

Toward a Successful Summit: Exploring the Use of Public Opinion Polls

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Executive summary

On Oct. 15, 2009, the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), Fedesarrollo and the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD), hosted a new think tank brainstorming meeting “Towards a Successful Summit” that represented a starting point for a new hemispheric effort to devise a plan for the Sixth Summit of the Americas (SOA) that will take place in 2012 in Cartagena, Colombia. The central purpose was to provide an ample and timely open space to have a strategic conversation on the optimal way to ensure an unprecedented and successful leaders’ Summit. This implied a clear understanding of the need to achieve the highest standards of efficiency and legitimacy to guarantee that the forthcoming SOA would represent a marked improvement over the five previous Summits.

In order to enhance the democratic relevance of this forthcoming Summit, the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the think tanks and the other participants underscored the need to explore whether the consultation process with civil society and governments throughout the hemisphere could be improved by incorporating the technical capacities of public opinion polling companies that work in the region. This shared idea led to the organization of a video conference between Bogotá and Washington, which was held on Dec. 16, 2009. During this virtual encounter, participants agreed to the creation of a Public Opinion Task Force that will examine the most important information available and consider the potential of formulating a set of new and relevant questions for public opinion polling, which could provide more accountability to the process and supersede the limitations of previous Summits. This will assure the public that this innovative form of multilateral collective action is not only responsive to their needs and expectations but also efficient and concomitant with the essence of democratic governance.

Introduction

The Think Tank Initiative, composed of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), Fedesarrollo and the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD), hosted a series of meetings in 2009 to guide a new hemispheric effort to devise a plan that will ensure a successful Sixth Summit of the Americas (SOA) to take place in 2012 in Cartagena, Colombia. In order to enhance the legitimacy and democratic relevance of the next Summit, the last meetings identified the need to explore whether the consultation process with civil society and governments throughout the hemisphere could be improved by incorporating the technical capacities of public opinion polling companies that work in the region. To pursue this idea, in December 2009, 24 participants from multilateral organizations, governments, think tanks and polling firms gathered at the Organization of American States (OAS) headquarters and others at the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) offices in Bogotá for a video conference (see the Annex for a list of participants).

The video conference aimed to explore and weigh the potential benefits of using public opinion polling as a way to innovate and to improve the efficiency and legitimacy of the forthcoming SOA, which could ensure greater results and impact. This report presents the strengths and weaknesses of this type of collective exercise organized to exchange ideas and share answers to new questions about common needs and desires to advance complex processes of multilateral diplomacy with a goal of achieving higher levels of sustainable human development and strengthening democracy. This report also highlights the inputs provided by the invited professional pollsters as they responded to inquiries formulated by a wide range of stakeholders gathered to participate in this dialogue and sharing the aspiration of defining and establishing the best possible route to meet such a difficult goal. It also offers some caution and reflections related to the confrontation of alternative challenges that the participants in the Public Opinion Task Force (POTF) may encounter in their work.

This meeting report recounts the main aspects of the video conference and discusses the outcomes of the conversation that took place between Bogotá and Washington. The high quality of the ideas exchanged in this meeting as well as its innovative and unprecedented character indeed call for a detailed account of the dialogue to serve as background for the group of participant stakeholders. But first, this report analyzes the main policy issues brought to the fore by the meeting.

Main policy issues and conclusions

Devising a plan for the Sixth SOA was identified as a new challenge at the end of the Bogotá meeting of the Think Tank Initiative in October 2009. This future plan would need to clarify the possible uses of public opinion polling to understand the peoples of the Americas' perception of key hemispheric issues, to

raise awareness, efficiency and legitimacy for the SOA process, and to engage the general public on the main summit themes. As a result, it was agreed that the first step in this direction was to conduct a new meeting to brainstorm around this innovative prospect.

