# LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

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THEDIALOGUE


**FEATURED Q&A**

# What Will Next Year Bring in Latin America's Politics?

Among the elections in Latin America in 2022 is Brazil's October presidential vote, in which President Jair Bolsonaro is facing a tough fight for re-election against former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

**Q Over the past year, internationally criticized actions by some Western Hemisphere presidents, such as Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega, El Salvador's Nayib Bukele, Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro and Donald Trump in the United States, have raised fears of growing authoritarianism, weakening institutions and a crumbling of democratic norms. Meanwhile, presidential candidates on extreme ends of the political spectrum have captured support in places such as Peru and Chile. And in Haiti, a sitting president was assassinated. With elections coming up in 2022 in Brazil, Colombia and Costa Rica, which countries in Latin America and the Caribbean will be the political hot spots to watch next year? What political trends will be the strongest in the coming year, and what traits will countries' political trajectories have in common? Is authoritarianism and polarization likely to worsen in the region in 2022, and what factors would influence that?**

**A Peter Hakim, member of the Advisor board and president emeritus of the Inter-American Dialogue:** "Two years of battering by the pandemic, which hit Latin America at a time of widespread political turmoil and sharp economic decline, has left the region deeply troubled and insecure about its future. Democracy is severely challenged in many nations and unraveling in some. In country after country, prospects for recovery and growth are uncertain, while indices of poverty, unemployment and inequality are at toxic levels. Within this generally bleak outlook, Brazil's election next October stands out as a particularly critical event for Latin America. Although he trails former President Lula da Silva by some 20 points in recent polls, the re-election

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**TODAY'S NEWS**

POLITICAL

## Chile's Congress Approves Same-Sex Marriage

The lower house of Chile's Congress approved legislation to legalize same-sex marriage, following the same action by the Senate. President Sebastián Piñera has voiced support for same-sex marriage and is expected to sign the measure into law.

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BUSINESS

## Santander Boosts Stake in Mexican Unit to 96.2%

Spain-based Banco Santander is increasing its stake in its Mexican unit, Banco Santander México, to 96.2 percent for $385 million through a tender offer.

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POLITICAL

## Peru's Congress Rejects Attempt to Impeach Castillo

Peru's Congress voted down an attempt to impeach President Pedro Castillo in a vote of 76-46. Right-wing parties had launched the effort in October.

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Castillo // File Photo: TV Perú.

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POLITICAL NEWS

# Chile's Congress Approves Same-Sex Marriage Measure

Chile's Congress on Tuesday approved legislation to legalize same-sex marriage in the country, El Mercurio reported. The lower house of Congress approved the measure on a vote of 82-20, with two abstentions, CNN reported. The Senate had previously approved the legislation. President Sebastián Piñera earlier this year expressed his support for same-sex marriage and is expected to sign the measure into law. "I think the time has come for equal marriage in our country," Piñera said in June, CNN reported. "In this way, all people without distinguishing by sexual orientation, will be able to live love and form a family with all the protection and dignity that they need and deserve." Gay-rights activists celebrated Congress' passage of the measure. "We have been working for years for a profound cultural change," Rolando Jiménez, a spokesman for the advocacy group Movilh, told The Washington Post. "I celebrate marriage equality as a fundamental milestone in our history." Since 2015, Chile has recognized same-sex civil unions, CNN reported. However, marriage would allow equal rights for couples of the same sex, including the ability to adopt children. The same-sex marriage legislation had been stalled in Chile's Congress since 2017 when then-President Michelle Bachelet proposed it, BBC News reported. Despite the measure's overwhelming passage in Congress on Tuesday, it also had opponents, including evangelical lawmaker Leonidas Romero of the National Renewal party, who called the measure "a tremendous betrayal for the Christian world," BBC News reported. In Latin America, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Uruguay have all legalized same-sex marriage, The Washington Post reported. In Mexico, the country's Supreme Court has declared the prohibition of same-sex marriage unconstitutional.

