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FORTALECEMOS  
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DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING  
DEMOCRACIES  
IN LATIN AMERICA

JULY 2020

# Image of power Power of an image

REPORT ON PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL RATINGS  
MAY-JUNE, 2020



## Summary

After three months of strict social isolation measures, the governments of the region, considered as the new “epicenter” of the pandemic, are facing increasing demands due to the health, social and economic crisis. How have levels of civic support evolved in this context?

In response to this inquiry, this report monitors presidential image and analyzes public opinion surveys, carried out between **May and June in 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean**, and compares them with the first four months of this year.

Until April, data suggested a scenario that strengthened overall presidential image and supported its management of COVID-19.

However, **May-June began to show signs of deterioration in 65% of the surveyed countries**, even though the levels of support continue to be higher than those registered at the beginning of the year.

As will be discussed throughout this report, these movements cannot be attributed in a linear way to the effective control of the pandemic or to the depth of restriction measures, but rather to the interaction of a set of factors in which the expectations in the short, medium and long term play a role. In order to analyze the effects of these dynamics on public opinion, this document offers a case study of six countries: **Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Mexico.**

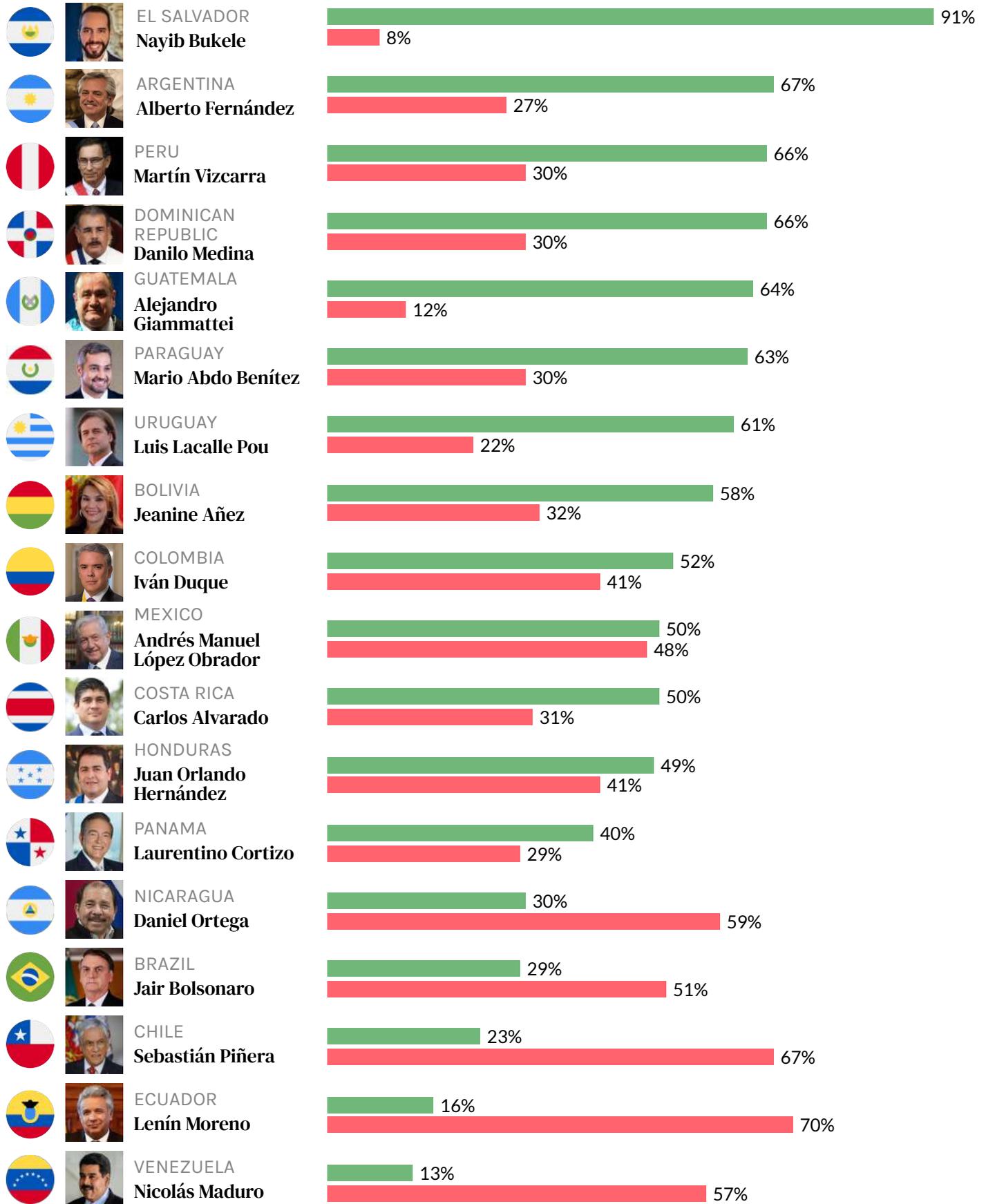
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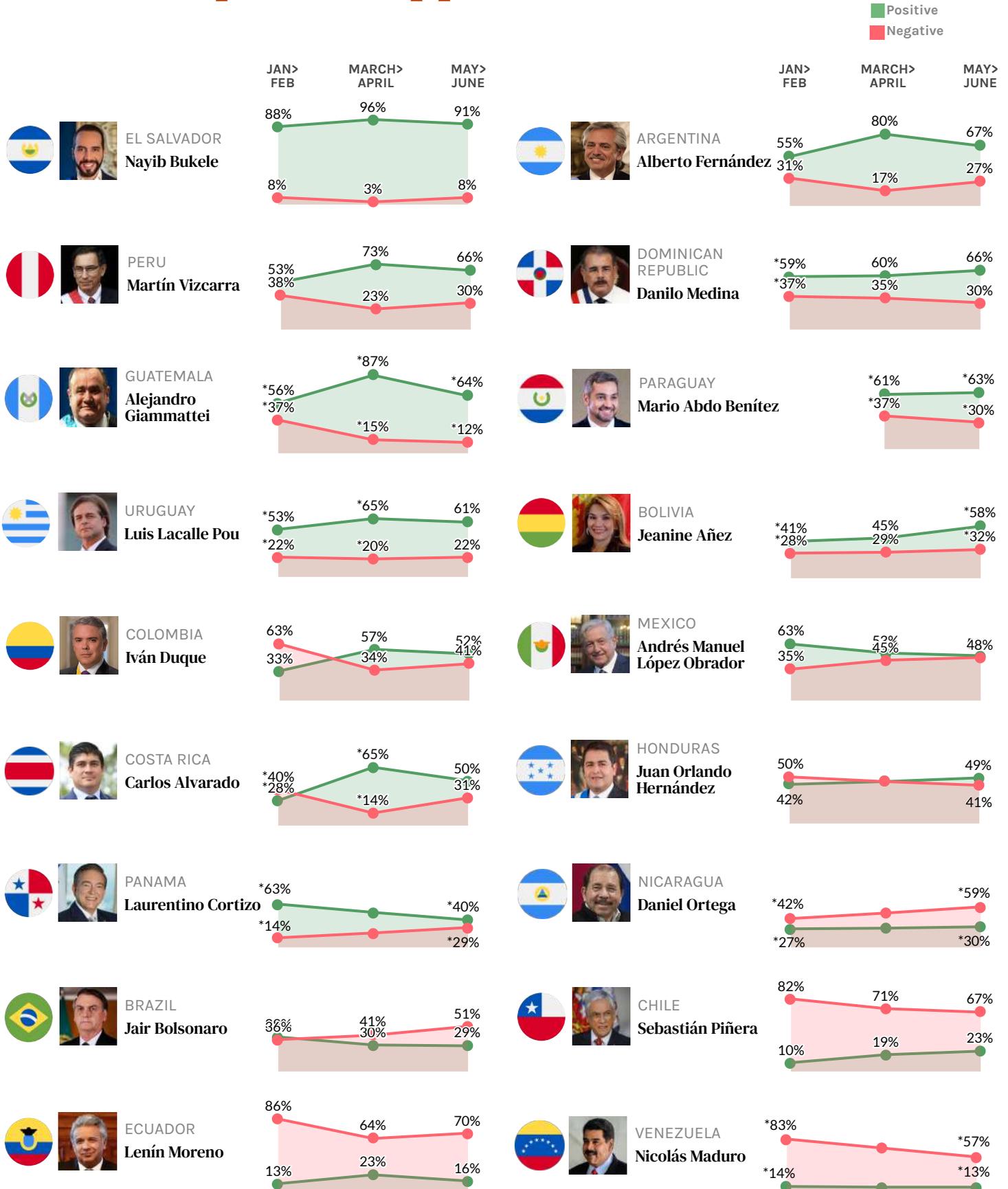
# Ranking of presidential image

