

BEYOND ELECTIONS

Redefining Democracy in the Americas

Sílvia Leindecker and Michael Fox

What is democracy? Freedom, equality, participation? Everyone has his or her own definition. Across the world, 120 countries now have at least the minimum trappings of democracy—the freedom to vote for all citizens. But for many, this is just the beginning not the end. Following decades of US-backed dictatorships, civil wars and devastating structural adjustment policies in the South, and corporate control, electoral corruption, and fraud in the North, representative politics in the Americas is in crisis. Citizens are now choosing to redefine democracy under their own terms: local, direct, and participatory.

In 1989, the Brazilian Worker's Party altered the concept of local government when they installed participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, allowing residents to participate directly in the allocation of city funds. Ten years later, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was swept into power with the promise of granting direct participation to the Venezuelan people; who have now formed tens of thousands of self-organized communal councils. In the Southern Cone, cooperative and recuperated factory numbers have grown, and across the Americas social movements and constitutional assemblies are taking authority away from the ruling elites and putting power into the hands of their members and citizens.

Featuring interviews with: Eduardo Galeano, Amy Goodman, Emir Sader, Martha Harnecker, Ward Churchill, and Leonardo Avritzer as well as cooperative and community members, elected representatives, academics, and activists from Brazil, Canada, Venezuela, Argentina, United States, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, and more.

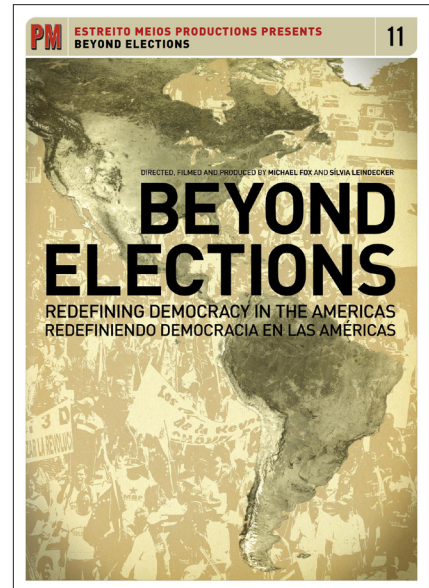
Beyond Elections is a journey that takes us across the Americas to attempt to answer one of the most important questions of our time: What is Democracy?

Extras include video, audio, and resource materials on participatory democracy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sílvia Leindecker is a Brazilian documentary film maker who has shot for the Spanish news agency EFE, Germany's *Politik* magazine, and numerous independent projects, advertisement and film productions.

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