

Americas

QUARTERLY



WHAT URUGUAY CAN TEACH US

A dispatch from Latin America's
imperfect success story

BY BRIAN WINTER

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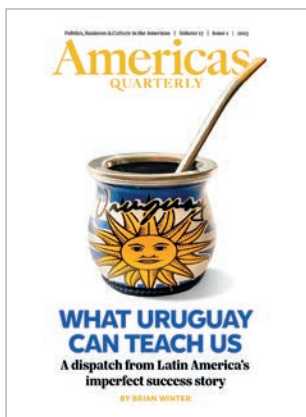
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An Imperfect Success Story


Yes, Uruguay is small. But at a time of turmoil in Latin America, it offers several valuable, and replicable, lessons.



URUGUAY HAS ENJOYED SO MUCH success in recent years that it's tempting to dismiss it as an outlier — too small, and too unique, to possibly be replicated elsewhere. It is by many measures Latin America's most economically prosperous country, its least corrupt, and its strongest democracy. GDP may grow 3% this year, double the regional average; it is blissfully free of the protests and political instability shaking places like Brazil and Peru.

But in fact, Uruguay's story is far more “relatable” than outsiders might expect, writes *AQ*'s editor-in-chief Brian Winter, who spent a week in Montevideo for this issue's cover story. Just 20 years ago, the country's poverty rate was 40% (compared to 7% today), and its politics were in shambles, in the wake of a severe economic crisis. Democracy only returned in 1985 following a period of guerrilla violence and repressive military rule. Today's achievements were not the work of any one leader, or ideology, but a concerted effort over many years.

So there is actually much that the rest of Latin America, and indeed the world, can learn from Uruguay's relative prosperity. Chief among them: Having a robust social safety net, as Uruguay does, can actually strengthen capitalism by giving citizens a minimum level of security, making them less likely to lash out at the system or elect populist leaders. Uruguay's strong political parties are integrated into society and have consistent ideas, instead of being mere vehicles for personalistic leaders.

Of course, Uruguay isn't perfect: It faces challenges including a genuinely scary crime wave, school dropout rates and a recent corruption scandal. The pace of life, and politics, can be frustrating — reforms often take years. But “what may look slow from the outside is often a democratic search for dialogue and consensus,” as Yamandú Orsi, a prominent mayor, told us. Given what's happening elsewhere these days, being predictable, and even a little boring, seems like a good problem to have. 

Dream Land?

Albeit imperfect, Uruguay consistently outranks its peers in Latin America when it comes to the quality of its democracy and policy choices.

Could others replicate its reality?

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Brian Winter

Winter is the editor-in-chief of *Americas Quarterly*. He first wrote about Uruguay in 2002, as a reporter covering its financial crisis for Reuters.



Claudia Méndez Arriaza

Méndez Arriaza has been an investigative reporter focused on human rights in Guatemala for two decades. She works with *ConCriterio*, a leading radio and television opinion program.



Jürgen Buchenau

Buchenau is a German-born professor of history at UNC Charlotte and a specialist on the Mexican Revolution. His forthcoming book, *The Sonoran Dynasty in Mexico: Revolution, Reform, and Repression*, focuses on the revolutionaries who helped found the Mexican state.



Alejandra Oliva

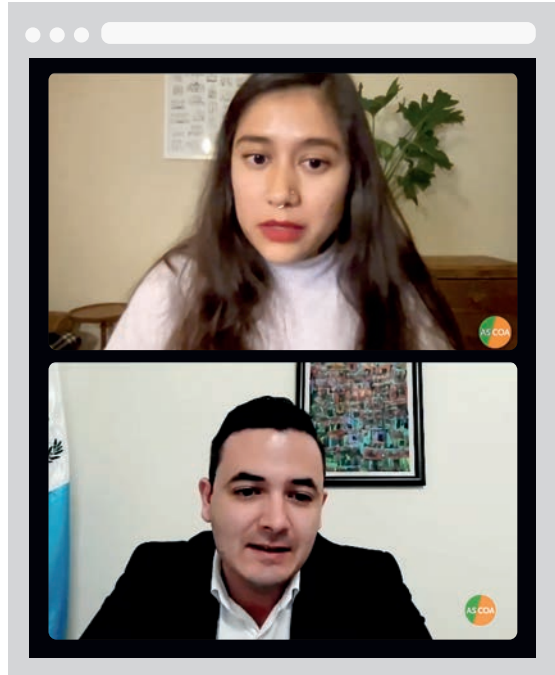
Oliva is an essayist, embroiderer and translator based in Chicago. Her first book, *Rivermouth: A Chronicle of Language, Faith and Migration*, is due out June 2023 from Astra House Books.



Juan Pablo Daza P.

Daza P. is a documentary filmmaker and photographer based in Bogotá, Colombia, focused on human rights, climate change and the arts. He also specializes in street photography and works with the Creative Districts Network at the Secretariat of Culture in Bogotá.

Tell us what you think. Please send letters to Brian@as-coa.org



AQ Editor-in-Chief Brian Winter, top left, and Council on Foreign Relations Vice President Shannon K. O'Neil, bottom left, at an event launching her book, *The Globalization Myth: Why Regions Matter*. Peruvian political analyst Andrea Moncada, top right, and Guatemalan lawmaker Samuel Pérez, bottom right, at the launch event for AQ's special report on millennials in politics.



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#Facts: "In #LatinAmerica, the younger generation is less radical than what elders think. But their patience with democracy may run out unless challenges like inequality and climate can be addressed." Learn more @AmerQuarterly.



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Latin American Millennials Want Reform, Not Revolution

The younger generation is less radical than elders think. B...



Ryan Berg, PhD

@RyanBergPhD

Political Scientist. Director @CSISAmericas & @CatholicUniv Prof. Former @OxfordCCW, @AEItdp. #LatinAmerica, bane to #dictators. @UniofOxford alum. Rtwto#endorse

In @AmerQuarterly @LucasdeAragao has a great piece on the growing power of #Brazil's Congress. "The president is a shareholder of the government, not its owner. It is fair to say that political power in Brazil has never been so diluted and shared as today."



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The Rise of Congress Will Have Consequences for Brazil's Victor

New powers for Congress mean increased checks on the executive, regardless of whether Lula or Bolsonaro wins on ...



Tiziano Breda
@TizBreda

Analyst, Central America at @CrisisGroup. Retweets do not necessarily reflect my or Crisis Group views.

Very interesting analysis by [@WillGFreeman](#). In a nutshell: the Biden admin already took actions that didn't play in Dems favor in Florida mid-terms and is likely to replace that concern with Texas' migration priority, equally constraining its Latam policy.



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The Midterms Will Change U.S. Latin America Policy, Just Not the Way You Think
The red wave was coming—until it wasn't.



Nicolás Saldías
@NicSaldias

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The curse of the short presidential honeymoon is being defied in Costa Rica.

In the first **5** months of Rodrigo Chaves administration, his popularity stands at a solid 79%.

This [@AmerQuarterly](#) article explains why this may be the case.



americasquarterly.org
Rodrigo Chaves Brings Confrontational Leadership to Costa Rica
Clashes with the legislature and the press and high inflation haven't hurt Chaves's high approval, but will it last?

Hari Seshasayee

[@haricito](#) Excellent piece by [@CreomarDeSouza](#) for [@AmerQuarterly](#) looking at the practical side of things for the new Brazilian government—these numbers are important but we must remember they are susceptible to change [@BrazilBrian](#) [@AmbSKReddy](#) [@indiainbrazil](#)

Jose Montes de Oca

[@josemontesdeoca](#) So sad to read this 😞 “The Destruction of Venezuela’s Amazon Is Going Virtually Unnoticed”—[@AmerQuarterly](#)

Leslie Forsyth

[@LeslieJF](#) In Latin America, polls suggest that millennials are less committed to democracy and capitalism, and more skeptical of institutions, than their elders. via [@amerquarterly](#)

Jose Ignacio Hernández G.

[@ignandez](#) “Progressive sanctions relief should accompany any political progress, but full-on recognition would take away Maduro’s key incentive to follow through in his commitments” [@Guillermo_Z](#) in [@AmerQuarterly](#)

Lauri Tähtinen

[@lauritahtinen](#) All that has occurred within & around the Brazilian presidency has diminished it: Dilma’s impeachment, Convictions of Temer & Lula + Lula’s annulment, and the spectacle of Bolsonaro. A spot-on argument by [@LucasdeAragao](#) in [@AmerQuarterly](#). Maybe Brazil’s election already happened!

Leonardo Gómez Berniga

[@leoberniga](#) Las dos facciones del partido, encabezadas por el actual presidente Mario Abdo y el expresidente Horacio Cartes, respectivamente, enfrentan acusaciones de corrupción de alto nivel. Ahora, cada uno teme ser procesado si el otro llega al poder [@AmerQuarterly](#)

Camilo Gómez

[@camilomgn](#) Interesting article by [@richmattbrown](#) at [@AmerQuarterly](#) on how Eva Copa the mayor of El Alto is changing the political landscape in Bolivia

Javier Corrales

[@jcorrales2011](#) Terrific answers by [@benjamingedan](#), reporting from BsAs. He discusses how bad the economy is (not as bad as 2001 but bad enough), why the new focus is Massa vs CFK, the pros and cons of Arg’s presidential candidates, and lithium





A mural of Argentine soccer icon Lionel Messi graces one side of an apartment building in his home city of Rosario. Argentina's national team won the World Cup in December, bringing the country its first championship since 1986.

PHOTO BY MATIAS BAGLIETTO/NURPHOTO/GETTY



THE BIG
PICTURE

A photograph showing a person wading in a lagoon. The person is wearing an orange and white striped shirt and is partially visible on the right side of the frame. The water is dark and rippled, reflecting the sky. In the background, there is a dense, lush green forest under a bright sky with some clouds. The overall scene is a natural, outdoor setting.

AQ

THE BIG
PICTURE

A member of the Ecobrion ecological foundation wades in the La Reina lagoon in Venezuela's Miranda state, on October 4, 2022. Two hours from Caracas, this coastal wetland is threatened by deforestation and pollution.

PHOTO BY FEDERICO PARRA/AFP/GETTY



AQ

THE BIG
PICTURE

Colombian Vice President Francia Márquez, right, dances at an event celebrating progress in the ongoing peace process for Colombia's long-running civil conflicts, in the town of Buenaventura on the country's Pacific coast on December 7, 2022.

PHOTO BY JOAQUIN SARMIENTO/AFP/GETTY







Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, center, accompanied by his wife Janja Lula da Silva, attends the funeral of Brazilian soccer icon Pelé in the city of Santos on January 3. PHOTO BY MARCELLO ZAMBRANA/ANADOLU AGENCY VIA GETTY IMAGES

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THE BIG
PICTURE





AS HEARD ON THE AMERICAS QUARTERLY PODCAST

Experts and policymakers join AQ's Editor-in-Chief Brian Winter to discuss the issues currently shaping Latin American politics, business and culture.



“Creating an autonomous institution with the capacity to organize free and fair elections was fundamental in the process of Mexico transitioning from an authoritarian to a democratic government, and this is what is at stake right now.”

—Carlos Bravo Regidor, political commentator, about changes to Mexico's national electoral institute



“Lula has shown his whole life that he understands things very fast and is very flexible, but it's not going to be simple. (...) It's a different population, it's a different Congress, it's a different Lula.”

—Malu Gaspar, political columnist at O Globo, about what's ahead for Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva



“There's a clear sense in countries like Chile and Colombia that the next years will be difficult. These are leaders who have a clear understanding of the need to come across as consensus builders, otherwise they won't be able to follow up on their very ambitious proposals.”

—Oliver Stuenkel, contributing columnist for Americas Quarterly and professor of international relations at Fundação Getulio Vargas in São Paulo, about Latin America's new “pink tide”

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Enzo Romero

Founder and CEO, LAT Bionics

In his childhood, Enzo Romero, 30, was enchanted by Star Wars' Luke Skywalker—but for a reason different than most. This native of Urubamba, Peru, was inspired by his hero to learn how to build prostheses—and has built a 10-person company that produces about 50 of them per year at relatively low cost.

by Khalea Robertson

AQ: What led you to create LAT Bionics?

ER: When I saw *Star Wars* as a boy, what impressed me the most was Luke [Skywalker]'s prosthesis. I was born without my right hand and longed to have one just like his. I went on to study mechatronics engineering at university.

[Then] you discover that you are not alone. We are talking about 2.5 million people in developing countries with upper limb amputation. In Peru an imported robotic prosthesis can cost as much as a down payment for an apartment — \$25,000 or more. That is why we began to work on a product that wasn't that expensive.



Romero's story impressed Mark Hamill.

AQ: How do you make your prostheses affordable?

ER: First by reducing the number of motors, which are all imported. We challenged ourselves: With a single engine, how many gestures could we do? We identified three: a clamp grip — when you put your thumb together with your index finger; a cylindrical grip that is for larger objects, like a glass; and a lateral grip, which is when you place your thumb against the side of your index finger, enough to grab keys and put them in the door, let's say.

And we work with low-cost, local materials. Our prostheses cost between \$2,500 and \$3,000. We call our models Maki, which means hand in Quechua, and Pisco, our flagship drink in Peru. We want our products to be associated with a Peruvian identity.


AQ: What is the future for LAT Bionics?

ER: I would like to establish a center for assistive technologies in Peru, with teams that understand each case and adapt to each person's needs. It will be known internationally that if you want such a solution, you can find it in Peru. **AQ**

Robertson is editorial assistant at AQ

THIS INTERVIEW HAS BEEN EDITED FOR CLARITY AND LENGTH





WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM URUGUAY

**Latin America's imperfect
success story contains lessons
for the rest of the world.**

by Brian Winter



MONTEVIDEO — It was a scene that inspired admiration, and no small amount of envy, all over Latin America.

At the January 1 inauguration of Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, not one but three presidents from Uruguay were in attendance: the current leader, Luis Lacalle Pou, as well as former presidents José "Pepe" Mujica (2010–15) and Julio María Sanguinetti (1985–90; 1995–2000), historic rivals in Uruguayan politics, one from the left, one from the center-right, smiling and clapping each other on the back as the cameras rolled.

In another era, such a scene might have been considered banal. But in this time of extreme polarization and social unrest throughout Latin America, the show of unity was treated as nothing less than a revelation on Twitter and elsewhere. "The Uruguayans are always so civilized, I don't know how they put up with us as neighbors," quipped Bruno Bimbi, an Argentine journalist. "That's why Uruguay is Uruguay, and it's the highest quality democracy in the region and one of the best in the world," wrote Daniel Zovatto, a prominent political scientist based in Panama. Brazilian newspapers jealously noted the contrast with their own country; Lula's predecessor Jair Bolsonaro skipped the inauguration after losing the election, and flew to Florida instead.

Frankly, it was not the first time Uruguay has seemed to be in a class of its own. The country has Latin America's highest per capita income (about \$17,000), its lowest poverty rate (7%), and among its

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, second from right, flanked by three Uruguayan presidents: former office-holders Julio María Sanguinetti, left, and José Mujica; and the incumbent, Luis Lacalle Pou, right.







lowest levels of inequality. Uruguay's energy matrix is the region's greenest, and its economy is forecast to grow a healthy 3.6% in 2023, more than double the Latin American average. International studies frequently portray Uruguay as the region's least corrupt country; the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked it the 13th strongest democracy in the world, ahead of the United Kingdom (#18), Spain (#24) and the United States (#26), and well ahead of regional peers like Brazil (#47), Colombia (#59) or Mexico (#86).

This success has not gone unnoticed elsewhere throughout the region, and indeed the world. A conference last May at the Universidad Católica de Chile was entitled "The Uruguayan Case: A Possible Model?," focusing on how it has combined economic growth with a strong social safety net. Uruguay is attracting record numbers of expatriates not just from Argentina, as it often does during times of crisis there, but also from Brazil, Chile, Venezuela and beyond. The resort city of Punta del Este became a magnet for remote workers during the pandemic, fueling a real estate boom estimated at \$6 billion in new investments in just the past three years; a private school there has students from 34 different countries. The idea that Uruguay is becoming a kind of Singapore for South America, a relative oasis for business and trade on a troubled continent, has drawn attention from global companies and great powers alike; Lacalle Pou's conservative government recently opened negotiations for trade deals with China and Turkey. Tim Kaine, a Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee of the United States Senate, recently called Uruguay "a model in so many ways" and asked why the U.S. is not investing more, or pursuing its own trade agenda there.

Given all of this interest, I traveled to Montevideo in November hoping to answer the questions: What can we learn from Uruguay? What are the secrets to its relative success? Over the course of a week, I interviewed leading politicians, analysts, business leaders and everyday people in an effort to understand Uruguay's strengths and weaknesses, and how other countries in the Americas, including the United States, might learn from them. I attended a political

rally; I walked the capital's riverside *rambla*; I ate a *chivito*, the unofficial national dish consisting of a steak topped with ham, bacon, cheese and a fried egg. OK, I ate two of them.

