

Social progress? A historical-critical analysis of measurement in Colombia 2000-2018

¿Progreso social? Un análisis histórico-crítico de la medición en Colombia 2000-2018*

O progresso social? Uma análise histórico-crítica da medição em Colômbia 2000-2018.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21803/penamer.14.28.477>

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Abstract

Introduction: This research presents a critical analysis of the conventional concept of social progress from different indicators with which Human Development, income inequality, quality and standard of living are recorded. **Objective:** In this way, it is intended to explain why, factually, a positive behavior of the conventional indicators of social progress in Colombia can be found, which is opposed to the evolution of the social conflict in terms of the social and trade union struggle, and to the increase in number of people arrested. **Results and/or conclusions:** The results suggest the need to establish an approach to the concept of social cohesion in the redefinition of social progress with the aim of overcoming the exposed methodological contradictions.

Key words: Socioeconomic indicators; social progress; Human rights; relative deprivation; Inequality.

Resumen

Introducción: La presente investigación plantea un análisis crítico al concepto convencional del progreso social desde diferentes indicadores con los que se registra el Desarrollo Humano, la desigualdad de ingresos, la calidad y nivel de vida. **Objetivo:** De esta forma, se pretende explicar por qué fácticamente se puede encontrar un comportamiento positivo de los indicadores convencionales del progreso social en Colombia, que se contraponen a la evolución del conflicto social en términos de la lucha social y sindical, y al aumento del número de personas detenidas. **Resultados y/o conclusiones:** Los resultados proponen la necesidad de establecer un acercamiento al concepto de cohesión social en la redefinición del progreso social con el ánimo de superar las contradicciones metodológicas expuestas.

Palabras Clave: Indicadores socioeconómicos; Progreso social; Derechos humanos; Privación relativa; Desigualdad.

Resumo

Introdução: A presente pesquisa levanta uma análise crítica do conceito convencional de progresso social a partir de diferentes indicadores com os quais são registrados o desenvolvimento Humano, desigualdade de renda, qualidade de vida e padrão de vida. **Objetivo:** Desta forma, pretende explicar porque, na prática, é possível encontrar um comportamento positivo dos indicadores convencionais de progresso social na Colômbia, o que contrasta com a evolução do conflito social em termos de lutas sociais e sindicais, e o aumento do número de pessoas em detenção. **Resultados e/ou conclusões:** Os resultados propõem a necessidade de estabelecer um abordagem do conceito de coesão social na redefinição do progresso social, a fim de superar a metodologia para superar as contradições metodológicas expostas.

Palavras-chave: Indicadores sócio-econômicos; Progreso social; Direitos humanos; Privação relativa; Desigualdade.

¿Cómo citar este artículo?

Sánchez, R. & Cifuentes, J. (2021). ¿Progreso social? Un análisis histórico-crítico de la medición en Colombia 2000-2018. *Pensamiento Americano*, 14(28), 111-130. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21803/penamer.14.28.477>

* El presente artículo es parte de la investigación doctoral Modelo analítico de seguridad ontológica. Medición del impacto de las protecciones sociales y del progreso social en Colombia 2000-2018. La investigación fue financiada por Colciencias (convocatoria 727 de 2015) y la Universidad del Norte (beca 2017-2020).



Introduction

Social progress as a category of socioeconomic analysis of countries, although relatively new, has integrated multiple theoretical efforts and social praxis in all parts of the world. The beginnings of the category are to be found in the work of the United Nations to improve the social conditions of nations, especially those classified as developing countries. It has also made inroads in the academic field, achieving different theoretical perspectives and the development of statistical instruments at the service of territorial planning.

Due to the multisectoral nature of social issues, these have been constructed from the perspective of observing the evolution of the level and quality of life of the population, as an effect of the socioeconomic policies of governments, which are expressed in social protections, and are therefore defined as process evaluation instruments.

1. Social progress as an international commitment

It is widely known that for the United Nations (UN) social progress is one of the pillars of the entity to ensure the improvement of the lives of all people (UN, n.d.). However, today we recognize in this context that social progress does not have a clear definition as a category for analysis. For the UN, the main reference in matters related to the category that concerns us here, it is a problem related to life, to the dignity of individuals, and is defined in practice through various elements such as education, health, housing, food, childcare, social integration, and access to science, culture and telecommunications. But how did *social progress* become a United Nations objective?

With the intention of arbitrating conflicts between nations and avoiding a new confrontation like that of 1939-1945, the allied powers decided to create the UN. The first conference in San Francisco, on April 25, 1945, gave rise to this organization through the signing of the Charter of the United Nations, endorsed by 51 countries, although 192 countries are currently members of the organization (Castillo and Bou Franch, 2008).

The central objective of the Organization has been peace and the protection of human rights. The Charter of the United Nations, as can be deduced from its purposes (UN, 2017), was not as such a document dedicated to this subject; basically its function was to establish the reasons for the Organization and to delimit the functions of the entity as an institution of international cooperation.

The Charter, in fact, conceptualized peace not only as the nonviolent regulation of conflicts, but as the result of a global leap forward. Violence erupts when progress is blocked. That was the conclusion the victorious powers drew from the past experience of economic depression and the resulting totalitarianism (...). The project to banish violence and war from the face of the earth was clearly related to the vision of humanity marching onward and upward along the path of progress. Humanity, progress and peace have been the conceptual pillars for erecting the expanding edifice of UN organizations. The idea that both humanity and peace are realized through progress/development is the expectation built into its structure. The mission of the UN depends on faith in progress. (Sachs, 2015, p. 112).

The first step to act in favor of human rights was taken in 1946, when the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), an entity of the United Nations, created the Commission on Human Rights, charged with drafting a general charter on human rights, which would appear in 1948 as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, approved by 48 votes of the 58 members at that time. The primary objective of the document was to provide the positive law of all the nations of the world with a parameter for regulating coexistence, basing relations on respect for life and human dignity. But that document would only be the initial step in seeking respect for human life and the universal acceptance of rights.

Thereafter, the UN adopted more documents to safeguard rights, extending the Declaration of Human Rights. The most important of these were the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These covenants actually came into being immediately after the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with the aim of seeking ways to strengthen the Declaration, positivize human rights, and achieve universal acceptance in the constitutions of all States, by systematizing rights and duties. But the idea did not materialize until 1966 when the United Nations approved both covenants in the General Assembly, being signed by all member states (Castillo and Bou Franch, 2008).