**President Sebastián Piñera is expected to sign the measure into law.**

# Peru's Congress Rejects Attempt to Impeach Castillo

Peru's Congress voted down a motion to impeach President Pedro Castillo with a 76-46 vote on Tuesday, Reuters reported. Right-wing parties launched the impeachment effort in October after investigators found $20,000 in a bathroom of the presidential palace that allegedly belonged to Bruno Pacheco, the former presidential secretary, Al Jazeera reported. Conservative former lawmaker Keiko Fujimori, whom Castillo defeated in the country's presidential election last June, pushed the impeachment effort, Reuters reported. However, the attempt appeared to lose momentum after Castillo held talks over the past several days with various political parties. "The issue of vacating [the presidency] is slowly being deflated," Vice President Dina Boluarte told reporters on Tuesday before the vote. After Congress rejected the attempt, Vladimir Cerrón, the founding leader of Castillo's Perú Libre party who has recently clashed with the president, welcomed the vote. "The impeachment motion failed, fascism failed, the parliamentary blow to democracy failed," he said in a posting on Twitter. Hundreds of supporters of Castillo as well as those in support of impeaching him took to the streets of Lima on Tuesday before the vote, Al Jazeera reported. "We want him to keep working," Castillo supporter María Lázaro Cornello, told Reuters. Another protester, who gave her name as Jacky, told the wire service that Castillo was "destroying Peru, destroying our economy and the freedom of all Peruvians." In a **commentary** published Monday in the Advisor's Dialogue Continues section, Gino Costa, a former member of Peru's Congress, said Castillo has a complicated road ahead. "Citizen

NEWS BRIEFS

## Honduras Plans Partial Recount of Votes in Congressional Races

Electoral authorities in Honduras on Tuesday began a recount of some of the ballots for congressional seats from the country's Nov. 28 election, following allegations of fraud and inconsistencies at a number of ballot boxes, Reuters reported. Leftist former First Lady Xiomara Castro defeated conservative Tegucigalpa Mayor Nasry Asfura for the presidency, but her ability to push through her agenda will depend on the balance of power in Congress. Castro's Liberty and Refoundation Party as well as the allied Salvador Party accuse the ruling National Party of "inflating" its number of votes.

## Colombia's National Police Confirms Killing of Rebel Dissident Leader

Colombia's national police director confirmed on Tuesday that Hernán Darío Velásquez, known as "El Paisa," was killed in a drug trafficking dispute in the Venezuelan state of Apure, Reuters reported. A former member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Velásquez had reportedly been in Venezuela for more than two years in an effort to form a new faction called Segunda Marquetalia, which U.S. President Joe Biden's administration recently designated a terrorist group.

## Brazil's BRF Plans to Invest $9.8 Billion by 2030

Brazilian food processor BRF, the largest chicken exporter in the world, said in a securities filing on Tuesday that it plans to invest 55 billion reais ($9.8 billion) by 2030 to broaden its business, Reuters reported. Since the 2020 unveiling of BRF's "2030 Vision" plan, there has been a 30 percent increase in the company's production of high-added value products, the company said in a statement.

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support is also key for the president. However, polls show a rapid erosion of his popularity. His saving grace is that Congress ... is even more unpopular. There is no doubt that the political landscape for the coming months and years will be highly uncertain and highly unstable."

**BUSINESS NEWS**

# Santander Increases Stake in Mexican Unit to 96.2 Percent

Spain-based Banco Santander said today that it had increased its stake in its Mexican unit to 96.2 percent from 91.6 percent for $385 million, Reuters reported. The announcement came after the expiration of a tender offer acceptance period. In October, Santander said it was launching an offer to buy out the Mexican unit, Banco Santander México, for

**Botín** // File Photo: Banco Santander.

26.50 pesos ($1.26) in cash per share of the Mexican unit, and $6.25 in cash for each of the unit's American Depositary Shares, Dow Jones reported. Santander said it will pay out 5.17 billion pesos ($246.3 million) for the tendered shares of Banco Santander México and $138.5 million for the American Depositary Shares, Reuters reported. Santander plans to make the payments on Dec. 10. The bank, which is chaired by Ana Botín, has increasingly focused on allocating capital to countries that have more significant potential for growth, Market Research Telecast reported. Mexico is among the bank's strongest markets, and Santander sees it as having good long-term prospects.

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of President Bolsonaro, an ardent fan of Brazil's 21 years of military rule who has packed his government with senior officers, is still possible. And so are a fraudulent vote count or an outright coup d'état. Any of these outcomes will put Brazil's democracy in mortal danger, upend its already badly damaged international image and quash any prospect of Latin America rebuilding regional cooperation. And Brazil will not be the only country where recent or upcoming elections are expected to install leaders with questionable commitments to democratic governance, human rights and greater equity. Another critical uncertainty is whether the Biden administration will turn any significant attention to Latin America in the coming year. So far, the White House has focused narrowly on two issues that powerfully affect U.S. domestic politics—migration and China's spreading influence in the region. But other crucial issues have been ignored. Can we now expect greater U.S. attention to protecting democracy in countries such as Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti, where democratic practices still hold, but are steadily being undermined? Will Biden take steps to rebuild cooperation in hemispheric affairs and press harder on Latin American nations to seriously address climate change? Is there any prospect that the United States will seek opportunities to promote inclusive and equitable economic growth to help the region get back on its feet?"

