



DIRECTORIO  
LEGISLATIVO

FORTALECEMOS  
LAS DEMOCRACIAS  
DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING  
DEMOCRACIES  
IN LATIN AMERICA

MAY 20, 2022

# Image of Power

REPORT ON PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL RATINGS IN LATIN AMERICA  
MARCH - APRIL 2022



# Executive summary

Data collected for the first months of this year show the consolidation of high or very high levels of disapproval for most governments of the region, with especially sharp falls in the case of those recently elected to power. Both these trends are new for Latin America – and explored in more depth by Mario Riorda in a piece titled *Governments, for the most part, are suffering – and being suffered*.

In Colombia and Brazil, polls show a narrowing of the gaps between rival candidates ahead of the presidential elections, though with clear frontrunners remaining in each case. While a second-round runoff looks likely in Colombia, in Brazil things are less certain, with most polsters agreeing Lula needs to add another 5-10 points to pass the 50% threshold needed for a 1st round victory.

Chile and Costa Rica have both welcomed new presidents – respectively Gabriel Boric, on March 11, and Rodrigo Chaves on May 8. Both, especially Boric, have faced a tumultuous time since. In Chile, clashes in the south of the country, internal coalition squabbling, bad economic news and rumbling social discord over the constitution renewal, have combined to see a 9% average drop in support for the president in the period from March to April. Chaves, for his part, has had to defend his country from a cyber attack causing major IT disruption across various ministries.

Tensions within governing coalitions are nothing new in Latin America, but they have been a strong feature of late. This includes in Argentina, following the government's poor showing in last year's legislative elections; in Peru, where the president has fought off another ousting attempt but been unable to prevent key political departures; and in Chile, whose formation of a representative 'rainbow cabinet' designed to widen Boric's political support has proved arduous.

In this issue, we will also be looking at two themes high on the regional agenda – rising inflation and public insecurity. As well as Argentina and Venezuela,

five of the region's main economies are now seeing average annual inflation figures of 8% or above, with the cost of living foremost on the minds of citizens. In addition, five nations have declared a state of emergency on the grounds of public insecurity, covering all or part of their territory, and prompting growing concern over the risk of these moves to democratic freedoms and the rule of law.

Finally, two of the most popular governments in the region, Mexico and Uruguay, passed crucial referendum 'tests'. The victories were somewhat undermined in each case, however: in Mexico, owing to a paltry turnout and in Uruguay, because of the narrow margin of victory. Meanwhile, the Chilean government is eying with concern recent polls showing voting intentions ahead of the vote on its new constitution set for early September.

**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 approach is outlined in more detail in the "Methodological notes" section at the end of the report.

## This number includes:

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# Governments, for the most part, are suffering – and being suffered

*Por Mario Riorda\**

Overgeneralizing can sometimes happen when sweeping conclusions are made on the basis of particular or one-off phenomena. In the same vein, purported trends and tendencies occurring in Latin America may not always be accurate. One of these is the common belief that all the region's governments have seen an erosion of public support as a result of the pandemic. This is untrue for several reasons.

For one thing, approval ratings of several Latin American governments did not appear to be knocked one way or the other during their response to the pandemic and despite its associated economic woes. For another, many governments there were already short of public support before the arrival of Covid 19. And indeed, a number of the ones that today face legitimacy issues either came to power at an advanced stage of the pandemic or even just months ago.

What we can say for certain is that, for most of the presidencies of the region, there is a very clear trend pointing to often sharp public disapproval. This is a new thing. In the seven years from 2002 to 2009, average presidential approval ratings increased from 36% to 60%. Then after 2010 they began falling. Today, two characteristics of the behavior of this public support stand out:

1. The speed with which approval drops once presidents take office;
2. The extent of the public disapproval, which in many cases outweighs or even dwarfs their levels of support.

Let's look more closely at this, using survey data accessed by Directorio Legislativo.

In Argentina, disapproval to approval ratios of between 2:1 or even 3:1 can be seen, depending on

the source. Brazil shows a similar picture. Bolivia less so, but with a seeming drift towards 2:1 dislike vs like.

In the case of Chile, the comfortable margin of approval enjoyed by its recently assumed president exists no longer; almost as many now oppose him as show their support, with signs of the former taking over. And this, barely two months into his tenure. Several other countries display the same trend. In Colombia, a majority-felt discontent with the president is well documented. Costa Rica's outgoing leader signs off with a 3:1 ratio of disapproval to approval. In Ecuador there is a similar scenario, and with a president that has not even spent a year in power. Panama, Paraguay, Peru – all show similar trends; Peru has even witnessed repeated attempts by its Congress to oust the president.

There are some exceptions; not all the region's presidencies are similarly beleaguered. Bucking the trend are countries like Uruguay, Mexico and – especially – El Salvador.

Why this pattern?

Certainly those enjoying more public support appear to be 'playing on the edge'. They tend to pursue more aggressive, reform-oriented policies. Much of their 'promise of change' draws from Hirschman's "argument of reciprocal support", with previous achievements being preserved or reinforced through new reforms. It is happening both democratically – witness the recent Uruguayan referendum on a major government-led reform package – and in a context of controversy and tension, such as in Mexico or El Salvador, the latter even in violation of democratic or human rights norms.

Those enjoying high levels of backing tend to use consultative approaches i.e. referenda, while at the same time and often by stealth, incrementally

\*President of ALICE (Latin American Association of Researchers in Electoral Campaigns). Director of the Master's Degree in Political Communication at Universidad Austral.

## Governments, for the most part, are suffering – and being suffered

breaking with conventional rules and structures of governance. Thus they steadily go about modifying the State structurally and legally from within, changing its relations with the market and citizens. It is also well known that leaderships that can be defined as populist, particularly the cases of Mexico and El Salvador, tend to have, in the short term, positive effects, increasing confidence in democracy.

These publicly backed governments tend to want to be seen as heading a movement – pushing particular causes that pit the present against the ‘mistaken past’, to be banished. They may adopt a crusade-like demeanor, eschewing the status quo and relying less on party than on identity politics – or rather ‘counter-identity politics’, constantly engaging in battle with the opposition and with what preceded them.

Meanwhile, the unpopular presidents appear to be incapable (or unwilling, or both) to effectively negotiate the new-school terrain of fragmented multi-party politics. The emergence of new parties and identities at the cost of weakened traditional ones has created fresh expectations. The struggling leaders are failing to meet these; and their attachment to the well-known political parties of old – and the support they get from those parties’ former leaders, such as in Colombia, Argentina and Bolivia – simply are not the pull-factors they once were. Beyond this, some of the weakened leaders are not able to cater for their own very disparate minded citizens and societies, some of which are still haunted by past crises and trauma (e.g. Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador).

A hallmark of these unpopular presidents in the region is their adoption of closed-off leadership styles. As in Brazil, they may be instinctively exclusionary and tribal in nature, governing inflexibly and by dogma. One of the evident challenges for some of them is that, unable to recognise (much less take steps to address) that their place in government owes far less to their own merit than to previous administrations’ failings,

they underestimate the fragility of their public support. This can be seen in their reckless embroilment in scandal after scandal – precisely what they need to avoid to keep already wavering voters on side.

Exacerbating this is that those who are doing badly in terms of public opinion, appear to have reached government because they managed to pull off a good marketing strategy that had nothing to do with a sound government program, or because they were the by-product of the party system crisis, ultimately leading to first round electoral surprises.

These different issues and dynamics are, of course, just some of the myriad factors at play here. Economics, the media, civil society – each of those also contributes and in different, complex ways. And yet the big picture is undeniable: elected leaders have a hard time in office – and citizens a hard time putting up with them. Might this be because governments simply aren’t recognizing the hardship and disaffection of our times?

# Presidential Image Rankings

March - April 2022

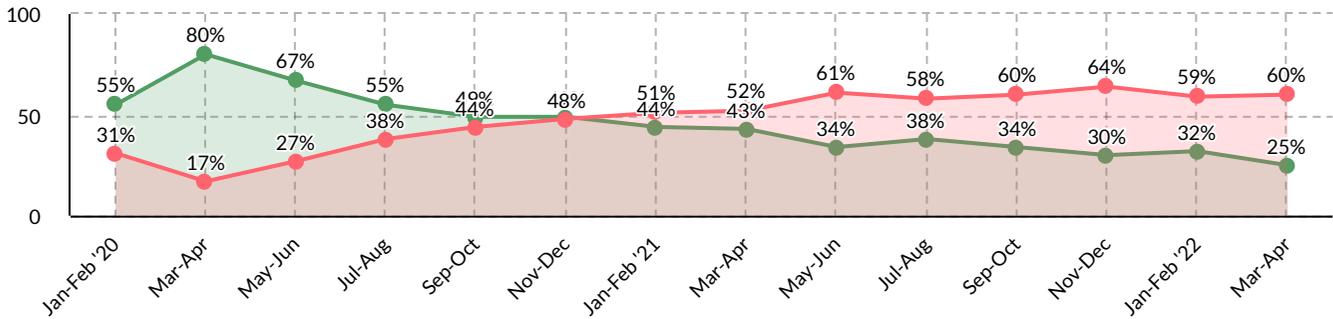
These rankings include cases where a minimum of three measurements are available over the study period from at least two different sources. Unclear answers ("neither approve nor disapprove" or "regular") are not counted.