May - June 2020

Positive  
Negative



# Since May this year, 65% of the presidents have lost public support



Source: author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between May and June. The empty points correspond to periods when no data is available. \*Based on a single data source. To see the sources: [click here](#)

# Presidential support 10% higher in Central than South America

May - June 2020



Source: author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between May and June 2020. To see the sources: [click here](#)



ARGENTINA

# The image of Fernández begins to show signs of decay



President Alberto Fernández has

**67%**

**APPROVAL**

according to an average of sources surveyed by Directorio Legislativo\* between May and June 2020

Even though Fernández maintains approval ratings higher than those recorded at the beginning of this year, public opinion measurements are beginning to show clear signs of wear. Repeated extensions of the quarantine, concern regarding the state of the economy and an increasingly tense relationship with the opposition place public opinion well below the 80% that he reached in April.

## Evolution of COVID-19

The country is experiencing the peak of the disease, which jumped from 5,500 cases to more than 65,000 between May and June. The abrupt growth of cases generated debates on the capacity of the health system, which as of June 30 already registered over 50% occupancy level in intensive care units. Additionally, it forced the government to take exceptional measures in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, in which more than 90% of cases are concentrated.

## Segmented and regional reopening

More than three months from the start of the quarantine, and after repeated extensions, authorities are concerned about signs of social relaxation in the areas most affected by COVID-19. Even though the national government formed a common front with the city and the province of Buenos Aires, in recent weeks there has been increased pressure from sectors that criticize the renewal of the quarantine.

## Tensions in Congress

In mid-May, after almost two months of discussions on the measures to adapt legislative activity to the new reality, Congress began to hold virtual plenary sessions. Tensions between the ruling party and the opposition, particularly visible in the Senate, are hindering the construction of a legislative agenda and have delayed the government's plans to create a tax on large fortunes.

## Beyond COVID-19

Fernández faced criticism and protest prompted by the decision to intervene and expropriate one of the main cereal companies in the country after it fell into default. The unrest generated by the measure, followed by two adverse court rulings, led the president to change his strategy and propose alternative solutions.



# Quarantine extension erodes Vizcarra's approval



President Martín Vizcarra has

**66% APPROVAL**  
according to an average of sources surveyed by Directorio Legislativo\* between May and June 2020

With 285,000 COVID-19 cases as of June 30, Peru became the second hardest hit country by the pandemic after Brazil. The quarantine, in effect since March 15, severely affected a population that registers an informal work rate of over 70%. In this context, the government began the reopening of economic activities while facing one of the worst forecasts for contraction in the region.

## Burnout effect of the quarantine

Peru began obligatory isolation on March 15 with strong restrictions on movement. For informal employees, who at the end of 2019 represented 71.1% of the population according to CIE-Perucámaras, the measure meant a sustained loss of family income. In this framework, Vizcarra initiated an economic reopening plan and announced the end of compulsory isolation from July 1, with the exception of seven regions.

## Reopening strategy

Urged by the profound impact of social isolation on the economy, Peru began the implementation of a four-phase reopening plan in May. In the first two phases, the government detailed the economic activities that could be resumed “behind closed doors” with a regional segmentation criterion. Phase 3 started on July 1 will simultaneously bring about the end of obligatory isolation.

## Tense relations in Congress

The legislative agenda was focused on the health emergency, predominantly bills presented by the Executive branch. Although Congress had delegated broad powers to the president in March, the lack of government representation made it difficult to build a regulatory agenda. This situation became evident as Congress passed a constitutional reform that eliminates the president's immunity.

## The worst recession in South America

The World Bank estimates that Peru's GDP could fall to 12% in 2020, a calculation that contrasts the 3.2% growth projected last January. If these projections come true, the contraction of the Peruvian economy would be the worst of South America. The president of the Central Reserve Bank considered that the country will be in a position to reach the pre-pandemic indicators only in the first quarter of 2022.

# Duque centers discourse around reactivation, but approval falls strongly in June



President Iván Duque has

**52%** **APPROVAL**  
according to an average of sources surveyed by Directorio Legislativo\* between May and June 2020

With an apparently controlled epidemiological situation when compared to neighboring countries, Duque has focused discourse on the gradual recovery of “productive life,” while maintaining that citizens must learn to live with the pandemic. The effects of the quarantine, which began to relax mid-May, were most strongly felt in the increase in the unemployment rate, which according to official data already exceeds 21%.

