



DIRECTORIO
LEGISLATIVO

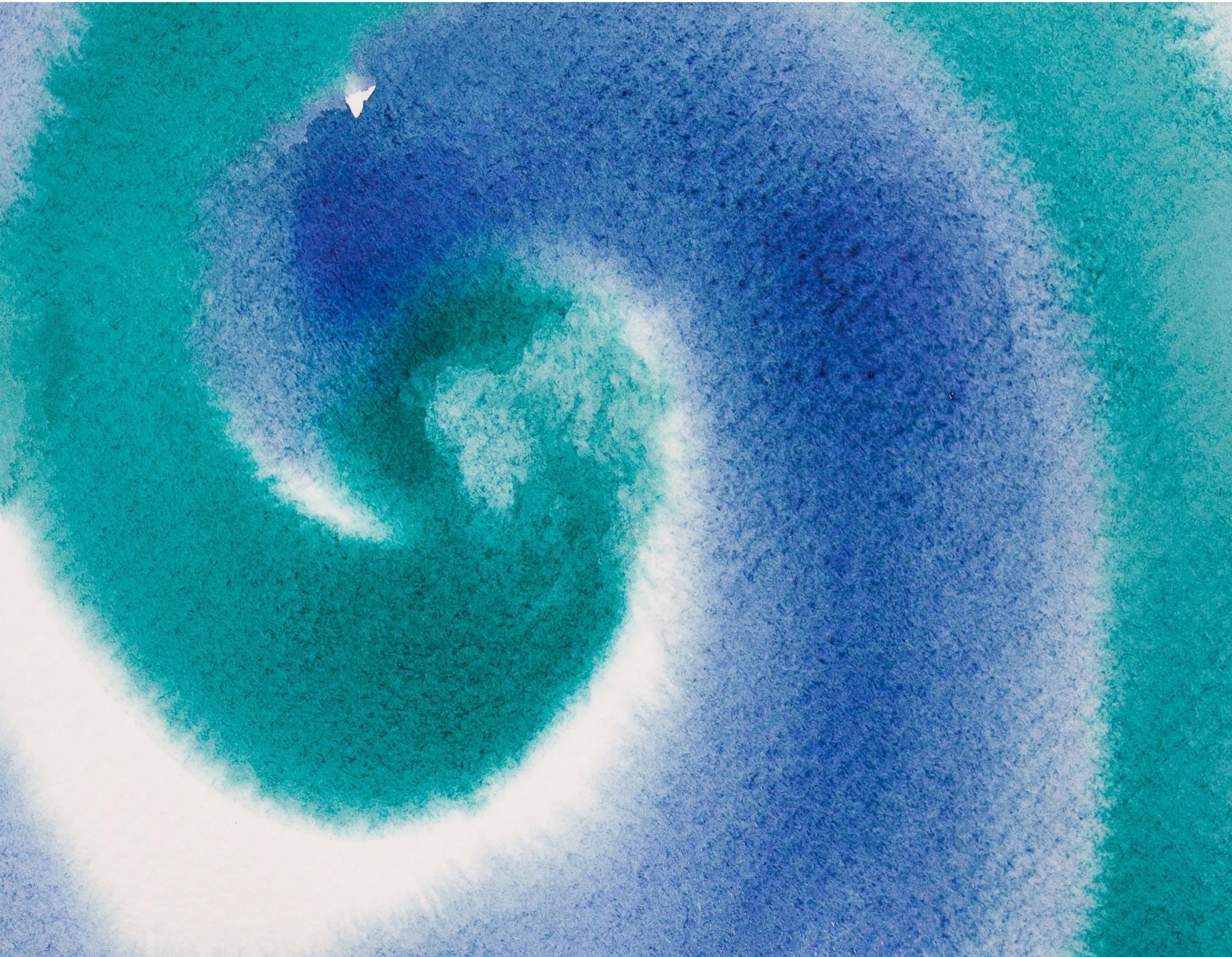
FORTALECEMOS
LAS DEMOCRACIAS
DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING
DEMOCRACIES
IN LATIN AMERICA

SEPTEMBER 26, 2022

Image of Power

REPORT ON PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL RATINGS IN LATIN AMERICA
JULY - AUGUST 2022



Executive summary

With a month and a half to go before the end of a busy election year for the region, this issue will be devoted to the analysis of three topics:

1) the baffling outcome of the constitutional plebiscite in Chile, maybe not so much for the final result but for the outstanding level of rejection. Facundo Cruz puts into play several elements: the record turnout, the possible causes behind in the vote between the entrance plebiscite of 2020 and the exit plebiscite of 2022, and the alternatives from now on. Perhaps the process and the actors overshadowed the message, but not the desire for change of the Chilean society. The game is not over, it just came to a halt.

2) the scenarios a few days before the general elections in Brazil. Most polls confirm that Lula will win in the second round, and some even suggest he will win outright in the first, but this does not provide a clear answer to the main questions surrounding these historic elections. That is, whether the results will be accepted by a president who has actively questioned the reliability of the electoral system, which actors might be able to assert their weight - now and after the elections - in a balance of forces that due to polarization has remained remarkably stable recently, and to what extent Lula will be able to progress with a fragmented Congress. These elections have two visible faces, but they are not just about Lula and Bolsonaro.

3) a balance of the first six weeks of Gustavo Petro's government. The new president managed to forge agreements with the traditional parties that today are reflected in the multicolored physiognomy of Congress and the cabinet of ministers, giving him a wider margin of maneuver than what could be anticipated in March (at least from the point of view of the external observer). However, past experience in the region shows that taking care of the coalition does not always go, or can go hand in hand with campaign promises. The government decided to take advantage of its initial political capital to take a huge first step: present the tax reform bill.

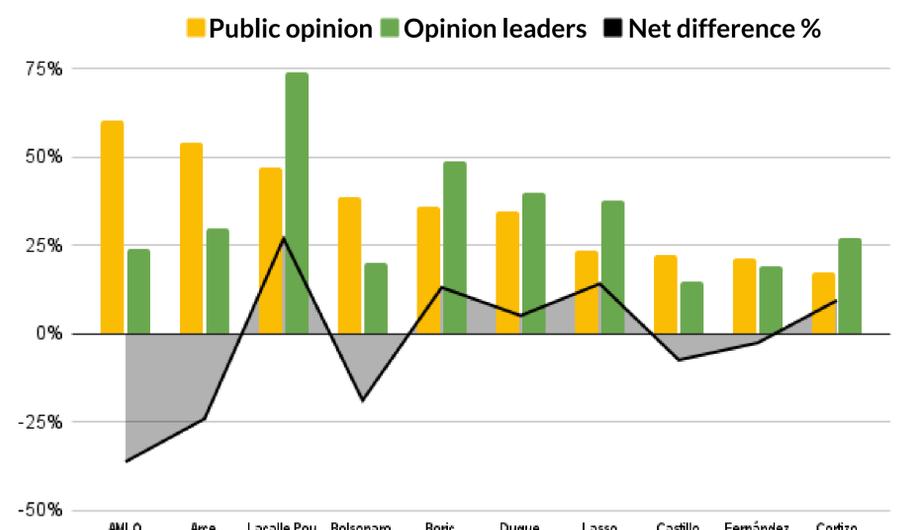
However, during the last month there were more movements in the corridors than in the legislative chambers. Meanwhile, the presidents of the Chambers - both members of Pacto Histórico - launched some veiled criticisms for the slow progress of the agenda.

What else did the July-August two-month period bring?

The average presidential approval levels have remained relatively stable in the region compared to the May-June period. Alberto Fernández, Gabriel Boric, Pedro Castillo, Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Luis Lacalle Pou barely broke +/- 1%: the first three with low favorability percentages, the last two with a high average.

In August, IPSOS published its [latest survey of Latin American opinion leaders](#). What differences does it show when compared to public opinion polls? The level of approval of opinion leaders is lower than public opinion in the cases of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (-36%), Luis Arce (-24%), Jair Bolsonaro (-19%) and Pedro Castillo (-7%). It is higher in the cases of Luis Lacalle Pou (+27%), Guillermo Lasso (+14%), Gabriel Boric (+13%), while in Argentina it appears relatively level (-3%).

Graph 1. Presidential approval, public opinion polls vs. opinion leaders



Source: Own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between July and August 2022. *Opinion leaders approval data is based on the IPSOS measurement of August 2022.

Executive summary

The new presidents are, for now, running with a tailwind. Almost four months after taking office, Rodrigo Chaves of Costa Rica leads this edition ranking with an average approval rating of 76%. The [survey conducted by CIEP-UCR](#) yields some interesting data: 1) even among those who did not vote for him in the second round, there is a mostly positive evaluation (56%); 2) despite the high approval level, 78% of the population believes that the economic situation is bad or very bad, a level similar to that registered in April 2021; 3) an 88% consider that there are people who do not let the president do his job, 51% of them point to the National Assembly where the government holds a minority representation.

Gustavo Petro approval is around 60% although measurements differ, while the outgoing president ended his term with 35% approval. Regarding the level of agreement with some of the new government's proposals, a CNC survey shows that 48% of people approve the tax reform; 53%, the glyphosate ban (CNC); and 44%, the fracking ban. Polls results are not conclusive when it comes to evaluating the proposal to remove the police from the scope of the Ministry of Defense, which 32% approve for CNC and 63% for Cifras & Conceptos. They are more consistent when it comes to the initiative to reestablish diplomatic relations with Venezuela: 69% approve for CNC, 79% for Invamer and 81% for C&C. Another interesting fact that emerges from the Invamer survey is that there was an increase in the level of approval of Congress, which today stands at 25% (it was 11% in March).

Alberto Fernández is among the presidents with the lowest approval rating in the region. How did the latest cabinet changes and the attack suffered by Vice-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner impact his image? Some polls show that there was a moderate improvement in economic expectations and that between 17-25% of the population considers that the coalition could become stronger with the

appointment of Sergio Massa as Minister of Economy. In spite of this, rejection of the president increased while approval remained stable. Inflation, which in August was 7%, comfortably surpasses other issues among the main concerns of the population. A survey published by Zubán Córdoba after the attack against the vice-president shows several interesting facts: when asked which sector is contributing more to neutralize and diminish hate speeches, 32% answered "none", while more than 70% considered that both the ruling party and the opposition should moderate themselves.

Jair Bolsonaro is the president whose approval has grown the most – by 3% – compared with the previous two-month period. Today, he has a 39% approval rating, which places him 10 points higher than at the beginning of this year, and in the level of voting intention for the runoff. For the first round, voting intention is 5 points below his current average approval.

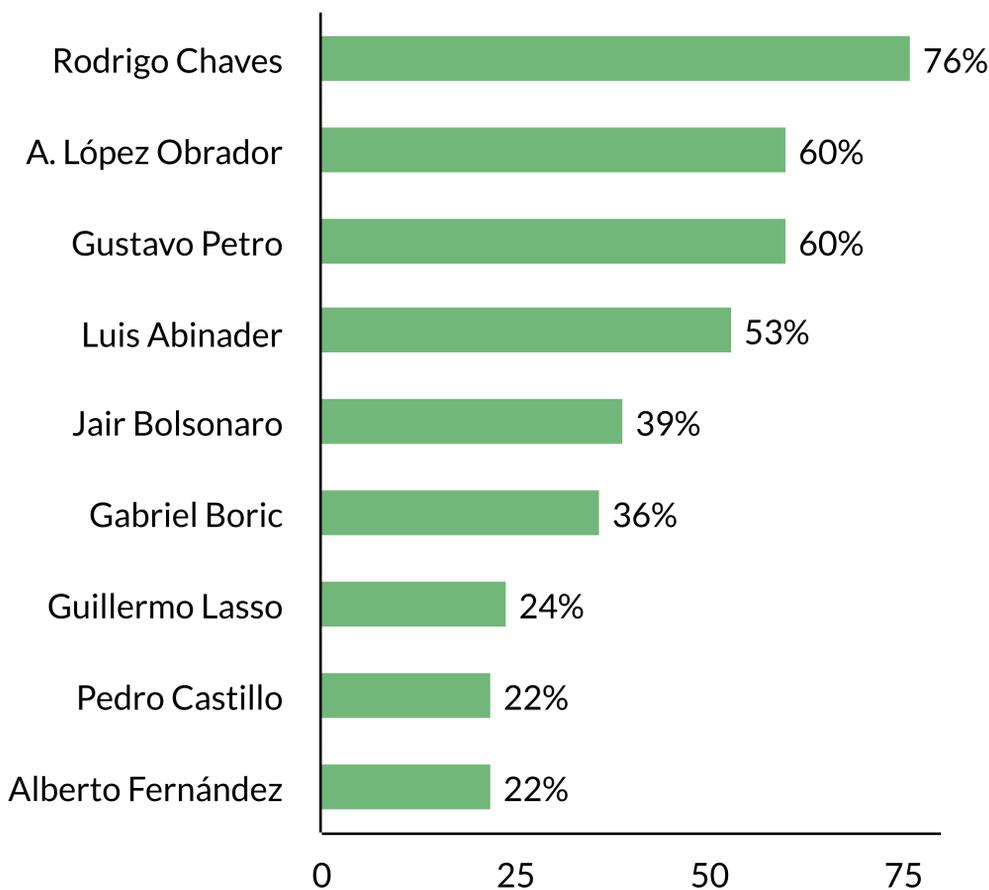
With a 5-point drop, Ecuador's president, Guillermo Lasso, is the one whose approval level fell the most. In mid-September, the president submitted to the Constitutional Court a proposal for a Constitutional referendum. The proposal includes eight questions on security issues (among them, the role of the armed forces the role of the armed forces in supporting the National Police against organized crime), the political party system and the National Assembly (among them, changes in the election of assembly members and reduction of the total number, minimum number of members that political groups must meet) and the environment (protection of water resources and compensation for the generation of environmental services).

