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FORTALECEMOS
LAS DEMOCRACIAS
DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING
DEMOCRACIES
IN LATIN AMERICA

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Image of power Power of an image

REPORT ON PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL RATINGS IN LATIN AMERICA
JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2022



Introduction

Presidential approval ratings had been expected to recover a little in the January–February window following a continuing return to normalcy as Covid disruption eased and with signs of incipient economic recovery. However, other issues including the Russian invasion of Ukraine appear to have put paid to that.

The war led to challenges in accessing credit, obstacles to international trade and pressures on food and fuel prices in a context of already rising inflation. While analysis undertaken by the [Latin America Risk Report](#) suggests **commodity prices could be the main political and economic driver** in the region this year, other studies also point to inflation being foremost on the minds of voters.

The war has also forced Latin American governments to adopt a stance on the conflict. Most have condemned the invasion and called for a peaceful solution. But governments must strike a difficult balance between the multiple interests at stake and their own objectives and reputations. The political scientist **Juan Battaleme analyzes these new challenges** for the region in the special note "Latin America, the Ukrainian War and the shadow of COVID".

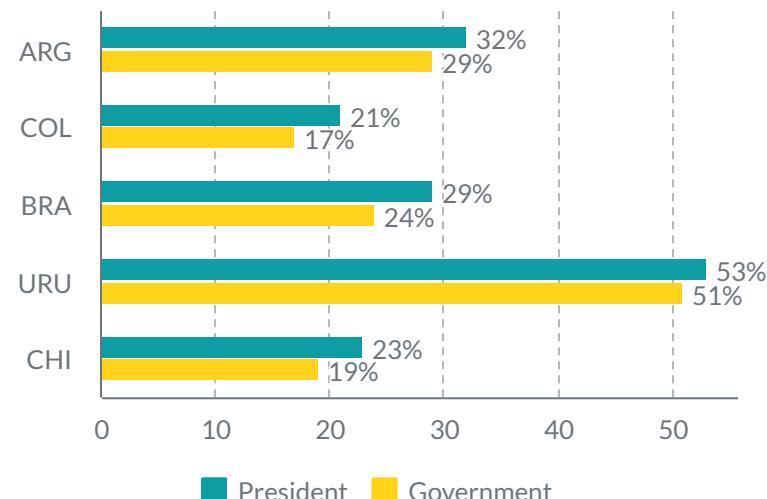
Survey findings over the last two months show that **public approval of the region's presidents remains low** - apart from few cases such as Mexico, El Salvador or Uruguay - , at mostly between 20-30%. **Governments as a whole are even less popular** in all the countries measured (Figure 1). This will likely have a direct impact on governance in general and on the decision-making process in particular. With low citizen support and more fragmented congresses, presidents have less chance of passing their legislative agendas.

Andres Manuel López Obrador, one of the region's most popular presidents, saw his approval dip after revealing personal details of a journalist who exposed his son's lavish lifestyle. In Guatemala,

thousands have demanded the resignation of President **Alejandro Giammattei** over alleged corruption, and that of Attorney General Consuelo Porras following the arrest of several officials of the Special Prosecutor's Office. In Honduras, former president **Juan Orlando Hernández** was arrested for drug trafficking and use of weapons charges and awaits extradition to the US. Meanwhile, **Xiomara Castro** is promoting the reinstatement of an international anti-corruption commission while facing criticism for an amnesty for political prisoners during the 2009 coup against her husband, former president Manuel Zelaya, which could eventually lead to the release of former public officials prosecuted for crimes against the State.

Only seven months after taking power, **Pedro Castillo's** embattled government remains steadfastly unpopular. Disapproved by some 60% of the public, he has already made four cabinet changes and now faces a Congress motion seeking to oust him over "permanent moral incapacity". Similar motions brought down two previous presidents in the last five years. Meanwhile, former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori, jailed over crimes against humanity, has been released amid protests after the Constitutional Court overturned the annulment of a humanitarian pardon.

Figure 1. Presidential and government approval rating, January–February 2022



In Chile, **Sebastián Piñera** saw out his second term in office with a personal and government approval rating of 23% and 19%, respectively, the lowest in the history of the country. Now it is the turn of Gabriel Boric who took office on March 11 with just over 50% approval.

Against this backdrop of mostly dwindling citizen confidence in government and presidents, the question arises of how strong democracy remains in Latin America. Here, we have sought to answer this using data from the latest [annual report of the V-DEM Institute \(Varieties of Democracy\) on the state of democracies worldwide](#).

The results of the first two elections of the year bore out disillusion with ruling and traditional elites, a trend already set in Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Honduras and Argentina during 2021. After 8 years in power, Partido de Acción Ciudadana of **Costa Rica** [failed to retain any seats in the Assembly](#) in the February 6 elections, while a virtual unknown is emerging as favorite for the run-off.

The ruling party was also [dealt a blow in the Colombian legislative elections](#), to the point of its presidential candidate withdrawing from the race and aligning with Federico Gutiérrez of Equipo por Colombia. The center-right is thus pitting itself against the center-left candidate Gustavo Petro, for the moment the odds-on favorite.

On March 27, a referendum will be held in **Uruguay** to decide on the repeal of 135 out of 475 articles of the Law of Urgent Consideration passed in 2020. This is the most important piece of legislation of a government still enjoying broad support, just over 50%. The campaign to revise the law, which includes potentially restrictive provisions for the rights to protest and strike, was promoted by various social actors and the Frente Amplio, among others.

About Image of Power. This is a bimonthly assessment of presidential approval levels, based on public opinion polls and some 90 sources spanning 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The ranking covers only those countries where it has been possible to obtain a minimum of three measurements from at least two different sources over the period assessed. The approach is outlined in more detail in the "Methodological notes" section at the end of the report.

This number also includes:

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Latin America, the Ukrainian War and the shadow of COVID

By Juan Battaleme*

The war in Ukraine took a large part of Western public opinion by surprise, except for the US and a significant number of its allies who today can boast saying "we warned you", thanks to the intelligence capacity at their disposal.

The world responded with incredulity to their warnings and Latin America was no exception. Still immersed in the reconstruction of the damage caused by COVID, it is now facing the problems posed by a war between Russia and Ukraine, especially in the field of economic sanctions imposed by the West on that country. This situation may affect the business that the region has with Russia for a value of US\$ 12 billion according to the think tank RUSI, 50% of which is represented by Mexico and Brazil. The good news is that this country is not one of the main partners of the region.

Hence, we must look at the economic sanctions with attention. Interdependence obliges Latin American leaders to think about political and economic relations recognizing that it has been decided to maximize the capacity to use it as an element of coercion, placing emphasis on the denial of the necessary access to financing, resources and raw materials by means of a sophisticated blockade.

In addition, multinational private actors decide to align their interests with those promoted in the political sphere in order to avoid two types of costs: on the one hand, the direct costs arising from sanctions; while on the other hand, they try to avoid those linked to reputation, showing a certain commitment to wider audiences in different markets, committing the corporation to what is perceived or considered to be wrong. Known as a "chokepoints" strategy, it is based on who has power over networks to either provide or deny access. For peripheral countries such as those in the region, this is an important wake-up call because of the degree of vulnerability that governments have to their international partners.

The removal of seven major Russian banks from the SWIFT system is a good example of this. The flip side

of this situation is that it will accelerate the search for an alternative system such as China's SPSF to limit the damage caused by Western disconnection, especially encouraging countries that are syndicated by the West as rule-defying actors to seek alternative ways to continue to maintain their access. What an opportunity for autocracies to generate a network of their own, as China has the resources to be the ultimate guarantor of such a system.

