Image of power
Power of an image

REPORT ON PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL RATINGS IN LATIN AMERICA
NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2020
A year that signaled a turning point in modern history has ended. With it came a deepening of existing challenges for governments not only in terms of health but at the economic and social levels, too. The first two months - March and April - had the effect of immediately bolstering the image of Latin America's presidents, though survey data indicates this has not, for the most part, been sustained over time.

In the context of uncertainty this year, public opinion initially favored governments taking active preventive measures. In some cases, this helped temporarily ease tensions with opposition forces. Interestingly, the reverse happened in countries such as Mexico or Brazil whose approaches in the face of the pandemic were far more lax.

As months passed, however, the deepening social and economic price of those pursuing more hands-on measures eroded citizens' expectations and support. As a result, approval ratings of their Presidents have gradually fallen back to their pre-outbreak levels, with the exception of Lacalle Pou in Uruguay and Duque in Colombia who remain more popular.

This return to the pre-pandemic status helps explain why debates and conflicts that are not directly related to or caused by coronavirus - though may have attracted attention because of it - have similarly resurfaced recently.

The last two months of the year ended with an exponential growth in the number of Covid cases in almost all countries in the region, including Uruguay. The situation confronts governments with tough decisions on whether to reintroduce restrictive public health measures in parallel to organizing their vaccination programs.

In eight countries, these decisions will be taken amid the runup to elections. Throughout 2021, Chile, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru will appoint a new president, while in Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru, legislative powers are set to be totally or partially renewed.
## Presidential Image Ranking

### November - December 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EL SALVADOR</td>
<td>Nayib Bukele</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMINICAN REPUBLIC</td>
<td>Luis Abinader</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEXICO</td>
<td>Andrés López Obrador</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URUGUAY</td>
<td>Luis Lacalle Pou</td>
<td>60%*</td>
<td>20%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLOMBIA</td>
<td>Iván Duque</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARAGUAY</td>
<td>Mario Abdo Benítez</td>
<td>50%*</td>
<td>44%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARGENTINA</td>
<td>Alberto Fernández</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERU</td>
<td>Francisco Sagasti</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>Jair Bolsonaro</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSTA RICA</td>
<td>Carlos Alvarado</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILE</td>
<td>Sebastián Piñera</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VENEZUELA</td>
<td>Nicolás Maduro</td>
<td>14%*</td>
<td>82%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECUADOR</td>
<td>Lenín Moreno</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between November and December. (*) Based on a single data source. To see the sources, [click here.](#)
How did the image of presidents evolve in 2020?

January - December 2020

Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between Jan and October. The empty points correspond to periods when no data is available. *Based on a single data source. **He took office on 11/17/2020. To see the sources click here.
Which presidents improved in the polls compared to September-October?

November - December 2020

Evolution of the level of support in relation to the period September-October

- The level of support dropped by more than 3%
- The level of support raised by more than 3%
- The level of support remained +/- 3%

Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between September and December. To see the sources: [click here](#)
How does support for the presidents compare with pre-pandemic levels?

January- December 2020

Citizens’ changing support shows that most presidents today are at levels close to those before the outbreak - with some exceptions.

Luis Lacalle Pou (Uruguay) and Iván Duque (Colombia) are still far ahead (7 points or more beyond their pre-pandemic level). Alberto Fernández (Argentina) is 6 points below but has slowed his decline in the last two months. Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil) has also lost ground lately but remains above pre-pandemic levels, while Manuel López Obrador’s popularity has risen to his January-February values.

Another 4 presidents managed to maintain relatively stable levels of support since March: Nayib Bukele (El Salvador), Juan Orlando Hernández (Honduras), Luis Lacalle Pou (Uruguay) and Nicolás Maduro (Venezuela).

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between January and December. (*) To see the sources: click here
How does the public view the work of the regions’ Congresses?

November - December 2020

On average, only 1 in 6 people approve of the work of their representatives in Congress. This year there will be legislative elections in eight countries of the region. In Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru, legislative powers will be renewed in their entirety. In Mexico and Chile, only the Chamber of Deputies will change, though in the case of Chile 27 new senators will be appointed. In Argentina, half of the Chamber of Deputies and one third of the Senate will be renewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Approval</th>
<th>Disapproval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>20%*</td>
<td>72%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>22%*</td>
<td>66%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>5%*</td>
<td>86%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>26%*</td>
<td>67%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between November and December. (*) To see the sources: click here
Highlighted cases of this issue

**BRAZIL**

The image of Bolsonaro takes a downward turn for the first time since mid-year

"Brazil is broke, I can’t do anything," said the President this month. His approval levels, which had been growing since May-June, fell on average 9% compared to the previous two-month period. Although support from the middle classes weakened throughout the year, in recent months this was offset by more working class support following the provision of emergency relief subsidies. However, the scaling back of this support (by 50%) combined with the decision not to renew subsidies to companies for the payment of wages, all amid rising COVID-19 cases and criticism of the government's environmental policies, dented Bolsonaro’s image.

