INTRODUCTION

Research on political systems shows that democracy is the best path to safeguard diversity because it is based on the reproduction of exercises, such as citizen participation, which enable a society to function as a unit in spite of its multicultural differences (Dewey, 1998; Freire, 2005; Pleyers, 2006). In a democratic country, a close relationship between education and the norms of social coexistence is established because democracy is learned, mainly, as an associative experience; through dialogue and consensus, we can reach perspectives of cultural pluralism, as well as forms organized actions for the improvement of citizens’ living standards.

In this regard, participation can be thought of as a means to achieve social commitment and integration. “Participation is the power to make choices, act, and transform reality” (Calderón, 2017, 8). In a representative democracy, the greatest exercise of participation is electoral participation, in other words, casting a vote (Rivera, 2008). However, it is citizen participation what sustains democracy. Citizen participation refers to the ways in which citizens are included in decision processes regarding topics that affect different members of a society (Ziccardi, 2007). This type of participation relies on mechanisms that promote public deliberation and social interaction within a framework of respect and tolerance.¹

In spite of the theoretical principles, the results shown by the Country Report on the Quality of Citizenship in Mexico, published by the National Electoral Institute (INE) and the Colegio de México in the year 2015, revealed that the confidence that Mexican citizens have on their institutions did not exceed 50%, except for three cases: the army (62%); teachers (56%); and, churches (55%). However, confidence on political parties and representatives was below 20%, while the electoral authority had a confidence level of 34%. The study also showed that citizens with higher levels of education and income tended to significantly prefer a democratic system over an authoritarian one (INE, 2015, 44).

Hence, civic training is necessary; the strengthening of democracy depends on it. A country that educates its citizens on the processes, mechanisms, and on the full exercise of their rights, fosters participation. However, it is only through formal and informal education that the exercise of these mechanisms can be fostered in the collective imaginary. This, in turn, result in the strengthening of citizenship.

¹ In Mexico, such mechanisms are the referendum, the plebiscite, the popular or citizen initiative, and mandate revocation; hence, it is only through formal and informal education that the exercise of these mechanisms can be fostered in the collective imaginary.

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citizenship, will achieve greater development since public decisions will be taken based on public deliberation, which allows for the construction of the common good. Classic authors such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim explained that the goal of education is the generation of citizens capable of being part of a society and of coexisting adequately for its proper functioning (Álvarez, 2007, 9-10). Hence, in the theory of democratic education two basic concepts are defined, civic instruction, and, civic education; these concepts should be incorporated into every educational process that promotes citizen participation. Picardo, Escobar, and Balmore (2003) define these concepts as follows: “Civic instruction is the discipline that has as its goal educating students for their role as citizens, providing facts about the administrative and political organization of the country, the distribution of large public services, the main economic problems, etc. Civic education is the transmission of effectively common values (…). Civic education shares information for living in a society, looking forward to the appropriation of everyday life knowledge” (Picardo, Escobar y Balmore, 2003, 1107).

Within any proposal for civic participation strengthening, these two concepts should be complementary because democracy obliges to revise the way in which we relate with each, and every member of a society, regardless of whether the interaction space is public or private. Hirmas and Eroles (2008, 21 and 22) explain that education for democratic coexistence should be oriented towards participation in public affairs in order to influence the political agenda because participation is a key element in the construction of both democracy, and sustainable development. Hence, the quality of citizenship does not expire, even when the rights and responsibilities derived from the social pact are not exercised. Therefore, the exercise of these rights and responsibilities should be strengthened via educational processes throughout the life of the citizen, and not only before electoral processes.

The aforementioned thoughts inspire this article, which analyzes the strategies for civic participation strengthening in Mexico that emerge from the changes in the General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (LGPE) as a result of the Political-Electoral Amendment of February, 2014. (DOF, May 23rd, 2014), The analysis considers civic instruction and civic education as theoretical perspectives.

A critique of the strategies of civic training in Mexico

The social situation in Latin America presents a context of violence and vulnerability, which has aggravated in the last years because of the corruption of national governments. This, in turn, worsens the legitimacy crisis, prevents the full exercise of citizen participation mechanisms, and forestalls the democratic regime, due to a tradition of strong presidential power that favors chiefainship and institutionalized dictatorships within the region. The report presented by the NGO “Latinobarómetro” in 2015 illustrates this, presenting Mexico as the country least satisfied with democracy, compared to other Latin American countries (see Graph 1). Out of the 18 countries in the sample, 12 are above the dissatisfaction mean. This same study revealed that, in Mexico, only 19% of the people polled expressed being satisfied with this type of government, and 48% of Mexican citizens expressed that democracy is “preferable to any other type of government”, while the regional mean was 56% (Latinobarómetro, 2015).