The immediacy of the war will have a new negative impact on the economic structure of the countries in the region. The specialists of the Initiative Global Market Forum point out the possibility of a period of stagflation, recession and, above all, the search for alternative reserve and payment currencies to the dollar. The rise in food and energy prices, the logistic costs due to the virtual closure of the Black Sea, and the geopolitical risks that this situation generates, demand that the countries of the region review their positioning strategies in the face of a more economically restricted world. When -on average-

Map 1: Latin American countries' vote at the UN General Assembly on condemning the conflict



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there are 201 million poor people in the region, of which 86 million are in extreme poverty according to ECLAC, the impacts of the war may translate into an increase in political instability and criminal violence in the face of a poverty that appears on the horizon as difficult to reverse.

In this context, the possibility of expanding markets as a result of Ukraine's abrupt exit from food production and the trade sanctions against Russia, including the impact on oil trade, opens up the necessary opportunities to be able to partially replace this particular situation for those who are in a position to do so, as has been shown in the EU. This would provide some oxygen to the ailing economies of the region. It is a good time to re-discuss free trade agreements that do not depend on geographical proximity. In this context, Argentina is a question mark: it is not clear whether it will be able to take advantage of international opportunities or how much collateral damage its economy will suffer as a consequence of its own vulnerabilities.

A conjunctural "winner" appears on the horizon. The Biden administration has decided to punish an autocrat like Putin by shifting its policy towards two autocratic regimes of less international, though regional impact, such as Venezuela and Saudi Arabia. The tragedy of the double standard will translate into a greater questioning of America's solvency to lead and opens the game to those who see China as a more useful alternative leadership than the American one. The rapprochement between the Biden administration and the Venezuelan government is a test of this and of how long sanctions can last if geopolitical conditions change. First, because in the Western Hemisphere the partnership with Russia capitalizes less than at other times and second, because the prospect of being able to regain some sort of position and resources that will decompress the Venezuelan government situation would seem to be attractive enough to pass up. Guaidó and the Lima Group have possibly been mortally wounded in the Mariupol bombings.

The vote condemning the aggression in the United Nations General Assembly where 141 members supported it did not generate any surprise where Venezuela was absent despite its vocal defense of Russia; Bolivia, El Salvador, and Nicaragua abstained and the rest of the countries of the region approved the condemnation, showing us that in

terms of the principle of territorial integrity and use of force the Latin American space continues to be one of unity. An interesting fact is that the countries of the South, even when they have condemned the war, have not joined the sanctions schemes imposed by the US, Japan and Europe, showing their willingness not to present automatic alignments and prioritizing their economic realities.

Beyond the current moment of the war, attention should be paid to the emerging peace and the conditions and agreements to be reached as a solution to the demands of Russia, the European architecture and the West's view of China, the rival that looms on the horizon and has a growing influence in the Latin American space.

Latin American democracy may not be slipping (that much)

In recent issues of *Image of Power* we have focused on two apparently mutually reinforcing trends. On the one hand, the decline of citizen confidence in politicians and government institutions. On the other, a general dip in public support for the region's presidents. A broader question arises from this: is democracy in Latin America on the wane?

Certainly in global terms, it seems to be weakening. A report of an assessment of the state of democracy worldwide published this month by the V-Dem Institute (Varieties of Democracy) says there has been an increase in 'low democratic' states, and that more people are living in them.

With this in mind, we set out to examine if and to what extent Latin American democracies have slid

backward or if, conversely, the so-called 'third wave' of democratic strengthening witnessed since the 1980s is holding stronger than thought. Our conclusions point to a region that while certainly having pockets of authoritarian drift presents a complex picture that cannot be accurately described as witnessing a generalized slippage in democracy.

Applying similar approaches to V-Dem, we have looked at two dimensions of democracy: **electoral democracy** (degree of free voting, electoral fairness, and respect for electoral results) and **liberal democracy** (upholding of rights and freedoms including of minorities and the rule of law in this respect). Our analysis draws on data for the period 1980-2021 and sub-divides countries into South and Central America. Indicators for both dimensions show

Figure 2. Evolution of the electoral and liberal democracy indexes in South America, 1980-2020

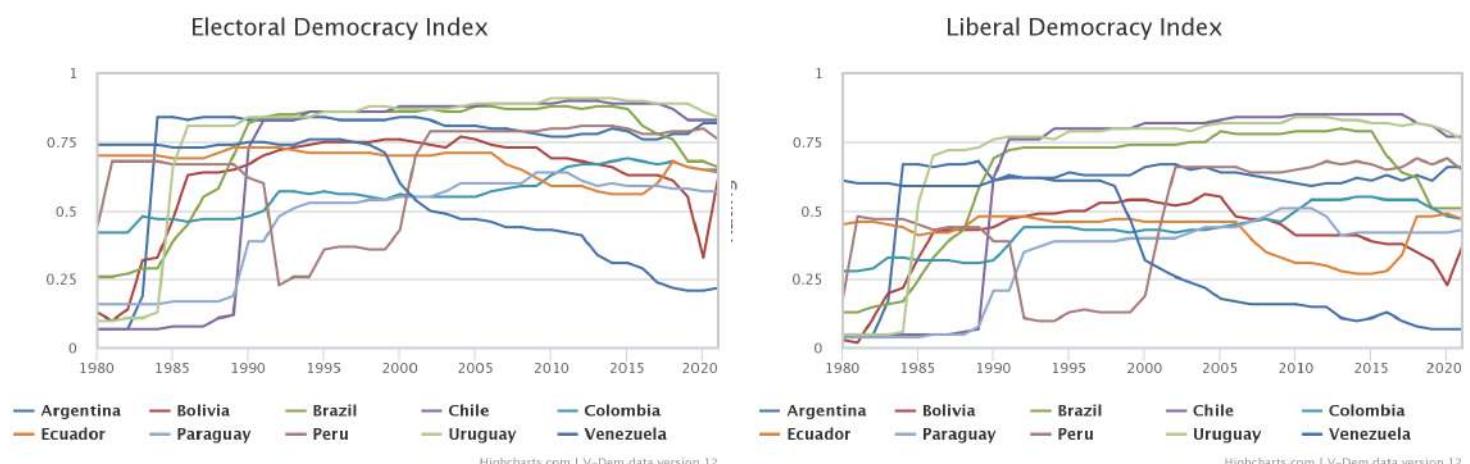
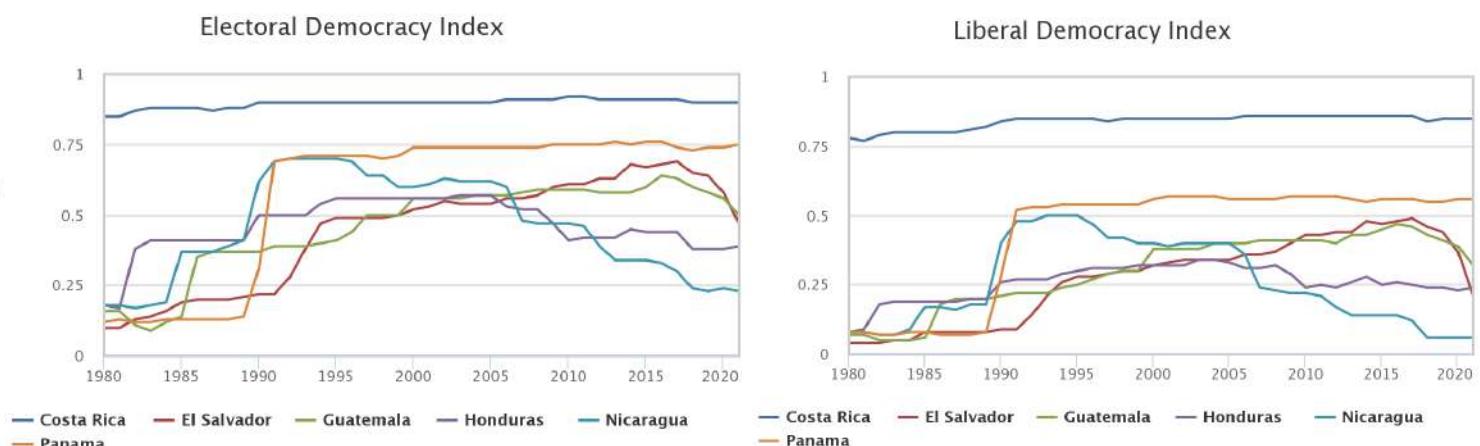


Figure 3. Evolution of the electoral and liberal democracy indexes in Central America, 1980-2020



similar trends, as shown by **Figures 2 and 3**.

