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**Latin American Electoral Analysis. November 2005-
December 2006**

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Summary

Latin America had never seen an electoral agenda so intense – nor through popular suffrage such a profound and simultaneous political change – as it has in the past 14 months. This agenda comes as Latin America seems to be embarking on an about-face with regard to its record over the past 28 years, since the start of the Third Wave of democracy.*

Introduction

Unlike the period 2003-2004¹, in which less than 13% of the 500 million people of Latin America elected new presidents, from November 2005 through the end of 2006 the region engaged in a flurry of electoral activity. Two countries in the Southern Cone (Brazil and Chile), the five nations of the Andean region (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela), three in Central America (Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua) and Mexico - 11 out of a total of 18 countries – held presidential elections which etched out a new political map for the region. In nine of the 11 countries, legislative voting was held at the same time as the presidential election; there were non-simultaneous elections in Venezuela (one year before the presidential voting); near concurrent voting in Colombia (two months before the presidential election) and mid-term elections in two countries (El Salvador and the Dominican Republic).² Meanwhile two referendums were held – one in Bolivia and one in Panama -- and elections to a constituent assembly were conducted in Bolivia.

If we add to this the general elections in Canada (January 2006), in which the conservative opposition won, the mid-term elections in the US (November 2006) which dealt a severe blow to President Bush and his Republican Party and the presidential elections in Haiti (February 2006) which led to the return of President Preval, one can say that not just Latin America but rather most of the continent's population went to the polls during this 14-month period.³

The exceptional nature of this burst of electoral activity does have two precedents in the period since the region returned to democracy in 1978: the years 1989 and 1994. In 1989 presidential elections were held in nine countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay, while in 1994 voters in eight countries chose new presidents, in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay. However, despite its importance, Latin America had never seen an electoral agenda so intense – nor through popular suffrage such a profound and simultaneous political change – as it has in the past 14 months. This agenda comes as Latin America seems to be embarking on an about-face with regard to its record over the past 28 years, since the start of the Third Wave of democracy. Today the region is living in a situation that blends good news and bad news, although in a context in which moderate optimism prevails, due in part to strong macro-economic factors.

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1 Julio Burdman and Daniel Zovatto, 'Latin American Electoral Analysis 2003-2004', in C. Malamud and P. Isbell, *Anuario Elcano*, Latin America 2004-2005, Elcano Royal Institute, October 2005.

2 Although they are not addressed in this study, concurrent municipal elections were also held in Honduras, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Nicaragua. Brazil staged regional elections, and in Costa Rica, Paraguay and Peru non-concurrent municipal elections were held.

3 In the Caribbean, general elections were held in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (7/12/2005 and Guyana (28/8/2006).

Highlights of the good news include four years of economic growth averaging more than 4% annually, progress in some social areas and continuity of the democratic process, despite its shortcomings. On the down side one observes a crisis of credibility affecting politics, parties and parliaments; inequity in the distribution of wealth and social exclusion; persistent poverty which still affects approximately 40% of the population despite all the economic growth, and finally, although no less important, a surge of new nationalism and populism. Within this complex and volatile context we will carry out a detailed analysis of the elections held from November 2005 to December 2006, examining their socioeconomic, political and cultural dimensions as well as the culture of democracy in these countries.

Table 1. Latin American electoral calendar 2005-2006 a (in chronological order)

| Country | Date of Elections | Type of elections |
|------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Honduras | 27 November, 2005 | Presidential, legislative and municipal |
| Venezuela | 4 December, 2005 | Legislative |
| Chile – first round | 11 December, 2005 | Presidential and legislative |
| Bolivia | 18 December, 2005 | Presidential and legislative |
| Chile – second round | 15 January, 2006 | Presidential run-off |
| Costa Rica | 5 February, 2006 | Presidential and legislative |
| Colombia | 12 March, 2006 | Legislative |
| El Salvador | 12 March, 2006 | Deputies (mid-term) and Municipal Councils |
| Peru – first round | 9 April, 2006 | Presidential and legislative |
| Peru – second round | 4 June, 2006 | Presidential run-off |
| Dominican Republic | 16 May, 2006 | Legislative (mid-term) and Municipal |
| Colombia | 28 May, 2006 | Presidential |
| Mexico | 2 July, 2006 | Presidential, legislative, regional and local |
| Bolivia | 2 July, 2006 | Regional referendum and Constituent Assembly |
| Brazil – first round | 1 October, 2006 | Presidential, legislative and regional |
| Ecuador – first round | 15 October, 2006 | Presidential and legislative |
| Panama | 22 October, 2006 | Referendum on Panama Canal |
| Brazil – second round | 29 October, 2006 | Presidential runoff |
| Ecuador – second round | 26 November, 2006 | Presidential runoff |
| Nicaragua | 5 November, 2006 | Presidential, legislative and municipal |
| Venezuela | 3 December, 2006 | Presidential |

^a Includes presidential elections in Honduras (11/2005), Chile (12/2005) and Bolivia (12/2005) legislative voting in Venezuela (12/2005). Although not addressed in this essay, during the period under study municipal elections were held in Costa Rica, Paraguay and Peru. Source: the author.

Socioeconomic context

Latin America is the only region of the world that combines democratically elected regimes in all of its countries (except Cuba) with high levels of poverty (40%) and the planet's most unproportional sharing-out of wealth. Meanwhile, any analysis of the region must take into account its structural heterogeneity because this operates on at least three levels: economic, political and social.⁴ On the economic front, some countries (and some areas within countries) have transformed into engines of deregulation, economic vibrance and improvement in living standards. The axes or poles of development, such as Buenos Aires, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Santiago, São Paulo, the north of Mexico and the central region of Costa Rica are examples of this strength. On the other hand, other areas (some Andean countries, Central America and part of the Caribbean) are saddled with low levels of growth, stagnation in social conditions and severe political instability. A third group of countries display characteristics similar to those of failed States, or endemic political and social crises with scant prospects for resolution. Haiti is the clearest example, but not the only one.

In terms of economics Latin America is better off than it has been in three decades. In 2004 the economy grew 5.9%, its best showing of the past 20 years. The growth rate was 4.5% in 2005 and 5.3% in 2006. Growth for 2007 is forecast by CEPAL⁵ as approaching 4.7%. Thanks to this

4 Daniel Zovatto, 'Regional agendas in scenarios of conflict in Latin America at the start of the 21st century', opening lecture of the National Congress of the Argentine Society for Political Analysis, Córdoba, 15/XI/2005.

5 CEPAL, Preliminary results for the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2006, www.eclac.cl/publicaciones/xml/2/27542/lcg2327_p_e_capIV.pdf

economic performance, rates of poverty and indigence – in 2005 they stood at 39.8% and 15.4% respectively – are expected to fall to 38.5% and 14.7% by the end of 2007, their lowest levels in the past 25 years.⁶ However, Latin America has more economic inequality than any other region of the world. According to the *Human Development Report 2005*, prepared by the UNDP, the Gini coefficient (which measures inequality) of the region is 0.571, whereas for the countries of the OECD it is 0.368. Although in some countries (Colombia, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Uruguay) the Gini coefficient fell between 1990 y 2002, in most cases it rose.⁷

Political context

Important differences among the countries of the region are also observed in the political realm. Although as a region Latin America is significantly better off than it was 28 years ago, (when the Third Wave began), this positive trend is not uniform. While some countries are making major progress in democratization, others seem to have stagnated after taking an initial step forward and a third group is showing a clear decline. This observation coincides with the Democratic Development Index (DDI) devised by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Polilat. The index seeks to measure the democratic behaviour of the 18 countries of Latin America. For the year 2006 the DDI value was 5.063, which denotes an average level of democratic development albeit with a slight increase over the previous year (4.842). A breakdown analysis of DDI values shows only six countries above average: three with high levels of democratic development (Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay) with scores above 7.51, and three others with an average development level: Argentina, Mexico and Panama, with scores above 5. The 12 remaining countries of Latin America posted figures below 5 and this classifies them as nations with low democratic development (El Salvador, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela).

Table 2. Democratic Development Indices in Latin America

| Country | Score |
|--------------------|--------|
| Chile | 10.796 |
| Costa Rica | 9.704 |
| Uruguay | 8.397 |
| Panama | 6.828 |
| Mexico | 5.917 |
| Argentina | 5.330 |
| El Salvador | 4.718 |
| Brazil | 4.468 |
| Honduras | 4.431 |
| Dominican Republic | 4.187 |
| Colombia | 4.362 |
| Paraguay | 3.745 |
| Guatemala | 3.834 |
| Peru | 3.590 |
| Nicaragua | 3.151 |
| Venezuela | 2.720 |
| Bolivia | 2.726 |
| Ecuador | 2.237 |

Source: Konrad Adenauer and Polilat, <http://www.idd-lat.org/Edicion%202006.htm>

According to the Index of Democracy devised by *The Economist*,⁸ countries can be classified by four types of regime depending on their level of democratic development: (1) complete

6 CEPAL, Social Outlook of Latin America, 2006:

www.eclac.cl/publicaciones/xml/0/27480/PSE2006_Sintesis_Lanzamiento.pdf

7 Fernando Calderón, 'Electoral Outlook in Latin America: what will replace the neoliberal model?', *Nueva Sociedad*, Buenos Aires (III/2006).

8 *The Economist*, The Economist intelligence unit's index of democracy:

www.economist.com/media/pdf/DEMOCRACY_INDEX_2007_v3.pdf

democracies; (2) imperfect democracies; (3) hybrid regimes; and (4) authoritarian regimes. The distribution by region shows that Latin America, Eastern Europe and to a lesser extent Asia are home to the largest number of imperfect democracies. The analysis also shows that, despite Latin America’s progress in democratization in recent decades, many countries still have fragile democracies. In these countries, electoral turnout is generally low and the culture of democracy is weak; one observes the phenomenon of political ‘caudillos’ or bosses. In recent years there have been significant declines in some areas, such as freedom of the press.