Presidential Approval Rankings

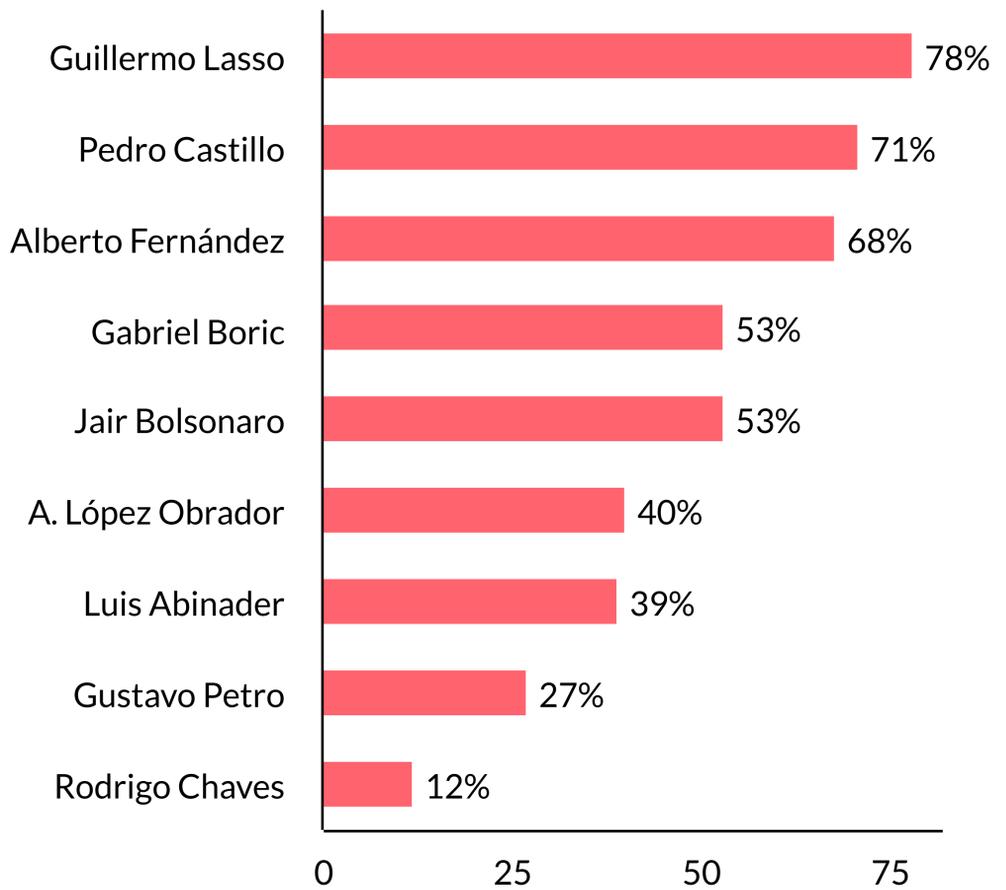
July-August 2022

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.

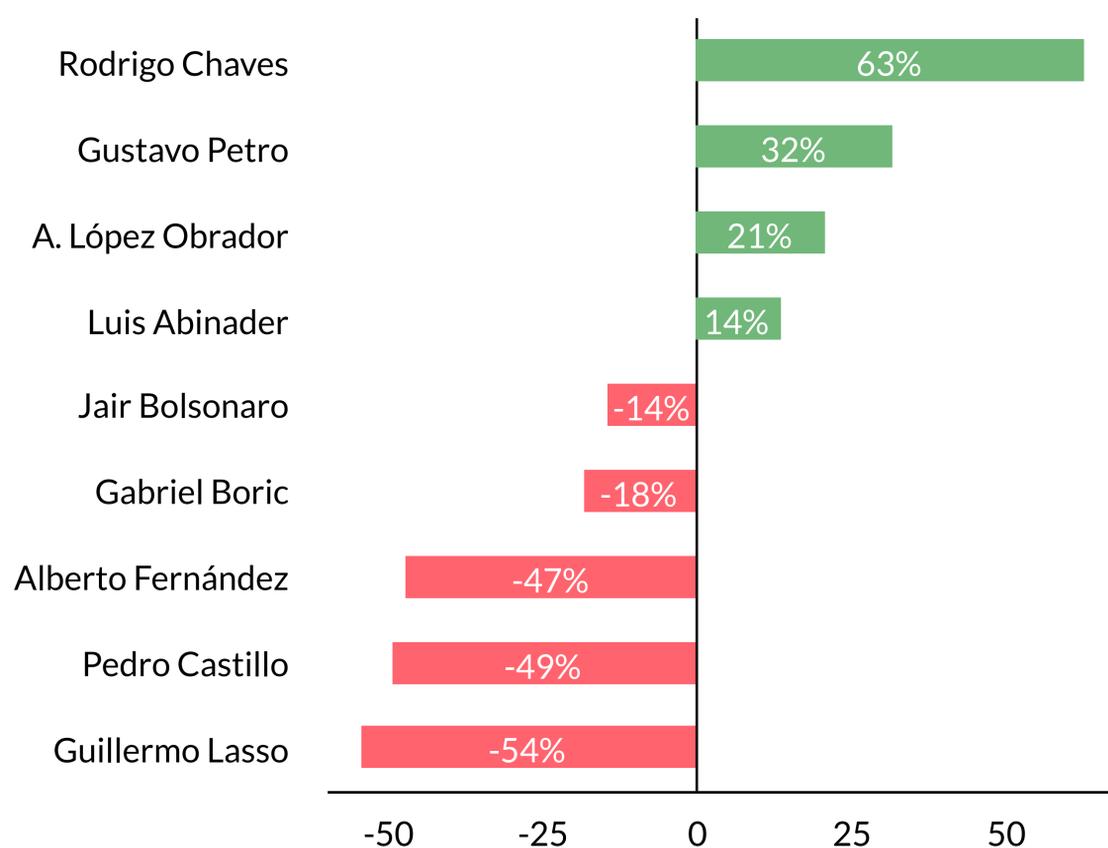
Approval %



Disapproval %



Net approval (approval % - disapproval %)

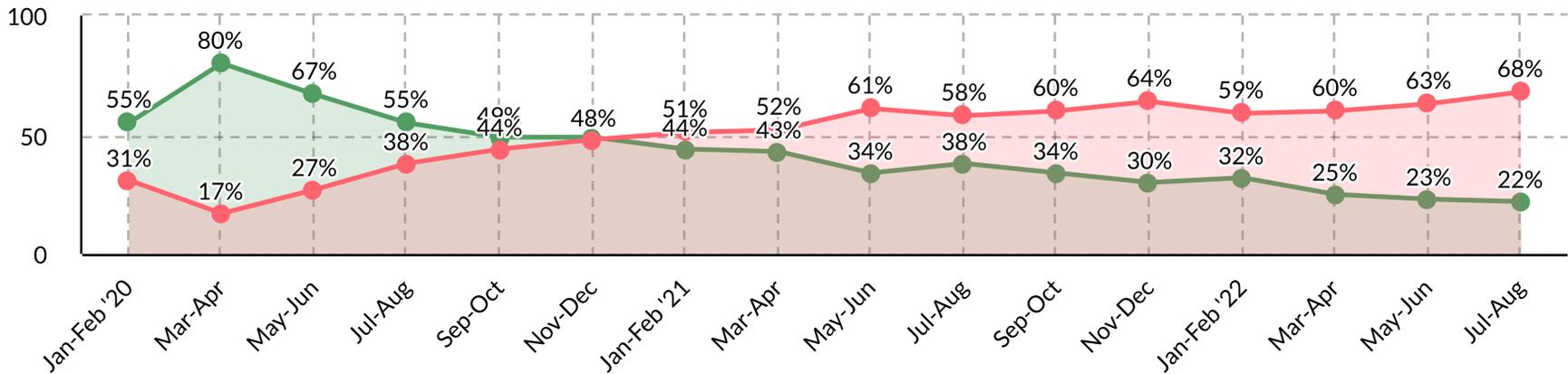


Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between July and August 2022. To see the sources: [click here](#)

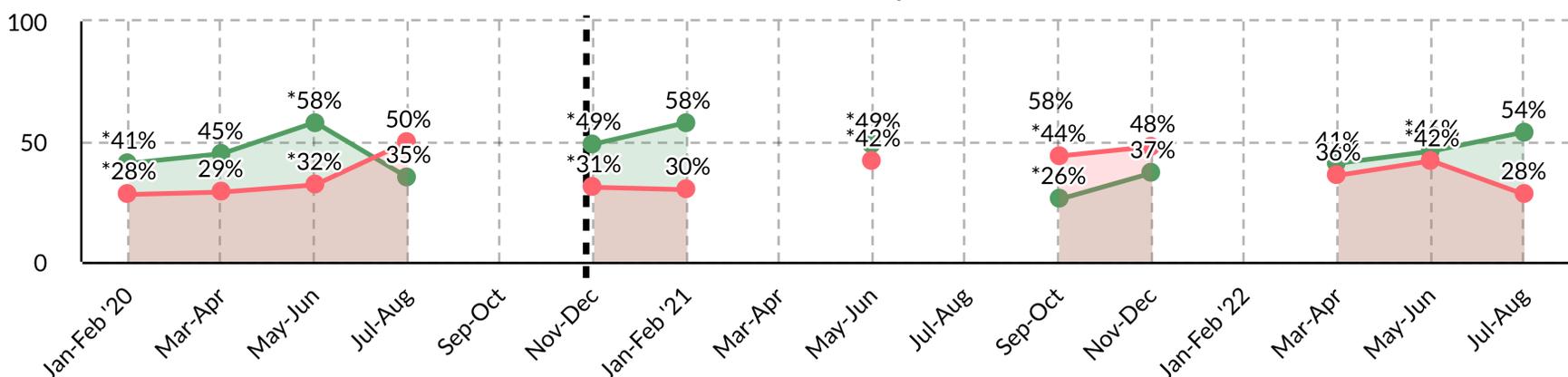
Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022