At the political level, the sub-national elections of 2020 proved a setback for the government, particularly in Rio de Janeiro, the stronghold of Bolsonaro, where the allied mayor Marcelo Crivella lost at the hands of former mayor Eduardo Paes. The forecasts for the election of the President of the Chamber of Deputies, to be held in February, are not favorable either.

**COLOMBIA**

2020 ends with an upturn in Duque’s image

The approval level recovered the July-August values, reaching peaks of 56% at the end of November according to the pollster CNC. Among factors that could have helped increase his popularity are the relaxation of movement restriction measures, the reactivation of sectors of the economy, and a decrease in the number of daily cases of COVID-19 recorded until mid-December. In addition, at the legislative level, the government promoted laws to accelerate economic recovery in the entrepreneurial, cultural/orange, tourism and agricultural sectors.

The situation, however, could change quickly. As in other countries of the region, the last weeks of the year saw an accelerated growth in coronavirus spread, which peaked at the start of January. As a result, the three main cities in the country reached an ICU occupancy rate of around 90%. Given this, the local governments of Bogotá, Medellín and Cali have already imposed new measures to restrict movement.
Highlighted cases of this issue

**PERU**

A record of three Presidents in just 10 days

November began surprisingly with the ousting of Martín Vizcarra over "permanent moral incapacity", promoted by various legislative blocs as a result of alleged wrongdoing in the issuance of public contracts. Since then, the country has seen two Presidents come and go. The first, Manuel Merino, the former leader of the Congress, presented his resignation just six days into his term. His departure was preceded by massive social protests against Vizcarra's removal in which at least two people lost their lives. Finally, on November 16 Congress approved a multi-party list led by Partido Morado legislator Francisco Sagasti. Sagasti, who had voted against the motion to remove Vizcarra will act as interim president until July 28, when a fresh government, elected this April, will take office. In the last few days, the country experienced a sudden worsening in Covid cases, which put the health system under significant strain in Lima and Callao. In seven regions, movement restriction measures have already been applied.

**VENEZUELA**

The government recovers control of the National Assembly

On December 6, legislative elections were held, which defined the composition of the National Assembly for the 2021-2026 period. The elections took place in a context marked by the abstention of a large part of the opposition, a low voter turnout of only 31% and the ongoing economic crisis. According to the National Survey of Living Conditions 2019-2020 conducted by three universities, 79% of the population cannot afford the basic 'food basket' and 44% of those over 15 years of age are economically inactive. It was under these conditions that the government obtained a disputed if expected victory and gained 253 seats out of a total of 277 (110 more than in the outgoing Assembly). The new deputies took office on January 5 and elected Jorge Rodriguez, Maduro's former communication minister, as president of the legislative branch.
Highlighted cases of this issue

**AMLO reaches pre-pandemic approval level again**

The positive image of the president grew on average 7% between November and December, which puts him only two points off that registered at the beginning of the year and makes him the region’s third most popular president. **Surveys suggest that citizens value the president’s personal traits positively**, though his performance as President a little less so, perhaps partly because of the scrapping of an existing law preventing incumbent presidents from being prosecuted other than for treason. However, the government has also given contradictory signals around promoting a reform to do away with the Institute of Access to Public Information among other independent public bodies, arguing that they are costly and inefficient. AMLO was one of the last leaders in the region to recognize the victory of Joe Biden, with whom he has begun talks on regional migration, combating COVID-19, trade and cross-border security.

**Despite criticism of the government, Fernández’s fall slows**

In the last two months, the government of Alberto Fernández has been harshly questioned by the opposition and media for its management of the health situation and, in particular, the negotiations with Russia for the acquisition of the Sputnik V vaccine. In addition, there has been criticism regarding the sanctioning of a tax on large fortunes, the decision (later suspended) to interrupt corn exports until March, and the alleged tensions within the ruling coalition. However, this is only partly mirrored in **opinion surveys which show the president’s personal image to have stopped falling but not approval for his management which continues to drop, although to a lesser extent than in previous months**. Partly accounting for this less than expected negative picture may be the recent legalization of abortion in the country, which the government backed. In 2021, the electoral campaign for the October legislative elections will add to the existing challenges.
Elections in 2021

The electoral year begins in February for Ecuador and El Salvador.

February 7: presidential and legislative elections

On February 7, Ecuador will choose its next president, to govern until 2025. To be elected in the first round, the winning ticket must achieve an absolute majority, or 40%, and an advantage of at least 10 percentage points over the runner up. Current polls suggest this is unlikely. On the same date, and for the same period in office, the 137 members of the National Assembly will be elected.

