

Democratization



Year 5, Issue 29

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El Salvador 2024: The Consolidation of the Autocratic Regime

Ruth López

The five years from 2019 to 2024 in El Salvador were characterized by suspensions and rights violations^{1,2}, the co-optation of the accountability system³, reforms to electoral systems⁴, public procurement⁵, and criminal prosecution⁶. Government control over the narrative⁷ was established

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- 1 Sandoval, Williams. La Prensa Gráfica, January 26, 2024: <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/El-IDHUCA-recibio-1814-denuncias-entre-los-anos-2020-y-2023-20240125-0083.html>
 - 2 Lemus, Lissette. El Diario de Hoy, March 27, 2024: <https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/nacional/regimen-de-excepcion-tortura/1132609/2024/>
 - 3 Fundación Cristosal. Noviembre de 2023: <https://cristosal.org/ES/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Presentacion-sistema-de-control.pdf>
 - 4 Idea Internacional. July 7, 2023: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2023-07-07-estudio-constitucional-de-las-reformas-electorales-en-el-salvador.pdf>
 - 5 Portillo, Denni. La Prensa Gráfica, September 9, 2023: <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/22-leyes-distintas-para-regular-las-compras-publicas-en-El-Salvador-20230908-0095.html>
 - 6 Fundación para el Debido Proceso. December 7, 2023: <https://www.dplf.org/es/news/el-salvador-reformas-regresivas-bajo-el-regimen-de-excepcion-representan-un-riesgo-para-la>
 - 7 Crespin, Verónica. Diario El Mundo. December 19, 2022: <https://diario.elmundo.sv/politica/estudio-revela-que-bukele-controla-narrativa-en-las-redes-sociales>

through opacity⁸ and the sensationalization of presidential decisions⁹. Extreme poverty increased¹⁰, and foreign investment decreased¹¹, achieving the lowest economic growth in the region¹². Civic space contracted¹³, and while official figures indicated a reduction in homicides, an authoritarian regime was installed amidst numerous allegations of corruption.

Hence, it is imperative to scrutinize the electoral process's context, the reforms to electoral systems, the irregularities of election days, and the electoral results, and expose El Salvador's challenges regarding the complete departure from the democratic path initiated since the Peace Accords in 1992 is essential.

The 2024 electoral process in El Salvador took place in an exceptional regime established by the Executive, which had

8 Fundación Cristosal. Enero de 2024: <https://cristosal.org/ES/reporte-sobre-el-estado-de-la-transparencia-la-instauracion-de-la-opacidad/>

9 Luna, Omar et al. Revista Abierta de la Escuela Superior de Comunicaciones Mónica Herrera, Número 14 (2020): Especial pandemia <https://revistaabierta.monica Herrera.edu.sv/index.php/abierta/article/view/62>

10 Cantizzano, Irma. La Prensa Gráfica. November 24, 2023: <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/economia/Sube-la-pobreza-extrema-en-El-Salvador-20231123-0093.html>

11 Alvarado, Moisés. El Diario de Hoy, January 3, 2024: <https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/negocios/inversion-el-salvador-nayib-bukele-sanchez-ceren/1114126/2024/>

12 Alvarado, Moisés. El Diario de Hoy, December 18, 2023: <https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/negocios/el-salvador-crecimiento-economico-fmi-cepal-bm-bcr-/1111119/2023/>

13 <https://cristosal.org/ES/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Sociedad-civil-en-alerta-informe.pdf>

been in place for 22 months at the time of the elections¹⁴. This situation had detrimental effects on the rights and guarantees necessary for free elections. Furthermore, the government exploited it politically and electorally for its benefit. In fact, the Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (MOE/OAS) stated in its preliminary report for the presidential and legislative electoral day of February 4, 2024, that conducting electoral processes under exceptional regimes can impede their normal organization and development¹⁵.

According to a recent investigation by the Cristosal Foundation¹⁶, during the electoral period, there was an increase in complaints of arbitrary detentions, arrests of community leaders, imposition of daily capture quotas on security forces, recapture of released individuals, establishment of military and police checkpoints in communities, as well as military presence at voting centers and intimidation of sympathizers and members of opposition parties. These findings raise doubts about the free exercise of suffrage.

Undoubtedly, the recent 2024 electoral process marks a turning point in El Salvador's democratic dynamics for several reasons that cast doubt on the contest's transparency, legality, and fairness. This harms citizens' rights, as evidenced by the

14 Legislative Decree 933 from January 10, 2024 published in DO 6, Vol 442. <https://www.diariooficial.gob.sv/seleccion/31182>;

15 Organización de Estados Americanos. Informe preliminar de la Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA en El Salvador, February 6, 2024: <https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/INFORME-PRELIMINAR---Informe-preliminar-de-la-Mision-de-Observacion-Electoral-de-la-OEA-en-El-Salvador.pdf>

16 Fundación Cristosal. March, 2023: <https://cristosal.org/ES/elecciones-de-2024-en-el-salvador-coercion-intimidacion-y-detenciones-arbitrarias/>

separation of the general election into two separate days without any technical justification from the electoral authority. This decision clearly aimed to influence voter preferences, prioritizing the presidential election over the legislative and creating a distance from the Achilles' heel of the ruling party's administration: local governments.

Other relevant aspects that negatively influenced the process include: First, the failure to settle political debts with opposition political parties until three days before election day, a clear violation of Article 210 of the Constitution¹⁷. Second, there was and continues to be an absence in the control of political financing, resulting in impunity for officials who utilized state assets and funds for campaigns¹⁸, facilitated by the complicit inactivity of the electoral oversight body, which failed to fulfill its legal duty of supervision. Third, there were repeated instances of non-compliance with transparency obligations by the ruling Nuevas Ideas party¹⁹. Fourth, an illegal electoral campaign was conducted, particularly by the ruling party, without any oversight, according to the Observa

17 Observa EL Salvador 2024. Segundo Informe de Observación Electoral, 2 de febrero de 2024: https://drive.google.com/file/d/12N6JtKv4XCHMB1FopBxmxkIIB_fjVNCZ/view

18 Redacción de La Nación. January 31, 2024: <https://www.nacion.com/el-mundo/centroamerica/nayib-bukele-cuestionado-por-uso-de-fondos/DV4LBOOONVDJTO5B2L4ZCVXA6A/story/>

19 Resolution issued by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal on April 25, 2023 in the reference process AIPP-03-2023: <https://mega.nz/file/oXAVIQCD#2jB8B9nYK15bl00JcyLt1cvbT2laTECunwYSzGWrmP4>

El Salvador National Consortium²⁰, with the TSE neglecting its role as the electoral arbiter.

Reforms that modified electoral rules

While it is essential to briefly explain the reforms that impacted the operational rules of the four Salvadoran electoral systems, it's worth noting that the starting point was the elimination of the rule guaranteeing stability within the electoral framework one year before the elections. This alteration resulted in a system imbalance that favored a particular political force and led to the reconfiguration of the political party system.

The most significant change in the presidential electoral system was the unconstitutional and illegal “enablement” of immediate presidential re-election. This was supported by a resolution issued outside of any constitutional and legal framework by individuals who have unlawfully occupied the positions of magistrates since May 1, 2021, within the Constitutional Chamber. This situation arose following the dismissal of those legitimately elected in 2018, a case currently under review by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The deferred re-election model outlined in the Constitution was essentially dismantled after the violation of at least seven articles containing provisions prohibiting immediate re-election, which are considered unamendable. These provisions were effectively rendered immutable.

20 Observa EL Salvador 2024. Primer Informe de Observación Electoral. January 2024: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nnX931mWa3NgEZCtVV7L71nOPPcc_ebQ/view

In the case of the legislative electoral system, the number of seats was reduced from 84 to 60, consequently shrinking the size of constituencies. Additionally, the electoral formula underwent a modification, transitioning from a Hare formula (based on larger quotients and residuals) to a D'Hondt formula, which also impacts the election system of the Central American Parliament. These changes resulted in less plural and representative systems, favoring parties with the highest number of votes and leading to overrepresentation. This contradicts the principles of equal suffrage, proportional representation, and political pluralism. Under the previous formula, Nuevas Ideas would have secured 10 fewer seats, and there would have been representation from other political entities that didn't achieve it according to the electoral results, such as GANA and FMLN.

It's important to note that there are two main families within proportional formulas: those based on divisors and those based on quotas. Each family includes formulas that do not exhibit a bias towards either small or large parties. Specifically, Sainte-Laguë and Hare with Major Remainders represent these families, respectively. Similarly, within these families, there are formulas with pronounced biases, with the D'Hondt formula being the one with the most significant bias towards large parties within the divisor family. Therefore, if the intention behind changing the formula was to eliminate wastage (common in quota-based formulas) while attempting to maintain proportionality, the transition should have been made to Sainte-Laguë rather than D'Hondt.

Furthermore, in the case of the legislative branch, the deck was stacked in favor of the ruling Nuevas Ideas party with the approval of overseas voting. This decision unconstitutionally allocated all votes from Salvadorans residing abroad, as recognized in their Unique Identity Document, to the San Salvador constituency, distorting representation. Additionally, the use of outdated census data and the TSE privatization of the overseas electoral process are notable. The TSE granted a “turnkey” contract to a company for managing and implementing both virtual and in-person voting from abroad, thereby relinquishing control over the overseas voting process, as acknowledged by one of its magistrates²¹.

Finally, the municipal constituencies were also unconstitutionally altered, reduced from 262 to 44, without any justification, which undermined the representative nature of local government in an attempt to favor the Nuevas Ideas party electorally. The outcome of March 3 confirms this: out of the 151 municipalities it had governed since 2021, it would have lost 31, including 8 out of the 14 departmental capitals, of which it had governed 13.