**Katya Rimkunas, regional deputy director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the International Republican Institute:** "According to Latinobarómetro, only 25 percent of Latin Americans are satisfied with democracy. This is unsurprising as the pandemic has increased poverty, exacerbated poor service delivery and entrenched corruption. Additionally, the region is experiencing higher inflation, which will lead to greater economic pressure and overshadow the modest economic growth seen this year. These factors have resulted in voters decidedly selecting the anti-incumbent, a trend likely to continue next year. With citizens increasingly turning away from traditional political parties and candidates, polarizing figures with grand, but unrealistic, promises and sometimes authoritarian leanings have gained support. Crucial elections for the region will take place in 2022 against this backdrop. Colombia will elect a new president in May. An Ipsos poll found that 89 percent of Colombians believe their country is headed in the wrong direction. Highly dissatisfied, pessimistic Colombians could push voters to choose a more radical candidate. In Brazil, there are concerns that with a potential recession, low economic growth and decreasing support, President Bolsonaro could feel threatened enough to discredit the October 2022 elections, leading to social unrest. Citizen discontent across the region has also increasingly led to calls for constitutional rewrites. Presidents in Peru, El Salvador and now Honduras are pushing for constitutional reforms. And while Chile's process could be the blueprint for other countries, if not managed well, transparently and with ample civil society participation, constitutional reforms could be used to further consolidate power by the executive or set the country in a path that further erodes democracy."

**R. Evan Ellis, Latin America research professor at the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute:** "The region is undergoing a strategic shift with worrisome implications for democracy, development and the United States, involving three interrelated axes: movements toward the left, toward authoritarian populism and toward China and other extra-hemispheric actors. This combination portends a region that is less democratic, less cooperative with the United States, more tied to its strategic rivals, as well as shifting its multilateral dynamics. The drivers include frustration

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with endemic corruption and the persistent failure of democratic governments to show meaningful progress against their nation's challenges, with frustration compounded by the socioeconomic and fiscal strains of Covid-19. Chinese investments, loans and commodity purchases, given without regard to populist abuses of their own laws or established investments, help those regimes consolidate power. While Chinese resources also enable non-left populists like Bukele in El Salvador, the leftist variant is particularly virulent, informed by the Chavista model of transforming institutions and eliminating competing government, media and economic bases of resistance. Key tipping points include whether Chile's fear of the left leads voters to choose the social conservative Kast over Gabriel Boric on Dec. 19; whether disparate conservative forces in Peru block the agenda of Vladimir Cerrón in Peru; whether Costa Rica elects a leftist president in February 2022 and defaults on its IMF commitments; whether Colombia's fear of the left overcomes its fatigue with the nation's grave situation to sink leftist Gustavo Petro's presidential candidacy in May 2022; and whether a viable centrist emerges in Brazil to prevent a likely Workers' Party victory in Brazil in October."

**Lisa Haugaard, co-director of the Latin America Working Group:** "From my perspective as a human rights advocate, a deeply concerning trend in the region is the closing space for civil society. Governments of the left and right have enacted restrictions on civil society, persecuted human rights defenders and committed grave abuses against protesters. We see this trend in the NGO laws in Guatemala and Nicaragua and the draft foreign agent bill in El Salvador. Criminalization of activists reached new lows in Honduras with the Guapinol River defenders, who were forced to wait more than two years in pretrial detention while two men arrested during post-electoral protests spent 18 months in maximum security prison before being finally ruled innocent. In Mexico and Colombia, to just mention two cases, human rights defenders and journalists have been subjected to surveillance. We have seen brutal crackdowns on protesters, notably the paro nacional in Colombia this year in which 87 people were killed, the estallido social in Chile in 2019-20, the killings of students in Nicaragua in 2018, and the killings of protesters in Honduras following the 2017 elections, while in Cuba state repression continues to quell protests. Across the Americas, environmental and land rights defenders—often Indigenous, Afro-descendant or poor campesinos—face threats and assassinations for protecting their communities and the planet. In all these actions, people are trying to defend their basic rights to access jobs, education and social services, as well as their rights to self-expression and to choose their governments. In 2022, will governments of the right and left continue to seek to control social movements, persecute activists and crush protests? Can civil society movements begin to make headway against these authoritarian trends? Will the U.S. government begin to weigh in on these disturbing trends in a more principled way, willing to criticize close allies as well as other governments? Those are some of the questions I have as I look ahead to 2022."

> **"A deeply concerning trend in the region is the closing space for civil society."**
>
> **— Lisa Haugaard**

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at* **gkuleta@thedialogue.org**.

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