Image of power

REPORT ON PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL RATINGS IN LATIN AMERICA
NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2022
Introduction - A brief review of 2022

In this latest edition of Image of Power, we review some of the main developments over the last year. From the impeachment of Pedro Castillo in Peru and its ensuing violence, to an apparent coup attempt in Brazil barely a week into Lula’s presidency, there is plenty to suggest political leaders in the region will have their work cut out trying to strengthen and stabilize their democracies in 2023 - not least considering the climate of increasing political fragmentation and polarization and with citizens’ expectations and demands growing ever more divergent.

1) Presidents with low approval ratings

Throughout 2022, presidents witnessed high or very high degrees of disapproval (above their approval levels), while some of the newcomers saw their political stock taper off fast. Currently, over half the region’s presidents have approval levels of between 20% and 30%; few of them show signs of regaining much ground. Some key pictures emerge in relation to this.

One of them relates to political fragmentation - an aspect of which is the increasing inability of political candidates and leaders to garner and tie down wide-scale support; voters, in other words, are not finding their needs and expectations adequately expressed or catered for by the region’s emerging leaders (or would-be leaders), at least not to the extent as in previous years. Peru illustrates this. Its divisive president was recently ousted from office only to be replaced with another one no more popular than her predecessor, a trend that keeps repeating in the country. In Ecuador, Guillermo Lasso’s popularity has tanked by 44% since he took office, whilst Gabriel Boric’s approval ratings in Chile are down 11% barely a year into his tenure.

Another picture being seen in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Uruguay are the political tensions related to voter polarization, which has its roots in the crisis of representation from the 1990s. Last year, this was most obviously on display in Brazil, where the previously languishing Jair Bolsonaro saw his approval ratings surge ahead of the elections; and they account for much of the current tensions in Bolivia concerning its Santa Cruz region. In Uruguay, Luis Lacalle Pou’s popularity is beginning to wane, having kept his image remarkably constant in spite of the challenges brought by the darkening international context.

Another aspect worth picking up on is the emergence of new leaders in the region brought to power on the back of citizens’ growing disillusion with their countries’ traditional political parties. In some cases, these leaders have adroitly - if at the same time regressively and harmfully - reshaped the political system to their advantage. Mexico and El Salvador’s presidents are cases in point, both enjoying solid popular support and legislative majorities.

2) Political turnover and governability

In the context of these developments, there has been a lot of talk about a supposed resurgence of leftist governments - a so-called “pink tide” comparable with the one the region experienced in the early 2000s (if only in political not economic terms). We have previously argued, however, that this trend owes a lot less to voters distancing themselves from the right than to citizens becoming exasperated over their governments failing to deliver on their expectations and improving quality of life.

Evidence of this increasing sense of frustration can be seen, for example, in how voting behavior is fragmenting, in the proliferation of candidates (many of them outsiders), and in elections spilling over into second-round runoffs often pitting contenders from polar political extremes. However, the challenges now facing the region’s new governments of the left are far tougher than those encountered twenty years ago. Today’s realities are marked by a much bleaker economic context and outlook, with citizens’ demands just as urgent as before but a lot more disparate and so harder to collectively deal with. This adds to voter impatience and reduces the governments’ margin of error, accounting for the rapid decline in approval of most of the region’s newly elected presidents.

In addition to this, two other challenges bear
Introduction - A brief review of 2022

mentioning, both connected with political fragmentation and polarization. The first is the often fraught relations of governments with legislative branches that are splintered into multiple parties and blocs (such as in the case of Chile, Brazil, Ecuador, or Costa Rica). The second relates to disparities and tensions within the government coalitions themselves. This is evident in Argentina, Chile, and Honduras (where the ruling coalition cracked as a result), and can now also be seen in Colombia and Brazil.

For more detailed (and country-specific) lowdowns of the relations between the executive and parliaments, we invite you to read our latest legislative overviews for Colombia (2018-2022), Mexico (2018-2022), and Argentina (2022).

3) Erosion of democracy and civic space

A broader issue of concern is the overall resilience of democracy in Latin America. In the last 12 months, the region has registered an apparent coup attempt in Brazil, physical attacks on the vice presidents of Argentina and Colombia, and declarations of states of exception or emergency in Honduras, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, and El Salvador where they have been in place since March 2022. More than 60 protesters lost their lives in Peru in the weeks following Castillo’s ousting and arrest. In Guatemala, the turmoil surrounding the country’s judicial branch, especially in the context of anti-corruption, has now spilled over into the diplomatic arena, amid legal proceedings being brought against Iván Velázquez - former president of the International Commission Against Impunity (CICIG in Spanish) and the current Minister of Defense of Colombia. And all this without even mentioning the goings-on in Nicaragua, Venezuela and Cuba.

In an effort to answer the above question - about the strength of democracy in the region - DL has analyzed various regional surveys which, when taken together, suggest that whilst the overall picture for Latin America does not, for the time being at least, merit talk of a marked general decline in democracy, we are doubtless witnessing certain specific instances of regression of great concern.