Both subregions display similar changes over time, with democracy taking root in the 1980s only some years apart, before gradually ticking upward until the early 2000s. After that, however, some countries do indeed undergo a regression across both indicators.

A more detailed picture comes from looking at changes over the course of two time-periods – first comparing Index scores in 1980 with those of 2000 and then contrasting 2000 with 2021. **Figures 4 and 5** show the results of this for South American countries and across both dimensions. If we imagine the grids of each graph having four quadrants, then the green dots (in the top left) represent countries whose democracies strengthened in the given period, while the red-dotted countries (bottom right) experienced the opposite. The gray dotted states, meanwhile (top right and bottom left) are countries that saw their

democracies remain, respectively, consistently strong and weak. It is clear that the most notable democratic regression in South America, extending across both time periods, occurred in Venezuela – with two other countries, Brazil and Bolivia, also sliding backward but a lot more recently. Democracy levels in other countries such as Ecuador, Colombia and Paraguay have kept more or less constant, whereas in others they have even consolidated albeit moderately. In sum, democratic regression in South America is not a generalized phenomenon but rather confined, for now, to a limited number of countries.

Trends in Central America are similar (**Figures 6 and 7**). The first two decades post-1980 show mostly strengthening electoral and liberal dimensions. However, only for Costa Rica do scores for both indicators increase right up until 2021. Indeed in the last 20 years, democracy has grown weaker in Honduras and Nicaragua (on both dimensions) and El Salvador in terms of liberal democracy.

Figure 4. Electoral democracy index scores in South America, 1980 vs. 2020 and 2020 vs. 2021

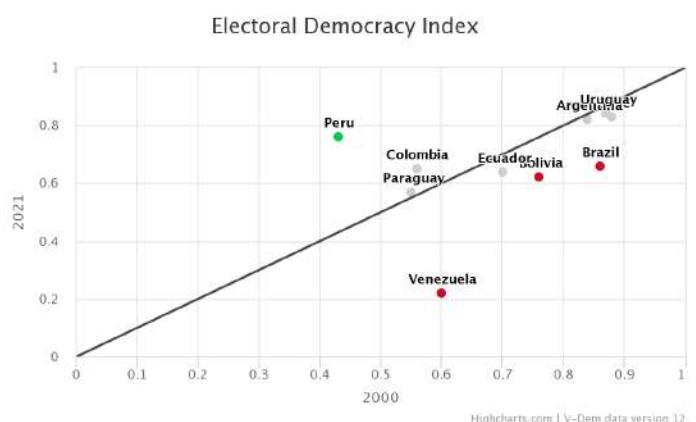
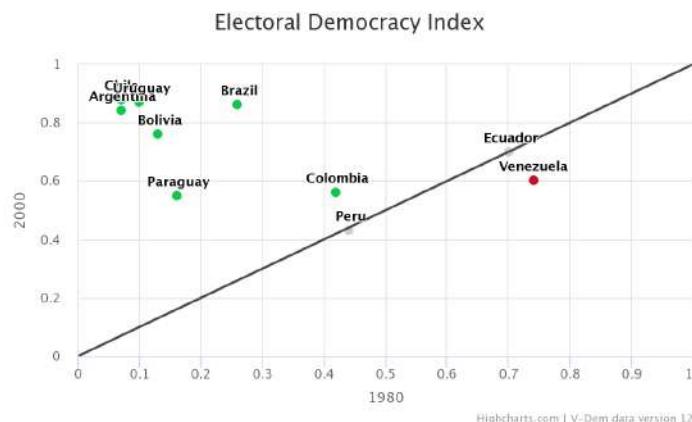


Figure 5. Liberal democracy index scores in South America, 1980 vs. 2020 and 2020 vs. 2021

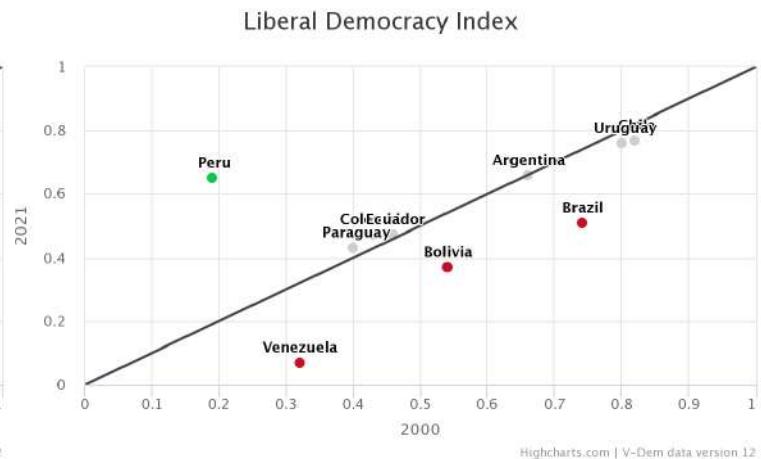
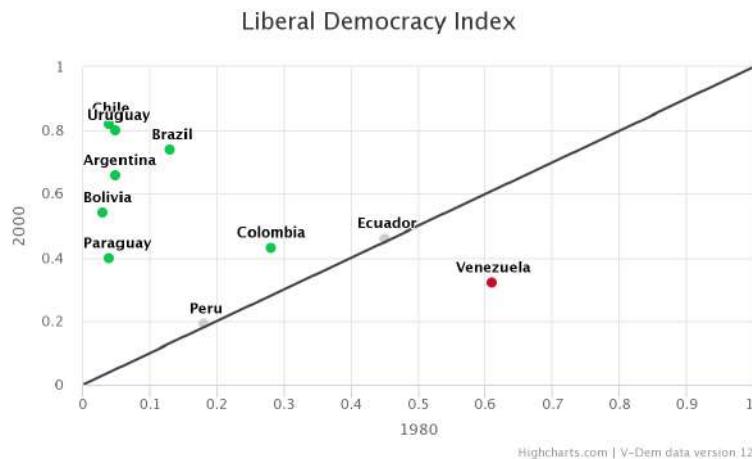
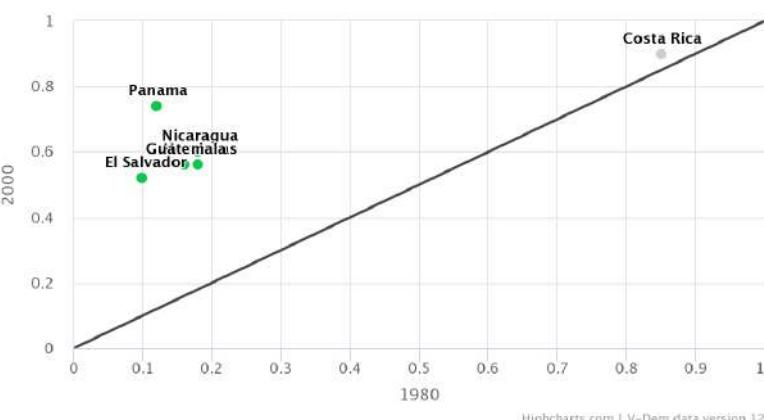


