Effective use of political advocacy in the fight against corruption

The promotion of social transformation

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Politics is about much more than political parties and elections. It is a permanent and dynamic process within which different actors confront each other to promote their development visions and influence decision-making. The development visions that these actors promote should be based on ideological convictions and be in the public's interest, but unfortunately, on many occasions, individual or sectoral interests take precedence.

Political parties are just one type of political actor, but there are many others. Any actor that attempts to promote its development vision and influence decision-making – the media, civil society organisations, universities, religious institutions, trade unions, multilateral organisations, or individual citizens – can be considered a political actor. Some actors operate from their institutional position and others from a position of moral authority, but all of them participate in the 'game' of politics.

In no other sphere do development visions (and interests) face each other more visibly and palpably than in parliament. Fernando Savater eloquently describes this in *Política para Amador* when he writes, "What is typically seen in parliament is debate, controversy, criticism without contemplation, sarcasm, even in bad taste on occasion, because it is there that opposing social interests and different visions about what is best for the community come face to face." (2014:179)

Elections are nothing more than a periodic renewal of political representatives by popular choice. That is to say, politics do not end with elections; elections simply determine who is going to be an

MP or the President, but no policy decisions are actually being made. It is not until after the elections that true political processes begin, when political decisions are made as a result of dynamic interaction between all of the actors that wish to make an impact on decision-making.

In order to influence decision-making, individual actors use diverse strategies to intervene at different moments during the public policy process. The majority of these strategies, when they do not involve acts of corruption, are legitimate and contribute to vitalising democracy. In effect, a healthy democracy requires active and constant participation by all political actors, including civil society, and this means more than participating in elections.

Giovanni Sartori reminds us in *Ingeniería constitucional comparada* that, "Democracy cannot simply be the "power of the people", because this is just an abbreviated name for the complete expression: "the power of the people over the people." (…) So, how can a whole population – dozens or hundreds of millions of people – exercise power over itself?" (2005:159) Sartori confesses that there is no clear answer, but perhaps political advocacy could be part of this answer, understanding that it is a process through which political actors can put items on the agenda, stand up for the rights of vulnerable groups, or promote forgotten interests.

The fight against corruption constitutes a pertinent, commendable, and urgent political advocacy objective. In order for it to be truly effective, it is vital to begin with a judicious understanding of the political context and use more effective tools and strategies to make a real impact on decision-making. In this paper, I will provide various empirical and conceptual elements, as well as practical recommendations for this purpose. I will do so from a position situated between activism and academia.

Based on empirical observations and my experience as a consultant to various civil society organisations over the last ten years, I will first explain the opportunities for political advocacy that I perceive on the institutional landscape for countries in Latin America (1). Secondly, I will propose an alternative analytical framework for Latin American politics, summarising diverse research projects carried out by myself and by colleagues to encourage civil society to participate in public action (2). Thirdly, I will offer a series of strategies and tools for effective political advocacy that can be used in the fight against corruption, the majority of which are based on the book *Aprendamos a incidir: estrategias y herramientas para una incidencia política efectiva*, which I published in 2017 with my colleague José Antonio Pastor (3).[1] I will close with some final comments (4).

1. Opportunities for political advocacy on the institutional landscape of Latin America

In this section I will identify three regional trends on the institutional landscape of Latin America: the growing relevance of parliamentary opposition (1.1), the empowerment of extra-parliamentary opposition (1.2) and the increase in formal and informal spaces for citizen participation (1.3). Even

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[1] Available at www.aprendamosaincidir.com.

though great democratic challenges remain, including in the field of the fight against corruption, I will conclude that these trends constitute opportunities for political advocacy by civil society.

1.1 The growing relevance of parliamentary opposition

One typical characteristic of the majority of Latin American political systems is that they combine a presidential system with proportional representation electoral systems, which usually belong to parliamentary systems. With the trend of increasing electoral fragmentation, and the absence of a culture of coalition governments – as is normally seen in parliamentary systems –, Latin American Presidents often govern without a political majority, which forces them to negotiate each legislative initiative with the parliamentary opposition (Payne, Zovatto & Mateo Díaz 2002; Alcántara Sáez, García Montero & Sánchez López 2005).

Many analysts complain about the situation of un-governability that this reality creates, as it slows down decision-making. Situations of legislative gridlock are obviously not positive when urgent social problems have to be resolved, but they are not entirely negative from the perspective of quality of democracy. Indeed, the existence of divided or minority governments generates necessary counterbalances to Presidents – who already possess broad institutional powers – because they enable greater politico-parliamentary control (Morgenstern & Nacif 2002; Vargas & Petri 2008). The opportunity for exercising political control is in fact greater when the President does not rely on a legislative majority (Sánchez de Dios 2008; Petri & Vargas 2009).

From a political advocacy perspective, this situation brings with it greater opportunities for influencing decision-making, because it increases the political weight of each MP and each party, and therefore increases the number of relevant interlocutors for civil society in the parliamentary arena. This gives greater substance to the representative function of the parliamentary institution, because it allows it to be more reactive to the needs of the citizens, performing its function of 'interest articulation', the creation of legislation to address social problems, the oversight of the implementation of these laws and a more focused use of tools for political control, such as parliamentary questions or the hearings of government ministers (Carrillo-Flórez & Petri 2009).

Opportunities for political advocacy are not limited to the parliamentary opposition, as they can also exist at the level of government. It is often believed, incorrectly, that the Executive Power and party legislators in parliament make up a monolithic block which operates in a harmonious manner. In reality differences between the Executive Power and its parliamentary group are seen frequently, as well as inside these institutions. Within the Executive Power differences may exist between the different ministries, or even between government officials and their civil servants. There is no guarantee of legislative discipline at the level of parliamentary groups either, with individual MPs pursuing agendas that sometimes contradict their party lines.

If it is true that the streamlining of internal organisational structures of Latin American parliaments and the strengthening of their capabilities for political control is a pending agenda, the growing relevance of the parliamentary opposition is, in general terms, positive for the promotion of issues by civil society. This type of scenarios constitutes a favourable context that civil society can make the most of when attempting to influence decision-making.

1.2   The empowerment of extra-parliamentary opposition

Outside of the parliamentary sphere a growing empowerment of civil society can also be seen in many Latin American countries, becoming more and more a true 'extra-parliamentary opposition', or "countervailing power", to use Galbraith's (1952) concept, with ample abilities for articulation, mobilisation, and participation. Even though there is still a long way to go, recent examples such as the impeachment of President Otto Pérez Molina in Guatemala, the *piqueteros* movement in Argentina, and the revolution by the *pingüinos* in Chile, demonstrate how Latin American civil society has managed to genuinely impact decision-making (Dabène 2006; Petri 2016).

Latin American civil society continues to face many obstacles that reduce its political impact. Many civil society organisations lack a long-term vision, which makes them more reactive than proactive. They have to deal with challenges of internal organisation, representation, and legitimacy, which puts them at a disadvantage when compared with interest groups such as business and industry associations which are better-organised and have more resources. Many civil society organisations still have an 'adversarial' logic, so they limit themselves to exercising a role of opposition to organised social interests, without participating in social dialogue processes in a constructive way (Vargas & Petri 2009).