Positive
Negative

Argentina: Alberto Fernández

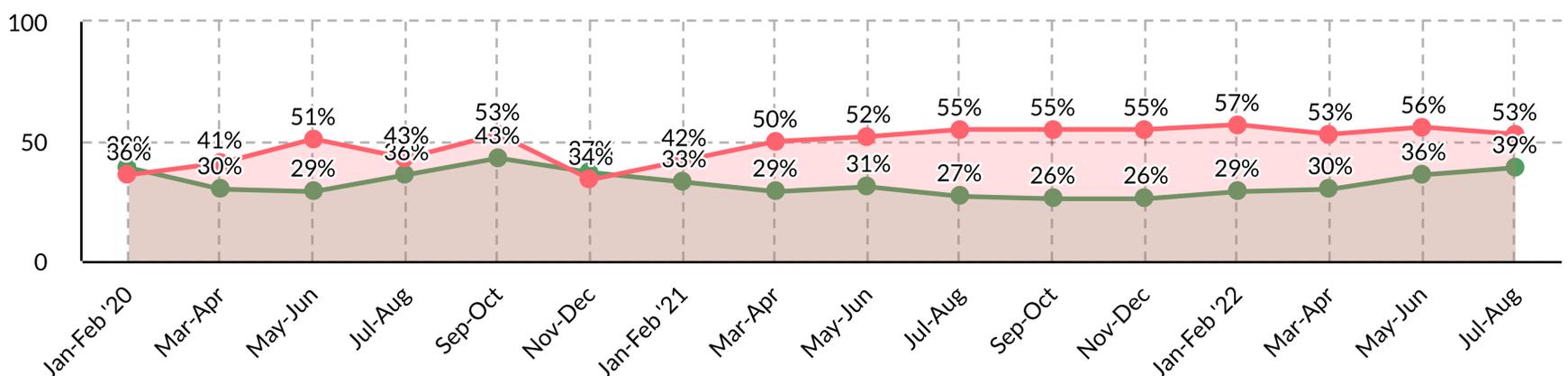


Bolivia: Jeanine Añez | Luis Arce

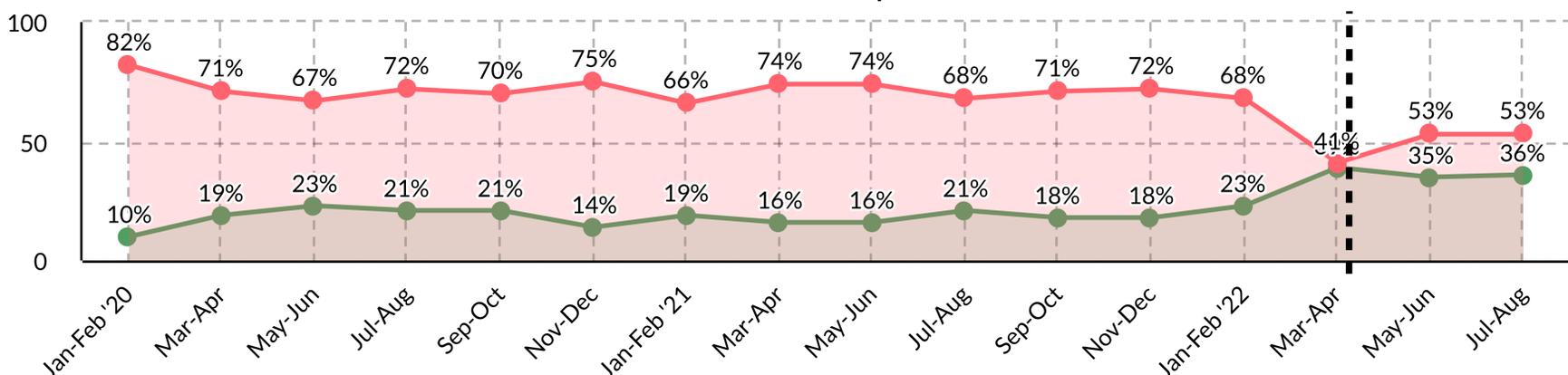


*Arce took office Nov. 8, 2020

Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro



Chile: Sebastián Piñera | Gabriel Boric

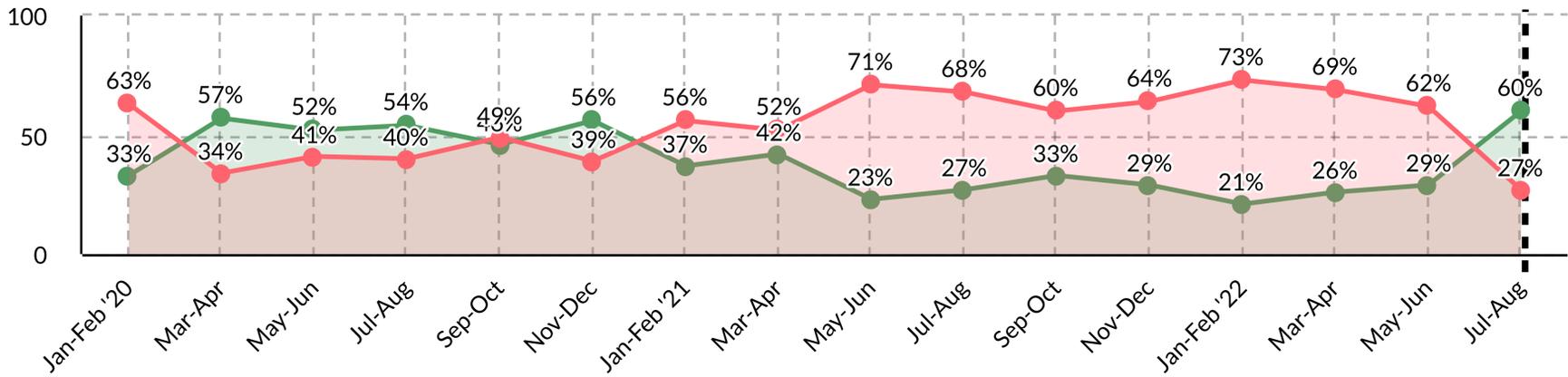


*Boric took office Mar. 11, 2022

Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022

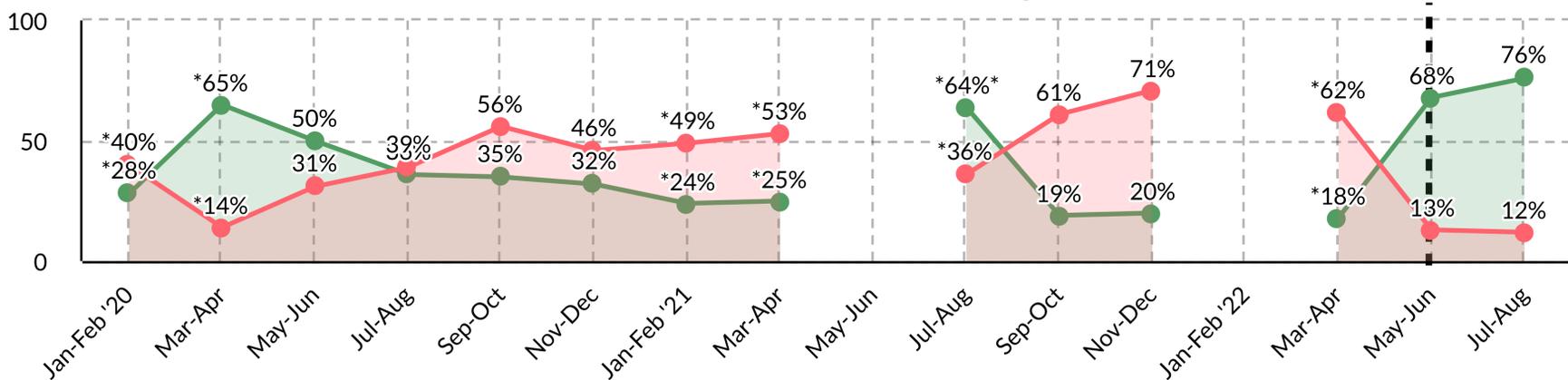
Positive
Negative

Colombia: Iván Duque | Gustavo Petro



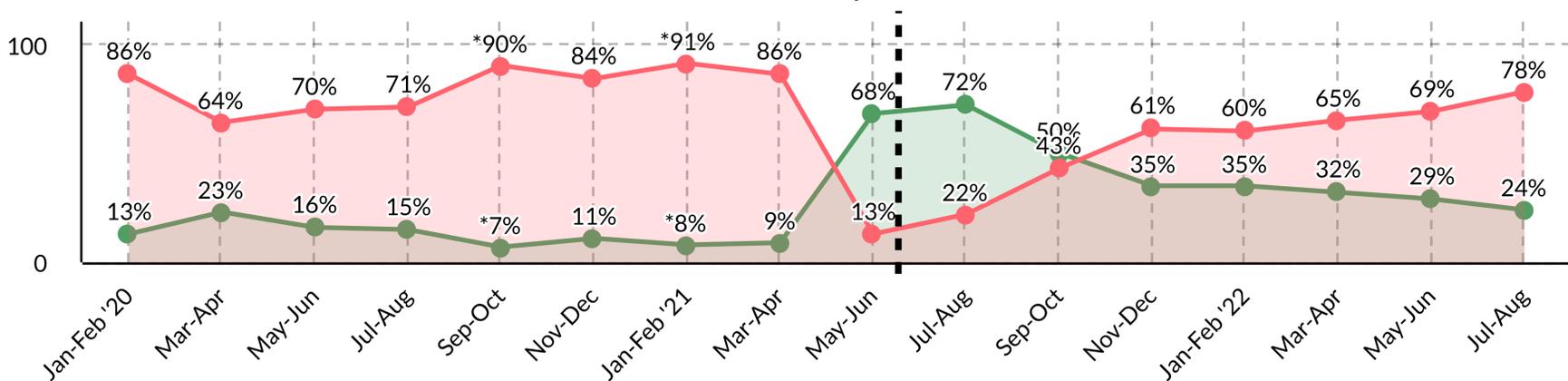
*Petro took office Aug. 8, 2022

Costa Rica: Carlos Alvarado | Rodrigo Chaves



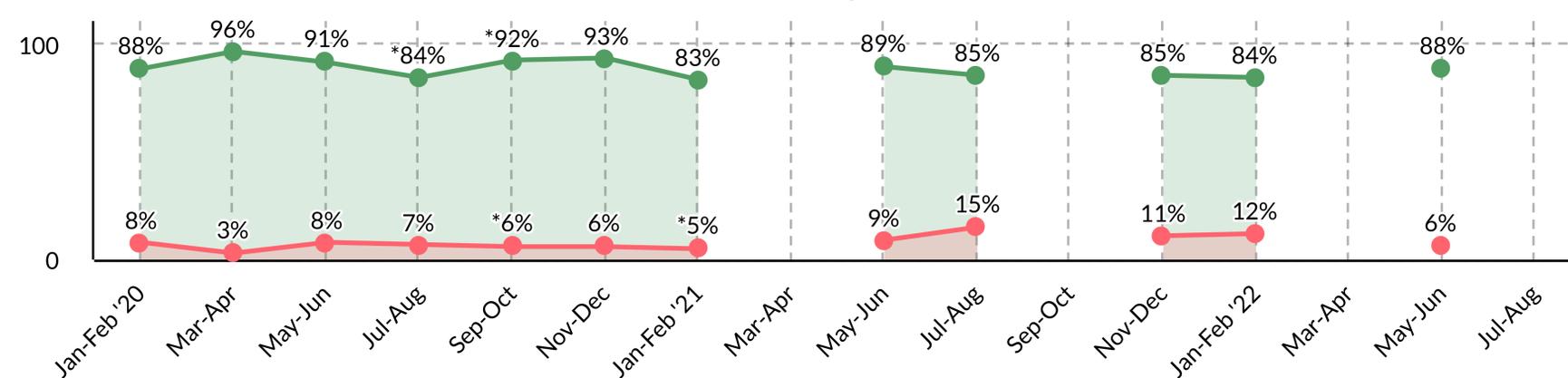
*Chaves took office May 8, 2022

Ecuador: Lenin Moreno | Guillermo Lasso



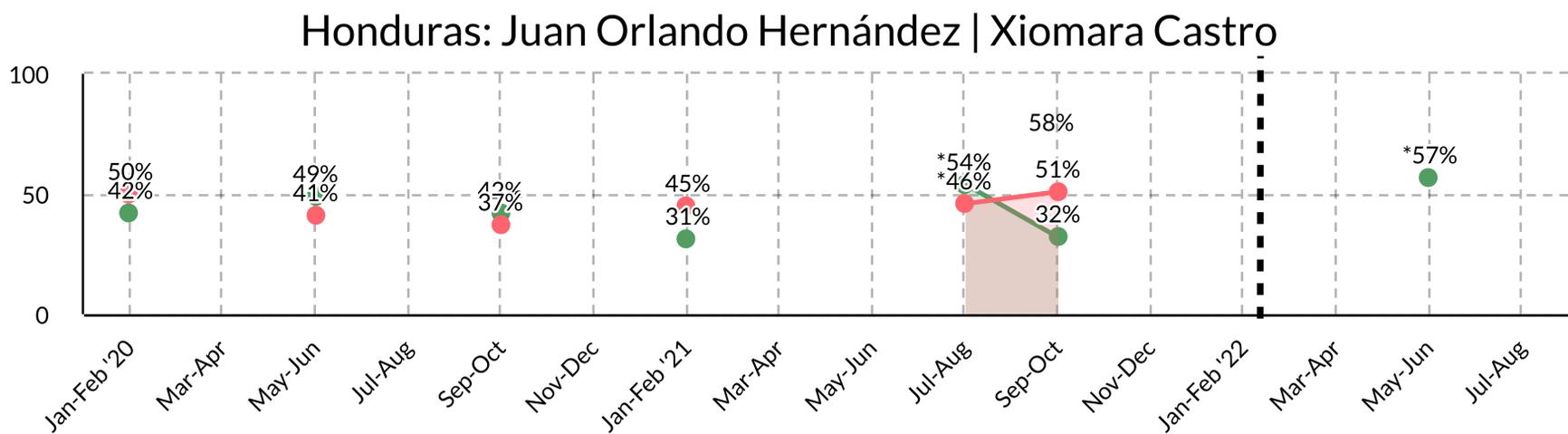
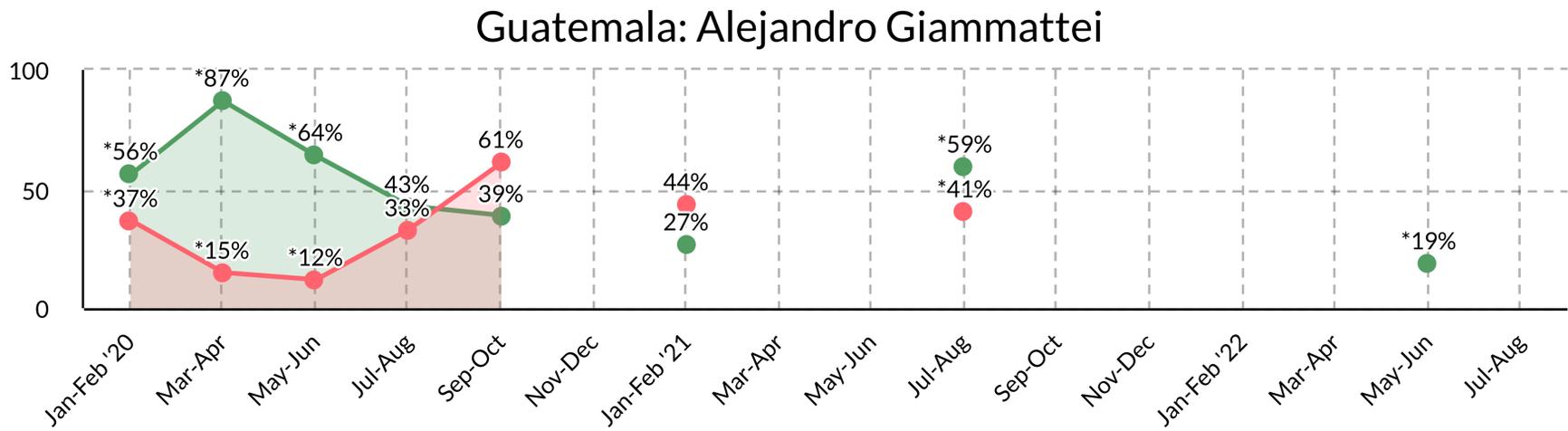
*Lasso took office May 24, 2021