Figure 6. Electoral democracy index scores in Central America, 1980 vs. 2020 and 2020 vs. 2021

Electoral Democracy Index



Electoral Democracy Index

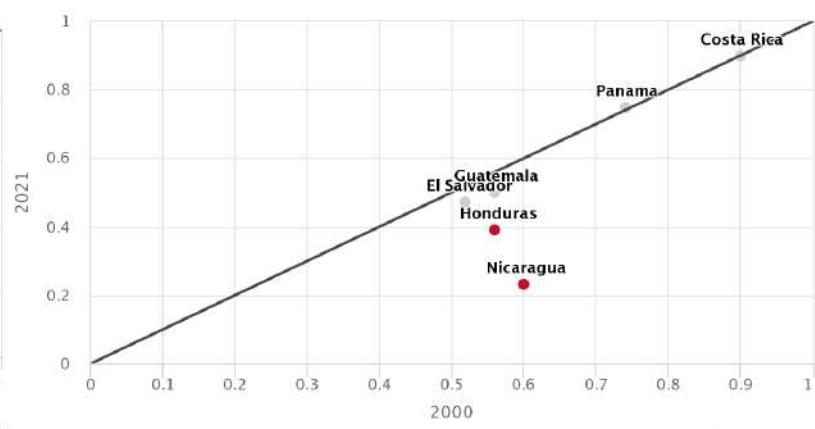
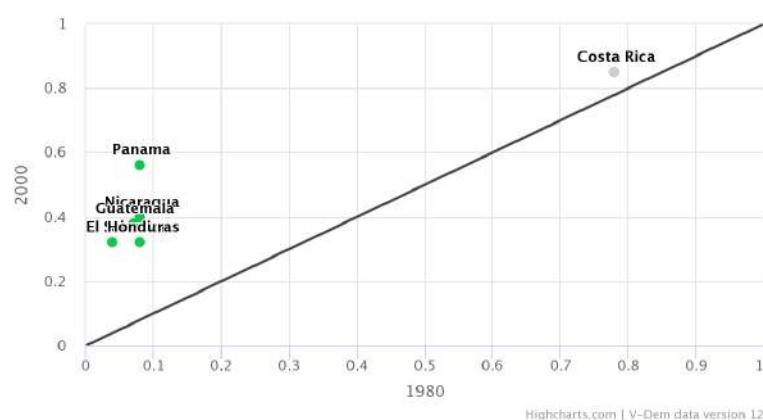
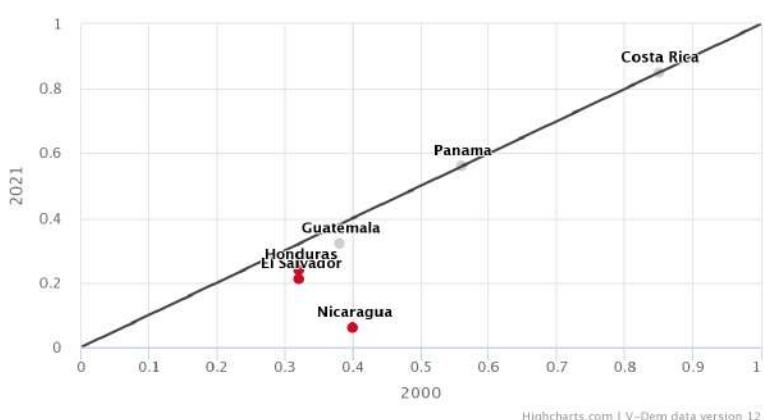


Figure 7. Liberal democracy index scores in Central America, 1980 vs. 2020 and 2020 vs. 2021

Liberal Democracy Index



Liberal Democracy Index



Source: [V-Dem](#)

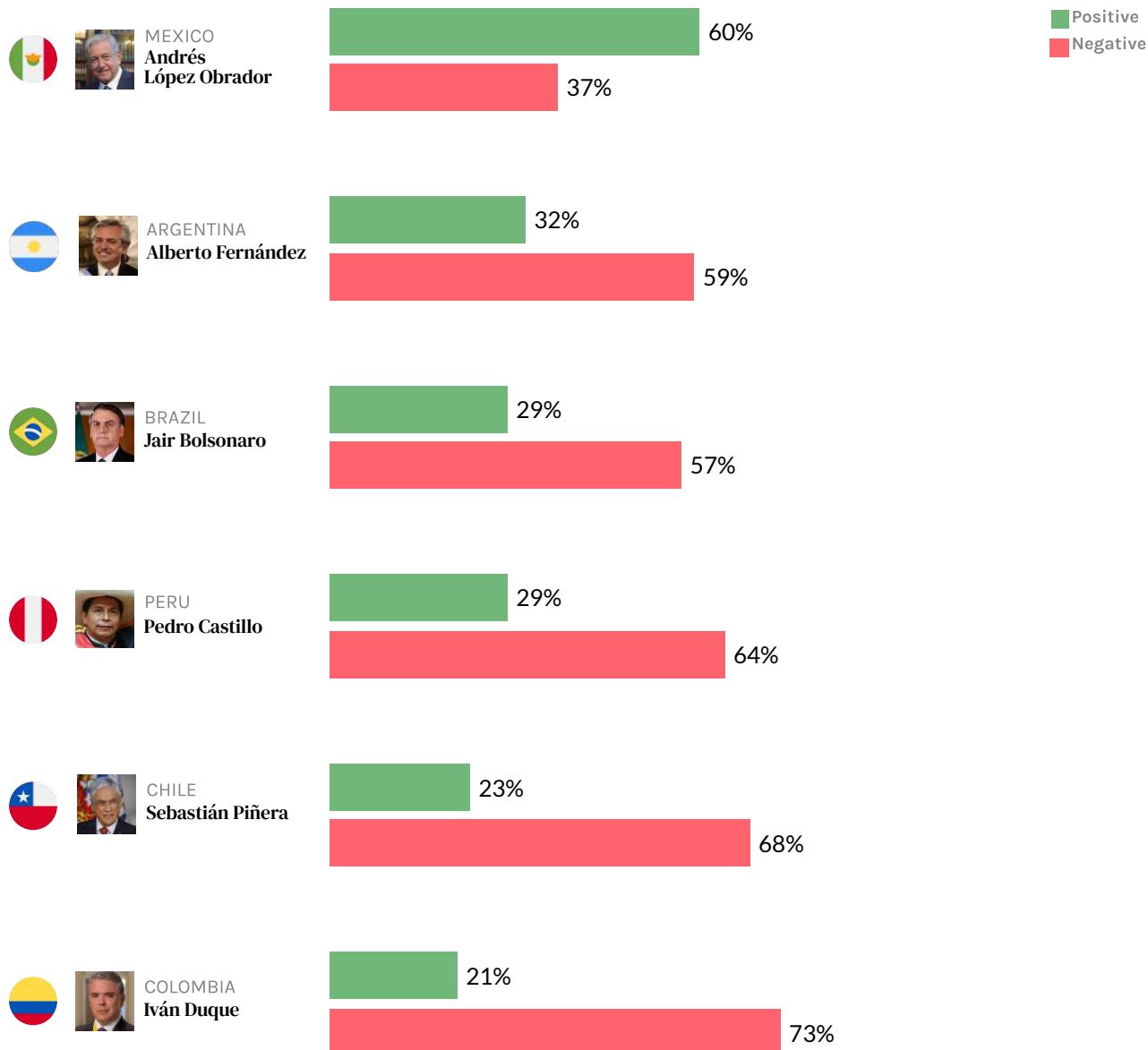
What do Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras have in common? Certainly there is a correlation between countries experiencing democratic regression and presidents who have been widely criticized for their lack of commitment to good governance. This has been especially true and for some time in Nicaragua and Venezuela, whose democracies have seen a long-running erosion. Backsliding in Brazil and Honduras, meanwhile, is more recent and follows the election of presidents who have challenged electoral rules and turned against civic space. It remains to be seen if these two countries' elections this year can stem or reverse this trend, which in the case of Honduras has marked the end of decades of bipartisanship and in Brazil could herald the return of the PT. Finally, the attenuation of Bolivia's democracy has gathered pace since the 2019 electoral coup and amid its political fallout.

