An image of power, power of an image

May 2020

Report on presidential approval ratings in Latin America
Executive Summary

Since the confirmation of the first cases of COVID-19 in Latin America in late February, most governments in the region have reacted by imposing strict isolation measures. Two months on and attention has turned to plans for loosening the quarantines and reactivating social and economic activity.

What level of support do governments have in facing the medium and long term impacts of the pandemic? Do citizens trust their leaders' ability to respond effectively to present and future threats? In trying to answer these questions, we have prepared the following presidential image report which draws on surveys from 12 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean during the months of March and April 2020.

The survey data point to an overall strengthening in presidential images - with some exceptions that correlate suggestively to where confinement measures have been less strict. However, inconsistent survey results, added to the next phase of relaxing isolation measures, which is set to vary by sector and region, mean that further studies are needed to confirm the observed trend.
Ranking of presidential image in times of COVID-19
March 1st – April 30th 2020

Positive  Negative

1. El Salvador  Nayib Bukele  96%  3%
2. Guatemala  A. Giammattei  87%  15%
3. Argentina  Alberto Fernández  80%  17%
4. Peru  Martín Vizcarra  73%  23%
5. Uruguay  Luis Lacalle Pou  65%  20%
6. Dominican Rep.  Danilo Medina  60%  35%
7. Colombia  Iván Duque  57%  34%
8. Mexico  López Obrador  53%  45%
9. Bolivia  Jeanine Añez  45%  29%
10. Brazil  Jair Bolsonaro  41%  30%
11. Ecuador  Lenín Moreno  64%  23%
12. Chile  Sebastián Piñera  71%  19%

To see the sources surveyed, click here
### Positive image before and during quarantine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Image Jan - Feb 2020</th>
<th>Image Mar - Apr 2020</th>
<th>Bi-monthly difference</th>
<th>Compulsory social isolation</th>
<th>Start date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Nayib Bukele</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>▲ 8%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>03/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>A. Giammattei</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>▲ 31%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>03/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>Alberto Fernández</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>▲ 25%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>03/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Martín Vizcarra</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>▲ 20%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>03/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>Luis Lacalle Pou**</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>▲ 11%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Rep.</td>
<td>Danilo Medina</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>▲ 1%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>03/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Iván Duque</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>▲ 25%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>03/25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>López Obrador</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>▼ 9%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>Jeanine Añez</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>▲ 4%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>03/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Jair Bolsonaro</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>▼ 2%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>Lenín Moreno</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>▲ 10%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>03/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>Sebastián Piñera</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>▲ 9%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>03/25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The start date for each country is the date from which compulsory restrictions on internal mobility were imposed at the national level and applied bi-monthly.*

### Notes
- Social isolation measures include lockdowns, closures, curfews, and more.
- Data is based on surveys conducted by different institutes.
- Bi-monthly difference indicates the change in public opinion between two months.
- Yes indicates compulsory restrictions were imposed.
- No indicates compulsory restrictions were not imposed.

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*To see the sources surveyed, click [here](https://example.com).*
### Negative image and evolution of COVID-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Image Jan - Feb 2020</th>
<th>Image Mar - Apr 2020</th>
<th>Bi-monthly difference</th>
<th>Confirmed deaths as of 11/05</th>
<th>Confirmed cases / million inhabitants as of 05/11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>▼ 5%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>▼ 22%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>▼ 14%</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>▼ 15%</td>
<td>1.814</td>
<td>2.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>▼ 2%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Rep. Danilo Medina</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>▼ 2%</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>▼ 29%</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>△ 10%</td>
<td>3.353</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>△ 1%</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>△ 9%</td>
<td>10.627</td>
<td>744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>▼ 22%</td>
<td>2.127</td>
<td>1.730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>▼ 11%</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>1.541</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*To see the sources surveyed, click here.*
Map of confidence levels in government handling of COVID-19

PERIOD
March 1st – April 30th 2020

REFERENCES
% of presidential approval

To see the sources surveyed, click here
Argentina: strong endorsement of the response by the Fernández administration

President Alberto Fernández has

80% APPROVAL
according to an average of sources surveyed by Directorio Legislativo\(^*\) between March and April 2020

The quick and thus far effective response of the Argentine government to the COVID-19 crisis has led to an appreciable strengthening of Alberto Fernández’s image. However, controversies linked to mistakes in coordinating different government areas, perceived overpayment for foreign food purchases and talks of freeing at-risk prisoners chipped away at his 91% approval peak reached in late March.

* To see the sources surveyed, click [here](#)
Brazil: emergency management calls Bolsonaro's leadership into question

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has 30% APPROVAL according to an average of sources surveyed by the Diretorio Legislativo* between March and April 2020.

Conflicts inside and outside the administration put Bolsonaro in a difficult position as his confrontational and personalist style ill befits a worsening public health crisis. Amid mounting infection numbers, the Brazilian president ousted his health minister and clashed with governors who recommended taking more restrictive measures in the face of the pandemic. These tensions, coming on top of the resignation of the justice minister Sergio Moro, a central figure in the Lava Jato investigation, help explain a 9% rise in Bolsonaro's negative image rating.

From the start of the emergency, Bolsonaro resisted dictating confinement measures as a way to slow the spread of COVID-19. Brazil has the highest number of infected people in the region. Faced with Bolsonaro’s resistance, the governors of some of the most affected states, such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, began to implement distancing measures that clashed with the president.

On April 16th, in the midst of the crisis, Bolsonaro dismissed Luiz H. Mandetta, who was promoting the adoption of more restrictive measures to control COVID-19, in line with the actions of some governors. Bolsonaro named Nelson Teich as his replacement to head the ministry. According to Datafolha, Mandetta had a 76% approval rating.

