note that student and youth activism online diverges from previous generations of university students in that they contest actions of "pink tide" states, such

as Venezuela and Honduras. Social media are also used to "assert the voices of marginalized and minorities who might be ignored by the hegemonic media" (Cogo and Barsi Lopes 2011, 36). Cogo and Barsi Lopes, drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, caution that the representation of excluded youth fosters the danger of their "televisualization"; when poor youth have a media presence, the audience mistakenly concludes that social inequality has been resolved privately. Digital literacy—a comfortable relationship with technology and adequate skills to use it effectively—remains a key issue, more important than access (Pedrozo 2013). Nevertheless, Cogo and Barsi Lopes conclude in their investigation of youth NGO participants that social media create "horizontal and democratic communication spaces" for young people typically excluded from full political participation.

Conclusions: Current Strengths and Future Steps

We wrote this review out of our own personal and professional excitement about the emergent research on youth politics and culture since the beginning of the new millennium. Though national-level reviews exist, no previous effort has systematized this scholarship from across Latin America, as we do here, to show the richness of this new direction and highlight its strengths. A crucial strength is that empirically and theoretically, scholars are working—indeed, struggling—with the questions of what youth politics looks like and why. The results are more diverse and deeper interpretations that eschew predefined ideas about what youth politics—and maybe politics in general—should look like.

We are especially inspired by the wealth of studies of looking at digital technologies through the lens of youth politics. Scholars embed their examinations of youth politics in the wider social, political, and cultural changes in the region. Yet even with a clear emphasis on youth and peer-oriented generations, a final strength is the continued mindfulness of the historical and contemporary relationships between state institutions and youth identities. Adults and their initiatives continue to affect youth politics.

Nevertheless, we advocate future steps to enrich this new direction. The first step is to extend the geographical basis of studies. We gained easy access to studies from the Southern Cone (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay), Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela. We are convinced that more studies of youth politics also exist from the other Andean countries (Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador), as well as Central America, but these were largely absent from international databases for Spanish and English research publications. These patterns reflect the resource hierarchies that exist for scholars from the region. Many publications on youth gangs, including those from Central America, focus on youth sociability. These studies may offer crucial insights, but were excluded here due to limited resources.

Second, the need continues for an intersectionality perspective (Coe et al. 2013). Many studies take into consideration the impact of social class hierarchies and differences on young people's political action (Margulis and Urresti 1996).

Fewer studies incorporate gender hierarchies. This surprising omission neglects the significant social and policy changes regarding gender injustice across the region since the 1990s, shifts that have even influenced young men's activism about alternative masculinities (see Goicolea et al. 2014). Consideration of ethnicity and race is largely absent (Del Popolo et al. 2009; Jackson and Warren 2005, 567), despite the consistent growth of mobilization regarding ethnic and racial identities during the last two decades involving strong youth elements. As with gender and masculinities, more research is needed on indigenous and Afrodescendant youth, but also on white and mestizo youth: what do these characteristics mean today, how have they changed or continued, and how do these shape youth politics?

Furthermore, across subfields, scholars must reconsider politics in light of changes emerging from new youth practices. Theoretically and empirically, Latin American youth politics fuse previously assumed dichotomies, thereby urging scholars to move beyond the binary categorizations of politics as either traditional, formal, and institutional or new, informal, and noninstitutionalized. We propose the development of more useful conceptual tools to ask open questions about politics, not just among youth but in the larger society. Looking to youth's new practices and meanings to forge the path forward, some possibilities emerge from our review: politicizing practices or politics embedded in practice; building networks through the digital and the physical combined; merging personal issues around sexuality, cultural expression, educational access, and physical security with questions about the social organization of movements; and drawing from globalized technologies and repertoires to make sense of local issues (a different kind of reterritorialization).

The horizontality of how youth come to politics—individually and digitally—translates into their desire for different arrangements in organized political forms whereby the individual shapes mass movements, rather than a selected vanguard that changes individuals' lives. Instead of seeing youth practices and meanings as problematic, our review suggests that scholars should examine these for their potential to be emancipatory and to signal new directions of social change.

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