These and other findings were outlined in a report we published in March last year. In this, we looked at evidence collected by the V-DEM Institute (Varieties of Democracy) focusing, in particular, on the 'electoral' and 'liberal' dimensions of democracy. Our report explains that the region improved on both indicators until the early 2000s, before beginning to slide backwards consequent to events in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Brazil, Bolivia, Honduras and El Salvador. While not seeing the same regressions, other countries - Ecuador, Colombia, and Paraguay - were also found to have struggled in the last two decades to add any meaningful strength to their democracies.

In our August issue of Image of Power, we looked at data from Latinobarómetro to show how in the last 10 years, the proportion of people who say they are “not at all” or “only a little” satisfied with the state of their democracies has increased across several countries: Bolivia, Costa Rica, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil.

Finally, our analysis of the latest LAPOP survey brought to light another matter of concern: during the last decade and a half, confidence in the region's electoral processes and systems has fallen significantly, with almost 50% of voters now distrustful of how their country's ballots are operated. As Facundo Cruz points out in this issue of Cenital’s La Gente Vota, the increased tendency among voters to question their electoral systems and results, without any apparent grounds for doing so, can be linked to an increase in violence - which, he goes on to argue, could be mitigated by adding strength and transparency to the region's electoral institutions. To learn more about this, we encourage you to read the section of this report entitled “A ghost that stopped growing”.

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**Image of power** is a bimonthly monitoring of presidential image, based on the compilation of public opinion polls in 18 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a report produced by Directorio Legislativo’s research team: Felicitas Torrecilla (coordinator), Facundo Cruz (associate researcher), Matías Carpignano (research analyst) and Gastón Peréz Alfaro (research analyst).

Your feedback and comments are welcome.

The presidential approval data do not express the opinion or the institutional position of Directorio Legislativo.

**In this issue:**

- Presidential Image Rankings
  November- December 2022
- Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022
- Evolution of the presidential image between November and December 2022
- A ghost that stopped growing
- Zoom in. The time for electoral reforms: Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia and Ecuador
- Can Lula and Brazilian democracy emerge stronger from the J-8 coup?
- Zoom in. Lula’s cabinet
- Peru: the never-ending story
- 2023 electoral calendar
Presidential image rankings
November-December 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.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between November and December 2022. To see the sources: [click here]
Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022

Argentina: Alberto Fernández

Bolivia: Jeanine Añez | Luis Arce

Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro

Chile: Sebastián Piñera | Gabriel Boric

*Arce took office Nov. 8, 2020

*Boric took office Mar. 11, 2022

Source: author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between January 2020 and December 2022. (*) Based on a single data source. Vertical dotted lines indicate the change of government. To see the sources: click here
Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022

**Colombia: Iván Duque | Gustavo Petro**

- *Chaves took office May 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**

Source: author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between January 2020 and December 2022. (*) Based on a single data source. Vertical dotted lines indicate the change of government. To see the sources: [click here](#)
Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022

Guatemala: Alejandro Giammattei

Honduras: Juan Orlando Hernández | Xiomara Castro

*Castro took office Jan. 27, 2022

México: Andrés Manuel López Obrador

Nicaragua: Daniel Ortega

Source: author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between January 2020 and December 2022. (*) Based on a single data source. Vertical dotted lines indicate the change of government. To see the sources: [click here](#)
Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022

Panamá: Laurentino Cortizo

Paraguay: Mario Abdo Benítez

Perú: M. Vizcarra | F. Sagasti | P. Castillo | D. Boluarte

Dominican Republic: Danilo Medina | Luis Abinader


Source: author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between January 2020 and December 2022. (*) Based on a single data source. Vertical dotted lines indicate the change of government. To see the sources: [click here](#)
Evolution of presidential approval in Latin America 2020-2022

Source: author's own elaboration based on a compilation of public opinion surveys carried out between January 2020 and December 2022. (*) Based on a single data source. Vertical dotted lines indicate the change of government. To see the sources: click here
Evolution of the presidential image between November and December 2022

The following figure shows the evolution of the presidential image throughout the period and the variability of the measurements, marked with dots of different colors according to the month in which they were taken. The descending line to the right indicates a fall and the ascending line to the left indicates growth.

Among the most outstanding cases is that of Jair Bolsonaro, whose approval grew (+4%) despite the electoral defeat suffered in the last presidential elections against Lula Da Silva. Gustavo Petro’s popularity has started a downward trend (-5%), while he faces several social and electoral reforms.

Figure 1. Dispersion of presidential approval and disapproval measurements, November-December 2022.
A little over a year ago we warned about a sustained increase in citizen distrust in Latin America. We detected this phenomenon by analyzing the last survey published by Latinobarómetro, measured at the height of the pandemic in the year 2020. The data indicated that disenchantment was impacting both the Executive and Legislative branches, as well as partisan actors. Predictably in a global health and economic crisis, the blame fell on public officials.