The study also considered an evaluation of the sense of belonging to a discriminated group. Out of the 18 countries in the sample, Mexico was seventh in this indicator (17.8%), right after Chile (28.2%), Bolivia (26.2%), Brazil (19.1%), Guatemala (19%), Peru (19%), and Paraguay (18%). This confirms that the citizens have few opportunities to exercise their participation due to their gender, socioeconomic level, and geographic location, among other reasons.

The study reveals that, in Mexico, 43% of citizens expressed satisfaction with the democratic regime, compared to other Latin American countries (see Graph 1). Out of the 18 countries in the sample, 12 are above the dissatisfaction mean. This study also revealed that, in Mexico, only 19% of the people polled expressed being satisfied with this type of government, and 48% of Mexican citizens expressed that democracy is “preferable to any other type of government”, while the regional mean was 56% (Latinobarómetro, 2015).

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**Graph 1** Percentage of satisfaction degree with the functioning of democracy in Latin America, 2015.


This makes us think that, with participation-based education, as people develop within a society, more likely it becomes that they conduct a series of demands towards the bureaucracy, regardless of being successful or not. The different government agencies would then have the possibility to adjust the ongoing normativity, for they would receive feedback from an active society that makes demands and is involved in change processes. Following this chain of thought, investment in civic education would bring benefits for formal education through educational programs centered on civic values. González (2009, 18) proposes this idea, stating that the purpose of public education is to provide a moral training that solidifies and gives consistency to a national project.

However, the educational policies of the 70s stopped using formal education as a means to reproduce the ideology that Mexico required. An example of this is the repeal of the Civic Studies course from the curricula during the presidential term of 1970-1976. This removed the contents of this subject from the national education system for more than 25 years2, affecting the identity of modern Mexican citizens and making the social, technological, and economic changes of the XXI century a space for the culture of social indifference. This, in turn, allowed electoral institutions and political parties to fill the

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2In January 29, 2014, the Minister of Public Education, Lic. Emilio Chuayffett, said during a tour through San Luis Potosí, that the disappearance of some subjects, such as “civic education and values” from the basic education programs had cost the country more than 21 billion pesos per year. He also considered that the decision to do so delayed development in the country. Higuera Cecilia (29 de enero de 2014).
void in political education in terms of the training of citizens; however, they pursued completely different agendas. As an example, a survey conducted by the Institute of Juridical Science, UNAM, published on February 5, 2017, on the hundredth anniversary of the Constitution of Mexico, showed that 56.1% of the people polled claimed to know little about the Mexican Magna Carta (UNAM, 2017).

These figures show that educative and electoral institutions in Mexico must collaborate in the strengthening of democratic values, which have been diluted by corruption, violence, and impunity. When the basic needs of the members of a society are not covered, the last thing in their mind is involvement in public life. That is why the Political-Electoral Amendment of 2014 is so important for social change (DOF, February 10th, 2014). Even though the principles that fostered the Amendment are based in the enhancement of the relationship of the Executive and Legislative branches of government, it was also aimed at strengthening the participation of citizens. The Amendment grants the National Electoral Institute (INE) full autonomy to push civic education; however, this could result in a deep divide between the formal education received in schools, and an informal education promoted by theINE.

Furthermore, the LGIPE, in its article 58a, explains that the responsibilities of the Executive Directory of Training are “to elaborate, propose, and coordinate the civic education programs developed by the Local and District Executive Boards” (LGIPE, 2014). Therefore, it considers civic education as part of the democratic activities, defining it as a training process that contributes to citizen’s democratic coexistence and participation through the development of a set of competencies that raises awareness on the importance of the exercise of their basic rights, the fulfillment of their civic duties, and of participation in public affairs.