It should be noted that when the Think Tank Initiative started this conversation, its outcome was uncertain. Not only were the promoters of this meeting quite unsure about the outcome of this effort, it was also the case for pollsters and other stakeholders. The Colombian government and the OAS also sought to clarify its goals. They opted for warning against the risk of increasing the quantity of existing data instead of rationalizing the use of the available information. After agreeing to the value of surveys and communicating its intention to carry the official inter-ministerial consultations autonomously at the national level, the Colombian Cancilleria insisted on the need to start learning about previous experiences of public opinion polling for wide public consultations before accepting its validity. The OAS stressed the importance of understanding the dynamics of the Summit process to ensure its connectivity and sustainability by establishing the difference between the process as a whole and the Summit event as such. All recognized that sustained work is indispensable to ensure the continuity between Summits.

The desirability of giving more credibility and legitimacy to the process through this endeavor was underlined, but several participants presented cautionary messages to prevent a potential lack of responsiveness from the governments to the public in order to minimize the frustration of citizens and avoid losing their trust. Also, one main challenge for the Think Tank Initiative will be to collaborate with the OAS to provide a satisfactory analysis of existing public opinion information, and avoid duplicating efforts by collecting information that already exists.

Although public opinion polling has never been used to inform the Summit consultation process, the presentations offered by three professional polling organizations helped to explore ways to access the information required to improve efficiency and generate credibility and accountability for the SOA process. Each of them was amenable to facilitating access to the necessary information about public opinion that stakeholders may desire and require. They provided a thorough list of topics and information packages available in their surveys and archives. Any possible doubts about information vacuums were discussed and resolved. The possible lack of data on elites and leadership mentioned by one of the experts was contradicted by the other pollsters who noted the existence of such data in both a comparative inter-university project of which the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) is part and a research initiative on foreign policy and decision-making that the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica (CIDE) is coordinating from Mexico, which will be implemented in eight different countries.

Overall, the bulk of materials available in pollsters' databases and surveys in addition to that of the OAS collected during the past 15 years (not published yet) represent an enormous body of information that has to be organized and inventoried to determine what is available and what has to be collected. Moreover, it will be necessary to create an order of priorities to serve the different interests of the main stakeholders.

A number of important questions exist for future research. First, what material will the OAS provide to ensure that public expectations will be satisfied and existing frustrations minimized? All data? Only the raw data on the main issues dealt with in previous Summits? Just the policy recommendations from civil society representatives that participated in previous and parallel meetings? Only what is related to the agreements reached by the leaders?

Second, what information does Colombia require as the host country of the Sixth Summit? What other information would the SOA participating member states need? And what information would multilateral organizations require and expect to get?

Third, what type of complementary information should be extracted from the databases of the polling organizations? What new additional information will be indispensable to meet efficiency challenges? What information could diminish the public's mistrust of leaders and their view of the Summits as illegitimate?

This last preoccupation about information requirements began to dissipate once the formal presentations of the main stakeholders and the pollsters were offered.

The dialogue among participants was not only critical but also frank and pertinent regarding several key issues.

First, all saw the need for knowledge and understanding of relative notions and concepts. Terms like the 'Americas', the 'process' or the 'event' were defined and included in the recommendations for clarity in future presentations before the general public. The implied semantic difference between legitimacy and accountability was also made explicit in the conversation. It became clear that for the Summits, legitimacy becomes apparent when leaders assemble to work together on behalf of public interest and improvement in the quality of life for citizens of the hemisphere. Accountability relates to both the ability of those who govern to report honestly on their administration of public goods and the existence of trust from the constituents on the commitments and capabilities of the elected officials to respond optimally to public needs and expectations.

Second, participants emphasized the importance of the SOA both on sub-regional and hemispheric levels.

Third, worries about the urgency to eliminate the 'culture of mistrust' were expressed and all agreed on the need to address it.

Fourth, undesired outcomes of polling were considered, including the risk that it could produce damaging accounts that could put into question the honesty and transparency of Summit leaders.

As the proceedings unfolded in a very frank and respectful way, participants agreed to create a POTF. This task force will launch a set of innovative ideas and an unprecedented course of action to provide the SOA process with a new direction for confronting its crucial objectives and goals.