In recent decades, thanks to the work of the United Nations, human rights have acquired a universal value, and, even if they are rhetorical actions, national States have adopted human rights within government policies; these rights have become central elements of international relations. The UN has been creating bodies for the protection of human rights, such as the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNICEF, created after the signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1963. In recent years, the United Nations has been joined by a group of non-governmental organizations that have taken on the task of ensuring that human rights are respected by national states, especially in conflict zones; organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch at the international level, and at the regional level a number of groups have also emerged whose objective is to monitor the situation of rights in areas such as freedom of expression, education, freedom of the press, among others.

However, in 1969, the UN accepted that in recent years it had neglected the social question, and that this question was facing serious challenges due to the process of globalization, in the midst of which inequality has increased. The Declaration on Social Progress and Development (UN, 1969) emphasizes the need to guarantee a life of dignity and the enjoyment of social progress as one of the principles of law. For this reason, it establishes the need to eliminate all forms of inequality and exploitation, as well as to guarantee the full exercise of civil and political rights and of economic, social and cultural rights. For the fulfillment of these normative precepts, the declaration establishes as a condition to promote economic growth and its equitable distribution.

Apart from the debate over the definition and modes of social progress are one-sided bets. In 1972, the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, proposed the Gross National Happiness Index or Gross Domestic Happiness as a methodology to determine the standard of living beyond consumption, based on happiness, health and well-being as fundamental elements. This index represents a balance between physical, spiritual, material and social needs of individuals to achieve happiness as a collective end (Sithey, Thow, & Li, 2015). Technically, the index is not calculated quantitatively, but from information obtained based on the evaluation of nine dimensions and a weighting is established.

(GNH Center, n.d.): 1) Psychological well-being, 2) Time use, 3) Community vitality, 4) Cultural diversity, 5) Health, 6) Education, 7) Environmental diversity, 8) Standard of living, and 9) Good governance.

In 1976, the International Labor Organization (ILO) Conference on Employment, Income Distribution and Social Progress introduced the "basic needs approach", which established a minimum level of well-being applicable to all countries. In this way, the International Organization responded to the need to establish a measurement of the social objectives of development (Sachs, 2015).

In the 1990s, after the economic crises of the 1970s and changes in protectionist economic models, international politics resumed the debate on social issues. Thus, the Declaration on Social Progress and Development was taken up again, promoting a series of conferences on issues related to social progress, which will allow new instruments for measuring the evolution of social progress and development.

In addition, the UN General Assembly reviews every five years the progress achieved in the implementation of the measures adopted at the conferences on population and development (1999), women (2000), social progress (2000), human settlements (2001), children (2002), food (2002) and sustainable development (2002).

But, beyond the UN's general efforts regarding social progress, the UN recognizes that it is not possible to define the outcome of this category and impose it on all the nations that make up the organization. The UN affirms that social progress is not a problem limited to developing countries, but is also a problem for developed nations. However, at the World Summit on Social Progress, held in Copenhagen in 1995, the nations gathered there agreed that social progress is an issue that must be addressed from each social reality, since imposing homogeneous standards in this regard "would have been impossible in light of the great historical, cultural and political differences among countries" (UN, 1995, pp. 2-3). Instead, it identified three essential elements of social progress that affect all countries: poverty, productive employment and social integration (UN, 1995, p. 2). It also established a list of commitments containing "elements considered crucial to achieving sustainable human development" (UN, 1995, p. 3).

In this spirit of the United Nations to build a system of policy guidelines that goes beyond the classical economic discourse and its proposal to measure GDP development, the idea of human development appears with Sen in the early 1990s (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2015). This idea of human development is based on the notion of the individual as the unit of development, on the construction of opportunities as a modification of the economic environment to achieve its purposes, which are expressed as: improving human capabilities and expanding opportunities for human development.

It is within this framework that the concept of human security developed in the 1994 Human Development Report is subscribed to and defined as "a concern for human life and dignity" (UNDP, 1994, p. 25), which proposes overcoming any notion of security associated with defense, the public, military or legal sphere, or any other limited to a social dimension. It proposes a holistic view of security that takes in all human dimensions, without equating it with human development, since this "is a broader concept, defined in previous Human Development Reports as a process of broadening the range of options available to people" (UNDP, 1994, p. 26). The proposal

allows us to identify human security based on observational indicators that show the status of its seven main areas of security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political.

The evolution of this tradition, which has its origins in the United Nations and aims to give more social content to the analysis of classical liberalism, has led to the development of different proposals for measuring social progress. If we follow the theoretical developments of Sen and Nussbaum, we find the Human Development Index (HDI), which aims to measure the impact of policies in terms of human development:

has to do with human freedoms: the freedom to develop the full potential of every human life - not just a few, not just the majority, but all lives in every corner of the planet - now and in the future. This universal dimension is what gives the human development approach its uniqueness. (UNDP, 2016, p. iii).

This synthetic indicator, proposed by economists Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1990, is a measure created in response to the need to determine the level of development of human capabilities of all people, beyond economic progress, based on the following variables: 1) A long and healthy life measured by life expectancy at birth: average age of deceased persons in a year; 2) Acquisition of knowledge defined by the level of schooling: average and expected years of schooling; and 3) Decent standard of living calculated with the gross national income per capita (UNDP, 2018, p. 1).

It should be noted that this index contains a limit, as evidenced in the latest Nussbaum approaches and more specifically in the Sarkozy Commission:

The HDI simplifies and reflects only part of what human development entails, as it does not include inequality, poverty, human security and empowerment. The Human Development Report Office (HDRO) offers the other composite indices as a broader representation of some of the main issues of human development, inequality, gender disparity and human poverty (UNDP, n.d., para. 3)¹.

In this regard, other proposals have been developed that facilitate, from this liberal perspective of measurement, the understanding of the state of social progress as a relationship of individual satisfaction in different social dimensions. On the one hand, the Human Poverty Index (UNDP, 2001) was presented by the UN in the 1997 Human Development Report as an indicator of the standard of living measured in terms of the deprivation of opportunities and human capabilities that limit development. Its objective is to determine an aggregate level of poverty in a population given the deprivations of the basic components of human life, previously established in the HDI. For this purpose, three basic aspects of deprivation are considered: survival, knowledge and decent standard of living, which represent the variables that correspond to the developing countries for which the HPI-1 is calculated; as well as for some developed OECD member countries, the HPI-2 is measured, which also includes social exclusion².

¹ The HDI simplifies and captures only part of what human development entails. It does not reflect on inequalities, poverty, human security, empowerment, etc. The HDRO offers the other composite indices as broader proxy on some of the key issues of human development, inequality, gender disparity and poverty.