This ghost that threatened to continue to grow and generate a new cycle of crisis of representation throughout the region, however, stopped expanding. It continues to lurk, it did not go away, but neither did it increase. That is what we found when we looked into the new edition of the survey conducted by LAPOP in 2021. We worked with the data aggregated at regional level which, although they lose the detail of the breakdown by country, give us a general overview of the continent. And a partially reassuring piece of news.

Trust in the branches of power

To analyze the three dimensions on which we are going to elaborate below, we use the scale recalibrated by LAPOP, which converts the scale from 0-100 ("not at all trustworthy"-"very trustworthy") to one ranging from 1 to 7 ("not at all"-"very trustworthy"). In the analysis, we contemplated all the years in which the level of citizen confidence in the different dimensions of local politics was surveyed.

Figure 1 synthesizes the perception that the inhabitants of the region have about the Legislative Branch, we can observe that there was, in effect, a growth in the upper values of the scale (5, 6 and 7) from 2018 to 2021. In parallel, a reduction of the lowest values (1, 2 and 3) is detected. The midpoint of the scale (4) also grows. These data allow us to consider that the distribution of (dis)confidence is returning to the values of the 2004-2010 period, the year prior to the recessionary cycle that came after the commodity boom at the beginning of 2000.

As shown in Figure 2, something similar occurs with the Executive Branch. The difference lies in the high rate of people surveyed who say they have no confidence at all, no less than a quarter. This value is to be expected as many countries in the region are in a recessionary cycle in economic terms, with an increase in poverty and inequality, and with situations of daily insecurity. If we add to this the instability of several governments as a result of the lack of guarantees of governability, it is to be expected that a significant portion of the region’s inhabitants are skeptical of the political leadership and, in particular, of whoever holds the presidency.
Trust in political parties

Another facet of the issue, which we have been analyzing closely, is the perception that Latin Americans have of political parties. Political parties are ultimately responsible for defining candidacies and making public decisions once in power, in addition to campaigning, proposing government plans and shaping negotiations in the collegiate bodies that pass laws, resolutions and provisions with an impact on daily life.

As in previous years, partisan actors continue to be the wedding duck of the political game. Nearly 50% of the people consulted say they have little confidence in them (see Figure 4). There is, however, a glimmer of hope in the evolution of responses between 2018 and 2021, a period in which a prominent jump can be observed among those who assign them a value of 4 and 5, with a consequent retraction of the lowest values. In other words, people who say they have no confidence at all went from being a third of the total to a quarter. This is moderately encouraging news, although it confirms that it is necessary to work on reestablishing trust in the mechanisms through which public officials come to occupy spaces of power.

Confidence in the elections

If at the beginning we said that the news is partially reassuring, it is because distrust in elections is growing.

That is, in the processes through which we elect our representatives and which are, ultimately, the source of legitimacy of elected governments. If the legitimacy of origin is tarnished by distrust in institutions and electoral processes, then many elective mandates start in negative pigeonholes. This can be seen in the graph below (The jump in the series is due to the lack of data between 2006 and 2010 inclusive).

As can be seen in Figure 5, the situation is more worrying than in the dimensions of analysis considered previously. If in 2004 only 20% of those surveyed were in the lowest values on the scale (1, 2 and 3), by 2021 that number had grown to just over 40%. This means that, in the last decade and a half, almost half of the voters have lost confidence in how electoral processes are organized in the region. This trend is notably contrary to those analyzed above.

The causes are not yet clear, but we could outline in principle two related lines that have been occupying us in recent months. First, the increase in electoral polarization has led those who are defeated at the polls to question the whole process, its integrity and legitimacy. In recent years it has become, in fact, a common practice and, even more, an expected behavior that we have seen from the United States to Peru and Brazil.
Secondly, the political dispute has intensified in the context of presidential runoffs with very close results. This is not a minor point in terms of citizen confidence or the construction of governance, because a portion of the citizenry does not trust the legitimacy of the victory of the new government and also because the elected presidents are taking office with weak support and serious difficulties to expand it in a context in which some sectors of the opposition are using the denunciation of fraud or lack of legitimacy as their own electoral capital.

It is at this point, then, where an urgent work agenda arises. Doubting electoral results from the moment of defeat is extremely detrimental to the construction of better democracies. The electoral authorities of several countries in the region have improved processes and logistics, have made progress in greater efficiency by incorporating technology, and have worked hard to generate the necessary public and private consensus.

This last point is, perhaps, the Achilles Heel of the region. The cases that have been successful in terms of the efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy of the modifications incorporated have been those that have achieved broad consensus in the respective congresses. However, those that have been promoted by the ruling parties in office without finding support in the opposition have added fuel to the fire of the existing high polarization, as has been happening in Mexico, El Salvador and, before that, in Nicaragua. Without reform, Jair Bolsonaro’s confrontation with the electoral institutionality also crossed the last elections. The experiences that are opening in Colombia, with the political reform and the Electoral Code, and in Ecuador, with the debates raised by the upcoming constitutional referendum, should look at their peers with a vocation for learning rather than unilateralism.