Yet despite such delights, one of the more obvious conclusions of my visit was this: Uruguay is definitely *not* a paradise. It is a country that arguably had its best moment more than a century ago, when farm exports briefly made it, with Argentina, one of the world's 10 richest countries. In intervening years, there have been long periods when the economy barely grew at all, and today economists say it performs well below its potential, with an average annual growth rate of just 1% in the five years prior to the pandemic. Montevideo can seem like a grayer, much less dynamic version of Buenos Aires; even in well-off neighborhoods, almost everything could use a fresh coat of paint. Today's Uruguay is struggling with a genuinely frightening crime wave, including a homicide rate almost double that of Argentina or Chile, driven in part by expansion of criminal gangs from elsewhere in the region. Only about 40% of students finish high school, one of the lowest rates in Latin America, although test scores are high by regional standards. While I was there, a corruption scandal erupted involving Lacalle Pou's administration, challenging the country's carefully cultivated reputation for clean government.

Similarly, it is reasonable to ask to what extent Uruguay's success really is replicable elsewhere in Latin America. Many Brazilians and Argentines roll their eyes, contending that Uruguay's small population of about 3.4 million people makes it much easier to govern. (This ignores the fact that, say, Honduras and El Salvador are also small.) Others say Uruguay's history of European immigration has made it a "homogenous," and therefore prosperous place. (This is demonstrably false, and also racist, but I've heard it a lot.) Still others whisper Uruguay may have some merits, but has benefited above all from the mistakes of Argentina and Brazil, consistent with its history as a buffer state subject to the cycles of its much larger neighbors.

But it's also true that Uruguay's story is more ... well, relatable ... than many people assume. Today's

“If people think Uruguay was always like this, they’re wrong.”

— former President Julio María Sanguinetti

thriving democracy was a dictatorship as recently as 1985, plagued by the same divisions and human rights abuses seen elsewhere on the continent. That enviable 7% poverty rate? Just 20 years ago, it reached 40%, amid an economic crisis so severe that Uruguay was exporting skilled workers by the thousands, not receiving them. Even the political bonhomie on display at Lula’s inauguration took work to build, and is always in danger of fading, said Sanguinetti, one of the two former presidents who inspired such admiration.

“Oh, if people think Uruguay was always like this, they’re wrong,” Sanguinetti, age 87, told me with a laugh. “Nothing is easy. I’m sure there are lessons we can humbly offer others.”

There are indeed many. But based on my travels and research, I would highlight four takeaways that help explain Uruguay’s imperfect success story:

1 A social safety net strengthens democracy—and capitalism too

MUJICA, THE OTHER FORMER PRESIDENT who traveled to Lula’s inauguration, earned a global following in the 2010s as a kind of oracle of anti-materialism, continuing to drive his 1987 Volkswagen Beetle to and from his humble farm outside Montevideo every day while in office, instead of living in the presidential palace, and also donating 90% of his salary to charity. And while Mujica was never as universally popular at home as he was abroad, one of his most famous sayings does indubitably capture the Uruguayan ethos: *Nadie es más que nadie*, or, roughly translated, “No one is better than anyone else.”

That egalitarian philosophy stands out in Latin America, where the world’s biggest gap between rich

and poor has fueled countless social conflicts over the years. And while it remains more an ideal than a reality, it has underpinned what by some measures is the region’s oldest and most generous welfare state. Today, around 90% of Uruguay’s population over 65 is covered by the pension system, among the highest rates in the region. The state provides unemployment insurance, cash transfers to low-income families, resources for care of children and the elderly, and a public health care system.

Paying for all this isn’t cheap, of course. Uruguay collects about 27% of its GDP in taxes, above the Latin American average (22%), although less than Brazil (32%) and Argentina (29%) and well below the average of the OECD (34%), a club of mostly developed European countries. Overall, the government plays a large role in Uruguay’s economy: State-run companies dominate the oil sector, mortgage lending and even internet data transmission. About one in five workers is employed by the public sector, according to the World Bank.

Javier de Haedo, an economist with ties to Uruguay’s center-right, said the economy has been weighed down by a long-term cycle of rising social demands, tax increases and periodic restructurings of the debt. “That’s the history of Uruguay,” he told me. “The only solution is to grow more.” Lacalle Pou, the current president, arrived in office with an agenda of business-friendly reforms following 15 consecutive years of rule by the leftist Frente Amplio, or Broad Front. But in a stroke of fate, Lacalle Pou was inaugurated on March 1, 2020, 12 days before the first COVID-19 case appeared in Uruguay. He has spent much of his term managing the pandemic instead of passing legislation.

But even Lacalle Pou and his allies are focused



more on adjustments to the existing system — raising the minimum age for pensions, for example — than tearing it down entirely. In Uruguay, you hear very little of the heated rhetoric about socialism or neoliberalism that dominates politics elsewhere in Latin America. “It almost doesn’t matter who’s in power; there’s a kind of social democratic consensus that doesn’t fundamentally change,” said Nicolás Saldías, a Uruguayan-born analyst for Latin America at the Economist Intelligence Unit. “What you hear are debates over tax rates, more than the tax itself.” De Haedo, the critical economist, recognized there have been “spectacular examples” of good administration by the public sector.

The Uruguayan model may not be for everybody. But in an era when demands for greater social rights and services have swept Latin America, leading to violent protests and severe instability in countries like Chile, Ecuador, Peru and elsewhere, it is hard not to notice that Uruguay is ... pretty quiet. Even in the aftermath of the pandemic, Uruguayans generally felt their basic needs were being met. In a poll published in May 2022 by the United Nations, 37% of Uruguayans said their socioeconomic situation was good, 48% called it neither good nor bad, and only 14% called it bad. Given the relative satisfaction with the status quo, it seems no accident that Uruguay has never elected a true populist on the ideological left or right, while the fundamental pillars of a stable, market-based economy are also widely accepted.

I spoke to a group of young activists from Lacalle Pou’s right-of-center National Party, and they, too, seemed to appreciate the balance. “People in Uruguay feel protected,” said María Ángela Rosario, 27. “I don’t know anyone who wants to fundamentally change that.”

2 Slow and steady wins the race

TO DO SOMETHING *a la uruguayaya* means to do it slowly, gradually, deliberately. It is a celebrated aspect of local culture — as Uruguayan as drinking mate tea, or watching the sun set over the River Plate (both



Montevideo’s famous Pocitos beach, seen in the background from the city’s Kibon neighborhood.

**To do something *a la uruguaya*
means to do it slowly, gradually,
deliberately. It is a celebrated
aspect of local culture.**





of which, not coincidentally, should be done *a la uruguaya*.)

And, like so many other things here, it can be a double-edged sword.

When new legislation is proposed, politicians say it is usually debated, and debated — and then debated some more. The most important changes often happen through popular plebiscites or referendums, which can take years to organize, and have been used since the 1990s to vote on privatization of public services, amnesty laws, anti-crime policies, water rights and more. By the time the change takes effect, sometimes the world has moved on. “I have seen Uruguay miss out on so many opportunities because we couldn’t act on time,” a lawyer who works with international investors told me, citing deep-water ports, data centers and more.

Indeed, even in Montevideo, the pace of everything — commerce, politics and daily life — can come as a bit of an adjustment to those more accustomed to Buenos Aires, Lima or Mexico City. One morning, I committed a journalist’s cardinal sin: I ran out of space in my notebook. It was 11:30 am on a Wednesday, and I was in the heart of downtown. I found a paper store two blocks away; the keys were in the front door, which I slowly opened, and stood waiting for a few minutes until an older man, mate in hand, appeared in the back of the store. “¡Buen día!” he said cheerily. “We don’t open until, I don’t know, 12:45 or 1. Try across the street.” So I did: “Ah, I’m out of notebooks,” the salesman there said. “Come back Monday or Tuesday. Or you could try across the street.” I finally gave up, and borrowed one from a Uruguayan journalist. Other expats shared similar stories of a country that rarely seems to be in a hurry. A friend from São Paulo told me: “Every day, I want to scream.”

But taking a deliberate approach to life has its advantages, especially in politics. A reform may take a long time to pass — but once it does, it is considered legitimate and settled, and people generally move on. “We have a political culture of making decisions, and then accepting them,” Yamandú Orsi, the mayor of Canelones, a city north of Montevideo, and a possible

presidential candidate in the 2024 election, told me. “What may look slow from the outside is often a democratic search for dialogue and consensus.”

As a result, Uruguay has little of the scorched earth politics seen elsewhere in Latin America, as well as in the United States and Europe, in which governments enter office determined to undo the achievements of their predecessors. This stability has given certainty to investors — a sense of long-term direction usually lacking in the rest of the region. “Boring is good. God, I wish Argentina and Brazil were this boring,” one investor told me. As with so much else in Uruguay, I was left wondering if it was possible to separate the positive from the negative.

3 Institutions matter, especially when they’re accessible to the public

WHILE I WAS IN THE COUNTRY, a major scandal — by Uruguayan standards, anyway — was raging over a scheme in which government officials allegedly sold dozens, and perhaps hundreds, of fake passports to foreigners, including Russians fleeing their country after the invasion of Ukraine. As prosecutors dug into the case, they also found signs that Lacalle Pou’s presidential bodyguard tried to sell software that could be used to track opposition senators. (The president, his bodyguard and other officials denied wrongdoing.)

Through it all, prosecutors did their work normally, without political interference, as is the Uruguayan way. “The strong sense of a republic makes it so the average Uruguayan understands that none of the branches of government can step on the other. Above all, the judicial system is a safeguard,” said Agustín Mayer, a lawyer for the Ferrere law firm. And while the scandal was clearly embarrassing and a blow to the country’s reputation, some saw an opportunity to further strengthen Uruguay’s democracy. “What I see is society debating this, processing it, trying to understand what happened,” said Adolfo Garcé, a political analyst. “That is what we do. This is a democracy with a tremendous ability to learn.”

One thing that sets Uruguay’s institutions apart is

Even the region's success stories can fall apart quickly, with little warning.

how open they are, and integrated into society. Almost everyone seems to be part of *something*; a political party, a union, a neighborhood club, that in turn has ties, or at least some connectivity, to the state. “Active social movements have been the motor of Uruguayan politics and democracy,” Carolina Cosse, the mayor of Montevideo and another possible presidential hopeful, told me. She said virtually “all” social policy reforms of recent years began at the grassroots level, pointing to universal health care, marriage equality and a new university in the country’s interior as causes that politicians then adopted as their own.

All this mixing of regular people and elected officials also demystifies politics a bit — and here, OK, the country’s size may indeed play a role. Four different people showed me selfies with President Lacalle Pou, taken at ice cream shops and restaurants and on the street. This may also contribute to Uruguay’s culture of transparency. “If a politician buys an expensive new car, everybody knows it. We live next to each other, we see each other at the grocery store,” said Martín Aguirre, editor of the newspaper *El País*. As if to prove his point, as we left our lunch (*chivito*, naturally), we bumped into his aunt. They chatted for 15 minutes; as we left, he smiled and shrugged. “Small country!”

4 Civility is difficult, but worth it

IT WOULD BE TEMPTING to conclude that the emphasis on civility in Uruguayan politics is also a by-product of people living side by side. But it was not always so — especially in the 1960s and 1970s, when Uruguay fell into the same spiral of guerrilla violence

and brutal repression that plagued much of the region. In our conversation, Sanguinetti told me he and Mujica used to be “not just adversaries, but enemies,” noting that Mujica was a leader of the Tupamaro rebel group that didn’t fully rejoin mainstream political life until the 1980s.

Healing those divisions took time and effort. Mujica, who spent 13 years in jail, has spoken movingly over the years about his own journey. “I have my long list of defects, I’m a passionate person, but for decades now in my garden I don’t cultivate hatred,” Mujica said upon retiring from day-to-day politics in 2020. “I learned a tough lesson that life imposed on me, which is that hatred makes one stupid, because it makes us lose objectivity when faced with things.”

Such sentiments seem to have trickled down into society as a whole. But many Uruguayans voiced a sense that these traditions are under stress — because of social media, and the pressures sweeping the rest of Latin America in the wake of the pandemic. Some noted with concern the fourth-place finish in the 2019 election of a party with populist leanings. Chile is an example of how even the region’s most vaunted success stories can fall apart quickly, with little warning.

And that’s why Sanguinetti and Mujica, even at the age of 87, continue to make a showcase of their relationship, even writing a recent book together. “We still disagree about many things, fundamental things,” Sanguinetti said. “But well, these old guys are trying to show the new generations that you can disagree, without losing civility.”

“I think others can do this too,” he added. “There’s nothing special about Uruguay.” AQ

Winter is the editor-in-chief of Americas Quarterly



WHAT URUGUAY CAN TEACH US

Uruguay in Numbers

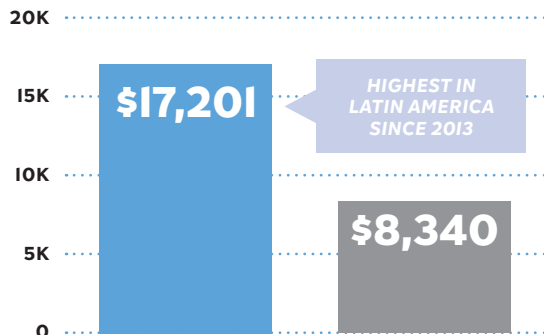
The country's reputation for political and economic stability in recent decades is backed up by its high GDP per capita, low poverty rate and consistent support for democracy compared with the rest of Latin America. AQ tracked key indicators and facts about governance, the economy and society in Uruguay.

by Khalea Robertson and Emilie Sweigart

Economy

GDP per capita

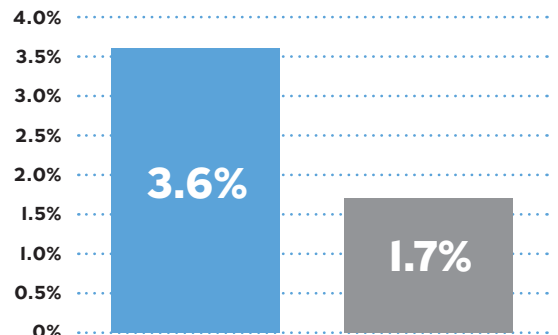
■ URUGUAY ■ LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN AVG.



SOURCE: WORLD BANK (2021)

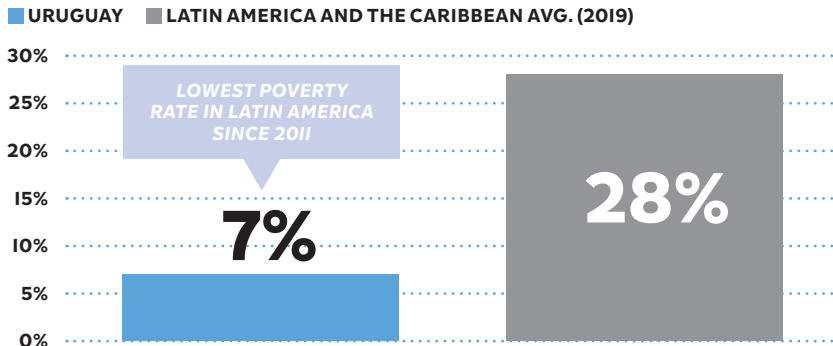
Projected GDP growth in 2023

■ URUGUAY ■ LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN AVG.



SOURCE: IMF (OCTOBER 2022)

% of population living on \$6.85 or below a day



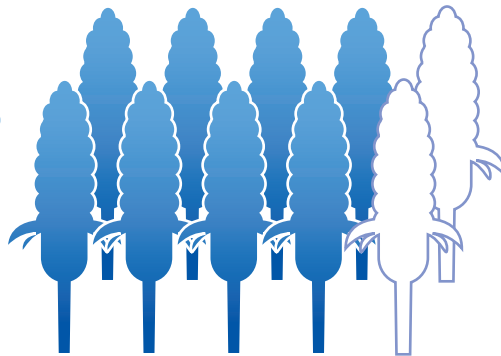
SOURCE: WORLD BANK (2020)
NOTE: THE \$6.85 POVERTY LINE IS USED FOR UPPER-MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES LIKE URUGUAY.