Irregularities after Election Day

Irregularities during the election days were not few, and the most severe were reported on February 4, during the most significant elections for the ruling party: presidential and legislative. Of particular concern regarding the free exercise of suffrage were unjustified changes in the residential voting

21 Rodríguez, Carmen at al. Revista Focos. February 3, 2024: <https://focostv.com/el-audio-del-comando-nacional-nuevas-ideas-controla-en-nombre-del-tse-centros-de-votacion-en-el-extranjero/>

registry, including alterations to citizens' voting locations and even some registry removals²²; illegal electoral propaganda featuring a call from the President of the Republic to vote in favor of the ruling party²³; the presence of electoral propaganda from the same party in at least 55% of the voting centers or their vicinity²⁴, along with inducements to vote in at least 9% of voting centers and abroad²⁵; the dissemination of an exit survey; and impersonation, occurring in at least 80% of the voting tables through individuals designated or proposed solely by Nuevas Ideas²⁶, ensuring control of the scrutiny process and the processing and transmission of results.

All of these irregularities were compounded by the electoral authority's inaction and the TSE's corresponding lack of timely and effective decisions in response to a crisis in the transmission system.

In addition to the irregularities observed during the election day, others occurred during the scrutiny process, as

22 Parada, Abigail. El Diario de Hoy. February 4, 2024: <https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/nacional/elecciones-legislativas-presidenciales-2024-voto-en-el-exterior/1120658/2024/>

23 Redacción Diario el Mundo. February 4, 2024: <https://diario.elmundo.sv/politica/bukele-pide-el-voto-una-hora-antes-del-cierre-de-las-elecciones>

24 Fundación para el Debido Proceso. February 8, 2024: <https://www.dplf.org/es/news/las-irregularidades-en-el-proceso-electoral-salvadoren-no-pueden-ser-ignoradas>

25 Villarroel, Gabriela. La Prensa Gráfica. January 17, 2024: <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvado/Denuncian-induccion-al-voto-para-Nuevas-Ideas-en-el-exterior-20240116-0086.html>

26 Parada, Abigal. El Diario de Hoy. February 8, 2024: <https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/nacional/80-integrantes-jrv-suplantados-elecciones/1122146/2024/>

highlighted by the OAS²⁷, which noted a particular attitude and intimidating behavior that hindered the scrutiny process, as stated in the *Observa El Salvador 2024* report²⁸. Furthermore, there were attacks on journalists by individuals affiliated with the ruling party. The Association of Journalists of El Salvador (APES) reported 319 attacks against the press during the electoral process, with 224 confirmed as attacks.

The results

The electoral results must be analyzed based on the different election days and types.

Concerning the presidential election, as anticipated, amidst a lack of robust competition, unified proposals, and a fear campaign regarding a potential shift in security policy, the President of the Republic was re-elected (unconstitutionally) with 82.66% of the total votes cast²⁹ and 84.5% of the valid votes. Notably, only 52.60% of eligible voters participated, amounting to 6,214,399 votes, including Salvadorans residing abroad. On the same day, for the legislative election, the ruling party received over 501,394 fewer votes than the presidential election, representing a decrease of 14.6%. However, due to changes in the electoral formula, constituency size, use of outdated census data, and the artificial allocation of voters to the constituency with the most contested seats, the ruling party

27 Organización de los Estados Americanos. Communication from February 17, 2024: https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/_prensa.asp?sCodigo=C-011/24

28 *Observa El Salvador*. Communication from February 22, 2024: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jwqb-VhPIBYxwjdzW-gSAWIMKkfB5GL/view>

29 Sum of null votes, challenges, and abstentions.

secured 90% of the seats with 70.56% of valid votes. Had there been no alterations to the electoral formula, instead of winning 54 out of 60 seats, it would have attained 44 seats, losing the super-qualified majority and necessitating agreements with other political parties.

Table 1. Distortion of seats by the D'Hondt formula

PARTIES	VOTOS	%	Hare	%	D'Hondt	%
ARENA	227,357	7.29	5	8.33	2	3.33
FMLN	195,920	6.28	5	8.33	0	0.00
FUERZA SOLIDARIA	51,021	1.64	0	0.00	0	0.00
NUESTRO TIEMPO	41,060	1.32	0	0.00	0	0.00
NUEVAS IDEAS	2,200,332	70.56	44	73.33	54	90.00
PCN	101,641	3.26	2	3.33	2	3.33
PDC	93,108	2.99	1	1.67	1	1.67
GANA	99,344	3.19	2	3.33	0	0.00
VAMOS	91,675	2.94	1	1.67	1	1.67
CD	12,165	0.39	0	0.00	0	0.00
PDC-PCN	4,913	0.16	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	3,118,537	100.00	60	100.00	60	100.00

Source: Own elaboration.

Only 30.10% of voters turned out to vote in the municipal and Central American Parliament election, which took place a month later. This marked the lowest turnout in electoral history following the Peace Accords. Consequently, the governing party experienced decreased support, with over one and a half million voters showing diminished intention to vote. Additionally, reducing the number of individuals comprising the diverse Municipal Councils directly undermines political pluralism, a principle constitutionally established. Comparative results are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Comparison of participation and votes according to election

PARTIES	Presidential		Legislative		Parlacen		Municipal councils	
	VOTOS	%	VOTOS	%	VOTOS	%	VOTOS	%
Nuevas Ideas (N)	2,701,725	82.66	2,200,331.79	68.06	799,433.25	48.49	592,084	35.94
FMLN	204,167	6.25	195,919.98	6.06	122,926.11	7.46	125,733	7.63
ARENA	177,881	5.44	227,357.30	7.03	163,432.87	9.91	158,089	9.60
Nuestro Tiempo	65,076	1.99	41,060.48	1.27			15,202	0.92
Fuerza Solidaria	23,473	0.72	51,021.13	1.58	48,856.03	2.96	70,455	4.28
Fraternidad Patriota Salvadoreña (FPS)	19,293	0.59					7440	0.45
Cambio Democrático (CD)			12,165.49	0.38	30,284.00	1.84	52,356	3.18
Gran Alianza por la Unidad Nacional (GANa)			99,343.89	3.07	116,549.25	7.07	216,664	13.15

Partido de Concertación Nacional (PCN)	101,641.43 3.14 91,474.17 5.55 120,267 7.30							
Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC)	93,107.56 2.88 114,370.32 6.94 180,377 10.95							
Coalición PDC-PCN	4,912.50 0.15 22,446 1.36							
VAMOS	91,675.45 2.84 8994 0.55							
N-CD Coalition	24,169 1.47							
N – GANA Coalition	15,992 0.97							
PCN-GANA Coalition	5948 0.36							
Null	60,027	1.84	69,909.00	2.16	84,115.00	5.10	26,644	1.62
Abstentions	15,064	0.46	40,208.00	1.24	74,345.00	4.51	3865	0.23
Disputed	1,760	0.05	4,180.00	0.13	2,709.00	0.16	634	0.04
Voters	3,268,466	100.00	3,232,834	100.00	1,648,495	100.00	1,647,359	100
Eligible vote	6,214,399		6,214,399		5,473,305		5,473,305	
Participation	52.60%		52.02		30.12		30.1	
Representativeness of the winner	43.48							

Source: Own elaboration based on data issued by the TSE.

The electoral outcomes led to the consolidation of political parties, reducing them to two and establishing a hegemonic party system. This system does not necessitate the involvement of any formalized political force for decision-making and implementation, thereby wholly eradicating the possibility of having a functional system of checks and balances. Moreover, there is no prospect of change in the short or medium term.

It is worthwhile to examine the electoral behavior of Salvadorans who voted abroad in the presidential election, considering two potential modalities: virtual and in-person voting at overseas polling centers.

There was no voter registry for Salvadorans who intended to vote abroad despite having identification documents with addresses in El Salvador. This was due to a legislative decision to prevent the TSE from establishing a special registry, which complicated the TSE's planning decisions for the process regarding logistical requirements such as voting center space and the number of voting machines. In this mode, 88,455 voters out of a potential 5,473,305 participated in the presidential and legislative elections, with the ruling party securing 96.74% of valid votes. In remote internet voting, this figure rose to 98.41%. However, audits of the system conducted by a foreign company have been classified by the TSE as confidential information³⁰.

Where are we heading?

Upon analyzing the electoral results, a significant decrease in citizen participation, along with a contraction of the party system, becomes evident. This has resulted in establishing a hegemonic party system, which does not serve the interests of the minority electorate and deliberately fosters a tyranny of the majority.

El Salvador is currently undergoing an autocratization of its political system, wherein the party system, electoral

30 Crespín, Verónica. Diario El Mundo. March 6, 2024: <https://diario.elmundo.sv/politica/tse-reserva-informes-de-auditoria-de-voto-del-exterior-y-correspondencia-de-indra-sobre-voto-electronico>

process, form of government, control mechanisms, and public service system are entirely under the autocrat's will. This trajectory offers no immediate or near-term prospect of reversal for Salvadorans. The reforms to electoral regulations ensure that the electoral process no longer serves its intended function of facilitating changes or renewals in authorities but rather serves to legitimize existing power structures.

This year, the newly constituted Legislative Assembly is tasked with electing five regular and alternate magistrates for the Supreme Court of Justice, as well as five regular magistrates and their five alternates for the upcoming electoral authority. This electoral authority will organize and administer electoral justice in the subsequent elections from 2027 (legislative and municipal) and 2029 (presidential and Central American Parliament). Unfortunately, in none of these instances is there any possibility of appointing independent officials. This once again confirms institutional cooptation within the country, where the decisions of the Executive and its legislative arm remain unquestionable.

Similarly, the Exception Regime will persist for as long as the government deems it necessary to validate its popularity, disregarding the grim realities such as the more than 236 deaths of individuals who perished in State custody without a trial or the over 76,000 people detained without a determination of their culpability in potential crimes.