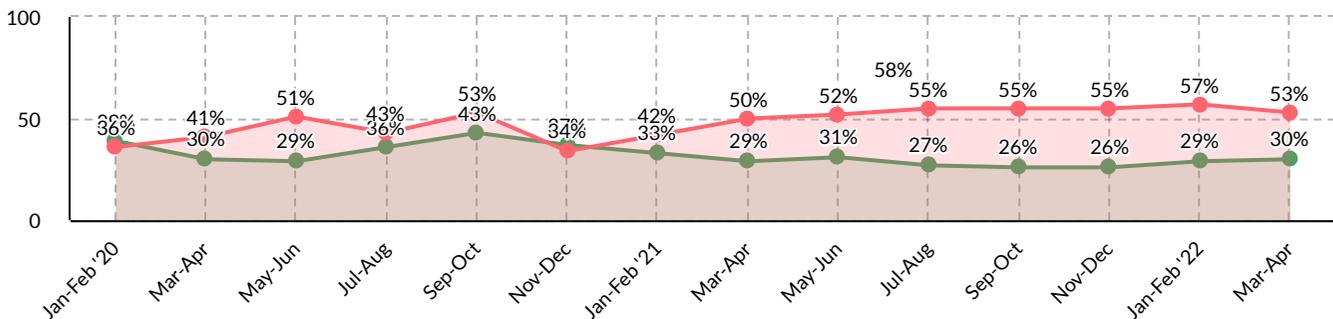
# Changes in presidential approval 2020 - 2022

Positive  
Negative

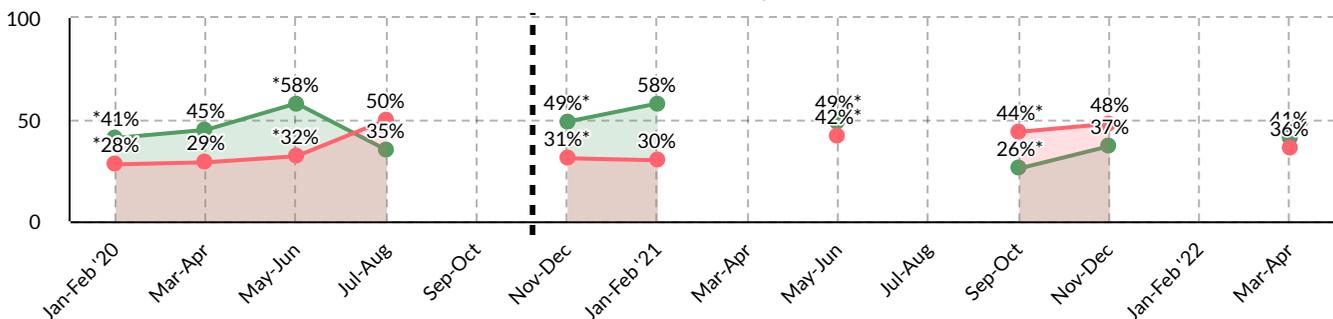
### Argentina: Alberto Fernández



### Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro

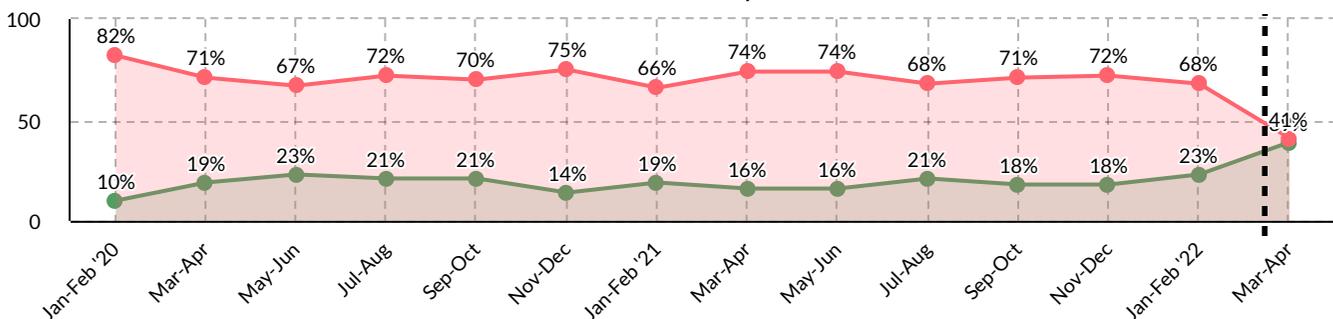


### Bolivia: Jeanine Añez | Luis Arce



\*Arce took office Nov. 11, 2020

### Chile: Sebastián Piñera | Gabriel Boric

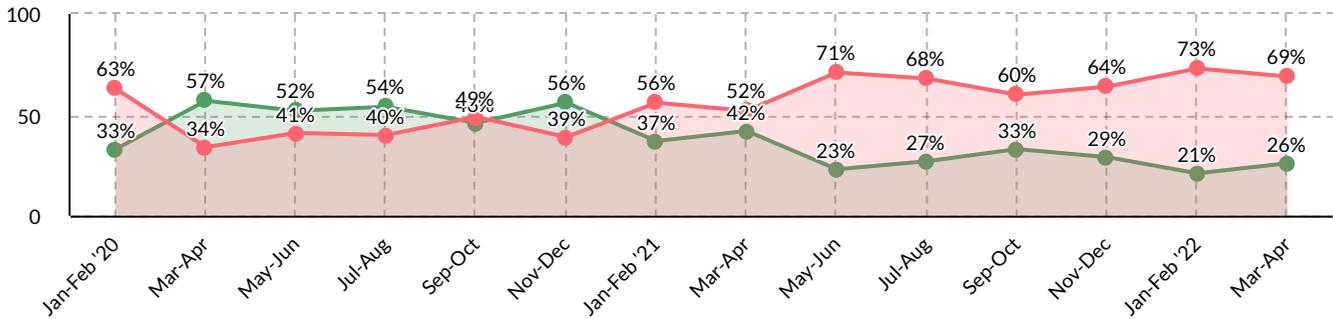


\*Boric took office March 11, 2022

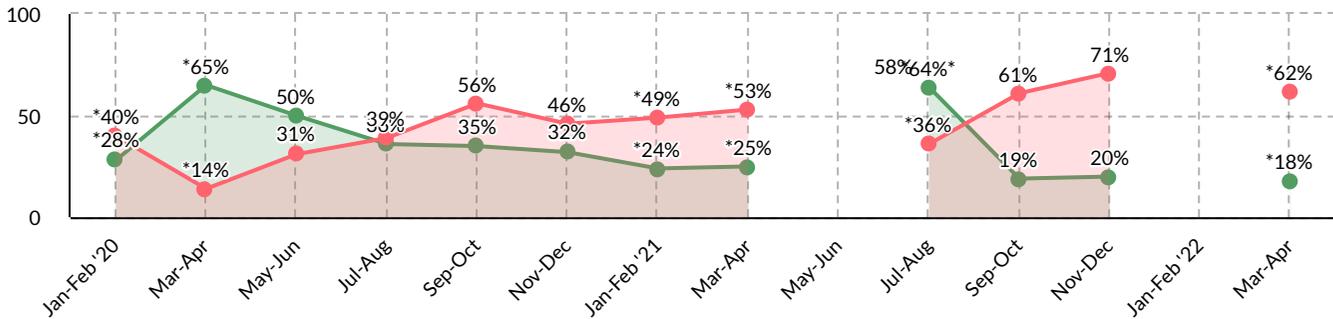
# Changes in presidential approval 2020 - 2022