## Response to COVID-19

With almost 92,000 infections at the end of June, Colombia has a lower mortality rate than its neighbors and is one of the countries that has carried out the most diagnostic tests. However, the emergence of outbreaks located in the Amazon region and in some parts of the Pacific coast, has highlighted the imbalances in health coverage throughout the territory.

## Economic reopening

Since May, and with each extension of isolation, the government has authorized the reactivation of different economic activities with a regional-based approach. However, flexibilization was accompanied by much debate. The agglomerations caused by the “days without value-added tax” fueled the demand of the mayor of Bogotá to return to a strict quarantine.

## Bogotá vs. Medellín

With the administration of gradual measures in the hands of the mayors, the counterpoints between the national government and the head of the city of Bogotá, Claudia López, are far from appeasing. The lifting of the quarantine in the capital began weeks later than in the rest of Colombia’s cities. Meanwhile, Duque highlights Medellín’s digital policy to control the virus and further the city’s advanced reopening measures.

## Legislative agenda

The limitations of Congress to meet virtually, along with the powers that the president acquires when declaring a social, economic and ecological emergency, have concentrated decision making processes in the Executive branch. However, after the legislative recess, it could move forward with electoral, judicial and labor reforms, a royalty law and a prior consultation law, while negotiating support to guarantee its approval.



# Image of AMLO continues to fall while contagions increase



President López Obrador has

**50% APPROVAL**  
according to an average of sources surveyed by Directorio Legislativo\* between May and June 2020

May-June confirmed the decline in approval, already seen since the beginning of the year. Amid criticism of the health and economic strategy, AMLO's image hit its lowest point - 47% - when the rate of infections began to exceed 5,000 cases per day. However, with the reopening of economic activities, he achieved a rebound that brought him closer to the levels of support he had in 2018.

## Response to COVID-19

On May 23, the "safe distance" measures came to an end and president Andrés Manuel López Obrador resumed his tours around the country. The relaxation of social isolation measures at a time of exponential spread of COVID-19 had been discouraged by health authorities. However, the government decided to prioritize the reactivation of the economy. The World Bank estimates that GDP could contract up to 8.7% in 2020.

## Economic reopening strategy

In May, the government presented its de-escalation strategy for the gradual reactivation of economic and social activities. The third phase, which began to be implemented in June, includes the application of a traffic light system with 4 stages applied at the departmental level. Most jurisdictions are at the red and yellow level, but the impact is uneven from one region to another with a focus on Mexico City and the State of Mexico.

## Social indicators

According to the Inegi Occupation and Employment Survey, one of the consequences of recovery in the informal sector was the reduction of the employment rate from 4.7 to 4.2% between April and May. An opposite trend is seen in formal employment, which in May alone fell by 1.6 million jobs. The government expects this loss to begin reversing as of July.

## Fight against organized crime

On June 26, Mexico's City secretary of public security, Omar García Harfuch, suffered an attack by an armed group in which three people lost their lives. The action was attributed to the Jalisco Nueva Generación cartel and followed by the arrest of some of its principal economic operators.

# Bolsonaro softens his confrontational style, but disapproval rate continues to rise



President Jair Bolsonaro has

# 51%

## DISAPPROVAL

according to an average of sources surveyed by Directorio Legislativo\* between May and June 2020

While the growth of COVID-19 makes Brazil the second-most affected country, the president calls for reopening, straining relationships with governors. His support base still appears stable, but disapproval rates increased by 10 points. Repeated changes in the health ministry and allegations of official misconduct turned out to be detrimental to the president, who is now trying to soften his confrontational style in dealing with the opposition.

### Controversies over COVID-19 data

In early June, the Ministry of Health was the focus of intense debate after announcing that it would only report daily epidemiological statistics, instead of accumulated figures. The measure was interpreted by the opposition as an attempt to hide the rates of infections and deaths at the point of greatest impact of the disease. Soon after, the measure was annulled by the Federal Supreme Court.

### Crisis in the Ministry of Health

Nelson Teich lasted barely a month as head of the Ministry of Health. His hasty resignation in May was due to differences with the president over the health strategy. Eduardo Pazuello, the third minister since the beginning of the pandemic, is ex-military with no experience in health. According to Datafolha, support for sanitary measures fell from 71% under former Minister Luiz H. Mandetta to 53%.