The former chief judge of Operation Lava Jato Sergio Moro, resigned his position at the head of the Ministry, following Bolsonaro's attempt to change the leadership of the Federal Police. His sudden departure has been a severe setback for the government and could impact the president's image.

Faced with the threat of possible impeachment, the Brazilian president is seeking legislative support in exchange for government posts. Negotiations with the “Centrão” parliamentary bloc, which accounts for 220 of the 500 deputies, could include the Ministry of Science and positions in public agencies and institutions with budget management for public works.

* To see the sources surveyed, click here
The popular unrest that began in October 2019 in Chile took its toll on Piñera's ratings, which slumped to roughly 10% in the first two months of 2020. The government's response to the health crisis coupled with a pause in demonstrations have given him respite however, and led to an uptick in his approval rating.

Early response to COVID-19

Chile developed a disease containment plan in January 2020, two months before the first death from COVID-19 was recorded. This was added to the establishment of regional and temporary quarantines, a night curfew and the launch of mass testing. The government’s handling of the health crisis has thus enabled Piñera to claw back some approval, his ratings now roughly on par with those recorded before October 2019.

Financial support for sectors affected by the crisis

The Chilean government launched an Emergency Plan to mitigate the effects of the crisis on economic activity. This platform based on three pillars - job protection, liquidity injection to companies through loans at 0% rates and support for family income - was well received by the population.

Halt to "Safe Return Plan"

On April 19th, Piñera announced a gradual three-stage return to normalcy plan that included the resumption of face-to-face work in public offices, the return of private sector activities and workers and finally the reopening of educational establishments. However, criticism from different sectors and a rise in the number of infections forced the government to halt the plan soon after it had been announced.

* To see the sources surveyed, click here
Colombian President Iván Duque has 57% APPROVAL according to an average of sources surveyed by the Directorio Legislativo* between March and April 2020.

With the arrival of COVID-19, the negative effects on his image caused by the National Strike at the end of November 2019 seems to be behind him. Adopting an approach heavily geared to prevention, and amid a surge in popularity for Bogotá mayor Claudia López, one of his main political adversaries, he now faces pressure to safeguard the economy.

**Preventive response to COVID-19**

Colombia began taking social isolation measures against the spread of COVID-19 even before the first death was reported in the country. The Colombian government applied early confinement measures and carried out an effective communication policy with the support of experts, which was well received by the public. In this way, it also managed to contain the disease better than its neighboring countries.

**Economic plan and OECD membership**

The government launched a health emergency plan worth close to US $15,000 million. It includes credits, subsidies for the poorest and resources for the health system. The President has endorsed plans for the construction and manufacturing sectors to resume activities as of April 27th, in an attempt to revive the economy. On April 28th, Duque announced Colombia’s official entry to the OECD.

**Tensions with the Mayor of Bogotá**

The district led by Claudia López cooperated with the central government at the beginning of the crisis, but this was soon followed by several confrontations with the national government over the handling of the quarantine and sources of financing for company rescue packages. López’s popularity rating is 82.2% according to a Cifras & Conceptos survey.

* To see the sources surveyed, click [here](#).
Mexico: lax response to crisis accentuates drop in AMLO’s image

**APPRAISAL** according to an average of sources surveyed by the Directorio Legislativo* between March and April 2020

**53%**

53% APPROVAL

Mexican President López Obrador has 53% approval according to an average of sources surveyed by the Directorio Legislativo* between March and April 2020.

AML0 began his term in December 2018 with 90% public approval. His support has dwindled ever since. Several episodes contributed to this, among them the botched capture of Chapo Guzmán’s son and the country’s continuing economic woes. To that has now been added the government’s sluggish response to the pandemic.

**Delayed response to COVID-19**

Although the disease reached Mexico on February 27th, the government only declared an emergency in late March. Still, measures to restrict movement and economic activity were very limited. AMLO was also criticized for attending mass demonstrations contrary to recommendations from the Ministry of Health.

**Economic recession**

Mexico’s economy has been in decline partly due to falling investment since AMLO became President. In the first quarter of 2020, a 1.6% decrease in GDP was recorded, the lowest in a first quarter presidency for 11 years. Worsening numbers are expected as the pandemic unfolds.

**Failed capture**

Public approval had already seen a slump before the emergence of COVID-19 following a failed security operation on October 17th, 2019 in which security forces apprehended and then released Ovidio Guzmán López, while under attack from the Sinaloa Cartel in Culiacán.

**Sharp growth in infections**

AMLO announced that the ‘phase of greatest contagion’ will be from May 8–20th. However, during the previous three weeks the number of confirmed cases had risen from 5,000 to 29,696 with urban areas the hardest hit. A member of his cabinet then tested positive having been criticized for not complying with distancing recommendations.

*To see the sources surveyed, click here*
Methodological notes

PERIOD

March 1st – April 30th 2020

This monitoring of presidential images is based on simple average calculations of approval rating surveys developed in each country between the months of March-April. The different data sources are not weighted according to the methodology used, the sample size or the surveyor. It includes measurements of the level of approval of the president, level of approval of the government's handling of COVID-19, presidential image and level of approval of the administration.

In some cases, a considerable level of dispersion has been seen between one measurement and another, shown in Tables 1 and 2. In particular, the surveys carried out in Argentina stand out, with variations between 58 and 93% approval; Peru's Martín Vizcarra's also ranges from 58 to 86%; and Chile's President's from 11 to 40%. The variation is even greater in the measurement of the Presidents' negative image.

See the data sources used here.
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