In spite of these obstacles, which in part may be overcome by the application of political advocacy strategies and tools that I will describe in section 3, the regional trend of empowerment of Latin American civil society is undeniable. With nuances that are typical of each national situation, political decision-making is no longer a result of a closed interaction between the Executive Power and parliamentary opposition; now, more than ever, the extra-parliamentary opposition exerts an influence (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The interaction between the Executive Power, the parliamentary opposition and the extra-parliamentary opposition
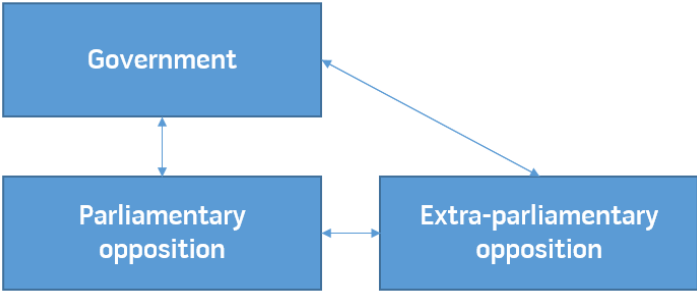
Source: own elaboration.

The observation of the empowerment of civil society confirms the thesis by Moisés Naím in his book *The End of Power* (2014). The author argues that power in all spheres, including in politics, is changing and becoming more atomised. Actors that may seem insignificant – named "new micro powers", such as emerging social movements, groups of hackers or bloggers – may succeed (and have succeeded) in overthrowing dictators or ending commercial monopolies. (It is not a

coincidence that the book has been recommended by Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, because the political irruptions that social media has provoked in recent years, for good and bad, have been significant.)

The remodelling of politics generated by "the end of power" presents opportunities because it opens new spaces for civil society organisations, including even the smallest ones, to participate in public action. Society is no longer exclusively a recipient of government policies. The extra-parliamentary opposition has consolidated itself to function as a link between citizens and the political system, not only when communicating needs, but also to contribute improved solutions to public problems.

1.3   The increase in formal and informal spaces for citizen participation

Civil society's ability to influence decision-making is largely determined by the level of institutionalisation of citizen participation in public spaces, as well as the governmental culture of accountability. My observations lead me to believe that participation by civil society in the development of public policy is increasing in Latin American nations. While it is expressed in different ways and does not always achieve the same level of success, more and more mechanisms for consultation or social dialogue are being developed, associating civil society with the public policy process, generating politico-social agreements. Social dialogue can be very time-consuming, but it is a worthwhile investment if it avoids social conflict. A true social, plural, and inclusive democracy is emerging, allowing for the generation of consensuses that guarantee social peace and a strengthening of democratic institutions (Petri 2008; Vargas & Petri 2009).

Font & Gomà distinguish between various types of citizen participation that can be observed during different phases of the public policy process: 1. participation in the diagnosis and formation of the agenda; 2. participation in the formulation of policies and the adoption of decisions; and 3. participation in management (1999). It seems to be the case that in Latin America, participation is mainly seen in the first phase of the public policy process, and to a lesser extent in the third phase, but it has hardly been developed in the second phase. A priority for political systems in the region is therefore to increase participation in the second phase, corresponding to the level of participation in the formation of policies.

The first phase (participation in the diagnosis and formation of the agenda), is now relatively commonplace and being developed heterogeneously in different Latin American countries. This occurs during every election, when the population has the chance to choose its representatives. It occurs constantly in the media, which criticises the government's actions. Social uprisings (such as a strike) can result in a particular matter finding its way onto the political agenda. The third phase, which relates to participation in management, is reasonably developed. An example of this could be the emblematic experiences of participatory and administrative budgets at the local level. The second phase (participation in the formulation of policies and the adoption of decisions), mainly corresponds to the negotiation of politico-social agreements. It is a relatively new practice in Latin America, but is gradually being institutionalised (Acotto 2003; Murillo 2003).

In the Central American context two types of politico-social agreements can be differentiated between: agreements that can be described as 'conjunctural' and agreements that are a result of institutionalised negotiation processes (Figure 2). Conjunctural agreements are made about a specific matter in a specific context, according to the needs of that time or revolving around a conflict, such as the negotiation processes that ended civil wars in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. These agreements often emerge in a context of severe social unrest, as was the case in Panama in 2002, when the government summoned a negotiation to generate consensuses about a highly controversial and explosive legislative project. This type of government negotiations are also seen when, after elections, a newly-elected government has an unstable legislative majority, and wants to ensure that it will receive support for its policies from civil society. This is what happened in Costa Rica in 1998 with the consultation initiative of President Miguel Ángel Rodríguez.

Alongside these agreements and governmental consultations, there are institutionalised negotiation processes that are more programmatic. They usually correspond to sectorial negotiation platforms, where all concerned interest groups (trade unions, corporate sectors, government, civil society, pressure groups, etc.) are represented. Their intention is to generate consensuses and make recommendations for the definition and implementation of public policies to the decision-maker. This type of negotiation process with a high level of institutionalisation exists in Honduras and Nicaragua.

Figure 2. Social dialogue and social conflict
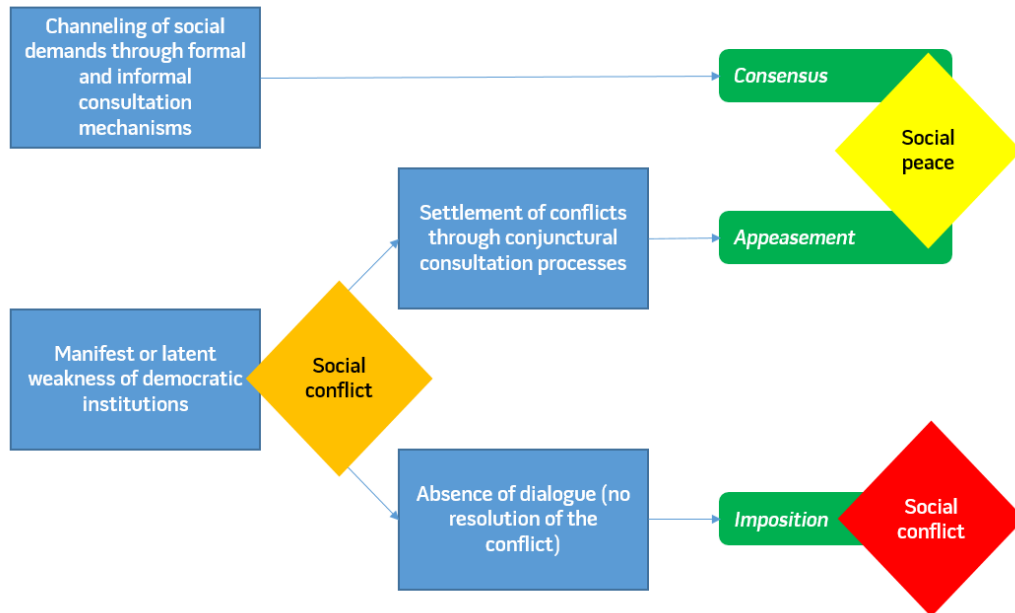
Source: Vargas & Petri (2009).

It must be noted that these negotiation processes do not always obtain the desired results, particularly when they start from a short-term logic or are manipulated to legitimise a political decision. They do not always manage to prevent social conflict, such as the one Nicaragua currently finds itself in. Moreover, the scarcity of verification and follow-up mechanisms weakens

the impact of many negotiation processes, as was the case with the Peace Agreements signed in Guatemala. Even so, the increase in spaces for citizen participation constitutes an important democratic advance.