A balance sheet of strengths and weaknesses of this virtual meeting is difficult to draw. The opportunity and frankness that characterized this collective exercise allowed for a change from an uncertain and somewhat tense climate into one of recognition and acceptance of the creation of an unprecedented and transitory resource, the POTF. This possibility will enable the formulation of guidelines needed to decide on the use and directions allotted to the inventory of accumulated information before entering into the final preparation of a strategy that will provide the Sixth Summit of the Americas scheduled in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, with its own accent of efficiency and general legitimacy. However, uncertain and confusing views about devising a strategy to achieve credibility, legitimacy and accountability should be clarified.

The POTF should now work to implement a new approach in multilateral political action and inter-institutional co-operation to improve inter-American democratic governance.

Detailed account of the meeting

The convener and executive director of FOCAL, Carlo Dade, opened the conversation by proposing that the continuation of the think tank involvement in the SOA endeavour be based on the examination of new ideas to improve the process with particular emphasis on the consultation issue and the possibility of using public opinion surveys for this purpose based on two simple sets of questions:

First, can public opinion surveys be utilized fruitfully for developing the Summit process? If yes, how can they be used? If not, are there some other means or ways to employ them within the OAS or with other institutional components of the inter-American system?

Second, if public opinion surveys can inform the Summit process, exactly what is required? What are the possibilities? What can be done? What needs are to be considered? How do we develop a framework for going ahead?

After thanking the Government of Canada and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for their support in the organization of this meeting and all the participants for their presence and interest, the convener relinquished the floor to the co-chair in Bogotá.

Guillermo Perry of Fedesarrollo started his intervention with a summary of the main points that generated a broad consensus in the previous Bogotá meeting. He stressed the shared goal of striving for a Summit with its own accent (*su propio sello*) that would make a noticeable contrast with previous Summits in terms of its efficient organization and focus on a few key issues or topics that clearly reflect official responsiveness to the needs of the citizens of the region. Additionally, the selected topics would also reflect important international dimensions. The Summit of leaders could also discuss and negotiate potential agreements that would inform and support whatever needs to be done at the national level.

Then he mentioned other ideas that resulted from the encounter in Bogotá: a succinct Summit with a one-day meeting of state leaders and one prior day of panels on selected topics with strong civil society and private sector participation and the involvement of some of the leaders—a practice similar to the methodology employed in meetings of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The idea emerged because participating civil society and private sector representatives have experienced considerable frustration when their inputs in previous parallel meetings were mostly unrelated to the crux of the Summit. He also stressed the need to end with a simple and clear declaration instead of presenting countless recommendations and action plans that cannot be implemented. He finished this introductory summary by reaffirming the commitment of the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to these ideas, along with the importance of initiating the consultation process by collecting the opinion of the citizens—which could also help in selecting a few relevant issues or topics—even before consulting the specialized NGOs that may be invited to participate because of their expertise and knowledge. All this, according to him, would allow for a much more efficient process of consultation. Finally, he excused the involuntary absence of the Colombian Vice-minister of Foreign Affairs who had been enthusiastically involved in this process but could not attend the meeting. However, he mentioned she had sent a message to the participants, which was presented by the director of the Office of Summits of the Ministry.

The chairperson in Washington, D.C. congratulated the Colombian co-chair for his clear and concise summary of the meeting and invited everyone to participate for the remainder of the agenda. The representatives of the Colombian government and of the OAS were asked to present their points of view on the possible use of polling for the Summit consultation process. Then he proposed that the three representatives from the polling groups offer their respective presentations and opinions on this matter before a general discussion.

Following this suggestion, the representative of the Colombian Cancillería presented what she considered to be the most significant thoughts of the Vice-minister's message. She maintained that Colombia recognizes that this consultation process provides important insight that reflects the complex actual reality of the hemisphere as expressed in the diversity of economic and political models throughout the region. She also recognized the importance of public

opinion surveys because they faithfully reflect the citizen perceptions and feelings about democracy in the hemisphere. Consequently, nations should be receptive to opinions emanating from the public and also should acknowledge and value the participation of diverse actors and stakeholders in the preparation of this Summit. She remarked that because this process is in its preliminary stage, it is important to identify and explore what types of consultation should be employed with civil society that can have both an internal and a regional impact. She closed her remarks by reiterating that Colombia is interested in utilizing public opinion polling for the Summit. Moreover, she recognized their lack of knowledge and practical expertise and expressed an official interest in learning about the existence of significant previous experiences in countries such as Canada or the United States or within the action range of the OAS.