Positive  
Negative

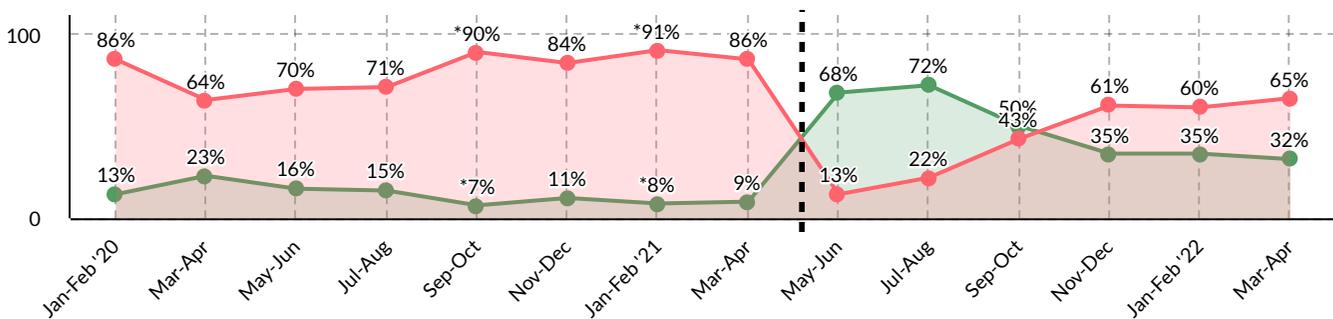
## Colombia: Iván Duque



## Costa Rica: Carlos Alvarado

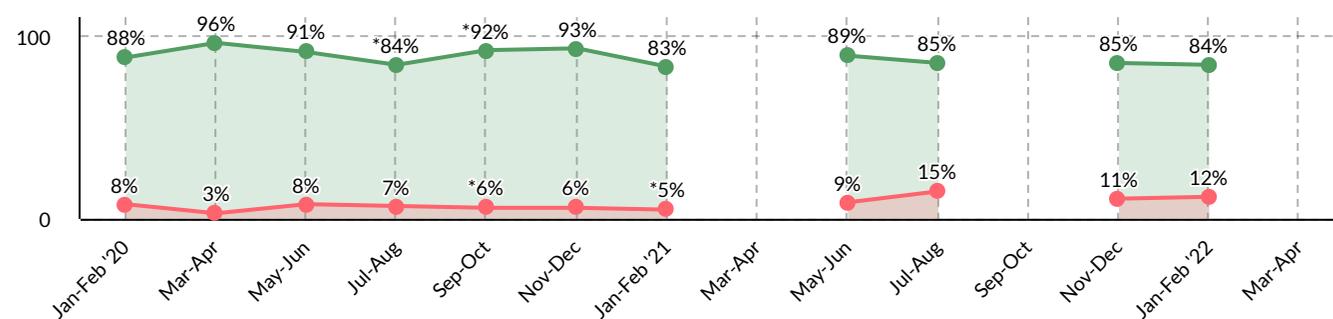


## Ecuador: Lenin Moreno | Guillermo Lasso



\*Lasso took office May 24, 2021

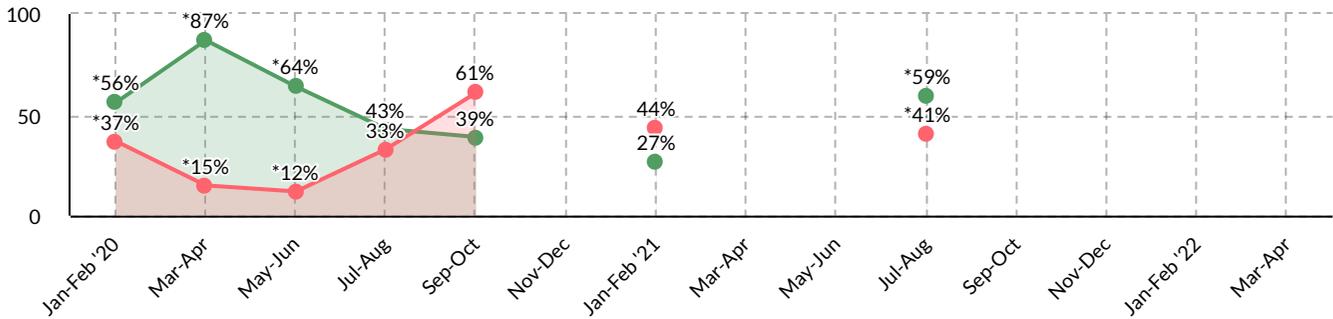
## El Salvador: Nayib Bukele



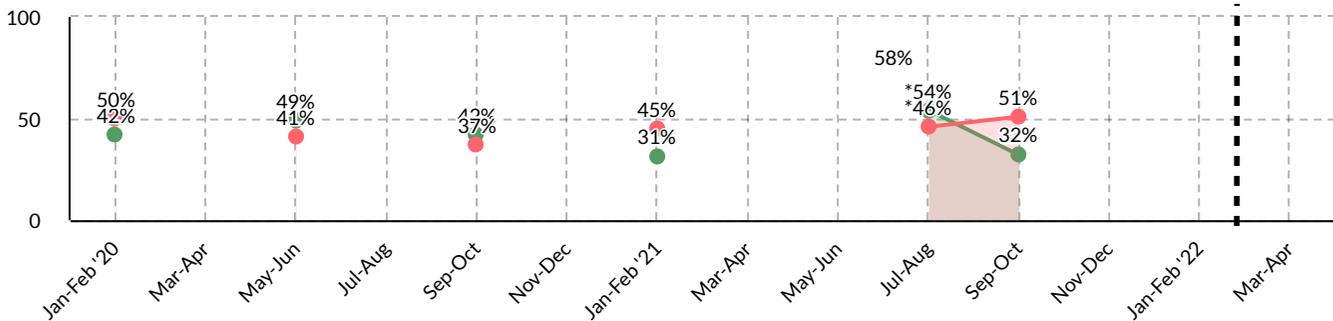
# Changes in presidential approval 2020 - 2022

