Does the expansion of civil society promote democracy? Many academics, leaders, and public officials around the world assume it does. Since the transition to democracy in the 1980s, there has been a significant growth and diversification of civil society organizations (and movements) in most countries of Latin America. However, at the same time, democratic political institutions are fragile, economic development uneven, and the reduction of social inequality still in the making. In short, citizenship remains “low intensity.”

Drawing on the experiences of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Peru, the talk will map common trends in the current dynamics of civil society in the region and tentatively propose a public policy reform agenda by addressing two questions: Do civil society organizations have indeed an effective positive role in the process of democratization? And if so, what factors favor or hinder their effectiveness?

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