² Survival: probability of death at a relatively young age. For HPI-1 it is 40 years, and for HPI-2 it is 60 years. Knowledge: exclusion of reading and communication. For both HPI we work with the adult illiteracy rate of the country. Decent standard of living: for HPI-1 we calculate the percentage of the population without access to drinking water and the percentage of children under 5 years of age who are underweight for their age, and for HPI-2 we measure the percentage of the population whose income is below the income poverty line. For the HPI-2, social exclusion is also measured in terms of the long-term unemployment rate.



The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was also developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) for the Human Development Research Office (HDRO) as a new way of measuring poverty from a multidimensional perspective, which now replaces the previously explained index. The multidimensional nature of this indicator implies measuring the level of poverty not only in economic terms, but also taking into account parameters such as health, education and standard of living, in order to identify household deprivation and thus make a more efficient distribution of resources. To obtain the data, surveys are conducted in all households, including indicators of the three main dimensions (health, education and standard of living). The ten components that are assessed are: nutrition, infant mortality, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing and assets (UNDP, 2018).

In 2005, the *Economist Intelligence Unit* developed a Quality of Life Index based on both subjective satisfaction surveys and objective measures of quality of life in countries. This indicator aims to measure the level of quality of life in a country through information obtained about households and more general determinants of the country.

On the other hand, the team led by Michael Green created the Social Progress Imperative (SPI) (Social Progress Imperative, n.d.) -appropriated by the Social Development Network for its application in Colombia- which integrates the observation of basic human needs (nutrition and basic medical care; water and sanitation; housing; personal safety), the measurement of well-being (access to basic knowledge, access to information and communications, health and well-being, ecosystem sustainability), and of opportunities (personal rights, personal freedom and freedom of choice, tolerance and inclusion, access to higher education) (Red Colombiana de Ciudades Cómo Vamos [RCCCV], 2016). This comprises progress within the limits of the sociological category of quality of life. Thus, it starts from the definition of social progress as "the capacity of a country to satisfy the basic human needs of its citizens, establish solid foundations that allow improving their quality of life, and create adequate conditions for all individuals and communities to reach their full potential" (RCCCV, 2016).

Another widely recognized proposal was the Millennium Development Goals 2000-2015 (MDGs), which originated in September 2000 when the United Nations Millennium Declaration was adopted. This document established commitments to reduce extreme poverty and improve the living conditions of the world's population through different strategies and initiatives.

Subsequently, at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in 2012, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were created to replace the MDGs. The focus of these goals follows the guidelines of the previous ones, but broadens the scope of action based on the environmental, political and economic problems facing the world today. The SDGs were established as a set of 17 commitments that seek to contribute to building a prosperous, sustainable and safe world for all people.

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These international political processes reveal the need to search for a concept and a methodology that offer solutions to determine the analytical referents of the social actions within the standards of international human rights norms and, therefore, how to measure them for the evaluation of public policies.

The characteristic of all these conventional measures of social progress and development objectives is that they are not only

This is because they are carried out by means of sectoral indicators that observe society as the sum of individuals, with the social structure and the way of life as the very reality of the social being disappearing. In this way, indicators in general, emphasizing different aspects of the social life of individuals, will orient observation on the achievement or non-achievement of social goals that describe the welfare of individuals, thus becoming sectoral indicators of process or result of liberal social protections.

Critical remarks on the measurement of social progress

In view of this evidence, the Commission on *the Measurement of Development and Social Progress* proposed the challenge of investigating "the improvement of better measuring instruments that will allow us to better assess economic performance and social progress" (Stiglitz et al., 2009, p. 17). The importance of statistical indicators for national governments lies in being able to orient their policies according to their objectives, which include progress. In this sense, Stiglitz et al. (2009), in the Commission's report, state that "what is measured has an impact on what is done: but if the measurements are flawed, the decisions are inadequate" (p. 4). This report highlights the limits of conventional indicators. Reviewing data from developed countries, there is no doubt that their governments have used GDP as an instrument for measuring development and have worked for the accelerated economic growth they enjoy. The same is true for indicators such as education, health and other social indicators, which have guided the improvement of quality of life conditions in these countries. This has led to a concern for the environment, gender equality conditions, income inequality and other social characteristics -demanded by the Commission-, which have found an echo in the SDGs, allowing progress in these specific areas.

However, realities such as Colombia's, which involve social struggles, among other circumstances, continue to show a certain distance between the results of conventional indicators and the population's perception of insecurity or social dissatisfaction. Thus, some of the Commission's explanations that justify the present investigation are still valid:

- [1] The statistical concepts may be adequate, but the measurement process may be imperfect.
- [2] In addition, there is a debate on the choice of relevant concepts and the appropriate use of concepts.
- [3] The statistics commonly used may not reflect certain phenomena that increasingly influence the well-being of citizens (Stiglitz et al., 2009, p. 5).

This critical analysis of the conventional indicators for measuring the impact of social protections (and the determination of the state of social progress) in Colombia between 2000 and 2018 shows that these instruments have as their object the observation of social issues based on the aggregate consumption of individuals; an observation that is limited to determining the state of the level and quality of life in the population, leaving out the analysis of lifestyle, gender and, in particular, the way of life³ (Zamora and García, 1988, pp. 66-67). This constitutes a determining component for the analysis of social protection and the observation of social progress, given that it is impossible for every individual to be able to make an accurate analysis of his or her own life style, gender and, in particular, his or her way of life.

³ These sociological categories (standard of living, quality of life, gender of life, lifestyle and way of life) will be explained below.



This is because, as a way of observing reality, such a liberal approach is oriented towards the efficiency of the market as a means to achieve the welfare of each individual, as an isolated being (according to its assumptions), and the social, structurally, as a unit of analysis, is not the object of its investigation.

But what is the individual?

It consists in a peculiar state of consciousness within the fundamental objective and subjective society of man. The ontological position, that man, insofar as he is man, is a social entity that in every act of his life, however he reflects it in his consciousness, always and without exception realizes himself, and simultaneously the eventual plane of development of the human race, albeit in the most diverse forms, is not a thesis invented by Marx. This fundamental truth was repeated concretely and resolutely highlighted from Aristotle, to Goethe and Hegel. (Lukács, 2014, p. 190).

It is impossible for current measurement instruments to record social progress as the development of social cohesion, so it is necessary to reorient the observation and selection of data based on the way of life in order to measure it. This shows the persistence of imperfect measurement processes of conventional indicators for observing such social progress.

The rupture of social cohesion is manifested in social conflict, expressed in strikes and work stoppages, as a historical fact of the dissatisfaction of social expectations. For this reason, the results of the research seek to overcome the sectorial vision of social progress based on the limited social observation of liberalism, which does not overcome utilitarianism, and which bases its ethos on Bentham's principle: "the greatest good for the greatest number". Utilitarianism defines that:

Actions are *right* insofar as they tend to promote happiness, *wrong* insofar as they tend to produce the opposite of happiness. Happiness is understood as pleasure and absence of pain; unhappiness as pain or absence of pleasure (Mill, 2014, p. 60).