The Executive Directory of Training issued, as public policy, on October 14, 2016, the National Strategy of Civic Culture 2017-2023 (ENCCIVICA). ENCCIVICA considers ten main points for the strengthening of citizen participation in Mexico: 1) The importance of public information; 2) Rule of Law and Human Rights; 3) Governance and networks construction; 4) Gender perspective; 5) Interculturality; 6) Equality and non-discrimination; 7) Citizen participation as citizen empowerment; 8) the duo political parties – government; 9) Media; and, 10) State space for the fostering of civic culture.

Even though the public policy for the strengthening of democracy is consistent with the assessment presented by ENCCIVICA, the bureaucratic system seems to drift apart from the subject, because, historically, the exercise of democratic life is not conceived outside of electoral periods. It is then where society and government must retake the concepts of citizen participation, civic instruction, and civic education within each, and every government ministry at the federal, state and municipal levels, which are spaces where societal life is carried out, and where citizen participation and democracy are the central aspects.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study presents a comparative legal research, using as inputs the Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (COFIPE), created by the electoral authority in 2010, and the LGIPE. Both documents contain the normativity that, according to discourse, strengthens citizen participation and democracy in the country.

The premise of this paper is that the LGIPE speaks little about this subject. In order to prove this, an analysis that begins with the identification of the concepts of “civic education” and “civic training” in each of the books of the LGIPE was conducted. Table 3 shows the changes related to the strengthening of citizen participation through the Political-Electoral Amendment. The goal of this study is to detect the possible consequences of these modifications on the strengthening of citizen participation and on Mexican democracy.

**Analysis**

Few analyses consider educational processes as an axis of electoral policy. Nevertheless, the need for these studies is evident, especially when governments have little legitimacy, as in the Mexican case. This is due to the fact that education can be thought of as a means to create an ideology and to share the principles that shall rule the life of a society, as explained by the classics, Althuser, Gramsci, and Marx (Choza, 1984), when they referred to education as a means of ideology reproduction. Although democracy is an ideal hard to reach, it is not a utopia. In order to achieve it, it is necessary to revise Plato’s principle expressed in his great dialogue, The Republic: “in order to arrive to an optimal political regime, the population should be educated. Without education the men and women of a country are nothing more than eternal children, always subject to the despotic mandates of rulers” (Platón, 2003, 60).

Álvarez explains that, “the State is the body in charge of regulating economic life and elaborating certain representations that are valid for the collectivity and, hence, are the foundations of democracy and justice” (2007: 9-10). This way, a population becomes more democratic when deliberation, reflection, and a critical spirit play a greater role in the conduction of the public affairs. These attitudes develop through education, which contributes to the democratic aspiration. Thus, education is the main generator of citizens.

After a thorough revision, it can be stated that the LGIPE speaks little of the strengthening of citizen participation, one of its alleged main underpinnings. Table 3 proves this, showing that only two books of the law address the changes in citizen education. Book 2 explains how the Legislative and Executive branches of the Union, as well as the electoral authorities in the federal entities and in the municipalities, should be constituted. Book 3 dives into aspects of civic education related to the INE.