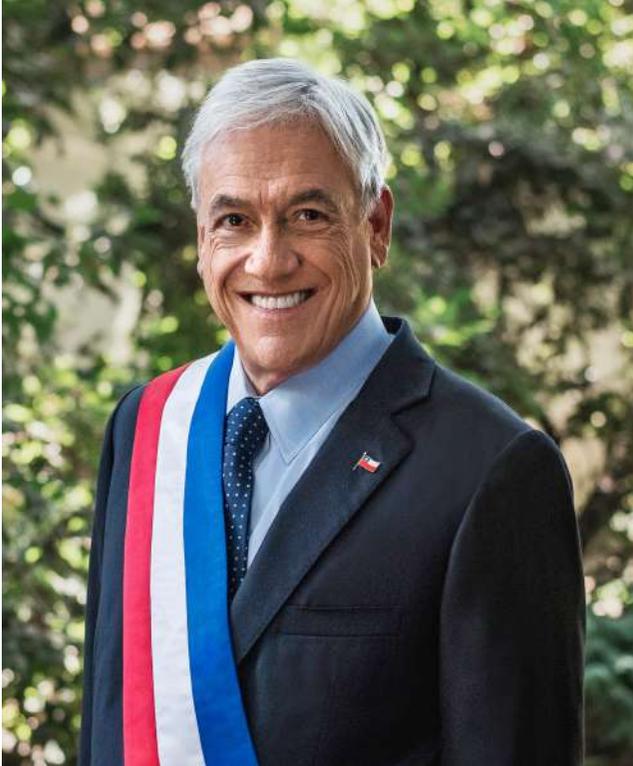
### Bolsonaro's interference in police

In May, a video was leaked that committed Bolsonaro in an alleged interference with the work of the Federal Police (PF). Previously, the former justice minister, Sergio Moro, had reported that the president wanted to place a person of his trust at the head of the PF to request intelligence reports.

### Approaching the Congress

In an attempt to consolidate the support of the pivotal block "Centrão" in Congress, Bolsonaro granted the management of the National Fund for the Development of Education to the Progressive Party and the Bank of the Northeast to the Liberal Party. In May, the Congress had enacted a key constitutional amendment that enables an exceptional budget regime.

# Piñera maintains image rebound achieved at the beginning of the pandemic



President Sebastián Piñera has

**23% APPROVAL**  
according to an average of sources surveyed by Directorio Legislativo\* between May and June 2020

Despite criticism for the handling of the quarantine, which triggered the resignation of the health minister, Piñera managed to sustain the slight improvement in support level achieved between March and April. Meanwhile, he is negotiating a plan to reactivate the economy with some sectors of the opposition. According to World Bank estimations, the country's GDP could contract up to 4.3% this year.

## Response to COVID-19

Chile remains one of the 10 countries most affected by the pandemic, not only due to the number of cases that reached 230,000 as of June 30, but also because of the contagion rate per 100,00 inhabitants. The criticisms of the strategy of regional dynamic quarantines and the controversy generated by the COVID-19 death registry halted mid-June with the resignation of the Minister of Health, Jaime Mañalich, to be replaced by Enrique Paris.

## Emergency Plan

In mid-June, the government managed to agree with three opposition parties on an emergency plan that includes a 24-month fiscal package, the protection of family income and measures to revive the economy and employment. The agreement includes the creation of a special fund of USD 12 billion to be financed with debt issuance and Treasury transfers, which must be approved by Congress.

## Legislative agenda

Within the framework of the agreements reached between the ruling party and the opposition, Congress passed two bills presented by the Executive branch: one involved the increase of the Emergency Family Income, which was one of the main demands of the opposition during negotiations. The other, concerned the creation of a benefit for independent workers. The government also presented a bill that reinforces unemployment insurance.

## Changes in the cabinet

The resignation of the Minister of Health was not the only change in the cabinet since the start of the pandemic. There were also reshuffles in the General Secretariat of the Presidency, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the State Bank. Some of these changes could respond to the need to strengthen communication between the opposition and the Legislative branch.