Thus:

The immediate utilitarian practice and the corresponding common sense put men in a condition to orient themselves in the world, to become familiar with things and to handle them, but it does not provide them with a comprehension of things and of reality. For this reason, Marx was able to write that, in the world of phenomenal forms, removed from their internal concatenation and completely incomprehensible in this isolation, those who effectively determine social conditions are at ease, like fish in water. For them there is nothing mysterious in what is internally contradictory, and their judgment is not in the least shocked by the inversion of the rational and the irrational. The practical activity referred to in this context is a historically determined and unilateral praxis, it is the fragmentary praxis of individuals, based on the social division of labor, on the division of classes, and on the growing hierarchization of social positions that derives from it. In this praxis, both the environment and the spiritual atmosphere is formed in which the superficial appearance of reality is fixed as the world of supposed intimacy, of trust and familiarity, in which man moves 'naturally' and with which he has something to do every day. (Kosík, 1967, pp. 26-27).

This has been the way in which a liberal hegemonic theory of reality observation is defended, theorized in the past.

This is a way of defining the population uniformly, without division, without classes, without taking into account the socio-economic dynamics that compose it; a way justified in science thought of as "technical", ignoring that its theory of reality is subordinated to its ideological framework, which claims objectivity under the empirical-analytic evidence it consumes without contemplating that it is an abstract (rational) construction whose evidence follows from biased interpretation, as occurs in general in sociology. In this condition can be observed the developments by sociologists such as Comte, Durkheim and Weber because "they were not concerned with studying the essential contradictions of capitalism, but limited themselves to look at some of its external manifestations, and above all to propose reforms that would strengthen their respective bourgeois societies, that would avoid new sociopolitical crises" (Gil, 2012, p. 25).

In general terms, conventional indicators are described as observations of the state of reality based on two factors: 1) the delimitation of a parameter that determines an optimal level of quality of life (according to the theory of each indicator), and 2) the measurement of the population average. It is possible to find variations in which the indicator is composite, where in some cases different weights are established for each component of the indicator.

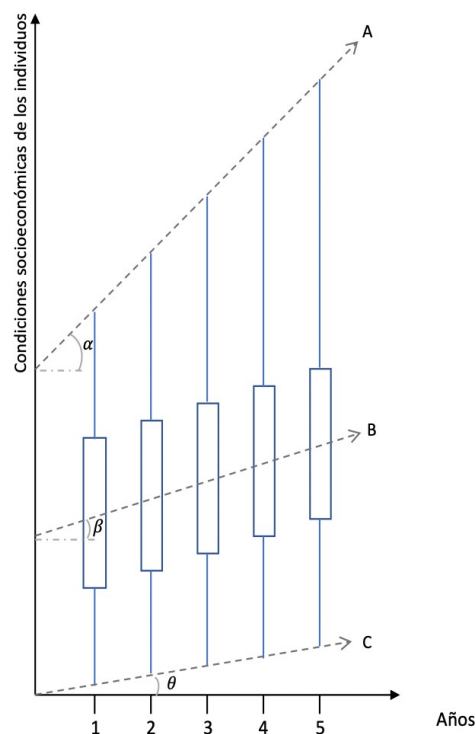
The population mean indicators follow the form shown in Figure 1. These central tendency indicators hide the dispersion of the data, which does not show, in colloquial terms, 'how well those who are doing well are doing, how badly those who are less well off are doing'.

Following Figure 1, as a theoretical representation of the results of the conventional indicators of Quality of Life (QoL), Multidimensional Poverty (MP) and Human Development (HDI), if we analyze the slopes of the peaks and compare them with the averages for each year, it is possible to find that slope A has a greater angle of inclination than that of B and the latter is greater than that of C, where $\alpha > \beta > \theta$.

Indicators that are constructed according to parameters establish an assessment of achievement, so that they guide the observation of social phenomena in terms of the population that does or does not achieve the pre-established parameter. However, they also hide the relative distances between population groups, in other words, they hide inequality.

It is for this reason that the results of the conventional indicators show an increase in material conditions, mostly following the utilitarian parameter that hides those who benefit most from the economy. By focusing on averages and grading on minimum conditions, it is evident that there is no need to review the

Figure 1.
Distribution of data over time



Note: Authors' elaboration.

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structural inequality, thus hiding the reality of rising social expectations. Thus, these indicators are not able to read social progress as social cohesion and its inverse in social conflict. When crossing the information with the data on social struggle and the number of people arrested, a contradiction appears.

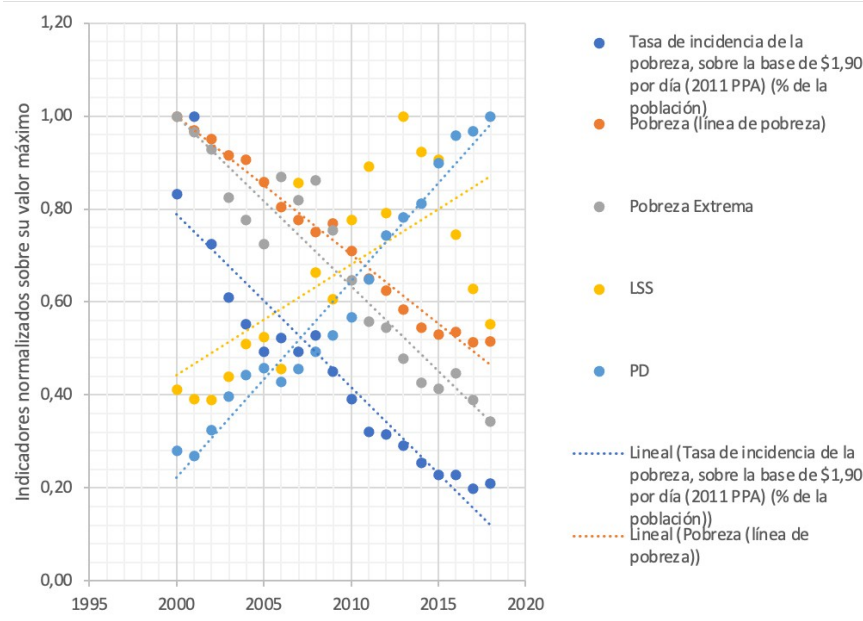
Clearly, this is not a matter of social cohesion, but rather of the aggregate increase in goods and services available to households. In this sense, the way out of the social conflict does not seem to be reduced to the reduction of poverty, understood as the most critical point of absence of prosperity, which evidences that with the reduction of monetary poverty (in any of its measurements and standards) in Colombia, there is an increase in social conflict given in the expressions of social struggle and number of people arrested (Table 1, Figure 2).