2. An alternative analytical framework for Latin American politics to encourage civil society to participate in public action

In a book with the somewhat presumptuous title *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (2002), George Tsebelis proposes an analytical framework that goes further than traditional typologies of political institutions in terms of its degree of separation of powers (presidential or parliamentary system), its party system, and the degree of independence that the civil service or Judiciary Power have. Tsebelis asserts that it is more appropriate to analyse political institutions by considering the effects that specific institutional arrangements have on decision-making. To guide civil society's public action, in this section I will apply Tsebelis' analytical framework to political institutions in Latin America (2.1). Later, I will extend this to apply it to civil society (2.2).

2.1 Institutional veto players

In order to analyse the decision-making process, Tsebelis introduces a key concept, that of "veto players." They are defined as decision makers – individual or collective – whose approval is required for a change in the status quo. Tsebelis argues that each political decision – the passing of a law or adoption of a public policy – constitutes a new status quo that modifies the previous status quo. On the basis of this definition, it is possible to identify the veto players in different political systems, and determine the effects of different politico-institutional arrangements on decision-making.

For example, if the President of the Republic has the institutional right to a legislative veto at his disposal, he is a veto player. MPs and political parties that can block the approval of a bill because their votes determine whether the required legislative majority is reached are also veto players. In a two-chamber parliament, the second chamber can become a veto player. When a mandate can be recalled by popular initiative or when a referendum is called, citizens can also become veto players.

In addition, Tsebelis identifies a specific type of veto player that he refers to as "agenda setters." Even though they rely on other veto players for the approval of their proposals, agenda setters are able to include matters in the political agenda and have significant control over public policies that alter the status quo.

In presidential systems, in the parliamentary sphere the Legislative Power has the power to set the agenda during ordinary sessions; during extraordinary sessions, the Legislative Power analyses and discusses only those initiatives submitted for consideration via express action by the Executive Power. Individual or collective actors that have the power to call for a referendum, although they cannot control the result, can decide to exercise this prerogative and can formulate the question to

be asked. The popular legislative initiative allows a sample of the population to place an item on the legislative agenda.

Understanding the way in which the status quo is modified is strategically important for any actor interested in influencing decision-making, because it allows him or her to be more effective in their attempt at political advocacy, by identifying the actors that have to be convinced to support or, on the contrary, block a political decision from being made, or to succeed in having a particular matter included in the legislative agenda.

Having an excellent personal relationship with the Vice-President of the Republic, for example, is of little relevance if he does not hold any institutional veto power (unless he has a moral influence over the President). Influencing the government parliamentary party group could be less strategic when the finding of a legislative majority depends on a minority party. Likewise, it could be simpler to convince one single MP to present a bill instead of attempting to obtain the required quantity of signatures for a popular legislative initiative.

In short, the identification of veto players is useful for guiding public action by civil society, because it allows us to identify precisely which actors should be influenced to obtain the best result. It should be pointed out that this type of analysis must be dynamic, because veto players can change depending on the issue or the politico-institutional context. I will return to the importance of the timing of political advocacy in the following section.

2.2 Societal veto players

Until now, I have only discussed the players that have veto powers as a result of their institutional position, which are those studied by Tsebelis. Upon observation of the Latin American context I propose broadening the concept of veto players to take it beyond the politico-institutional sphere. In effect, civil society organisations can become 'societal veto players' when the government cannot avoid or circumvent them in the process of formulating public policies.

I developed the concept of societal veto players in Vargas & Petri (2009) and refined it in Petri & Pastor (2017). Independently, in 2009, Simon Fink published an article about churches as societal veto players. The concept has also been applied to the analysis of other policy fields: telecommunications (Bauer, Häge & Schneider 2004), health care (Kotzian 2009), pension reform (Carrera, Angelaki & Carolo 2010), social policy (Angelaki 2012), and prostitution and same-sex marriage (Schmitt, Euchner & Preidel 2013). The concept of societal veto players has also been applied to the analysis of terrorism (Young & Dugan 2011).

The emergence of societal veto players once again confirms Moisés Naím's ideas about "the end of power." It is becoming increasingly evident that if civil society organisations did not participate in the process of forming public policies – because the government was not open to negotiation or because the civil society organisations did not want to be involved in the consultation process – a militant reaction could be expected from those that want to express their opposition. Leaving aside the debate about the risks of the so-called 'democracy of the street', there are numerous examples of times when social uprisings resulted in the repeal of a bill or even led to the resignation of

elected Presidents (Pérez-Liñán 2007), which demonstrates that civil society occasionally holds a true veto power.

In Costa Rica, for example, informal and non-institutionalised citizen initiatives managed to set the parliamentary agenda. The social movements in 2000 (which took the form of strikes, roadblocks, hunger strikes, marches, petitions, etc.) resulted in the withdrawal of the so-called 'Combo del ICE', a controversial telecommunications privatisation bill. These mobilisations had a very low level of institutionalisation, but they had a real effect on the legislative process, as an effective extra-parliamentary opposition and managed to impose the withdrawal of the bill in the Legislative Assembly.

The role of civil society is not only limited to the rejection of political decisions; it can also have a genuine influence on the setting of the agenda, raising awareness and educating policy-makers. The media traditionally plays this role, and it is now being complemented by social media. Other social action instruments, such as marches, also enable a matter to be added to the political agenda by forcing institutional powers to consider it. The mass protests against corruption in various cities across Brazil in 2016 became an unavoidable issue for legislative actors. Even though there is a risk of politics becoming reactive, active participation by civil society in the construction of the agenda can generally be considered positive.

Politics can therefore be analysed as an interaction between institutional veto players (formal and informal) and societal veto players. Implemented public policies depend on the interaction between said players. This interaction can be peaceful or conflictive depending on the level of empowerment that civil society has and the willingness of the governments to negotiate, which may in turn be conditioned by democratic institutions (legal requirements for consultation) or by an intense social demand (practical need to negotiate with the extra-parliamentary opposition) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The interaction between institutional and societal veto players
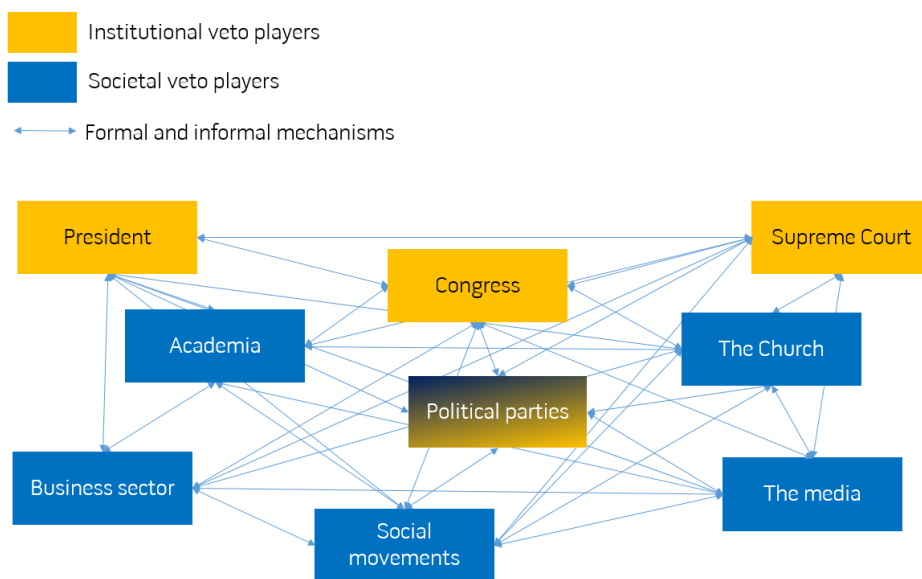
Source: own elaboration.