El Salvador: Nayib Bukele

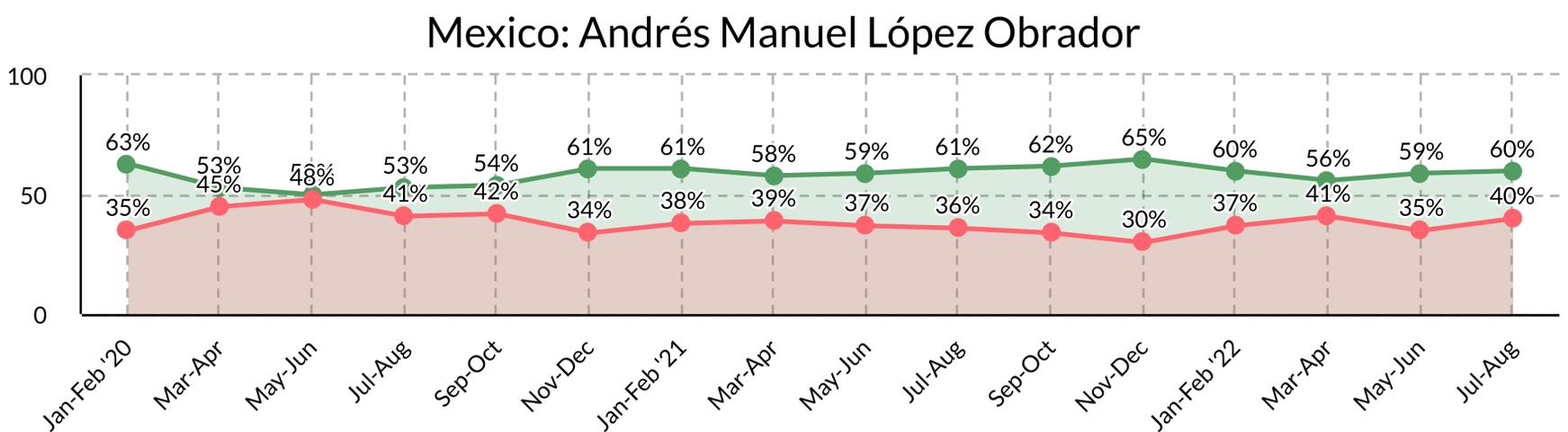


Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022

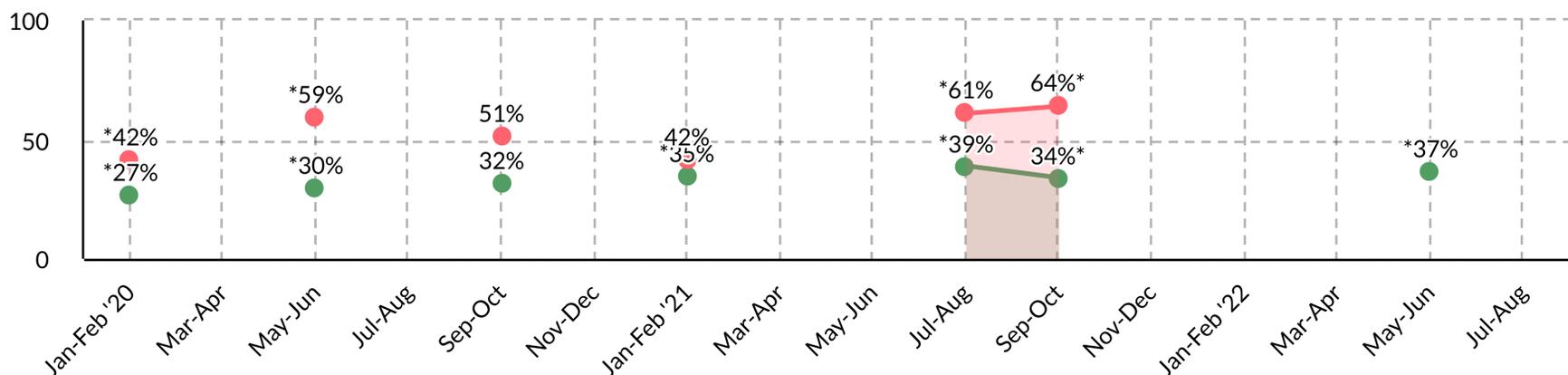
Positive
Negative



*Castro took office Jan. 27, 2022



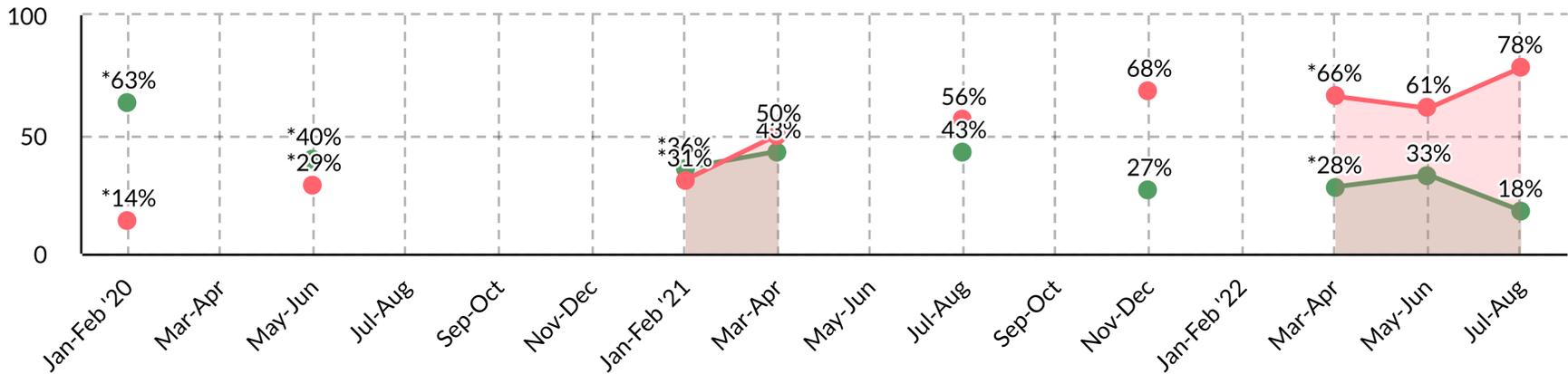
Nicaragua: Daniel Ortega



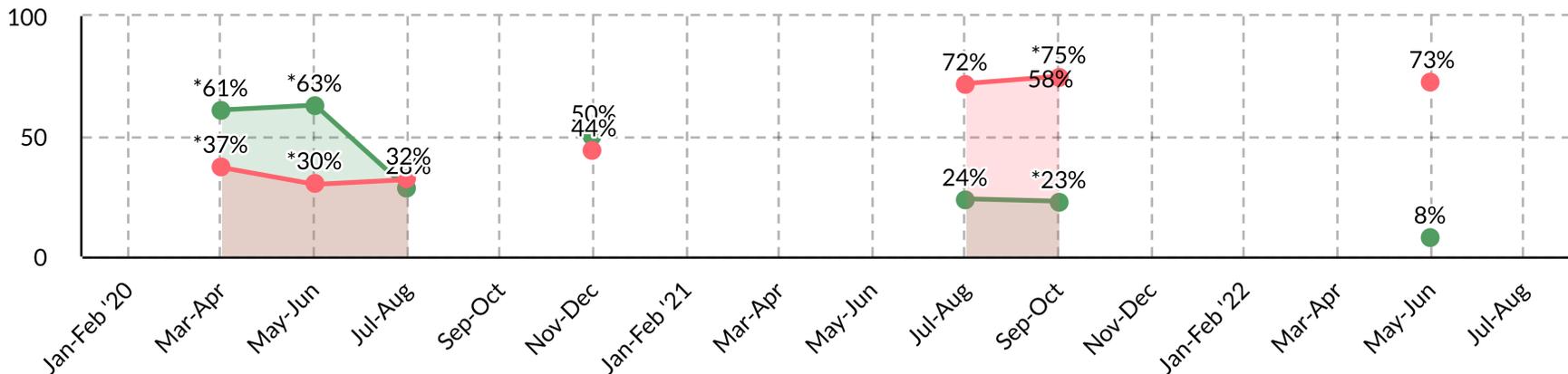
Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022

Positive
Negative

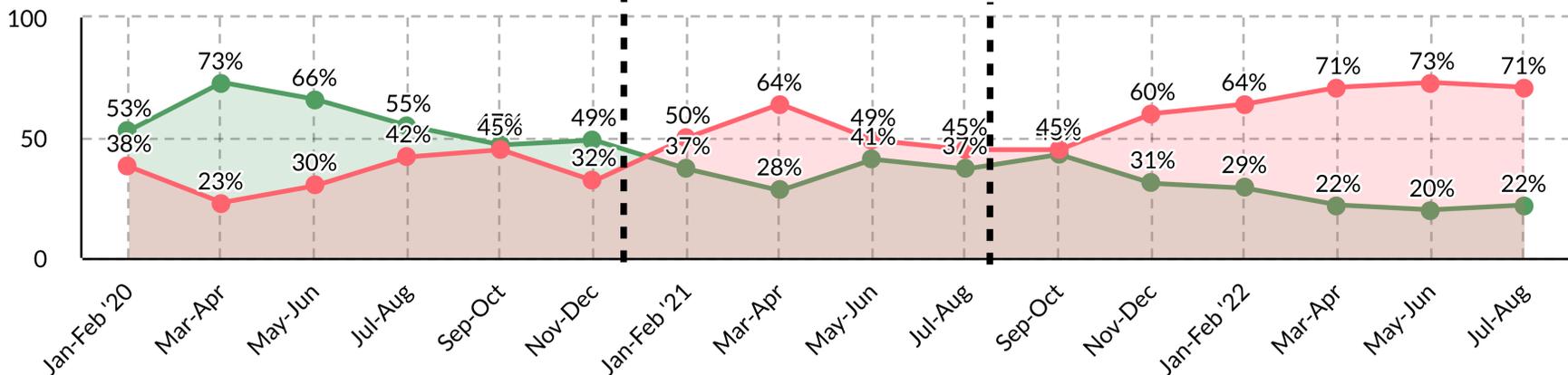
Panama: Laurentino Cortizo



Paraguay: Mario Abdo Benítez

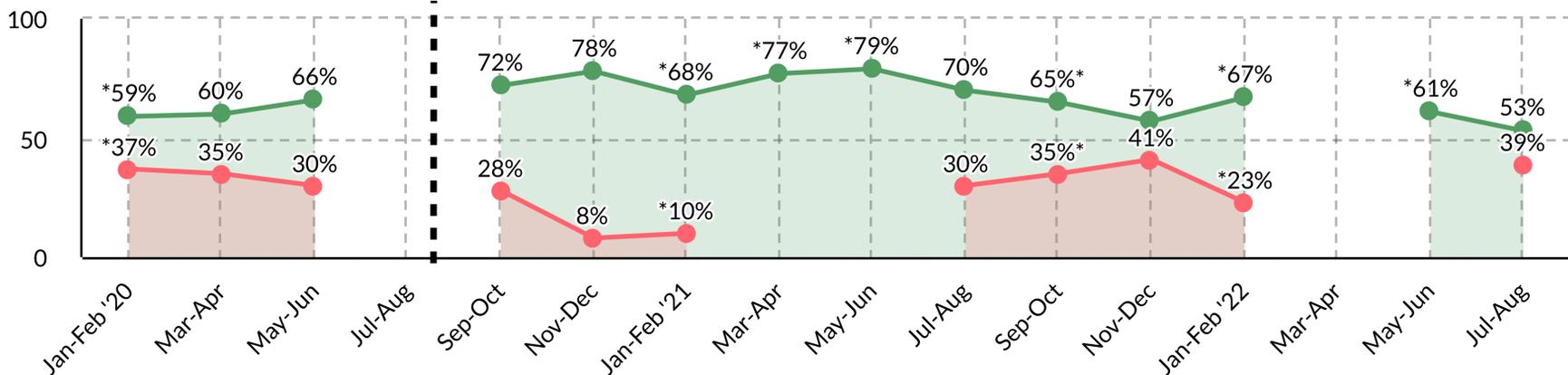


Peru: Martín Vizcarra | Francisco Sagasti | Pedro Castillo



*Sagasti took office Nov. 17, 2020 until Jul. 27, 2021. Castillo took office Jul. 28, 2021.