Table 1.
Correlations between LSS and PD vs. P, PE and PM

	P	PE	PM
LSS	-0,7371516	-0,6616305	-0,7089035
PD (cases)	-0,9687252	-0,9729391	-0,9664443

Note: P: poverty; PE: extreme poverty; PM: multidimensional poverty; LSS: social and union struggle; PD: number of persons detained.
Source: Prepared by the authors. Data taken for each case as follows: LSS: CINEP databases (2019); PD: data from INPEC (2019a) and the Prison Group of the Universidad de los Andes (2019a); P, PE and PM: data from Ocampo (2015, p. 356) DANE (2017), with update from the World Bank (2020).

Figure 2.
Dispersion and trend of Poverty Incidence Rate, P, PE, LSS and PD

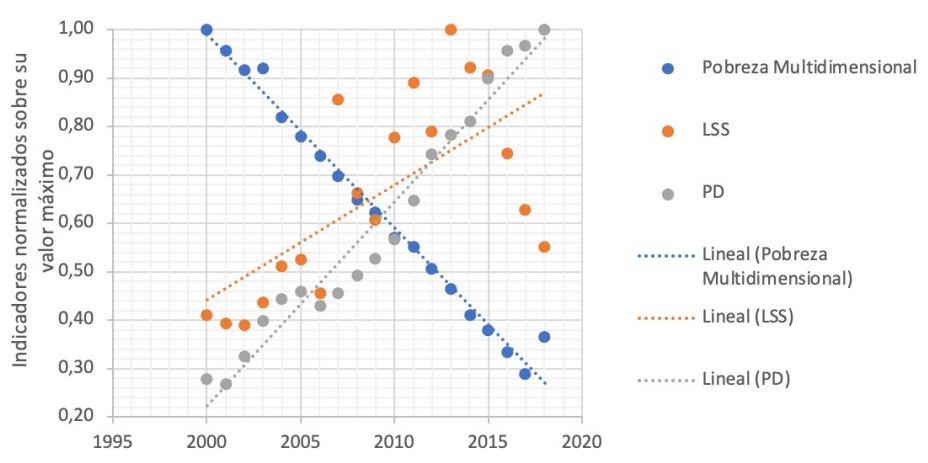


Note: P: poverty; PE: extreme poverty; PM: multidimensional poverty; LSS: social and union struggle; PD: number of persons detained.
Source: Own elaboration. Data taken for each case as follows: LSS: CINEP databases (2019); PD: data from INPEC (2019a; 2019b) and the Prison Group of the Universidad de los Andes (2019a; 2019b); Poverty incidence rate, P and PD: data from Ocampo (2015, p. 356), DANE (2017), with update from the World Bank (2020).

This social behavior is theoretically incomprehensible beyond establishing a discursive correlation. By making a matrix of correlations between indicators, one has indirect behaviors that could be statistically causally linked on the basis of spurious arguments:

Why is poverty measurement misleading? The measurement of minimum material conditions prevents us from observing the causes of the breakdown of social cohesion, which do not manifest themselves in social conflict per se, but in its effects: on individuals in accordance with the parameters given in the very definition of 'minimums'. For this reason, the contradiction that can be read in a possible relationship between monetary poverty and social conflict is also to be found in the results of the multidimensional poverty indicator and the quality of life indicator compared with the results of the social struggle and the number of people arrested. These indicators, which no longer observe minimum monetary income, but average conditions as well, do so from welfare minimums following Rawls' theory.

Figure 3.
Dispersion and trend of normalized PM, LSS and PD data



Note: LSS: social and union struggle; PD: number of persons detained.
Source: Own elaboration. Data taken for each case as follows: LSS: CINEP databases (2019); PD: data from INPEC (2019a; 2019b) and the Prison Group of the Universidad de los Andes (2019a; 2019b); Multidimensional poverty: data from Ocampo (2015, p. 356), DANE (2017), with update from the World Bank (2020).

The multidimensional poverty index, which is composed of several sectoral indicators, combines a series of statistical techniques, from the qualification of a minimum condition by socio-economic sectors to an arithmetic mean. It also considers differentiation in terms of the importance between sectors (from the following theory) with specific weights for each (sectoral) indicator.

The results for Colombia allow us to affirm that there is no difference in the relationship between monetary indicators and quality of life indicators such as those of multidimensional poverty. Likewise, both observation methods work as a qualification on individual optimums, which in this case are understood as minimums, to observe the state of the total population; and the observation refers to the Rawlsian principle of maximization of minimums.

Beyond the fact that welfare minima are indeterminable, as suggested by Cohen's (2004) critique of Rawls, the theoretical definition of individual minima that measure welfare does not take into account that

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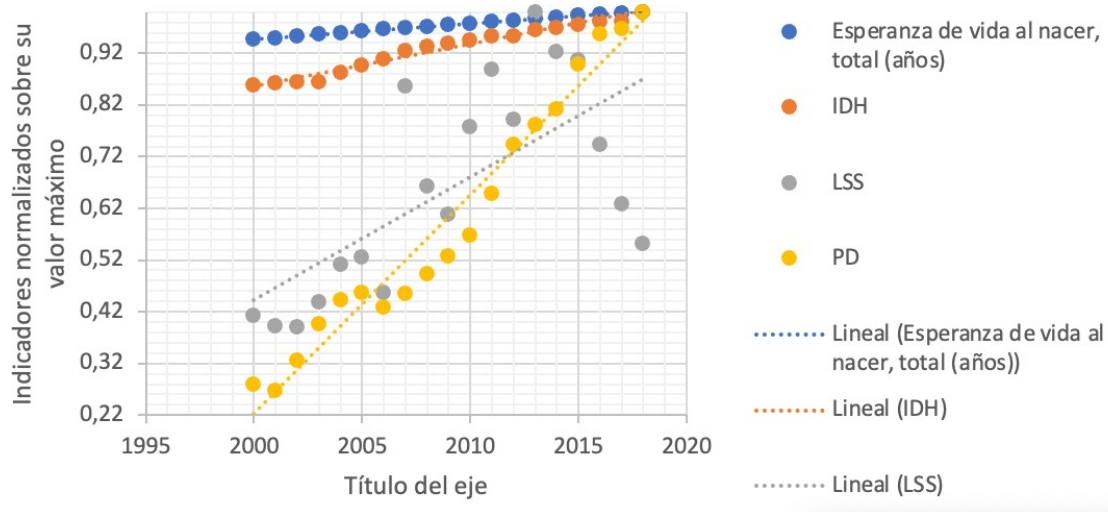


these minimum standards are a social construct, and are therefore dynamic in that they change with the evolution of social expectations. The reference values for each indicator are always in constant movement in accordance with the variation in social expectations, which implies new minimum standards over time.