In the last two weeks of 2020, Andrés Araúz, the candidate of the Correa movement, has begun edging ahead in polls, and today leads the race with an overall support of between 20% and 37% depending on the pollster. Araúz, trained in economics at the University of Michigan, held various public positions between 2009 and 2017. He was Director of the Central Bank (2011-2013), Deputy Secretary General of Planning, Director General of the National Public Procurement Service and Minister of Knowledge and Human Talent (2015-2017). He is a member of the Puebla Group.

However, pre-election polls are still too tight to call. Until mid-December some considered conservative candidate Guillermo Lasso the frontrunner, a businessman and former executive president of the Bank of Guayaquil from 1994-2012. Meanwhile, banana industrialist Alvaro Noboa had crept into the top four preferred candidates only to be disqualified by the National Electoral Council (CNE), a move that also ended in the removal of four CNE members.

Lenin Moreno ends his mandate as the President with the worst approval rating in the region. He leaves as a legacy an economy more indebted than that permitted by the Constitution and with stark fiscal imbalances. In the last months, the President signed an agreement with the United States that would pave the way for an eventual free trade agreement, he announced the presentation of a tax reform before leaving office and declared that he will not veto the Anti-Corruption Law sanctioned in December.
Elections in 2021

February 28: legislative elections

On February 28, Salvadorans will elect the 84 members of the Legislative Assembly for the period May 2021 to 2024, the members of the 262 municipal councils and 20 representatives for the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN). These elections take place after a year of growing tension between the executive and a legislative where the opposition has a majority.

2020 began with a call by President Nayib Bukele for citizen mobilization at the gates of the legislative palace, in order to force approval of an international loan needed to finance his territorial control plan. From the beginning of the pandemic, the three branches of government were also involved in disputes over the management of the health crisis in the country. This resulted in no health regulations being approved by consensus and, in August, the country began to reopen the economy without a concrete regulatory framework.

In his 19 months in office, Bukele vetoed at least 45 legislative decrees arguing unconstitutionality and other reservations. Among them, at least 15 were norms linked to the handling of the pandemic, and 5 to electoral legislation.

Despite the fact that 31% of Salvadorans surveyed in a recent study by CID-Gallup consider the work of Assembly members “good” or “somewhat good”, the Pre-electoral Survey of the Center for the Study of Public Opinion of FundaUngo indicates that 3 out of 4 support the position of the President in relation to the Assembly.

The dynamics between the two branches of government could change by February if the tendencies marked by the pre-electoral polls are confirmed, which place the New Ideas party at the forefront of voting intentions with percentages above 60% (60% UCA; 64% FundaUngo; 70% CID-Gallup). In that case, New Ideas could stay in its first national election with 60 to 70 of the 84 seats.
Elections calendar

**PERU**

*April 11: presidential and legislative elections*

To be elected: President, Vice-Presidents and all members of Congress

**MEXICO**

*Junio 6: legislative elections*

To be elected: all members of the Chamber of Deputies.

**ARGENTINA**

*October 24: legislative elections*

To be elected: 127 deputies (half of the seats) and 24 senators (one third)

**HONDURAS**

*November 7: presidential and legislative elections*

To be elected: President, Vice President and all members of the National Assembly

**NICARAGUA**

*November 21: presidential and legislative elections*

To be elected: President, Vice President, all members of the Chamber of Deputies and 27 Senators
Methodological notes
November- December 2020

This monitoring of presidential image is based on simple average calculations of approval rating surveys developed in each country. 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 November-December period have been compared with those of the previous 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 November to December.

Chart 1. Variation in the measurement of Presidents’ positive images - November-December 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>President</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Nayib Bukele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Luis Abinader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>AMLO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>Costa Rica</td>
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<td>Chile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Nicolás Maduro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>Lenín Moreno</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources
- Analogías
- Aresco
- AtisSnead
- Atlas Intel
- Buendía y Laredo
- Cadem
- CEC
- Cedatos
- CELAG
- CID Gallup
- CIEP
- Click Research
- Clima Social
- CNC
- Consulta Mitofsky
- Criteria
- Datafolha
- Datanaúsis
- Datum
- Demotecnia
- El Financiero
- Enkoll
- Equipos Consultores
- Fundaungo
- Gallup-Hoy
- GEA-ISA
- Guarumo
- IEP
- INVAMER
- IPSOS
- JOTA Labs
- Management&Fit
- Parametría
- Poliarquía
- Pulso Ciudadano / Activa
- Reforma
- Ricardo Rouvier Asociados
- UDESA
- Varela y Asoc/tel
- XP/Ipespe
- Zuban Cordoba y Asociados

To see the sources: click here
Methodological notes
November-December 2020

Chart 2. Variation in the measurement of Presidents’ negative images - November-December 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>President</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>Lenín Moreno</td>
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<td>Nicolás Maduro</td>
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<td>Alberto Fernández</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Luis Abinader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Nayib Bukele</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% image - nov - dec

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