In short, any reform process seeks to guarantee the trust that provides legitimacy to the starting point of democracy. These are the elections. To trust in them is to trust in their authorities. And the starting point is from the top down. If the ghost of distrust in public authorities and party actors has stopped growing, then the first ingredient of the recipe could be found there.
Zoom in: The time for electoral reforms

Several countries in the region are in the process of revising their electoral legislation and institutions. Here we briefly analyze four cases.

**Mexico: Plan B of the electoral reform**

As we analyzed in our September-October issue, one of AMLO’s most ambitious bills for 2022 was the electoral reform of the electoral system and the electoral institutional framework. The original proposal proposed the replacement of the National Electoral Institute, with which AMLO has had several short circuits, by a new National Institute of Elections and Consultations (INEC in Spanish), the reduction of the number of councilors and their election by direct vote; the suppression of state electoral institutes and tribunals; the reduction of the number of national legislators (128 to 96 in the Senate and 500 to 300 in the Chamber of Deputies, which would imply the elimination of the seats assigned by the principle of proportional representation), and the reduction of financing to political parties, which would be limited to electoral campaign expenses.

As expected, the bill bounced in the Chamber of Deputies due to the rejection of the opposition benches, whose support was necessary to reach the qualified majority required for a constitutional amendment. The vote was defined with 269 votes in favor (MORENA, PT and PVEM) and 225 against (PAN, PRI, PRD and MC).

This is why the government opted to introduce near the end of the first ordinary period the so-called “Plan B” of the electoral reform, which is divided into two packages of amendments to ordinary laws. The first one, approved and promulgated in December, modifies the general laws of Social Communication and Administrative Responsibilities in relation to the principles governing governmental propaganda. The decree has already been brought to court through an action of unconstitutionality filed by the PAN and the PRD parties before the Supreme Court of Justice.

The second package is the most controversial and includes amendments to the General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures, among others.

It covers three central points: the expansion of electoral rights, changes in the organization, structure and operation of the administrative authorities of INE and the local public authorities in electoral matters and the reform of electoral justice.

The issue that has generated the most internal debate, even within the ruling coalition, is the second one. In this article, Dr. Hugo Concha Cantú of the UNAM analyzes its implications in terms of the reduction of its political, technical, administrative and regulatory autonomy due to the compacting of areas, resources and attributions. Its essential functions remain, however, unchanged, since they are established by the Constitution. Since the bill was modified by the reviewing chamber, its legislative procedure will be completed in the Senate when the ordinary sessions resume in February. No difficulties are expected for its approval, although it is anticipated that it will also be subject to judicial review, so that its application is still uncertain.

**Colombia: political and electoral reform on the agenda of Congress for 2023**

In 2022, Congress began to deal with a political reform bill promoted by the government of Gustavo Petro. Since it is a constitutional amendment, the initiative must go through 8 instances of debate in Congress instead of the 4 required for the approval of an ordinary law. At the close of the first legislative period in December, the first 4 had been completed.

The proposal includes several particularly sensitive issues that have generated debate both with the opposition and within the government coalition. First, it replaces the preferential vote with closed, blocked and parity lists. Centro Democrático and Cambio Radical are against, but there was also resistance within some allied blocs (such as Alianza Verde and Partido Liberal). Second, it eliminates the one-year disqualification for a legislator who resigned from his seat to hold a government position. Third, it eliminates the power of the Attorney General’s Office to sanction or dismiss political officials who have been elected by popular vote. Instead, it must be by order of a judicial authority, in line with a recommendation of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.
Other changes that were under debate were to reduce the age requirement to become a legislator from 30 to 25 years old, finally discarded; to enable congressmen and women to run for governorships and mayorships without having to resign their seats one year before the elections, and to change their party only once; and to eliminate the restriction imposed by the 2015 constitutional reform that reserves the possibility of forming alliances for smaller parties that in total do not gather more than 15% of the votes in previous elections.

Some of these possible changes have been - and will surely be - questioned for their possible implications for the survival of small parties, for favoring personalisms, the primacy of party presidents, “the revolving door” and transfugism from one party to another. The debate will continue in the second period of the legislative year, which begins in mid-March.

It is also foreseen that in March the Electoral Code reform, which was initially filed with a message of urgency from the government, will begin to be dealt with. Although the need to modernize the norm is generally recognized, the road will be arid. Several congressmen and congresswomen of Centro Democrático, Alianza Verde, Verde Oxígeno, have already anticipated their objections to the text signed by the head of the Registrar’s Office, Alexander Vega, whose management has been receiving criticism. It is worth remembering that a similar bill had been promoted by Vega in 2020 but was overthrown by the Constitutional Court due to irregularities in the procedure.