The measurement of population optimums refers to the conditioning of well-being in terms of the least favored in capitalism, but leaves a blind spot in the observation of the most favored, which, as can be seen, is not measured. On the other hand, we find the HDI which, following individual minimum parameters on education, income and life expectancy at birth, describes the reality of the population in relation, evaluating the state of individuals in these three aspects, and the results are evaluated according to an international *ranking* on which high, medium and low levels of human development are empirically defined. The results also show an evolution of the indicator in Colombia.

Figure 5.

Dispersion and trend of conventional indicator data

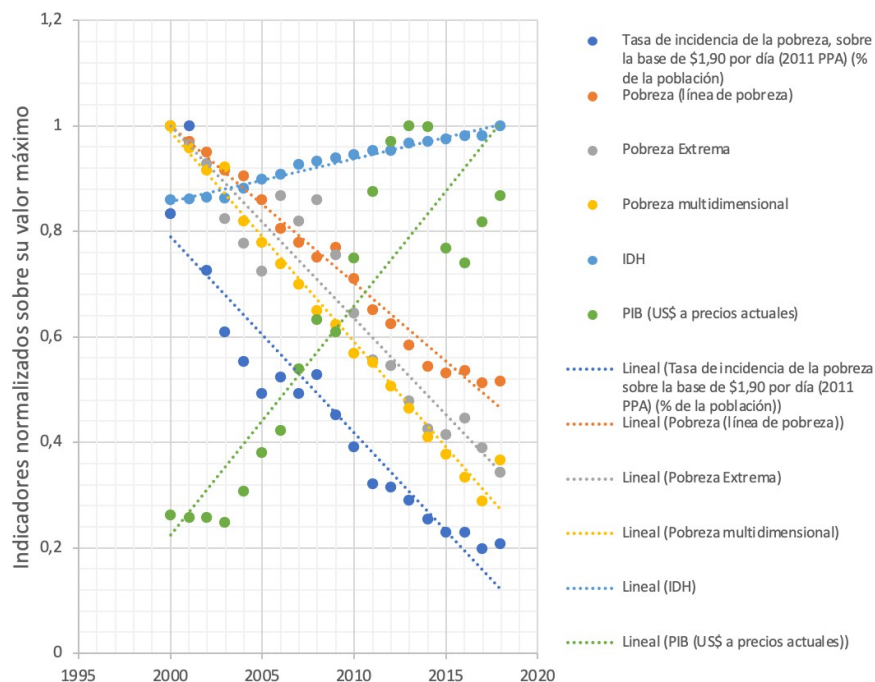


Source: Own elaboration. Data taken from Ocampo (2015, p. 356), DANE (2017), with update from World Bank (2020).

Consequently, it is evident that in Colombia there is an increase in social conditions and that in general, the most vulnerable population has been improving its quality of life. However, in all of them we also see the factual contradiction between a) the phenomenon that each indicator describes as an increase in social progress and b) the phenomenon of social conflict given in the increase of social struggle and the number of people arrested.

The results show that the indicators observe a part of the reality in the face of social minimums (whatever they may be) observed from population averages; however, this cannot be understood as an increase in social progress, given that in fact, social strife and crime are expressions of the breakdown of social cohesion, which in the final analysis is an expression of progress itself.

Figure 5.
Dispersion and trend of conventional indicator data



Source: Own elaboration. Data taken from Ocampo (2015, p. 356), DANE (2017), with update from World Bank (2020).

An analysis of correlations between the conventional indicators shows that all these indicators show equality in the evolution of the socioeconomic conditions of individuals in Colombia. Thus, although each indicator shows a particular characteristic of the conditions of individuals, it is consistent that Colombia has shown positive progress in increasing the standard of living and quality of life of individuals from an aggregate perspective, so that any indicator is sufficient to illustrate this progress. Table 2 and subsequent figures show the correlations between these indicators:

Table 2.
Correlation between conventional indicator data

	Poverty incidence rate, based on \$1.90 per day (2011 PPP) (% of population)	Poverty (poverty line)	Extreme poverty	Multidimensional poverty	HDI	GDP (US\$ at current prices)
Poverty incidence rate, based on \$1.90 per day (2011 PPP) (% of population)	1,00					
Poverty (poverty line)	0,94	1,00				
Extreme poverty	0,93	0,95	1,00			
Multidimensional poverty	0,94	0,99	0,94	1,00		
HDI	-0,93	-0,98	-0,91	-0,98	1,00	
GDP (US\$ at current prices)	-0,86	-0,92	-0,86	-0,90	0,92	1,00

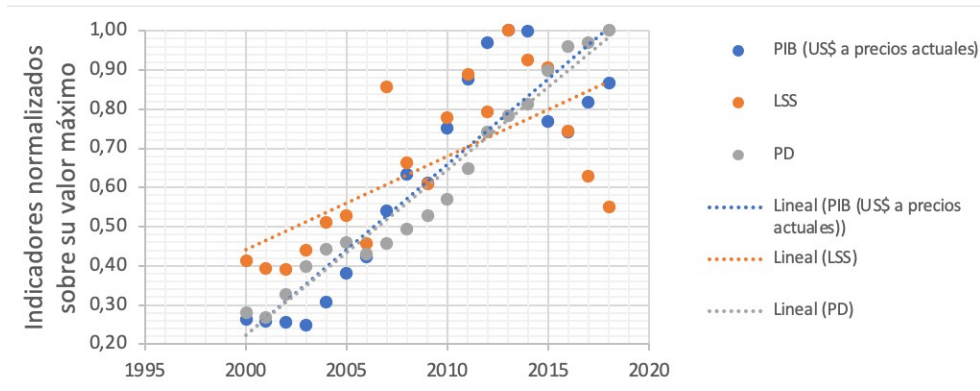
Source: Own elaboration. Data taken from Ocampo (2015, p. 356), DANE (2017), with update from World Bank (2020).



Thus, since the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is an indicator that behaves coherently with the aforementioned poverty and quality of life indicators, when contrasted with the social struggle and the number of people detained, we find the same results given with these conventional indicators:

Figure 6.