SHARE OF LAND AREA USED FOR AGRICULTURE

80.4%

HIGHEST PERCENTAGE of land used for agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean

SOURCE: WORLD BANK (2020)



FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT INFLOWS IN 2021

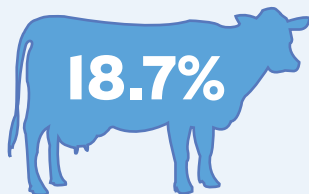
\$1.4 BILLION

(3% OF GDP)

SOURCE: URUGUAY XXI (2022)

MAIN EXPORTS JAN-SEP 2022

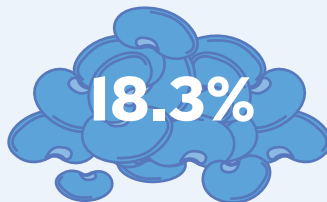
BEEF



18.7%

(\$2.02 BILLION)

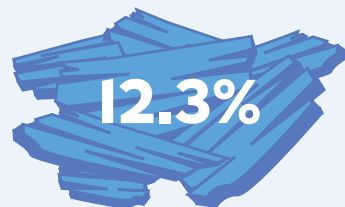
SOYBEANS



18.3%

(\$1.97 BILLION)

WOOD PULP



12.3%

(\$1.32 BILLION)

SOURCE: URUGUAY XXI (2022)



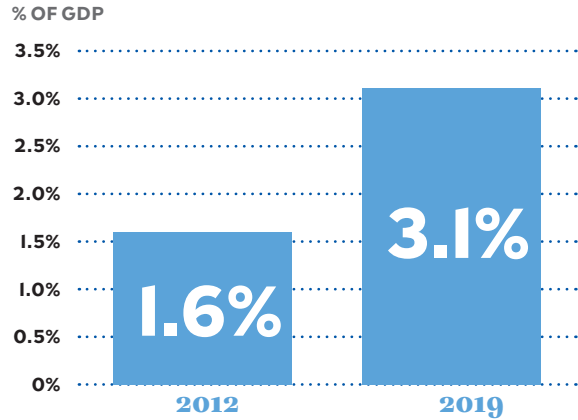
Tech Industry



In 2012, the value of the ICT sector's production was \$824 million or 1.6% of GDP; in 2019, it was \$1.9 billion or 3.1% of GDP.

SOURCE: URUGUAY XXI (2021), CHAMBER OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

ICT sector's production value



SOURCE: URUGUAY XXI (2021), CHAMBER OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

Governance

CAPACITY TO COMBAT CORRUPTION INDEX RANKING

#1
OUT OF 15
LATIN AMERICAN
COUNTRIES

Uruguay has been the **TOP PERFORMER** in the Index since 2020.

SOURCE: CCC INDEX (2022)

WORLD JUSTICE PROJECT RULE OF LAW INDEX RANKING

#25
OUT OF
140 COUNTRIES

Uruguay has the **HIGHEST SCORE** of any Latin American country.

SOURCE: WJP RULE OF LAW INDEX (2022)

E-GOVERNMENT RANKING

#1
IN LATIN AMERICA

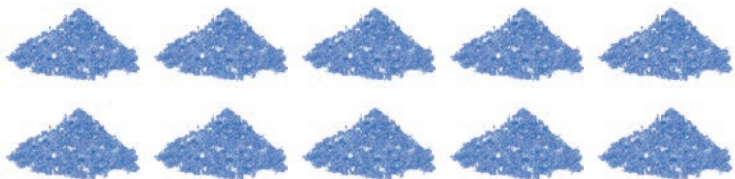
Uruguay ranks at the **TOP** of an index assessing the public sector's provision of online services, telecommunications infrastructure and quality of human capital.

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS (2022)

FUN FACT

URUGUAYANS' ANNUAL PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION OF MATE

WORLD'S HIGHEST mate consumption per capita

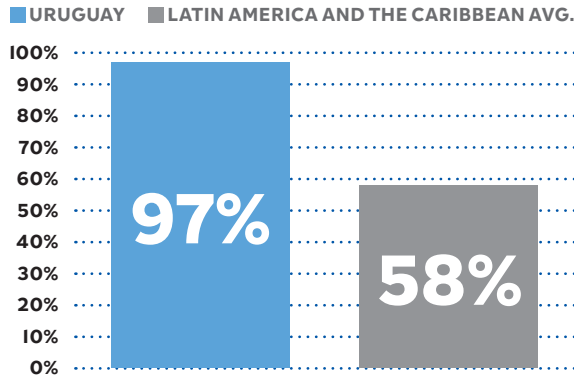


SOURCE: ID RETAIL (2019)



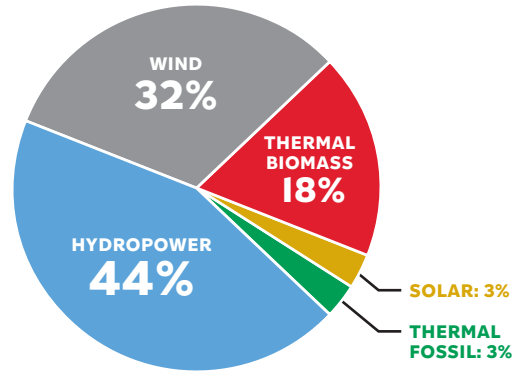
Climate

Electricity supply generated by renewable energy



SOURCES: URUGUAYAN MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, ENERGY AND MINING (2022) AND INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (2021)

Uruguay's renewable energy sources



SOURCE: URUGUAYAN MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, ENERGY AND MINING (2022)

Society



3RD-HIGHEST in South America, behind Chile and Argentina

SHARE OF URUGUAYANS WHO SAY DEMOCRACY IS PREFERABLE TO ANY OTHER KIND OF GOVERNMENT

74%

LATIN AMERICAN AVERAGE **49%**

Uruguay has had among the highest levels of **SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY** in the region over the past 25 years.

SOURCE: LATINOBARÓMETRO (2020)

HOMICIDE RATE (PER 100,000 PEOPLE)



Uruguay's homicide rate for 2021 was **HIGHER** than in Paraguay, Nicaragua, Peru and Chile.

SOURCE: INSIGHT CRIME (2021)

FUN FACTS



Uruguay was the first host and **FIRST WINNER OF THE FIFA WORLD CUP** in 1930, and won the title again in 1950.

Uruguay is tied with Argentina as the most successful team at the **COPA AMÉRICA**, with 15 titles each.





WHAT URUGUAY CAN TEACH US

Why Uruguay Matters – a Lot – for Global Trade

The nation is looking beyond Mercosur to China and the rest of the Pacific. Washington and others should get on board.

by Eric Farnsworth

T**RADE IS THE LIFEblood** of Uruguay's economy, and the administration of Luis Lacalle Pou is doing virtually everything within reason to position itself effectively and creatively, given regional and global realities. Nestled between South America's two largest countries, Montevideo has relied on an outward-facing strategy to compensate for its tiny internal market, first through the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), which includes Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. Uruguay also maintains strong traditional links with Europe, and trade with the United States, especially in services, is growing. Trade with China, from a baseline of essentially nothing 20 years ago, is booming, and Beijing is hungry for more.

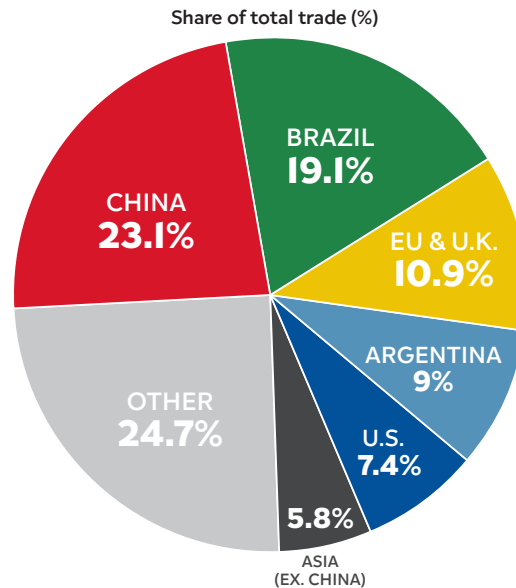
The good news is that Uruguay is less complicated politically or economically than its immediate neighbors. As a result, despite its own small size, it is often considered a preferred investment destination for those who seek access to Mercosur's giant internal markets without



Uruguay's President Luis Lacalle Pou, left, greets Argentina's President Alberto Fernández at Mercosur headquarters in Montevideo on December 6, 2022.

Uruguay's top trade partners in 2021

Unlike in most of the region, the U.S. does not compete with China as Uruguay's most important commercial relationship.



Source: Uruguay National Institute of Statistics

the drama that often attends to larger neighbors, although labor costs and steep rules of origin requirements have reduced its attractiveness. Politics also occasionally intervenes to disrupt the internal Mercosur trade flows on which the country relies, a reality that the recent bilateral trade agreement between Uruguay and Brazil is designed, in part, to counteract.

Recognizing that membership in Mercosur restricts the potential for a broader strategy of trade-led economic growth, Uruguay has lately been exploring opportunities farther afield. Individual trade expansion initiatives are dissuaded without the consent of all parties to the agreement, limiting Uruguay's ability to strike preferential deals, although Montevideo maintains it is legally entitled to do so. Agreements negotiated as a bloc, as Mercosur has sought to do with the European Union since the beginning of this century, depend on factors out of Montevideo's control, such as Amazon deforestation and French and Irish fears about Brazilian and Argentine agriculture.

The election of Jair Bolsonaro as president of Brazil provided Lacalle Pou with an opening to explore a new approach. Downplaying the importance of Mercosur to Brazilian development — an agreement that a previous leader once called Brazil's "destiny" — Bolsonaro sought closer trade relations with the United States and got them, sort of, at the end of the Trump administration. By pursuing such an agenda outside the confines of Mercosur, Brasília tacitly acquiesced to others for similar initiatives.

Betting on Asia

MONTEVIDEO HAS NOW made clear its own desire for a freer trade arrangement with the United States. Unfortunately, Washington has so far ignored Uruguayan entreaties, slow-walking bilateral investment discussions and refusing to discuss the possibility of a more substantial relationship, despite Uruguay's unimpeach-

A Political Example


People want to feel secure, and Uruguay has been leading the way all along.

by Susan Segal

URUGUAY HAS LED LATIN AMERICA in the development of a strong social safety net. While there is much discussion about affordability and the need for reform, the country's welfare system has been a bedrock of its society. It is characterized by a strong universal primary education system, widespread health coverage, as well as a robust social security system.

This has provided stability and social justice. It has dramatically reduced poverty, provided opportunity for its citizens and has also supported political stability. Unlike in many other countries, its existence is not a lightning rod for the right or left. And interestingly, markets seem to evaluate the country the way they look at many social democratic governments in Europe or other parts of the world. This is quite unique: Leaders of Latin American countries responding to demands for strong social safety nets, more and better education and healthcare are often defined, although not exclusively, as left-leaning governments.

At the same time, the country has encouraged entrepreneurship and the creation of new companies, and has attracted business leaders and entrepreneurs from across the region to relocate to Uruguay. There are multiple reasons for this, among them the business environment and strong commitment to the rule of law. While waiting to meet the Minister of Industry, I was entertained by a loop video describing Uruguay's first unicorn. This is a clear sign that there is no backlash for success — rather, Uruguay is proud of its entrepreneurs and unicorns.

So, what is the lesson? There are many, but one of the most important is that people want to feel secure. They want good education, healthcare and a pension that provides dignity. And when a population feels good, it is easier to believe in government and in the rule of law. And guess what? It also makes the political discussion much more civil and issue-based, an impressive role model for other countries to follow. 



Susan Segal is the CEO of Americas Society/Council of the Americas

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CENTRAL AMERICA

2023 ELECTIONS

A closer look at the leading candidates in this year's presidential races

Paraguay APR. 30

SINGLE-ROUND ELECTION



Efraín Alegre



Payo Cubas



Santiago Peña

Argentina OCT. 22

SECOND ROUND (IF NEEDED) NOV. 19



Patricia Bullrich



Alberto Fernández



Horacio Rodríguez Larreta



Mauricio Macri



Sergio Massa



Javier Milei



Gerardo Morales

Guatemala JUN. 25

SECOND ROUND (IF NEEDED) AUG. 27



Roberto Arzú



Thelma Cabrera

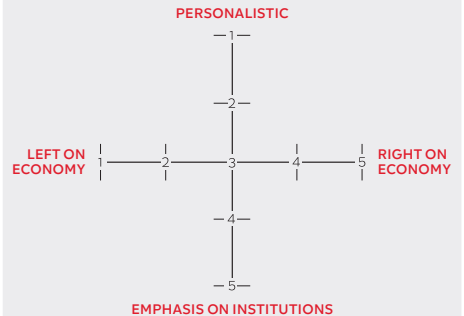


Zury Ríos



Sandra Torres

IDEOLOGY AQ asked a dozen nonpartisan experts on Paraguay, Guatemala and Argentina to help us identify where each candidate stands on two spectrums: left versus right on economic matters, and a more personalistic leadership style versus an emphasis on institutions. We've published the average response, with a caveat: Platforms evolve, and so do candidates.



PARAGUAY: SURVEY INCLUDES CANDIDATES LEADING SEPTEMBER POLLING FROM FASAC CONSULTORES.

GUATEMALA: SURVEY INCLUDES CANDIDATES LEADING DECEMBER POLLING FROM CID GALLUP.

ARGENTINA: SURVEY INCLUDES CANDIDATES LEADING NOVEMBER POLLING FROM ZUBAN CÓRDOBA, PLUS THE INCUMBENT.

PHOTOS: PARAGUAY: TWITTER/EFRINALEGRE; CUBAS: ABC.COM.PY; PEÑA: WIKIMEDIA; GUATEMALA: TWITTER/ROBERTOARZUT; CABRERA: HOYLOSANGELES.COM/EFE; RÍOS, TORRES: GETTY; ARGENTINA: WIKIPEDIA (6); TWITTER/GERARDO MORALES



Efraín Alegre 60

PARTIDO LIBERAL
RADICAL AUTÉNTICO (PLRA)

PARTY PRESIDENT



"We run the risk of a 'Mexicanization' of politics, the consolidation of a mafia state that impedes normal development."

HOW HE GOT HERE

Alegre is president of the centrist PLRA and the candidate of the Concertación opposition coalition. He was a longtime legislator and then minister of public works and communication under President Fernando Lugo (2008-12), the only non-Colorado politician to hold the presidency since 1945. (Lugo was eventually impeached.) Alegre ran for president in the two previous elections.

WHY HE MIGHT WIN

Ongoing corruption scandals have shaken the Colorado Party. In the 2018 election, Alegre lost to current President Mario Abdo Benítez by less than 4% of the vote after running a campaign focused on the Colorado Party's alleged corruption. Sharp divisions within the Colorado Party may also lead some voters to defect to the opposition, as occurred in 2008 when Lugo was elected president. As Lugo's public works minister, Alegre oversaw large investments in infrastructure.

WHY HE MIGHT LOSE

The Colorado Party remains a dominant political machine, and not all opposition groups have joined the Concertación. Left-wing elements of the Guasú Front and other Concertación parties may eventually withdraw support for Alegre's largely centrist platform. The Concertación also includes supporters of expanded birth control, sex education and LGBTQ rights, which may attract attacks from the Colorado Party.

WHO SUPPORTS HIM

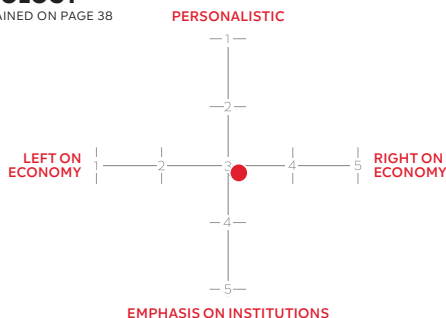
Alegre's party is the second-largest political force in the country and has support among both urban and rural voters. It has also built alliances with smaller parties, including with the Lugo-led Guasú Front, giving him strong support from some left-wing groups and grassroots social movements.

WHAT HE WOULD DO

Alegre is expected to push anti-corruption investigations into the Colorado Party and contraband trafficking rings. He may also expand the social safety net slightly but is unlikely to raise taxes. He has said that the country's fundamental ills are corruption-related rather than economic or social.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38



Paraguayo "Payo" Cubas 60

CRUZADA
NACIONAL

FORMER SENATOR



"Don't talk to me about human rights, don't say we can't apply the death penalty [for corruption]."

HOW HE GOT HERE

Cubas is a high-profile political and media personality known for provocative publicity stunts. A lawyer, he served one term in Congress from 1993 to 1998 as a member of the center-left Encuentro Nacional party. In 2018, he was elected to the Senate as a member of the center-right Cruzada Nacional party but was suspended for outbursts and physical altercations with Senate colleagues. He was expelled in 2019 after a confrontation with police.

WHY HE MIGHT WIN

Cubas is running for president after seeking to be vice president on Efraín Alegre's ticket. He is a classic outsider candidate at a time when outsiders have done well elsewhere in Latin America. He has high name recognition and is accustomed to the national spotlight. Cubas is expected to pull more votes from the Colorado voter base than from that of the Concertación alliance, which he has left.

WHY HE MIGHT LOSE

With a small party that lacks infrastructure, he cannot match the organizing power of the Colorado Party or the Concertación coalition and is generally considered a potential spoiler candidate. He is a controversial figure known for provocative acts like throwing water at a Senate colleague and defecating in a judge's office.

WHO SUPPORTS HIM

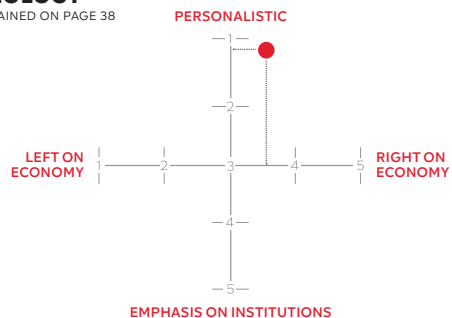
Cubas draws much of his support from anti-system voters who express frustration with traditional party politics they view as clientelist. Certain elements of the Colorado Party base may vote for Cubas, seeing him as a strong, confrontational leader who has not been implicated in the high-profile corruption scandals of the past decade.