Positive  
Negative

Guatemala: Alejandro Giammattei

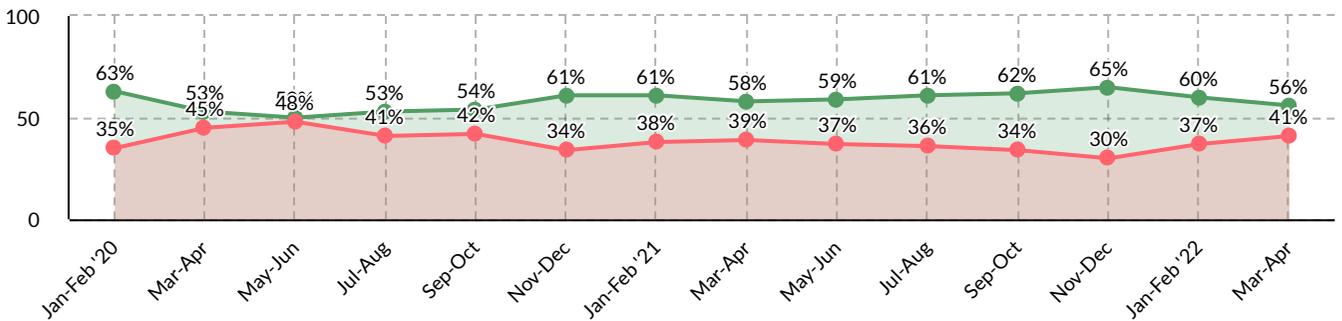


Honduras: Juan Orlando Hernández | Xiomara Castro

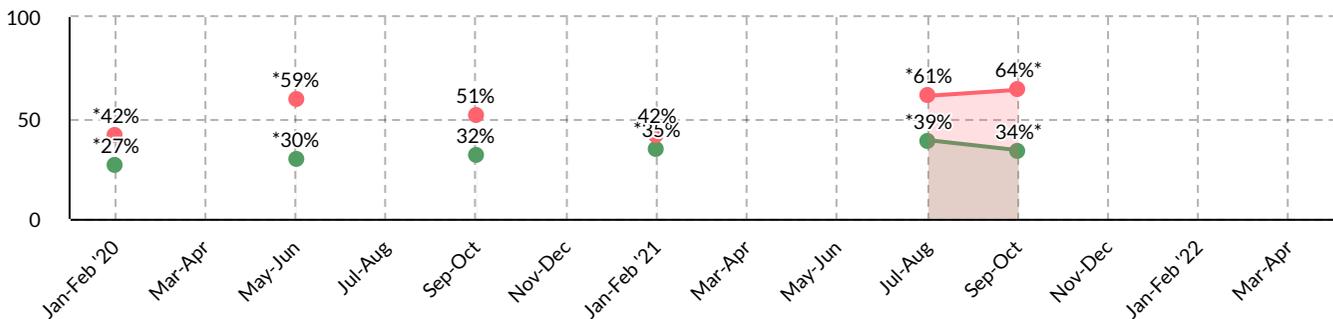


\*Castro took office January 27, 2022

Mexico: Andrés Manuel López Obrador



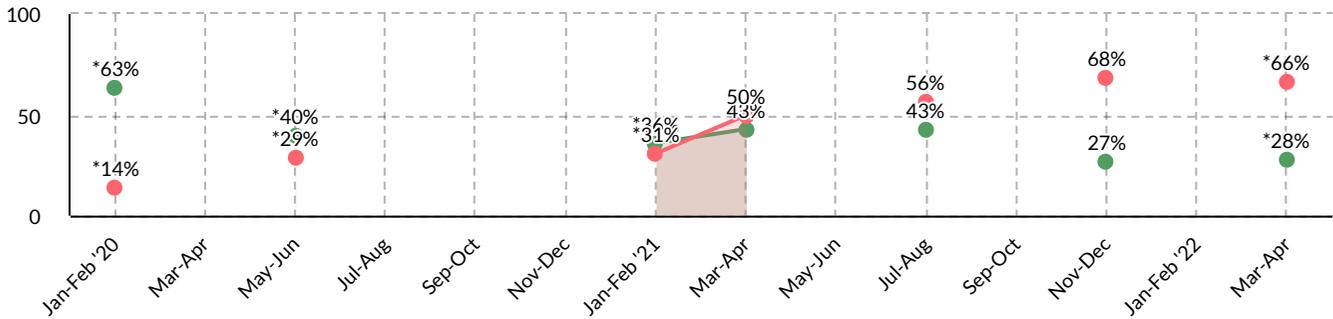
Nicaragua: Daniel Ortega



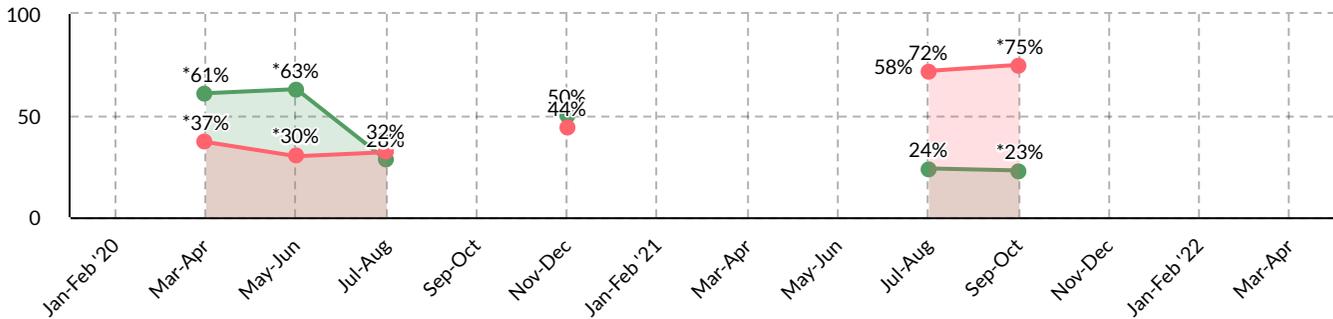
# Changes in presidential approval 2020 - 2022

Positive  
Negative

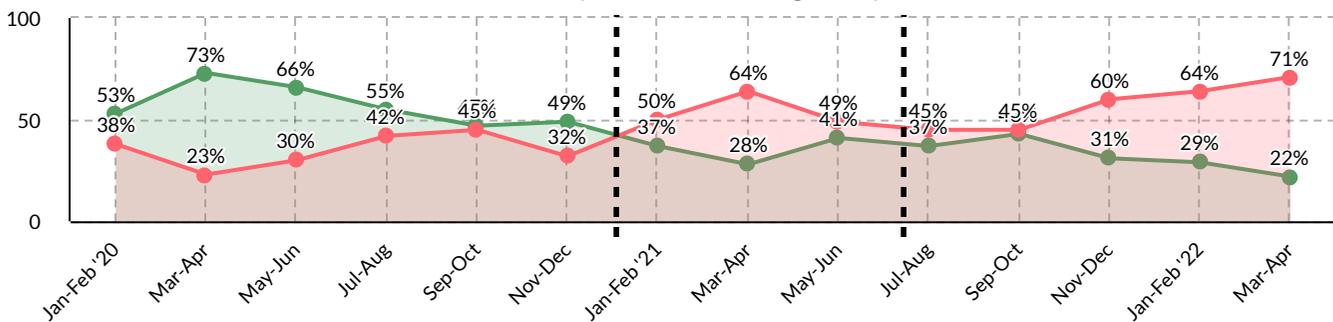
Panama: Laurentino Cortizo



Paraguay: Mario Abdo Benítez

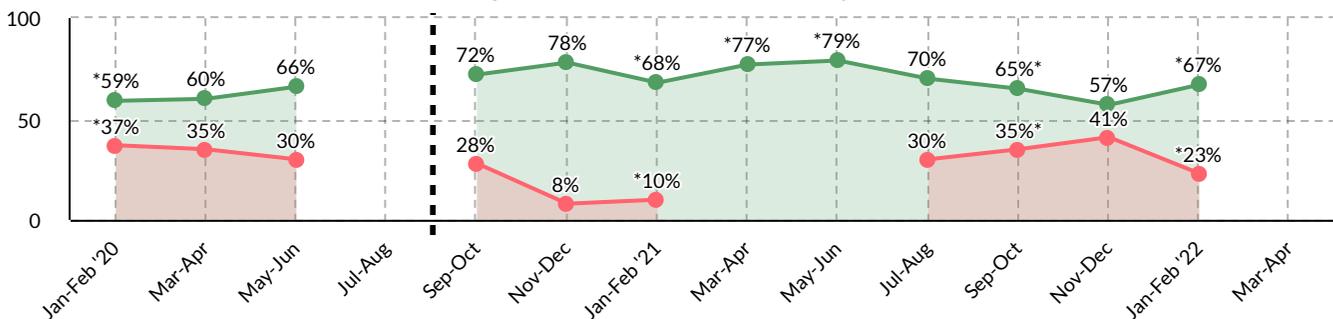


Peru: Martín Vizcarra | Francisco Sagasti | Pedro Castillo



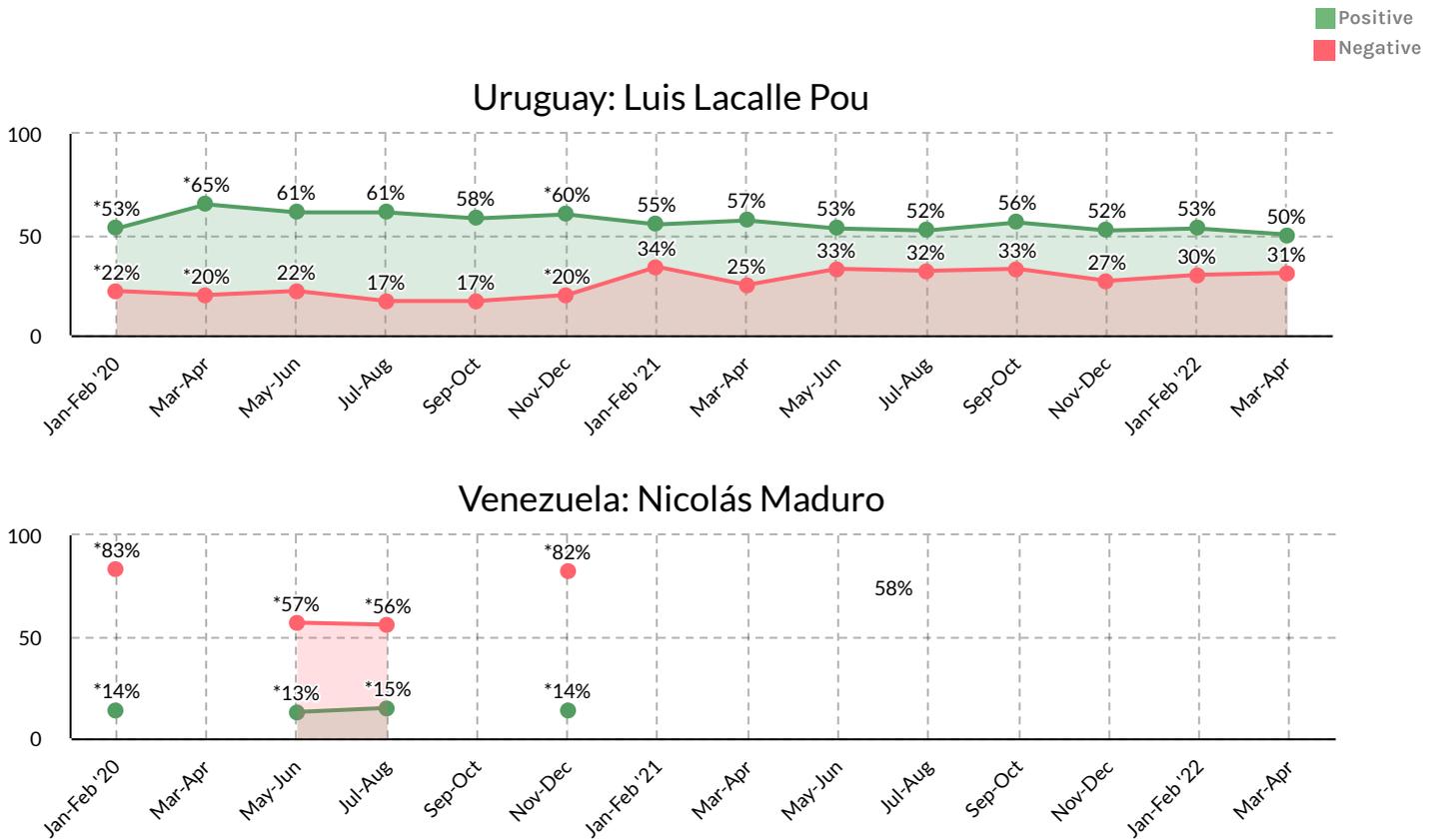
\*Sagasti took office November 17, 2020 and Castillo, July 28, 2021