Dispersion and trend of LSS, PD and GDP indicator data



Source: Own elaboration. Data taken for each case as follows: LSS: CINEP databases (2019); PD: INPEC data (2019a; 2019b) and Universidad de los Andes Prison Group (2019a; 2019b); GDP: World Bank data (2020).

We cannot conclude that the increase in GDP (the country's internal wealth) is a determinant of the increase in social conflict. The breakdown of social cohesion occurs, among other things, because this increase in wealth has developed on the back of widening socio-economic gaps, the ever-increasing and completely palpable difference between the income of workers and the profits of capitalists: it is a matter of inequalities.

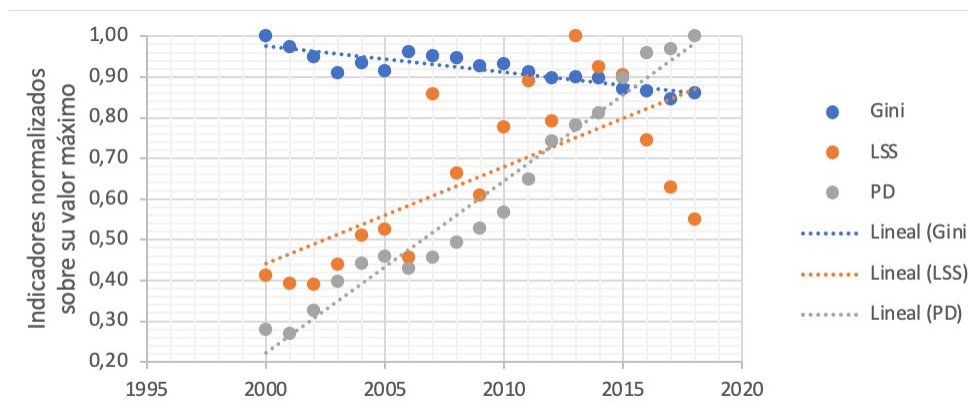
In this regard, it is possible to find another conventional indicator that does not focus on the reading of standards around minimum goods and services for the well-being of individuals, but instead observes inequality. This is the income Gini, which takes the income records of individuals to establish the degree of concentration of wealth. Since the difficulty of this indicator is that wealth in economic terms is not limited to income (salaries, bonuses, rents, etc.), then we encounter a difficulty: part of the profits of companies and their value is not taken by the indicator, beyond the statistically improbable fact that the richest population of the country (the owners of large national companies or participants in transnational companies) is taken by means of socio-demographic surveys.

Therefore, the Gini manages to define the degree of concentration of wealth of workers and small entrepreneurs. This indicator highlights a situation of all indicators constructed on the basis of information provided by surveys (or population samples): the statistical limit to capture the income of large capitalists methodologically expresses the capture of a partial reality.

The Gini, which focuses primarily on the income distribution of workers (more when only wages are studied) and some small rentiers, entrepreneurs or producers, has a difficulty

by not making it possible to show "which social groups are behind this or that variation of the indicator over time or between countries" (Piketty, 2019, p. 788). In this way, it hides the reality of the social class division that implies a socioeconomic imbalance tending to the concentration of wealth.

Figure 7.
Dispersion and trend of LSS, PD and Gini indicator data.



Source: Own elaboration. Data taken for each case as follows: LSS: CINEP databases (2019); PD: data from INPEC (2019a; 2019b) and from the Prison Group of the Universidad de los Andes (2019a; 2019b); Gini: data from the World Bank (2020).

Consequently, it can be affirmed that the approximations to reality that are based on these conventional indicators are partial, and likewise that their conclusions regarding the determination of social progress do not start from the conditioning factors of the class division in that reality; they are indicators that "allow hiding the weaknesses (even the totally aberrant character) of the underlying data, or at least to draw a thick veil of limitations" (Piketty, 2019, p. 788).

Towards an epistemological and technical shift in the measurement of social progress

We have seen in the behavior of poverty and extreme poverty indicators that Colombia shows a positive evolution, revealing the results of social policies, which in the country are focused on the most socioeconomically vulnerable population. Thus, the indicators sensitive to this reality would seem to show certain government achievements in this area. However, it is necessary to consider the way in which social issues are observed and analyzed, which means examining their claim to truth. It follows that not every measurement of social aspects or characteristics can be understood as an adequate observation of the social, or that it is based on the truth that defines the social.

In this sense, it is necessary to determine the structural categories of what we conceive as the social, to observe social cohesion, what it is that generates unity or social body, to describe the way society (and therefore individuals) achieve a life, that is, its mode of production; in order to avoid the deception of market observations, not to put the focus on the commercial transactions of goods and services under the imaginary of private property, which is nothing other than the level of appropriation of individual labor power, what Marx calls *the paradise of the rights of man of 1789*. In the buying and selling of labor power:

only *freedom, equality, property and Bentham reign*. *Freedom*, because the buyer and the seller

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of a commodity, of *labor power*, obeys no other law than that of their *free will*. They contract as free and equal men before the law. *The contract* is the final result in which their wills take on a *common* juridical expression. *Equality*, since buyers and sellers only contract as *providers of merchandise*, exchanging equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each one has and can only have what is his. *And Bentham*, because all those who take part in these acts are only moved by interest. The only force that unites them and puts them in relation is the force of their *selfishness*, of their personal benefit, of their *private interest*. Precisely for this reason, because each one cares only for himself and no one looks after the others, they all contribute, thanks to a pre-established harmony of things or under the auspices of an all-embracing providence, to carry out the work of their mutual benefit, of their collective convenience, of their social interest.

On leaving this orbit of simple circulation or commodity exchange, where the vulgar free trader goes to seek ideas, concepts and criteria for judging the society of capital and wage labor, it seems as if the physiognomy of the characters in our drama changed somewhat. The former possessor of money opens the march converted into a capitalist, and behind him comes the possessor of labor power, transformed into his own worker; the former, treading stiffly and smiling disdainfully, all bound; the latter, timid and suspicious, reluctantly, like someone who is going to sell his own skin and knows the fate that awaits him: to have it tanned. (Marx, 2001, pp. 128-129).

It must be admitted that

the population is an abstraction, if I leave aside, for example, the classes that make it up. And, in turn, these classes are an empty word if I do not know the elements on which it rests, for example, wage labor, capital, etc. (Marx, 1985, p. 15).

Thus, the indicators of social progress must take into account the socioeconomic structure and dynamics of the population, because the measurement of the social, of the impact of social protections, must include social cohesion as a way of evaluating the way of life.