### Ecuador: majority support for a reform promoted by an unpopular government

On February 5, eight changes to the Constitution in force since 2008 will be submitted to popular consultation, among which there are two questions whose result could have an impact on the configuration of the political-electoral system.

The first one refers to the reduction of seats in the National Assembly and the modification of the election criteria (see Table 1).

In practical terms, the reform would increase the number of seats for the national constituency (which would come to represent one third of the seats, compared to the current 10%) and reduce the number of seats for the foreign constituency. With this, it is also possible that the fragmentation of Legislative Branch will be reduced.

The second aims at establishing new requirements for the operation of political parties: a minimum number of affiliates equivalent to 1.5% of the electoral roll of their jurisdiction and

### Table 1. Comparison of the 2008 Constitution of Ecuador and the changes proposed in the February 5, 2023 referendum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of constituency</th>
<th>2008 Constitution</th>
<th>Proposed reform</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National constituency</td>
<td>15 assembly members</td>
<td>2 per million inhabitants (without considering fractions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 assembly members per federal constituency, and 1 more for every 250,000 inhabitants or fraction thereof exceeding 150,000.</td>
<td>1 assemblyman for each federal constituency, and one more for every 250,000 inhabitants (without considering fractions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal constituencies</td>
<td>The law shall determine the election of assembly members from regions, metropolitan districts, and the overseas constituency.</td>
<td>1 assembly member per oversea constituency for every 500,000 inhabitants residing abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other kinds of constituencies</td>
<td></td>
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the registration of their members, audited by the National Electoral Council.) The purpose of establishing a threshold is to reduce the number of political movements, which currently stands at 272.

The reforms are approved with half plus one of the valid votes cast and incorporated to the constitutional text. A survey conducted by IPSOS in mid-December showed that only 55% of the people surveyed knew about the call. Beyond that, between 82% and 86% said they were in favor of the proposal to reduce the number of assembly members, according to the survey (IPSOS, Clima Social). It should be noted that the legislative body barely surpasses 11% approval, according to Perfiles de Opinión. Meanwhile, between 80 and 82% agreed with the modification of the requirements for political movements to obtain legal recognition (IPSOS, Clima Social).

El Salvador: chronicle of a re-election foretold

In September, Nayib Bukele confirmed that he will be a presidential candidate in 2024. However, his race for reelection began more than a year ago when a controversial ruling of the Constitutional Chamber - making a reinterpretation of Article 154 of the Constitution- granted him the possibility of accessing a second term under the condition that he requested a license during the six months prior to the election (a subject we have analyzed in this article). Stripped of the constitutional impediments, Bukele began to pave the way towards his goal.

First of all, the Assembly approved a reform of the penal code that stiffened the penalties for those who obstruct the elaboration of the electoral registry, the free exercise of the vote or the scrutiny. The crime of electoral fraud reaches those who hinder the registration of candidacies that comply with the established requirements, therefore, any electoral authority that tried to challenge Bukele's candidacy could receive up to 15 years in prison.

No less controversial was the reform of the overseas suffrage, a factor that will be crucial in the elections of a country that has more than 1.4 million inhabitants (out of a total of 6) residing abroad.

Critics warn that as a result of the modifications, the electoral roll is susceptible to irregularities such as substantial changes in the voter registry (in the year 2022 there are some 730 thousand new voters with respect to 2021) or duplications in the data, since the Single Identity Card (as of August more than 500,000 had been issued) and the passport are considered valid documents for voting. At the same time, the new regulation has strong implications for the autonomy of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, which is obliged to hire a private company for the development and implementation of the electronic voting system in consulates and diplomatic representations. Finally, one of the crucial aspects of the reform is that it granted full autonomy to the Overseas Vote Receiving Boards in the counting of votes without having an oversight by the political parties, which fuels fears of possible fraud.

At the same time, the government is also promoting an initiative to reduce the number of municipal districts from 262 to 50. As in the previous case, the reform generated concern among the opposition and the public opinion due to the possibility that it responds to a strategy of Bukele to eliminate those districts in which the ruling party is disadvantaged for the upcoming elections.

Tension has been increasing during the last months in local politics and the fear has grown that the elections will consolidate for 4 more years a leader who ambitions to concentrate the totality of power in his hands. For the moment, Bukele seems to be one step ahead and public opinion seems to support his continuity (77% do so according to CEC-FGV and 64% according to La Prensa Gráfica). However, there is still a long (and unpredictable) road ahead until 2024.
On January 1, 2023, Luis Inácio Lula Da Silva began his third term as President of Brazil. A few days earlier, Brazil's Congress - which will only be renewed on February 1 - had approved a constitutional amendment allowing the new government to raise its 2023 spending ceiling by R$145 billion to cover social expenditure, and to invest another R$22.9 billion on top of that from the country's financial surplus. This was considered a triumph for Lula in his all-out search for resources to fulfill his campaign pledges, albeit he had to settle for an authorized higher spend for only one year as opposed to the two he had hoped for.