Observing the distribution of countries in the Index of Democracy, one sees that only two countries of Latin America have complete democracies – Costa Rica and Uruguay – while most (13 of 18) amount to imperfect democracies. This group is made up of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and the Dominican Republic. Three others countries have hybrid regimes: Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Cuba, according to the rating of *The Economist*, is the only country of the region with an authoritarian regime. Comparing regional averages one sees that Latin America is in third place in the index ranking, below North America and Western Europe, and above the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Asia and Australasia, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa.

Table 3. Index of Democracy. The Economist

| | Average Index of Democracy | Number of countries | Complete democracies | Imperfect Democracies | Hybrid regimes | Authoritarian regimes |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| North America | 8.64 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Western Europe | 8.60 | 21 | 18 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Latin America | 6.55 | 18 | 2 | 13 | 3 | 0 |
| Caribbean | 5.81 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Eastern Europe | 5.76 | 28 | 2 | 14 | 6 | 6 |
| Asia and Australasia | 5.44 | 28 | 3 | 12 | 4 | 9 |
| Subsaharan Africa | 4.24 | 44 | 1 | 7 | 13 | 23 |
| Middle East and North Africa | 3.53 | 20 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 16 |
| Total | 5.52 | 167 | 28 | 54 | 30 | 55 |

Source: the author, based on ‘The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2006’

The Freedom House Index, which measures levels of freedom by evaluating political liberties and civil rights in each country, defined three categories: countries that are free, partially free or not free. The first group includes those cases in which there is an atmosphere of open political competition, respect for civil liberties and independent media. Partially free countries are characterized by limits to citizens’ civil liberties and political rights, often beset with corruption, a weak system of rule of law and a dominant political party that hampers political plurality. Finally, the group of countries that are not free includes those in which there is a lack of civil liberties and citizens’ political rights are denied.

Table 4. Freedom House Index Latin America, 2006

| Country | Political Rights | Civil Liberties | Level of Freedoms |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Argentina | 2 | 2 | Free |
| Bolivia | 3 | 3 | Partially Free |
| Brazil | 2 | 2 | Free |
| Chile | 1 | 1 | Free |
| Colombia | 3 | 3 | Partially Free |
| Costa Rica | 1 | 1 | Free |
| Ecuador | 3 | 3 | Partially Free |
| El Salvador | 2 | 3 | Free |
| Guatemala | 3▲ | 4 | Partially Free |
| Honduras | 3 | 3 | Partially Free |
| Mexico | 2 | 3▼ | Free |
| Nicaragua | 3 | 3 | Partially Free |
| Panama | 1 | 2 | Free |
| Paraguay | 3 | 3 | Partially Free |
| Peru | 2 | 3 | Free |
| Dominican Republic | 2 | 2 | Free |
| Uruguay | 1 | 1 | Free |
| Venezuela | 4 | 4 | Partially Free |

Note: The index is a scale running from 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 the lowest. This index covers the period from 1/12/2005 to 31/12/2006.

▲▼ Arrows indicate a change in political rights or civil liberties compared to the previous measurement.

Source: Freedom House, www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/press_release/fiw07_overview_final.pdf

According to the Freedom House classification, 10 of the 18 countries of the region are free. The remaining eight (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Venezuela) are partially free. If we include Cuba and Haiti, the former is the only country of the region that is not free. Haiti is partially free and has shown improvement in respect for civil liberties and political rights in comparison with previous evaluations.

On the other hand, democracy in Latin America is combined with high levels of violence and internal conflicts. Until not long ago, the region could be described as a set of violent societies with relatively peaceful States. However, the deepening of new kinds of regional, intra-regional, ethnic and cultural conflicts, such as those seen in recent years in Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico or Peru, among others, show that the subcontinent is not completely free of renewed forms of inter-state or sub-national conflict, nor of ‘tribal’ fragmentation like that seen in sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans or the Caucasus.

In doing this electoral analysis, another point that requires our attention is that of indigenous demands: their clearest exponent is Evo Morales, Bolivia’s first indigenous president. It is important not to confuse or automatically associate being indigenous with being nationalist – a trend that is in fashion in some countries – because the two concepts are not interchangeable. In this sense, indigenous claims do not always come with territorial demands, as shown in the case of Bolivia, where the demands of the civil committees that make up the ‘half moon’ focus on autonomy and territory, which clashes with indigenous demands. There is no indigenous movement with strength comparable to those in Bolivia, Peru or Ecuador, where although there are large and numerous ethnic groups, the Pachakuti movement won only 2.19% of the votes in the election held in October 2006. In Peru, indigenous power was subsumed by the broader political movement that supported Ollanta Humala, a clear advocate of nationalism.

Meanwhile, the crisis of institutions as channels for social demands has led to a proliferation and crystallization of these demands in horizontal protest movements that do not join the political system in a vertical fashion. The movements of the ‘piqueteros’ in Argentina, the landless ‘Sin Tierra’ in Brazil, the Zapatistas in Mexico (at least in their initial phases) and many others in the majority of countries are clear manifestations of this tendency. Purely individual channelling of social demands through institutions is being replaced by a gradual process of mobilization and politicizing of civil society, one of the main challenges for the region’s democratic future.

To sum up, and without ignoring important differences between countries, the problems at hand can be separated into three categories that are closely linked: (1) growth and employment: it defines the need to achieve high and sustained levels of growth and create quality jobs; (2) inequity and poverty: it addresses the tasks of reducing high levels of poverty and achieving greater levels of social cohesion in a region characterized by being the most inequitable in the world; and (3) political-institutional: it refers to the need to rebuild institutions and restore the State in new frameworks of globalization. With this assortment of economic, social and political-institutional problems, as Fernando Calderón⁹ notes, the question that served as the backdrop for the electoral calendar for 2005-06 is this: What model can replace the neo-liberal one, which appears to have run its course?

The responses range from the most conservative ones – linked to the war on terrorism and free market economics – proposed by the US to more radical leftist ideas related to the government of Venezuela. In this sense Calderón argues that one can define four axes of political orientation: (1) the first, set by Washington, establishes a norm based on its fight against terrorism and the logic of a ‘pre-emptive war.’ Within this ideology the United States coincides with several governments, like that of Colombia, many of the governments of Central America and that of Mexico, which advocate proposals based on free market economics. They are associated with traditional values and the building of solid, neo-liberal democracies; (2) the second, defined by countries such Brazil and Chile, along with their allies Argentina and Uruguay, and more recently Peru, has developed centre-left ideas, with thinking that is more geared toward redistributing wealth but with market realism in the economic sphere; (3) the third axis is that of Venezuela and its new Bolivarian movement, which looks to spread to other countries; and (4) finally, the indigenous axis which brings together both Bolivarian and Mercosur-type proposals. Bolivia, where the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) won the elections, is the best example. Ecuador and Guatemala might also be receptive to these ideas, but they have yet to take root.

Political culture: citizens’ opinion

The socio-economic context we have described – significant but insufficient economic growth, high levels of poverty and inequality – and the problems with ability to govern tend to fuel each other, generating a vicious cycle of institutional weakness, lack of competitiveness and high levels of political instability. This saps the levels of legitimacy of democracy and its institutions, living rise to crises of representation and ability to govern. Experience shows that levels of satisfaction with democracy vary over time and are more vulnerable to changes in economic conditions. Sometime economic growth increases rather than eases discontent. For instance, Chile’s robust surplus in 2006 triggered claims and protests, as some sectors of society felt there had not been a fair distribution of that unexpected windfall.

Citizens’ support for democracy¹⁰ (with respect to the ideal and the form of democratic government) differs from the degree of satisfaction with the way it works, and although we detect an acceptable level of support for democracy (58%) and a strong majority of people see it as the best system of government despite its problems (74%), only a small percentage of people say they are satisfied with the way it works (38%). This is explained in part by people’s perceptions of the economy: even though macroeconomic indicators show an improvement over past years, this had not influenced Latin Americans’ perception of democracy and their expectations for economic development. There are also contradictory opinions because the data on citizens’ perceptions of the economic situation of a country, while not terribly flattering, show a significant recovery. In 2004, while 8% of Latin Americans saw the economic situation in their country as good, in 2005 the figure rose to 11% and in 2006 it increased to 18%.

9 Ibid.

10 Figures from the Latinobarómetro 2006, en www.latinobarometro.org

Although democracy enjoys widespread support in the region (58%), Latin Americans are very critical of their institutions of political representation. The data show low trust in congress (27%) and political parties (22%), although a majority feels there can be no democracy without these institutions (58% for the parties and 55% for the congress). And as we will see further on, there is a worrisome loss of confidence in the electoral process, as only 57% believe in voting as a vehicle for changing things and only 41% think elections are clean.