Dominican Republic: Danilo Medina | Luis Abinader



\*Abinader took office August 16, 2020

## Changes in presidential approval 2020 - 2022

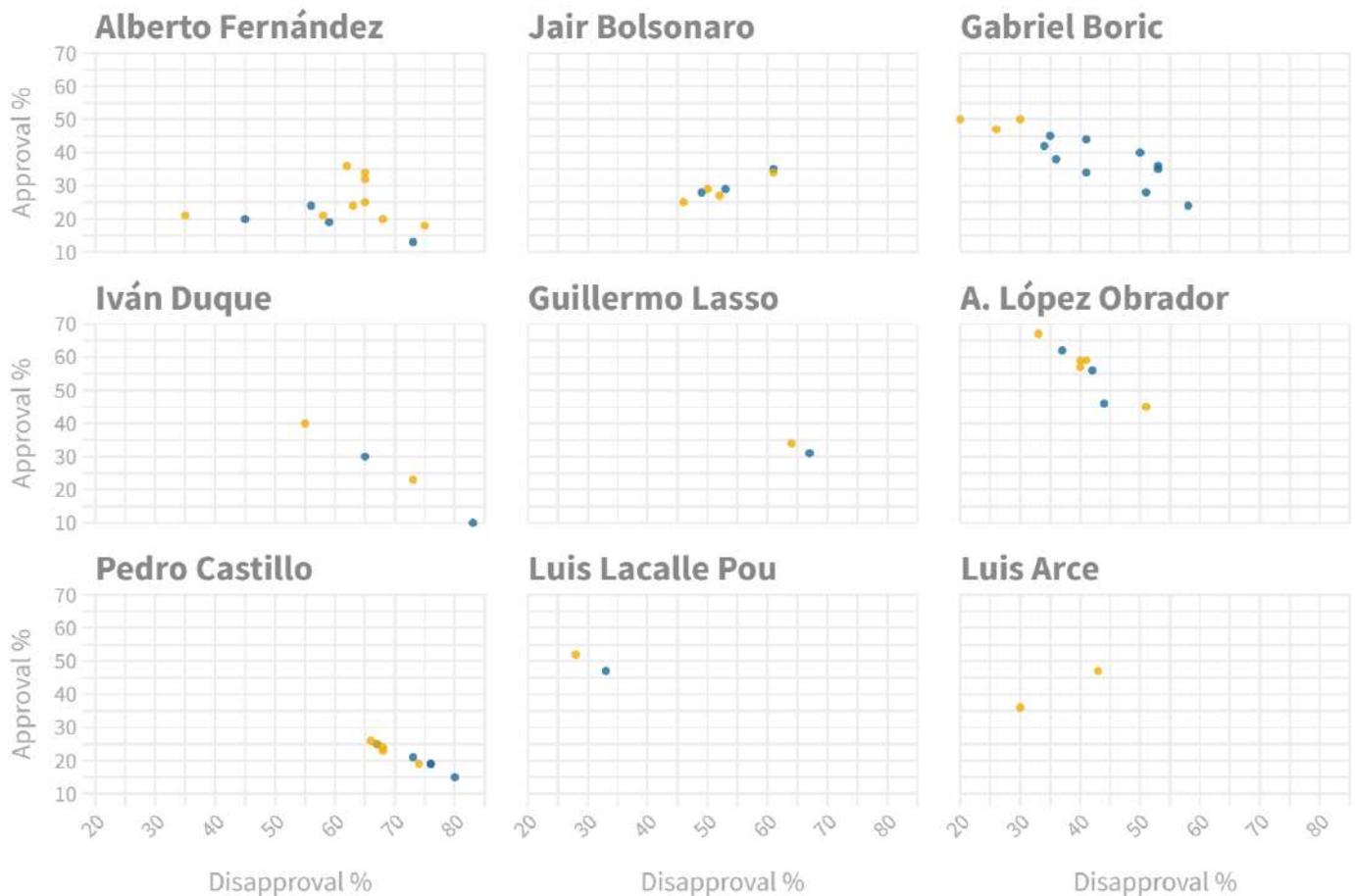


## Evolution of the presidential image between March and April

The following chart shows the evolution of the image (popularity) of presidents throughout the period and the dispersion of the measurements, marked with different colored dots according to the month they were taken. The descending line to the right indicates a fall, while the ascending line to the left shows growth.

The drop is evident in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay. In Brazil there were no significant variations. The variation is not conclusive in the cases of Colombia, due to the high level of dispersion of the results, and Bolivia due to the unavailability of data for April.

Mes ● April ● March



# These are the top 5 issues of this number:

## 1. In Colombia and Brazil, the presidential race still has clear frontrunners but gaps are narrowing

As analyzed in the first issue of this year, for some time now elections in the region have been crossed by political polarization, fragmentation and the crisis of the party systems. Faced with this context, what are the scenarios for the two key elections in 2022?

**In Colombia**, where the current government cannot be reelected and bows out with close to 70% disapproval, history could be made if the left-wing candidate wins the May 29 first round. However, forecasts for a likely second round are still uncertain, and even more so given that voting is not compulsory. Indeed, according to a May 18 INVAMER survey, only 51% of respondents indicated that they will definitely go to vote and 15% that they probably will.

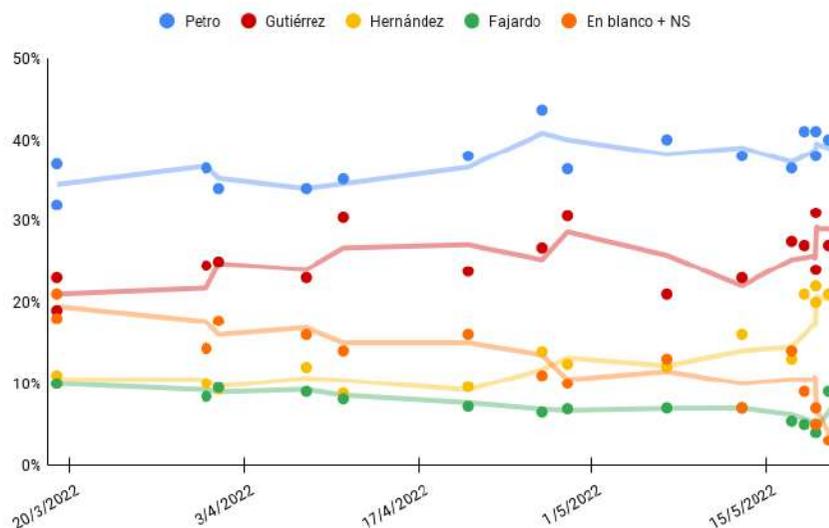
Colombia's inter-party consultations on March 13 - where the parties decided on who their candidates would be - has centered the country's electoral race around two candidates: Gustavo Petro-Francia Márquez (Pacto Histórico) and Federico "Fico" Gutiérrez-Rodrigo Lara Sánchez (Equipo por Colombia). All polls and scenarios continue to favor Gustavo Petro, by a margin of between 6 to 17% depending on the pollster (**Figure 1**). Petro

ranks highest in Bogotá (where he was mayor), the Caribbean and the Pacific, and among the 18-24 year-old population.

Gutiérrez, who just prior the elections barely mustered 10% in polls, later settled at around 25, after the early withdrawal of Oscar Zuluaga from the Democratic Center and the official backing of the Liberal Party. However, he has not managed to grow much since then. The former mayor of Medellín is stronger in Antioquia-Cafetero Axis and among the population over 55 years old.