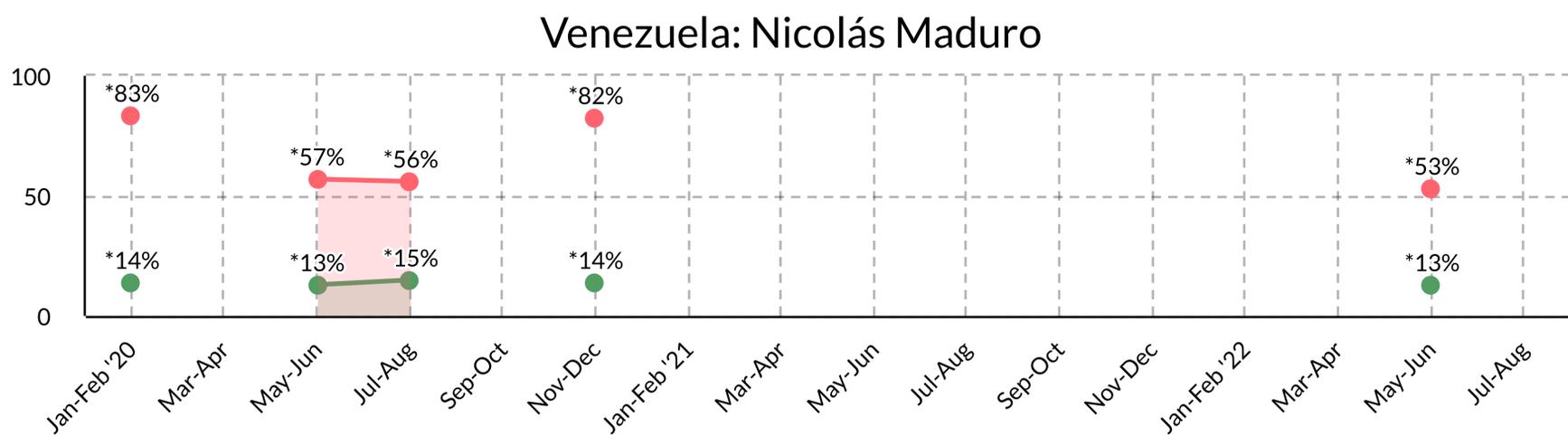
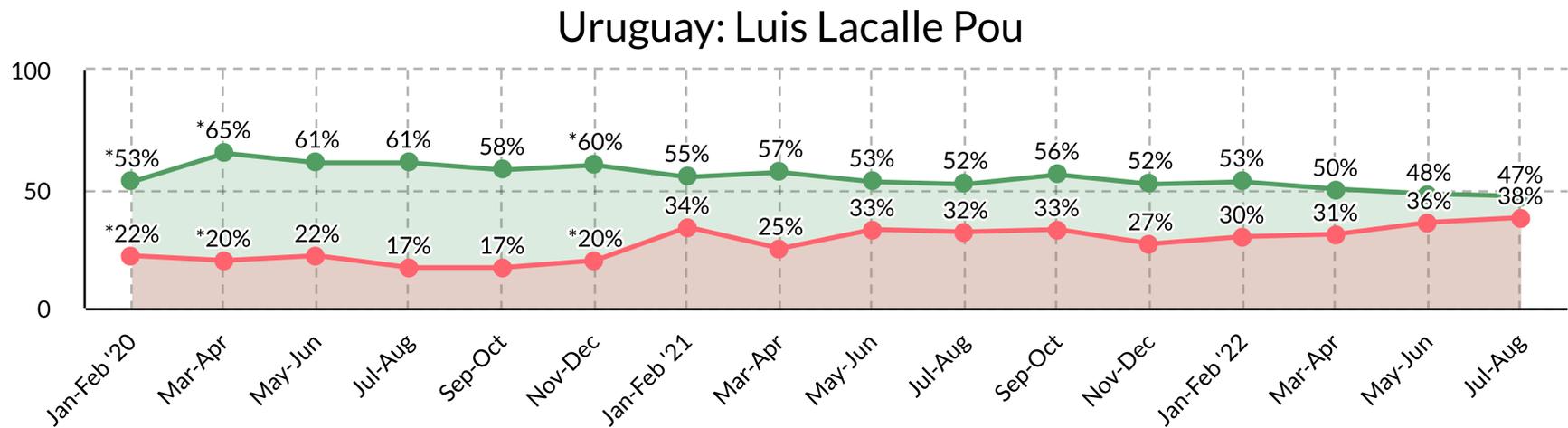
Dominican Republic: Danilo Medina | Luis Abinader



*Abinader took office Aug. 16, 2020.

Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022

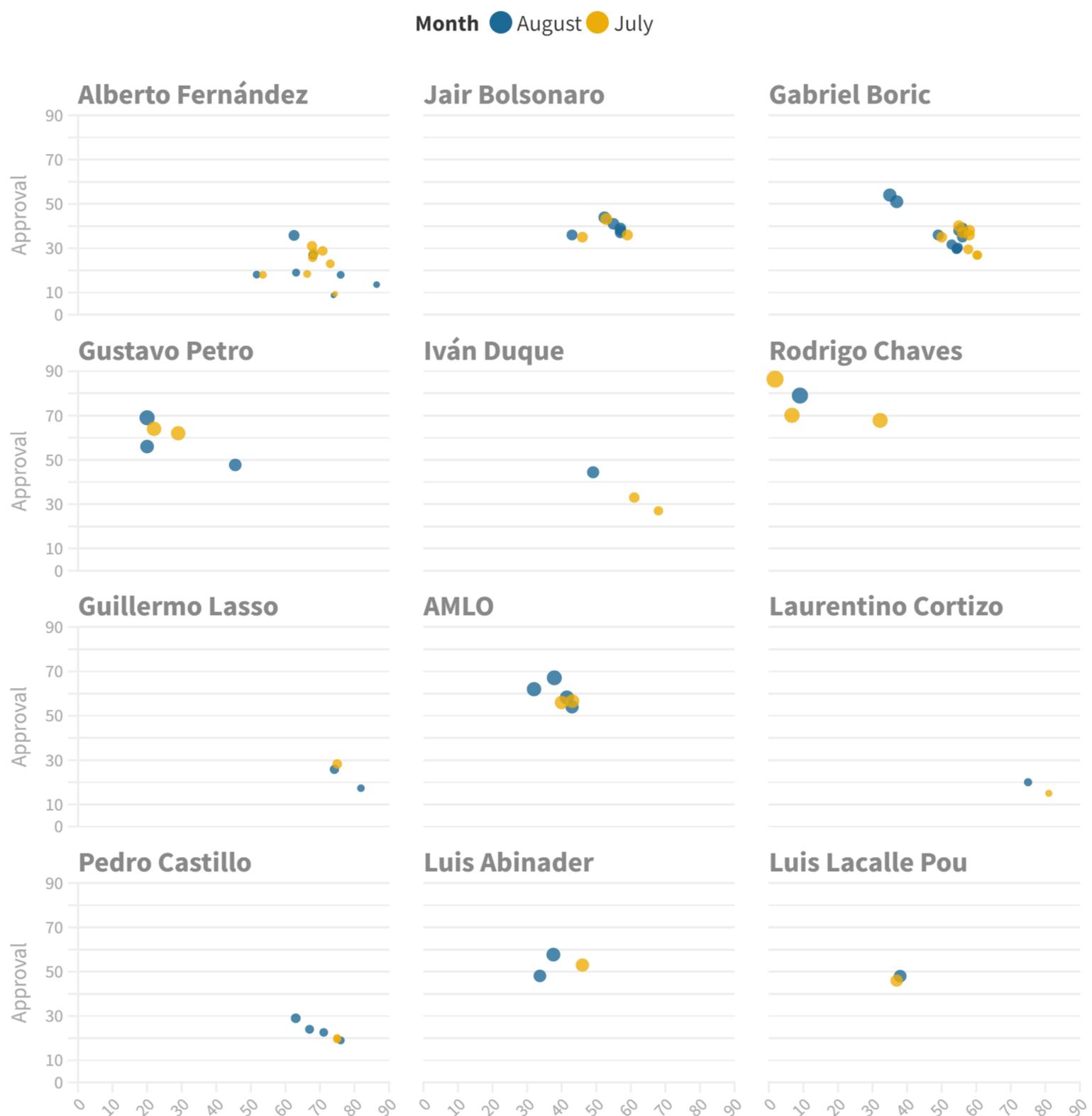
Positive
Negative



Evolution of presidential approval July - August 2022

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.

President Gabriel Boric's approval remained relatively stable in the two months prior to the constitutional plebiscite. So did that of Jair Bolsonaro who, however, saw his approval ratings rise by three points over the previous two-month period, and now it equals his vote intention for the runoff. However one fact stands out: government approval was lower than presidential approval throughout the entire period. Alberto Fernández registered a slight decrease between July and August, although on average it did not vary in relation to the last edition of this report.



Chile kicks the ball out, but the game is not over

by Facundo Cruz

On September 4, the last part of the [Agreement for Social Peace and the New Constitution](#), the roadmap agreed by the ruling and opposition parties in November 2019 to deal with the Red October of that year, took place. The Exit Plebiscite, in which voting was compulsory, put the [constitutional proposal](#) of 388 articles and 57 transitory provisions to the vote of 15 million Chilean men and women. One of the longest in the world.

The result was not what its promoters expected. For its detractors, it was a relief. 61.89% voted for rejection of the text, while only 38.11% voted for approval. Although the main polls predicted that rejection was going to prevail in the end, they did not forecast the distance. Nor the magnitude. Nor the impact.

In this sense, I would like to address four points that I consider key to think about what happened and to provide useful tools for what is to come.

1) Participation was the highlight of the day

The most important fact of the day, apart from the result, was undoubtedly the high rate of electoral participation. Chile has had a major debate about this point in recent years, and a continuous back-and-forth in the electoral regulations regarding this matter. Since the return to democracy, there have never been so many Chilean men and women eligible to vote. Nor have so many participated in an electoral process. A little more than 13 million left

their homes to express themselves democratically. That leaves the 2022 Plebiscite as the second national election since 1988 in terms of electoral participation: 85.84%. Only surpassed by the 1988 Plebiscite, which had about 4 points more. That both referendums are leading the ranking has a unique symbolism.

This, of course, shows a major improvement in relation to previous elections. With the change of the electoral legislation in 2012, which made citizen participation transparent by means of an automatic registration system, the downward trend in voter turnout reached its lowest point in 2021.

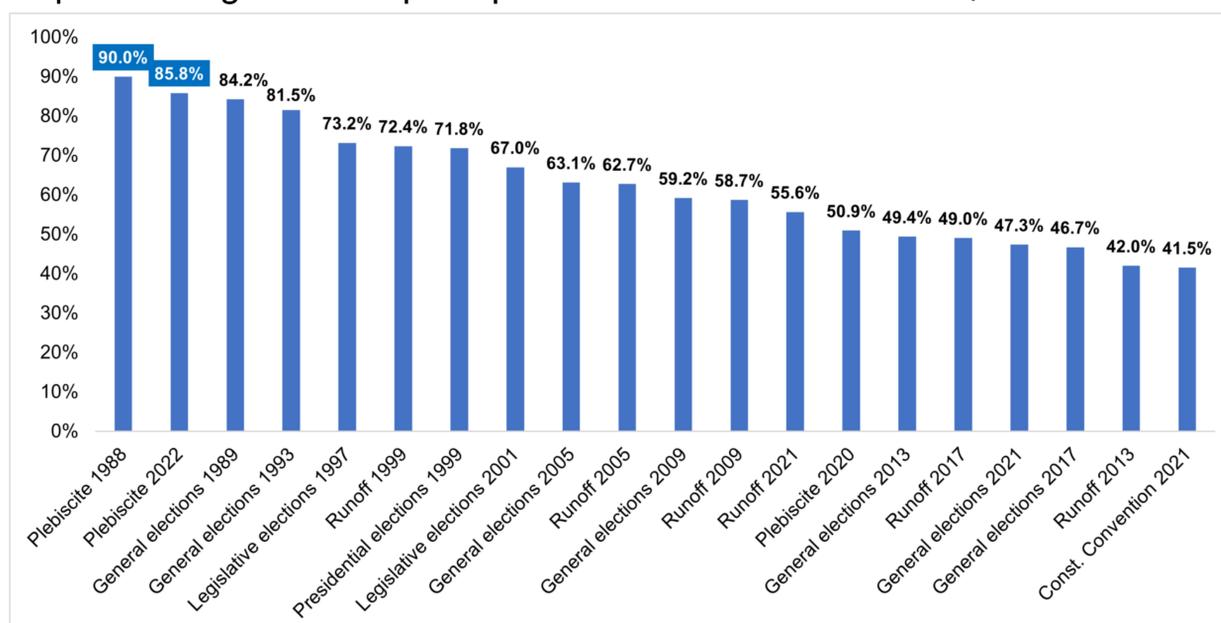
There are two lessons here. First, the importance that the right to vote is also a civic obligation. If this principle is followed, we can assure that democracy is firmly sustained. Second, that support for the Rejection was overwhelming.