Certainly, the situation at this point was highly fraught, not just economically but in political terms too. And that was even before, barely a week later, each of Brazil's three branches of power were unprecedentedly set upon by large mobs of Bolsonaro supporters. The circumstances surrounding this are yet to fully come to light: Did the ex-president or others close to him directly incite it? Were the police deliberately permissive? The ongoing investigation is actively pursuing these lines of inquiry with Lula himself accusing the security forces of open complicity.

Faster to act has been the Supreme Court, which has already taken several weighty measures in response to the event: the suspension for 90 days of the governor of the district of Ibaneis Rocha; the arrests of Bolsonaro's former Minister of Justice, and of the since sacked Secretary of Security of Brasília Anderson Torres; and the announcement that Bolsonaro himself is to be investigated in relation to a video in which he challenges the results of last year's elections. The Public Prosecutor's Office has requested that the Court of Auditors freeze the assets of all three individuals.

Lula responded with no less potent measures of his own. He greenlit a ‘federal intervention’ of Brasília with the backing of Congress, mandating the country's security forces to assume control of the district until the end of January. He then sacked his army commander, along with 18 Federal Police chiefs and 26 regional heads of police, and replaced the military units tasked with standing guard outside the Planalto Palace and his own presidential residence. Additionally, he ordered an overhaul to the management of several of the country's public media broadcasters - put in place during the previous government - among them Agencia Brasil, TV Brasil and Radio Nacional, which all pertain to Empresa Brasil de Comunicação.

**What else is there to report on Lula in recent weeks?**

- The day after the riots Lula met with the country's governors, marching alongside them from the Planalto to the Supreme Court. By then he had already summoned the presidents of the Senate, Rodrigo Pacheco, the Chamber of Deputies, Arthur Lira, and the Supreme Court, Rosa Weber.

- If Lula succeeds in putting these events behind him and barring any further comparable attacks or unrest, another figure to potentially emerge from the situation with some credit to his name is the Federal Supreme Court judge, Alexandre de Moraes, who is now leading the investigation into the riots. De Moraes is not just the person behind the aforementioned court rulings, but was also the president of the Superior Electoral Court as Lula defeated Bolsonaro in the polls last year. No stranger to politics, he served as Sao Paulo's secretary of Justice under then governor Gerardo Alckim between 2002 and 2005, as its secretary of transport between 2007 and 2010, and as the its minister of Justice under Michel Temer.

- The events of January 8 drew worldwide condemnation, including from the European Council, the UN Secretary General and Organization of American States, among several others. In the aftermath of the riots, Brazil rejoined the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC in Spanish), which during its VII Summit ratified through its final declaration that "democracy is a conquest of the region that does not permit interruptions or setbacks" and the "firm commitment to the preservation of democratic values and the full and unrestricted validity of institutions and the rule of law in the region”. Brazil’s return was also accompanied by ambitious proposals such as the implementation of a common reference currency, as an alternative to the dollar, which, although unlikely to prosper, reflects Lula's appetite for asserting his regional leadership.
Can Lula and Brazilian democracy emerge stronger from the J-8 coup?

- The government has expressed interest in investigating the role of private sector bodies in facilitating the January 8 attacks. Under the spotlight in this context would be certain agricultural and mining entities in Brazil which stand to be negatively affected should Lula pursue his proposed shift in environmental policy.

- On February 1, the Congress will be renewed and all signs are that the current presidents of the chambers will be re-elected: Rodrigo Pacheco of the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (Senate) and Arthur Lira of Progressistas (Chamber of Deputies). The PT is set to support Lira’s candidacy (as is the case with the PL, MDB Republicans and União Brasil), despite his previous closeness to Bolsonaro, as a means to ensure Pacheco’s reelection. Lira himself has been actively searching for support, through an intense agenda of meetings with deputies, governors and executive officials. He has also announced that ‘measures’ will be taken against those legislators who downplayed the gravity of the January riots.

- As addressed by Magna Inácio in our September-October issue, Lula’s negotiations with the different political forces in Congress will be largely centered around the issue of the Executive’s discretionary use of budget resources. These spending powers, which actually predate Bolsonaro’s time in office, have been considerably strengthened in recent years, and are expected to be difficult to amend.

Zoom in: Lula’s cabinet

An expanded cabinet. The multiplication of executive portfolios, from 23 to 37, puts an end to Jair Bolsonaro’s institutional adjustment policy and carries an implicit message: the government is interested in making visible issues that had been neglected until now. The former Ministry of Economy was divided into four (Finance; Planning and Budget; Development, Industry and Trade; and Management and Innovation in Public Services), portfolios eliminated during the Bolsonaro government (Integration and Regional Development, Racial Equality and Human Rights and Citizenship, among others) were reestablished and completely new units were created, such as those of Indigenous Peoples, Ports and Airports or the aforementioned Ministry of Management and Innovation in Public Services.