The previous analytical framework provides two essential lessons on the participation by civil society in public action. The first lesson is an invitation to focus on political advocacy efforts on those actors that possess institutional or societal veto power in order to make it more effective. The second is the observation that civil society can become a societal veto player or an actor with the power to set the agenda. In both scenarios, civil society participates directly in the construction of public policies.

3. Strategies and tools for effective political advocacy

Taking into account the opportunities for political advocacy and participation by civil society that are offered by the dynamic institutional landscape of Latin America, as well as the analytical framework in terms of institutional and societal veto players described in the previous sections, I will now proceed by presenting a series of recommendations – they are barely recommendations, there are no formulas as every context is unique! – for effective political advocacy by civil society that can be applied in the fight against corruption and the promotion of other social issues.[2]

Use arguments to convince, not money (3.1). Define your ask (3.2). Document, document, document (3.3). Understand the timing of political advocacy (3.4). Choose a strategy based on your objective (3.5). Use media pressure strategically (3.6). Target actors with influence (3.7). Use formal and informal channels (3.8). Establish coalitions (3.9). Do not neglect evaluation and follow-up (3.10).

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[2] A shorter version of this section has been published in *Los efectos de los procesos participativos en la acción pública*, edited by Claire Launay Gama and Olivier Dabène (2019).

3.1 Use arguments to convince, not money

Talking about political advocacy to fight against corruption may sound contradictory. There is a perception that political advocacy, which is sometimes contemptuously referred to as 'lobbying', corresponds to the promotion of individual interests – personal or corporate – and involves acts of corruption. The words 'advocacy' and 'lobbying' are synonymous up until a certain point, but it is important to note that the word lobbying has negative connotations for many.

If political advocacy is a tool to promote issues, it always has to have the public's best interests in mind if it is going to be successful. Not only because that is to be expected morally, but also because it is the most strategic way of influencing a decision-making process that is public and, for the large part, carried out in the parliamentary arena. In other words: if an individual interest is to be promoted, it is vital to adjust it to become a public interest, at least if you want to obtain a political majority and avoid social protests.

In *Trois discours sur la condition des Grands* (1670), Blaise Pascal reminds us that the end does not justify the means, in direct opposition to Machiavelli. This also applies to the practice of political advocacy. It goes without saying that any political advocacy effort must be carried out within the margins of the law. Resorting to corruption is not only a crime, but also reveals a weakness in your ability to convince others and a lack of arguments.

You should be very careful with the way information is managed. It may be the case that it is not available publicly or that its reliability cannot be guaranteed. Within the advocacy process, it must be disseminated based on trusted relationships. If the information is disseminated this could damage the reputation of our contact. It is also vital that we do not overuse contacts. Overusing one specific contact can be a counterproductive tactic because if there is no contrasting information, the ability to analyse what is happening may be lost.

Lastly, it is important to be aware that contacted people may expect something in return. They may ask us to give them information, advice about a matter, or participation in the advocacy process for a specific event, etc. We must be clear about what they want and decide whether we are willing to give it to them.

3.2 Define your ask

In *How to Resist: Turn Protest to Power*, Matthew Bolton, who led a successful campaign for fair wages (Living Wage campaign) in the United Kingdom between 2008 and 2014, states that the most important element in any attempt at political advocacy is clearly defining your ask (2017). Even though this recommendation may seem obvious, I have borne witness to many attempts at political advocacy that were not effective due to the lack of clarity regarding their objectives and the problem they wanted to resolve.

The first thing that needs to be done when one desires to have a public influence is to clearly define the objective of the intervention. It is vital to firmly establish which legislation or public policy you want to promote or reform. Sometimes, civil society organisations make general and vague

declarations, but if an actionable ask is not formulated, their attempts at political advocacy will not be effective. No decision-maker can act without concrete proposals, even if he or she were sympathetic toward the activists.

In other words, a political advocacy process will not be significant if it is not accompanied by a concrete and actionable ask. A helpful tool to develop a concrete and actionable ask is the public policy paper (Annex 1). General and vague statements allow for different interpretations and leave a lot of room for sidestepping the matter. Expressing disagreement with corruption in general is not the same as formulating a clear ask about a specific public policy you would like to be implemented.

In addition, proposals that take the form of long lists of demands do not get the attention of the actor with decision-making power. It is better to gain strength and lay the foundations for more important achievements in the future. Political advocacy usually leads to negotiation processes, based on the principle that nobody achieves everything they want. To a large extent, it is based on small victories.

3.3   Document, document, document

A famous phrase attributed to Vitruvius is: "For neither talent without instruction nor instruction without talent can produce the perfect craftsman." In the case of political advocacy, something similar can be said. You may be of the opinion that political advocacy has to do with the charisma of the leader of the group, who has the contacts and the ability to influence any decision maker. Wrong. Although charisma is an important aspect of success in political advocacy, much more than an eloquent spokesperson is required. To achieve effective political influence, adequate preparation that combines three essential elements is vital: (a) objective information and data, (b) solid arguments, and (c) people skills (empathy). Neglecting any of these may harm the success of political advocacy (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The pyramid of successful advocacy

Empathy

Arguments

Data and objective information
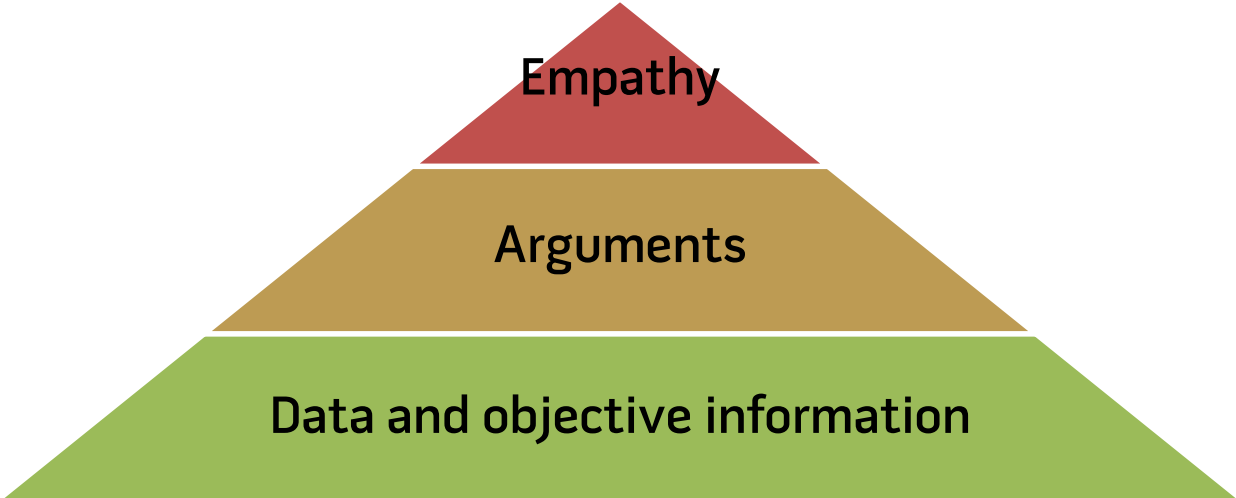
Source: Petri & Pastor (2017).