The Director of the SOA Secretariat informed participants about previous internal discussions that the Summit Secretariat and FOCAL had had to contextualize their past experiences in the consultation with social actors (a term that he prefers to use instead of civil society because it covers the main segments of society: indigenous groups, afro-descendants, youth, women, labour unions, think tanks and academia, parliamentarians, media). In general terms, he mentioned that the result of a very intense consultation agenda in more than 20 meetings, seminars and virtual forums online for Trinidad and Tobago had yielded 450 policy recommendations and 700 comments only on the Summit themes. Then he presented five generic objectives that his office has for the use and presentation of this large body of inputs for the consultation process:

- 1) Provide ample opportunities for discussion of the main topics that citizens feel governments should address (the essence of the Summit process).
- 2) Create mechanisms for participation by social actors, which enable them to make recommendations and exchange ideas, experiences, perspectives and best practices for the benefit of subsequent negotiations.
- 3) Open spaces to formulate ideas or concepts that could be translated into projects for the consideration of development agencies, governments and multilaterals that are working with citizens.
- 4) Promote and expand networks or contacts in areas of mutual interest and then come to forums in which they can be articulated with the governments into the Summit process.
- 5) Enhance dialogue between constituents and their governments to minimize the frustration of civil society leaders.

Due to the extensive material collected and keeping in mind the challenge to respond, analyze and address it in a logical order of priorities for the public, he then moved to ask the polling firms and the Colombian Foreign Ministry for their thoughts about the way they can facilitate the systematization and organization of

this enormous body of information to give it a sense of validity and credibility. According to him, after 15 years of Summit process evolution, there are 1,027 paragraphs of consensus and one third of them are mandates or commitments that need to be organized. Further, if the focus for 2010 is an appropriate implementation of the Fifth Summit, instead of getting ready for one that is still more than two years ahead, it would be optimal to define the priorities of the existing mandates which still need further attention and additionally what is to be done with the information gathered during the last 18 to 24 months, as opposed to generating new information too quickly. He emphasized the importance of the process rather than that of the event as such to indicate the convenience of working first on the organization and optimal presentation of the materials that have resulted from the many years of the Summit process and then move into the preparation of the Sixth Summit in Cartagena de Indias. This would allow presenting the Colombian government with updated information on the status of the hemispheric agenda in light of the real standing of human development indicators.

Then he was asked by the chairperson to answer the question formulated by the representative of the Colombian Foreign Ministry in terms of the existence and availability of information on the previous use of public opinion polling to facilitate the Summit process. He responded that according to his knowledge public opinion had not been used for this purpose before, but mentioned the existence of the Summit Virtual Platform, a device created in September 2008 to offer the public, the OAS Secretariat, the member states and the stakeholders in general, with an opportunity to broaden the spectrum of information and outreach to citizens. He closed his remarks by informing participants about the launch of a second phase of this mechanism that may even include an interface with public opinion pollsters.

This presentation was followed by those of the polling companies that attended this meeting. The representative from Latinobarómetro (a survey implemented in 18 countries of the Americas) spoke from Bogotá explaining how she understood the role of polls in evaluating citizen perceptions. Citing Giovanni Sartori, she talked about the imbalance between abundant data and a lack of theory to interpret it. For her, although being indispensable, polls by themselves are only a means to gather information about peoples' perceptions and expectations that must be used to analyze the reality behind the data. She opted for a balance between testing and leadership, between demand for information and what is required to implement policies to meet the public expectations and satisfy their needs. She argued for the implementation of studies using existing data to help governments confront the harsh reality before moving blindly into the collection of more unnecessary information. Alternatively, she proposed to have a look at the existing databases to see what they contain and perhaps then decide on the need to collect additional data. She offered her assistance in this effort and ended with a cautionary note on the knowledge gap on elites in Latin America that makes it difficult to contrast the perceptions and opinions of leaders with those of other citizens.