In conclusion, while it is inaccurate or at least misleading to generalize weakening democracy to the entire Latin American region, there are certainly enough cases of backsliding to warrant concern. The region is certainly beset by dwindling public confidence in political leaders and institutions, which combined with wavering democracy could spell big challenges ahead.

Presidential Image Ranking

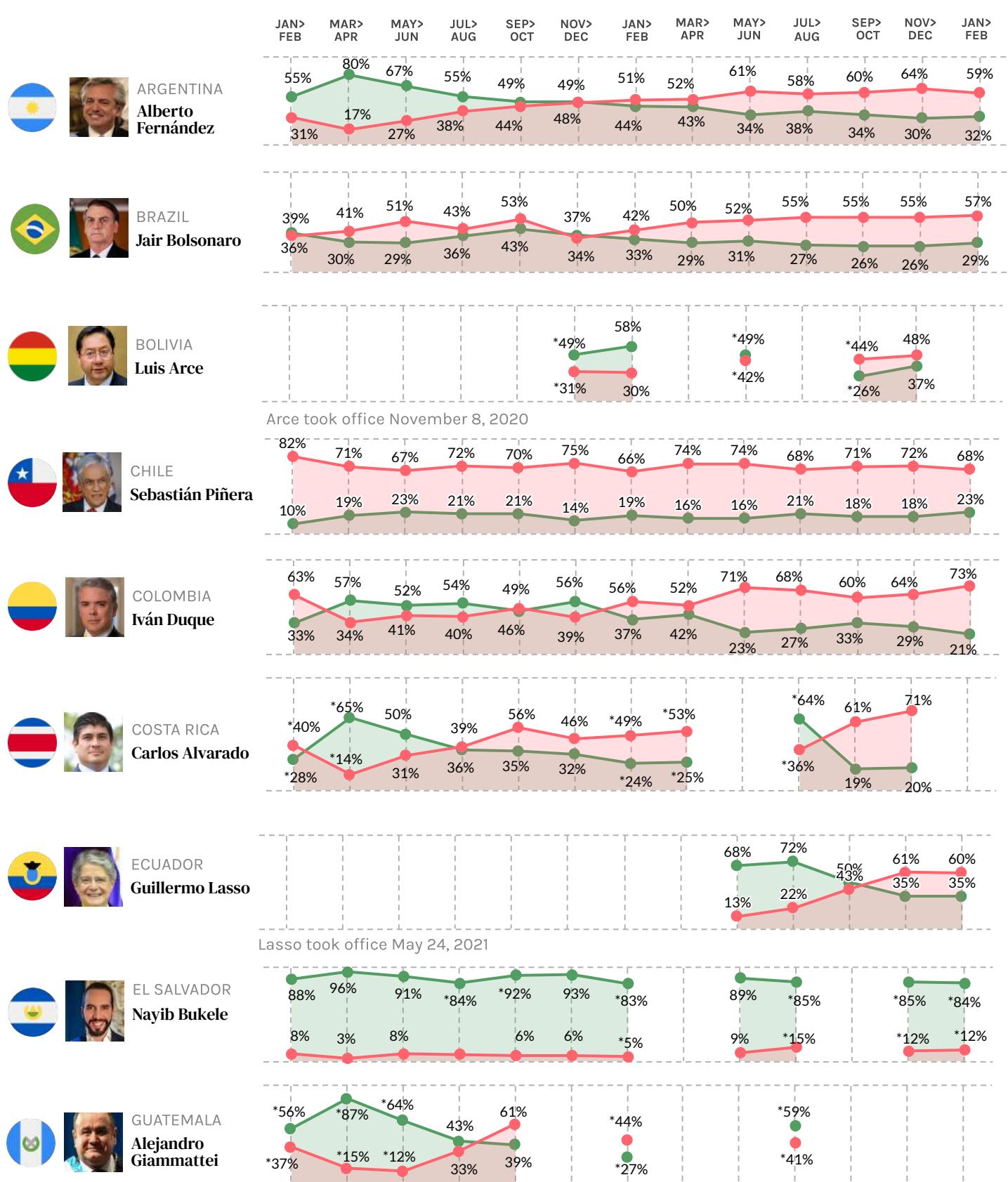
January - February 2022

This ranking includes cases where a minimum of three measurements are available over the study period from at least two different sources.



Changes in presidential approval between January 2020 and February 2022

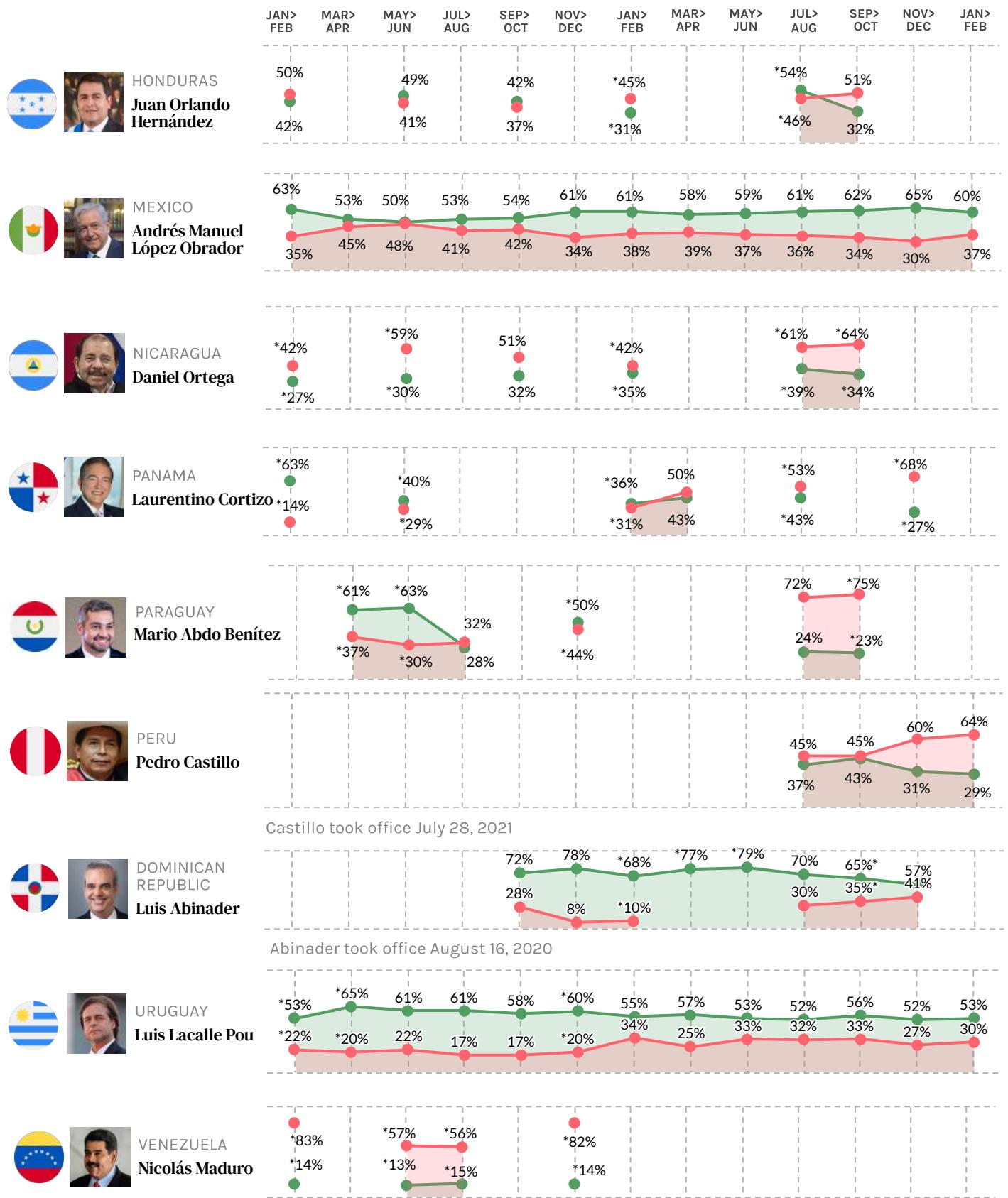
Positive
Negative



Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between January 2020 and February 2022. (*) Based on a single data source. To see the sources: [click here.](#)