After defining the ask, all political advocacy processes must begin with the collection of objective, up-to-date, and reliable information, which often means documenting incidents of human rights violations. In order to do that it is necessary to research, seek advice, and systematically monitor the media. Limited access to information when trying to effectively analyse a problem is always an obstacle. Research is required to overcome it. The absence of a consultation process with experts, allies, and the affected population before submitting a proposal may reduce its impact. The proposal must be representative of a social force.

The overwhelming number of organisations in Latin American civil society that neglect their responsibility to collect data is noteworthy. They are generally very good at talking about issues, creating attention-grabbing campaigns in the media and social networks, social diagnostics, and even recommendations for public policy, but what they do not do is the tedious, time-intensive, and sometimes dangerous task of documenting incidents. One exception to point out is the Colombian chapter of Transparency International, which always has excellent data based on a solid monitoring system (the *Monitor Ciudadano*).

The documentation of incidents is the main justification for requesting attention to a specific social problem. By objectively observing the (quantitative) impact of an issue, it can then become a "social fact" that can be considered (Durkheim 1893). If it is not documented, it is as if it did not exist. This is fundamental for any attempt at political advocacy:

> "Documenting human rights abuses is the heart of human rights work. The effectiveness of human rights as a tool depends on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the evidence gathered. It can contribute to educating and organizing as well as advocating at a political or legal level. Government leaders have been brought down through documentation of human rights violations; the power of the process, both for the victim and the perpetrator, should not be underestimated. Documentation is about collecting stories, establishing truths and "sounding alarms." Success can depend on one's ability to access those stories and give meaning to them, for example through showing patterns of abuse." (Kaplan 2009:25)

Documentation is particularly important in situations with victims of violence that are too afraid to report crimes to the police, or when States fail to comply with their duty to register human rights violations. To cite just one example, according to estimates by Ethos, a Mexican think-tank, 94% of crimes in this country are not reported (2017). In its report *The Human Rights Situation in Mexico*, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reported that "the internal forced displacement has not been documented and analyzed comprehensively by the [Mexican] State, which is the main obstacle facing the comprehensive response that Mexico should give this phenomenon." The report also observed that the situation "is evidenced by the invisibility of the problem", which does not allow to "adopt the measures necessary to provide an effective response to this phenomenon." (2015:134).

As a human rights manual states, "Well-handled human rights information is basic to any struggle for justice and peace." (Burma Issues 1994). Therefore, one of the most important purposes of

documenting incidents, particularly when they concern human rights violations, is to ensure that a record of specific violations is kept (Annex 2), to hold the responsible party accountable, and demand that its victims are compensated, which is what the Colombian chapter of Transparency International does, using the mobile app *Dilo Aquí [Tell it here]*.

3.4   Understand the timing of political advocacy

To effectively make an impact, you must know every detail about the institutionality of the State or the organisation that you want to influence (structure and operation, formulation processes, approval, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies). Against this background, understanding the timing of political advocacy and its three elements is key: (a) the socio-political context (electoral, social and politico-parliamentary agenda), (b) the public policy cycle, and (c) the standing orders of parliaments. Understanding these three elements is necessary to be able to determine the most opportune moment for carrying out an attempt at political advocacy.

The electoral agenda must be kept in mind, because in each of the electoral periods and phases (the pre-electoral, electoral, and post-electoral phases) the political dynamic is unique. As a general rule, it is unlikely that an advocacy process will be successful if it is executed during the electoral period, as the majority of political actors will be more concerned about the electoral campaign than their legislative work. Having said this, in some cases, it could be strategic to develop advocacy during the electoral campaign, so that a certain topic is included in the negotiations of this phase. The important thing is to take advantage of strategic windows of political opportunity.

In any political advocacy process it is recommended that you get to know which issues are of greatest concern in the media and in society, as this will give you the chance to take advantage of them, or at least not be harmed by them. For example, if you want to promote a reform of the electoral system, it is not recommended that you do it at a time when the whole population is more concerned about the humanitarian consequences of a natural disaster.

In the same way it is convenient to get to know the social agenda, it is also a good idea to take the political agendas of various parliamentary party groups into consideration, particularly their main issues of concern, identifying how they could pose a threat to or promote the objectives that you want to have an impact on.

In addition to the discussed elements, political advocacy implies having a reasonable amount of common sense and a certain 'political sense', i.e. having the ability to 'feel' the agenda to identify and make good use of the opportunities that the socio-political context presents. Furthermore, certain cultural considerations should be paid attention to. This varies depending on the country being operated in, and includes a whole array of prevailing norms and codes of conduct.

In the same manner, an adequate understanding of the public policy cycle is vital in order to determine the best advocacy strategy. One of the most common models to analyse public policy is the so-called sequential approach which divides the process of public policy formulation into five phases: statement of the problem, formulation of the policy, decision process, implementation and

evaluation (Figure 5). Although it has been criticised for not integrating the dynamism of politics, it is relevant for its didactic qualities.

Figure 5. The public policy cycle
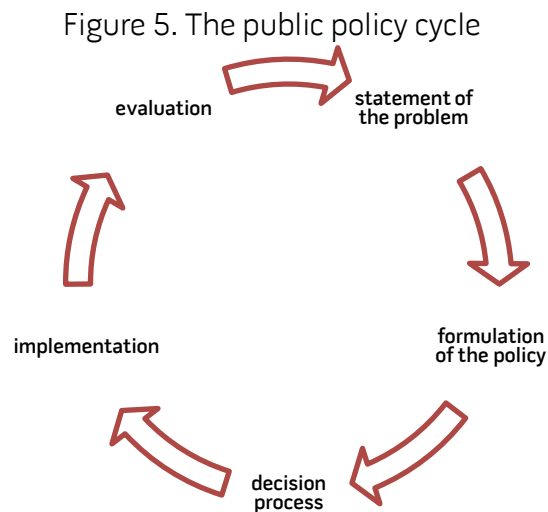
Source: Petri & Pastor (2017).

Depending on the objective, it may be more strategic to exert an influence during a specific phase of the public policy cycle, as the typology already described by Font & Gomà (1999) summarises. What is of interest to us for the purposes of this paper is that there may be participation by political actors and political advocacy during each of the phases of the public policy cycle. Differentiating between these phases allows us to identify the most appropriate moment to have an influence. If the objective is influencing the formulation of the policy, it would be too late to begin at a time when the decision is being made, for example. If the objective is to add a matter to the agenda, it is not necessary to worry about the implementation phase.

To have an influence on the legislative sphere specifically, it is important to have knowledge of the legislative agenda, both of the plenary and of the legislative committees, and if we find ourselves in ordinary or extraordinary sessions, or in legislative recess. A basic understanding of legislative technique is also fundamental for anybody involved in political advocacy, because it is vital that he knows how to 'read' a bill.

Lastly, understanding the law-making process of the legislature you want to influence is key for a strategic political advocacy initiative. In the majority of democratic systems, each bill begins with its presentation to the Speaker (Chairman) of the Legislative Power, who refers it to the legislative committee that will hear it; the bill is then included as the last item of the Order of Business. Sometimes, by means of a qualified majority, it is possible that a bill will occupy a preferential position. The bill then passes to the parliamentary clerk's office, where it is given a number and the committee to which it has been referred to. Depending on the standing order, the committee has a given timeframe to make a report on the bill, following which it is returned to the Speaker or Presidium, which processes it in the legislative plenary. This is where it is discussed, usually in two debates (Figure 6).