Moreover, controlling the government narrative under the guise of restrictions and closures of access to public information, thereby violating citizens' rights, is a crucial

safeguard to keep instances of corruption, including irregular campaign financing, concealed from public scrutiny³¹.

Ultimately, constitutional reform looms, promising the country a “New State” with “new rights” as part of a foundational and messianic narrative.

This scenario resembles those observed in other autocracies across Latin America, and the subsequent steps are all too familiar.

31 García, Jessica. El Diario de Hoy. March 1, 2024: <https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/nacional/observadores-electorales-elecciones-2024-delitos/1126514/2024/>

2024 Elections: A Potential Turning Point?

Miguel Ángel Martínez Meucci

The Chavista-Madurista regime, established by the so-called Bolivarian Revolution, has been in power for a quarter of a century. The balance is evident to all and could hardly be more catastrophic: destroyed institutions, ruined economy, families torn apart. Other countries in the hemisphere are not spared from these terrible consequences either, as they receive nearly 8 million Venezuelan migrants and are subject to undue interference by Nicolás Maduro's regime.

However, Venezuela is not the only country to have undergone such a collapse, nor is it the first time it has experienced it. Throughout history, almost all societies have suffered critical processes that reach a turning point sooner or later, which, in the best cases, is related to some kind of political learning that allows establishing the foundations for a long development period.

Based on the above, many questions arise regarding the Venezuelan case, especially as the 2024 presidential elections emerge as an opportunity for political change. Could this electoral juncture be a turning point amid the current national drift? Have we, as a society, developed any kind of political learning to seize this opportunity? Are there elements to suggest that we are facing a potential political change? What is

the significance of the upcoming presidential elections in Venezuela for our hemisphere?

The following pages attempt to provide some answers to these questions in reverse sequence from the one in the previous paragraph. This article does not offer the reader a scenario analysis; it is not an exercise in political foresight, nor does it attempt to answer, through a methodologically rigorous approach, a formally stated research question. The sole purpose of this article is to explore the reasons (potentially active today) for what might happen in the short and medium term if, against all odds, things were to go relatively well in 2024 or some time afterwards.

**a. The international relevance of the Venezuelan case:
A national process with external repercussions**

A careful retrospective reveals the extent to which the so-called Bolivarian Revolution has significantly influenced Latin America. This is demonstrated by some of the most relevant changes in the region over the last quarter-century, especially in multilateral institutions. In this context, how much the Chavista-Madurista Venezuela has directly contributed to fostering these changes is evident.

When Hugo Chávez assumed the presidency in 1999, the main frameworks of regional cooperation and integration were the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), mechanisms that were strengthened or emerged during the liberal wave of the 1990s. The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was also outlined

as a commercial cooperation initiative theoretically destined to encompass the entire hemisphere. These frameworks were supplemented by the Organization of American States (OAS), which since 1948 has been the region's principal political forum, primarily at the initiative of the United States.

Twenty-five years later, the landscape has changed substantially. MERCOSUR has lost much of the specific weight it exerted in South America, while CAN has been reduced to its minimum expression. On the other hand, the Trump administration reviewed NAFTA to become the USMCA, while the OAS plays a considerably diminished role compared to the past. As often opposing frameworks, new regional political forums have emerged, such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA). Although these frameworks may not necessarily be in good health, they have contributed to diminishing the power and influence of the previous ones.

In all these cases, the Venezuela of Chávez and Maduro has played an active role in modifying the system of multilateral organizations that predominated in the region. Chávez energetically moved to debilitate the FTAA in 2005 and withdrew Venezuela from the CAN in 2006 while rushing to found the ALBA in 2004 and the CELAC (with Cuba and Bolivia as the three promoting states) in 2010-2011. Similarly, Chávez supported the government of Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva in the creation of UNASUR in 2008. For his part, Maduro announced Venezuela's withdrawal from the OAS in 2017. In

short, the Bolivarian Revolution has been decisive in causing significant changes in regional cooperation mechanisms.

Chávez's and Maduro's Venezuela has also enthusiastically helped countries like China, but especially Russia and Iran, increase their operations in Latin America. Close to a dozen Ibero-American countries purchase weaponry from Moscow, but Russia has become Venezuela's leading arms supplier. As for the networks of Shiism in South America, the evidence of the cooperation Iran provides to the incumbent Venezuelan government seems to be increasing.

The Bolivarian Revolution has also notably influenced the deterioration of democracy on the continent. When Chávez came to power in 1999, the only authoritarian regime in the hemisphere was Castro's regime in Cuba. Today, not only has that regime been strengthened with support from Chavismo-Madurismo, but the government of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua has also received similar assistance to establish itself as a dictatorship. In Bolivia, authoritarianism prevails, winning elections, and Venezuela itself has an autocratic regime.

Other countries governed by allies of the Bolivarian Revolution, such as Honduras and Ecuador, also show significant setbacks in the quality of their democracies, while suspicions abound that social upheavals like those recorded in Chile in 2019 or Colombia in 2021 may have been instigated or intensified by Nicolás Maduro's regime. Even the constitutional processes that have resulted in varying outcomes in several countries in the region (Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile) seem to find in

the Venezuelan case a pattern to follow and undeniable diplomatic support.

However, the most noticeable consequence that the Bolivarian Revolution seems to be exerting in the region is the number of Venezuelan migrants moving throughout Latin America, North America, and Europe. South American countries receive more than six out of the nearly eight million Venezuelans living abroad today, a circumstance that has significantly altered their societies' social and political dynamics. In several cases, the infiltration of Venezuelan criminal organizations (with the Aragua Train at the forefront) raises animosities that, unfortunately, end up penalizing the entire migrant population.

As if this were not enough, the Chavista-Madurista influence in the region continues to become increasingly complex. The recent murder in Santiago, Chile, of Venezuelan lieutenant Ronald Ojeda, who had sought asylum in that country after enduring Venezuelan dungeons, only serves to increase doubts and suspicions regarding the operations carried out throughout the region by Venezuelan organized crime organizations and the Venezuelan regime itself.

It's important to note that all of the above emerges as a consequence of the revolutionary nature of the Chavista-Madurista regime. A revolutionary state seeks to subvert the established norms regulating the behavior of actors in the international system. Typically, revolutionary states repeatedly express their radical dissatisfaction with the current international order and seek to "export the revolution" they are

developing in their own country, resorting to conventional and unconventional mechanisms for this purpose.

In light of these factors, elections in Venezuela will be significant for the hemisphere to the extent that they indeed can foster change. Just as many communist dictatorships collapsed with the Soviet Union, which became an irreplaceable pillar for all of them, an eventual collapse of the Chavista-Madurista regime would likely have significant ripples throughout the region, especially in countries like Cuba and Nicaragua, which are dictatorships closely aligned with Venezuela. Recent polls indicate two contrasting migratory trends that could arise from this juncture: the potential return of many emigrants in the event of a change in Venezuela or the increase in emigration if the regime consolidates its power.

b. María Corina Machado's leadership and the party system's imbalance

What are the real opportunities for the 2024 elections to bring about significant political change in Venezuela? On the one hand, the odds seem against it, especially if we weigh the anti-democratic inertia implanted in the country over 25 years of Chavismo-Madurismo. On the other hand, unprecedented, disruptive dynamics are emerging that could eventually derail such inertia. Let's examine both trends and how they oppose each other.

Firstly, what do we mean by "*anti-democratic inertia*"? Initially, *Chavismo* was always clear that it intended to undermine liberal democracy to perpetuate itself in power. From the outset, it took advantage of its initial popularity to dismantle the

foundations of the democratic system. It insisted on the need to change all the fundamental rules of the Civil Republic, starting with the Constitution, then proceeding with the automation of elections and the enactment of enabling laws, culminating with repression and control of PDVSA, the National Electoral Council, and the Supreme Court of Justice.

Faced with the ineffectiveness of political institutions in halting this onslaught in its early years, broad sectors of Venezuelan society initiated a resistance that was as tenacious as it was disorganized and fruitless. Sectoral and general strikes, marches and rallies, elections and protests, various unity schemes, several referendums, a fleeting overthrow of President Chávez, and even an interim government have been the primary mechanisms to seek political change that has failed to materialize.

As recently pointed out by Steven Levitsky, contemporary Venezuela “defies the laws of political gravity”. Despite the opposition’s determined efforts, an unpopular and authoritarian government like Maduro’s has managed to perpetuate itself in power for over a decade. This outcome is partly due to the type of political regime that Chávez bequeathed, expressly prepared to control the population through intelligence mechanisms and repression rooted in Castro’s strategies. Similarly, the negotiating skills that Maduro himself has been forced to develop have been a decisive factor in his continued grip on power.

Maduro lacks Chávez’s charisma, though this is not his main handicap. Two more grave factors distinguish him from his

predecessor: He has no background in the armed forces and has not experienced a similar surge in oil prices. The first factor has made him notably dependent on a figure like Vladimir Padrino López to control the military establishment, unlike Chávez, who frequently changed his Defense ministers and top military commanders. However, Maduro has likely developed greater independence in the relationship with Cuba.

As for the second factor, Maduro inherited a profoundly indebted economy, reliant on imports and continuous rises in oil prices. Chávez was determined to subdue and expropriate the private sector while politicizing and dismantling PDVSA. Thanks to the boom in oil prices and through the expansion of public spending, he promoted domestic consumption, which was later satisfied with imports from allied governments. He bolstered a gigantic clientelist apparatus through the so-called “*misiones*”. At the same time, abundant subsidies and excessive exchange controls completely distorted the value of the currency and the labor-benefit relationship until the system collapsed early on in Maduro’s presidency.