The expert from Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) followed. She based her presentation on what she believes are the main features that make this project and its principal output, the Americas Barometer, unique. She noted that LAPOP is a regional endeavour, directed and co-ordinated at Vanderbilt University and implemented in 26 countries of the hemisphere. She emphasized the existence of large samples of a minimum of 1,500 respondents in each country that are interviewed in person every two years. The next survey will be implemented in 2010, the data will be ready by May and the reports will be available by the end of summer. She also emphasized that they use the most advanced technology for data collection, which enables them to work in different languages, to transfer data into other formats and to grant public access to their questionnaires for revisions, additions and changes for the sake of transparency and methodological improvement. Aside from their interest in experimentation, they are involved in larger comparative projects with other universities (Salamanca, Princeton, Laval) on several topics (parliamentary elites, race, ethnicity, federalism in the Americas). Through these projects, LAPOP has developed an ample consortium of academic partners in different countries where they work. This asset offers the possibility of modifying the number of variables and indicators included in the surveys and allow them to break down the data in order to issue concise reports on specific topics at different levels (regional, national, local), to deepen and determine the structural character of their analysis (economic, political, social, cultural) and to compare or prepare case studies for the member countries of the Summit process that may need them.

The representative from CIDE in Mexico made the third and final presentation of the professional pollsters. She presented their regional project called *The Americas and the World* that is centred on issues related to hemispheric foreign policy and international relations. In 2010, the survey will be implemented in eight countries: Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Peru, and beginning next year, Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. Their samples of no less than 1,200 interviews per country reflect the opinion of the citizens and the main components of the national elites. They include perceptions on political identity, foreign policy objectives and threats to national and regional security, multilateral organizations, and treaties in Latin America, North America, Asia and China. She explained that although this is a co-operative venture co-ordinated in Mexico, the different members have their own autonomy and funding sources but share the methodological approach. She finished by presenting a list of topics contained in their surveys that can answer questions of interest for the organization of the Summit: the 'new left' in the region; political change in Chile with the return of the right; possible change of attitudes toward the United States under the Obama administration; the impact of the international financial crisis; the impact of Chavismo in the region; perspectives for the role of new actors, such as G-20 and ALBA; perceptions about the future of integration and existence of regional fragmentation; agreements or disagreements with governmental democratic performance; the Mexico bi-centennial commemoration and the status of attitudes toward Spain and the

United States as the new power; toward free trade and the existence of one or several Americas.

After these three presentations, two questions were asked to the pollsters:

- 1) To what extent do they feel that there is enough information for reprocessing or reanalysis to provide an improved tool for implementing the consultation process?
- 2) Is there a need to execute additional public opinion polling? This question is based on the idea to learn more about what people would like the presidents to address in the Summits in order to increase their legitimacy.

These questions were complemented with a comment provided by one of the participants in Bogotá. He expressed his satisfaction with the high quality of the previous expositions and agreed with the three pollsters with respect to the validity and convenience of consulting citizen views and expectations on the presidential Summits: Latinobarómetro was clear in underlining the importance of signalling and interpreting the needs and demands of citizens; LAPOP in emphasizing the value of asking people their perceptions and feelings; and finally, CIDE in stressing the relevance of giving a voice to the public. After this, he rephrased the key questions already formulated by the co-chair with the intention of reiterating the central purpose of this meeting, which is to bring together the most capable pollsters in the hemisphere and ascertain their willingness to share an ample regional approach by asking the same or similar questions to generate comparable, objective and valid information on the expectations and desires of the people, along with the respondent's confidence about governmental commitment and responsiveness to their demands through public policy measures. According to him, the lack of time in a meeting of this nature suggests the need for additional spaces and task forces to continue with this conversation of stakeholders.