2) The message got lost at some point along the way

The results show, also, that the message of change, innovation, inclusion and progress embodied in the project of a new constitution drafted in democracy, was at some point lost. Box 1 compares the support between the Entry Plebiscite in 2020 (with an optional vote) and the Exit Plebiscite in 2022 (with a mandatory vote).

Slightly more than 1 million voters who voted for Approval in 2020 turned to Rejection in 2022.

Graph 2. Ranking of electoral participation in national elections in Chile, 1988-2022



Source: own elaboration based on data obtained from [Servel.cl](#).

Chile kicks the ball out, but the game is not over

Elections	Approve	Reject	Turnout
Plebiscite 2020	5.899.683	1.634.506	7.573.914
Plebiscite 2022	4.860.266	7.886.434	13.024.792
2022 vs. 2020	-1.039.417	6.251.928	5.450.878

Box 1. Plebiscite 2020 vs Plebiscite 2022.

Source: [CICaD](#) with updated data obtained from [Serval.cl](#).

In addition, almost all of the new voters went for this option. Thus, not only new voters but also some old ones expressed their opposition to the proposed change.

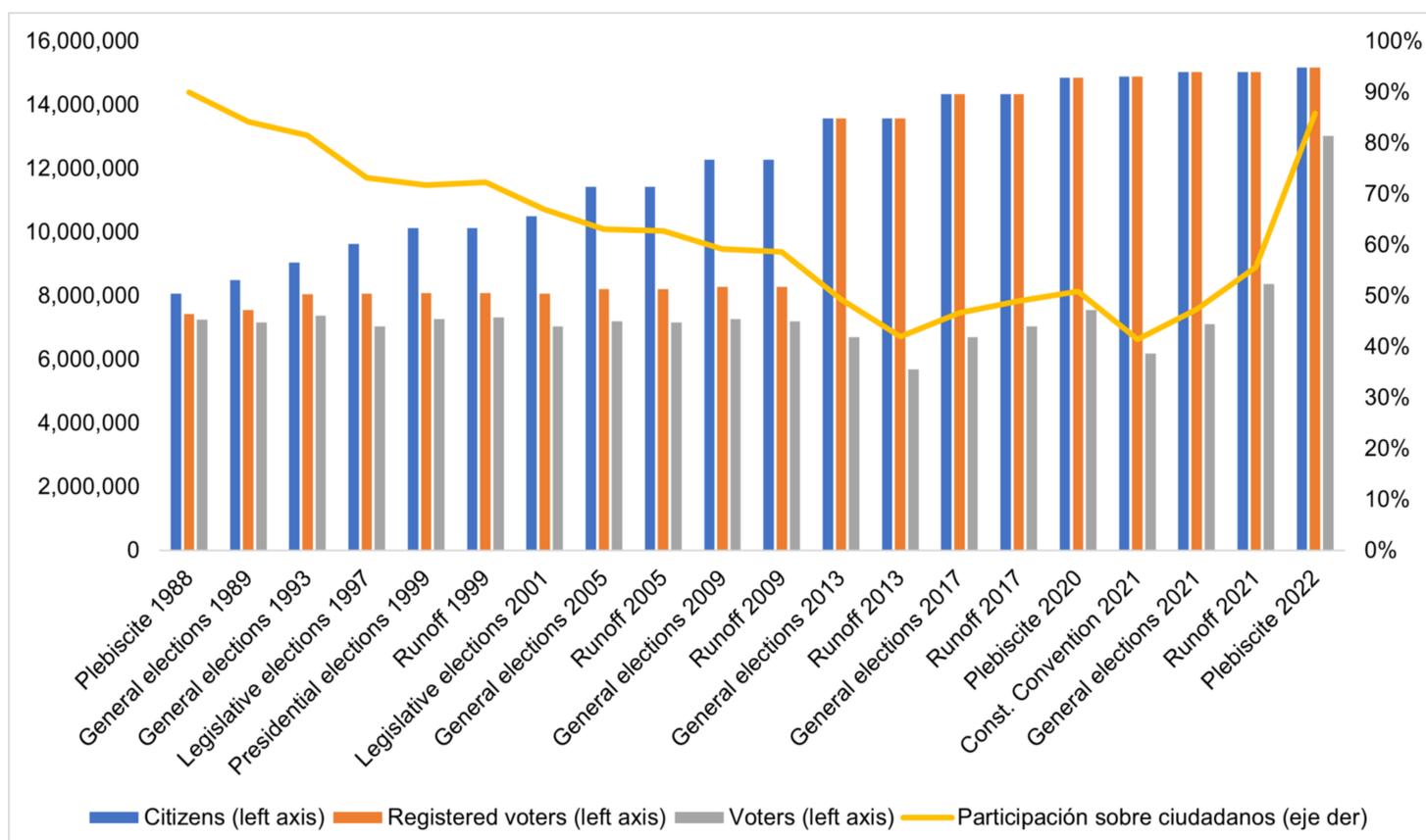
The possible causes can be summarized in three, but mutually reinforcing ones. The first has to do with the negative assessment of the content of the new constitution, especially the inclusion of new institutional arrangements and new social rights that went beyond the social demands of 2019. In other words, the Convention members went too far.

The second focuses on the process which was also

strongly questioned. Several situations of public knowledge raised concern and doubts about the professionalism of the 155 Constituent Convention members elected in 2021. What happened with "[el Pelao Vade](#)", Deputy Vice President of the first board of directors of the Constituent Convention, or with the "[Convencional Ducha](#)", undoubtedly had a strong impact on public opinion which distinctively appears when comparing the level of support or rejection in [the CADEM polls](#). In April rejection had already surpassed the support, when neither the preliminary nor the final text was yet known. Voters assessed people, not substance.

The third reason links the support to Gabriel Boric's government to the fate of the constitutional proposal. Although the government coalition and its main leader entered the Palacio de la Moneda with a firm footing, the rejection to the constituent process and the decay of the new president's public image went hand in hand. Economic, social and security factors had a negative impact on citizen support, a honeymoon that barely had a chance to start. [Comparing the two CADEM graphs](#) side by side, one can see how the new government tied its fate to the Convention.

Graph 3. Voter turnout in national elections in Chile, 1988-2022



Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from [Serval.cl](#).

Chile kicks the ball out, but the game is not over

3) The discussion around independents

The second point mentioned above begs the question of the role of independents in this type of process. Chile is one of the countries in the region that allows for candidacies without any party affiliation, both for executive and legislative posts. The requirements for the presentation of independents were further relaxed, winning over the citizenry in 2021: out of the 155 seats at stake, 48 were won by independent candidates (31% of the members of the convention). To that are added those figures who ran as such but within some party and/or coalition, which extended the number to 65 (42%).

Taking into account the 2/3 majority rule necessary to pass all constitutional provisions, the independents became key actors in an election where the new left had a good performance, the old left survived and the right cratered. A new dawn for a new Chile.

This, however, may have had a counterproductive effect. Firstly, because of the poor preparation in legislative procedures, parliamentary process and orderly debate. It is true that many of those who joined had some kind of social, community or grassroots experience. But politics is also a profession that requires expertise and experience. Secondly, the 1-year schedule (9 + 3 months) ended up being scarce to build a country from scratch. The inauspicious climate for advancing on the process – the product of an outgoing right-wing government initially unsupportive of it – saddled the new leaders with intense media scrutiny. Without a party structure to contain it, the public outdoors can quickly feed disaffection. Something that, as I stated in the previous point, happened. This allows us to consider, as we have expressed in other editions of Image of Power, the importance of having strong, solid, well-organized and socially supported party organizations to sustain institutions, processes of change and democracy itself.

4) The process continues

While Gabriel Boric felt the blow of the so called Exit Plebiscite, he moved fast to keep the process of

change alive. On September 4, he gave a message informing that he was going to summon the opposition to discuss a new road map and that he was also going to implement a cabinet change. Reaction to the former, especially from the traditional right wing and the new right wing, was heterogeneous. Rejection gave them a reason to hope, which was scarce after losing the government in the 2021 presidential elections.

The second point was implemented a few days later, where it became clear that the new left needed to lean on the old left in order to redirect its agenda, take the lead and find the path of (consensual) change. For this purpose, it added political figures with experience, both from Partido por la Democracia and Partido Socialista, something that wasn't free of tensions within the Frente Amplio and Partido Comunista. Leaders emerge from coexistence in moments of crisis.

The forthcoming agenda raises three possibilities to put the constituent change back on track. The first is to call for a new election of conventional members to work on the rejected proposal and present an improved one. The second is to leave to the Congress, a milder solution that would only allow for amendments to the 1980 military Constitution. The third lies somewhere in between: go back to the ballots to form a new constituent convention that would work under the advice of a special commission. Some media reports indicate that the government, its left-wing allies and part of the right-wing opposition prefer the latter. For the moment, the first steps do not look promising.

In short, the constituent process does not end here. The latest IPSOS survey indicated that 78% of those consulted want a new constitution, not a patched version of the old one. The message is clear: the match is not over, it is just on a stand-by for a while.

Brazil: forecasts two weeks before the elections

The election in Brazil is just days away and the big - and unusual - question mark is whether President Jair Bolsonaro will accept the results. Throughout the year, he repeatedly questioned the reliability of the electronic voting system and got into several disputes with the magistrates of the Superior Electoral Court (TSE in Portuguese) who between 2021 and 2022 authorized investigations of the president for disseminating false news about an alleged electoral fraud in the making and ordered the removal of messages reinforcing such claims.

The level and evolution of voting intention, very stable since May, confirm a highly polarized panorama, while raising questions as to which factors and actors could come to operate or assert their weight in this balance of forces, both during elections and after.

Everything indicates that Lula will be president of Brazil for the third time, and two reputable pollsters even estimate that he could win in the first round. However, in this context, a very narrow electoral victory in the first round or a reduction of the gap in the runoff could pose a risk. Such a situation would not only enhance the possibility of disputed results, it could also make governance for Lula even more complicated, especially given the already complex economic situation and the fiscal ceiling imposed on him by the constitutional amendment approved in 2016 during Michel Temer's term.

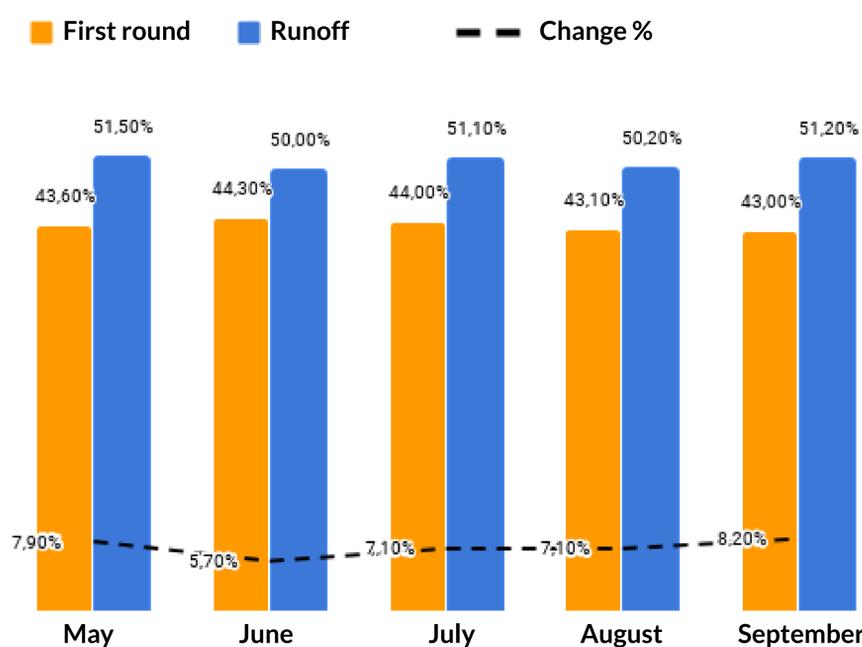
Another issue weighing on this scenario is related to the role of the armed forces, a topic that, by the way, is being debated in the congresses of several countries in the region (to learn more about these debates, we invite you to subscribe to our [civic space monitor](#)). Bolsonaro doubled the number of military officers, serving or retired in the cabinet and, in 2021, appointed the three commanders of the forces after a crisis that ended in the resignation of the entire military leadership. Closer to the date of the first round, he urged them to "safeguard freedom" and to carry out an alternative vote count. The issue escalated around an alleged agreement with the TSE to participate in the provisional recount, reported by Folha, which the TSE denied.