The ensuing hyperinflation was the main trigger for long cycles of protests in 2014 and 2017, which were heavily repressed by state and para-state forces. During those years, the Obama administration began implementing personal sanctions against senior officials of the Venezuelan regime. In that context, a constituent assembly was installed (which, after three years, did not produce any constitution), and fraudulent elections were held in 2018, leading the opposition to form an interim government in 2019. To navigate these challenges, Maduro became accustomed to maneuvering adeptly through

various dialogues facilitated by foreign actors, during which he gained time without conceding much in return.

If the aforementioned factors were not enough to generate an almost chronic disillusionment in the population, we must add the enormous emigration that surged from 2017 onward and the political demobilization prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, a momentum of apathy and widespread hopelessness was fully formed in the country. The disillusioned proliferated just as much as those who preached the need to adapt. However, this latter is difficult to accept for most Venezuelans living in increasingly desperate conditions.

On the other hand, and perhaps precisely because of the numerous abuses and injustices suffered by Venezuelan society, *the electoral situation of 2024 could be shaping up as an unprecedented opportunity for profound change in Venezuela*. This change may not be limited to the individuals in government or stop at a change in the political regime but extends to the fundamental nature of the state-society relationships that have long prevailed in our country. After all, nature does not leap. Only when most of the elements sustaining a system have collapsed do the conditions and principles for the emergence of something substantially new begin to solidify.

Some of the ongoing factors and disruptive dynamics can be considered. A first factor worth noting is *the party system crisis that has been consolidating over the last three decades*, arising from the bipartisan system crisis dominated by Acción Democrática (AD) and COPEI in the previous thirty years. The collapse of these two major parties in 1993 gave rise, during the

1990s, to a relatively atomized system composed of a plurality of leadership and political organizations stemming from the dismantling of AD and COPEI. Often, these new figures emerged during and as a result of the decentralization promoted by the Commission for State Reform (COPRE).

Amidst this atomization, Hugo Chávez emerged as a militaristic and populist outsider, rallying multiple political actors whose only common denominator was their disloyalty to the previous political system, which they called "*puntofijismo*". Starting in 2006, Chávez promoted the concentration of these forces into a new organization, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), which later became the hegemonic party amidst a plurality of opposition organizations that generally shared a standard social democratic orientation. On numerous occasions, this diverse opposition has made efforts to work together, as evidenced by a succession of unity schemes, including Coordinadora Democrática, Mesa de la Unidad Democrática, and Plataforma Unitaria.

Paradoxically, the contentious interaction between Chavismo and the opposition for more than two decades has led to an increasingly stable polarized pluralism. Chavismo's autocratic nature has imposed strict discipline within the PSUV, where top leaders handpick candidates for each election. Meanwhile, the unity mechanism has operated like a cartel, where political offerings are restricted to citizens and are subject to inter-party negotiations within opposition coalitions.

This system evolved so that while Chavismo preserves the republic's presidency at any cost (as a guarantee of regime

continuity), sub-national elections allow for a distribution of positions between both poles and generate incentives for a relative stabilization of the system. However, the disastrous results in terms of public policies, primarily resulting from Chavismo's autocratic and predatory exercise of state power, but also from the widespread perception that the opposition has become incapable of changing this situation, have led citizens' confidence in this system to decline to historic lows.

This brings us to the second factor: *The emergence of an individual, alternative, and unconventional leadership for this system, embodied by María Corina Machado*. With a distinct proposal, an essentially liberal vision doctrinally, and an attitude contrary to stabilizing the status quo, Machado's political offer has finally resonated with the country at a time when a clear majority of citizens reject socialism and opt for someone who unequivocally works towards a radically different system.

The contrast her leadership represents is further heightened by her being a woman and a mother. This circumstance is not insignificant in a political system like Venezuela's, riddled with obstacles when it comes to paving the way for female leadership, yet operating within a mainly matrifocal society. It is hard to conceive a more contrasting leadership or image to a militaristic and autocratic regime. The dimensions of this phenomenon became evident in the primaries of October 22, 2023, where 93% of the nearly three million voters overwhelmingly favored Machado's candidacy, even knowing that the regime led by Nicolás Maduro had decided to prevent her from competing in the 2024 presidential elections.

Beyond the period this phenomenon may remain relevant, it reflects Venezuelans' rejection of a party system that currently falls far short of their expectations. Part of the discredit of the system is due to the opposition's continuous harassment by the Chavista-Madurista regime, which dismantles the most frontal organizations while advancing to tame some and co-opt others. Consequently, the probability of a profound change in the system being led by the most visible political sectors during the last 25 years seems to diminish. The stage seems set for citizens to embrace something different massively.

In this context, the emergence of strong leadership, clearly associated with an individual and a groundbreaking discourse, offers new perspectives for a potential change in presidential elections. Machado's disqualification has not prevented voter intention from leaning overwhelmingly in her favor, with figures around the 80-20 ratio. Instead, it has enhanced it. It's a clear sign that the Chavista-Madurista model is exhausted, even though it still holds on by force, and that the possibility of change will depend on the opposition leadership's ability to articulate this massive popular rejection of the autocratic regime.

As of the time of writing this article, neither Machado's candidacy nor her representative, Dr. Corina Yoris, have materialized during the nomination proceedings before the National Electoral Congress. This was prevented by the autocratic regime itself, which instead offered the option to a series of candidates with whom it has shown varying degrees of ease in understanding. It's impossible to predict what will happen from now on. Still, it is worth noting that both the

enormous rejection experienced by the current regime and the presence of a clear and outspoken leadership that has deeply rooted itself among Venezuelans constitute clear obstacles to the consummation of fraud. Many dictatorships have fallen after attempting these types of maneuvers.

c. The end of the oil century and the necessary rediscovery of the value of freedom

It is then worth asking whether the possibility of change emerging in this electoral juncture of 2024 is due to fortuitous or passing factors or whether it comes from widespread learning within Venezuelan society. Indeed, it is still too early to assert something conclusively, as events are still unfolding. However, at this stage, it is already possible to point out several revealing facts that must be presented from a historical perspective to be aware of the change we may face.

Our society has been profoundly shaped by what we could term “the Venezuelan oil century”. To understand this, it is necessary to note that the Venezuelan territory’s unity is not, by any means, a natural tendency from a geographical, social, cultural, or political standpoint. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the western part of present-day Venezuela was more closely related to Colombia than the rest of the territory, which for a long time was much more linked to the Caribbean islands.

The territorial unity of Venezuela was conceived late, in the second half of the 18th century, with the establishment of the Captaincy General in 1777. However, that conception was quickly endangered for over a century, starting from the wars that fractured the Spanish monarchy in the early 19th century

until the consolidation of Andean hegemony in the early 20th century. These wars ruined the foundations of an agrarian economy, interrupted natural population growth, and resulted in a considerable decline in the population.

Fortunately, the territory of that former captaincy did not fracture into several countries, as happened with the Captaincy General of Guatemala. Venezuela managed to survive as a disjointed territory, extremely vulnerable to the appetites of foreign powers, until a succession of Andean rulers knew how to use the sudden oil windfall to lay the foundations of a true state capable of exercising legitimate monopoly of violence throughout the national territory. And as is often the case in the early stages of state formation, it did so authoritatively, prioritizing order over democracy.

Thus, the Venezuelan oil century, which began under the auspices of an authoritarian regime, would later experience a democratic explosion that effectively put oil revenue at the service of the majority. Beyond its imperfections, Venezuelan democracy in the second half of the 20th century laid the groundwork for social mobility rarely seen in the region and worldwide. However, as multiple authors have explained (Baloyra, Martz, Rey, Karl, etc.), the stability of democracy was contingent upon the effectiveness of revenue distribution. Loyalty to the system was inherently precarious, as revealed during the events between 1989 and 1999.

The so-called Bolivarian Revolution came to power promising to restore an ideal that had been consolidated during democracy but was perceived as betrayed by society: that of a

popular government in favor of the majority, where this prevalent condition would be reflected in less corruption and more effective transfers from the state to society. The state was, after all, assumed to be the engine of the economy and the distributor of oil revenue in a country rich in resources. During the early years of the "revolution," this ideal seemed to be fulfilled: the harassment of dissent was seen as a sign of combating corruption, while the irresponsible squandering of resources through an extensive clientelistic network was interpreted as progress.

However, time caught up with us. The destruction of the national productive sector, both public and private, is now more evident than ever. The currency has been pulverized. Institutions are no longer serving democracy. And through the most traumatic means, society has been losing hope that the state can be the engine of national development. After 25 years of continued plunder, the public bureaucracy is now seen as a gigantic extortion machinery, an unfathomable and dangerous network that the average citizen avoids contact with as much as possible. We moved from a "magical state" (*Estado mágico*) to the "racket state" (*Estado matraca*).

The dimensions of this disillusionment are immeasurable. Once again embraced by the man who took up arms, Venezuela is once more acquainted with the rigors of deceit, mistreatment, plunder, and abandonment. From those dreams of the "beautiful revolution," from that delirium of a "powerful Venezuela," only the bitter taste of a long nightmare remains, the infinite anguish generated by that totalitarian fiction from which the Chavista regime offers no escape. Hence,

Venezuelans once again feel the most pressing of needs, the deepest thirst one can experience, which is none other than the thirst for freedom born from a solid self-love.

If, against all odds, a minority and persecuted religion like Christianity managed to become the official creed of the Roman Empire, it was not because it promised buckets of water or bags of food. If the religion of forgiveness and brotherhood succeeded in imposing itself over the hierarchies of law and arms, it was precisely because it offered hope to the most hopeless, because it opened the door to intangible goods for those most deprived of tangible ones, and because it instilled in the humblest the profound sense of their human dignity. The Venezuelan, as a culturally Catholic people, carries in their blood a sense of personal dignity that is the foundation of all love for freedom. It is a feeling that needs to be appealed to through truthful words to relinquish the totalitarian nightmare.