WHAT HE WOULD DO

Cubas has said he would aggressively prosecute corrupt officials, reduce taxes and shrink the government. He supports the death penalty for corruption charges and would also focus on reforms to weaken the traditional party system and engineer a more powerful presidency.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38



PARAGUAY



Santiago “Santi” Peña 44

PARTIDO
COLORADO

FORMER FINANCE MINISTER



“We believe that the best social policy is job creation.”

HOW HE GOT HERE

Peña is a former IMF economist and central banker. He ran in the center-right Colorado Party primary with the Honor Colorado faction of former President Horacio Cartes (2013–18), who is weathering corruption probes and denies wrongdoing. Peña was finance minister in the Cartes administration from 2015–17. He ran for president in 2018 but was narrowly defeated in the primary by current President Mario Abdo Benítez.

WHY HE MIGHT WIN

The Colorado Party has held the presidency for all but five of the past 77 years as the country’s largest and best organized political machine. Peña is seen as a successful economist and promises to uphold traditional family values to attract conservative Catholic and evangelical voters.

WHY HE MIGHT LOSE

Peña is a close ally of Cartes, the subject of various scandals involving alleged corruption. In July 2022, the U.S. designated Cartes as a participant in “significant corruption.” In October, a Paraguayan congressional investigation accused Cartes of being the “head of a broad network of cigarette smuggling and alleged money laundering.” Cartes denies the allegations.

WHO SUPPORTS HIM

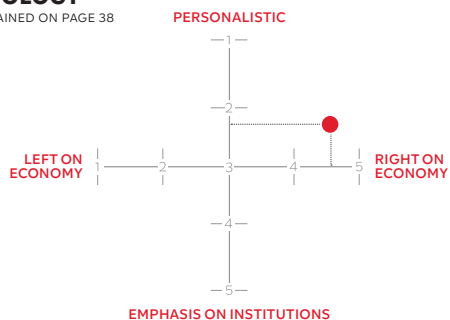
Peña’s base of support is the Colorado Party’s broad coalition of rural and urban voters who have seen the party deliver relative stability and incremental progress on poverty reduction since the 2000s. He is especially popular among more conservative and religious voters.

WHAT HE WOULD DO

Peña would likely push business-friendly policies that focus on attracting investment and continue the professionalization of the bureaucracy. He would also seek to reduce Paraguay’s debt, which ballooned in the wake of the pandemic, by raising revenue and cutting spending through public-private partnerships instead of raising taxes. He is likely to advance economic integration with the rest of South America.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38



GUATEMALA



Roberto Arzú 52

PARTIDO
PODEMOS

ENTREPRENEUR



“I am ready to make Guatemala great.”

HOW HE GOT HERE

Arzú is the son of Álvaro Arzú Irigoyen, the former president (1996–2000) and five-term mayor of Guatemala City (1986–90 and 2004–18). He ran for president in 2019 using the Trump-inspired slogan “Let’s Make Guatemala Great,” finishing fifth. He is an entrepreneur whose business interests have ranged from pharmaceuticals to restaurants and soccer fields. He also ran the popular soccer club Comunicaciones FC from 1994–2006.

WHY HE MIGHT WIN

Arzú has high name recognition and deep roots in Guatemala City’s political circles. His campaign platform includes promises to cut families’ electric bills and boost education subsidies. Despite his own background, he has adopted an anti-elitist rhetoric, placing blame for the country’s ills on major private sector groups that are increasingly unpopular.

WHY HE MIGHT LOSE

Arzú’s formal political experience is limited to his temporary appointment in 2017 as an “honorary” business ambassador to South America. He is polling behind fellow conservative Zury Ríos, who is widely expected to outperform other right-leaning candidates. Arzú has been more outspoken than Ríos in his opposition to the popular, defunct C1C1G anti-corruption commission.

WHO SUPPORTS HIM

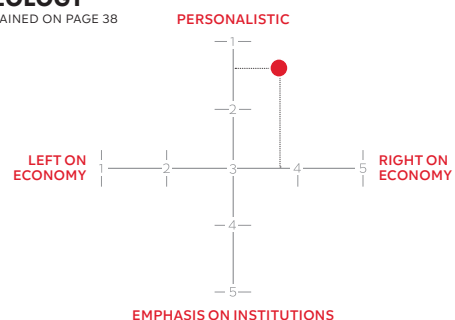
He is popular in Guatemala City and has made political alliances with supporters of former President Alfonso Portillo (2000–04) — including his running mate, a former Portillo lawyer — to shore up his base in rural areas and eastern departments.

WHAT HE WOULD DO

Arzú says his administration would pay for all household electricity for ten years, lower the price of medicines and introduce major education subsidies. He would put the army on the streets, militarize prisons and use the death penalty to combat crime and gang violence.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38





Thelma Cabrera 52

MOVIMIENTO PARA LA LIBERACIÓN DE LOS PUEBLOS (MLP)

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZER



"I'm daring to break the silence as a [Maya] Mam woman."

HOW SHE GOT HERE

Cabrera has been an organizer with *campesino* groups for 30 years. She grew up in a poor rural family living on a coffee plantation and has worked primarily with the Comité de Desarrollo Campesino (CODECA), a national grassroots group known for confrontational demonstrations and denunciations of corruption and racial discrimination. Cabrera first ran for president in 2019.

WHY SHE MIGHT WIN

Cabrera is an outsider candidate at a time when the country's political class is very unpopular. In her first run in 2019, Cabrera received 10% of the vote, finishing in fourth place in the first round. This was a surprisingly strong showing for the MLP, at the time a new political party, especially considering that Alejandro Giammattei, the eventual winner, advanced to the runoff with just 14% of the first-round vote.

WHY SHE MIGHT LOSE

Guatemalan politics is dominated by a conservative political culture oriented around Guatemala City. Cabrera does well in rural areas where the MLP is strongest, but is less popular in urban areas. CODECA's protests frequently block roads and often generate negative coverage from traditional media.

WHO SUPPORTS HER

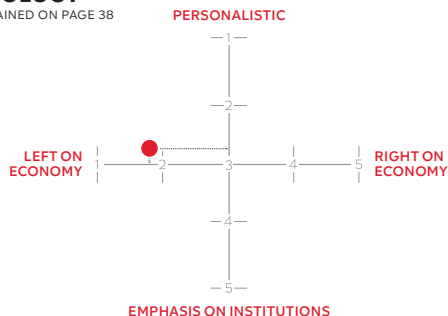
Cabrera has strong support in rural areas, especially among the Indigenous communities that account for an estimated 40%-60% of the country's population. She draws on the base that CODECA has built through 30 years of organizing around issues like access to land and electricity in these communities, which have some of the highest rates of poverty and malnutrition in the hemisphere.

WHAT SHE WOULD DO

Cabrera has called for a popular assembly to draft a new constitution to make Guatemala a plurinational state that guarantees cultural rights as well as access to land, water and housing. She also favors the nationalization of sectors like energy distribution.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38



Zury Ríos 55

PARTIDO VALOR

FORMER MEMBER OF CONGRESS



"In Guatemala, [gangs] kill 20 people per day. El Salvador has learned how to stop this."

HOW SHE GOT HERE

Ríos spent 17 years in Congress from 1995-2012. She ran for president in 2015, finishing third, and was a leading candidate in 2019 until she was disqualified due to a constitutional prohibition, since rescinded in her case, on relatives of coup leaders running for office. Her father, the deceased General Efraín Ríos Montt, seized power in a coup in 1982 and in 2013 was convicted of ordering acts of genocide as president. (The conviction was later overturned.)

WHY SHE MIGHT WIN

Ríos is a prominent opponent of President Alejandro Giammattei, who is very unpopular, with approval ratings below 30%. Since leaving Congress, she has steered clear of politics between presidential campaigns, allowing her to position herself as an outsider. In Congress, she staked out relatively progressive positions on discrimination against women and people with HIV, but she is now emphasizing her evangelical faith and vowing to uphold conservative Christian values.

WHY SHE MIGHT LOSE

Ríos' Valor Party is relatively small and she has always expressed support for her father, a polarizing figure. She also condemned the CICIG anti-corruption organization before it was decommissioned in 2019.

WHO SUPPORTS HER

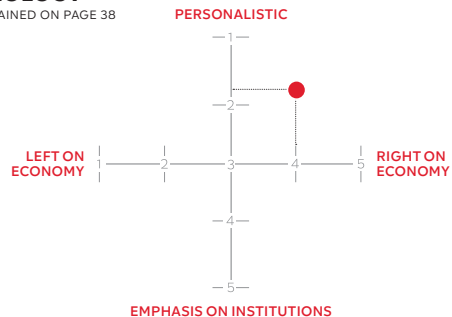
Ríos is popular among evangelicals, conservative opponents of the current president and those who approve of Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele's security strategy, of which Ríos has spoken admiringly.

WHAT SHE WOULD DO

Ríos would likely employ an especially aggressive security strategy against gangs, as well as organizations involved in land conflicts and disruptive demonstrations. She would likely also push policies supportive of conservative evangelical positions on issues like abortion.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38



GUATEMALA



Sandra Torres 67

UNIDAD NACIONAL DE LA ESPERANZA (UNE)

PARTY SECRETARY-GENERAL AND FORMER FIRST LADY



"Malnutrition is a tragedy for our country ... and one of the emergencies any administration should focus on."

HOW SHE GOT HERE

Torres founded the UNE party in 2002 and ran for president in 2015 and 2019, when she won the most votes in the first round but lost in the second. From 2008–11 she was first lady alongside President Álvaro Colom, a center-left president who oversaw the formation of the CICIG anti-corruption commission in Guatemala but who himself weathered multiple corruption investigations.

WHY SHE MIGHT WIN

As first lady, Torres helped create popular social programs. She is at the head of the country's largest and best organized political party and has high name recognition. She has recently tacked to the right, especially on culture war issues such as abortion.

WHY SHE MIGHT LOSE

Torres is a political insider at a time when Guatemala's political class is very unpopular. Her party has been the target of several recent corruption investigations. She is also viewed as close to President Giammattei, who is himself embroiled in various corruption scandals. (Both deny wrongdoing.)

WHO SUPPORTS HER

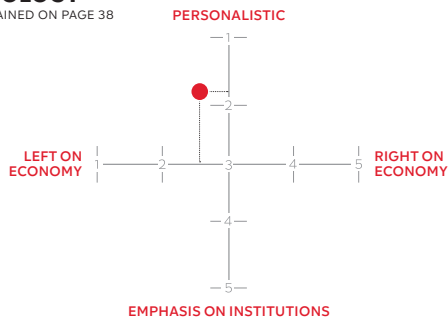
Torres is popular with many local governments and communities that have benefited from aligning themselves with the UNE political machine and from the social programs she continues to promote, including a free food distribution system.

WHAT SHE WOULD DO

Torres would likely modestly expand Guatemala's social safety net and boost budgets for municipal governments to tackle issues like malnutrition. She is seen as unlikely to crack down aggressively on alleged corruption in the party system.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38



ARGENTINA



Patricia Bullrich 66

PROPUESTA REPUBLICANA (PRO)

FORMER SECURITY MINISTER



"I'm going to make profound changes in the country."

HOW SHE GOT HERE

Bullrich is known as one of the more conservative figures within the center-right/right PRO party, which she has led since 2020. She served for several years in the lower house of Congress and one year as minister of labor under Fernando de la Rúa in the early 2000s. She garnered a tough-on-crime reputation as minister of security in Mauricio Macri's administration (2015–19).

WHY SHE MIGHT WIN

In what is shaping up as an anti-status quo election, Bullrich is seen by many voters as sufficiently different, without being too radical. Her *mano dura* security policies have increased her popularity within the opposition Juntos por el Cambio coalition.

WHY SHE MIGHT LOSE

Her specific security policies, such as easing restrictions on the police's use of force, may prove too hard-line for some voters in a country with deeply negative memories of military rule. In November, she threatened to hit rival candidate Buenos Aires Mayor Horacio Rodríguez Larreta's chief of cabinet, prompting the PRO to announce a truce within the party.

WHO SUPPORTS HER

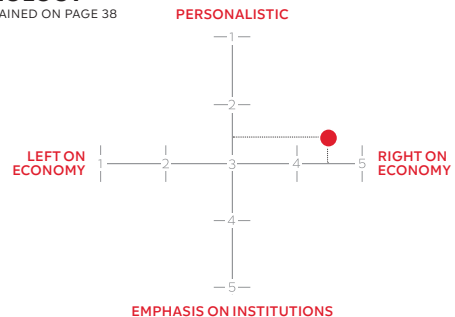
Bullrich's voters tend to be higher-income and older, and many hail from central Argentina. Some observers note that the emergence of libertarian Javier Milei has pushed Bullrich further to the right, which could increase her support among social conservatives.

WHAT SHE WOULD DO

Bullrich has said she would modify laws so that the armed forces can be involved in cases where "loss of territory" could occur, referring to drug trafficking in Rosario and conflict with Mapuche communities. She has proposed the simultaneous use of the peso and the U.S. dollar, and said she would reduce taxes and seek free trade agreements within the Mercosur framework.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38





Alberto Fernández 63

PARTIDO JUSTICIALISTA

PRESIDENT



“People are in need, and they need us to be united.”

HOW HE GOT HERE

Fernández struck a deal with Cristina Fernández de Kirchner to run together, but with him at the top of the presidential ticket, in 2019. It was an arrangement that allowed them to get elected, but has been a source of regular conflict ever since, as his vice president has been one of his fiercest critics.

WHY HE MIGHT WIN

Fernández is still perceived by some Argentines as a relatively moderate, well-intentioned face within Peronism. If a fragmented opposition sends a candidate through to the runoff who proves too radical for a majority of Argentine voters, Fernández could still win — especially if inflation falls before the election.

WHY HE MIGHT LOSE

Inflation nearing 100% and other persistent economic troubles have made Fernández so unpopular that some believe he won't even run for a second term. An Ipsos survey from August found that 91% of Argentines say their country is on the wrong track. The Peronists already suffered a major setback in the 2021 legislative elections.

WHO SUPPORTS HIM

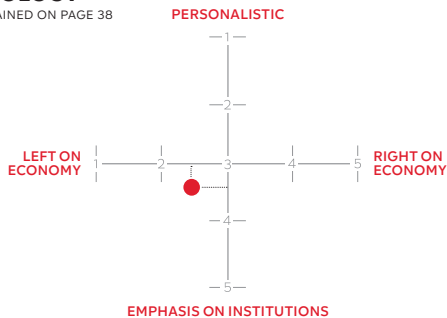
Traditional Peronist governors have backed him in the past, but today the president has little political support. Fernández benefits minimally from followers of *kirchnerismo*, but his own personal base is comparatively small.

WHAT HE WOULD DO

Fernández would prioritize taming inflation and developing shale extraction in Vaca Muerta to boost the economy. The incumbent would also welcome deeper ties with China and leftist leaders in South America. Fernández would continue promoting socially progressive policies, building on the passage of abortion legalization and policies guaranteeing rights for transgender people.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38



Horacio Rodríguez Larreta 57

PROPUESTA REPUBLICANA (PRO)

MAYOR OF BUENOS AIRES



“If Argentines want an extreme candidate, I will not be that candidate.”

HOW HE GOT HERE

An economist and Harvard Business School graduate, Larreta started working in government in the 1990s. Along with Mauricio Macri, he co-founded Compromiso para el Cambio (later renamed Propuesta Republicana) and was the party's campaign director through 2011. He continued working closely with Macri, serving as his chief of staff when Macri was mayor of Buenos Aires. Larreta was elected as mayor in 2015 and reelected in 2019.

WHY HE MIGHT WIN

A center-right, pro-business technocrat, Larreta received praise for his leadership during the pandemic and for large-scale infrastructure and transportation improvements in Buenos Aires. He is known as an effective manager who reaches across the aisle and has dialogue with some Peronists, a rare trait amid Argentina's deep *grieta*, or political divide. He has maintained relatively high approval ratings.

WHY HE MIGHT LOSE

Larreta is seen as a somewhat establishment face in what could turn into an anti-establishment election. He has moved toward the center throughout his career and is known as one of the doves within his party.

WHO SUPPORTS HIM

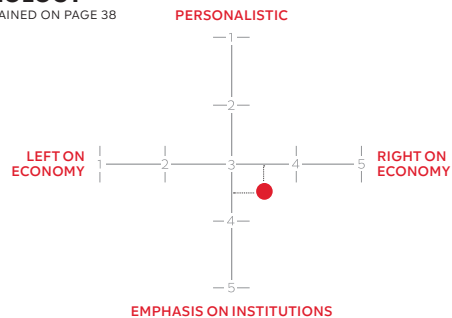
He appeals to centrist, pragmatic voters both in and outside of the center-right and right-wing Juntos por el Cambio coalition. Larreta's support base is strongest in Buenos Aires and other urban areas.

WHAT HE WOULD DO

Larreta has said that it's necessary to eliminate currency restrictions and implement a free-floating exchange rate. The mayor has also spoken about the need to address the climate change crisis and open Argentina up to the world.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38





Mauricio Macri 63

PROPUESTA
REPUBLICANA (PRO)

FORMER PRESIDENT



“Populism is over. Next year (2023) the opposition will govern.”