Figure 6. The law-making process
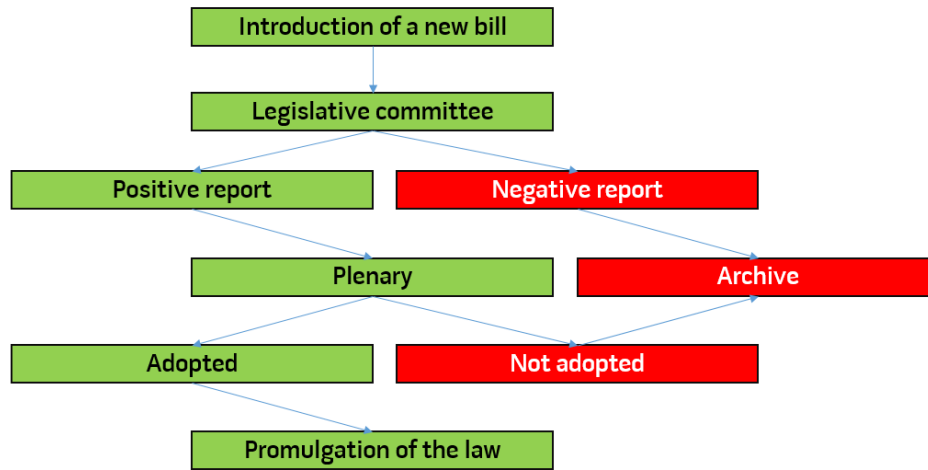
Source: Petri & Pastor (2017).

3.5 Choose a strategy based on your objective

A matter for political advocacy is a problem or situation that action can be taken against. The definition of the ask that was mentioned before determines the strategies that will be adopted to see it through. Surrounding the matter identified as the priority for political advocacy are all of the other components that make up a political influencing strategy, i.e. the combination of activities directed toward achieving a specific objective.

The recommendation for adjusting the strategy so that it is in line with the political advocacy objective implies a certain level of pragmatism. You must always keep the impact you want to have in mind. To make an impact in a decision-making space and obtain the passing of a proposed public policy, a variety of strategies and activities – that go from personal visits to motivating and incorporating the population affected by the problem you want to resolve – must be used. If the objective is not achieved, the advocacy campaign will have little credibility, little social power, and is unlikely to be successful.

Civil society organisations often rush to organise a march without stopping to consider whether this type of action is the most appropriate course to reach their objective. Marches are a legitimate expression of a democratic right, but there are many other tools that may sometimes have more of a political impact.

It is also common to see organisations trying to resolve social problems with the promotion of a new bill, but this is not necessarily the most appropriate strategy for the objective of an advocacy process. On occasion it may be more strategic to lobby for a better application of existing legislation, or for an administrative regulation, than to promote a completely new bill, which is all too common in Latin American policy-making, where many decision-makers fall prey to "la rage de vouloir conclure", as Hirschman describes it (1963), referring to the characteristic policy-making style in which new governments are eager to restart from scratch without benefiting from

the work of previous administrations. The adoption of laws can take a long time and add to the proliferation of legal norms, without necessarily having the desired impact.

The main challenge for Latin American countries is not their legal frameworks, which are generally exemplary. On paper, they have considerable protection of human rights, at a constitutional level as well as at the level of ratified international treaties. However, the single act of a State signing an international human rights treaty does not mean that these rights are being respected. The problem is often found in their enforcement, above all in contexts of impunity, where there is no political will or state capacity to enforce the rule of law, such as in rural areas of large countries such as Brazil, Argentina, or Mexico (O'Donnell 1993; Gibson 2005; Dabène 2008; Giraudy 2009).

The promotion of a genuine application of the existing legal framework may therefore be a more effective political advocacy strategy than promoting new legislation. Rosen & Zepeda claim that one of the main reasons for organised crime taking such strong control of Mexican political institutions was not the shortcomings of the legal framework, but the failure to enforce it and, above all, the absence of a culture of accountability (2016).

In this context, I ask myself if the impetus of some civil society organisations to promote Constituent Assemblies in South America has always been sufficiently justified. Taking Bolivia as an example, it is valid to question whether the change of the Constitution in 2006 was really necessary for the promotion of a more inclusive democracy that is respectful of the cultural rights of the indigenous population. This objective may have been achieved more quickly with a change to political staff by means of elections, effective application of the existing Constitution, the promotion of social policies, and the creation of spaces to involve citizens in the construction of public policies (Petri 2006).

The adopted strategy for political advocacy must be adjusted to suit the institutional context within which it is operating, as the discussed framework in section 2 of this paper explains. Even in non-democratic contexts there are opportunities for political advocacy. It is worth noting that in spite of the democratic nature of Latin American nations (with the obvious exception of Cuba and now Venezuela), there are numerous examples of "democratic backsliding", often at the sub-national level (Glasius 2018). In the famous book *From Dictatorship to Democracy. A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (1993), Gene Sharp provides a comprehensive catalogue of 198 tools for political advocacy, or "methods of nonviolent action", which can be used to promote a regime change.

3.6 Use media pressure strategically

The media can play an important role in political advocacy work. Television, radio, and print media provide opportunities for both accessing decision-making and influencing public opinion in general. They can also have a considerable influence over those that make decisions and other opinion influencers, making them agenda setters on their own account. It is therefore important to view the media as not just a tool for political advocacy, but also as an influential advocacy target.

In a political advocacy campaign, having a plan that ensures the communication of the correct messages, to the right people, at the appropriate moment, is essential. It is a reasonably simple process, but it requires a clear definition of the ask. Before saying 'I have a friend that works in…' it is important to remember that obtaining media coverage requires more than having good contacts. It cannot always be guaranteed that sympathising journalists will consider our matter of interest newsworthy. The key for ensuring that a story reaches the public is to seize the right moment and link your message to a current news story. Opportunities to make the news must be looked for. The key is to act quickly, and also to provide all of the information in one place, as this will make things easier for journalists.

Media pressure can be very useful, but must be used in moderation and in a strategic manner. I have seen many civil society organisations that use the media to antagonise the authorities before even having a conversation with them, and later they are surprised when they do not pay attention to them. Let us remember that advocacy does not necessarily mean confrontation. It is more like a dynamic in which critical and proactive attitudes are adopted, representing good practice by citizens and a deepening of democracy.

3.7   Target actors with influence

To be effective at political advocacy, focusing all efforts on the actors that have power or, when not possible, on actors that have an influence on those that have power, is fundamental. Understanding the institutional framework in politics plays an important role in determining who said actors are, which will guarantee that nobody is forgotten when making strategic decisions related to the priorities of the advocacy work. In section 2 of this paper, I presented the veto players approach as an analytical framework to identify these key people.

The identification of veto players, both institutional and societal, is subject to constant change due to shifts in the political situation, possible turnover of staff, and other factors. This situation poses a need for continuous updates based on new information. The power of influence over key people comes from different sources: friendship, economic power, mobilisation abilities of social groups, access to or control of the media, moral authority, and many more.

A useful tool for determining which actors to prioritise is to create an actor map, as this will provide you with a matrix to identify appropriate veto players according to two variables: their level of influence (high, medium, low) and their position in relation to the objective of the advocacy campaign (favourable, indifferent, against). This exercise will help to determine lobbying priorities (Figure 7).