At the same time, in a more pragmatic sense and by those paradoxes of life, with the introduction of the dollar into the national economy, common sense has been sneaking in through the back door. Unlike those who earn in American dollars, Venezuelans who earn in bolivars experience the proper relationship between effort and benefit, just as those who work abroad and send remittances. Thus, a minimum sense of personal independence is regained, a certain motivation for achievement from which a complete understanding of what the market truly means emerges as a place where demand and supply come together to reach mutually beneficial agreements.

From the statist impulse, the plundering frenzy, the socialist paroxysm, it seems that nothing but a renewed love for personal, political, and economic freedom is emerging. Few slogans are cheered more vigorously at the rallies organized by María Corina throughout the country than the promise to end socialism, which has become synonymous with oppression and disgrace. Even the employees of Chavista unions long for health insurance policies; even the most socialist of our revolutionaries prefer a private clinic for their family or avoid public schools for their children. Paradoxically, when the statist impulse destroys the state, private effort emerges as an unavoidable pillar of national recovery. It's no longer a matter of preferences but correspondence with the truth.

Thus, the model of the oversized and inefficient state, born from the absolute public control of oil revenue, ends. The undeniable virtues that characterized it for a time were crushed by the exacerbation of its worst inherent tendencies. Today, even the possibility of reviving a sort of welfare state depends on a prior reconstruction of public institutions and on the liberation of the productive forces of a society tightly gripped by the prevailing totalitarian dynamics.

There is an urgent need for a wholly different model of state-society relations, where Venezuelans' spirit of free association and entrepreneurship, supported by an effective rule of law, stands as the valid driver of national economic activity. The vast majority of Venezuelans have grasped this from the common sense and clarity that adversity fosters, unlike those who still have the means to negotiate the widening of their cages within the current chaotic framework.

d. The 2024 juncture: A Turning Point?

Dictatorships in our time organize elections; there is no doubt about it in the world's reality. What they do not allow is for people to choose. They use multiple mechanisms to prevent the citizens' will from being expressed. However, electoral situations are not always comfortable for autocratic regimes. Perhaps they are relatively easy situations for authoritarian leaders who enjoy significant popular support because some do. But they remain uncomfortable episodes for those facing massive citizen rejection.

We won't dedicate these lines to quoting dozens of authors who analyze how elections can trigger political transitions despite all the obstacles imposed by autocracies. We'll only assert that this possibility doesn't arise automatically simply by voting; it requires the convergence of multiple factors. Elections in which only the autocrat and his cronies participate, devoid of any will for change and lacking any challenge to the system, only serve to stabilize it.

Elections in autocracies can only catalyse political change when they are seen as an opportunity to articulate and express a massive rejection of the autocratic regime. This entails enormous efforts in communication, mobilization, and organization, under adverse conditions and multiple risks. In this sense, unity among the forces advocating for change is crucial, but I emphasize: *those advocating for change*. The worst outcome in these circumstances is when those seeking change must carry political actors within their movement who, in practice, are betting on the stability of the autocratic system.

Those who control a system of this nature are not willing to allow its dismantling if change represents persecution or imprisonment for them. If I use a metaphor, this works more or less like a tube of toothpaste: the pressure applied to make its contents come out must be accompanied by the opening of the cap; otherwise, it's difficult for the matter to work. Likewise, things will tend to remain as they are without any pressure. That's why it's necessary to identify the interests of the main political actors involved, as only some of those who theoretically oppose the system necessarily perceive themselves as net losers within it. Those who see possibilities for survival and development within the autocratic ecosystem only have a few incentives to bear the costs inherent in its modification but promote its consolidation and strengthening voluntarily or involuntarily.

Regime changes in politics usually don't occur when there is only minimal strategic and operational unity among those genuinely seeking change, which hinders the social sector from organizing. Clear leadership, a general crisis within the system, and the loss of confidence by the power groups maintaining the system are also typically necessary. In this sense, concerning the current Venezuelan case, Machado's leadership significantly contributes, in the eyes of the citizenry, to focus on a course of action that collective leadership often fails to provide.

Likewise, the Chavista-Madurista regime seems to have lost all possibility by this point to offer a viable model to Venezuelans. After squandering the greatest oil boom in our history, the country is more bankrupt than ever. None of the current regime's public policy initiatives are aimed at the

development of the population; instead, they are focused on exerting tight control over it, which is how people perceive it. On the other hand, the lack of results and the systematic use of lies have caused the political leadership of the PSUV to lose all credibility among the population, from whom they are separated by high walls, thick armor, and legions of bodyguards.

In short, no survey fails to reveal the enormous rejection generated by this political regime among Venezuelans. Even several of its international allies, those who still have some respect for democratic norms, have publicly expressed their disagreements with the fraudulent handling of the electoral process. The massive preferences for a profound and urgent change are evident. Indeed, none of this guarantees change, but let's take the inverse exercise for a moment: if the regime were to collapse today, as happened with the Soviet Union at the time, tomorrow, the prophets of the past would swarm, those who explain in hindsight why that fall was inevitable and could be seen coming. And not without reason, because indeed, the system's decomposition signs are already quite noticeable at this point.

Finally, remember that dictatorships rarely fade away through perfectly predictable and institutional channels. When this happens, autocracies usually prioritize order, while the continuity of the Chavista regime is based on disorder. More often than not, autocracies fall through a succession of errors and unexpected events that emerge when the external and internal pressure experienced by their leaders, combined with the emergence of exit mechanisms, leads to their collapse in a

somewhat surprising way. In this sense, as long as the factors mentioned in previous paragraphs are combined, elections can trigger change even when they become blatant fraud. This was the case, for example, in Venezuela in 1957-1958, Panama in 1989, Peru in 2000, and Bolivia in 2019. Time, in any case, will always have the final word.

A Ghost named Gramsci haunts Mexico

Alejandro G. Motta Nicolichia

Antonio Gramsci's "cultural battle" refers to his concept of cultural hegemony, which is a fundamental part of his Marxist theory. Gramsci, an Italian philosopher and political theorist, argued that power in societies is not only exercised through state institutions or economic force, but also through culture, education, and the media. According to this reference of Latin American leftism, cultural hegemony occurs when the ruling class imposes its own views, values, and beliefs on society, establishing them as the norm or common consensus. This causes their ideas to be widely accepted, even by the disadvantaged classes under this system¹. In summary, Gramsci's cultural battle addresses how the ruling classes maintain social control not only through economic and political means but also through cultural dominance, and how subordinate classes can challenge and transform this dominance to achieve social change.

In this context, the President of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), leader of the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), adheres to the Gramscian logic of the "cultural battle." This is his political action base for his party to

1 Antonio Gramsci, *Pasado y presente* (Barcelona, España: Gedisa, 2018), <https://doi.org/eISBN: 978-84-17341-13-8>.

remain in power and to consolidate his Fourth Transformation in the long term.

This aim is materialized through three main pillars. The first of these is communication. Just as Hugo Chávez celebrated his television program *Aló Presidente* every Sunday, AMLO hosts a morning press conference called *Las Mañaneras* from Monday to Friday. During two hours each day, the president sets the public agenda, defines reality, and establishes the tone of the conversation. At the beginning of his government in 2018, all journalism had open doors. However, as months and years passed, as one might expect, the press conference turned into a space where pseudo-reporters serving his editorial line, rather than asking significant questions and challenging his government, present topics and variables of reality that end up becoming a preamble to the official stance. Thus, *Las Mañaneras*, like Chávez's *Aló Presidente*, is more of an educational space than an informative one.

The second pillar is education. In 2019, the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE) distributed 6,000 copies of educational textbooks to schools in the state of Michoacán. According to the Mexican media outlet, *El Universal*: "In the fifth-grade book, *Society*, the CNTE refers to neoliberalism, dedicates several chapters to the Sandinista revolutions in Nicaragua and Cuba, to Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara, as well as to the military dictatorships of the 1970s in Latin America. Two of the chapters related to the movement in Cuba are «Background» and «Armed Struggle» on pages 145 and 146: «On January 1st, Fidel Castro triumphantly entered Santiago de Cuba, declaring it the

provisional capital [...] The United States recognized the revolutionary government. From that moment on, power definitively remained in the hands of the revolutionary forces».”²

What happened in Michoacán set a precedent. Thus, the first semester of 2023 was marked by a legal battle over whether or not to allow the distribution of new textbooks by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP), which were certainly not the same ones distributed in 2019 by the CNTE. This was an experiment, and what happened last year was real and decisive. In most states, the distribution of the new educational material was a fact. Part of its content repeats and reinforces the presidential discourse. Just to cite one example, in the book “Ethics, Nature, and Societies” for first-year secondary school students, it says: “A fundamental cause of the origin of inequalities is the neoliberal socio-economic models implemented for decades in most regions of the world, which grant facilities, privileges, and incentives to the political and economic elites of the countries... and that public goods can have private owners who can appropriate them legally or illegally, in the case of Mexico, the minerals of the subsoil, water, forests, jungles, and wind”³. After reading, the one dictating seems to be a Karl Marx follower.

2 El Universal, “Fidel Castro, Marx y Comunismo en libros de la CNTE,” *El Universal* (Ciudad De México), August 2, 2019, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nación/política/fidel-castro-marx-y-comunismo-en-libros-de-la-cnte/>.