Table 5. Latin American public opinion on democracy and its institutions and economic expectations (1996-2006) (percentage figures)

| | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | Average |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------|
| Democracy | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Support | 61 | 62 | 62 | 60 | 60 | 48 | 56 | 53 | 53 | 53 | 58 | 56.9 |
| Satisfaction | 27 | 41 | 37 | 37 | 37 | 25 | 32 | 28 | 29 | 31 | 38 | 32.9 |
| Trust | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Political Parties | 20 | 28 | 21 | 20 | 20 | 19 | 14 | 11 | 18 | 19 | 22 | .3 |
| Congress | 27 | 36 | 27 | 28 | 28 | 24 | 23 | 17 | 24 | 28 | 27 | 26.3 |
| Economy | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Current Economic Expectations ^a | 8 | 10 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 11 | 18 | 9.2 |

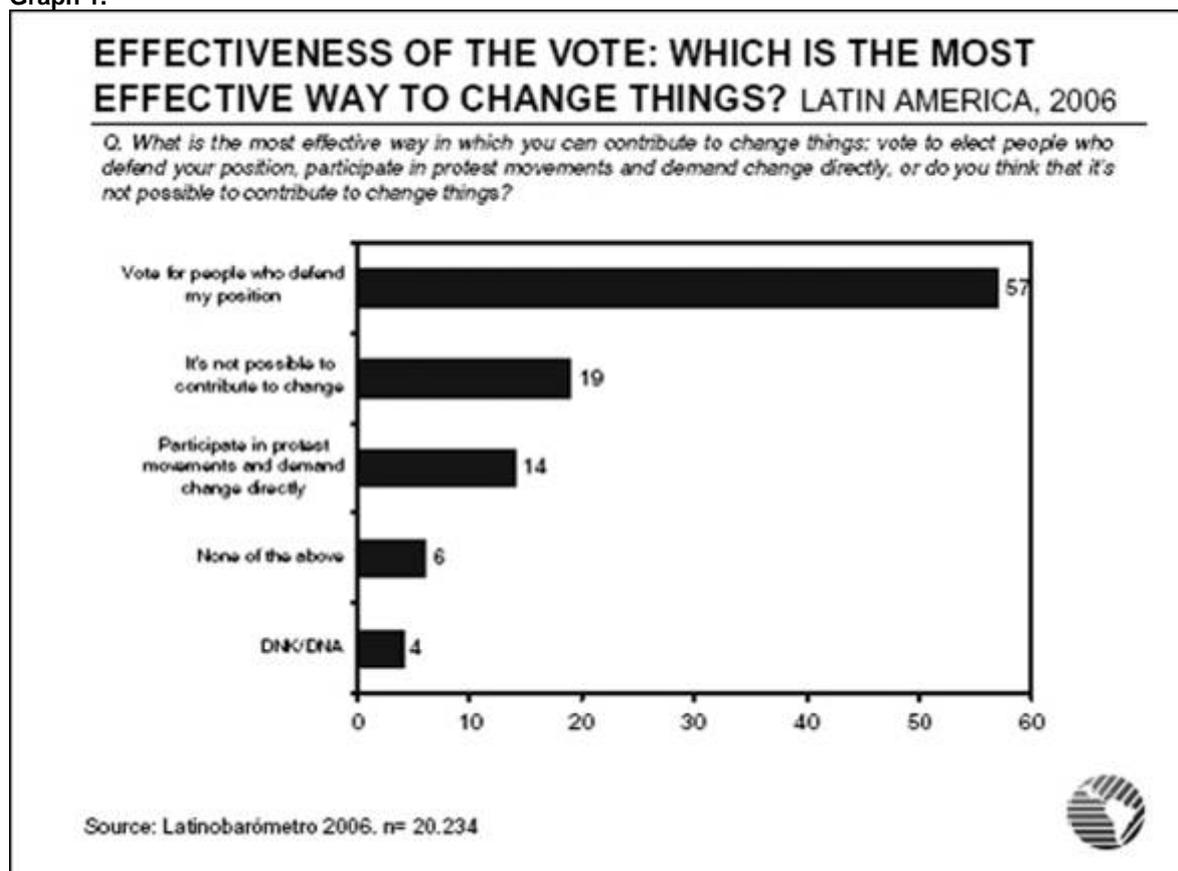
^a Based on the question: How would you rate the current economic situation and that of your family? Here those who responded are taken into account: 'very good' and 'good'.
Source: Corporación Latinobarómetro.

Citizens' opinion: the context of the elections

The context of this burst of electoral activity is characterized by attitudes and perceptions that favour the stability of the democratic regime (a clean electoral process, support for democracy and high percentages of voter intention) and significant levels of discontent with the performance of political leaders and institutions of representation (political parties and Congress.) In this sense, as we explain later, the first impact of these elections was their effect on voter intentions, inverting the trend observed since 2000, in which most people said they would not vote for a party. In the period 2005-2006, the proportion of people who would vote for a party rose from 49 to 53%. At the same time there was a decline from 51 to 47% in the segment of people who said they would not vote for a party.

Another variable that marked the context of the elections is the efficiency of the vote. This allows one to analyze the legitimacy of democracy in terms of the power of voter sovereignty. A total of 57% of Latin Americans say voting 'to elect those who advocate my position is the most effective way of changing things.' In the same sense, 19% say it is impossible to have an influence for things to change, no matter what one does, and 14% say the most effective tool is to take part in protest movements and demand changes directly.

Graph 1.

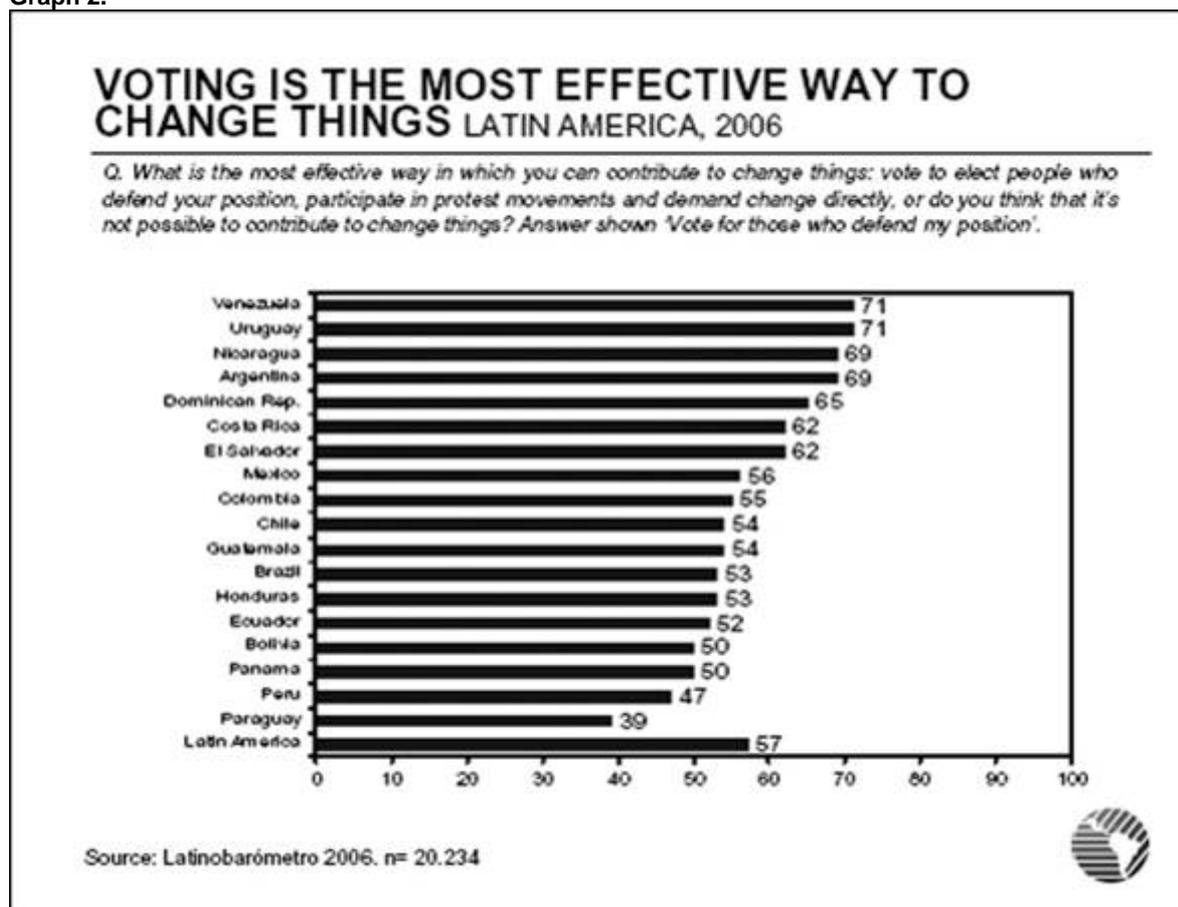


An analysis by countries shows that in Paraguay (39%) there exists the weakest perception of the efficiency of voting. There, 20% of those polled also said elections were clean (the last ones were held in 2003) and 31% said there was fraud. The countries of Latin America where people have the strongest perception of the efficiency of voting are Venezuela and Uruguay, both with 71%, and Nicaragua and Argentina with 69%.

Trends

Between November 2005 and December 2006 the region went through its most important electoral period of the last 28 years, a period characterized by a major reconfiguration of the regional political scene. As we have stated, these elections came in a regional context of moderate optimism, despite the democratic process's shortcomings and the challenges it faces. This optimism stems from the currently strong macroeconomic conditions in Latin America. These in turn coincides with a rise in support for and satisfaction with democracy, and with the fact that no president has had to leave his position ahead of schedule. All of this is added to the importance of elections as the mechanism for choosing legitimate rulers and resolving differences democratically. With this panorama as a backdrop, an analysis of the main features and results of this electoral period allows once to identify the following trends.

Graph 2.



The region's alleged shift to the left

Election results in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Venezuela led many observers and analysts to conclude the region had taken a turn to the left. The question of whether Latin America had shifted to the left, and, if it had, what exactly the word 'left' meant – an issue that had been under debate for some time – took on new importance at the end of 2005 with the victory by Evo Morales and in early 2006 with the triumph of Concertación in Chile. The possibility of other leftist wins in 2006 -- Ollanta Humala in Peru and Andrés Manuel López Obrador en México—the re-election of Lula and the return to power by Daniel Ortega, or the triumph of Rafael Correa in Ecuador and the re-election of Hugo Chávez fuelled an erroneous perception that the facts themselves and a more careful reading of events in the region would debunk. At no point was it specified what left had triumphed, nor was it acknowledged that differences among all these 'leftist' governments and candidates were sometimes greater than the similarities.¹¹

There is no doubt that political and electoral processes in Latin America have an influence on each other, but there is no consensus on how. so-called contagion effects are not pure, and the shift to the left or the indigenous effect do not occur everywhere. Thus, the 'Chávez effect' that people talked about so much and continue to talk about, did favour Morales, Correa and Ortega but it had the opposite effect with Humala and López Obrador.