A balance of forces... As part of the political strategy of building support and governability, the cabinet was distributed among 9 parties: the PT with 10, MDB, PSB, União and PSD with 3 each, and PSOL, PDT, REDE and the Partido Comunista with 1. 11 other portfolios were left in the hands of career officials (Foreign Relations or the Federal Attorney General’s Office) or independents from the academic, cultural or social activism fields (Human Rights and Citizenship, Racial Equality, Culture, Health or Indigenous Peoples). Lula’s challenge will be to avoid that the gestures of unity end up sounding like an orchestra without a conductor and at the same time to balance the interests of multiple spaces and the expectations of those who are taking their first steps in public management.

... and figures. It is not only about the coexistence of heterogeneous political spaces but also of figures that have their own weight, such as Simone Tebet, the young MDB presidential candidate, now Minister of Planning and Budget, or Marina Silva (REDE) who returns to the Ministry of Environment, which she had already headed between 2003 and 2007, when she resigned with strong criticism to Lula’s government. Eight former governors were also integrated into the cabinet (Geraldo Alckim, Sao Paulo, in the Ministry of Industry and Foreign Trade; Rui Costa, Bahia, in the Chief of Staff; Camilo Santana, Ceará, in Education; Márcio França, Sao Paulo, in Ports and Airports; Wellington Dias, Piauí, in Development and Social Assistance; Flávio Dino, Maranhão, in Justice; Waldez Góes, Amapá, in Integration and Regional Development; and Renan Filho, Alagoas, in Transportation) and 2 former deputy governors (Luciana Santos, Pernambuco, in Science and Technology and the aforementioned Simone Tebet, Mato Grosso do Sul).

More women. This will also be the cabinet with the largest number of women, 11 in total.
Since the last issue of Image of Power (published in November) we could argue that everything and not a single thing has changed in Peru. At that time, the third vacancy motion against Pedro Castillo was being processed in Congress. Several analysts have argued that despite the strong erosion that his government had been suffering for months, the numbers were inconclusive. In other words, the motion was likely to fail. However, days later and within no more than five hours, a series of events unfolded that brought the presidency to an abrupt end and ushered in a new period of instability with as yet unforeseeable consequences. At the time, 65 demonstrators lost their lives in the protests in the weeks that followed.

The morning of December 7 began with the now former president declaring a state of siege, the dissolution of congress and the intervention of the judiciary. The Peruvian Constitution contemplates that the head of state can dissolve the Congress but only if the latter has censured or denied confidence to two Councils of Ministers. It was Martin Vizcarra’s argument to call for extraordinary legislative elections in 2019, but it was not the case now. There are, in fact, no other legal ways to revoke the parliamentary mandate and also Congress cannot be dissolved under a state of siege.

The move was closer, in institutional terms, to Alberto Fujimori’s self-coup of 1992 than to the last dissolution of Congress but far, far away, in terms of power. Fujimori then had the strategic support of the Armed Forces and part of the citizenry, while the image that remains of Castillo is that of a president in solitude, reading a message with trembling hands. That is why the decision caused a generalized bewilderment. Not only the opposition rejected it as unconstitutional, but also the armed forces and numerous cabinet members who resigned on the spot.

Thus, Congress ended up approving the presidential vacancy for “moral incapacity” and swearing in vice-president Dina Boluarte as the new head of state. Castillo, meanwhile, tried to escape from the Government Palace, but failed in his attempt. He was arrested by the police and remanded in custody. Since then, he has been detained, paradoxically, in the same prison where Alberto Fujimori is serving his sentence.

The arrival to power of Peru’s first female president was marked by at least three factors that have crossed the agenda of her first month and a bit of government. The first is related to the decision not to call national elections in the short or medium term, perhaps the clearest demand arising from the protests of recent weeks. The deterioration of the internal political climate forced her, however, to set a date. On December 20, Congress approved with 93 votes in favor the proposal of the Executive Branch to bring forward the elections to April 2024, which means that the presidential term would end on July 28 of that year. A few days later, with the beginning of 2023, the Legislative Branch granted a vote of confidence by 73 votes to 43 to the presidential cabinet headed by Alberto Otárola.

However, reaching April 2024 was already a challenge in itself. Now the government, under social and media pressure, submitted to parliament a request to bring forward the elections to December 2023. At the time of this edition, the request was at a standstill.

As is well known, and here we introduce the second factor, for weeks now the country has been convulsed by incessant citizen mobilizations, especially in the southern region of the country. The government’s handling of the situation has been plagued by criticism due to the repressive actions that have already caused the death of more than 60 demonstrators and injured more than 1,200 at the closing of this note. Boluarte also declared a state of emergency for 30 days with suspension of the rights to inviolability of the home, freedom of transit, freedom of assembly and personal safety, and ordered, among other measures, the violent police intervention of the University of San Marcos.