3 Raymundo Rivapalacios, “La Guerra Cultural de López Obrador,” *El Financiero* (Ciudad De México), August 7, 2023, <https://www.el>

The third pillar is the reform of the State. Specifically, there is a plan to modify or draft a new Constitution starting from the next legislative year. One of its main promoters is the leader of the *Partido de los Trabajadores* (PT), a friend of Nicolás Maduro and a staunch defender of López Obrador, Gerardo Fernández Noroña. It is no coincidence that this admirer of the Cuban Revolution is the official spokesperson for Claudia Sheinbaum's campaign. At the proclamation ceremony for the candidate chosen by AMLO, Fernández Noroña stated: "I am convinced that we should convene a constituent power, a people's assembly where we make a profound reform to the Constitution, or a new Constitution, and repeal all neoliberal reforms." Thus, it would not be surprising if this initiative becomes the centerpiece of the debate if MORENA remains in power.

With this triangle: communication, education, and state reform, there is no doubt that the ghost of Gramsci haunts the public sphere of the Mexican government.

Is there fertile ground for the Gramscian ghost to gain more strength in Mexico?

From Thinko Consulting, we've been conducting sociological studies to measure public opinion and, above all, to study the beliefs and culture of Mexicans. Focusing part of our analysis on the upcoming June 2nd electoral event in Aztec lands, we can conclude that 65% of Mexicans want a change in regime in their country. Specifically, this is a longing that

elfinanciero.com.mx/opinion/raymundo-riva-palacio/2023/08/07/la-guerra-cultural-de-lopez-obrador/

demands a profound transformation of the traditional political parties: *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), and *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD). This is one of the data points that explains the popularity of the President of the Republic.

It should be clarified: it is not true that the vast majority of Mexicans believe that AMLO is a hope for Mexico. However, he is the most visible face of change. There is no messianic sentiment towards his figure, but his image does continue to represent the new over the old. The sentiment of profound change expressed at the polls in 2018 remains prevalent in social mood.

At the same time, there's a great paradox. 60% of Mexicans support the President. However, 80% affirm that security, family economics, education, and health have either worsened or remained the same after AMLO's government. Why the socio-political paradox or contradiction? Because the tolerance range remains very high. In the qualitative studies we've conducted during these months, statements like "Five years are not enough" or "We cannot compare five years of management with 80 years of previous governments" are clear and indicate that AMLO still represents that change.

Another piece of data that leads us to conclude that the breeding ground for a new political model is a reality comes from the 2023 Latinobarometer. 56% of Mexicans stated, "I wouldn't mind if a non-democratic government came to power if it solves the problems." This number reflects the citizen phenomenon known as political disaffection. This phenomenon

is a consequence of anti-establishment sentiment and is something entrenched and palpable. Thus, there could be an attempt to pulverize institutions, erase the liberal democracy system, and transform the codes within the legal system, and in that dangerous space, civil society would have an obligation to react. The question is whether Mexicans know how precarious the future would become if the Fourth Transformation continues to deepen its perverse task.

What happens with the opposition?

Xóchitl Gálvez has been chosen by traditional political parties opposing MORENA to halt the course that began in 2018. As an entrepreneur and engineer, she is known for her work in the technology sector and her career in Mexican politics, particularly as a senator and General Director of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples in 2000, under the presidency of Vicente Fox. In 2015, she ran as an independent candidate for the head of the delegation (mayor) in Miguel Hidalgo, Mexico City, winning the election and serving until 2018. From that year on, she was elected senator, standing out for her active participation in various committees and her focus on issues such as technology, transparency, accountability, and indigenous rights.

What does she propose? Her main proposals include the creation of a Ministry of Justice belonging to the Federal Executive Power, support for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to foster a middle-class economy, and responsible economic management to control inflation. She also emphasizes the acceleration of the transition to renewable

energies and the transformation of Pemex into Emex (Mexican Energies) to produce clean fuels and electricity, something that, by the way, the current national administration has been indifferent and frugal about.

Xóchitl Gálvez's campaign has plateaued in terms of voter intention. The most serious polls place her below Sheinbaum with a 12 or 13-point disadvantage. With 50 days left until the election, it doesn't represent an impossible distance to overcome, but it is a steep hill to climb. Initially, Gálvez must "carry" the enormous weight of the political parties. We say this because the rejection towards party structures is of such magnitude that every photo or image associating her with national party leadership and party brands represents a blow to her candidacy. The undecided voters, currently representing about 10%, hope to see Xóchitl as a figure completely separate from the parties. However, the challenge is enormous and difficult considering that precisely these parties organize and mobilize ground efforts, which is indispensable in a campaign.

Gálvez has decided to "citizenize" her campaign further by speaking more about herself and taking positions to empathize with the population's most delicate issues. These include insecurity and its various aspects (drug trafficking, fraud, robbery or assault, and extortion), the high cost of living, poverty, and the lack of conditions for an optimal public health system.

What should be done?

There are political principles that must be strengthened to raise awareness, stimulate citizen participation, and stop any pretense of a pseudo-revolution that could ultimately destroy a country. An initial principle is the creation of identity: if we don't know what we are, who we are, and what we represent, it will be impossible to persuade others that our identity is the right one. In this process of identity construction, it is essential to contrast with the anti-value. It is as important to define what we are as it is to define what we are not and what we oppose. We must define our “causes and/or flags”: in other words, it is about defining the “why and for what” of our identity, of what we represent.

Likewise, those of us who defend liberal democracy must be sowers and builders of what is good, beautiful, and true. Something that is beautiful and true will always be good. Something that is good and true will always be beautiful. And something that is beautiful and good will always be true. Faced with something like this, it is irresistible not to want to fight for it.

Additionally, we must cultivate knowledge: the greatest enemy of truth is ignorance. We should sow interest in cultural formation, the development of ideas, social values, and individual virtues. Without intending to give moralistic lessons, it is indispensable to establish common foundations to guide our actions towards a shared goal.

And two more things before we conclude: liberal democracy must recreate its own dictionary with creativity and new forms. This is fundamental to combat the “Gramscian alphabet,” which, in the face of educational voids, turns its proposal into something powerful and attractive. Lastly, family must be placed at the center of the debate. Why? Because it is the foundation of society and will always be the strongest bulwark to protect us from the anti-values that continue to pervade our Latin America, where Mexico is no exception.

The Challenge of Milei's Argentina

Miguel Gómez Goldin

A chainsaw, a wild hairstyle, accusations against the political class for forming a caste, uncontrollable shouting, and a mock-up of the Central Bank being smashed. The images that have made the Argentine president with no political background known have crossed borders and are not at all free from controversy. Few could have predicted not only an anti-system, far-right figure and political outsider but also one who promised austerity and recession winning the nation's presidency against such a mainstream candidate as his opponent from the traditional Peronist party in November 2023.

His disruptive figure managed to penetrate the electorate's preferences, making the citizens discontent with traditional leaders his own. The current president challenged the system and the playbook of politics, even communication. He promised to cleanse the state of a political caste that uses its institutions to serve itself; he promised austerity measures rigorously orthodox to balance the fiscal accounts, eliminate the deficit, reduce inflation, and foster conditions for generating competitive and deregulated capitalism. He promised sacrifice, blood, sweat, and tears. And thus he won.

What elements and circumstances allowed the eccentric personality of Javier Gerardo Milei to occupy the Seat of Rivadavia? In what context does this president propose a controversial package of drastic reforms? And how has Argentina, after 40 years of democracy, come to choose a man who presents himself as a complete outsider of the political system, free from its vices?

The Argentine Republic prides itself on its young democracy. And it's logical: it took no less than six military coups in the 20th century to reach a political regime where the rule of law is respected, where elections are held periodically, and where the civil and political rights of its citizens are guaranteed. Furthermore, it has been an example to the world for prosecuting in civilian courts those responsible for the last military dictatorship, which constituted one of the darkest episodes in its history.

However, behind that young and fragile democracy lies another tragedy: its inability to bring about economic prosperity. Rather, it has failed to guarantee it. In every decade since 1983, there have been years of deep crises, and today 41.7% of Argentinians¹ are below the poverty line, representing about 19.4 million people. As if that were not enough, nearly half (47.6%) of workers are outside the formal system in an informal arrangement that deprives them of social security,

1 Gimenez, José, "Más de 19 millones de personas en la Argentina son pobres, una de las cifras más altas en 20 años". In Chequeado.com, March 27th, 2024 <https://chequeado.com/el-explicador/mas-de-19-millones-de-personas-en-la-argentina-son-pobres-una-de-los-cifras-mas-altas-en-20-anos/>

access to quality healthcare, paid vacation, etc. And, while unemployment stands at around 6.2%, the year-on-year inflation has reached 276.2%², putting it on the podium alongside countries like Lebanon, Zimbabwe, and Venezuela.

In the 2023 elections, 30% of the electorate was under 30 years old, 50.2% were under 40 years old, and 6 out of 10 voters were under 45 years old. In other words, it was an election defined by the millennial and centennial segments of the population. It's worth noting that numerous civil organizations and international bodies such as UNICEF consistently highlighted that poverty and informality affect youth with greater intensity, so it's not surprising that the first group of citizens attracted by the libertarian “purple earthquake” is concentrated mainly in the younger segments.

In fact, Argentina was so stagnant that it failed to generate genuine employment in the private sector since 2011. Inflation has been a defeat for both Peronist and non-Peronist governments in recent decades, and the populations of “popular neighborhoods” –or slums– have continued to increase since the 2001 crisis. This means that the dramatic aspect lies in the fact that, with 40 years of democracy, electoral and partisan politics have not been able to find real solutions to concrete problems and lead to progress and growth.