11 Manuel Alcántara says the 'heterogeneous rise of leftist parties' in Latin America is characterized by the fact that these parties exhibit more differences than similarities. On the other hand, the region's institutional design is based a presidential system, while for a president to fulfil his or her electoral platform they need a strong and stable majority in parliament. This is the case in Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay and Venezuela, but not in Brazil and Chile. In these two countries the presidents are clearly leftists and belong to the 70-year-old Socialist Party of Chile or Brazil's Workers Party, which has been around for a quarter century. The presidents lack single-party governments and a majority in congress, so many times decisions are taken that do not reflect the presidential agenda. 'The Latin American Electoral Carrousel', *Bitácora Almendrán*, Madrid, 14/8/2006. www.almendron.com/tribuna/?p=11047

The premise that Latin America was making a 'shift to the left' began to fall apart with the elections in Honduras (November 2005), Costa Rica (February) and Colombia (May). In these three presidential elections, neo-liberal political forces of the centre or the right were the winners. Shortly thereafter, the successive defeats of Humala and López Obrador strengthened the perception that, rather than a shift to the left, what was happening was, as Costa Rican president Oscar Arias said, a turn to the centre, toward democracy. It was a turn toward moderation in the face of the excesses of neo-liberal policies that for most people failed to generate prosperity.¹² Julio María Sanguinetti expressed a similar opinion:

More than a shift to the left, what we are witnessing is a laborious, contradictory and relentless movement of the left toward the centre. Even traditional leftist parties such as the Brazilian PT or the Frente Amplio in Uruguay have been abandoning long-standing ideals. They call themselves friends of Fidel and seek out his friendly embrace in order to appease old comrades pressing them to settle debts for all those years of hard-left support. But it stops there: it is good for getting your picture taken but not for imitating.

And on the case of Chile he adds:

For starters let's rule out Chile [as being on the left], a country governed by a centrist coalition comprising the European-style socialism of Ricardo Lagos and historic Christian Democrats. The fact that Mrs. Bachelet has a socialist background does not change the nature of the government, which will follow the parameters of its predecessors, with the region's most open economy, integrated in a globalized world through free-trade treaties with everyone from the United States to China.¹³

Alain Touraine does not think the region is shifting to the left, either. He says it is not useful to use expressions invented for a different context. The language that corresponds to a parliamentary system by nature works poorly for a presidential or semi-presidential system. The hypothesis that should be formulated is that the continent is drifting further away from a model which, while if it may not be parliamentarian, is at least based on mechanisms of different interests and ideologies opposing each other. Latin America seems further from finding a political expression for its social problems than it did 30 years ago. Herein lies the main point: it is what is at stake and therein lies the failure. Touraine concludes that:

Political events ... in several countries of the continent do not encourage... the idea of a general movement to the left. Once again the ... opposite conclusion prevails: the deep and lasting failure of a vigorous social democracy. In this sense, clearly the question one must address today is the appropriateness of the new policy of rupture inspired by Fidel Castro and represented by Venezuela. In the face of this model, Hugo Chávez holds the opportunities of political and social voluntarism that is much more radical, in particular in contrast with the countries of the Southern Cone.¹⁴

Given the different sources of thought cited here, I agree with the opinion that the interpretation of what is happening in the region has been superficial, hasty and simplistic. As Rojas Aravena says: 'Left and right, in this day and age, do not reflect the essential identities of the new leaders, nor do

12 Oscar Arias Sánchez, 'Latin America's shift to the centre', *The Washington Post*, Washington, 15/3/2006: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/14/AR2006031401114.html

13 Julio María Sanguinetti, 'A leftist wave spreads across Latin America', 24/3/2006: www.correoperu.com.pe/correosur/cusco/columnista.php?col_id=17

14 Alain Touraine and E. Laclau, 'America in times of Chávez', *Page/12*, 8/10/2006. www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-74196-2006-10-08.html

they represent the changes that are taking place in the world.’¹⁵ The debate on what the term ‘left’ means is not exclusive to our region, but rather extends to Europe, as Ulrico Beck states when he talks (in the European context) of four ways of being leftist: protectionist, neo-liberal (Third Way), one who lives enclosed within a citadel, and the cosmopolitan leftist.¹⁶ We feel there is no solid evidence that the region is taking a turn to the left. Dividing politics into right and left, besides being out of sync in terms of time, causes more confusion than clarity. As former president Ricardo Lagos said, rather than a shift to the left, the region is undergoing a deepening of the democratic system. Voters are seeking options that will help them fix unresolved problems. Rosendo Fraga says it this way:

In political terms, 2006 was a year of presidential elections in which 85% of the region voted and there was an ideological shift toward the centre, with three clearly defined lines: Social Democrat, populist left and centre-right. The re-election of Lula in Brazil and the election of Bachelet in Chile confirmed the existence of a Social Democratic axis which Uruguay also joined. Meanwhile, the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA), founded by Venezuela and Cuba, incorporated Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, although the new president of the latter (Ortega) announced he will not abandon the free-trade accord that Central America and Santo Domingo signed with the US. At the same time, a third centre-right force emerged unexpectedly with the triumphs of Calderón in Mexico and Alan García in Peru – with its new turn in this direction - which, along with Colombia and the majority of the countries in Central America constitute an axis with a coast overlooking the Pacific, close to Washington in political terms.¹⁷

According to the argument expressed by former president Lagos, Latin America is approaching a new era. Whereas before the goal was to grow (and this is being done nicely) now the priority is to define what model of society we want to build. So, rather than a shift to the left, it is more accurate and correct to speak of a search for new options in the framework of a deepening of democracy. It is a democracy which in some cases can have an authoritarian or plebiscitary slant, with strong populist components and objectives that are a bit all-encompassing.

The electoral system: run-offs and concurrent elections

During the period under study, much use was made of the run-off mechanism for electing presidents. There are opinions for and against this system. Its defenders point to two fundamental advantages: 1) it is said to strengthen the electoral legitimacy of the president, not only because it guarantees this person has broken through a minimum electoral threshold but also because it allows the electorate to decide the race in the event no candidate surpasses that threshold in the first round of voting; 2) as a result of this first point, the system would tend to strengthen democratic governance by guaranteeing election of a president with broad popular support and promoting electoral coalitions between the first and second rounds that can easily turn later into governing coalitions.

Critics of the run-off system argue that the second round hardly ever lives up to these promises. They say that first of all, the alleged legitimacy stemming from broad electoral support can be artificial and unstable. On the other hand, critics say the second round generates fewer incentives for strategic voting: voters can cast ballots for their favourite candidate in the first round, albeit with scant probability of victory, without worrying too much about an undesired candidate winning because in the mind of the voter this is put off until the second round. According to this argument, the two-round system favours an increase in the number of parties, a process which over the long term will tend to fragment the electorate. Despite this debate, the two-round voting system has been incorporated into the legislation of most of the countries of the region. Thirteen countries use it,

15 Francisco Rojas Aravena, ‘The new Latin American political map. Rethinking the factors that mark political trenes’, *Nueva Sociedad*, Buenos Aires, 2005, p. 125.

16 Ulrich Beck, *El País*, Madrid, 17/11/2006, p. 13.

17 Rosendo Fraga, ‘Three trends in the region’, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 17/1/2007, p. 3.

although with important differences in how: Argentina, Bolivia,¹⁸ Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay. The ones that do not have it are Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Venezuela.

Of the 11 presidential elections that were held during the period under study, eight were conducted with the two-round system. Of these, in half the cases a run-off was needed (Brazil, Ecuador, Chile and Peru) while in the other four a winner emerged in the first round of voting (Bolivia, Costa Rica, Colombia and Nicaragua). In the cases of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, the electoral system stipulates reduced margins for winning in the first round (40% of the votes in both cases, or in the case of Nicaragua 35% with a margin off 5% over the person in second place), which facilitated the victory of Arias and Ortega in the first round. Otherwise, had a classical two-round system been in place (winner needs 50 percent plus one vote) in both countries there would have been a run-off election.

As observed in Table 6, of the four cases in which it was necessary to go to a second round, in two of them the final result went against the first-place finisher of the first round. In Peru, the candidate who finished second in the first round, (Alan García) ended up winning, and the same thing happened in Ecuador, where Rafael Correa triumphed over Álvaro Noboa, who had won the first round of the election.

As for the nature of concurrent or off-year legislative elections, it is worth pointing out that in the vast majority of the presidential elections, legislative voting was held at the same time. In nine countries the legislative and presidential elections were simultaneous. The only countries that did not hold concurrent elections were Colombia (it held them two months before the presidential voting, a typical case of what are known as semi-concurrent elections) and Venezuela (in December 2005).

Table 6. Latin American voting systems in elections of 2005-2006

| Country | Electoral system | Election result 2005-2006 | |
|------------|------------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| | | First round | Second round |
| Bolivia | Two rounds, with majority | Evo Morales | — |
| Brazil | Two rounds, with majority | 1. Luiz Inácio da Silva 2. Geraldo Alckmin | Luiz Inácio da Silva |
| Chile | Two rounds, with majority | 1. Michelle Bachelet 2. Sebastián Piñera | Michelle Bachelet |
| Colombia | Two rounds, with majority | Álvaro Uribe | — |
| Peru | Two rounds, with majority | 1. Ollanta Humala 2. Alan García | Alan García |
| Costa Rica | Two rounds, with reduced threshold | Oscar Arias | — |
| Ecuador | Two rounds, with reduced threshold | 1. Álvaro Noboa 2. Rafael Correa | Rafael Correa |
| Nicaragua | Two rounds, with reduced threshold | Daniel Ortega | — |
| Honduras | Simple majority | Manuel Zelaya | n/a |
| Mexico | Simple majority | Felipe Calderón | n/a |
| Venezuela | Simple majority | Hugo Chávez | n/a |

n/a: not applicable
Source: the author

18 In Bolivia, the second round is held in Congress. This is done if no candidate wins an absolute majority in the first round. The second round in the legislature requires an absolute majority of the lawmakers present in order to elect a new president.