HOW HE GOT HERE

Macri was president from 2015-19. His first term was defined by “gradualism,” a policy of implementing spending cuts and other market-friendly measures at a relatively gradual pace, so as not to alienate voters. It didn’t produce the intended results. Argentina fell into financial crisis by the end of his term, and he lost his reelection bid to Alberto Fernández. Some say that Macri sees better political conditions for his agenda in 2023, given the depth of the current economic crisis — and therefore may be tempted to run again.

WHY HE MIGHT WIN

Polling indicates that Macri has a more positive image than when he left office. The ruling Peronist coalition is increasingly unpopular, which could favor the former president, who remains one of the leaders of the opposition Juntos por el Cambio coalition.

WHY HE MIGHT LOSE

Since he left the presidency, Macri has moved further to the right, which may alienate more centrist Argentines. Voters who remember the high inflation at the end of his term may be reluctant to cast their ballots for him.

WHO SUPPORTS HIM

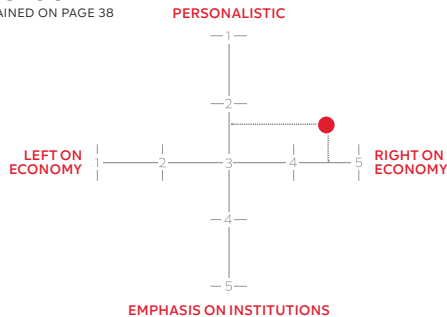
Macri’s voters tend to be older and upper- or upper-middle class. He has support from fiscal and social conservatives in the city of Buenos Aires as well as in Argentina’s central agricultural regions.

WHAT HE WOULD DO

While he had not declared his candidacy as we went to print, Macri has sometimes behaved as if he is on the campaign trail, touring the country and promoting his latest book, which hints at policies he might pursue. These are in line with the deregulation and privatization plans from his previous term and include drastically reducing public spending, cutting back on certain social programs and ending protectionist policies.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38



Sergio Massa 50

FRENTE
RENOVADOR

ECONOMY MINISTER



“Energy, proteins, minerals and especially human capital are key for Argentine development and are the pillars of our place in the world.”

HOW HE GOT HERE

Massa, a former lawyer, served as the mayor of the city of Tigre and as then-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s Cabinet chief. Still, like Alberto Fernández, he is seen as an independent voice within Peronism, and sometimes critical of *kirchnerismo*. He ran for president in 2015, against a Kirchner-sponsored candidate, finishing in third place. In July 2022, President Fernández named him economy minister in the hope that he would have the credibility to heal the economy. Massa had not confirmed his candidacy as of press time.

WHY HE MIGHT WIN

As the head of an economy ministry that was merged with the agriculture and production and development ministries, Massa’s portfolio includes Argentina’s relationship with the IMF, industrial policy and energy. If Massa is successful in this role, which some have compared to a “super-minister,” and if he significantly reduces inflation, he may garner enough support for a second presidential run.

WHY HE MIGHT LOSE

Expectations are high, and Massa faces an uphill climb to stabilize the economy and tame inflation. While those abroad, particularly in the U.S., have praised his management, he is less popular at home.

WHO SUPPORTS HIM

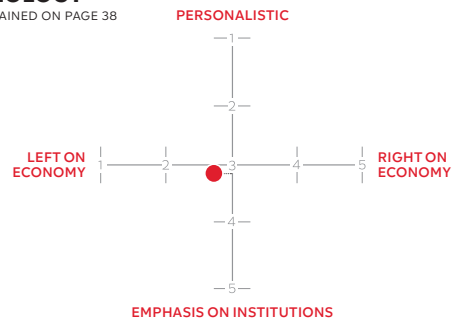
Massa has support from moderates within and outside of Peronism who favor more liberal economic policies. His voters, similar to those of Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, are concentrated in urban areas and favor their similar brand of pragmatic, technocratic leadership.

WHAT HE WOULD DO

As a more economically orthodox Peronist, Massa would maintain the program Argentina signed with the IMF in March 2022 as well as the good relationships he has established with some in the private sector. He may continue some of the limited austerity measures and selective price controls he has implemented as minister.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38





Javier Milei 52

LA LIBERTAD AVANZA

CONGRESSMAN



"(I'm called) politically incorrect because I'm against the thugs in the political caste, because I'm against their privileges."

HOW HE GOT HERE

Not a career politician, Milei played in a Rolling Stones cover band before studying economics, specializing in the Austrian school, and working in finance. He led his libertarian group, La Libertad Avanza, to a surprisingly strong showing in Buenos Aires in 2021, when he was elected a federal congressman.

WHY HE MIGHT WIN

The inability of both Mauricio Macri's center-right government and the current left-leaning Peronist government to solve Argentina's chronic economic problems has left many people disillusioned with both sides. That provides opportunity for an outsider who seems to have simple and forceful answers and is skilled at conveying his message via social media.

WHY HE MIGHT LOSE

With his opposition to abortion and focus on culture war issues like criticizing feminism, Milei may be too radical for most Argentine voters. He has met with criticism for his absences in Congress (one supposedly led to the passage of a new tax). The libertarian movement is itself divided and lacks a unified party structure. If Peronism and the main opposition each unify around a single, viable candidate, Milei may struggle.

WHO SUPPORTS HIM

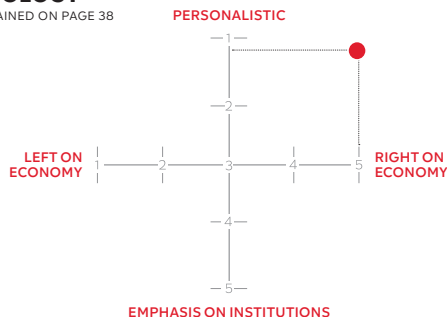
Milei's base of support is concentrated among young people, especially men, but it runs across social classes and includes lower-income sectors that might traditionally be expected to support Peronism. He has also attracted support from voters who are fed up with the political system.

WHAT HE WOULD DO

If elected, Milei says he would cut taxes, deregulate the labor market, shutter government ministries and reduce public spending by shrinking the state. Dogged opposition from the Peronist left and from social movements would likely raise obstacles to such an agenda.

IDEOLOGY

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 38



Gerardo Morales 63

UNIÓN CÍVICA RADICAL (UCR)

GOVERNOR OF JUJUY PROVINCE



"In some ways Buenos Aires inhabits a different country from what we feel and experience inland. The time has come for another outlook."

HOW HE GOT HERE

Morales has represented the northwestern province of Jujuy as a provincial deputy and as a national senator, and served as secretary for social development under Fernando de la Rúa. In 2015, he became the first non-Peronist governor of Jujuy since 1983, and is now serving a second term. Morales is the president of the centrist UCR party, a position he also held from 2006-09. He was a vice presidential candidate in the 2007 election — his ticket with Roberto Lavagna placed third.

WHY HE MIGHT WIN

In a fragmented field, Morales' reputation as a pragmatic voice from the interior may make him stand out, especially among Argentines hungry for political change. Some polls indicate that Morales has pulled ahead of his main competitor within the UCR, Facundo Manes — Morales has suggested holding a March primary to choose the UCR's candidate. A July poll found that Morales has the most positive image among Argentina's governors.

WHY HE MIGHT LOSE

Although Morales has stated that the UCR will not take a secondary role within the opposition Juntos por el Cambio coalition, the bloc includes potential candidates who poll higher than Morales, such as Bullrich and Larreta.

WHO SUPPORTS HIM

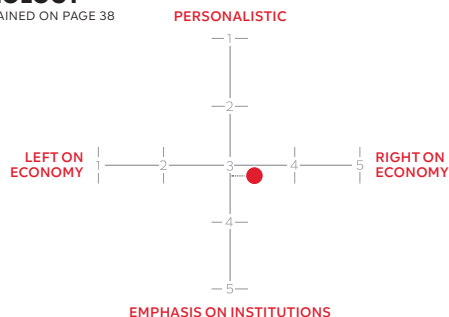
Support for Morales is strong in Jujuy province, where his electoral list beat the governing coalition Frente de Todos' list by over 30% in the 2021 local elections. Morales may attract support from pro-business and moderate voters.

WHAT HE WOULD DO

Morales would likely continue championing the sectors he has promoted as governor, such as medicinal cannabis and lithium mining. He has emphasized the role of critical minerals in changing Argentina's energy matrix and projects like Jujuy's Cauchari solar park, the largest in Latin America, in addressing climate change.

IDEOLOGY

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THE AQ PROFILE

A Candidate on the Edge

**The past looms large over *Zury Ríos*'
run for president of Guatemala.**

by Claudia Méndez Arriaza

GUATEMALA CITY — Zury Ríos was already front-page news in 1990, at the age of just 22. That year, she led a dramatic protest in Congress in support of her father, Efraín Ríos Montt. He had been one of Guatemala's most brutal dictators, and he was trying to run for president under democracy, even though the new constitution barred from seeking the presidency any leader who, like him, had seized power in a coup. As the delegates who had written the constitution debated his fate, Zury Ríos, her mother and dozens of others disrupted the session for hours. The protesters hung a banner calling the delegates “dirty clowns,” threw ground chili powder into the eyes of one person who tried to take the sign down, and broke the eyeglasses of another, according to media accounts from the time.

Zury Ríos, now 55, has tried to cultivate a different, more democratic profile in the decades since. She was elected to Congress in 1995 alongside her father (the constitution carries no such ban on legislative office) and served four terms, pushing causes dear to their ultra-conservative party. At times, she also built broad alliances to champion progressive causes such as opposition to tobacco companies and protections for women and people with HIV.

Today, Ríos is a favorite to win Guatemala's 2023 presidential election, although she remains a divisive figure and, some say, a potential risk to democracy itself. Her candidacy may face legal challenges from her opponents, including current President Alejandro Giammattei. Although she has spoken of the importance of democratic checks and balances, Ríos' persistent defense of her father's legacy, and admiration

for figures like El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele, have raised questions about her commitment to Guatemala's fragile institutions, which have already been badly weakened in recent years.

“She has the authoritarian tendencies of her father,” said Claudia Samayoa of Udefegua, a group that documents attacks on civil society. “She's a smart woman and knows how government works.”

Efraín Ríos Montt was found guilty in 2013 of ordering acts of genocide during his 1982–83 presidency, one of the bloodiest periods of a 36-year internal armed conflict that left more than 200,000 Guatemalans dead, mostly at the hands of the military and state-backed paramilitary forces. Ríos Montt's conviction was overturned prior to his death in 2018. “He taught me the values of believing in God, fighting for principles and being resilient,” Zury said the following year. “He was a role model.”

Zury Ríos declined requests for an interview through a spokesperson. But her defenders say she should not be punished or judged based on her father's record, and she has earned plaudits from some beyond her conservative base for her legislative and other work. “Her agenda was to pass laws in favor of women and vulnerable LGBTQ groups,” said Nineth Montenegro, a left-wing former lawmaker who served with her in Congress. “She did it as a member of the legislative minority and she did it well, (with) the ability to build alliances with all parties.”

That kind of political savvy may allow Ríos to build a broader than usual political alliance in Guatemala, where right-wing figures have dominated the presidency since democracy returned in 1986. Ríos seems to have support from much of the country's economic

She has earned plaudits from some beyond her conservative base for her legislative and other work.

The rivalry between Ríos and Giammattei reflects what many describe as Guatemala’s unique path toward authoritarianism.

elite, and is beloved by the military old guard. She emphasizes her faith and is popular among Guatemala’s evangelical Christian community, who account for about 43% of the country’s population, despite her sometimes socially progressive work in Congress and her four divorces.

“She was a very capable member of Congress,” said Carmen María Solares, 41, a salon and spa owner in Guatemala City who plans to vote for Ríos. “I like that she supports the army and business owners, because that means prosperity.”

A shifting political landscape

THESE DAYS, Ríos has made denouncing corruption a centerpiece of her messaging — with a special focus on the administration of President Giammattei, whose approval rating of about 24% makes him one of Latin America’s least popular leaders. And yet, her Valor Party was a reliable legislative ally of Giammattei’s until late 2022. The party finally broke with Giammattei in November over this year’s record budget.

This antagonism explains why Giammattei’s allies on Guatemala’s Constitutional Court may try to rule once again that Ríos’ candidacy is illegal — as the body did in 2019, arguing that the constitution bars close relatives of coup leaders from serving as president. Last year, Guatemala and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights reached an agreement on a case about individual political rights with Ríos at its center, which seemed to reverse that finding and

clear the way for Ríos to run in 2023. But the consensus behind that decision remains delicate, and apparently subject to politics. A close advisor to Ríos said, “Her candidacy hangs from a very thin thread.”

The rivalry between Ríos and Giammattei reflects what many describe as Guatemala’s unique path toward authoritarianism. It has been not personalistic, but systemic; presidents have been limited to one term in office, so there has been no single figure in whom power has been concentrated along the lines of Bukele in El Salvador or Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua. Conservative presidents with much in common have come and gone, often fighting among themselves. Meanwhile, political power has resided largely in a web of alliances that dominates Congress and represents overlapping networks of elites, organized crime and other power brokers — what some in civil society call the “Pact of the Corrupt,” who all benefit from reduced transparency and accountability.

Apparently aware of the political class’s unpopularity, Ríos frequently portrays herself as an outsider and speaks about the importance of institutions and anti-corruption efforts. “We need to rescue the republic,” Ríos said at a November rally. “A republic needs checks and balances.” But she has also heaped praise on figures like El Salvador’s Bukele, who has dismantled checks and balances — including a constitutional ban on reelection. In its war on gangs, Bukele’s administration has declared repeated states of emergency and detained tens of thousands of people for alleged gang affiliation, often denying basic legal rights. In a campaign-style video last year, Ríos

Her equating of gangs and guerrillas concerned many in Guatemalan civil society. Indeed, the conflict still looms large in today’s headlines.

called Bukele’s “territorial control” policies “a model.”

Some see an appetite in Guatemala for a similarly strong leader. Economic growth has been relatively steady, but the country’s rates of inequality, poverty and malnutrition are among the highest in the hemisphere. Despite its negative social indicators, the public considers corruption the country’s most pressing problem, and Giammattei has been implicated in a series of scandals. He denies wrongdoing. Meanwhile, Attorney General Consuelo Porras — sanctioned by the U.S. for “significant corruption” — has stonewalled corruption investigations and pressed charges against anti-corruption judges and prosecutors.


A position of strength

GIVEN THE DETERIORATION of checks and balances in Guatemala, some believe the next president could go even further than Giammattei. And Ríos is a far more experienced politician. Her rhetoric on security indicates that, like Bukele and President Xiomara Castro in Honduras, she may bet on aggressive security strategies to boost her traction with the public. In the July video praising Bukele, Ríos said, “A country can’t have development if it doesn’t have security. Between the guerrillas (of the armed conflict) and the gangs, Guatemala has seen so many of our brothers and sisters die.”

Her equating of gangs and guerrillas concerned many in Guatemalan civil society. Indeed, the conflict still looms large in today’s headlines. The Giammattei administration has chased numerous Guatema-

lan judges into exile, including Miguel Ángel Gálvez in November. He had been overseeing a case against former military and police officers for the disappearances of over 190 people from 1983–85. Conflicts between land-poor Maya communities and the plantations, dams and mines that dominate land ownership have also been on the rise.

The day the Constitutional Court barred Ríos from running in 2019, she was in Miami and appeared on Fernando del Rincón’s popular program on CNN en Español. In response to the Court’s decision, del Rincón asked her if she would call for violence. “You’re not going to set the country on fire? ... Do you promise?” To Guatemalan viewers, this recalled the Black Thursday of 2003, when thousands of armed Ríos Montt supporters rioted in Guatemala City, setting fires and smashing windows, after the courts again blocked his candidacy for president. In the wake of the riots, the courts reversed their decision. He was allowed to run, finishing third.

To del Rincón, Ríos replied that she would not call for protests, and continued with a smile, “I promise. Everything. Anything you want.” Instead of fomenting unrest, she waited patiently, built strong alliances with other right-wing parties and waited until an international court recognized her political rights. Now she is ready to run, in a stronger position than ever. 

||||| Méndez Arriaza has been an investigative reporter in Guatemala for 20 years. She currently works with ConCriterio.

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**U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the 52nd Washington Conference on the Americas.
(Image: Mark Finkenstaedt, 2022)**

PHOTO ESSAY

BOGOTÁ'S CREATIVE DISTRICTS

*A city and its artists find places
to call their own.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUAN PABLO DAZA

OPEN SA

Venezuelan actress Johanna Morales, pictured here at the Open San Felipe event, which she directs.





» SOMOS DE TODO «

PACHAMAMA - MAMANI MAMANI 2015



BOGOTÁ'S 15 specially designated “creative districts” are areas where galleries, studios, theaters as well as creative and tech businesses have been encouraged, via tax breaks and other incentives, to set up shop.