The chairman in Washington valued this summary that sparked more comments and ideas from the participants. The expert from Latinobarómetro mentioned the possibility of preparing and including sets of questions to be used by pollsters and cautioned about the risk of using the term 'the Americas' when it is clear that the public does not understand what it really means and even participants ignore if there is a Latin America as such. She said that one simply cannot ask about a concept that is not out there. Each nation in the region has its own history and idiosyncrasies. That is why she is not at ease with the idea of collecting data from an assumed uniform context when its main feature is diversity. Nevertheless, in her opinion, differentiated regional surveys can be implemented but it could be a much better idea to create a Public Opinion Task Force (POTF) composed of pollsters willing to ask comparable questions on a regular basis. She expressed her confidence in the success of this idea that later on could be backed by many other pollsters, newspapers and media that, aside from helping to reduce costs, may be interested in joining. She said it would be possible to start this collective

work in the POTF with a consultation process framing a set of new questions (even open-ended ones) specifically around the Summit, including several ways to test and rephrase them in 2010, 2011 and again in 2012 depending on the results. This POTF could also be comprised of a small group of experts that would meet to share their thoughts, experience and account of what they believe is the most important and pertinent existing body of information to be collected before bringing their findings and recommendations to the table for final decision making. She finished by offering her availability to participate in this effort.

The officer from the Colombian Cancillería reiterated her concern with the bulk of existing information and recommended the careful revision of what already exists to assess what is necessary; only then should the POTF move to collect what is really missing. Then the host from the IAD confessed his uneasiness with the insistence of using polls for every imaginable purpose. In his opinion, it would be preferable to allow the elected public officials to describe what they have in mind to respond to citizens' expectations. There is plenty of information available at present within the countless existing surveys and policy organizations. Other participants agreed with him and insisted on the importance of looking at the existing data before producing more data.

After agreeing with these remarks, another expert complemented these views by saying that in addition to understanding what 'the Americas' really means, it is also crucial to know about the Summits, their actions, achievements and perspectives, and to know how citizens perceive the region differently from the leaders. The representative from CIDE intervened again to insist on the convenience of comparing the opinion of the public with that of the leadership in the region. The chairman underlined the importance of capturing the views of all the countries of the Americas given the hemispheric essence of the Summit process. Another participant asked if the Summits were designed to represent the views of the public or of the leaders. The co-chair intervened again to sum up two key points that emerged from the conversation:

First, there is a lot of information on what people feel and think about many topics; whoever will help the leaders organize an agenda to optimize the use of this body of information will have to take that into account.

Second, it is pointless to repeat the same questions and preferable to include new and specific ones that will provide added value in line with the goals of the process. Some interesting examples would be: According to the people, is there any use for this type of leaders' meetings? Do they feel that there are difficult issues to deal with because these are manifested very differently among countries? Are there issues that require common attention to be solved?

He concluded by signalling the skepticism of some of the participants. He asked whether they agreed or disagreed that if anything additional could be done in order to learn more about the views of the public on the Summit, it would be to ask them these types of questions. As a response, participants reiterated that

polling could be used as a resource to educate public opinion on something concrete. They also said that perhaps it would be possible to use polls to educate more people on the Summit by broadcasting this information through the media. Therein, the need to think about the kind of questions that should be asked was emphasized. Thus, a set of good questions could be given to pollsters throughout the hemisphere and then they could promote large scale media coverage and ample debate. It was agreed that this would be the best way to put the Summit on the agenda and help legitimize it among the public. Nevertheless, concerns about the intense mistrust of leaders in Latin America were shared and a cautionary note on the importance of taking this into account when testing the new questions was made. Moving forward on these ideas, the representative from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) suggested that another good use of polling would be to commit the presidents to follow-up on their agreements after the Summits. She informed the group that NED is supporting a couple of projects that are looking at what happens after agreements are reached at the Summit and mentioned that it appears presidents are not committed to the implementation of these agreements. This idea was well taken and seen as a good thought that could turn into an instrument of compliance, accountability and transparency for the process.

Before closing the meeting, the chairperson in Washington asked Bogotá participants for their final thoughts. One of them summarized the second part of the conversation, underscoring the general agreement regarding the plethora of material for the POTF to use. He repeated that an inventory of the most important information available was needed before a set of new questions designed by the pollsters involved in this phase of the process could be formulated. This consensus offered the possibility of a successful termination of the meeting. The co-chair added two additional points: 1) his understanding is that the use of these new questions by the POTF can truly be decisive for placing the Summit on the agenda; 2) there is an opportunity to provide more accountability for the process by assuring people that answers to these new questions would be continuously reviewed and rephrased when necessary before informing the public. Hence this innovation would facilitate recognition that this new form of multilateral collective action supersedes the limitations associated with the traditional approach to public problem-solving. This, for him, could be tested in an additional module.