Table 7. Latin America: Concurrence of presidential and legislative elections

| Country | Presidential and legislative elections | Result in Congress |
|------------|--|--|
| Bolivia | Concurrent | The president-elect's party won, with a majority in the lower house but not in the Senate. |
| Brazil | Concurrent | The president-elect's party won, but without a majority in both houses. |
| Chile | Concurrent | The president-elect's party won, with a majority in both houses. |
| Costa Rica | Concurrent | The president-elect's party won, but without a legislative majority. |
| Ecuador | Concurrent | The president-elect's party lost, no legislative majority. |
| Honduras | Concurrent | The president-elect's party won, no legislative majority. |
| Mexico | Concurrent | The president-elect's party won, no legislative majority. |
| Nicaragua | Concurrent | The president-elect's party won, no legislative majority. |
| Peru | Concurrent | The president's party lost, no majority. |

Source: the author

In seven of the concurrent elections, the results of the presidential election carried over into the legislative voting, although in a limited fashion. In five of these seven cases (Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua), the party of the president failed to achieve an absolute majority in Congress. In two cases (Bolivia and Chile) the carry-over effect was greater, as in Chile the Concertación party mustered a majority in both chambers, while in Bolivia the MAS party won an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies but not in the Senate. In two cases, Ecuador and Peru, the president-elect's party did not finish first in the concurrent legislative elections. In Peru, first place went to Ollanta Humala (UP) and in Ecuador it was Álvaro Noboa (PRIAN). In the latter, it must be noted that president Correa does not have representatives in Congress as a result of his decision not to field candidates.

Ability to govern

All the governments of the region feature presidential-style regimes (although with important differences among them) and most of the countries have multi-party systems. So relations between the executive and legislative branches are key to whether things work or stagnate. It is important to note if the results of these elections yielded presidents with a majority in the legislature or 'divided' governments. To a large extent this determines the new governments' margin for manoeuvring and acting, in particular with respect to its ability to govern. Latin American presidential systems rely on support from a majority in the legislature (that of the president's party) or a coalition. The existence of countries that are socially and politically fragmented makes it more difficult to form majorities that support and strengthen the ability to govern.

The election results revealed difficulties to form political majorities. Of the 11 presidents elected, only four have a majority on their own: Morales (only in the Chamber of Deputies), Bachelet, Uribe and Chávez. In the other seven countries (Brazil, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru), the president will have to seek out agreements – either on a case-by-case basis or, preferably, with a broader scope – to carry out the government's agenda and avoid the paralysis that tends to dog presidents who rule with 'divided' governments. This is the case of the president of El Salvador, Antonio Saca, who won the last mid-term election but failed to garner an absolute majority. On the other hand, President Leonel Fernández of the Dominican Republic did win a majority (in both chambers in mid-term elections.)

The results: continuity or change

A review of the electoral results examining where there has been continuity or change – from a general point of view that takes in not just presidential elections but also legislative voting, referendums and constituent assemblies – shows that ruling parties have done well, to a large extent because macroeconomic figures for the regional economy are good. A comparative analysis shows that ruling parties were returned to power in five countries: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela, while the opposition triumphed in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru. Three of the five ruling-party victories were consecutive re-elections (Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela). In Chile, the Concertación party won again (for the fourth straight time since democracy was restored in 1990) and in Mexico it was the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) that stayed in power.

In evaluating the opposition wins, we must keep in mind that in two of these countries there were transitional presidents (Bolivia and Ecuador); in a third, the party of the acting president did not field a candidate for president (Peru) and that in a fourth country the ruling party was deeply divided as it took part in the elections (Nicaragua). Then there is Costa Rica, where corruption scandals that affected two ex-presidents of the ruling party (Partido Unidad Social Cristiana – PUSC-), added to the fact that this party has been in power 12 of the last 16 years, combined to give the party the worst electoral drubbing of its history.

Table 8. Latin America: ability to govern of parties that won elections in 2005-2006

| Country | Winning party's ability to govern | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| | Lower chamber | Upper chamber |
| Bolivia | Majority | No majority |
| Brazil | No majority | No majority |
| Chile | Majority | Majority |
| Colombia | Majority | Majority |
| Costa Rica | No majority | n/a |
| Ecuador | No majority ^a | n/a |
| El Salvador | No majority | n/a |
| Honduras | No majority | n/a |
| Mexico | No majority | No majority |
| Nicaragua | No majority | n/a |
| Peru | No majority | n/a |
| Dominican Republic | Majority | Majority |
| Venezuela | Majority | n/a |

^a The alliance led by president-elect Rafael Correa did not field candidates for parliament.

n/a: Not applicable

Source: the author

Table 9. Latin America: Continuity or change in the Executive Branch. Elections 2005-2006

| Country | Executive branch Continuity vs. change |
|------------|---|
| Bolivia | Change |
| Brazil | Continuity |
| Chile | Continuity |
| Colombia | Continuity |
| Costa Rica | Change |
| Ecuador | Change |
| Honduras | Change |
| Mexico | Continuity |
| Nicaragua | Change |
| Peru | Change |
| Venezuela | Continuity |

Source: the author.

Besides their strong showing in the presidential elections, ruling parties won all the non-concurrent legislative elections in Colombia and Venezuela, and the mid-term elections in El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. As for direct democracy, ruling parties were the clear victors in all the referendums held. The first was in Bolivia, with the Autonomy Referendum of July 2, in which the ‘no’ vote (encouraged by the government) won 57% of the votes compared to 42% for the ‘yes.’ The second was the referendum held in Panama on Oct. 22 on whether to enlarge the canal. This time the ‘yes’ vote (supported by the government) won 77.8% of the votes and the ‘no’ vote 22.2%. Another important event was Bolivia’s election of delegates to a constituent assembly on July 2, and here, too, the ruling party won the most seats.

Re-election fever

Latin America is living a re-election fever with two forms: immediate and alternating. In seven of the presidential elections held, candidates ran for re-election: Brazil, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Colombia, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela. Of these, four were cases of leaders seeking to return after having left the presidency and three were sitting presidents seeking another term. The former were in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Peru. With the exception of former president Jorge Quiroga in Bolivia, the other ex-presidents managed to win re-election (Arias, Ortega and García). In the three cases of immediate re-election -- Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela – all three presidents won another term (Lula, Uribe and Chávez).

Table 10. Latin America: Re-election of presidents in 2005-2006

| Country | Re-election | Candidates in elections 2005-2006 | Election result |
|------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Bolivia | Not immediate | Jorge Quiroga | Not re-elected |
| Brazil | Immediate | Luiz Inácio da Silva | Re-elected |
| Colombia | Immediate | Álvaro Uribe | Re-elected |
| Costa Rica | Not immediate | Oscar Arias | Re-elected |
| Nicaragua | Not immediate | Daniel Ortega | Re-elected |
| Peru | Not immediate | Alan García | Re-elected |
| Venezuela | Immediate | Hugo Chávez | Re-elected |

Source: the author.

An analysis of these data at the regional level shows that in 63% of the presidential elections, candidates were seeking re-election, and in 86% of the cases (6 out of 7 elections) they won. These results fuelled debate in the region over the pro’s and con’s of re-election. On one hand, critics argue that allowing leaders to be re-elected exposes the political system to the risk of becoming a ‘democratic dictatorship’ and strengthens a trend toward the personality-based and domineering leadership inherent in a presidential system. These critics say that in general a president’s second term is of low quality. At least seven cases, from 1978 to the present, seem to confirm these assertions as to the dangers and defects of letting a leader be re-elected: 1) Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay, who did not finish his last term as a result of a coup d’etat in 1989, although he had been in power since 1954, winning re-election several times; 2) Joaquín Balaguer in the Dominican Republic, who last term was reduced from four years to two as a result of fraud committed during his last re-election in 1994; 3) Alberto Fujimori in Peru, did not finish his term because he fled the country amid charges of fraud and corruption; 4) Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada of Bolivia, who resigned half-way through his second term. Also turning in mediocre second terms as president were: 5) Carlos Andrés Pérez, who did not complete his term in Venezuela and instead was dismissed 6) Rafael Caldera, also in Venezuela. To all this we add the second term of 7) Carlos Menem in Argentina, who did manage to complete it but did so amid economic problems, high unemployment and many charges of corruption.

Defenders of re-election, meanwhile, argue that it allows countries to apply a more 'democratic' focus by letting voters choose their president with more freedom and hold this person responsible for their performance, rewarding or punishing them depending on how they do. Although over the last quarter century in Latin America the cases of Cardoso in Brazil (immediate re-election) and Sanguinetti in Uruguay (not immediate) are moderately positive examples of the two kinds of re-election, in both cases their first terms were more successful than the second ones.

The re-election fever in the region means that 40% of the countries are governed by leaders who were re-elected. While in 2004 there was just one president re-elected in the alternating, non-immediate fashion, (Leonel Fernández in the Dominican Republic), only two years later there are seven: three re-elected to immediate second terms (Chávez, Lula and Uribe) and four in the alternating fashion (Arias, Fernández – who might seek another term in 2008 - García and Ortega). Not since the return of democracy in 1978 have there been so many re-elected presidents. I believe that the destiny of re-election and its evolution seem more dependent than ever on the success or failure of this high number of re-elected presidents.

Regional electoral fracture

Another trend that emerges from the results of the various presidential elections is that of deep divisions between regions, with less developed ones rejecting the economic and political models in place. To this effect one can point out the results in Brazil and Mexico, which divided along north-south lines; Bolivia between east and west, Ecuador between coastal, mountainous and jungle regions; Peru's experience was similar to this latter case.