All these movements added noise to these elections, even though many experts rule out that the armed forces as an institution will fold to Bolsonaro in a claim of fraud. In [Cenital's recently published podcast on the Brazilian elections](#), Marina Vitelli, a professor at Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, observes that during Bolsonaro's government the armed forces gained a foothold as players in national politics and therefore have reasons to detach themselves from an institutional rupture. However, she argues that "their involvement is independent of the figure of Bolsonaro", in other words, "they are not allies", "they are with him because he serves them today". This does not mean that the relationship will not be an additional challenge for Lula, who anticipated some time ago that the Ministry of Defense could be left in the hands of a civilian.

What have the polls on voting intention been showing so far?

From the beginning, Lula led the voting intention. According to September data, the margin is around 8.5 points for the first round and 12.5 for the second round. At the beginning of the month, some polls suggested that the gap was narrowing, however this seems to have been reversed afterwards. However, the key fact is that voting intention levels are highly stabilized since May.

Graph 4. Monthly evolution of the vote intention for Lula in the first and second round of the 2022 presidential elections



Source: Own elaboration based on a compilation of pre-electoral surveys, May to September 2022.

Brazil: forecasts two weeks before the elections

Looking ahead to a possible runoff, expected growth is around 8% for Lula and 4% for Bolsonaro, also according to data collected during September.

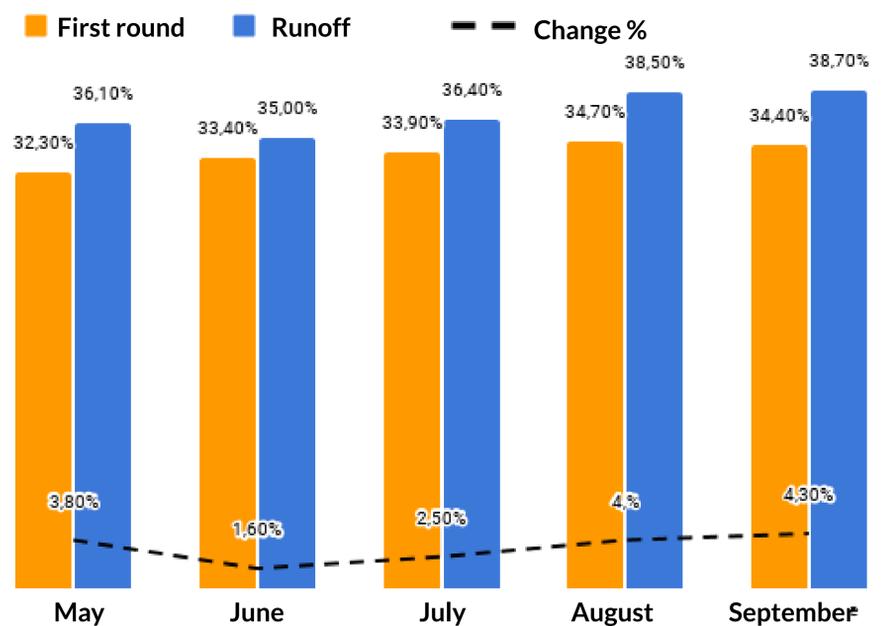
2) In which sectors or groups does the gap between Lula and Bolsonaro increase? (The percentages shown below, arise from the latest measurements made by each consulting firm, as of September 15).

- It grows in favor of Lula among women (+15% to 20%, IPEC, FSB, Ipespe, Quaest, CNT, Datafolha), in lower income sectors (+20% to 33%, IPEC, FSB, IPESPE, Quaest, CNT, Datafolha), with basic education (+14% to 25%, PP, FSB, IPESPE, Quaest, CNT), in the Northeast region (+30% to 40%, IPEC, PP, FSB, IPESPE, Quaest, CNT, Datafolha) and among Catholics (+18% to 25%, IPEC, FSB, Quaest, CNT, Datafolha).
- It increases in favor of Bolsonaro in the higher income sectors (+8% to 25%, IPEC, FSB, IPESPE, Quaest, CNT), in the southern region (+5% to 13%, IPEC, PP, FSB, IPESPE, QUAEST) and among evangelicals (+17% to 25, IPEC, FSB, QUAEST, CNT).

Much can be said about these trends, but here are three points to focus on. First, the notable gap in favor of Lula in the lower income sectors suggests that Bolsonaro's strategy of catching votes by implementing subsidies and economic aid did not work. Second, some polls show that the gap in the evangelical population is narrowing. Third, a [recent analysis](#) suggests that some of these groups may be underestimated or overestimated, because pollsters rely on data from the 2010 census for sample conformation, in the absence of a more recent one. This affects the sample weight of sectors where the gap between the two candidates increases leading to a possible overestimation of voting intention for Bolsonaro.

3) Another indicator of the level of polarization of this election is the level of rejection of the two candidates. The percentage of those who would never vote for Bolsonaro varies between 45 and 56%, according to the survey (CNT, FSB, IPEC, Paraná Pesquisas, Quaest, Datafolha). In the case of Lula, it ranges from 35 to 47 points (CNT, FSB, PP, Quaest, IPEC, Datafolha).

Graph 5. Monthly evolution of the vote intention for Bolsonaro in the first and second round of the 2022 presidential elections



Source: Own elaboration based on a compilation of pre-electoral surveys, May to September 2022.

4) According to the latest FSB, IPEC and CNT polls, **between 17 and 20%** of the people surveyed stated that they **might change their vote**. It is, of course, more stable in the cases of Lula and Bolsonaro. Between 84 and 87% of those leaning towards the former president would not change their vote. The percentage rises to a range that goes from 86 to 89 points for Bolsonaro. According to the Datafolha survey, Lula would be the most favored by the change of vote among voters who are likely to vote for Gomes and Tebet but are not convinced, 38 to 34%.

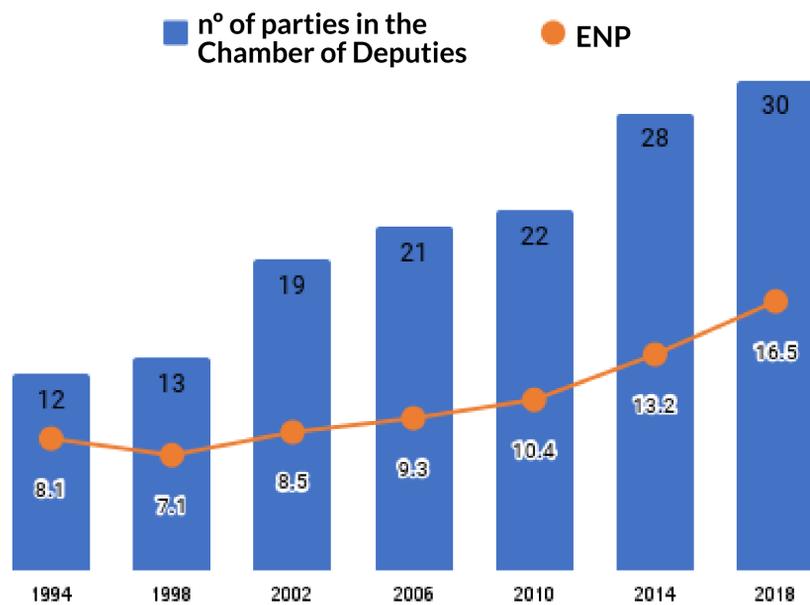
Congress will be decisive for the new government

Needless to say, these elections are not only about Lula and Bolsonaro. The 513 members of the Chamber of Deputies, one third of the members of the Senate, state governors and deputy governors, and members of the State Legislative Assemblies and the Legislative Chamber of the Federal District will also be elected. At the subnational level, voting intention shows a higher level of dispersion and forecasts that Lula will have to negotiate with a fragmented Congress.

This is not, by the way, something new if analyzed in a historical perspective. In the Chamber of Deputies, the number of parties with legislative representation (measured at the time of the election) increased from 12 in the 1994 elections to 30 in the 2018 elections and the effective number of parties (NEP in Spanish), or parties with "greater representativeness", from 8 to 16.

Brazil: forecasts two weeks before the elections

Graph 6. Parties with legislative representation and legislative fragmentation, 1994-2018



Source: Own elaboration based on the compilation of data from various sources carried out by Facundo Cruz

It is within this framework of fragmentation that the parties grouped in the so-called "Centrão", a conservative bloc with an undefined ideology, without formal existence and whose composition has been variable since the end of the 1980s, have gained relative weight. Its growing numerical presence has been the key to gaining increasing influence in Brazilian politics. The Centrão vote was, in fact, key in the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and in the government of Michel Temer.

In particular, the constitutional amendment that froze public spending for 20 years starting in 2017, only enabling increases to compensate for the previous year's inflation and a 10-year review, ended up increasing the weight of this bloc and its ability to negotiate positions and resources with the different governments. A change in this ceiling, which would be key for Lula, requires the votes of three-fifths of the members of the respective chambers, which makes negotiation unavoidable.

On the other hand, there is the issue of the Chambers' presidencies, especially the Chamber of Deputies. In recent years, these have been defined within the Centrão or with its support: Eduardo Cunha (PMDB) in 2015, Rodrigo Maia (DEM) in 2016 and Arthur Lira (Progressistas) in 2021 in the Chamber of Deputies, and Rodrigo Pacheco (DEM) in the Senate in 2021.

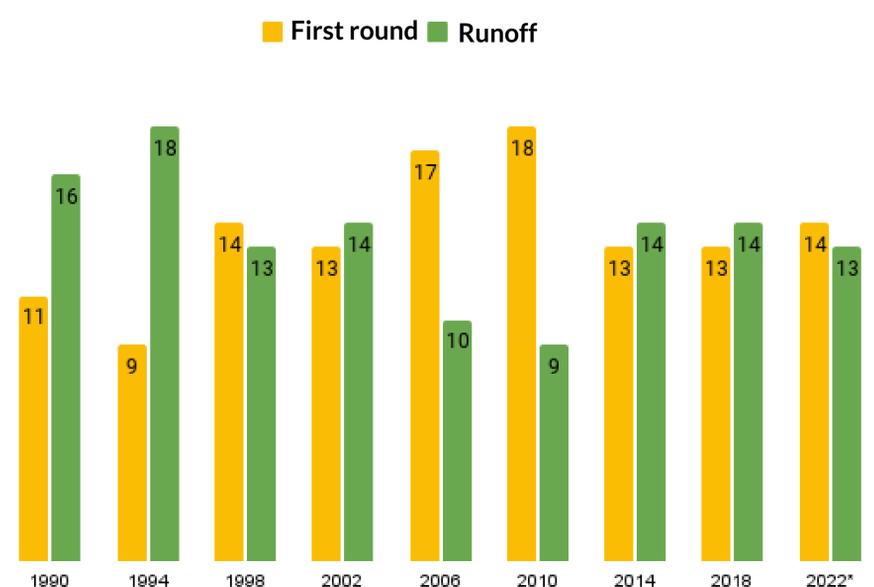
Elections in the states

The election of governors and vice-governors is governed by the same principle as for president and vice-president of the Republic. The winner is the one who obtains more than 50% of the valid votes in the first round. One of the main facts surrounding this election is that in 20 of the 27 electoral districts (including the Federal District) the current governors will seek reelection.

The polls seem to favor their hopes to remain in power, although the most likely scenario in some cases is that it will not be known until the runoff. The exception is the state of Sao Paulo, whose governor is the only one who is not among the two candidates with the highest voting intention.

A Poder360 study on data from the Superior Electoral Court and polls on voting intentions shows that historically half of the state elections were defined in a second round and that in this case the same will probably happen.

Graph 7. Monthly evolution of the vote intention for Bolsonaro in the first and second round of the 2022 presidential elections



Source: Poder360. *Data for 2022 are estimates.

Gustavo Petro's first steps: testing the ground

After the results of the presidential runoff were known, one of the big questions was whether Gustavo Petro would be able to build a political alliance in Congress that would allow him to push his legislative agenda and deliver the change he had promised to the electorate.