Changes in presidential approval between January 2020 and February 2022

█ Positivo
█ Negativo

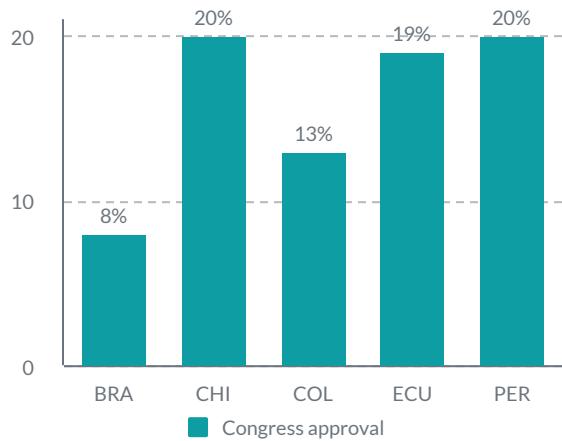


Two powers of government at loggerheads

Citizen confidence in congresses and the executive-legislative relationship

In previous editions of *Image of Power* we have pointed to the emergence of a more adversarial and fragmented congressional landscape, with balance of power issues and forging sustainable alliances likely to create challenges. Recent results of the Colombian elections confirm this pattern. Here, we will touch on some recent case examples illustrative of these difficulties, even for countries that have majority pro-government blocs in parliament. A brief overview of the Congress reform proposal being analyzed by the Chilean Constituent Convention completes this section.

Figure 8. Congress approval rating, January–February 2022



Peru: Castillo facing second impeachment attempt

Relations between the executive and legislature have long been fraught in Peru, so the opposition's filing of a so-called motion of vacancy against President Pedro Castillo for "permanent moral incapacity" is far from a surprise. This is, in fact, the second such motion he has faced since taking office in July 2021. However unlike the first, for this one his opponents have gathered the necessary votes for the motion to be debated in a plenary session.

The process for impeachment stipulates that 26 signatures are needed to present the motion, 40%

voter support from MPs to debate it on the floor of Congress and then, finally, two thirds Congress backing (87 MPs) for impeachment to go ahead. The first impeachment attempt gathered 29 MP signatures, from the blocs of Avanza País, Fuerza Popular and Renovación Popular, but failed to get the votes for it to be considered in Congress. The latest motion gained 50 signatures and surpassed the 40% threshold with 76 MPs from across seven opposition blocs approving it.

In justification of the motion, its backers cite the president's high disapproval ratings, at around 60% according to IPSOS data, and alleged controversies based on information from *El Comercio* which they argue shows the President has not only failed to "correct his actions and recognized he has lied" but insists on defending himself – hence the charge of 'moral incapacity'. In addition, they point to his selection of "questionable" ministers, that he operates a "parallel [i.e. de facto] cabinet", his meetings with dubious business figures, his saying in a CNN interview that he is open to holding a referendum on the issue of Bolivia's coastal access, and asking for bribes in order to greenlight police-force promotions, among other issues.

The motion will be dealt with by Congress on March 28 and will need 11 additional votes to be approved. Although these votes do not seem forthcoming at the moment, the fact the motion has come so far is deeply worrying for the government. Recent history is certainly not on his side: similar efforts to oust former presidents Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (2016-2018) and his successor Martín Vizcarra (2018-2020) led to former's resignation, even before the motion was concluded, and to the latter's impeachment.

Argentina: ruling bloc in Congress split over the debate of a key law

The national ruling party emerged scathed from the legislative elections last November. It lost its majority in the Senate, where it is now 2 seats shy of a quorum (and 11 short of a majority in the Chamber of Deputies). The challenges inherent to these changes

manifested a few days before the renewal of seats when the draft Budget of the National Public Administration for the year 2022 presented by the government was rejected by the opposition – unprecedented since the country's return to democracy.

However, the situation grew even more complex once the 2022 legislative year began and in debates on an issue key to the Fernández government: debt renegotiation with the International Monetary Fund to prevent the country defaulting on debt. On this occasion, the Executive managed to negotiate support from Juntos por el Cambio, the second largest bloc, but could not prevent internal ruptures that saw the detachment of the legislator chairing the bill in the Chamber of Deputies, Máximo Kirchner, son of the former president.

The negotiation came at the cost of a radical if expected modification to the bill, namely the removal of a mention of an agreement being reached with the IMF and its replacement with a single clause authorizing the public credit operation and the Executive Branch to sign the necessary instruments for that purpose. In this way, the opposition facilitated the negotiations to avoid default but without validating its terms. It was not enough, however, to secure its own votes or even the abstention of dissidents. Of the 117 members of the ruling party in the Chamber of Deputies (not counting the president of the Chamber) only 76 voted in favor, 28 against and 13 abstained. It is a revelatory outcome that shows just how complex consensus building for key bills, even internally within alliances, is becoming. The Senate witnessed something similar. Of the 56 votes in favor 36 came from the opposition and other allied blocs. All the votes against were from the ruling party.

Honduras: a negotiated solution to the legislative crisis

At the beginning of February, the government managed to negotiate a solution to the unexpected legislative crisis that unfolded a few days before Xiomara Castro took office as president, on January 27. It occurred when a fraction of the ruling bloc Partido Libre (PL) ignored a preelectoral agreement with Partido

Salvador de Honduras (PSH) under which the presidency of the legislative body (or Board) was to remain in the hands of the latter. It should be recalled that the PL is the first minority (biggest bloc but without holding a majority) with 50 of the 128 seats, together with the 10 held by the PSH.

For over two weeks Congress had, in effect, two boards, each with its own president. One was headed by Jorge Cálix of the PL, elected with 85 votes from Partido Nacional (PN), Partido Liberal (PL) and the dissident wing of the PL. The other board was led by Luis Redondo of PSH, with support of the ruling and allied MPs plus some other assorted legislators. Initially, Castro recognized the second board, expelled 18 of the 20 rebels from the party and announced he would offer Cálix the position of coordinator of the national cabinet.

However this only fanned the crisis further, leading to an intervention from former President Manuel Zelaya which led to an agreement between the parties. Under this, Cálix dropped his claims, the choice of board headed by Redondo was confirmed, and the expulsion of the 18 PL deputies was annulled. Another incident then sparked renewed tensions between the PL and its ally PSH: the issuing of an amnesty decree for political prisoners during the 2009 coup. This occurred shortly before the signing of the agreement, and could spell the release of persons prosecuted over 'crimes against the public administration'.

El Salvador: the majority ruling bloc shows cracks

Unexpectedly, the adverse international fallout from laws and appointments approved by the National Assembly since its renewal in May 2021, seem to be making a dent in the majority ruling bloc Nuevas Ideas. At the beginning of February, the approval of a regressive reform proposal of the Law of Access to Public Information (LAIP in Spanish) promoted by the government and following other transparency curbs, was halted. Although Nuevas Ideas has enough votes to push through the reform, the u-turn appears to owe to opposition from at least five of its members including the president of the Assembly, Ernesto Castro. The allied bloc GANA also opposed the initial greenlighting of the bill to debate it in the plenary.