Informality, which we sometimes see in street vendors, young people driving for Uber, or delivery app cyclists,

2 Índice de Precios al Consumidor (IPC). Cobertura nacional. Febrero de 2024, https://www.indec.gob.ar/uploads/informesdeprensa/ipc_03_24BF7A335103.pdf

comprises 45% of workers. They represent no less than 8 million people who, in addition to being unregistered and vulnerable to the fluctuations of an erratic economy like Argentina's, suffer from a deep weariness of empty promises from a powerless political system that only manages to see itself. In addition, there are another 3 million self-employed workers or professionals who also do not enjoy the security of the 5 million employed in the private sector. Now, the most ironic aspect was the hallmark created by the government of Alberto Fernández and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner during the 2019-2023 period, which is the creation of a scenario where there are formally employed workers, both within the private and public sectors, but who fail to meet their basic needs. In other words, they generated workers below the poverty line who, even with formal employment, are poor. Put another way, the Argentine system had become a true meat grinder.

Furthermore, and in light of some numbers that illustrate a frustrating reality, Milei triumphs almost as an act of faith and common sense. His vote becomes a bet on the different and fresh option compared to the center-right and center-left political establishments that have governed in the last 30 or 40 years, and even to the Trotskyist left, which has never had real chances. All experiences have been frustrated. In the face of inflation that erodes incomes, where it becomes increasingly difficult for parties to channel people excluded from the system and poor workers, isn't it logical, then, that an anti-system, extreme, and novel candidate like Milei would have swept the elections? Isn't it coherent that the traditional Peronism, once

identified with union sectors increasingly distant from its base, lose representativeness?

As a result of the previously described landscape, Milei arrived at the Casa Rosada –the government house in Argentina– in an unprecedented and unusual manner. Previously, it was believed that the government of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019) had the smallest representation in history, because it was a president whose party held only 5 out of 24 governorships (4 provinces plus the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, which serves as a hybrid between provincial subnational government and city-municipality). Milei, on the other hand, reached power without winning or governing a single province or having a single allied governor. Similarly, out of more than 1000 municipalities and communes, he only obtained 3 mayoralties. Consequently, a president arrives at the National Executive Power without any kind of territorial base or power, as no president has ever lacked before.

In fact, in many provinces, Javier Milei won with a “short ballot”. What does this mean? It means that in most of these provinces, when approaching the polling booth to cast the vote, numerous ballots for different categories such as President, Governor, Senator, Deputy, Mayor, Councilor, etc., could be found. However, in a large part of the provinces, Milei was limited to presenting himself with a ballot that confined the candidacy of Libertad Avanza, his political force, to the presidential category, thus reflecting a lack of apparatus and interest in other categories. But it also allowed him to plebiscite his figure against everything else. People chose the economist, the eccentric, the panelist, the new, the disruptive, and not a

party, an alliance, or a force. Moreover, being a candidate from Buenos Aires, he swept primarily in the most peripheral provinces. He achieved victory in the toughest election despite lacking an electoral machinery to support his candidacy in such a vast, diverse, and rigid country.

Needless to say, in a federal government system, the figures of the governors emerge as critical for ensuring governability, as they wield territorial power with the capacity to obstruct the measures and intentions of the president. Without them, it's hardly possible to guarantee the success of a political project, and this was partly what happened with the experience of the *Cambiamos / Juntos por el Cambio* government led by Macri.

In the parliamentary arena, the situation is not very different. In the Senate alone, the ruling party holds 7 seats out of 72, not counting the presidency held by Victoria Villaroel, the Vice President of the Nation. Her vote only counts in case of a tie. The hard opposition, represented by Kirchnerism and various expressions of Peronism, holds 33 seats. The rest belongs to different parties such as the radicals, PRO, and various provincial forces that may or may not constitute occasional allies.

In the Chamber of Deputies, on the other hand, the president's party has barely more than forty deputies out of 257 legislators. We are facing a government that, regardless of what it wishes to propose in these four years, will urgently need to engage in dialogue and negotiation with other forces to overcome the obstacles of Congress in a republican system

—and in a democracy itself— if it wants to ensure the success of its provocative reformist and libertarian agenda. Peronism and the hard-left factions there aggregate 105 opposition members who will reject any initiative from the ruling party. In between, there will be another forty potential and eventual allies identified in the PRO (Republican Proposal) party and affiliated expressions, along with other blocs like the historic radical party (with about thirty deputies) and other forces like *Hacemos Coalición Federal* and *Innovación Federal*, where different national and provincial parties converge. While they are more reluctant to provide explicit, much less unconditional support to the government, they present themselves as possible guarantors of governability.

Consequently, the challenge for the economist lies in navigating the paths of traditional politics, which he vehemently opposes, to implement a series of measures that face resistance across the political spectrum. This has happened with a controversial Decree of Necessity and Urgency (No. 70/2023) and with his measures contextualized in his cultural battle. It is even more paradoxical when reflecting on it because the government proudly flaunts its explicit rejection of the rules and conventions of politics, where the preferred and primary tools are dialogue and negotiation. But what is even more remarkable is that within this framework of guaranteed failure due to a lack of political muscle, he manages to turn defeats into rhetorical victories, as every impediment to labor, tax, fiscal, or political reform is explained by the “establishment” not willing to relinquish its privileges.

During negotiations on the so-called “Law of Bases and Starting Points for the Freedom of Argentines,”³ a monstrous and audacious bill exceeding 600 articles covering all topics, this situation was experienced. According to logic and usual practices, one would expect the hyper-minority government to seek to seduce and persuade other blocs to obtain ad hoc majorities that would allow them to pass their legislative agenda. However, the reality was very different. While some officials from the Ministry of the Interior responsible for political liaisons, along with Santiago Caputo, the star strategic advisor, attempted to play that role, congressmen received nothing but insults and criticism both on social media and on television from the president and his inner circle. In other words, their weakness did not result in the government seeking assistance but rather escalating conflict and denouncing other actors whom they needed. The president thus succeeds in challenging all politicians and analysts to think outside the box about how politics is conceived.

How is it possible that with barely 3 mayors, less than 50 parliamentarians, and not a single governor, the president does not hesitate to double down on every bet, rhetorically, economically, and politically? His weakness does not make him back down but intensifies the dispute. Originally, it should be considered that an orthodox fiscal adjustment to clean up public accounts would be impossible to carry out without a legislative contingent to pivot from or a set of governors to

3 Ley de Bases y Puntos de Partida para la Libertad de los Argentinos. <https://www4.hcdn.gob.ar/dependencias/dsecretaria/Periodo2023/PDF2023/TP2023/0025-PE-2023.pdf>

support the Casa Rosada. However, in *La Libertad Avanza*, they confront all governors without any fear that confrontation will serve as an incentive scheme to unify them against the government. By thinking precisely outside the box, he ends up fueling his anti-establishment rhetoric and triumphing even in defeat.

In this rhetoric and the president's focus, we can observe that this is a very different case from other right-wing populist presidents like Trump, Bukele, or Bolsonaro. While these represented profound earthquakes in their respective countries, there are substantial nuances that distinguish the Rioplatense case.

Firstly, while Bolsonaro had been part of Brazil's political scene for decades in the lower chamber, Milei ventured into politics for the first time in the 2021 legislative elections. Previously, he was only known for his appearances on various television programs as a panelist. He also lacks a substantive support base such as the evangelical church or the military, which provided strategic support and a base for the carioca leader.

Secondly, unlike Trump, who managed to seize a powerful political structure like the US Republican Party and build his candidacy on it, the Argentine barely sought out small parties –almost insignificant in electoral terms– merely for their use as legal vehicles to meet the minimum and essential requirements demanded by the courts to be able to run in elections. This allowed him to avoid resorting to negotiations

and concessions with leaders of conventional parties, which he so strongly disliked.

And thirdly, Nayib Bukele's case is very different as he pursues, in addition to a program, explicit reelection and the maintenance of power. On multiple occasions, Javier Milei has stated that he does not intend to have more than one term and he also shows no signs or actions of a politician whose main interest lies in power. A rare breed in a President.

His absolute priority is focused solely on his political mandate to reduce inflation, leaving everything else aside. For him, if that means adopting a series of drastic and unpopular measures with a high social cost, so be it. Unlike the conventional political class, whose main focus is the construction and maintenance of power itself, the libertarian's focus is solely on fiscal balance and economic stability. This perspective grants him a different time horizon than that of his opponents, allowing him to make highly unpopular decisions that his predecessors avoided due to the political cost involved, both in the upcoming elections and in the consolidation of his power. Interestingly, by adopting extremely orthodox measures, the president finds himself in a position where he can further strengthen his political position if he indeed manages to reduce inflation.

An obvious example is also found in the Omnibus bill, where the essence of his reforms was concentrated. The government of La Libertad Avanza is essentially a coalition of secondary parties. It includes the *Partido Demócrata*, the *UCeDé*, *UNIR* and the *Partido Liberal*, among others, which were

previously little more than legal instruments to participate in elections without a real possibility of reaching government. That's why, in slang, since they are not large and traditional parties, they were called "rubber stamps." Nevertheless, they managed to obtain 30% of the votes in the general elections, with a significant triumph in the country's rural areas and further away from Buenos Aires. Then, in the second round, they swept with 56% of the votes. Despite this, in what the aforementioned Law implies, they promoted a political reform aimed at an uninominal system, which weakens smaller parties and concentrates political representation in the conurbation, the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, a bastion of Peronism. The project was frustrated, but a president who seeks to remain in power would never promote such a reform. However, this one does. His incentive is different, and his obsession is the economy, not the elections. Therefore, he is capable of making sacrifices in economic matters (such as halting payments to soup kitchens, diluting social spending like state salaries and pensions, or halting public works) that no one else would have dared to do.

"(...) Everything is fine as long as we're comfortable, working safely, with a lovely family, a country house, vacations by the seaside, a good retirement in sight. We're prudent when choosing, we don't want to take risks. We choose what we know. But suppose things start to go wrong. The situation changes; one loses their job and their house and doesn't see his future clearly. What do they do then? Do they opt for prudence? Not at all: they start gambling like crazy! They prefer unknown risk over maintaining their current situation. That's

when everything turns upside down: chaos becomes more appealing than order, at least it offers the possibility of something new (...) An unexpected turn (...)”⁴. Giuliano da Empoli explains this when talking about how societies sometimes end up electorally opting for something different, for something daring and reckless that may mean a leap into the void towards doom, but also a solution.