Citizen participation-strengthening tasks are decentralized, granting autonomy to the states’ Executive Directories of Electoral Training and Civic Education, which will develop their own strategies in accordance to their own regional characteristics. Although a positive factor by itself, it could generate a hidden political agenda favorable to the incumbent political party.
Table 3 Comparison of articles related to the strengthening of citizen participation through civic instruction and education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COFIPE (IFF, 2010)</th>
<th>LGIPE (INE, 2014)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARTICLE 122.1. The Executive Directory of Electoral Training and Civic Education has the following responsibilities:</td>
<td>ARTICLE 58.1. The Executive Directory of Electoral Training and Civic Education has the following responsibilities:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Elaborate, propose, and coordinate the programs of civic education developed by the local and district boards;</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Coordinate and oversee the fulfillment of the programs referred to in the former clause;</td>
<td>2. Promote the subscription of agreements on civic education with the Local Public Bodies, giving rise to national policies geared towards the promotion of the political-democratic culture, and citizenship building.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Prepare the instructional material and the electoral tutorial;</td>
<td>3. Oversee the fulfillment of the programs and policies referred to in the two previous clauses;</td>
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<td>4. Guide citizens in the exercise of their rights and the fulfillment of their political-electoral duties;</td>
<td>4. Design and promote strategies to promote voting among the citizens;</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Conduct the necessary measures to urge the citizens that have not fulfilled their duties stated hereby, especially those relative to signing up into the Federal Electors Registry, and those concerning the vote, to do so.</td>
<td>5. Design and promote strategies for the integration of ballot’s executive boards, and electoral training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Attend to the sessions of the Electoral Training and Civic Education commission only with the right of voice;</td>
<td>6. Prepare the instructional material and the electoral tutorial;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Settle with the Executive Secretary matters within their competence; and,</td>
<td>7. Guide citizens in the exercise of their rights and the fulfillment of their political-electoral duties;</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Every other conferred by this Code.</td>
<td>8. Conduct the necessary measures to urge citizens to sign up and update their information in the Federal Electors Registry;</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARTICLE 1361. The District Executive Boards will meet at least once a month and will have, within their territorial scope, the following responsibilities:</td>
<td>9. Attend to the sessions of the Electoral Training and Civic Education commission only with the right of voice;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Oversee and evaluate the fulfillment of the programs and actions of their committees and district bodies</td>
<td>10. Design and propose Civic Education campaigns together with the Specialized Prosecutor for Electoral Offenses Prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Oversee and evaluate the fulfillment of the programs relative to the Federal Electors Registry, Electoral Organization, Professional Electoral Service, and Electoral Training and Civic Education;</td>
<td>11. Settle with the Executive Secretary of the Institute matters within their competence; and,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. A.</td>
<td>Every other conferred by this law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTICLE 731. The District Executive Boards will meet at least once a month and will have, within their territorial scope, the following responsibilities:</td>
<td>ARTICLE 104.1. It is the duty of the Local Public Bodies to exercise their functions in the following subjects:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Oversee the fulfillment of the programs relative to the Federal Electors Registry, Electoral Organization, Electoral Training and Civic Education;</td>
<td>d) Develop and execute the civic education programs in their corresponding state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. A.</td>
<td>e) Guide citizens within their state in the exercise of their rights, and in the fulfillment of their political-electoral duties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTICLE 104.1. It is the duty of the Local Public Bodies to exercise their functions in the following subjects:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Elaborate, propose, and coordinate the programs of civic education developed by the local and district boards;</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Promote the subscription of agreements on civic education with the Local Public Bodies, giving rise to national policies geared towards the promotion of the political-democratic culture, and citizenship building.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Oversee the fulfillment of the programs and policies referred to in the two previous clauses;</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Design and promote strategies to promote voting among the citizens;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Design and promote strategies for the integration of ballot’s executive boards, and electoral training.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Prepare the instructional material and the electoral tutorial;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Guide citizens in the exercise of their rights and the fulfillment of their political-electoral duties;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Conduct the necessary measures to urge citizens to sign up and update their information in the Federal Electors Registry;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Attend to the sessions of the Electoral Training and Civic Education commission only with the right of voice;</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Design and propose Civic Education campaigns together with the Specialized Prosecutor for Electoral Offenses Prevention</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Settle with the Executive Secretary of the Institute matters within their competence; and,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every other conferred by this law.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared by the author based on: COFIPE (2010), and LGIPE (2014).

The comparison of COFIPE (2010) and LGIPE (2014) shows that the District Executive Boards’ role is prominent, being them in charge of both civic education, and civic training. Thus, the differences between these two concepts are explicitly recognized. On the other hand, article 58-1, sections 5, and 6, and article 104-1, clause e), from the LGIPE, specify that “the actions for civic instruction are related to the design and promotion of strategies for the integration of Ballots’ Executive Boards, electoral training, the preparation of learning material and the electoral tutorials, as well as guiding citizens in the exercise of their rights, and the fulfillment of their political-electoral duties” (LGIPE, 2014). These actions focus on the electoral processes preparation stage. Only section 10 of article 58-1 establishes the design and proposal of civic education campaigns in collaboration with the Specialized Prosecutor for Electoral Offense Prevention (FEPADE). In order to strengthen Mexican democracy, this activity should be conducted permanently.

Regarding civic education, article 58-1 states that the actions of the states’ Executive Directories of Electoral Training and Civic Education will be focused on the “design and proposal of strategies to promote the vote; guiding citizens on the exercise of their rights and the fulfillment of their political-electoral duties, and; urging citizens to sign up and to update their personal data on the electoral register” (LGIPE, 2014). As can be seen, even though the actions are related to education for democracy, the discourse does not speak of a national educative strategy.