Election turnout

Turnout trends in the presidential elections were not consistent. In six countries (Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua)¹⁹ turnout was lower than in the last election. Worth pointing out are Honduras and Mexico, where turnout fell 11 and 5%, respectively. By contrast, in five countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) turnout rose. The biggest increases were in Venezuela with an 18.82% rise, and Bolivia with 12%. Average turnout in the 11 elections was 72.10%. If one measures the effect of these turnout figures on the Latin American average for presidential voting, it is slightly positive, rising from 69.94% in the period 1978-2004 to 70.18% in 1978-2006.

19 We use the preliminary electoral turnout figure (78%), provided by Roberto Rivas, chairman of the Electoral Council of Nicaragua: www.rnv.gov.ni/noticias/index.php?act=ST&f=3&t=40186

Table 11. Latin America: Average election turnout 1978-2004 and 1978-2006

| Country | Average 78-04 (%) | Average 78-06 (%) | Difference (%) |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Argentina | 81.22 | 81.22 | — |
| Bolivia | 74.20 | 75.67 | 1.47 |
| Brazil | 83.44 | 83.40 | -0.04 |
| Chile | 91.71 | 90.70 | -1.01 |
| Colombia | 44.45 | 44.53 | 0.08 |
| Costa Rica | 78.08 | 76.47 | -1.61 |
| Ecuador | 72.35 | 72.33 | -0.02 |
| El Salvador | 51.70 | 51.70 | — |
| Guatemala | 55.01 | 55.01 | — |
| Honduras | 73.57 | 70.93 | -2.64 |
| Mexico | 71.25 | 67.02 | -4.23 |
| Nicaragua ^a | 80.67 | 80.01 | -0.66 |
| Panama | 72.70 | 72.70 | — |
| Paraguay | 67.06 | 67.06 | — |
| Peru | 81.68 | 82.69 | 1.01 |
| Uruguay | 88.61 | 88.61 | — |
| Venezuela ^b | 72.51 | 72.78 | 0.27 |
| LATIN AMERICA | 69.94 | 70.18 | 0.24 |

^a Based on preliminary turnout figure for presidential election of 2006, as provided by the Electoral Council of Nicaragua.

^b Based on preliminary data for turnout in presidential election of 2006, as provided by the National Electoral Council of Venezuela, with 98.29% of the records examined.

Source: the author.

There is no clear downward trend in turnout in presidential elections in the region. This is because a large rise in abstention in several countries was offset by an increase in turnout in others, mainly in the Andean region, and in particular Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador. Table 12 shows turnout percentages for the region.

However, we do see lower levels of turnout in the mid-term elections in El Salvador and the Dominican Republic and in the legislative elections in Colombia and Venezuela. In the latter country, the opposition boycotted the legislative voting and turnout ended up being just 25% of registered voters. Next comes Colombia, the country which continues to have the lowest turnout rate in the region, with 40.5%. The highest turnout is observed in the Dominican Republic (58%), followed by El Salvador with 52.5%, but still below the average for turnout in presidential elections. As for voting in processes of direct democracy, i.e. referendums, here is there is no single trend, either. While Panama registered low turnout (43%), Bolivia posted the highest figure of its electoral history (84.51%), a percentage that equals that of the presidential election of December 2005.

Table 12. Latin America: Turnout in presidential elections in 2005-2006

| Country | Turnout in the previous election (%) | Turnout in the last election (%) |
|------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Bolivia | 72.10 (2002) | ↑ 84.50 (2005) |
| Brazil | 82.26 (2002) | ↑ 83.25 (2006) |
| Chile | 89.94 (1999) | ↓ 87.67 (2005) |
| Colombia | 46.47 (2002) | ↓ 45.04 (2006) |
| Costa Rica | 68.86 (2002) | ↓ 65.20 (2006) |
| Ecuador | 64.98 (2002) | ↑ 72.20 (2006) |
| Honduras | 66.30 (2001) | ↓ 55.08 (2005) |
| Mexico | 64.00 (2000) | ↓ 58.57 (2006) |
| Nicaragua | 79.42 (2001) | ↓ 78.00 ^a (2006) |
| Peru | 82.28 (2001) | ↑ 88.70 (2006) |
| Venezuela | 56.50 (2000) | ↑ 74.36 ^b (2006) |

^a Preliminary figure provided by Roberto Rivas, chairman of the Electoral Council of Nicaragua.

^b Preliminary figure from the National Electoral Council of Venezuela, with 98.29% of the records examined.

Source: the author.

The legitimacy of political parties

The *Latinobarómetro 2006* shows that political parties continue to suffer from a crisis of credibility (although to a lesser extent than in previous surveys) and that the vast majority of people in the region feel that there can be no democracy without such institutions. One of the main effects of the flurry of elections in Latin America was to reverse the trend observed since 2000, when most people said they would not vote for a political party. In 2006 the percentage of those who say they would vote for a party rose from 49 to 53%, while those who say they would not dropped from 51 to 47%. In my opinion, electoral competition revitalizes the validity of political parties.

Close results

Of the 11 presidential elections, in four countries the results were close (Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico and Peru), giving rise to complaints and challenges before election authorities and public opinion. In three cases, (Costa Rica, Honduras and Peru) the dispute was settled through institutional means. But in Mexico, the results were not accepted by the opposition party (PRD), triggering a post-election crisis that left the country with an atmosphere of political instability.

Another trend in the region was for there to be delays in counting of ballots and announcement of winners by electoral authorities. In Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru, the counting of votes was slower than usual, and the official announcement of a winner took days, weeks or months. The case that stands out most was that of Mexico, where the Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Branch declared Felipe Calderón of the PAN party to be winner two months after the election. In Ecuador, the company E-Vote delayed the process: after alleging technical problems, it suspended the counting when 30% of the ballot still had to be tallied.²⁰

Graph 3. Vote for a Political Party (1996-2006)

20 The problems started after polling stations had closed and vote-counting was under way. The TSE hired the Brazilian company E-Vote to carry out a so-called quick count, in which the country would know the result of the presidential voting accurately, although not officially, around 7 pm on election day, and would know the result of the legislative election the next day. None of this happened. Late into the night of the election and into the wee hours of the next day, E-Vote had counted only 70% of the votes in the presidential race, and the results of the legislative voting were not announced at all. The TSE was forced to annul the contract with this company and execute guarantees.

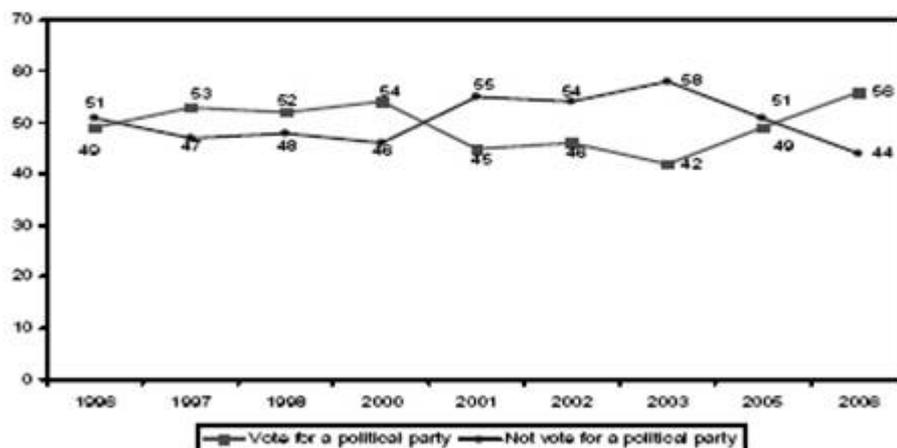
VOTE FOR A POLITICAL PARTY

TOTALS LATIN AMERICA, 1996-2006

Q. If elections were held this Sunday, which party would you vote for?

* 'Vote for a party' includes all those cases in which interviewees mentioned a political party.

** 'Not vote for a party' includes 'Vote void/blank', 'Nor vote/none', 'Not registered' and 'DNK/DNA'.



Source: LATINOBARÓMETRO 1996-2006.



In general, these last elections seem to indicate a setback in the administration of elections. Technical management and election commissions' difficulties in making the results official in several countries have caused serious doubts about these institutions in two respects: 1) their impartiality and 2) with regard to the technical efficiency of the vote-counting and the broadcasting of the results. In a region where complaints of fraud, manipulation and inefficiency by electoral bodies had decreased significantly, the questioning of these institutions and of the transparency of election-related acts amounts to a serious institutional setback.