The viability of his success lies solely and exclusively in the effectiveness of reducing inflation, in the tolerance of Argentinians towards the libertarian's *modus operandi*, and the political muscle he acquires in the coming months. That's when we'll see whether people prefer prudence with what they know or the chainsaw, the wild hairstyle, and the unbridled shouts.

4 Giuliano da Empoli, *El Mago del Kremlin*. Madrid: Seix Barral, 2023.

Security and Stability: The Opportunity for Politics to Escape the Swamp

Andrea Balladares Letelier

Since the beginning of this year, 2024 has been seen as complex for Latin America, with significant changes in political leadership and economic matters. The ECLAC¹, announced that the year 2023 ended with a growth rate of 2.2% and projects a decline to 1.9% for the current year, setting back the per capita GDP level by 10 years, thereby reducing the well-being of the Latin American population and leading to insufficient measures to reduce the still high rates of poverty and informality plaguing the region. The most pessimistic forecasts anticipate deceleration, disinflation, debt, and deglobalization.

In political terms, this year will be marked by significant electoral activity in Latin America, with six presidential elections: El Salvador, Mexico, Uruguay, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela, as well as territorial elections such as those in Chile. Additionally, all eyes will be on Brazil and Argentina. In Brazil, we will see if Lula can continue to maintain his approval ratings despite strong

1 Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago: CEPAL (2023).

opposition and if he will remain the regional leader. For Argentina, attention will be focused on Milei, his drastic and tough policies, and his lack of parliamentary majorities.

Throughout these elections, Latin American governments will continue to face threats that are damaging the rule of law, democracy, and governance. These threats include organized crime, systemic corruption, and authoritarian populism. As a result, it is highly likely that there will be a backlash vote against governing coalitions, the occurrence of run-off elections without clear majorities, divided and unstable governments, and populist candidates.

From a political-electoral analysis, the CEIUC² argues that it is necessary to consider the main political risks for this year in the region. The ranking is led by insecurity, organized crime, and drug trafficking. However, the second place is occupied by the increase in corruption and impunity, a problem that has been lingering for years and shows a worrying rise. The concentration of power and collusion among political and economic elites increases the opacity of state bureaucracies, while informality and the culture of illegality contribute to the entrenchment of corruption in civil society. Democratic disaffection once again occupies advanced positions, ranking third, due to a profound crisis of representation affecting confidence in traditional political parties and shifting expectations towards new leadership with limited structure and management experience, preventing them from having solid bases of governance upon

2 Centro de Estudios Internacionales de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

assuming power. Governance under pressure and the rapid loss of support from leaders ranks fourth, followed by the increase in migratory flows, a subject of enormous complexity with no clear solution in the region. In the second tier of the index are the radicalization of social protests (6th place), international instability (7th place), deterioration of the business climate (8th place), the impact of technology on politics (9th place), and lastly, vulnerability to climate change (10th place).

Due to all of the above, fortunately, the dominance of left-wing governments in Latin America since the beginning of 2023 has been reduced by victories of right-wing governments in Paraguay, Ecuador, and Argentina, and something similar could occur for the current year. If this were to happen, the regional political landscape would be less homogeneous, with no predominant majority forces.

During this year's territorial elections, Chile will continue to face the three underlying crises that extend throughout the region: (1) a governance crisis, with institutions being questioned where it is evident that levels of trust in public entities remain low, discontent regarding the quality of public services continues to rise, and social media is increasingly amplifying societal demands that the State is unable to efficiently address; (2) an expectations crisis, with damaged trust among the citizenry. Governments have failed to adapt to social change. While citizens operate under a contemporary logic, with digitization as an accelerator, the State and its institutions continue to operate at old-fashioned paces; and (3) a crisis of

certainties, given the levels of economic and political uncertainty.

In its Political Situation Report³ for 2024, *Libertad y Desarrollo* argues that it is pertinent to evaluate the impact that the constitutional process of 2023 had on the current political landscape. Firstly, it is noted that after four years, the constitutional agenda has been extinguished, at least until the end of this administration. This is positive news for the country and a good opportunity for the political class, as it opens a window of opportunity to reconnect with the real priorities of citizens. On a political level, the constitutional plebiscite did not provoke a widespread citizen impact. Presidential approval ratings continue to hover around 30%, with no capitalization on this by either the Government or the President. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the security crisis remains the most addressed political discussion topic and is compounded by the increasingly relevant issue of corruption, which has further alienated citizens from politics after the Convenios Case, Hermosilla Case, and other scandals. This has been extremely challenging for the government and the ruling coalition to confront and address, especially considering that they have been champions of transparency and probity for the past 10 years as distinctive aspects of their political action.

The conditions following the constitutional year require maximum effort in terms of unity among all center and right-wing forces. This aligns with the report from *Libertad y Desarrollo*, firstly because the ruling party will attempt to

3 Fundación Libertad y Desarrollo, Informe de Coyuntura Política 2024.

exploit weak points within the opposition, meaning those areas with no unified opposition view, which represents opportunities to advance their reforms. The Pension Reform case reflects the above, in terms of the ruling party's ability to garner support from “non-aligned” opposition forces such as the PDG and Democrats. This allowed them to successfully pass their pension proposal in the Chamber of Deputies, which divides the 6% increase in contributions into 3% for individual accounts and the other 3% for a redistributive fund. The Senate will be a second litmus test for the center and the right, as it will demonstrate the ability of the broad opposition spectrum to maintain cohesion, discipline, and conviction in defending positions with high levels of citizen support. This includes the fact that 100% of the increase in contributions should be allocated to individual pension accounts for affiliates.

Another issue that will require unity and complicity within our sector is the need to establish a policy of alliances among opposition forces. Only through this can the opposition effectively address the challenge of achieving effective unity for the municipal and regional electoral cycle, which will take place in October of this year. Despite all the problems the government has experienced, President Boric's solid 30% approval rating, combined with left-wing presidential leadership, has seen an increase in approval levels. Additionally, the fact that the government forces have already consolidated a broad electoral alliance from the Christian Democrats to the Communist Party, could make the ruling party a competitive electoral force in the municipal, regional, parliamentary, and presidential arenas.

Furthermore, it seems increasingly clear that the Socialist Party is gaining momentum within the ruling coalition as it develops a close complicity with the Broad Front. While it is true that in Latin America, there has been a strong surge of opposition, with 8 out of 10 elections being won by forces opposing the current government, this number is not a guarantee of success in Chile itself unless the unity of the domestic opposition is strengthened. Therefore, we must enhance stronger and more impactful leadership, foster opinion organization, and above all, enforce discipline.

Attention must be paid to historical figures in contemporary politics. The emergence of these personalities in the constitutional campaign of 2023 may have gained momentum, with the most significant being the return to the public sphere of former president Michelle Bachelet as a potential presidential candidate for the ruling party in the 2025 elections. Her performance in the constitutional campaign, combined with the public support she has given to the government and her own positive image (which reaches 57% according to the Cadem survey of the 3rd week of March), has positioned her once again with a seemingly solid foundation to consider competing again. Likewise, in the latest Pulso Ciudadano survey, with fieldwork conducted in March, the former president reached 8.1% in presidential preferences (a 3 pp increase from January), placing her in third position after Mayor Evelyn Matthei (24.9%) and José Antonio Kast (11.7%), and ahead of other candidates from the sector such as Minister Camila Vallejo (4.5%).

The ICP agrees that during these almost two years of Gabriel Boric's administration, it became clear that approximately one-third of the population supports the Government. Although it is true that only a 30% approval rating is not good news for any government, it is worth remembering that governments have cycles expressed in citizen approval figures. In this regard, when observing trends, governments start with good approval ratings, only to decrease as the months progress, reaching their worst results during the second and third year of their term, and finally gradually recovering during the fourth year. Taking these factors into consideration, the one-third of support that President Boric receives today ceases to be a liability and becomes a potential asset. Thus, comparing with the previous two governments, it is observed that today President Boric enjoys greater support than former Presidents Bachelet and Piñera had at the same point in their respective final terms. Secondly, the approval ratings of former Presidents Bachelet and Piñera were substantially higher at the time of the presidential elections that chose their successors.

In this context, it could be argued that it is possible for the current government to achieve higher approval ratings by the end of next year. This means that the governing coalition has the potential to face the next presidential election competitively, especially if their candidate is someone like Michelle Bachelet, who enjoys broad public support and is capable of uniting various factions of the left, from the parties of the former Concertación to the FA and PC. In light of this scenario, and despite the international trends mentioned earlier, where opposition forces have won the majority of the

elections they contest, no political faction can assume that the upcoming presidential elections are predetermined. Therefore, the call for this year is unity, electoral intelligence, and, above all, demonstrating guarantees of stability.

Furthermore, for the Chilean right, the 2021 municipal election marked their lowest performance since 2000. They secured 87 mayoralties, a significant drop from their peak of 145 mayors. This year, the focus is on regaining lost ground, aiming to recover the municipalities that were lost.

It's highly likely that in these elections, the balance of elected officials will be evenly split between both sectors, which is advantageous for the current opposition given that security, organized crime, and drug trafficking remain the electorate's primary concern. This represents an opportunity for the right to gain trust by demonstrating their commitment to tackling these issues with urgency and decisiveness. However, the alliances formed among the six non-officialist parties — the two center parties, the three from Chile Vamos, and the Republican Party — are also crucial. These alliances need to demonstrate governance and ensure stability to the votes.

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