An additional element that was incorporated into the LGIPE is the establishment of strategies related to the managerial process. Article 58-1 states in sections 9 and 11 that the District and Local Executive boards should assist, without right to vote, to the sessions of the Electoral Training and Civic Education Commission, as well as settle agreements with the Executive Secretary of the INE on matters within their competence. These duties were already carried out before the Amendment; however, they were not specified within the code.
Another important fact of the Amendment is that the LGIPE grants autonomy to the Local Public Bodies (OPLES) for the subscription of agreements on civic education. Article 731, clause a) of the LGIPE grants the District Executive Boards the exclusive attribution of evaluating the efforts on civic education within their territorial scope. This could reinforce the supervision of the whole process of citizen participation-strengthening in the states, as long as there is a comprehensive work plan. Furthermore, this action could favor the optimization of public resources allocated to citizen training. Mexico is a large and culturally diverse country; hence, centralized actions hardly result in the expected outcomes throughout the national territory.

In terms of public administration efficiency, the intergovernmental and inter-institutional relations that will arise when granting autonomy to the OPLES to sign agreements with public and private institutions, in order to strengthen civic education, stand out. An example of this is the training program for the School Elections 2016, conducted in primary and secondary level schools. This agreement was signed between the state of Puebla’s OPLE and the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) of the state of Puebla. The program implemented democratic exercises that allow involvement of children and youngsters in decision making on public affairs, and in the practice of civic values (SEP Puebla, September 22, 2016). Even though this type of actions had been conducted in former administrations, the LGIPE formalizes this attribution.

With these attributions, the action scope of the INE broadens, allowing for a national decentralization strategy that has local effects on civic education. This can be a good exercise for the generation of citizens committed with the common good because such local civic instruction and education strategies will be close to the particular contexts of the citizens. Besides, with the specification of the functions of the Executive Directory of Electoral Training and Civic Education, the OPLES, and the District Executive Boards, in administrative terms, there could be greater efficiency in the electoral participation processes.

CONCLUSIONS

This article showed the importance of education in democracy, since citizen participation is a required factor for the generation of public deliberation processes that allow the construction of the common good. The bibliographic revision proved that the theories on citizen participation involve two main actions, civic instruction, and civic education, both of which strengthen democracy. The Political-Electoral Amendment considered both concepts. Even though its results did not materialize in the intermediate electoral processes, it is expected that, as civic values are fortified, the citizens will be able to choose their governing authorities in a more rational manner.

After the analysis, the premise of this research is proven. In terms of “civic education” and “civic instruction”, only three articles that mention these concepts were found. Regarding the possible effects of such modifications on the strengthening of citizen participation and democracy in Mexico, the following thoughts are outlined:

Regarding civic instruction, it should be noted that the majority of the functions mentioned in the articles of the LGIPE that were analyzed focus on the preparation stage of the electoral process; regarding civic education, the strengthening of citizen participation couldn’t be found in the discourse of the LGIPE. However, actions carried out throughout the year that strengthen electoral participation are specified as functions of the Executive Directory of Electoral Training and Civic Education, the OPLES, and the District Executive Boards.

In terms public administration coherence, five relevant aspects stand out: 1) The possible efficiencies in the exercise of financial, technical, material, and human resources generated when granting autonomy to the OPLES to sign agreements of citizen participation strengthening; 2) Inter-institutional and intergovernmental actions are, due to their nature, an asset for achieving optimal results; 3) The decentralization of civic education strategies will allow to achieve local context-specific results; 4) An overseeing function is incorporated into the District Executive Boards, which will allow to complete the process of public policy; and, 5) Managerial functions were formalized in the LGIPE, although, in practice, they were carried out before the Amendment.

On the negative side, a scenario that could frequently arise, given the low legitimacy of the electoral authority in Mexico, is the perception that behind the decentralization of citizen training processes may lie a hidden local political agenda, which may deliberately steer the citizens through the processes of civic instruction and education.

Finally, after analyzing the LGIPE in terms of civic education, it is considered that the greatest advancement comes in terms of administrative modernization. Regarding INE’s labors for the strengthening of citizen participation, the inclusion of all sectors of society in the strategies of civic instruction and education is expected in order to fight corruption, inequality, impunity and discrimination in Mexico, incorporating the citizen as a key player in the exercise of democratic rights.

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