The Washington participants made three final interventions before the host closed the meeting. The first participant expressed relief regarding the decision to not conduct more polls but rather use those available. There was an offer made to the group to share two major surveys conducted by the OAS that contain valuable data and recommendations. Results of these surveys could not only curtail the frustration of those that have not seen the impact of their inputs, but also provide linkages among the Summits, as well as the added value of education of the public that was emphasized earlier. This idea could also benefit some people from the OAS who still think that the work surrounding the April 2009 Summit in Trinidad and Tobago will be overwhelming again with the arrival of the

Cartagena de Indias Summit in 2012, thus leaving little time for the organization to carry on with its inter-Summit work that is so crucial for continuity. Then a second participant explained that the existing concern was not with the Summit's legitimacy: the fact that 32 to 35 leaders assemble provides sufficient legitimacy. Rather, he sees potential for public opinion polling as a mechanism for educating the public about the Summit process and what nations can accomplish by working together. He agreed though that promises were made that were not acted upon. This idea was complemented by noting that this concern was more an issue of accountability than one of legitimacy. Finally, one other participant included an additional warning about the risk of polls producing an undesired and damaging outcome by questioning Summit leaders' legitimacy.

The convener thanked everybody for their presence, interest and contributions. He acknowledged the value of this meeting because it helped answer the most pressing questions and refined the initial thoughts raised at the end of the brainstorming session in Bogotá. With this gathering, participants achieved a better understanding of the use of polling for the consultation component and for the Summit process in general. With the ideas generated, it became possible to establish an appropriate course of action to continue the work of the Think Tank Initiative. He emphasized the work of POTF as being the key element that, along with new questions, will allow for the possibility to share information with the media and national polling firms to enhance the legitimacy of the process. He mentioned the availability of some funds for this purpose and offered to follow-up with all participants on the results of the POTF's work.

Gabriel Murillo is a Colombian scholar in political science who dedicated most of his professional career to academic work at the prestigious University of Los Andes in Bogotá. In addition to teaching several graduate and undergraduate courses in theoretical political issues, he directed countless research projects on topics related to democratic strengthening wrote and edited several books and articles published in different countries. He is recognized among the main promoters of Political Science as a discipline in his country. His professional activity has taken him to almost all of Latin America and the Caribbean, the United States, Canada and Europe, among other countries, where he has lectured, served as a visiting professor, participated in comparative research projects, founded and worked with international networks, editorial boards, expert advisory groups, and consulted for different multilateral organizations and NGOs. Presently he is an international consultant in issues related to democracy-building and is an associate of Fundación Presencia in Bogotá.

Annex

List of Participants

	Name	Organization
Bogotá		
1.	Adriana Maldonado	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia
2.	Diana Moya	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia
3.	Gabriel Murillo	Fundación Presencia
4.	Guillermo Perry	Fedesarrollo
5.	Marta Lagos	Latinobarómetro
Washington, D.C.		
1.	Alex Kerchner	New Democratic Institute (NDI)
2.	Alex Sutton	International Republican Institute (IRI)
3.	Ana Gonzalez	Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE)
4.	Andrea Montilla	Organization of American States (OAS)
5.	Carlo Dade	Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL)
6.	Carlos Muñoz	International Republican Institute (IRI)
7.	David Morris	Organization of American States (OAS)
8.	Fernando Flores	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
9.	Graeme Clark	Canadian Ambassador to the OAS.
10.	Ian Brodie	Inter-American Development Bank
11.	Jane They	Organization of American States (OAS)
12.	Lesley Burns	Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL)
13.	Liz Zechmeister	Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)
14.	Miriam Kornblith	National Endowment for Democracy (NED)
15.	Peter Hakim	Inter-American Dialogue (IAD)
16.	Robert Schwartz	U.S. Department of State
17.	Shannon Dalton	U.S. Department of State
18.	Vanessa Reilly	U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)