The population cannot be conceived as a given unit when it is divided into classes, and expressed as "wage labor and capital, which are in turn composed of others such as the exchange of merchandise, the division of labor, prices" (de la Garza, 2012, p. 31). So this research methodologically leads to define the concrete as "synthesis of many determinations, therefore, unity of the multiple. Thought appears, therefore, as a process of synthesis, as a result and as a starting point" (Marx, 1985, p. 15), so it is necessary to delve into the simplest concepts that define the population, which would be the observation of social progress defined from the pretension of the social, establishing what the social is and what configures it, starting from wage labor as an economic reality constitutive of Modernity on which this notion is built, in order to record its scope in empirical cases.

The idea of merit and social mobility established by modern capitalism, on the one hand, assumes the imaginary in which work is a condition for a person to reach the economically privileged social class (owner of the means of production); on the other hand, it places social expectations in the socioeconomic conditions of these classes, defined by Veblen as the idle class (2000, p. 64), which includes *the subsidiary idle class*⁴ as a social referent. Therefore, what is socially desirable is to reproduce the role that

⁴ They are those over whom the idle class holds its power; people who are therefore not economically free. They are for Veblen the wives and servants, and they have the fundamental role of maintaining the reputation of the idle class. In this subsidiary class are also the productive servants, persons who by their abilities sustain or increase the wealth of the idle class.

these classes play in the current way of life as the ultimate goal of work. This condition, according to the imaginary of reaching conditions more or less close within the representation of the progressive ladder of the level and quality of life; ladder defined by the capitalist idea of Modernity, a ladder that supposes a frenetic act of society to tend towards the highest point of social expectations, which marks the consumption and the distribution of the use of time of the population towards the highest social model of consumption in the social structure.

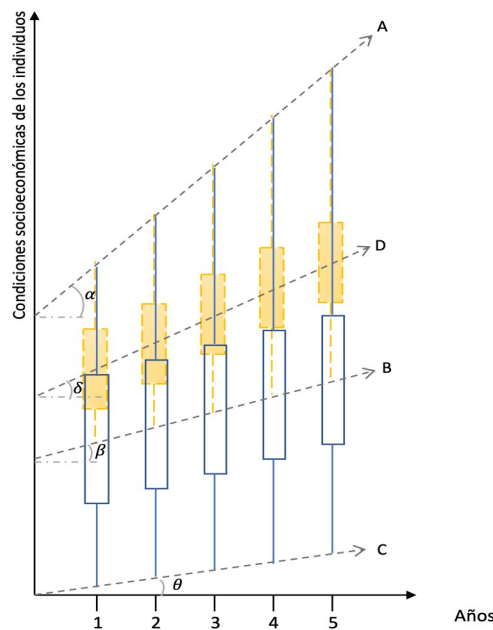
In this way, the measurement should seek to define the conditions of the population with the highest income, who determine social expectations; in such a way that the average condition of the highest income decile of the population (decile 10) can be established, and with it, the average condition of the population, which represents the possibilities of social satisfaction, can be compared, in order to distinguish the distance between both points as relative deprivation. Insofar as the meditation achieves this distinction, it responds to the need to highlight the current conditions of socioeconomic inequality and overcomes the absence of "intelligible indicators elaborated from reliable and systematic sources [that provide the evidence to establish the basis for] a serene debate at the national, regional and, above all, global level" (Piketty, 2019, p. 785).

Observing the results of the conventional indicators of standard of living and quality of life, as well as those of social conflict (of people in detention and social struggle), the assumption can be made that this social reference that establishes popular expectations (which can be reduced according to the information provided by official socioeconomic surveys to the richest decile, since it is statistically impossible to capture the richest percentile in Colombia) should have a greater evolution in relation to the total population in the improvement of the material conditions that generate ontological security.

Consequently, a comparison will be established between the historical compartments between the conditions of decile 10 and the population average in terms of slope, expecting that, if the social conflict is increasing, the slope of D (Decile 10 rate) has a steeper slope angle than the slope angle of B (Population rate) as shown in Figure 8, being: $\delta > \beta$.

Thus, the structure for measuring the relationship between social expectations and possibilities of satisfaction is defined on the basis of the measure of the material conditions of the part of the population that establishes these expectations and the average of the material conditions of the population in general. In empirical terms, this would imply an increase in relative deprivation as a result of a greater growth in social expectations compared to the growth in the possibilities of satisfaction.

Figure 8.
Relationship between trends of D and B averages



Note: D: Decile 10 rate; B: Population rate.
Source: Authors' elaboration.

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Understanding inequality as a present condition, this increase in relative deprivation given between the distances between curve D and curve B (expressed in the previous graph), should be understood as the condition by which social conflict is expressed; in such a way that it is expected that the indicators of social progress when coherent with the (factual) results of social struggle and crime, show a descending angle (or ascending if viewed as the state of relative deprivation) letting us see the rupture of social cohesion manifested in said social conflict.

Conclusion

The evolution of the different conventional indicators of social progress in countries such as Colombia, present great inconveniences to explain social conflict as an expression of the dissatisfaction of social expectations given in the socioeconomic conditions of the richest portion of the population. The measurement of social progress calls for a new perspective in recent history; one that assumes the determinants of social conflict. It is essential to define, then, the categories of analysis for each territory and the parameters for measurement and comparison, in order to determine the degree of relative deprivation. Here, polemology, which is "the study of conflict, or, in other words, of the dissatisfaction of social expectations" (Sañudo and Sánchez-Cárcamo, 2014, p. 59), is relevant and highly relevant.

The polemological analysis then clarifies the relationship between social conditions (reality) and social expectations (social objective), where relative deprivation is defined as "a gap between the aspirations of individuals and groups and the possibilities they believe they have of realizing their aspirations" (Verstrynge, 1997, p. 57) or "the perception by the 'actors' of the discrepancy between the values they expect to receive and those they can acquire" (Gurr, 1974, p. 25). In such a way that different scenarios are to be found, where, in general, an increasing dynamic of expectations is contemplated, confronted with different behaviors of the possibilities of satisfaction, both increasing and constant.

The contradiction in the social scenario is, then, that precisely the economic growth figures, widely disseminated by the State to show development, generate a growth in expectations, since the population would expect a redistributive effect of the profits generated by such growth, but, in contrast, it finds a fall in the possibilities of satisfying its expectations instead of a growth in them. In other words, in the short term, a situation is generated that is potentially more favorable for a social outburst, given the growth of the relative deprivation gap between popular expectations and the possibilities of satisfaction.

Thus, considering the evidence of social conflict expressed as social struggle and people detained in prison, it is proposed that social progress must be understood as a process towards social cohesion resulting from the reduction of the relative deprivation of socioeconomic conditions of standard of living and quality of life, in such a way as to tend towards a factual reduction of inequality, without there being a generalized or aggregate detriment of such conditions.

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