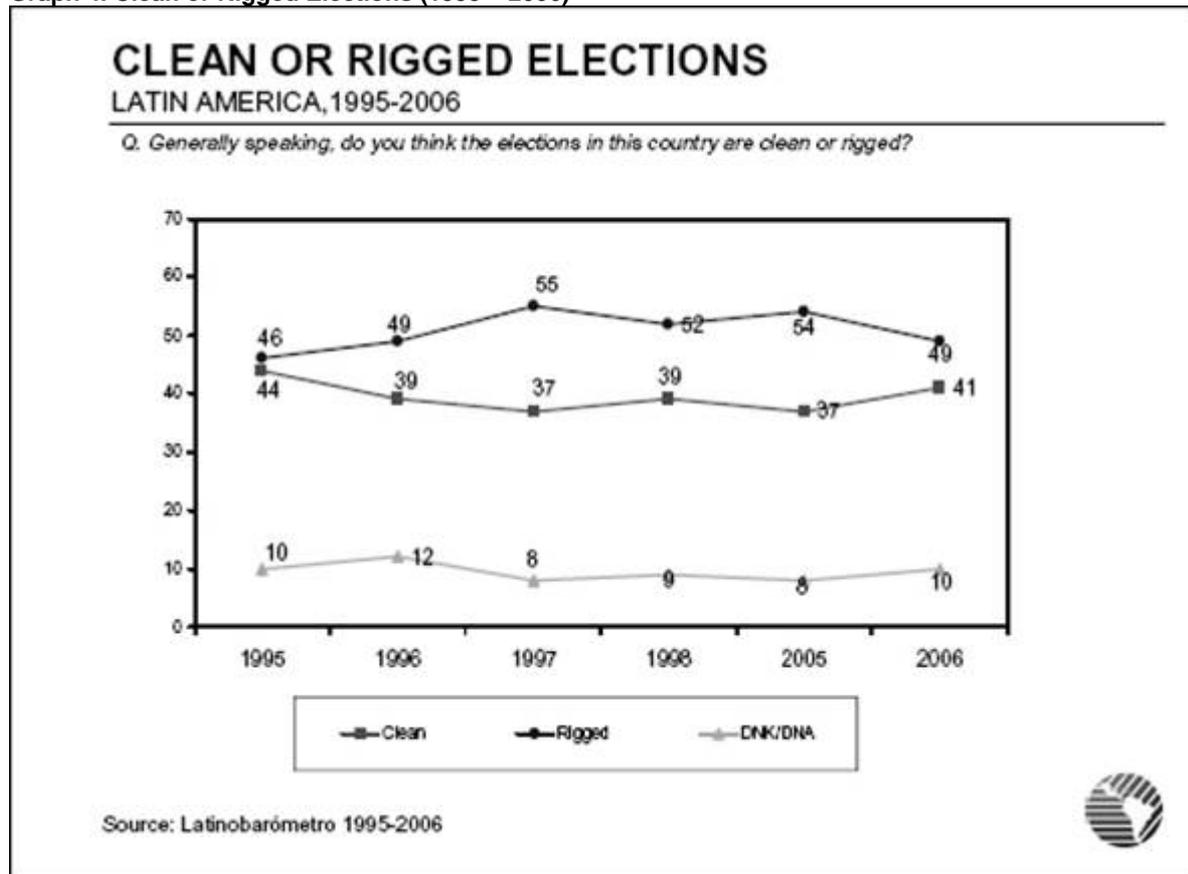
These problems also led to greater dependence on international observer and monitor missions to guarantee electoral decisions, although at times their evaluations were also called into question. For example: Hugo Chávez's refusal to allow an observer mission from the OAS for the legislative elections of December; the PRD's questioning of a European Union observer mission in Mexico, and Correa's objections to an OAS mission in Ecuador. In Nicaragua, early on in the process, Ortega questioned the representative of the OAS mission, but later an intervention by the OAS secretary general resolved the impasse.

Citizen perception of elections

According to the *Latinobarómetro 2006*, during this year people's perception that elections were clean rose: the figure went from 37% in 2005 to 41% in 2006. At the same time the perception that elections were fraudulent declined from 54 to 49%.²¹ However, much work remains to be done in changing people's perceptions: there were only five countries (Costa Rica, Chile, Panama, Uruguay and Venezuela) where a majority said elections are clean. In the other 13 countries of the region, this opinion is held by less than 50% of voters (the last time elections were held).

21 On this issue it is of particular interest to wait for the *Latinobarómetro 2007* to see how complaints of electoral fraud in 2006 are reflected in Latin Americans' perceptions.

Graph 4. Clean or Rigged Elections (1995 – 2006)

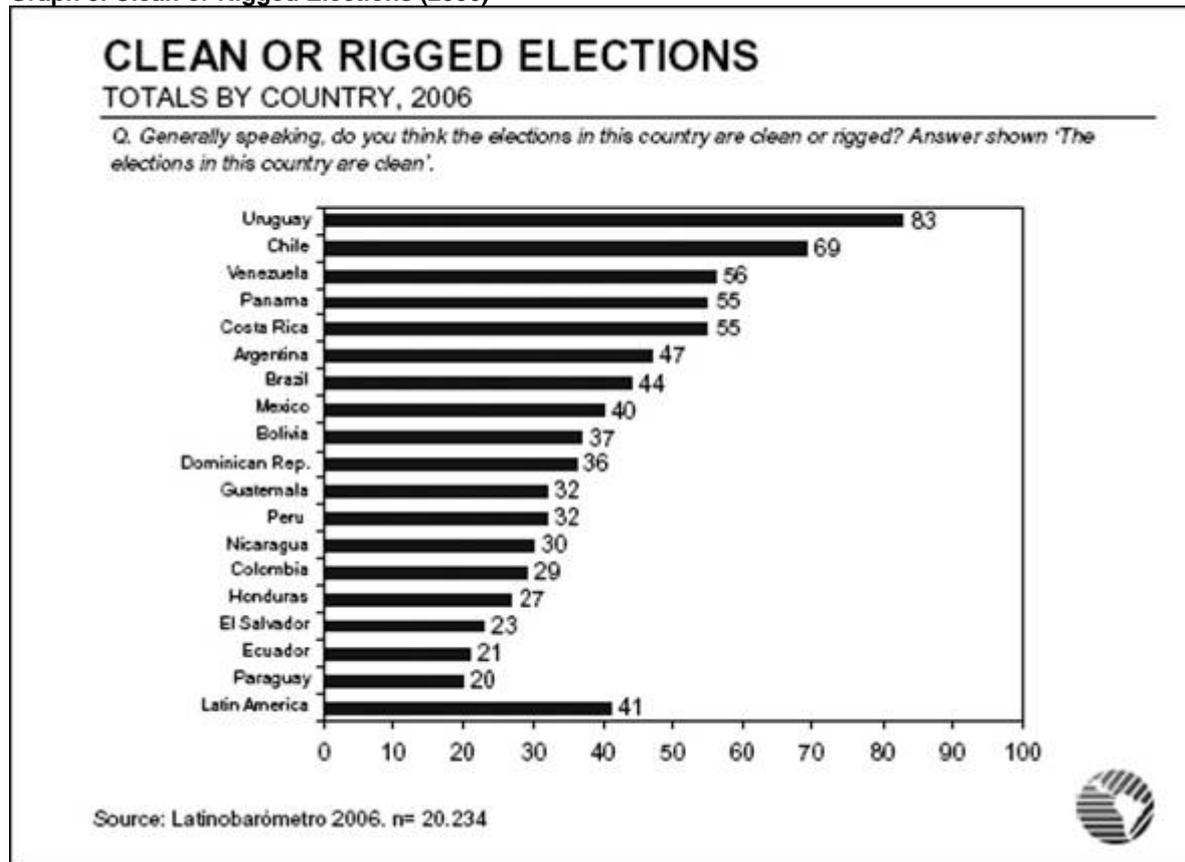


It is also worth pointing out that the Latinobarómetro shows a drop in the perception of fraud in most countries. Most notable is Mexico, which went from 55 to 20%; next came Ecuador, which fell from 30 to 12%; Bolivia declined from 33 to 17% and Nicaragua saw its number go from 22 to 11%. Other countries also saw these figures go down. Venezuela posted the smallest decrease (the number edged down from 29 to 27%), while in Chile the figure was unchanged at (15%).

The 'democratic normalization' of Bolivia and Ecuador

In Bolivia and Ecuador the elections represented these countries' 'democratic normalization.' In the Bolivian case, the triumph of Evo Morales came after the political crisis that began with the early departure of President Sánchez de Lozada in 2003. This led to short presidencies for Carlos Mesa and then the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Eduardo Rodríguez. In the case of Ecuador, the election came after the so-called 'Rebellion of the outlaws' that opposition parties mounted in 2005 against president Gutiérrez. This movement brought about his resignation and Congress named Alfredo Palacio as president.

Graph 5. Clean or Rigged Elections (2006)



Graph 6. Vote Buying (2002-2006)



Women's political participation

The elections in the 2005-2006 period yielded progress in the area of political participation by women. This began with the general elections in Honduras, where a new rule setting minimum quotas for male and female candidates (30%) led to an increase in participation by women in Congress. The figure went from 6% in the previous legislature to 23% in the current one. This positive effect continued in Chile, where the historic election of 2006 saw Michelle Bachelet become the first female president of that country. Bachelet has worked to bring more women into political posts, establishing a formula mandating equal numbers of men and women in the 3,500 jobs that are designated by the Chilean presidency.

The number of women elected to the national congress rose in most countries. Although the increase was most significant in Honduras, Peru's increase from 18 to 29% is also worth pointing out. The success of women in this country is seen in the fact that the six most-voted lawmakers were women. The legislature's speaker is also a woman. In the rest of the countries, the percentage of women elected to Congress was lower, and in some cases it even declined, such as in Bolivia and Colombia.

Table 13. Latin America: Women in parliament (lower house or single chamber legislature)

| Country | Before the last election | After the last election | Difference |
|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| | % women | % women | |
| Bolivia | 19 | 17 | -2 |
| Brazil | 9 | 9 | — |
| Chile | 13 | 16 | +3 |
| Colombia | 13 | 9 | -4 |
| Costa Rica | 35 | 39 | +4 |
| Ecuador | 16 | 20 | +4 |
| El Salvador | 11 | 17 | +6 |
| Honduras | 6 | 23 | +17 |
| Mexico | 23 | 23 | — |
| Nicaragua | 21 | RC* | — |
| Peru | 18 | 29 | +11 |
| Dominican Republic | 17 | 20 | +3 |
| Venezuela | 10 | 18 | +8 |

* Results tallied as of 13/11/2006.

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union and the author

Finally we should point out the results of the elections to the Constituent Assembly in Bolivia. As a result of an innovative electoral formula (three-name districts) combined with a gender quota of 30%, a total of 33% of the people elected to the assembly were women. The assembly also elected an indigenous woman as its speaker.

Other relevant aspects

To one extent or another, the issue of political financing and its relation to corruption has been present in the vast majority of the election campaigns. Scandals involving money in politics, rising campaign costs, mainly the part spent on ads – above all on television – and the weakness of legislation and control mechanisms have made this issue one of the main factors to consider when it comes to guaranteeing election fairness and transparency.