# Methodological notes

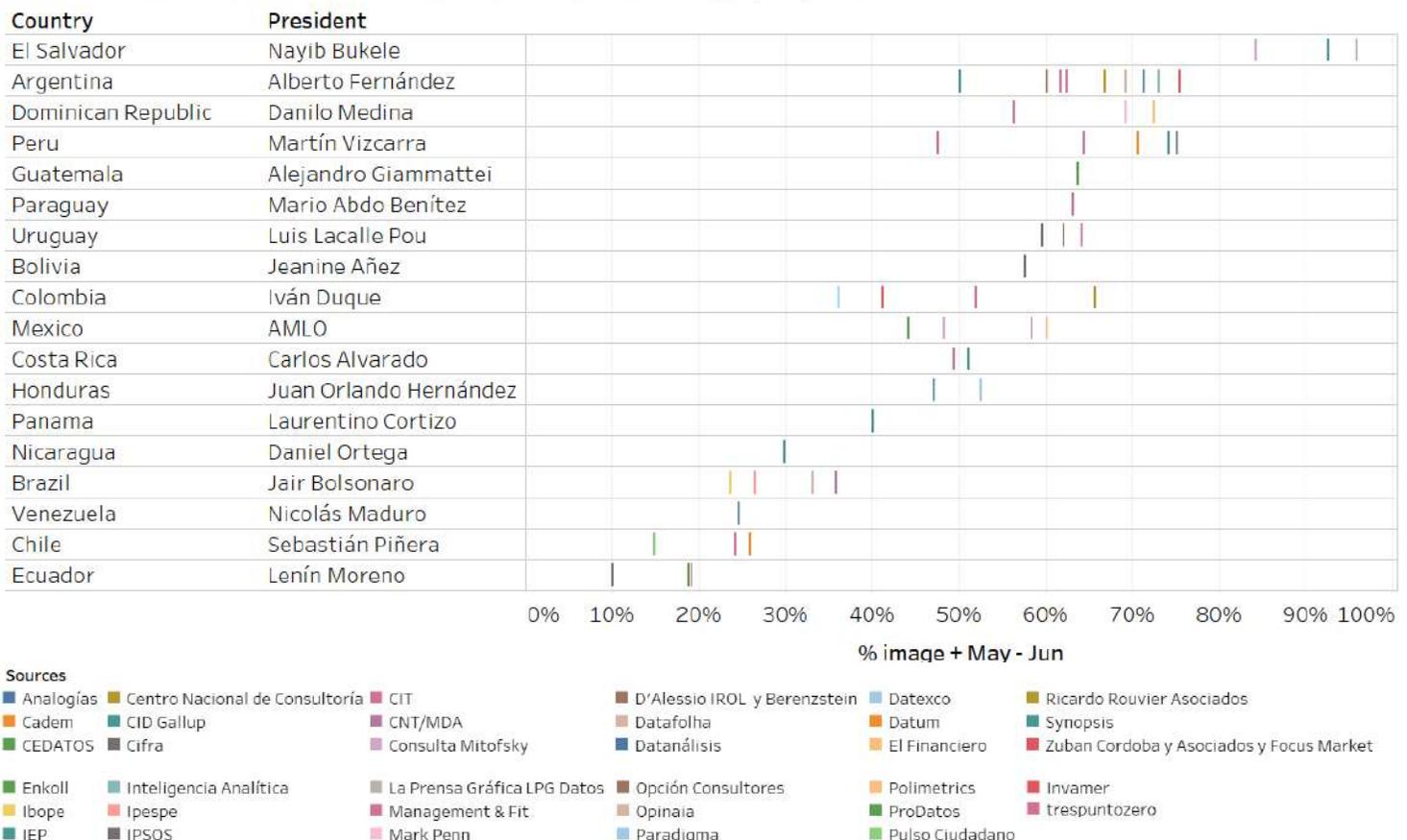
May - June 2020

This monitoring of presidential image is based on simple average calculations of approval rating surveys developed in each country between May and June 2020. The different data sources are not weighted according to the methodology used, the sample size or the surveyor. It includes measurements of the level of approval of the president, level of approval of the government's handling of COVID-19, presidential image and level of approval of the administration. The averages for the May-June period have been compared with those of the previous two quarters, using the same methodology.

While the goal is to average multiple data sources, compliance is conditioned by the availability of information. For this reason, all cases where figures are based on a single data source per period have been clearly identified.

In some cases, a considerable level of dispersion has been detected between one measurement and another. For more information, Tables 1 and 2 - also available in an interactive version - gather the data sources collected in the period from May to June.