Figure 7. The actor-mapping exercise

	Actors with a low level of influence	Actors with a high level of influence
Actors that are favourable to the objective of the advocacy campaign	Actors that are in favour of the initiative and have a low level of influence must be empowered, for example, by training them in political advocacy techniques.	Actors that are in favour of the initiative and have a high level of influence must be motivated and can be considered as potential allies for the political advocacy campaign.
Actors that are opposed to the objective of the advocacy campaign	Actors that are opposed to the initiative and have a low level of influence must be monitored, because their level of power may increase if the political situation changes.	Actors that are opposed to the initiative and have a high level of influence must be monitored. Their statements and behaviour must be denounced. It may sometimes be necessary to apply media or public pressure to them.

Source: Petri & Pastor (2017).

The actor-mapping exercise is also useful for identifying gaps in information regarding the actors that you want to influence. On more occasions than you would imagine, decision-makers do not hold firm positions on specific matters, often because they lack knowledge on the issue. In these cases, the advocacy strategy must first focus on informing them before requesting any action from them.

It is not always possible to influence the main policy makers directly. Knowing how to get to them through those people that they listen to is an alternative pathway to exerting an influence. As an example, I recall a case when the awareness efforts for a programme promoting gender equality at the municipal level were not focused on mayors or mayoresses, but on their partners, which resulted in better results than speaking to them directly.

3.8   Use formal and informal channels

The continual analysis of power must be a routine part of every advocacy process. Reaching our objectives is not usually as fast as we would expect, regardless of how convinced we are of the importance of our project. Not even the most favourable scenario should give us the impression that the journey will be free of obstacles.

We cannot forget the focus of the actions we are carrying out. We must identify formal and informal decision-making procedures in the space where the initiative will be discussed. Formal channels are those procedures established by national law or institutional statutes. Informal channels – informal, not illegal! – are the cumulation of activities and procedures that occur parallel to the formal process and that, in some cases, can be the determining factor when a decision is being made. Both channels must be identified, as well as technical aspects that could introduce modifications to laws and statutes. Understanding the decision-making procedures for a proposal is important in being able to determine each step in the process and, if necessary, influence each one of them.

Since it is not always possible to speak to the main policy makers directly, we must know how to reach them through those that they listen to; it is an alternative way of exerting influence on them (wealthy people with control over powerful organisations, such as large companies, faith-based institutions, or the mass media). At an international level, powerful neighbouring countries, institutions such as the World Bank or International Monetary Fund, foreign investors, and bilateral donors can wield hidden and/or informal power. Other examples include relatives or close friends of those that hold formal power, or people that belong to the same ethnic group, celebrities, intellectuals, and sportspeople.

Many people that exert informal power participate actively in the decision-making process. They can set the agenda and decide which topics and ideas will be submitted for debate and approval. In addition, they can influence instances of political decision when they determine which less powerful groups they will allow to participate in said debates. Some of them may be allies, who would gladly support us against other members belonging to the same group.

3.9 Establish coalitions

Nowadays, advocacy has to take place among politicians that are no longer politicians and people that want to be politicians, which makes it difficult to form coalitions, including around very specific issues. The situation becomes more complex if ethical considerations around what politics 'should be' (and what it is not) are considered. Even though an advocacy initiative may have various origins, the 'appropriation' of the process by those directly affected is crucial. Those that are protagonists in the end depends on the results of the process and not on any pre-established plan. This is because even if all advocacy plans have to have a preliminary definition related to those that it focuses on, it is more important to consider proposals and strategies for constructing the broadest possible social presence.

It is vital that we understand that in every process the relationships between different actors and the roles they have are constantly being re-defined. Nowadays, 'allies' or 'partners' are frequently spoken about and seen as more or less stable relationships between actors with different characteristics that share an objective.

Therefore, an opportunity to obtain a certain political visibility and exert pressure on the Executive Power or Legislative Power is the configuration of broad social alliances, to draw attention to a specific matter and influence the public policy process. These social coalitions tend to become an extra-parliamentary political control engine, taking on an active oversight of government actions, focusing on specific topics or geographic locations.

From a pragmatic perspective, a social coalition must only be created when it is anticipated that it will be beneficial to the political advocacy process. In a coalition, each member must bring something: media leverage, representativeness, or expertise. Adding members to a social coalition with the only objective of increasing its numbers is not justifiable and could be counter-productive.

Social coalitions must only be used as a political advocacy tool when it is considered necessary. It is a resource that must be handled carefully, because a coalition that is too broad, which contains

organisations with different interests and agendas, implies large coordination challenges. It is highly recommended that you avoid the inclusion of controversial actors or those that might harm your political advocacy objectives. In politics, perception is reality, so it is not wise to be associated with organisations that are frowned upon by the actors that you want to influence.

To run a social coalition, it is important for all members to speak with one single voice, and for their involvement to be coordinated, as this will result in the members naturally coming to an agreement on the content of a report or public policy paper, as well as a communication plan, where tasks and responsibilities are set out. It is also recommended that one person is named spokesperson and speaks on behalf of the coalition.

3.10 Do not neglect evaluation and follow-up

Follow-up and evaluation are important activities for the maintenance of any advocacy initiative in determining whether we are reaching the objectives we set out. As we have already seen, strategy is not a rigid pathway, as we often find that we need to adjust and revise our activities along the way.

Let the follow-up (we can also define it as monitoring or control) be understood as the systematic and constant evaluation of the progress of an initiative over time, to verify that things are taking place as we had planned, allowing us to make adjustments methodically. Follow-up activities must examine how well our plans are working. The objective of the follow-up is to determine whether our plans and practices require adjustments in light of new information, because things are not going as we expected, or because we need to take unexpected factors into account.

Effective follow-up rings alarm bells if something is not working well. It also helps us to guide activities, checking that they are as effective as possible. Even if our political advocacy objective is coherent, we must be willing to re-evaluate activities as the political advocacy process is being rolled out.

Evaluation is the periodic measurement of the pertinence, results, efficiency, and the impact of the initiative with regards to proposed objectives. Regular evaluation is carried out at important stages of the evolution of the project, for example, at the end of a planning period, when the project is nearing a new phase, or in response to a problem. It measures whether the objectives of an activity have been reached, how they were reached, and what can be learnt from their successes or failures.

The evaluation of political advocacy is a permanent monitoring and reflection about the planning and execution of strategies and activities in terms of their implementation and impact. Recording the day-to-day is as important as convincing a legislator of the importance of our initiative. It could be the difference between getting on the right track and sinking the entire campaign.

4. Final comments

Political advocacy is the archetypical "voice" strategy, to use Albert O. Hirschman's famous concept, which he defines as:

> "any attempt at all to change, rather to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion." (1970:30)

As I argued at the beginning of this paper, the political-institutional landscape of Latin America offers more opportunities for "voice" than ever. However, as Dabène recalls (1997), following Hirschman (1963), major social problems in Latin America are not addressed because they are not brought to the attention of decision makers due to an "articulation deficit." Mancur Olson makes a similar point in *The Logic of Collective Action*, observing that "the limited knowledge of public matters is a necessary factor for explaining the effectiveness of pressure groups." (1971) It is precisely this need for understanding that this paper aims to respond to.

The success of political advocacy is built on a foundation of small victories, by learning from failures and always focusing on the long term. Advocacy is not simple, above all because in order to promote it, we need to understand that power is not in our hands, but in the hands of those that do not think the same as us; that advocacy is a long journey to obtain the things we want; that we depend on analysis and proposals related to what we want to change; that a deep knowledge of the objective we want to reach is required; and that advocacy is often a result of negotiation processes, which are governed by the principle that nobody obtains everything they want.