So far, the left-right polarization scenario seemed quite clear. However, in the two weeks prior to the election, Rodolfo Hernández, businessman and independent candidate, who until then had remained in a stable third place with a voting intention of around 11% and a low intensity campaign, made the headlines. With an impressive 10-point increase in the polls, Hernández is now in position to contest both the first and the second round if poll numbers prove to be true. Ingrid Betancourt joined his campaign and invited a lackluster Sergio Fajardo - who did not manage to get above 7 points and keeps dropping - to do the same. In fact, a unified platform between the two candidates was on the table barely a month ago,

Figure 1. Voting intention for first round presidential election, Colombia 2022



Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion polls from March-May. Lines show moving average trendlines.



## 1. In Colombia and Brazil, the presidential race still has clear frontrunners but gaps are narrowing

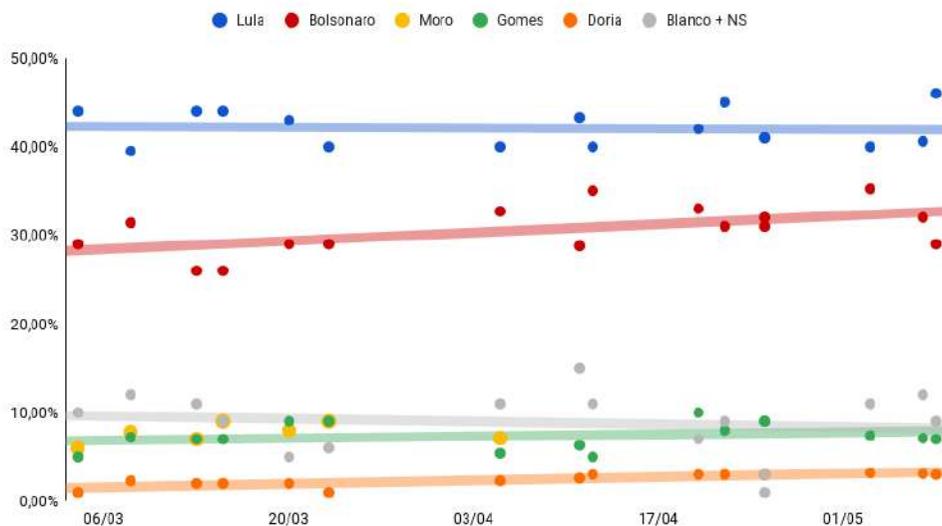
the former São Paulo state governor, with 7% and 3% respectively.

Even though all polls and scenarios favor Lula by a wide margin, he is still thought to need between 5 to 10 additional percentage points to win outright in the first round (**Figure 3**). Picking his erstwhile adversary (and another former governor of the state of São Paulo) Gerardo Alckim as his running mate, can be seen as a bid to achieve that extra margin of support, by appealing to more center-ground voters.

Around 40% of those surveyed indicate that they would not vote for Lula under any circumstances, while in the case of Bolsonaro this proportion rises to around 60%. An FSB survey also indicates that almost 40% will make a strategic vote, that is, they will vote depending on who they do not want to win (i.e. refrain from voting for third-party options to instead back the least disliked of the two frontrunners).

To close, we cannot help but remark that the risk of electoral results being challenged also seems to increase, as Jair Bolsonaro has already demonstrated on repeated occasions by questioning the reliability of the electronic voting system in Brazil. It was also seen in Colombia, with thwarted attempts to call for a recount of its Senate vote, further discrediting the National Registrar's Office and its head, Alexander Vega.

**Figure 3. Voting intention for first round presidential election, Brazil 2022**  
(closed list of options)



Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation [of public opinion polls from March-May](#). Lines show linear trendlines.

# These are the top 5 issues of this number:

## 2. Strained government coalitions under "friendly fire"

Tensions within government coalitions are not new, but lately they appear to have been exacerbated amidst distrust in democratic institutions, the crisis of the party system and the decline of economic activity among other such contextual factors.

Be it electoral coalitions or ex-post coalitions formed to ensure governability, such internal strains may partly explain the two striking factors that Mario Riorda highlights in his analysis: the rapid drop in approval in the early stage of the term (or more popularly, the curtailment of the "honeymoon") and high or very high levels of disapproval.

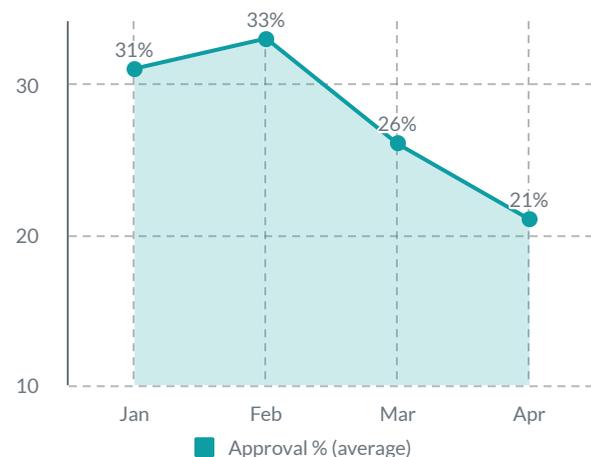
**In Argentina**, the poor results in November's mid-term elections revealed the differences between the sectors most aligned with President Alberto Fernández and those behind Vice-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as to how to deal with the economic crisis. The agreement for the renegotiation of the debt with the IMF raised these difficulties to unprecedented levels. During the legislative debate, the ruling party's bench in both Senate and Chamber of Deputies voted divided, and then formally split (although not yet in practice) in the former in an attempt to obtain an additional seat in the Council of the Magistrature.

Following this, there was explicit criticism to the economic plan and to some members of the national cabinet closest to the President, who tried to avoid giving a direct answer until he could no longer sustain such silence.

In addition, the new dispute with the Judicial branch over a bill to reform the Supreme Court of Justice together with the already evident tensions within the main opposition coalition Juntos por el Cambio, allow to anticipate that passing laws will require complex negotiations on a case by case basis.

This way, the government's approval has been falling and stabilizing at low levels. A month-by-month analysis shows that it went from an average of 31% in January and 33% in February, to plummeting to 26% in March (despite the public support to the agreement with the IMF) and 21% in April.

**Figure 4. Changes in presidential approval in Argentina, January-April 2022**



Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation [of public opinion polls from March-May](#).

**In Chile**, President Gabriel Boric tried to gain political and legislative muscle by bringing together representatives of different political parties and independents in his cabinet. However, coexistence soon became complicated. In a scenario of high inflation (the Central Bank anticipates that it will be around 10% this year) and discouraging economic perspectives, the government is facing criticism from the right and the left, particularly from the Communist Party and other political sectors that are part of the government coalition. Daniel Jadue (from the Communist Party and his opponent in the internal elections) went so far as to say, in fact, that "the government program has no political viability" with a congress where the forces are balanced.

## 2. Strained government coalitions under "friendly fire"

It is precisely in the legislative arena where some of these differences were seen. The government managed to stop a bill to authorize a fifth withdrawal of pension funds (even though during Piñera's administration the now ruling party supported similar initiatives) but then failed with its counter proposal. There was also controversy within the coalition about the plan to regulate by law "an intermediate state of exception" to deal with the situation in Araucanía, so much so that it was discarded.

The disenchantment regarding the constitutional reform process (see more in "*Referendums: beyond the numbers, what is the bottom line for governments?*"), which Boric has backed openly, also seems to have had a dragging effect on his own figure (**Figure 5**).

On the other side of the border, Pedro Castillo is struggling with the consequences of a broken party system. His own candidacy is in itself a symptom of this crisis of representation, also evidenced by high parliamentary fragmentation.

As Pablo Stefanoni argues in [this article](#), (in Spanish) since the beginning of his mandate,

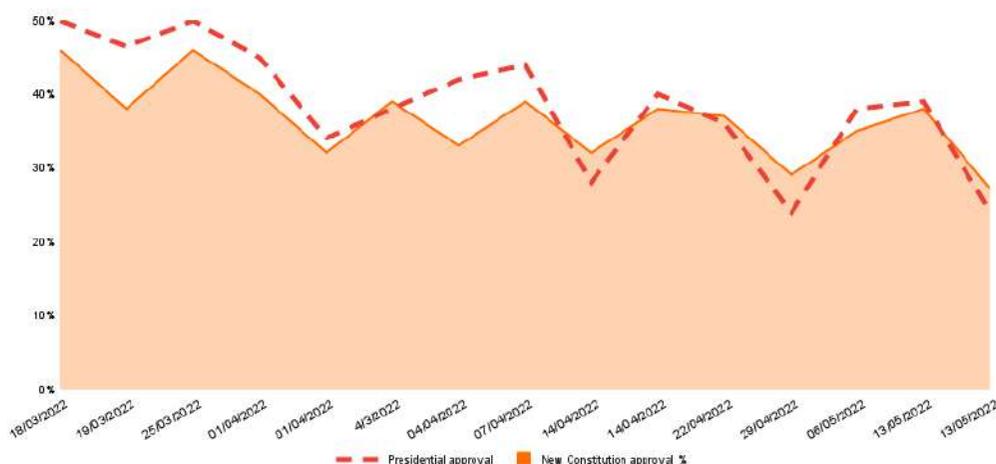
the president has wavered between three groups of support: the "provincial" left of Perú Libre, the urban left represented by Nuevo Perú, and his own union and local bases.