Some of them started spontaneously in areas that already had creative potential. Others were encouraged as a way to bring activity to underused areas or uplift distressed neighborhoods. A Bogotá initiative, the policy was later used as a model for the Ministry of Culture’s guide for creative districts in other parts of the country. Residents say the districts have stimulated the local economy, but some have also criticized them for population displacement and gentrification.

This mural, in the creative district of La Candelaria-Santa Fe, in the city’s historic district, says “somos de todo” — we are of all kinds. It was painted by graffiti collective Toxicómano as a way to pay homage to the special role of the street corner in convening people from all walks of life.



A dance performance takes place in the bohemian neighborhood of Chapinero.







This juggler is performing in a part of Bogotá that used to be the city's largest drug market, El Bronx. In 2016, the police removed residents who lived on the streets and in empty buildings. The move was criticized by many who saw it as a violation of their rights. The Urban Renewal Company later acquired dozens of properties, seeking to make the area a hub of entrepreneurship, innovation and technology.

Foco:Siesta

A former resident of El Bronx gives a guided tour of an exhibition that tells the story of the neighborhood. Efforts to alter the neighborhood continue. The city recently invited construction companies to take on the work of renewing three historic buildings, which will serve as centers for creative professionals in the future.



Montar rostro: Encarar, in



anchos:



Fuero: Goro







Teusaquillo is a neighborhood with large homes, most of them built in the first half of the 20th century for Bogotá's upper classes. Nowadays many of its buildings house restaurants, studios and galleries. One of them is Mutuo Casa Taller, where artists from different fields have a space to create their work. On the left, Alejandra Cubides, from Tundra Editora, a bookbinding business, and above, Juan Camilo Serna Alzate, from the furniture design studio Ochoinfinito.





San Felipe was a sleepy district in the center of Bogotá until young artists started to arrive. Four times a year, during the Open San Felipe festival, cultural venues open their doors to visitors and the streets become stages and studios. Here, an open-air salsa class.



Food is an important part of the creative districts. This taquería in San Felipe is an example of a trend in Bogotá, where taco spots have multiplied in the last decade.







Part of Distrito Creativo Teusaquillo, Librería El Dinosaurio is a used bookstore that has been in operation in Bogotá for 30 years.





Open San Felipe is a pet-friendly event. Galleries and other establishments encourage visitors to bring their *mascotas*.







An afternoon concert during Open San Felipe.



La Macarena is a middle-class neighborhood with an artistic and bohemian past. There are still many theaters, galleries and bookstores. This street, Calle Bonita, is currently part of the Distrito Creativo Centro Internacional. The city recently organized a festival with tours that highlighted the neighborhood's gastronomy and culture. Colombian author Juan Manuel Roca wrote about Bogotá that "there are cities hidden inside the city." With their advantages and disadvantages, the creative districts are a window into some of those.



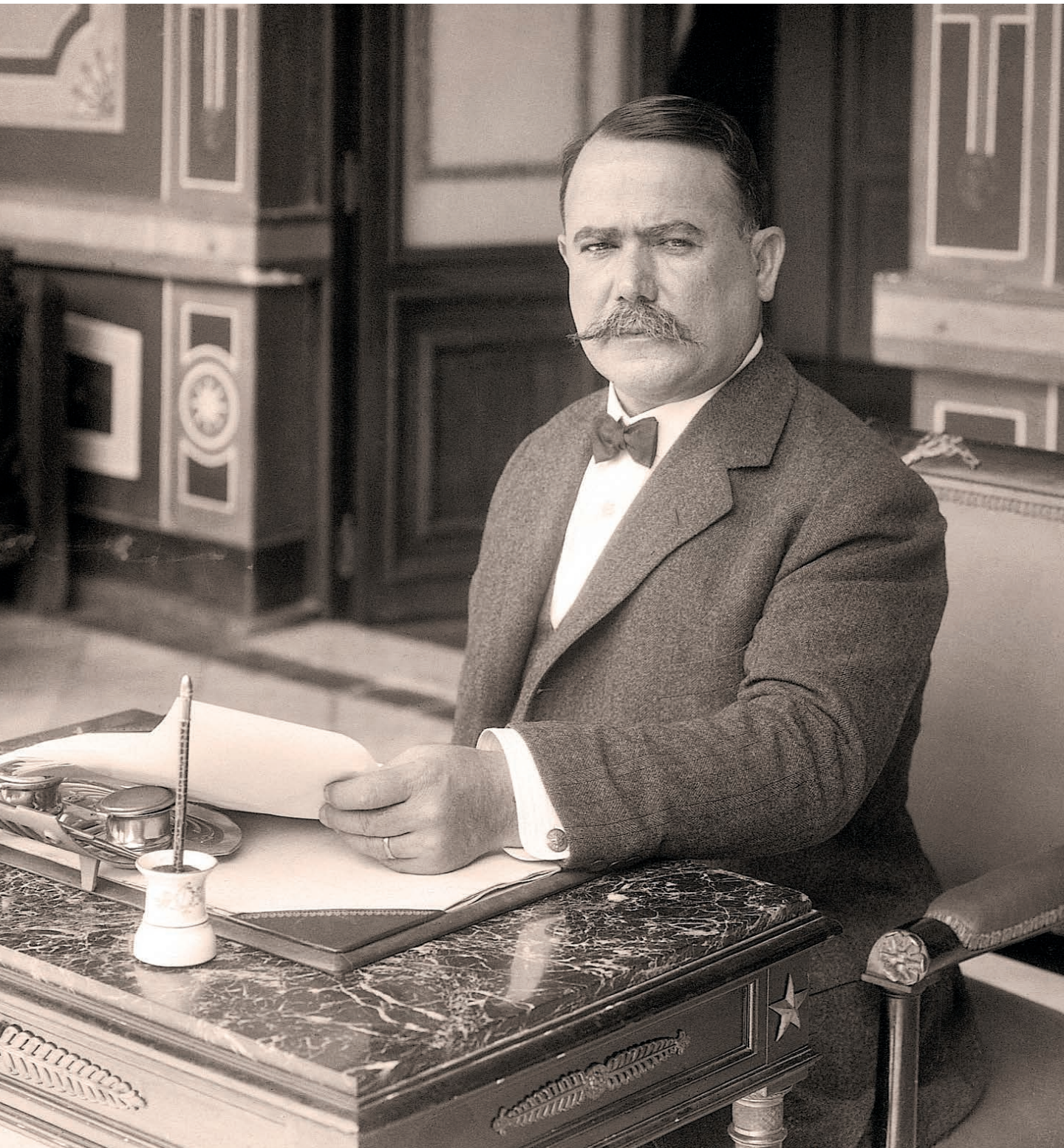
How Mexico's “Undefeated Caudillo” Met His End

**During the Mexican Revolution,
Álvaro Obregón vanquished all his rivals.
But his lust for power was his undoing —
and left deep scars on Mexican politics.**

by Jürgen Buchenau

President Álvaro Obregón, pictured here in 1921, several months into his first term.





GENERAL ÁLVARO OBREGÓN had a morbid sense of humor. His epic but victorious battle against General Pancho Villa's formidable army in 1914-15 cost him his right arm, and the loss left him overweight and depressed. To compensate, he told jokes.

In 1919, he told a Spanish guest how one of his aides found the arm on the battlefield. As the story went, he instructed his aide to hold a gold coin in the air. "Immediately from the ground rose a species of bird with five wings. It was my hand — which, sensing a gold coin nearby, abandoned its hiding place in order to grab it." Aware that this story might open him to charges of corruption, Obregón backtracked: "Here we are all ... thieves. But I have only one hand, while my opponents have two of them."

Humor served Obregón well. He eventually became the most powerful man in Mexico, known as "the undefeated caudillo" to his many supporters. But he had one great failing: He did not know when to stop.

His bid for a second presidential term became one of the great tragedies of Mexican history, and had enduring consequences for the country's politics. After Obregón's fall, institutions increasingly served as a check on personal rule. In the ensuing decades, individuals could still amass great influence, but they would be required to alternate in power, in the hope of preventing a return to violence and anarchy.

The rise of Obregón

BEFORE OBREGÓN REACHED the apex of power in revolutionary Mexico, he had to endure many brushes with death — not just the loss of an arm. After joining the fighting in 1912, Obregón came close to execution at the hands of Pancho Villa in 1914. Five years later, Obregón slunk out of Mexico City just in time to avoid a court martial.

When an assassin threw three bombs at his vehicle in November 1927, Obregón knew he was living on borrowed time. He reportedly told the daughter of one of his allies, "I will live until someone trades his life for mine." Prescient words, as it turned out.

The Mexican Revolution began in 1910, when more

than 100,000 ordinary Mexicans took up arms in a revolution against the rule of General Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911). Between 1 million and 2 million lost their lives or emigrated to the United States, fleeing from the violence.

The revolution's motto was "effective suffrage, no reelection," expressing a commitment to a democratic vote and a peaceful transition of power to new officeholders after a single term. But Obregón, a wealthy chickpea farmer who had joined the revolution only when it was bad for his business, saw in the revolution a chance for his own advancement. While he liked the reshuffling of the political deck, which brought opportunities to people like him, he did not see anything wrong with the authoritarian tendencies of Old Mexico. As he once put it, "Don Porfirio's only sin ... was to grow old."

Obregón was a military genius who successfully adopted new techniques like foxholes and barbed wire against the federal army and Pancho Villa's famed cavalry. He was also a charismatic leader who used his first presidential term to reconstruct a nation in tatters after 10 years of revolutionary warfare. His Sonoran ally Plutarco Elías Calles succeeded him as president in 1924. But Obregón wasn't done.

Battle of the generals

FIRST, OBREGÓN DIRECTED HIS SUPPORTERS in the legislature to clear the way for him to run for another term. In October 1926, the constitution was amended to allow multiple nonconsecutive presidential terms. Mexicans were alarmed, fearing that Obregón would alternate in the presidency with Calles to rule Mexico indefinitely.

But Obregón still had some loose ends to tie up. Between him and another term stood two of his fellow Sonoran generals. One was Arnulfo R. Gómez, ally and understudy of Calles. The other, far more formidable, was Obregón's own childhood friend and comrade-in-arms, General Francisco R. "Pancho" Serrano. Serrano had accompanied the caudillo during most of his battles, and he was a part of Obregón's family: His sister was married to Obregón's eldest brother.



Álvaro Obregón, center left, stands next to his ally Plutarco Elías Calles, center right, as Calles is sworn in as president in 1924.

In fact, it was Serrano who had helped persuade Pancho Villa not to execute Obregón in 1914. As Obregón once reportedly told Serrano's mother, "Pancho is my brain. Without Pancho, I am worth nothing." And Serrano had significant backing in the army.

But Serrano also had significant liabilities. Even by the standards of the military patriarchy in 1920s Mexico, he lived a lifestyle of dissipation. He liked to frequent brothels and casinos. According to a U.S. military intelligence report, one of his mistresses lived in his house along with her mother, while his wife lived in Los Angeles. In the words of a fellow general, "This valiant and meritorious military leader ... could never impose on himself any discipline or reserve that would prevent the adverse notoriety ... inappropriate for his destiny and his future."

Gómez and Serrano declared their candidacies before Obregón did, and for a while in the summer of 1927, the 1928 elections looked set to feature a thrilling competition between the three generals. But it was not to be.

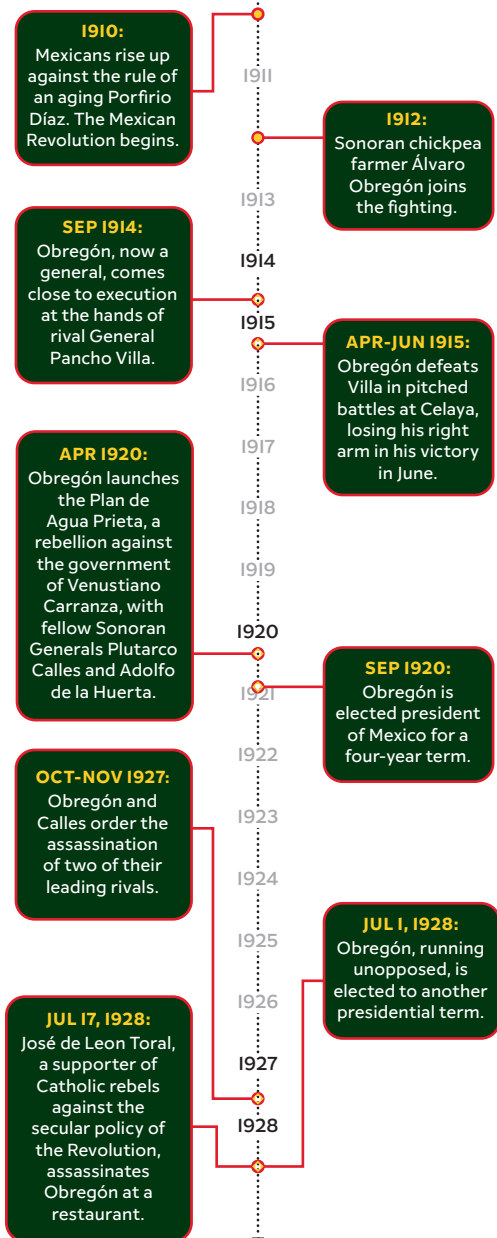
Worried that such a competition would split the army and result in violence, Calles sent Serrano to meet with Obregón. But the meeting didn't end in agreement, and Serrano and Gómez went on to launch a joint campaign against Obregón, though without deciding which of them would be the candidate.

The campaign rhetoric turned nasty. Citizens targeted Obregón and Calles with acerbic wit — always an important political weapon of the oppressed. Opponents invented anagrams of the two patriarchs: *vengo a robarlo* ("I have come to rob you") for Álvaro Obregón; and *el turco pescó la silla* ("the Turk nabbed the presidential chair") for Plutarco Elías Calles, who was rumored to be of Turkish descent. (His ancestors, in fact, were Spanish.)

Convinced that Serrano and Gómez were conspiring against them, Calles and Obregón launched a preemptive strike. On October 3, 1927, army officers arrested Serrano in Cuernavaca. Near Huitzilac, halfway to Mexico City, Serrano was executed on Calles's orders.

Gómez took flight eastward toward Veracruz, but

ÁLVARO OBREGÓN TIMELINE



in early November, the army caught up with him. On November 4, they found him hiding in a mountain cave and had him shot by a firing squad — in a graveyard, of all places. Though Calles ordered the killings, there is no question that Obregón either masterminded or supported them.

After the murder of the opposition candidates, Obregón coasted to victory unopposed in the 1928 elections. But the revolutionary regime had been unmasked as more of the same, at least when it came to presidential politics. Just like Porfirio Díaz, Calles and Obregón had eliminated the opposition — and in some ways, their deeds were worse, since they targeted allies, friends and, in Obregón's case, a member of his extended family.

But Obregón soon got his just deserts. On July 17, 1928, he attended a luncheon in his honor at the restaurant La Bombilla in the Mexico City suburb of San Ángel. While the orchestra was playing Obregón's favorite piece, "El Limoncito," a young man posing as an artist worked his way around the table. José de León Toral approached Obregón and showed him his portrait. Obregón saw the sketch and began to laugh.

When the caudillo returned his attention to the food, León Toral took out his pistol and fired six shots in Obregón's direction. Five found their target. Dead instantly, Obregón fell face forward into a plate of roasted goat and then to the ground.

Many Obregón supporters did not believe the official "lone wolf" theory of his assassination, believing that Calles' government had murdered him because he had become so powerful. Reports of 13 to 19 entry and exit wounds on Obregón's body led to rumors that others in attendance also fired on the caudillo once León Toral had begun to do so. At the very least, someone at the lunch might have looked the other way and failed to alert security to the presence of the strange, shy artist.

Mexican politics in the caudillo's wake

WHAT WE DO KNOW is that Obregón's assassination changed the course of Mexican history forever. Responding to rumors that he would use the emergency to remain in power, Calles announced that he would never serve as president again following the end of his term in November.



Supporters of Álvaro Obregón gathered in front of his portrait at Mexico's Congress after his assassination in 1928.

This placated Obregón's supporters, some of whom blamed Calles for the murder.

Even more importantly, the fact that all three major presidential candidates died violent deaths prompted a fundamental rethinking about the future. Mexico needed to move beyond personalistic allegiances and toward a functioning party system. Calles knew that he could wield power behind the scenes in such an arrangement, just as Obregón had done during Calles's term. Calles therefore warned his audience, "I do not need to remind anyone of how the caudillos obstructed ... the formation of strong alternative means by which the country might have confronted its internal and external crises."

Mexico was, Calles believed, a country in transition from a "country of one man" to a "nation of institutions and laws." Later in 1928, he and his allies created an organization, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario, that soon became the most powerful of these institutions. This party, now the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), exercised an effective monopoly on power in Mexico until the end of the 20th century. Its powerful presidents, serving

nonrenewable six-year terms, preserved the party's dominance through election-rigging and, when necessary, with political violence — as in the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre. This system proved more stable than the personalistic rule of previous periods.

But today, the PRI is a pale shadow of its former self. Its candidate commanded just 16.4% in the most recent presidential election in 2018, when current President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) triumphed easily over a fractured field. Concerns over Mexican democracy have risen as AMLO concentrates personal power, attacks established institutions such as the National Electoral Institute and seeks to put the military in charge of everything from tourism to infrastructure and security.