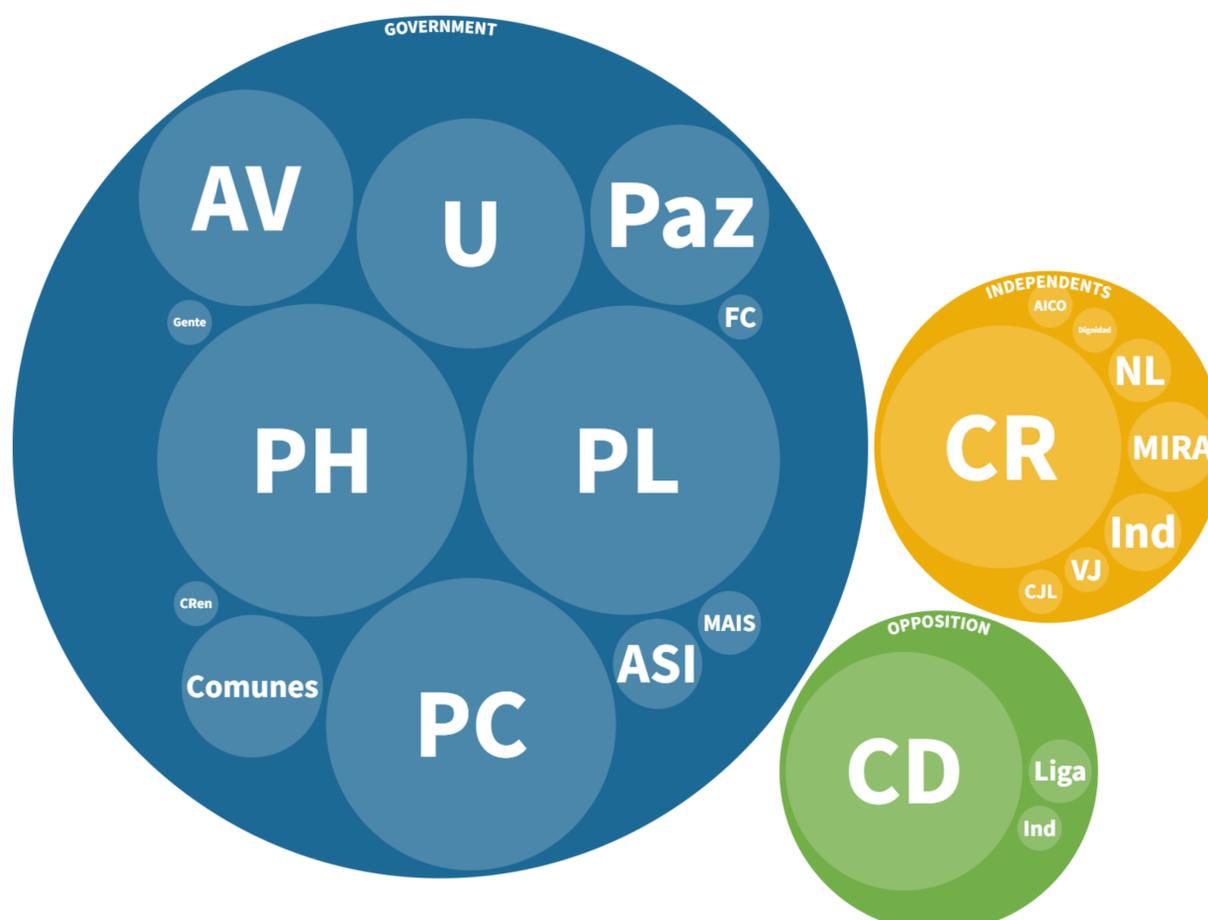
Beyond the good performance of Pacto Histórico in the March legislative elections, the fact is that it only has 28 seats out of a total of 188 in the House of Representatives, and 20 out of a total of 108 in the Senate. Dialogue in a context of fragmentation and polarization was, therefore, key - although not necessarily sufficient - to make the government agenda viable. The new government showed political will by summoning all forces, including its harshest adversaries, to a Great National Agreement in order to de-escalate the tense climate of the elections and lay the foundations for future governability.

Pre- and post-electoral political alignments display a distinctive feature in Colombia since the enactment of the [Statute of the Political Opposition](#) in 2018. Why? As of that year, political organizations must choose, within the month following the beginning of the government, to declare themselves in opposition, independent or government organization, before the electoral authority. This "political declaration" can be changed only once during the government period.

One of Petro's great achievements since his election was that political spaces as heterogeneous as Partido Liberal, Partido Conservador, Partido de la U, Alianza Verde, Comunes, the peace seats, in addition to other minority spaces, formally declared themselves as "government organizations". In this way it managed to align, at least for the time being, 144 seats in Representatives and 75 in the Senate. These agreements showed in the composition of the national cabinet, where some of these allies hold key positions: Partido Conservador in the Foreign Affairs portfolio, Partido de la U in the Interior, Partido Liberal in the Treasury, among others. The importance of these initial political achievements does not guarantee, by itself, homogeneity and full unity. Ultimately, the agreements will have to stand the test of time and some complex legislative debates to come.

Which spaces stayed out? On the one hand, Cambio Radical, which, with 11 seats in the Senate and 18 in the House of Representatives, declared itself independent. On the other hand, the former ruling party Centro Democrático (13 senators and 15 representatives). The Anti-Corruption League also proclaimed itself in opposition, but it hardly has a footing in Congress, and even less so after Rodolfo Hernández resigned his seat.

Graph 8. Composition of Congress according to block size and political declaration



Gustavo Petro's first steps: testing the ground

What the legislative activity has shown so far in four points

1) Distribution of positions of power

In Colombia, the presidency of the Chambers is renewed annually without the possibility of reelection. The same happens with the seven standing constitutional committees that each Chamber has. So how were these positions distributed among the different political spaces?

The presidencies of the respective chambers were left in the hands of Pacto Histórico for the legislative year 2022-2023, [Roy Barreras](#) in the Senate and [David Racero](#) in the House of Representatives, which is a change when compared to previous periods. The Senate was not in dispute unlike the leadership of the House of Representatives, with the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party and the Green Alliance also aiming for it.

Pacto Histórico also secured the presidency of three standing committees of the Senate (the Second of International Relations, the Third of Finance and Public Credit and the Fourth of Budget) and one in the House of Representatives (the Seventh of Health, Social Security and Family), in addition to the vice presidencies of the Fifth and Sixth committees of the Senate (Agro, Sea and Environment and Transport and Communications) and the First of Representatives (Constitutional Affairs). Some of the first bills that the government endorses must pass through these committees: tax reform, political reform and agrarian reform.

2) The first steps: the vote for the Comptroller General of the Nation and the 2023 budget

On August 18, Congress voted in favor of the appointment of Carlos Hernán Rodríguez as the new Comptroller General of the Nation. The candidate promoted by Petro gathered the support of 166 votes in Representatives and 94 in the Senate, including those of allied, independent and opposition benches..

On September 21, the Third and Fourth Committees of both Chambers jointly voted in favor of the Budget 2023, which includes a 14 trillion pesos

increase over the proposal first submitted by the projects in the agricultural sector, education, health, potable water, among others. The vote in the plenary is scheduled for October 17.

3) Tax reform

By mid-September, the government had submitted less than 10 proposals to Congress, between bills and legislative acts (or constitutional reforms). This small number (which prompted mild criticism from the presidents of the Chambers as analyzed [in this note by Milanese and Albarracín](#)) is not directly proportional to the scale of the proposals.

On the one hand, there is the [tax reform](#) presented by Minister José Ocampo, a bill that impacts several sectors: it seeks to eliminate tax benefits and exemptions for people with higher incomes and companies, for example those of the so-called "orange economy", increase the income tax, apply special taxes to exports of the hydrocarbon sector, extend the carbon tax, to sugary drinks and ultra-processed foods, and revamp the anti-tax evasion system.

Debate has been delayed, despite the fact that the President sent to Congress a "message of urgency" (or request for urgent treatment), which means that the Senate should decide within one month. This is partly due to the fact that the government has had to negotiate with its allies of Partido de la U and is engaged in talks with representatives of different sectors.

4) Other items on the legislative agenda

On the other hand, there is the [political reform](#) presented by the Minister of the Interior, Alfonso Prada. This is a draft legislative act, or constitutional reform, which will have to go through eight debates, instead of the usual four for the approval of an ordinary law. The proposal is to eliminate the preferential vote and replace it by single, closed lists with gender alternation, eliminate private financing of electoral campaigns, eliminate the Attorney General's Office's power to remove or disqualify elected officials by popular vote, reserving it only to the judicial authority, reduce the minimum age to become a congressman and change the requirements that political parties must comply with to obtain legal

Gustavo Petro's first steps: testing the ground

status. Several of these points have a background in recent political history and in bills that did not manage to come through. The Executive Branch also filed a reform of the Electoral Code that had already been approved by Congress but was subsequently stopped by the Constitutional Court due to formal defects.

In addition to this, there is a bill that seeks to recognize the peasantry as a subject of special protection and the duty of the State to promote progressive access to land ownership and basic services, and another one to modify the State's peace policy.

The "Petrista Revolution", an inevitable change?

Beyond the symbolic and political impact of these first steps, it cannot be taken for granted that the balance between the government and its allies will be sustained over time without concessions. A recent [analysis](#) by La Silla Vacía points precisely to this by suggesting that Petro's experiment is "stuck with jam" and that the decision to invite the traditional parties could have costs in terms of moderating the depth or pace of change. The president has shown his political girth, now it remains to be seen how skillful he will be when it comes to negotiations without disappointing the electorate that trusted in a leftist candidate for the first time in the history of the country.

Methodological notes

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.

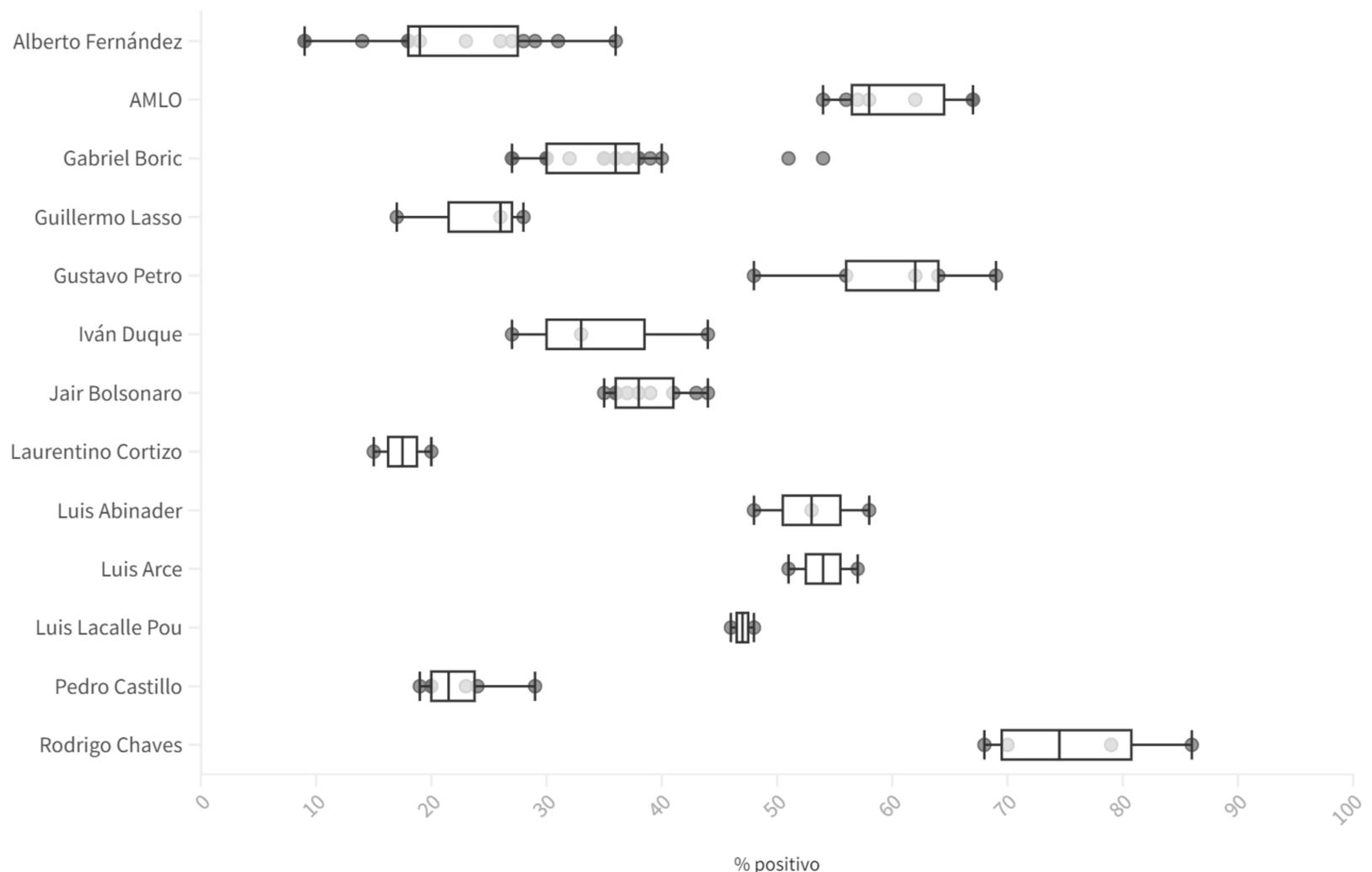
The presidential image rankings include cases that meet the following two criteria: a) they have

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 (research analyst).

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