Beyond the challenges posed by a Congress in which he was far from having a majority, his attempts to balance these forces in shaping his four consecutive cabinets so far, have not been successful, nor have they been consistent.

Along the way, both the provincial left and the so-called "caviar" left split. At the end of December, five congressmen from Perú Libre left the bloc and now another 10 have joined. This leaves the ruling party's bench with 22 members out of a total of 130 and no longer the first minority. Nuevo Perú, whose leader Verónica Mendoza has declared that today they are part of a "democratic opposition", also left.

Under these circumstances, the president attempted to contain the crisis with a bill to call for a constitutional referendum. It was, not surprisingly, rejected by a legislative committee.

**Figure 5. Changes in presidential approval and approval of the new Constitution**



Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation [of public opinion polls from March-May](#).

## These are the top 5 issues of this number:

### 3. Inflation, a major concern for governments and citizens alike

The outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine hit trade and regional economies amid rising inflation. In addition to the well known cases of Argentina and Venezuela, some five of the region's main economies are already showing an average annual rate of 8% or more: Brazil (12.5%), Mexico (7.7%), Chile (10.5%), Colombia (9.2%) and Peru (7.5%).

To what extent do voters blame governments for the state of the economy, does it change when such global-scale phenomena as pandemics or war strike the economy?

Several academic studies suggest that when citizens hold the incumbent accountable for the state of the economy, they tend to overlook other issues in their vote. Electoral accountability may be contingent on various institutional factors, as well as economic ones, such as political fragmentation, the stability of the party system, or the existence of credible and well-differentiated electoral alternatives.

Why raise this point now? Because research also proves that the Latin American electorate is particularly sensitive to inflation, even more so than to other economic indicators whose effects are perhaps less immediate or direct. One need not go far back in time to see the political effects of fuel price hikes or transport increases: in Ecuador it led to the declaration of a state of emergency in 2019 and in Peru, in April 2022, while in Chile it was the trigger for the massive protests of late 2019 and early 2020.

#### What do available surveys show so far?

Inflation is the main cause of concern for citizens in Argentina, Chile and Costa Rica, and is among the most important in Brazil, where it is also regarded with more pessimism than any other economic indicator.

In Argentina and Brazil, respondents hold the government accountable for the situation and doubt its ability to manage it. This is not the case in Chile, where individuals blame the business sector more than the government, even when they believe that the possibilities of controlling inflation depend on the latter (reduction of VAT, increase in the minimum wage, etc.).

Between 94 and 98% note that the cost of living has increased in Brazil, Colombia and Peru. In the latter, 81% say that their income is not enough to cover their expenses; in Chile, it is 47%.

Still, in Colombia and Mexico, the cost of living appears below other factors such as the economy in general, unemployment or wage levels.

## These are the top 5 issues of this number:

### 4. Insecurity and state of emergency in El Salvador, Peru, Ecuador, Costa Rica and Chile

Already five countries have declared a state of emergency to deal with situations of internal commotion, insecurity and even social unrest. On the one hand, there is a highly popular president who declared a "war on gangs" after a tremendous wave of murders, but did so at the expense of a battered institutionality. On the other hand, two governments that are barely in their first year but have found it hard to gain credibility and are currently carrying the full weight of the economic crisis and social disenchantment on their shoulders. Finally, we have the region's two most recently elected presidents, grappling with ongoing problems.

An exception regime or state of emergency normally implies the suspension of constitutional rights and guarantees (freedoms of movement, peaceful assembly and association or the right to privacy) and the deployment of the Armed Forces, that is made in response to an extraordinary situation posing a serious threat to the country. However, what recent experience suggests is that these exceptional measures (which in El Salvador require legislative authorization) seem to be no longer an exception in Latin America. Let us take a case by case approach.

The state of emergency in **El Salvador** has been in force since the end of March. In the previous days, a series of violent murders attributed to the maras (gangs linked to drug trafficking and other illicit businesses) shocked the citizens and altered the internal order. As of today, more than 30,000 arrests have been made, according to government sources, while there have also been reports of torture and death during the detention period and lack of information on the situation and location of the detainees.

The Legislative Assembly endorsed the declaration of emergency requested by the President, with the abstention or absence of opposition deputies, as well as its subsequent extension until the end of May. But it also went further by passing laws detrimental to freedom of expression and the right to information. For example, it approved a "gag law" to punish anyone who shares information about gangs either through written or digital media with up to 15 years in prison, and suspended the public procurement law allowing the government to make a more discretionary and less supervised use of public funds as long as the state of emergency lasts.

The "war against the maras" seems to have been well received by public opinion, as shown by an April [CID Gallup poll](#), frequently cited by congressmen to support the emergency measures.

In **Peru**, several regions are now in a state of emergency, in some cases for years now. Although the state's capacity to enforce them is at least doubtful, the systematic use of exceptional measures since the 1980s and 1990s for counter-subversive fight has completely denaturalized them.

As things stand, the metropolitan area of Lima and the Callao region have been under emergency since at least February due to insecurity caused by "common criminals" and "organized gangs". However, that did not prevent the situation from escalating in early April when protests over fuel price increases led the government to declare a 24-hour curfew, though it was quickly reversed due to social backlash. Also under emergency rule are several provinces in the Amazonian region of Ucayali (since the beginning of May due to internal

## 4. Insecurity and state of emergency in El Salvador, Peru, Ecuador, Costa Rica and Chile

order and security reasons) and Apurímac (since the end of April), including some mining areas affected by social unrest.

Finally, the VRAEM Zone (an acronym for Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro River Valley), shattered by drug cultivation and criminal groups linked to drug trafficking, has been in emergency since at least 2016. Indeed, it was there that the massacre of 16 people took place in 2021. While the current Minister of Defense, Jose Gavidia, proposed a possible withdrawal of military forces before 2026, a recent Datum [poll](#) revealed that 8 out of 10 Peruvians disagree with this course of action.

**In Ecuador**, the state of emergency is linked to the escalation of violence caused by organized crime and, in particular, the prison crisis that in the last year has left approximately 400 inmates murdered. Since its outbreak, the government has resorted to this measure on several occasions. The first, at the end of September with a decree declaring a penitentiary emergency, shortly followed by a 60-day national-scale state of emergency. At the end of April, the exceptional measures reached the provinces of Guayas, Manabí and Esmeraldas, with the suspension of free transit for two months, a curfew and the deployment of more than 9,000 security agents to prevent illegal trafficking and the activity of criminal groups.

**In Chile**, Gabriel Boric has tried to avoid at all costs the declaration of a state of emergency in the Araucanía and Biobío regions, hot zones of the Mapuche conflict, which he criticized so much as an opposition leader. However, his proposal to create an "intermediate state of protection and safeguard" failed due to the lack of agreements within his government coalition. Under pressure from the transport unions, he finally declared a state of emergency, albeit limited to roads and highways.

Finally, the situation facing **Costa Rica** is different from the other countries. In this case, the state of emergency declared by president Rodrigo Chaves a few days after taking office, is related to the crisis caused by a series of extortive cyber attacks that began in mid-April paralyzing customs system operations, the tax collection platform and the public sector salary and pension payment platform, among others. "Costa Rica is at war", declared the president and suggested that the so-called Conti group behind these attacks might be receiving insider help.

## These are the top 5 issues of this number:

### 5. Referendums: beyond the numbers, what is the bottom line for governments?

The outcome of a referendum is always a clear "Yes" or "No". However, recent experiences in Mexico and Uruguay show that the political fallout can be more nuanced.

The so-called recall referendum in **Mexico**, created by a law in 2021, is a tool that allows citizens in that country to decide on whether a sitting president should continue in office or not. The mechanism works on two levels: first a minimum participation threshold of 40% of registered voters must be met for it to be binding; and then at least 50% must vote in favor of the president remaining in office.

AMLO won the referendum, securing his backing until 2024. But this was a meager victory, with a turnout of only 22.3%, albeit 90% in favor of his remaining in office.

Why was turnout so low? Several factors may have played a role, as analyzed in this [report](#) by Directorio Legislativo (in Spanish=: citizens' lack of trust, interest or awareness of it, owing to it being a new mechanism; calls by the opposition not to participate in it. For his part, AMLO accused the National Electoral Institute - which he seeks to reform and has long had a tense relationship with - of orchestrating a boycott of the referendum.