Political advocacy is a tool that seeks to promote social, economic, political, and cultural justice, as well as equal opportunities and access to fundamental resources. In order for an organisation to comply with this role and influence public policies, it must have a sound knowledge of public affairs, use tools and plan strategies, and it must build the capacity and the means to design and implement its advocacy plans. It is yet another democratic tool, which encourages transparency and government accountability, promoting and defending human rights and the rule of law, incorporating more private actors in the public sphere, promoting the participation of the poorest sectors in public policy, and contributing to the formulation of public problems by; as well as the evaluation of and changes to social policy through social monitoring and control processes.

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Annex 1: The Public Policy Paper

Avoiding moral and fundamentalist arguments, advocates for social justice must develop constructive contributions. This section explains the steps needed to create a public policy paper, which, in less than two pages, will be accessible, easy-to-read and detailed enough to make an impact.

1. Summary (100 words)

This is a short text that analyses and explains, in a summarised form, the most important aspects of the document – in our case, each of the sections to be developed in public policy. Creating this summary, the aim of which is to help readers quickly digest the information in the document, is an art; the details must be simplified without being vague. It is an intelligent section that must hold the readers' attention, making an impact and motivating them with the content, facts and proposal, so that the reader decides to look at the whole document.

2. Objectives (50 words)

An objective is something that you want or need to reach through concrete actions. It means arriving at a goal in order to fulfil a mission. It is an expression that must fulfil a purpose within a specified timeframe and has to be able to answer questions such as 'What?' or 'Why?' It is recommended that we do not use general objectives or various specific objectives. Each organization will establish one specific objective only, which is in line with the selected topic; it will be concrete, measurable, and achievable. This will be helpful to stay focused and not lose concentration.

3. Description of the current status of the matter (300 words)

This consists of wilfully arguing the topic within the current context, with the aim of solving a problem. It is a process executed by means of a diagnosis of the current situation, which studies the topic in depth in order to subsequently arrive at a suitable action for intervention and transformation. This diagnosis will be carried out on three levels: (a) regional, (b) national, and (c) local. In this section, two aspects must be considered: quantitative and qualitative description.

- Quantitative description: Numbers are the most objective and credible tool, as well as having the advantage of being measurable. For example: In Cartagena (town), 13% of girls have been sexually abused (measurable incident).
- Qualitative description: Even if the quantitative description is relevant, it is also true that numbers do not always tell us everything. Here we address making an interpretative analysis of the proof. We need to explore the causes. For example: In Cartagena (town), the girls are victims of sexual abuse (incident) because of the permissive culture and negligence on behalf of the authorities (qualitative description with interpretative analysis).

4. Institutional-legal framework regarding the matter (100 words)

The process for creating a public policy requires knowing the constitutional regulations, institutional mandates and laws related to the topic at a regional, national, and local level. It is very important to identify whether the authorities related to the topic correspond to national or local government. This diagnosis will indicate what they have already done or are currently doing, as well as the existing gaps in the area in question. After learning about the institutional-legal framework, we will study the weaknesses that could be eliminated with the public policy. We will also consider current changes and needs, as problems in social order constantly and quickly change. Their study is therefore vital for making an impact and adapting to a changing environment.

5. Role of the organization regarding the matter (50 words)

Each organization will have to explain in detail, but in a summarized form, the role that it performs as promoter of the matter in question, as well as its role regarding the matter. This phase will demonstrate the organization's authority in the matter, making good use of its knowledge of fieldwork and expertise to make impact proposals. This section is important, because it will demonstrate ability in the specified matter. Also, the role that each organization performs is a task on procedural knowledge, or in other words, how to do it.

6. Critical aspects of the problem and the implications of public politics (300 words)

With the term 'implication', we are referring to a situation that is not visible. Due to being hidden, it can only be seen and understood by means of an explanation that will clearly contribute to the improvement of the situation. Here, the vision should be explained in a general way. With the support of all of the previous sections (diagnosis, institutional and legal framework to attack the problem), general suggestions and recommendations for public policy can be proposed.

This stage has to answer questions that arise from the analysis of the observed matter: Why is it a problem? Why does that justify an intervention? What are the mistakes found in the legal framework? How can it be resolved? Is there a lack of institutional capacity? Which are the most acute problems? The critical aspects will be able to help with the search for and implementation of solutions. But this stage does not solely consist of identifying the problem, but also of defending it to be able to convert it into the main focus and fight for its improvement.

7. Public policy recommendations (200 words)

When a subject matter is relevant for the population, a public recommendation is made. They are proposals for select topics, whereby the information is filtered to be attacked, and techniques are supplied to tackle it with. Each member would make various significant suggestions (which are not the same as implications), taking priorities into account. He or she will explain said ideas to the society and authorities, in order to influence finding a solution.

In order to make an improvement, topics such as strategy and tactics must be considered. The first one means answering "What must be done in a particular situation?", and then making a plan of action. The second one answers "How do we execute these plans and ideas?" They have to go hand in hand, because without tactics, it is impossible to decide on a strategy, and without strategy, there would not be clear objectives.

In the recommendations, it is essential that both concepts (what and how) are both achievable and appealing. For example:

- It is necessary to reduce the mistreatment of infants in families. The figures show an increase in children that have been physically attacked (Strategy – responds to "What?")
- It is hoped that these figures can be reduced through training, workshops and the creation of artistic works that involve families to create healthy relationships in the home (Tactics – responds to "How?")

It is important to remember two elements: the design of the strategies and the environment within which they operate. If the latter changes, the strategies and tactics will have to be altered to fit the new situation; this highlights the importance of monitoring the issues. In addition, it is possible that some tactics will require a budget, which will have to be considered when making the strategic plan.

Annex 2: Tool for the documentation of human rights violations

INCIDENT REPORT	
Date	
Location (City of residence, State, Country)	
What community do you belong to?	
Describe the manner in which you or your family were attacked. When did it happen? Was it physical or verbal abuse? Include as many details as you can.	
Do you know who attacked you or your family? Who were they? Do they belong to a particular group? Include as many details as you can.	
Do you know why you or your family were attacked? Include as many details as you can.	
Did you report the assault? To whom? Has anyone helped you to file the complaint? Include as many details as you can.	
What response did you get after the report of assault?	
Do you think you will be attacked again? Why?	
Add all the additional information you consider relevant:	

To read more

Launay Gama, Claire and Dabène, Olivier (eds.) (2019). *Los efectos de los procesos participativos en la acción pública*. Buenos Aires: Teseo.

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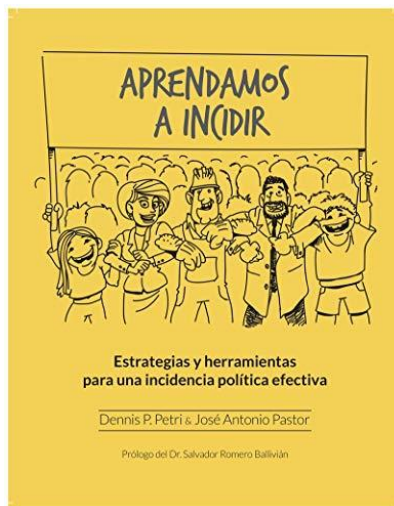
Petri, Dennis P. and Pastor, José Antonio. *Aprendamos a incidir*. *Estrategias y herramientas para una incidencia política efectiva*. Platform for Social Transformation, San José, Costa Rica, 2017.

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