What can be foreseen in this context is that the transition will be no less complicated in a country with a collapsed party system. The last president who managed to complete his term was Ollanta Humala in 2016. A wake-up call for any democracy. This situation seems to have worsened since the 1993 constitutional reform, which introduced radical changes in the institutional functioning such as direct presidential reelection, the change from a bicameral to a unicameral congress and the introduction of new executive powers such as the possibility of dissolving the congress.
Peru: the never-ending story

The following graphs suggest, on the other hand, that despite the low presidential stability (the median indicates that presidents have lasted 782 days out of 1827 days in office), there is no direct correlation with economic development. This is in line with what we stated in our May-June issue based on an analysis by Victoria Murillo: in Peru we find a situation of political fragmentation or destructuring in which collective mobilization does not generate clear leadership or find a focused electoral expression, but where at the same time the existence of economic elites has made it possible to maintain relative macroeconomic stability.

Finally, the third factor is related to the revision of the institutional order created by the 1993 Constitution. The possibility of a constitutional reform has been around the public debate for some time but, predictably, it has not been able to prosper in these political circumstances. In particular, the powers of Congress to dismiss the president, and of the president to dissolve Congress, have been called into question, as we have already analyzed in previous issues.

In mid-January, Congress approved a bill to eliminate the vote of confidence in the Council of Ministers provided for in Article 130 of the Constitution, although it does not touch Articles 132 and 133 which empower the Executive to raise questions of confidence regarding the general policy of the government. Since it does not meet the necessary qualified majority of two thirds of the total, it will have to be ratified by means of a popular consultation. The bill was rejected by Peru Libre among other blocks. At the same time, the Constitution and Regulations Committee is receiving contributions from experts on other reforms to the political system. Away from the parliamentary precinct, the percentage of the population that believes that the country needs a new Constitution and not only some changes is growing, 40% in January against 23% in July 2021 (IEP).

As of today, Dina Boluarte enjoys lower presidential approval than her lackluster predecessor, barely 19%. The latest IEP survey of January 2023 shows that 60% of the population justifies the protests (and even feels identified with them) and believes that there were excesses in the updating of the security forces. These percentages are even higher among young people. In sharp contrast, voices within the political leadership have also been heard supporting Dina Boluarte’s iron fist policy against those who, in her words, “want to generate chaos and disorder to take the power of the Nation”.

To conclude, although the rejection to the measures taken by Pedro Castillo continues to be in the majority, it is noteworthy that 41% of the people polled approve the dissolution of Congress and 28% approve the intervention of the justice system. It is worth noting that Congress is a highly discredited institution in the country, only 9% support its work. This reveals a more contextual and unavoidable dimension for any project committed to building a stronger democracy in Peru.

Figure 6. Length of Peru’s presidential terms (in days), 1990-2022

![Figure 6](source)

Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from MPIAL (Political and Institutional Map of Latin America) by Directorio Legislativo

Figure 7. Peru GDP evolution (in millions of USD), 1990-2022

![Figure 7](source)

Source: Own elaboration based on data provided by the World Bank
The year starts on February 5 with the sectional elections in Ecuador and the referendum in which eight questions or reforms to the 2008 Constitution will be submitted for consultation. In this opportunity, 23 prefects and vice-prefects, 221 mayors, 733 urban councilors plus 133 per district, 443 rural councilors and main members of parish councils will be elected. Also, 7 members of the Council of Citizen Participation and Social Control for the period 2023-2027. It is worth mentioning that the method of election of the latter could change after the referendum since one of the questions proposes that they be appointed by the National Assembly. In the zoom in on electoral reforms, we analyze in more detail other points included in the referendum.

This year there will also be general elections in three countries in the region, starting with Paraguay, where on April 30, the new president, governors and the two chambers of Congress will be completely renewed.

This will be followed by the presidential, legislative and municipal elections in Guatemala on June 25. 2023 will be an intense year for Argentina, not only because of the presidential and legislative elections to be held in October (preceded in August by the Open, Simultaneous and Mandatory Primary Elections), but also because of the splitting of the provincial elections. In fact, governors will be elected in 22 of the 24 districts, of which only 5 will coincide with the national elections as far as is known so far. The electoral calendar for the whole country can be consulted here.

Finally, the second constituent process in Chile. To recapitulate: in December 2022 the great majority of Chilean political forces - with the exception of Partido Republicano (Kast) and Partido de la Gente (Parisi) - laid the foundations to carry out a new process. On the one hand, a consensus on 12 points to be respected by the new drafters. On the other hand, the design of a supervised mechanism to prevent the new process from following the fate of the previous one.

Below we share a map with the main electoral milestones of the year.

Figure 8. Map of Latin American Elections in 2023
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.

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Your feedback and comments are welcome.

To see the sources of November-December 2022, click here.
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