If the intention was to shore up the President's image, it does not seem to have had an immediate effect. Polls over the last two months, in fact, point to the opposite: the continuation of a slight decline in his popularity already seen in January and February. Only a matter of days after the referendum, the government endured a tough legislative setback when the chamber of deputies overturned a bill to reform the electricity sector.

In **Uruguay**, the referendum to decide on the validity of 135 articles of the flagship law of Luis Lacalle Pou's government was certainly not sponsored by the government. It was the result of six months of citizen campaigning, after which a seemingly elusive goal was achieved: the collection of 800,000 signatures that paved the way for the referendum, a true example of "grassroots politics" and active participation of civil society.

On March 27, the government passed the test and the law remained in force in its entirety. However, the victory was much narrower than the polls anticipated, 50% against 48.7% for Yes. This election has been read by many media as a referendum on Lacalle Pou's administration. The results, however, are not conclusive. The president still enjoys a high level of popular support, but he slightly dropped in the following weeks from 53% to 50%. This sets the climate for the important legislative debates to come, among them, the social security reform. (For more information on the process, here is a [report by Directorio Legislativo](#)).

Unlike the other cases, in **Chile** an adverse result in the constitutional plebiscite could be very detrimental to a government that is already undergoing major challenges

Over the past months, the Convention has been the target of criticism, owing to inexperienced Convention members and advisors, scenes of heated debates and countless delays in the drafting of the [final text](#), finally submitted last May 15. There were also growing concerns about proposals aimed at setting up an innovative institutional framework, but far removed from the historical experience. For example, eliminating the Senate and replacing it with a Chamber of Regions, defining Chile as a plurinational and regional state

## 5. Referendums: beyond the numbers, what is the bottom line for governments?

made up of autonomous territorial entities, decentralizing fiscal matters and recognizing the "maritorio" (i.e. the sea as a territory to be regulated and divided).

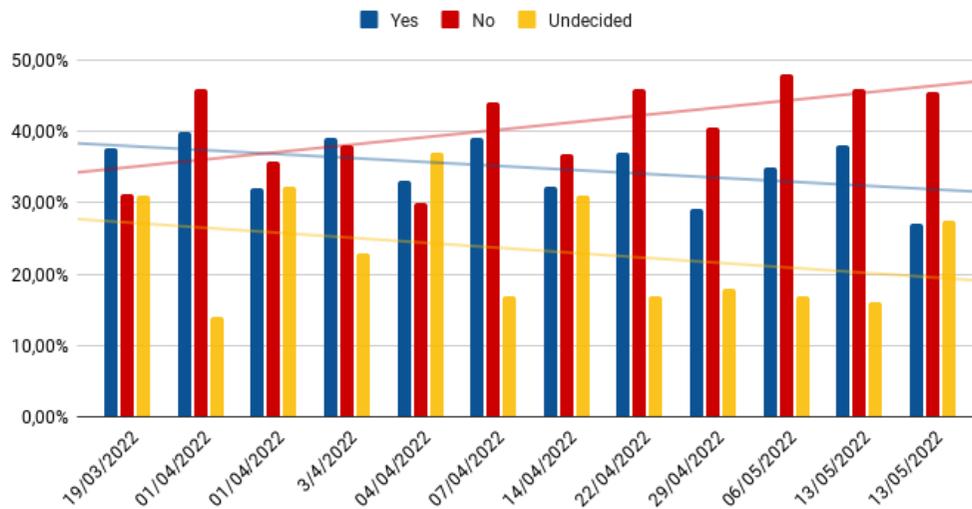
In this context, polls are showing that since the beginning of April, rejection began to prevail over acceptance of the new Constitution (**Figure 6**). It also suggests there could be a connection between increased disapproval of the Constituent Convention and increased disapproval of President Gabriel Boric.

Commenting on this, the President said: "the opinion polls are of course worrying and are a wake-up call for all of us who have believe in this process [...] The discussion is not only

communicational, it cannot be blamed only on external factors, there are also responsibilities of those of us who believe in the process".

Although an increase in rejection has been observed in almost every measurement of the last five weeks, four months lie ahead to turn it around as there are still many undecided citizens (yellow bars in **Figure 6**). The referendum will take place on September 4.

**Figure 6: Vote intention for the Chile Constitutional Referendum, 2022.**



Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion polls from March-May. Lines show linear trendlines.

# Election calendar

May - December 2022

Date	Country	Election
May 29	Colombia	First round presidential election
June 5	Mexico	State elections
June 19	Colombia	Second round presidential election
September 4	Chile	Constitutional referendum
October 2	Brazil	Presidential, legislative and state elections
October 2	Peru	Regional and municipal elections
October 30	Brazil	Second round presidential election

# Methodological notes

March-April 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.

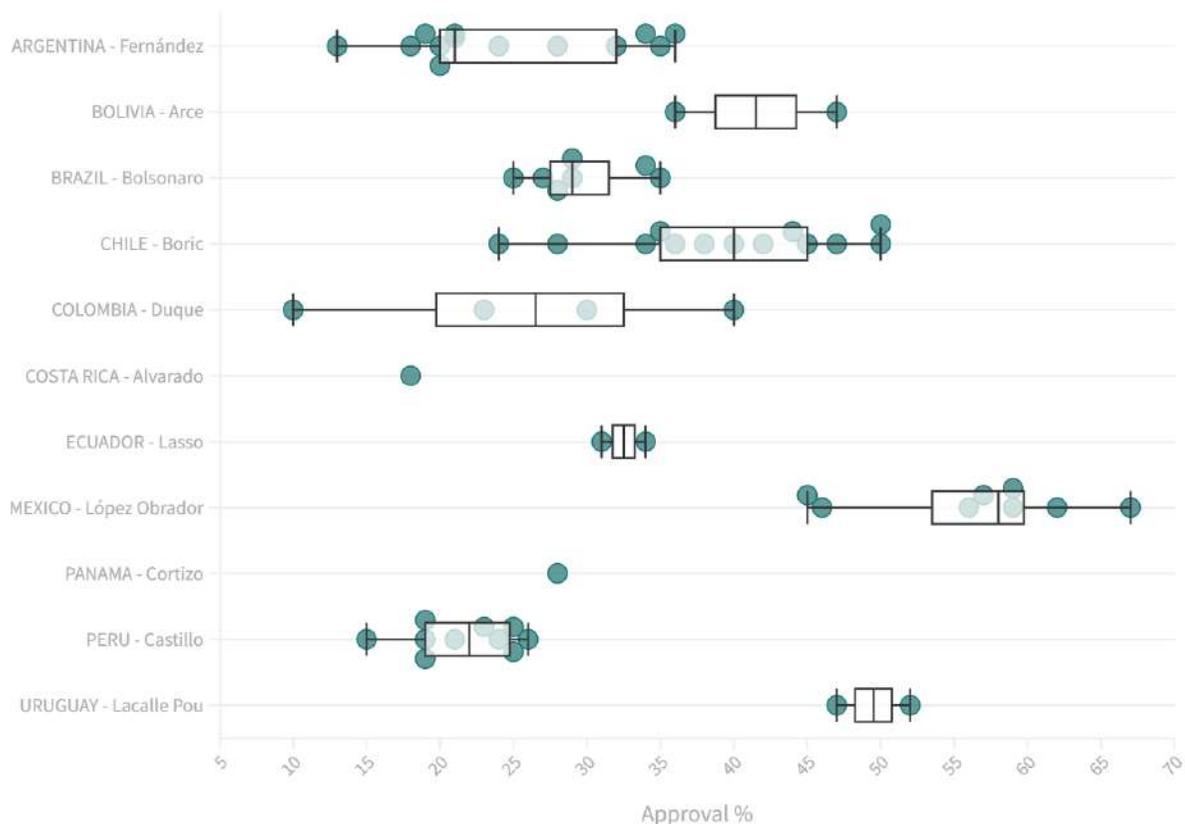
The measurements are integrated by means of a simple average per country for the study period. The data sources are not weighted according to the methodology used, sample size or pollster. The averages corresponding to this two-month period are compared with those of previous two-month periods, using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

The presidential image rankings include 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.

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. The graph below shows the number of polls included in this number and their distribution.

**Image of Power** is a report produced by Directorio Legislativo's research team: Felicitas Torrecilla (coordinator), Facundo Cruz (associate researcher) and Matías Carpignano. [Your feedback and comments are welcome.](#)





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**BUENOS AIRES**

Av. Entre Ríos 258 3o E  
(1079), CABA. Argentina  
+ (5411) 5218-4647



**WASHINGTON D.C.**

1110 Vermont Ave, NW, Suite 500  
Washington DC 20005, USA  
+1 (786) 828-0675



[info@directoriolegislativo.org](mailto:info@directoriolegislativo.org)



[www.directoriolegislativo.com](http://www.directoriolegislativo.com)