These slight cracks had already become visible in December when Nuevas Ideas had to resort to 19 substitute deputies to ratify Rodolfo Delgado as

Attorney General, according to [El Faro](#). The inclusion of Delgado's appointment in the first session of the renewed Assembly had come as a surprise, and came in the wake of the ruling party majority and its allies voting to dismiss the full Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court and the previous Prosecutor, Raúl Melara.

Chile: Constituent Convention mulls reforms to Congress

The Political System Committee of the Constituent Convention approved a proposal for [congressional reform](#) in the form of a Plurinational Congress accompanied by a Territorial Council with legislative functions that would replace the current Senate. There are concerns this new body could lead to 'imperfect bicameralism', since while the legislative process in general would remain in the hands of the Lower House, the Territorial Council would be competent to legislate only on specific matters affecting the regions, such as budget laws, powers of the regional governments and institutions, and the political-administrative division of the country, as emerges from this analysis by [Pauta](#) (in Spanish). The proposal also foresees the total renewal of the body every four years and the possibility of reelection only once.

Regarding the political and territorial organization of the state, the Convention made progress in the approval of an article that seeks to recognize Chile as a regional, plurinational and intercultural state; and another that establishes the territorial organization in autonomous regions, autonomous communes, indigenous territorial autonomies and special territories. In terms of advances in rights and freedoms, gender parity was included as one of the guiding principles for the election of representatives of territorial entities.

The articles must be debated by the plenary and approved in particular by a two-thirds vote of the members. The work of the Convention - which currently has 32% approval (Criteria) - will conclude on July 4. The proposed text must then be approved or rejected by means of a referendum.



COLOMBIA

A historical look into the results of the March legislative election

Colombia could be on the verge of a historic election if, as polls indicate, left-wing candidate Gustavo Petro wins in the first round. Already in 2018 he had reached the ballotage with 25% of the votes, 14 points behind Iván Duque, but ended up losing to the latter (41.7% vs. 54%). Currently, all polls place him as the favorite although the voting intention varies by pollster and electoral scenario (27% CNC, 02/02; 28% CELAG 04/04; 41% INVAMER, 28/02; 33% Ecoanalítica-Guarumo, 04/03). In view of this panorama, **what are the keys to the March 13 legislative elections in light of the electoral results of the last 15 years?**

To begin with, we must remember that **since the 1991 Political Constitution came into force, the electoral and party system in Colombia has been subject to multiple reforms** aimed at encouraging the internal cohesion of the parties, reducing fragmentation and mitigating personalism. In a period of barely 20 years, at least three reforms of great impact were approved.

In 2003, the electoral threshold of 2% of the valid votes was established for parties to obtain or keep their legal status, the distribution of seats through the split number system, the single list and the application of the optional preferential vote mechanism, the prohibition of double militancy and the regulation of aspects related to the financing of political campaigns.

This reform was partially revised in 2009, when 11 articles of the Constitution were modified (including 5 of those included in the 2003 Constitution) and a new one was incorporated: The electoral threshold was increased to 3% of the valid votes for legal personality and the allocation of seats in the Senate, substitutions or replacements in popularly elected positions were eliminated, sanctions were incorporated for legislators, parties and movements linked to groups outside the law, the holding of inter-party consultations for the definition of candidates and requirements for the change of party by members of a public corporation.

In 2015, the so-called "balance of powers reform" was approved, which reached 22 articles of the Constitution (including 3 that had already been modified in 2003 and 2009). It eliminated the presidential reelection that had been incorporated only in 2004, created new seats

for special constituencies and modified the criteria for allocation by territorial constituency.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the transitory provisions for the implementation of the Peace Agreements that include the allocation of 10 seats for the political party or movement that emerges from the transition of the FARC-EP to political life in the constitutional periods 2018-2022 and 2022-2026 and another 16 seats for the special transitory peace constituencies in the periods 2022-2026 and 2026-2030.

In the successive legislative elections held since 2006, these reforms and others had an impact at different levels:

On the composition of Congress

Due to the incorporation of reserved seats and the modification of the allocation rules, the Senate went from having 102 members to 108: 100 elected in a single national constituency and allocated by the split number system, 2 for the special indigenous constituency, 1 for the second most voted candidate for president and 5 for the party that emerged from the FARC-EP.

The House of Representatives went from 166 members in 2014 to 172 in 2018 and 188 in 2022: 161 elected by territorial constituency according to population and awarded by the split number system, 2 for the special Afro-descendant constituency, 1 for the special indigenous constituency, 1 for the international constituency, 1 for the special constituency of the Raizal community of the department of San Andrés and Providencia, 1 for the second most voted candidate for vice president, 5 for the party emerged from the FARC-EP and 16 for the special transitional peace constituencies.

On the number of parties with representation in Congress and legislative fragmentation

The number of benches went from about 40 in the 1998 and 2002 elections to about 14 since the 2006 elections (11 on average in the Senate and 17 in the House of Representatives). However, the same did not happen with legislative fragmentation, which has been



increasing steadily since 2014, to the point of surpassing 2002 levels. In other words, there are fewer benches but equal or more fragmentation and this was accentuated in 2022. What does the composition of Congress show us then in these years?

- The two most traditional parties, the Conservative and the Liberal, have managed to maintain a considerable legislative representation, especially in Representatives, despite the fact that the former lost positions to the new center-right parties and that in general their results in the presidential elections were meager. The Liberal, for its part, remained stable as second or third minority in the Senate, and first in Representatives with the exception of the 2010-2014 period. This was sustained in the 2022 elections, in which both parties even managed to increase their representation.

- In the center-right camp there were rearrangements in which the gravitation of former President Álvaro Uribe was key although in aggregate terms his representation was sustained until 2022: Cambio Radical and Centro Democrático grew in the 2018 elections, while Partido de la U and Opción Ciudadana ceded positions, the latter to the point of losing its legal status in 2018 for the Senate. In 2022, with Uribe further away from the electoral contest, all experienced a retraction in number of votes and seats. However, they are still relevant parties in Congress and even more so if one considers the possibility of alliances with the traditional parties in the face of the next government.

- With the exception of Polo Democrático Alternativo, which is already 20 years old, the party configuration of the center-left camp is more recent and therefore not yet consolidated. That encouraged the formation of coalitions as could be seen in the conformation of Lista de la Decencia in 2018 and in that of Pacto Histórico in 2022. In the 2018 elections, Lista de Decencia surprised by obtaining legal personality and accessing 4 seats in the Senate and 3 in Representatives (of which 2 correspond to those reserved for the opposition). The leap occurred only in these last elections: the list of Pacto Histórico - which includes the PDA and the old Lista de la Decencia - was the most voted with 2,250,000 votes for the Chamber of Deputies and 2,300,000 for the Senate.