Chart 1. Variation in the measurement of Presidents' positive images , May-Jun 2020

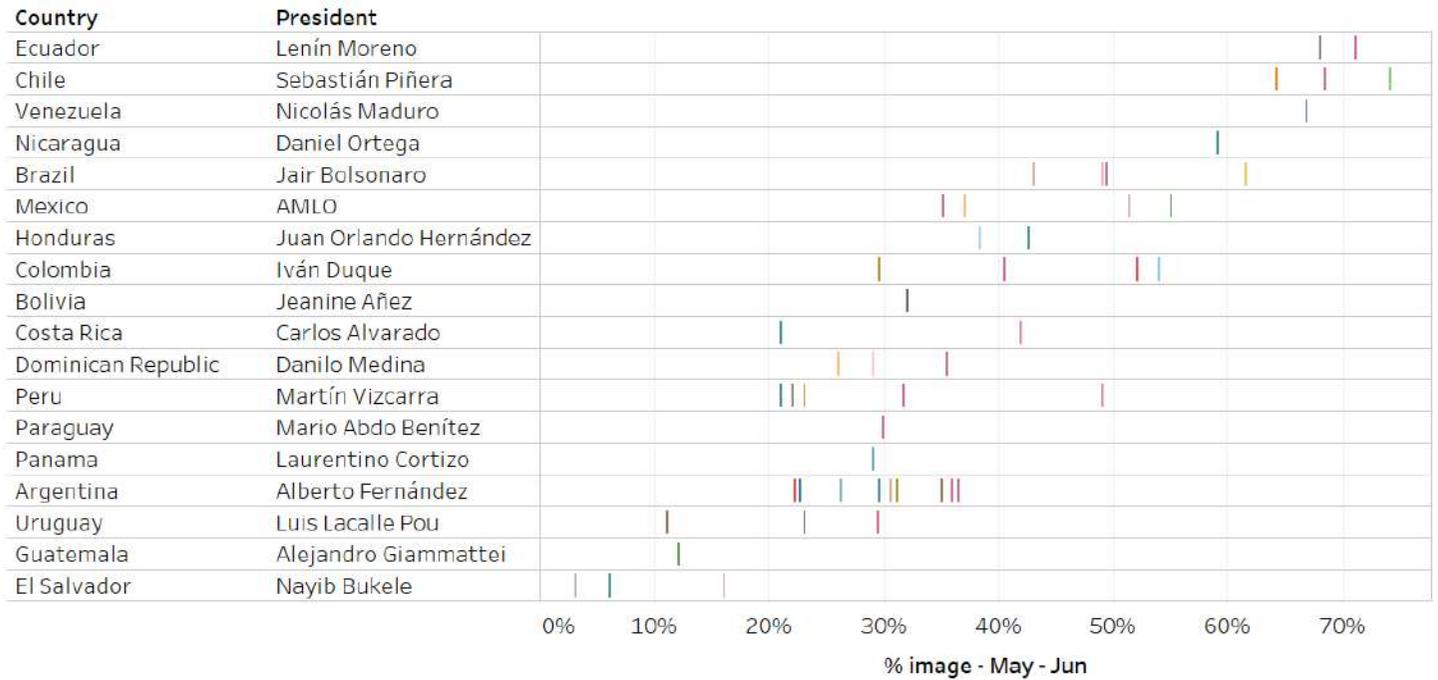


To see the interactive version of the tables, [click here](#).

# Methodological notes

May - June 2020

Chart 2. Variation in the measurement of Presidents' negative images, May-Jun 2020



**Sources**

- Analogías
- Cadem
- CEDATOS
- Enkoll
- Ibope
- IEP
- Centro Nacional de Consultoría
- CID Gallup
- Cifra
- Inteligencia Analítica
- Ipspe
- IPSOS
- CIT
- CNT/MDA
- Consulta Mitofsky
- D'Alessio IROL y Berenzstein
- Datafolha
- Datanálisis
- La Prensa Gráfica LPG Datos
- Management & Fit
- Mark Penn
- Datexco
- Datum
- El Financiero
- Opción Consultores
- Opinaia
- Paradigma
- Ricardo Rouvier Asociados
- Synopsis
- El Financiero
- Polimetrics
- ProDatos
- Pulso Ciudadano
- Zuban Cordoba y Asociados y Focus Market
- Invamer
- trespuntozero

To see the interactive version of the tables, [click here](#).

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