The increase in reports of illegal financing and its relation to political corruption scandals coincides with a new and negative evaluation of Latin America by the organization called Transparency International (TI). Its **Corruption Perception Index (CPI)**²² allows for the countries of the region to be classified into three groups. The first is made up of countries with high CPI levels placing them among the top 50 countries on the list. They include Chile (a CPI of 7.3, placing it in 20th place) and Uruguay (6.4 on the CPI, 28th place). A second group of seven countries -- Colombia,

22 The CPI is a compound index that measures public perceptions about corruption in 163 countries. It works on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being the highest level of perceived corruption and 10 the lowest.

Costa Rica, Brazil, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama and Peru – have a score of between 5 and 3, which suggests a worrisome perception of internal corruption. A third group of nine countries accounting for half of Latin America -- Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Dominican Republic and Venezuela- have CPI levels below 3, meaning they perceive political corruption as being at very high levels in their countries.²³

A second issue that has taken on importance is the function of public opinion polls. Several elections have shown pollsters had a hard time picking up on trends and predicting results. As Carlos Fara says, the elections of these past 14 months were full of surprises. Wasn't Morales supposed to fall short of a majority? Wasn't Arias supposed to win by a landslide in Costa Rica? Wasn't Alan García supposed to fail to once again be president of Peru? Wasn't Manuel López Obrador supposed to be the clear winner of the elections in Mexico? And wasn't Correa supposed to win in the first round?²⁴ After taking on an important role as a source of information for the media on people's preferences, polls failed to predict winners in Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Mexico, among other countries, and became the focus of political debate in Latin America.

In Bolivia, just days before the election, polls said Morales would win around 34% of the votes. In the end, he won 54%. In Costa Rica, the polls showed Oscar Arias with a big lead over the rest of the candidates, but this did not bare out and ultimately he won by a slim margin of just 18,169 votes (1.12%). The explanation of these failures lies in the already well-known limitations of polls as instruments of measurement. And the limitations grow much more in volatile contexts with significant levels of indefiniteness, high levels of hidden votes, etc. Meanwhile, another factor limiting the accuracy of polls is the fact that more and more people get interested in an election just weeks or days before it is held, and make up their minds on election day itself. These tend to be the youngest voters, people in rural areas or people from working-class districts. These voters don't go by the rationality of candidates' proposals but rather emotional stimuli such as television footage – in other words, what a candidate transmits and the sensations it triggers. For this reason, the last impression a candidate makes on voters is so important.

And thus it is also important for polling organizations to warn of the limitations in each case, so that the detected level of voter volatility is recorded and stated properly. Unfortunately, this almost never happens. At the same time it is worth pointing out that polls – which are supposed to be tools of political measurement – have instead been transformed in many cases into means of political propaganda. It is true that many parties hire polling firms to measure their levels of support, and publish results as part of their campaign strategy. Because of this and the fact that polls are being used to serve political interests, their accuracy is being questioned more and more.

Finally, a third issue that should be pointed out is the nature of the campaigns prior to elections and their growing 'Americanization.' The phenomenon is growing, and characterized by politics focused on personalities, the pre-eminence of candidates over parties, increasing use of television, and negative campaigns that stress attacks on opponents rather than debate on actual ideas. The political campaigns in Brazil, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mexico, Peru and other countries played out this way.

23 Transparency International, 'Corruption Perception Index 2006':

www.transparency.org/news_room/latest_news/press_releases/2006/es_2006_11_06_cpi_2006

24 Carlos Fara, 'Surprises in Latin America', 19/10/2006: www.cadal.org/articulos/nota.asp?id_notas=1463

New calendar: more elections

Although in the next few years the region will not undergo a new flurry of elections like the one discussed in this article, there are in fact numerous and important elections scheduled from 2007 through 2009. During this period, nine of the 18 countries of Latin America – half the region – will hold presidential elections: Guatemala and Argentina (2007), Paraguay and the Dominican Republic (2008), and El Salvador, Chile, Honduras, Panama and Uruguay (2009).

Table 14. Latin America: Presidential elections 2005-2009

| Country | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| Southern Cone | | | | | |
| Argentina | | | X | | |
| Brazil | | X | | | |
| Chile | X | | | | X |
| Paraguay | | | | X | |
| Uruguay | | | | | X |
| Andean Region | | | | | |
| Bolivia | X | | | | |
| Colombia | | X | | | |
| Ecuador | | X | | | |
| Peru | | X | | | |
| Venezuela | | X | | | |
| Central America and the Caribbean | | | | | |
| Costa Rica | | X | | | |
| El Salvador | | | | | X |
| Guatemala | | | X | | |
| Honduras | X | | | | X |
| Mexico | | X | | | |
| Nicaragua | | X | | | |
| Panama | | | | | X |
| Dominican Republic | | | | X | |

Source: the author.

Final Comments

The successful holding of the busiest and most important electoral schedule since the return of democracy to Latin America (starting in 1978) and the peaceful renewal via elections of 11 presidents (12 if we include Haiti) in just 14 months shows that this has been a clear triumph for democracy, especially for electoral democracy. The region witnessed an intense electoral period that showcased citizens' desire to seek political answers through elections and democratic processes. At the same time, during these 14 months not only has there been no president who had to end his term ahead of schedule, but rather the elections have been an instrument for expressing the will of the citizens.

This burst of electoral activity came in a context of moderate optimism in which economic growth has been one of the most important and undisputed achievements of the period 2005-06. The main cause of this strong macroeconomic situation is the high price of raw materials exported from Latin America. However, while Latin America has posted five straight years of economic growth and in the last four the rate has been above 4% (something which had not happened in years), it is also true that it is the region of the developing world with the lowest growth rates and the one with the least social progress, with only very small declines in poverty and indigence.

The robust economic situation has been reflected in a moderate rise in support for democracy and satisfaction with it,²⁵ as well as a rise people's expectations for the ability of recently elected governments to deliver, according to the *Latinobarómetro 2006*. So 2007 and the years after that will become the moment of truth – the chance to fulfil or miss all those campaign promises.

The keys to the new leaders' ability to govern democratically will include effective and successful handling of these expectations. People want them to deliver on promises of goods and services (especially jobs, reduction of poverty and inequality, less street crime and fighting corruption). Otherwise, growing frustration with unfulfilled campaign promises could fuel a new cycle of instability and the early departure of presidents, or, even worse, violence in some countries.

Politically, the presidential elections did not bring about the 'leftist tsunami' that many simplistic and alarmist analysts predicted. Rather, it was a shift toward the centre, with three separate political tendencies: social democrat, nationalist-populist left, and centre-right. And although the victories of Correa, Ortega and Chávez, preceded by that of Morales, could give rise to the idea that the nationalist-populist trend is dominant, the fact is that, as Rosendo Fraga warns, '[it is worth noting that [within this line] none of the region's five largest electorates are included (Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina and Peru). Altogether they account for four-fifths of the population.' Fraga argues that as a result of all this, Latin America is now

a more heterogeneous region in which the leadership of Chávez is beginning to find limits and Brazil is trying to act more as a moderator than a leader. The influence of the US is low, although hostility toward this country is less than it was a year ago. The death of Pinochet and Castro's illness served in 2006 as symbols of the end of a cycle that lasted more than half a century, a period in which communist guerrillas on one hand and anti-communist governments on the other weakened democracy in the region for decades.²⁶

Furthermore, old-style authoritarianism characterized by coups d'Etat is no long an option and has been replaced by a tendency toward neo-populism. As a UNDP report on Democracy in Latin America (2004)²⁷ states, 'today opposition movements do not tend to seek military solutions but rather populist leaders who bill themselves as being removed from traditional power and promise innovative prospects.' The study said the discontent of the peoples of Latin America is not 'with' democracy but rather 'in' democracy, and as we have stated several times, problems 'in' democracy are resolved with more and better democracy. For this reason Peter Hakim said the biggest danger for democracy in Latin America is not demagogue politicians or military officers with visions of grandeur or authoritarian ideologies. The biggest threat is continuous mediocre performance – the inability of democratic governments to meet the most important needs and demands of its people.²⁸

Meanwhile, although the democracies of Latin America have defied forecasts predicting they would not last long and displayed a heretofore unknown electoral vitality, they have also made clear that their consolidation is more complex and needs more time than originally thought. As Botana²⁹ warns, after nearly three decades of transition many of these democracies have yet to establish roots in the State, in society and in political parties. We have crossed the first threshold cleanly – the electoral dimension, the one which certainly gives rise to the most advances. But we still have a long way to go in the consolidation of the republic, the balance of powers and the rule of law. Ours

25 According to the *Latinobarómetro*, support for democracy rose from 53% in 2005 to 58% in 2006, and satisfaction with democracy went from 31% to 38%, *Informe Latinobarómetro 2006*,: www.latinobarometro.org

26 Rosendo Fraga, 'Three trends in the region', *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 17/1/2007.

27 PNUD, *Democracy in Latin America: Moving toward a Democracy of Citizens*, UNDP, 2004, p. 12.

28 Quoted by Ignacio Walter, 'Democracy in Latin America, 2006' www.cadal.org/documentos/documento_54.pdf

29 Natalio Botana, 'Democracy in Latin America', *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 29/10/2006:

www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/columnistas/columnistasnotasanteriores.asp?origen=3ra&columnista_id=618

are democracies characterized by a clear institutional weakness, by a rule of law with limited force and by low-intensity citizenry.

Thus, it is so important to move ahead urgently and firmly in the strengthening and perfecting of political institutions, being able to rely on ones that are representative, legitimate and efficient as they serve as the basis for the full functioning of democracy. People committed to democracy are also essential. In other words, both institutions and political leadership matter dearly, not just for the survival of democracy but also its quality. A mixed approach is essential, one that combines the institutional dimension and the behaviour of leaders: cultural contexts and leadership are not just important in designing institutions but also in their management and workings. Strong and representative democratic institutions, accompanied by quality leadership and a democratic culture, are the best means to protect against anti-politics, messianic leaders and the dangers of neo-populism.

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