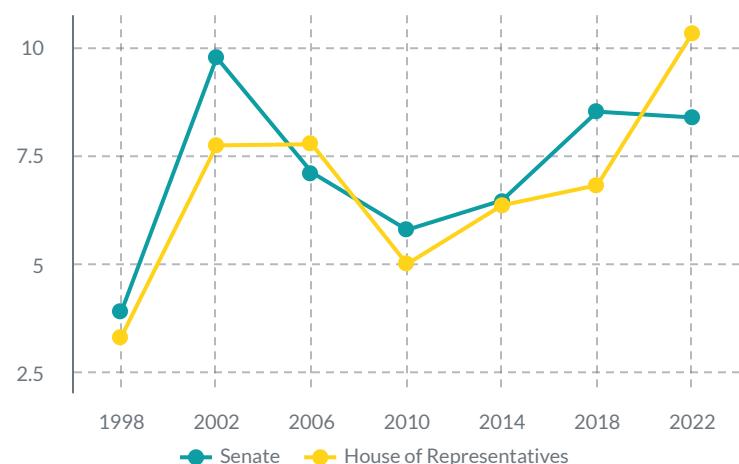
Although there is a center option, in recent times it has shown difficulties in defining itself internally and defining its alignments. Since its formation in 2009, Alianza Verde grew steadily in the first three elections in which it participated, which allowed it to go from 5 seats in 2009 to 9 in 2018 in the Senate, and from 3 to 9 in Representatives. It also ran presidential candidates in all of them, achieving excellent results in 2010 and 2018. However, in 2022 the campaign issues changed and the coalition that now includes Centro Esperanza was pulled by two visions, the one that seeks to represent a different way of doing politics and the one closer to a liberal reform agenda, as shown in this analysis by [La Silla Vacía](#).

- With the increase of reserved seats, the number of independent benches with which the government may eventually negotiate the approval of its legislative initiatives has also increased.

On the importance of personal leadership

Here there are also several aspects to consider. On the one hand, and as indicated above, the gravitation of the figure of former president Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) has been central in the configuration of the new center-right parties, at least until 2022. Partido de la U was founded in 2005 to support his reelection, although it later split under the Santos presidency. Cambio Radical integrated his government coalition until 2009, when part of its

Figure 9. Legislative fragmentation by Congress chamber, 1998-2022



Source: Facundo Cruz



COLOMBIA

when part of its congressmen migrated to Partido de la U. In 2013, he created Centro Democrático, which captured dissidents from Partido de la U and Partido Conservador, and made two excellent elections in 2014 and 2018. The same did not happen in 2022, in which it lost both votes and seats. However, it is still a relevant party and could gain momentum from the decision to withdraw its lackluster presidential candidate to support the candidacy of Federico "Fico" Gutiérrez for the Equipo por Colombia coalition, also composed of Partido Conservador and Partido de la U.

On the other hand, the system of open list and optional preferential vote that allows voters to indicate the candidate of their preference among the names on the list, has resulted in many cases in a vote more oriented to individual candidates than to the parties, as our [post-electoral report](#) shows. This could be clearly seen in the 2018 elections in which Álvaro Uribe (Centro Democrático), Antanas Mockus (Alianza Verde) and Jorge Robledo (PDA) achieved historically high votes, leveraging their individual caudal to their respective lists. This explains why these three parties won seats for elected senators with individual votes close to 25,000 votes, while other candidates of the Liberal, Conservative, Cambio Radical and Partido de la U parties that obtained 50 or 60,000 votes were left without a seat, as indicated in the report of the [Electoral Observation Mission](#).

In 2022, all congressional lists were open except for those of Pacto Histórico and Comunes. However, the leverage was rather given by the inter-party consultations that took place simultaneously. Thus, unlike in previous elections, the presidential race was fully involved in this campaign, which had the double effect of overshadowing the legislative lists and at the same time giving them power. In particular, it is worth mentioning Gustavo Petro's performance, who obtained 4.5 million votes in the internal campaign of Pacto Histórico. As mentioned before, the list reached 2,300,000.

Legislative forecasts

In a context of polarization and fragmentation, the numerical superiority of the center-right benches taken as a whole could be a major challenge if Petro becomes president. In such a scenario, it is feasible that the

Historic Pact will try to move closer to the center to build bridges with the Green Alliance-Center Hope and the Liberal Party whose support today is being contested by the left and the right. The seats of the special constituencies will also be key, with the added difficulty that in this case the new government will have to negotiate with multiple actors.



A surprise election result marked by indecision and abstention

The results of the February 6 general elections were not quite as anticipated ([see our post-election report here](#)). As polls had projected, former president José María Figueres of the traditional party "Partido Liberación Nacional" won in the first round, with 27% of the vote. However, the surprise of the day was economist Rodrigo Chaves, a new face in Costa Rican politics who ran with the recently established Partido Social Democrático party. With 16% of the votes, he came second, leaving Fabricio Alvarado (Partido Nueva República) and Lineth Saborío (Partido Unidad Social Cristiana) out of the running, and today he is emerging as the favorite in the polls.

The elections came amid much public disenchantment and party fragmentation borne out by the virtual disappearance of the ruling party, a record number of candidates (25), voter indecision, and ultimately the highest level of electoral abstention seen in decades (40%). These conditions favored the newcomer Chaves despite his lack of experience (and despite the accusations leveled against him).

A survey by [CIEP-UCR](#) shows that voter indecision caused a wide range of fluctuating preferences ahead of the elections – benefiting not just Chavez but also Figueres and with the PUSC and Partido Liberal Progresista losing out.

The new Legislative Assembly configuration

As a result of the elections, the 57 seats in dispute have been distributed as follows: 19 for Partido Liberación Nacional (Figueres), 10 for Partido Social Democrático (Chaves), 9 for Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (Saborio), 7 for Partido Nueva República (F. Alvarado), 6 for Partido Liberal Progresista and, finally, 6 for Frente Amplio. These results are evidence of a high degree of party fragmentation, which implies that the new government will have to dialogue with the other political forces in order to push forward its agenda. Moreover, the absence of independent legislators in the new legislature further reinforces this need for dialogue. The big loser was the Partido Acción Ciudadana (PAC), after having governed uninterruptedly for the last 8 years, suffered a historic defeat by failing to win seats in the Legislative

Assembly, an unprecedented event in the country's history.

The road to the second round

At a general level, polls have been anticipating that Rodrigo Chaves could win the second round by a wide margin: 60% vs. 40% according to OPol Consultores (11/02); 46.5% vs. 36% according to CIEP-UCR (24/02); 58% vs. 42% according to IDESCO-UNA (04/03); and 63% vs. 37% according to Enfoques (12/03).

PUSC, Frente Amplio and Partido de Acción Ciudadana (currently in power) have already announced that they will not support any candidate. In this line, polls indicate that a good part of PNR, PLP and FA voters, and to a lesser extent those of PUSC, are undecided at this moment. However, it is not excluded that Chaves is attracting votes from PUSC, PNR and PLP, in addition to those disenchanted with traditional politics. Figueres, on the other hand, has hardened his discourse, possibly in an attempt to dispute that same space, especially part of the votes of Fabricio Alvarado, who came third in the first round. However, he must deal with a very high negative image, 49% according to CIEP-UCR data.

Electoral calendar

March - December 2022



COSTA RICA

April 3:
presidential runoff



COLOMBIA

May 29:
presidential elections



MEXICO

June 5:
state elections



COLOMBIA

June 19:
presidential runoff



BRAZIL

October 2:
presidential, legislative
and state elections



PERU

October 2:
regional and municipal
elections



BRAZIL

October 30:
presidential runoff

Methodological notes

January - February 2022

This monitoring of presidential image compiles surveys on presidential image, level of presidential approval and level of government approval, developed in 18 countries of the region by a group of approximately 90 consulting firms and research centers.

The measurements are integrated by means of a simple average per country for the study period. The data sources are not weighted according to the methodology used, sample size or pollster. The averages corresponding to this two-month period are compared with those of previous two-month periods, using the same methodology. Starting in 2022, the presidential ranking and evolution graphs will only aggregate presidential approval data, not government approval data, which will be presented separately, when applicable.

Although the goal of this report is to average multiple data sources, its fulfillment is conditioned by the availability of information. For this reason, all those cases in which the figures are based on a single source of data for each period considered are identified.

On the regional ranking of presidential image. It includes cases that meet the following two criteria: a) they have measurements of presidential approval taken by at least two data sources (consulting firms / research centers); b) they have at least three measurements for the period considered.



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Power of an image
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