The temptations of the personal style of politics remain. But a look back at the tragic end of Obregón's career shows the danger, and the folly, of a politics based on men rather than laws. [AQ](#)

*Buchenau is a professor of history at UNC Charlotte and the author of *The Last Caudillo: Álvaro Obregón and the Mexican Revolution* (2011).*

China Is Here to Stay

Beijing's economic ties with Latin America may prove more resilient than some believe.

by Felipe Larraín B. and Pepe Zhang

AS CHINA'S GROWTH SLOWS and its investments in Europe and North America decline, a debate has emerged over whether Chinese investment and overall economic influence in Latin America and the Caribbean has receded in recent years.

While there has indeed been some decline, it is important to consider the full picture, which is a nuanced one, and in several regards positive. Doing so requires looking closely at recent trends and future trajectories for the four chief pillars of Chinese economic engagement in Latin America: foreign direct investment (FDI), official lending, trade and infrastructure.

Investment holding steady

FDI FLOWS FROM CHINA to Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have held steady at levels above \$4.5 billion annually, on average, since 2016, based on our conservative estimates. This is re-

markable, considering Chinese investment contracted globally during the same period, particularly in the U.S. and the EU, where it plummeted from over \$50 billion per year, combined, to under \$15 billion. The relative resilience of LAC enabled the region to gain importance as a destination for Chinese investment. Prior to 2016, LAC represented less than 3% of China's annual FDI outflows. Now, its share has likely grown to between 5% and 10%.

To put things in perspective, last year China invested \$8.4 billion in the EU, \$4.7 billion in the U.S. and \$7 billion to \$10 billion in LAC. The fact that LAC would attract a comparable amount of Chinese investment as the EU and the U.S. — much larger economies — was unimaginable a decade ago. By one estimate, Brazil alone absorbed \$5.9 billion of FDI from China in 2021, making it the top recipient country of Chinese investment in the world. After Brazil, other LAC nations, such as Chile, Peru, and Argentina, have also received sizable Chinese investments on a regular basis in recent years, with individual mergers and acqui-

sitions transactions representing upwards of \$3 billion — such as the Luz del Sur acquisition in Peru and the CGE purchase in Chile.

Several key factors will determine the pace of Chinese dealmaking going forward. On the one hand, our diverse region continues to boast a variety of attractive assets in energy, from conventional to renewables, generation to distribution. Minerals are another promising area, including lithium resources critical to the world's energy transition, and so is technology (an area of growing interest for Chinese and global investors), among other sectors.

From a geopolitical-regulatory perspective, Chinese investors see LAC as a friendly market, at a time when investment screening has significantly tightened — on grounds of national security concerns — against Chinese investment in the U.S. and the EU. This tightening has contributed to the collapse of Chinese FDI in these regions. In the U.S., for example, China has been subject to major scrutiny by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, an inter-agency investment screening committee whose mandate has broadened across different administrations in recent years. As we argued in 2021 in these pages, bilateral tensions between the U.S. and China will likely persist for the foreseeable future.

On the other hand, the region's governments and businesses should be vigilant about the weakening of the Chinese economy — notably its overall output and credit growth rates, its property sector and its structural rebalancing from an investment and export-led growth model toward a more consumption-based one. Any material deterioration along these lines may subdue Chinese economic activities in LAC, including the volume and size of investment deals (and the channels described below: lending, trade and infrastructure). More broadly, a sharper-than-expected slowdown in China would further complicate an already fragile and uncertain global economic outlook, indirectly impacting risk appetite and access to liquidity for the region.

A dramatic dropoff in loans

A SECOND PILLAR OF China's economic engagement with LAC is official lending: loans provided by Chinese policy banks to LAC governments. In its heyday, lasting approximately from 2007 to 2016, official lending accounted for the lion's share of China-LAC financial relations and cooperation, averaging over \$10 billion annually. But since then, official credit flows from China to LAC have diminished sharply, dried up completely by 2020 and remained at zero in 2021.

There is an important distinction between official Chinese lending and FDI in the region, despite the fact they're often used interchangeably: while lending has been trending downward, FDI has been stable or even increasing. There are also differences in the purposes and beneficiaries of the two. Lending was provided by Chinese public-sector creditors to support LAC public sector projects, and primarily and disproportionately appealed to sovereign borrowers that had trouble enticing international financial markets — such as Venezuela. The country represents less than 10% of regional GDP, yet received over 40% of total Chinese lending to the region.

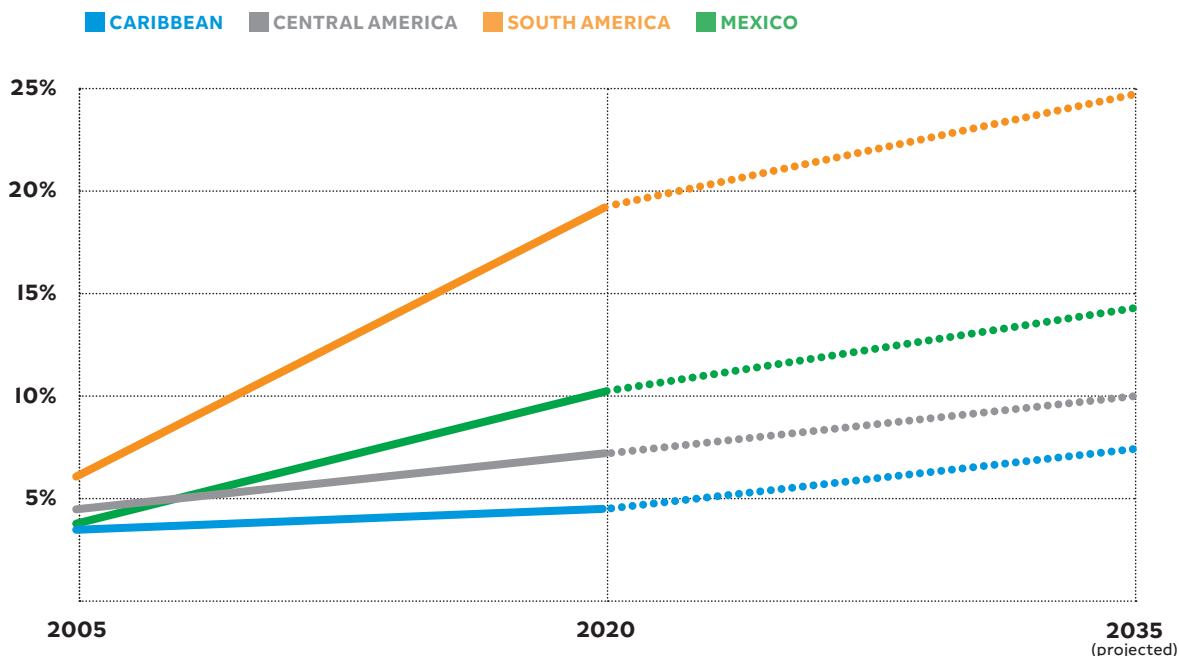
FDI is more likely to involve the direct participation of companies, whether as investor or investee. While not mutually exclusive, the fact that FDI has overtaken government-to-government lending as the main avenue of China-LAC financial flows is a sign of growing sophistication and private-sector participation in the bilateral economic relationship. It also signals an appetite for the control of foreign real assets that FDI allows for.

Looking ahead, high global costs of capital — both from market and from concessionary sources — could theoretically prompt certain LAC countries to borrow more from China at competitive rates. But Beijing would need a convincing economic argument to reverse the structural scaling back of official lending to LAC seen over the past years.

One possible explanation of the growing cautious-

Trade with China is projected to increase across the region

Exports to and imports from China, as a percentage of overall trade, continue to grow.



Source: China-LAC Trade: Four Scenarios in 2035 (Atlantic Council, 2021)

ness of Chinese policy banks in the region is buyer’s remorse. A handful of these early loans, driven arguably more by political than economic fundamentals, had become non-performing. Venezuela is an obvious example. If such cautiousness continues, more official lending activities would take place in the form of re-negotiations of existing Chinese lending, rather than the disbursement of fresh loans. For example, in late 2022 Ecuador successfully concluded the restructuring of \$4.4 billion in Chinese debt obligations.

Political and other incentives also appear to be lacking to motivate more loans. While loans used to be a thoughtful gesture complementing the visits of senior Chinese officials to LAC, such visits have not occurred since 2020 due to pandemic and zero-COVID travel restrictions. And as the region faces recession-

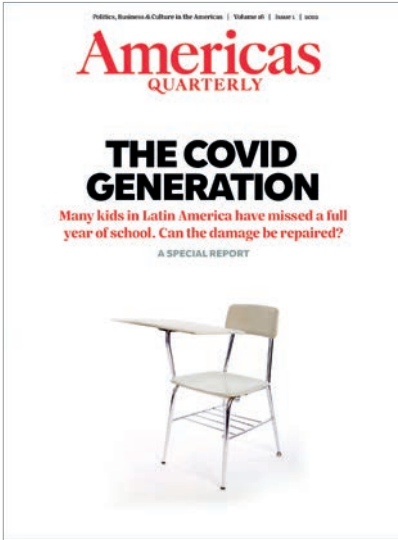
ary pressures at the time of this writing, it is unclear at best — based on experiences from the pandemic — whether Beijing really desires to become a global, counter-cyclical lender during economic downturns, a role traditionally played by institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, the IDB and the CAF.

Trade remains robust

THE THIRD AND BEST-ESTABLISHED pillar of China’s economic engagement with the region is trade. The exponential growth of the commercial relationship between China and LAC in the past 20 years has underpinned broader bilateral ties and provided a point of entry for Chinese investment and other engagements. Over the years, China



ONE YEAR LATER



The Pandemic's Impact on Education Lingers On—Especially for the Poor

A year after AQ's special report on how COVID affected students across the region, a leading scholar says there have been successes, but the lesson was not learned.

by Fernando M. Reimers

WHILE THERE IS AWARENESS of the educational loss caused by the pandemic in Latin America, what was also lost was the opportunity to learn from the crisis. Much of the region's progress in improving access to school over the last decade was undermined by the pandemic.

The crisis robbed many students of the opportunity to learn, while also causing them to lose skills they had already gained, pushing some children out of school.

The direct public health impact of COVID-19, its toll on human lives and the indirect impact on economic activity exacerbated inequalities in what was already the most unequal region in the world. The UN's Human Development Report from 2022 that documented de-

clining measures of life expectancy, education and income per capita since 2020 — wiping out gains made between 2016 and 2019 — shows that those declines were greatest in Latin America.

The suspension of in-person educational activities in Latin America was longer than in any other region, averaging 159 missed days of classes during 2020 alone, according to the World Bank. However, aggregate figures of school closures and attention to the approaches to educational continuity at the national level mask important variations within countries in how local governments and individual schools responded. For example, data from 10 Brazilian states (Alagoas, Amapá, Espírito Santo, Goiás, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Maranhão, Pernambuco, Piauí and Sergipe) show that reading fluency of second graders decreased, while the percentage of children who did not even reach the most basic level — those considered pre-readers — increased from 35% in 2019 to 72% in 2021. The inability to engage with and learn from remote education modalities caused some children to disengage from learning and to drop out. In Mexico's Guanajato state, for example, the high school dropout rate increased from 11.6% in 2019 to 15.8% in 2020. Similarly, in the state of Querétaro, also in Mexico, high school dropout rates increased from 11.3% in 2019 to 15.7% in 2020.

In Latin America as a whole, 3 million students dropped out of school in 2020, or 1.7% of all students in the region, according to the Inter-American Development Bank. In contrast, in Uruguay, which had the shortest school closures and which had made considerable investments in digital education through the Plan Ceibal, the dropout rates in secondary education even decreased slightly during the pandemic and secondary school completion continued to improve.

It was not just deficient approaches to education and the compounding effects of the pandemic on income and health that limited the educational opportunities of poor children. It was also the differences in the responses of the various educational streams into which students are sorted. Poor children are often segregated into schools of low quality, which magnify the losses. In Chile, for instance, schools serving the most privileged students experienced the shortest

closures. Across the region, governments and private education institutions created a variety of alternative ways to deliver instruction remotely.

To date, most studies of the educational impact of the pandemic have focused on national aggregate figures, missing out on the opportunity to learn from the important variations in policy responses within countries and the different results they achieved. We are missing out on the opportunity to understand the mechanisms that underlie the increases in educational inequality that the pandemic has produced. For instance, the municipality of Sobral, in Pernambuco, Brazil, had experienced considerable learning gains over the last two decades. In 2019 most students in the first two grades of elementary instruction were reading at grade level. For first graders, 91% could decode, 80% could understand and 71% could read fluently. For second graders, 90% could understand and 84% read fluently. Two years later, in 2021, those figures had dropped precipitously. Among first graders, only 49% could decode, 22% could understand and 18% were fluent. Among second graders, 60% could understand and 51% were fluent. In another study, though, two other municipal networks (Coruripe in Alagoas, and Machados in Pernambuco) showed much higher levels of fluency than the average in their states. The likely reason is that both towns had, before the pandemic, implemented data-based, formative professional guidance for teachers to improve literacy instruction.

The effect of the pandemic on education is not a single story, but several different experiences, largely mediated by nationality and social class. And COVID-19 proved to be a quintessential “Matthew effect,” a term coined by sociologist Robert Merton drawing on the parable of the talents: how unequal initial conditions often compound inequalities. AQ

Reimers is the Ford Foundation professor of the practice of international education at Harvard University, where he directs the Global Education Innovation Initiative. Since 2020 he and his colleagues have been studying the educational impact of the pandemic and options to rebuild educational opportunity.



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Books

Nonfiction

A new book asks what makes evangelicals stronger politically in some Latin American countries.

Reviewed by Nick Burns

THE RISE OF EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTISM represents one of the starkest shifts in Latin American society over the past 40 years — and the effects on the region’s politics have been hard to miss. Evangelical groups have helped make issues of gender, sexuality and abortion into hotly debated topics in Chile, Peru, Brazil and elsewhere.

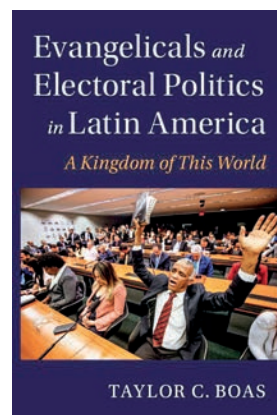
But, as a new book by Boston University professor Taylor Boas notes, evangelicals’ strength in electoral politics hasn’t been equal across the board in the region, even adjusting for the relative size of the Protestant flock in different countries. It’s well known that Brazil boasts a robust and powerful evangelical caucus in the legislature, reaching upwards of 20% of seats, while Chile’s is smaller, at around 5% of seats, and Peru’s has fluctuated.

Why is this? As the historical decline of Catholicism continues, and as Protestantism continues to win gains, what makes evangelicalism translate into political success is a crucial question to grasp the contours of a changing Latin America.

For Boas, “The most important factor in explaining evangelicals’ political representation is the degree to which their religious identity has been politicized by threats to their interests and worldview.” And that depends on the history of Latin American religious politics. In countries like Brazil, fears that the Catholic Church would seek special legal privileges led evangelicals to get involved in politics to ensure they wouldn’t be treated unfairly. In Chile, on the other hand, there wasn’t any moment of fear that the Catholic Church would demand special treatment — so there wasn’t any corresponding evangelical mobilization, the author says.

That had consequences when culture-war issues hit public opinion, determining whether Catholics or Protestants were better placed to take the lead. In Chile, Catholic politicians dominate the traditional right-wing parties and have had little trouble leading the charge on abortion and LGBTQ issues. But in Brazil, Boas argues, evangelicals had already beefed up their representation waiting for a battle with Catholics that never came — so they were in a better position.

Other cases are more complicated. In Peru, evangelical politicians



**Evangelicals and
Electoral Politics
in Latin America:
A Kingdom of
This World**

By Taylor C. Boas
Cambridge University
Press
Hardcover
315 pages

in Argentina to be visited by the dead: “It was always like that in a massacre, the effect like screams in a cave — they remained for a while until time put an end to them.”

Enríquez’s novel finds fruitful overlap between the horrors of the supernatural and the horrors of history. Take, for example, the Order that is in pursuit of Juan and Gaspar. It’s a multinational occultist organization that worships a shadowy, evil god, the Darkness — and in Argentina, it’s led by the Bradford family. Their ancestors arrived from Britain in the 1870s and made a fortune from land won during the Conquest of the Desert, a genocidal campaign against Argentina’s Indigenous people. From there, their wealth and power, both occult and political, was built on the backs of others: those who work in their *mate* plantations, the *desaparecidos* sacrificed in their occult rituals, and Juan himself, whose spiritual powers allow him alone to communicate with their god.

Father and son are now on the run. Juan’s wife, a Bradford herself, is dead, and the Order is looking for Gaspar to see if he shares his father’s gifts. We follow Gaspar from the age of six to his 20s, skipping forward and flashing back to his parents’ courtship in a novel as sprawling as it is tensely paced.

Enríquez, working again with her longtime translator, Megan McDowell, uses Argentina’s history, full of tumult, gaps and mysteries, as the scaffolding for her dark and mysterious world. How else to think

about the thousands of *desaparecidos* in Argentina’s history if not as sacrifices to a darkness that ate them whole? The book’s world grows from the sense that some evils are too large to come from simple human greed and ambition — but in the end it undermines this notion.

The novel highlights, as much through real-world events as through magical ones, that power and evil often grow from the same root. The beauty and sadness of Enríquez’s book, however, comes from the relationship between father and son, which illustrates how the disempowered are often drawn into complicity and collaboration in order to survive. Juan hates his position as medium for the Bradfords but also recognizes that the medical care and privileges they grant him have kept him and his son alive.

Just as Dracula reflected our nascent understanding of germs, Enríquez’s monsters point at the problems of Argentina’s history and present. The Bradford family’s empire reflects how Argentina’s natural resources have benefited only a slim proportion of its population. The Bradfords use their financial wealth to protect and enhance their supernatural powers — just as the politically powerful in Argentina continue to widen the gap between rich and poor. [AQ](#)

Oliva is an essayist and embroiderer. Her book, *Rivermouth: A Chronicle of Language, Faith and Migration*, is forthcoming from Astra House in June.

Upcoming Books

The latest in economics, history, policy and fiction from across the hemisphere

FICTION

Fulgentius
César Aira
March 2023
New Directions
176 pages

The Private Lives of Trees
Alejandro Zambra
February 2023
Penguin Books
144 pages

NONFICTION

Conquistadors and Aztecs: A History of the Fall of Tenochtitlan
Stefan Rinke
February 2023
Oxford University Press
320 pages

The Absent Moon: A Memoir of a Short Childhood and a Long Depression
Luiz Schwarcz
February 2023
Penguin Press
240 pages

Film

Drama

No one is innocent in Mexico's violent disappearances and economic exploitation, a new film suggests.

Reviewed by Ena Alvarado

MASS DISAPPEARANCES IN MEXICO reached a grim milestone in 2022, when the official number of missing persons surpassed 100,000. Lorenzo Vigas, a Venezuelan director and longtime resident of Mexico, has characterized this issue as a “deep wound,” one that has afflicted his adopted country for generations. In his latest film, *The Box*, he convincingly shows how no one can be spared entanglement in this decades-long crisis—and that, given the right conditions, even victims will turn into perpetrators.

The plot is deceptively simple. Hatzín, a teenage boy from Mexico City, travels alone to the north, seeking to retrieve his father’s body from a mass grave. On his way back home, with a box supposedly containing his father’s remains, he recognizes a man who looks strikingly familiar and quickly realizes there must have been a mistake. He returns the box. His father, he now firmly believes, still lives.

What follows is a gradual and rocky rapprochement between Hatzín and Mario—the doppelgänger who initially, and vehemently, denies any relation to his alleged son. Mario works as a recruiter for the *maquiladoras*—the manufacturing plants that dot the Chihuahuan Desert and industrial cities like Ciudad Juárez. Hiring migrant laborers for physically demanding jobs with long hours and low wages requires sleaziness and strategy. There is just no other way of getting people on board. As Mario teaches Hatzín the tricks of his trade, it becomes clear that the world of the *maquilas*, as they are informally called, invariably coexists with criminality and the absence of the law.

To survive, one must first master the art of deceit. “You are too honest,” Mario chides his putative son. “You shouldn’t reveal too much in this job. Don’t you ever lie?” Soon enough, Hatzín learns to hold his tongue and invent convincing excuses. He is put to the test, however, when Mario takes drastic steps to silence a female recruit. (She had complained too



The Box (La caja)

Directed by Lorenzo Vigas

Screenplay by Lorenzo Vigas, Paula Markovitch and Laura Santullo

Distributed by MUBI and Leopardo Filmes

Starring Hatzín Navarrete and Hernán Mendoza

Mexico, Venezuela and United States of America

AQ Rating: ★★★★★ (4/5)



Hatzín (played by actor Hatzín Navarrete), left, journeys to the north of Mexico to recover his father's remains.

much about the factory conditions and attempted to organize a union-like group among her coworkers.) Complicity in the woman's disappearance proves too much for Hatzín: He starts to come apart.

Other reviewers have described *The Box* as a “dark coming-of-age tale.” But whatever Vigas’s film—the final entry in a trilogy about absent fathers—has to say about the transition between adolescence and adulthood is entirely incidental. The narrative focuses instead on a painful process of socialization through which individuals come to accept and even participate in the recurring cycle of violence and impunity that has led to the disappearances of thousands. In this sense, Hatzín’s trajectory has affinities with the transformation from protagonist to antagonist of Walter White in the prestige U.S. TV show *Breaking Bad*.

Tellingly, Hatzín’s turning point comes *after* the woman’s murder, when her family arrives on the scene with anguished questions. No one has described the miserable state of uncertainty the family undergoes more biting than the Chilean novelist

Roberto Bolaño. In his magnum opus, *2666*, he called this condition a “purgatory, a long, helpless wait, a wait that begins and ends in neglect, a very Latin American experience, as it happened, and all too familiar, something that once you thought about it you realized you experienced daily, minus the despair.” Hatzín must have known this feeling once too, and the irony is not lost on the viewer. In fact, he was one of the lucky ones. Most families never get to recover their lost loved ones.

Hatzín ultimately reverts to his initial decision and recovers the box. The gesture represents a desperate desire to start over with a clean slate: not merely to forget but somehow to undo the past. But such a return is impossible, the stuff of childish fantasies. Perhaps it is this kind of escapism that, multiplied many times over, partly explains why—despite decades of activism—Mexico has been unable to secure a safer future for its citizens. [AQ](#)

Alvarado is a writer and former assistant editor at *The Atlantic*

Music

AQ's Winter Playlist

A tour of recent Latin American releases features mellow songs for a cold night in the north and others to dance the night away during the southern summer.

by Sebastián Zubieta



Afrobrasileira

by Mirla Riomar

Mirla Riomar was born in Salvador, Bahia, the center of Afro-Brazilian culture, and now lives in Barcelona. *Afrobrasileira*, her first album featuring her own compositions, was released earlier this year, and contains “Zaué,” a jewel of a smoothly flowing song she wrote at age 13. Her voice, gliding over Afro-Brazilian percussion and lilting guitars, tells us of her younger self’s dreams.



Loé Loá

by Betsayda Machado

Venezuelan singer **Betsayda Machado** grew up in El Clavo, a small village not far from Caracas and the Caribbean coast, to which she returned a few years ago to record traditional Afro-Venezuelan music with her lifelong friends of Parranda El Clavo. (A “parranda,” across the Caribbean, is a traditional musical group.) Their music features traditional drums and elaborate vocals, which are front and center in “Gaviota,” from their 2017 album *Loé Loá*. The infectious call-and-response style, typical of the genre, and the driving rhythm contrasts with wistful references to the titular seagull’s freedom and the singer’s unrequited love — of which she cannot free herself.

Visual Arts

Art

Arthur Bispo do Rosario is often seen as an outsider artist—but nothing in the world was outside the reach of his craft.

Reviewed by Luiza Franco



Bispo do Rosario: All Existing Materials on Earth

Curated by Aimé Iglesias Lukin, Ricardo Resende and Javier Téllez with Tie Jojima

January 15–
May 20, 2023

Americas Society

AS HE WOULD LATER TELL THE STORY, Arthur Bispo do Rosario was 29 years old when he had his first vision. It was in the backyard of the house where he lived in Rio de Janeiro, three days before Christmas in 1938, that seven angels came to him.

Bispo left the house and wandered the city streets for two days before making his way to a monastery, where he introduced himself as “the one who had come to judge the living and the dead.” The friars called the police, and Bispo was soon diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Before then, he’d spent time in the Brazilian navy, as a competitive boxer, and finally as a handyman after he injured his foot.

Now, he was never to live outside a mental institution again. But the outside world lived on within him. In the asylum where he spent half a century, the voices in his head delivered Bispo his life’s mission: to create representations of everything under the sun, so that he could present them to God on Judgment Day. Like a version of Noah’s ark, he set out to forge a sample of all the world had to offer — from everyday objects like shoes and mugs, to abstract concepts like nations and ideas. This inventory took the form of sculpture and embroidery.



"Annunciation Garment,"
fabric, thread, ink, found
materials, fiber
Above: rear view
Below: front view

Bispo do Rosario photographed in 1982.



A selection of the some 1,000 works that Bispo created over the course of his life is on display at the Americas Society gallery starting this January, the first exhibition of its size and scope ever organized outside Brazil. It will include what is perhaps Bispo's most important work, the *Manto da apresentação* (Annunciation garment), a mantle he intended to wear on Judgment Day. Designed to be worn like a poncho, over the head, it is embroidered on the outside with everyday objects and abstract figures and on the inside with the names of everyone he had met — nurses, doctors, fellow patients, friends.

It isn't known where Bispo learned his craft. Perhaps he took hints from his native Sergipe state, where there is a tradition of female embroiderers — or maybe he picked it up during his time in the navy.

What is clear is that this exhibition shows the breadth of Bispo's ability and vision. There are the jackets embroidered with the story of his 1938 vision. There are the *estandartes*, banners studded with everything from maps of his asylum, to representations of the human body, to names of countries. And there are sculptures of everyday objects that he

enveloped in the same threads he used to sew garments and banners.

The exhibit also makes clear the richness and complexity of Bispo's spiritual experience, characteristic of Brazilian religious culture. While he creates his work for what is understood to be a Christian God, his pieces also reflect Afro-Brazilian religious beliefs — featuring, for example, a messenger deity called Exu capable of traveling between worlds.

One thing we do know is that Bispo did not see himself as an artist. He viewed his creation as work he was ordered to do by voices he heard, and he did not like to be away from them. Only once in his life did he allow parts of his oeuvre to leave the asylum for an exhibition.

But despite this reluctance, it is as an artist that he lives on in Brazilian culture, posing questions still discussed today about artistic creation and expression — about what counts as art, where art comes from and where it belongs. **AG**

Francisco is editor and podcast producer at Americas Quarterly



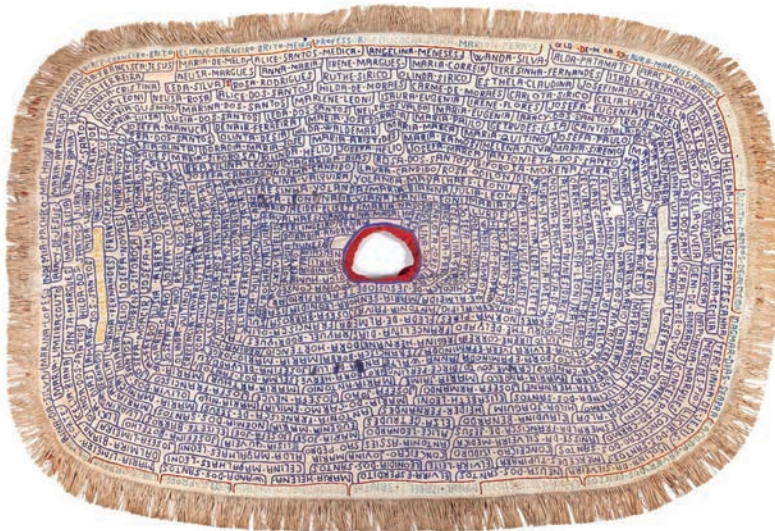
"Asdrubal de Moraes,"
fabric, paper, thread



"Faces," fabric, thread, metal



"Chess Board," fabric,
thread, paper, plastic, ink



"Annunciation Garment," interior view



"Exu's Crown," fabric, glass,
thread, found materials



"Lamp," unidentified material,
fabric, thread, wood, metal



"Carousel," wood, fabric, plastic,
thread, fiber, metal, synthetic leather,
ink, found materials



"Exu's Cape," fabric, thread,
plastic, found materials

LATIN AMERICA AT A GLANCE

Latin American countries have stuck with cryptocurrencies despite the crash, relying on crypto for remittances and storing value amid high inflation. According to Chainalysis, the region received \$562 billion in crypto from July 2021 to June 2022.



ARGENTINA BRAZIL CHILE COLOMBIA DOMINICAN REPUBLIC ECUADOR GUATEMALA MEXICO PERU VENEZUELA

GDP GROWTH

2022 (projected)	5.0%	3.0%	2.3%	7.7%	4.8%	2.8%	3.8%	3.0%	2.5%	8.0%
2023 (projected)	0.3%	0.7%	-0.8%	1.1%	3.7%	2.1%	3.3%	1.4%	2.4%	4.4%
2024 (projected)	1.0%	2.0%	2.8%	2.8%	4.6%	3.1%	3.6%	1.6%	2.8%	5.0%

PROJECTIONS CURRENT AS OF DECEMBER 2022

ECONOMIC INDICATORS

2023 Inflation (projected)	96.0%	5.6%	6.5%	8.0%	6.3%	2.8%	7.3%	5.9%	6.2%	127.5%
2023 Unemployment rate (projected)	8.0%	9.2%	7.0%	12.0%	5.7%	5.5%	4.0%	3.5%	7.3%	N/A
2023 Govt. deficit as % of GDP (projected)	-4.7%	-7.5%	-2.9%	-4.5%	-3.1%	-1.7%	-0.8%	-3.9%	-1.6%	-4.0%











PROJECTIONS CURRENT AS OF DECEMBER 2022

CRYPTOCURRENCY USAGE

Crypto transaction volume, July 2021 to June 2022 (billions)	\$92.7	\$142.7	\$28.6	\$42.2	\$12.1	\$15.7	\$4.8	\$58.5	\$20.1	\$37.4
2022 Global Crypto Adoption Index ranking	13	7	56	15	43	18	69	28	35	N/A

AMOUNTS ROUNDED TO ONE DECIMAL PLACE. RANKINGS CLOSER TO 1 INDICATE HIGH LEVELS OF CRYPTOCURRENCY USAGE.

PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL RATINGS

President										
	Alberto Fernández	Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva*	Gabriel Boric	Gustavo Petro	Luis Abinader	Guillermo Lasso	Alejandro Giammattei	Andrés Manuel López Obrador	Dina Boluarte	Nicolás Maduro
Approval	32%	N/A	25%	48%	68%	13%	24%	56%	21%	28%

*ENTERED OFFICE JAN. 1

SOURCES: GDP growth forecasts, inflation rate, unemployment rate, government deficit as percentage of GDP: Bloomberg (December); Dominican Republic and Guatemala unemployment: Trading Economics (December); Cryptocurrency data: Chainalysis (November).

PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL: Argentina, Zuban Córdoba (December); Chile, Plaza Pública Cadem (January); Colombia, Invamer (December); Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Venezuela, CID Gallup (October); Ecuador, Perfiles de Opinión (November); Mexico, El Financiero (December); Peru, Ipsos (December). NOTE: Figures rounded to nearest percentage.

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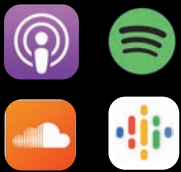
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AQ

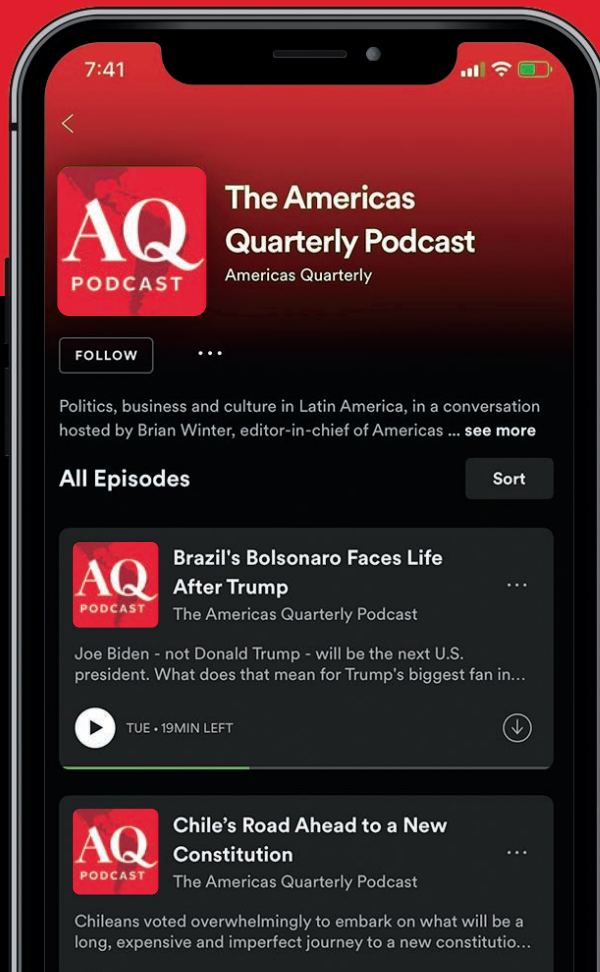
PODCAST

A 'Must-Listen' for Latin American Politics

Brian Winter, editor-in-chief of *Americas Quarterly*, hosts a conversation on the people and events shaping Latin American politics.



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