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2018 LATIN AMERICAN ELECTIONS: WHO, WHAT AND WHEN

Madrid, December 2017

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Introduction

Latin America faces a packed electoral calendar in 2018, one which will undoubtedly define the trajectory of its political and economic relations with the rest of the world. The first will be in Costa Rica in February, followed by El Salvador in March, Paraguay in April, Colombia in May, Mexico in July, Brazil and Peru in October and, if nothing gets in its way, Venezuela in October as well.

Will the bells sound for Lopez Obrador in Mexico, or for PRI candidate Jose Antonio Meade, the first candidate in history to not be a party litigant? Will they ring for Lula da Silva in Brazil or will they be silent by court order? Who will they sound for in Colombia: Fajardo, Vargas Lleras, De la Calle, Ordonez, Duque, Nieto, Lopez—or another of the more than 50 candidates that come forward? One thing is certain: the results are not an issue particular to each country, but will affect the entire region. In a globalized and economically, politically and ideologically interconnected world, what happens in each successive election will have consequences on the region’s geopolitical balance and, subsequently, its relations with the rest of the world.

For centuries, bells were a means of rapid and effective communication that informed the population of many community events. They were a shared signal, learned by all citizens since childhood. They told time of day, marked the arrival of a renowned visitor, or shared news of a fire, lost child, storm, party or death.

If that language were still used today, it would undoubtedly include election results among its many

420
million people
will be called to the polls



messages. There would be different rings and sequences for each party, for an absolute majority, for a presidential runoff or any other possible event. However, the *De campanorum pulsatione*, a manuscript kept in the Archives of the Cathedral of Toledo that describes how and when to ring the bells, confirms that there is nothing stipulated regarding elections. But we must note that it was written in 1357, a time when such circumstances were much less common.

In 2018, more than 420 million people will go to the polls in Latin America to choose who will lead their countries. Costa Rica (February), El Salvador (March), Paraguay (April), Colombia (May), Mexico (July), Peru and Brazil (October) and Venezuela (possibly in October) are the countries where and times when the region’s future political paths will be chosen.

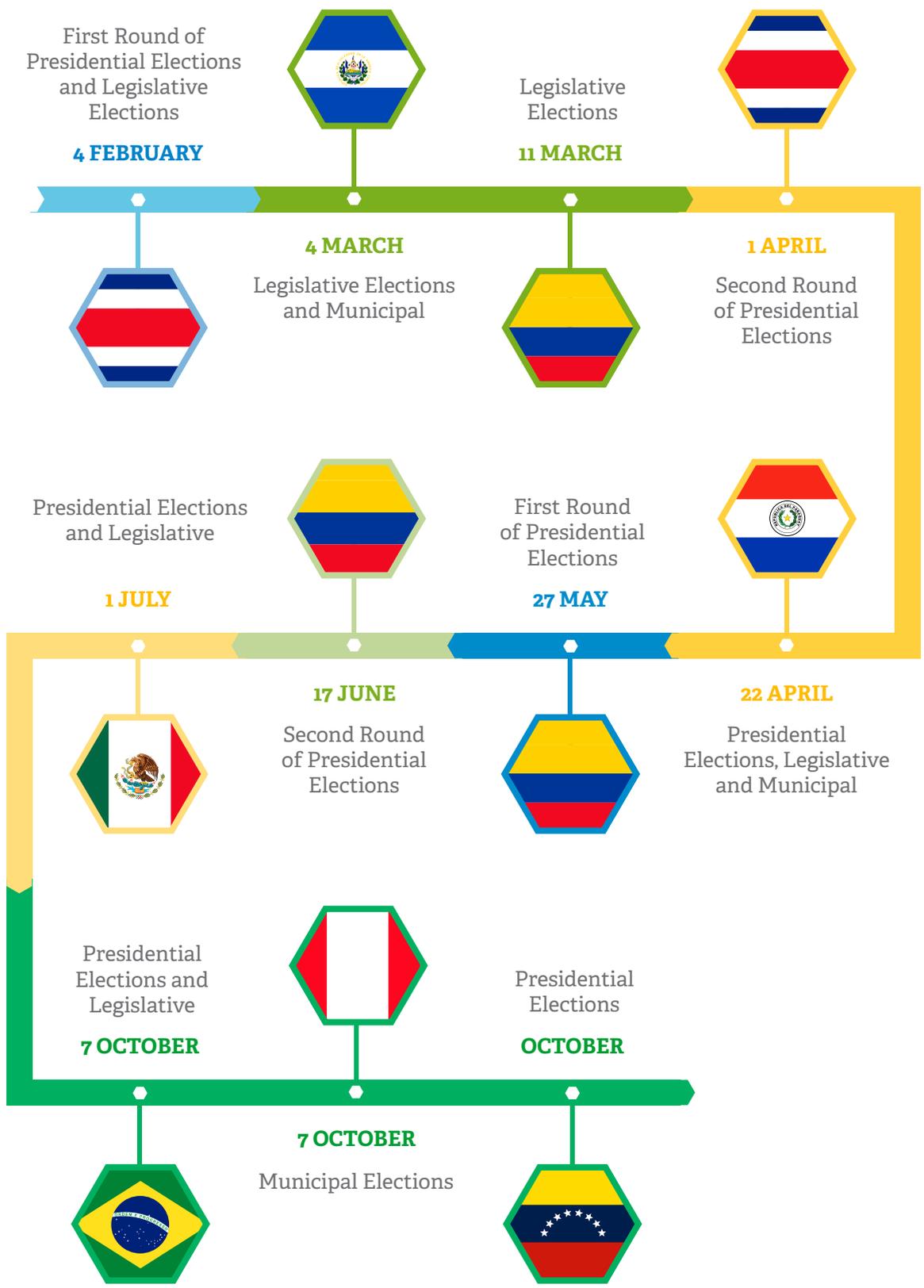
More than 420 million people will be called to the polls in Latin America to choose who will determine the destinies of their countries

Continuity or upset, left or right, new leaders or known actors, [rise of populism](#) or consolidation of the middle class—these are just some of the political questions that will be answered as the year progresses and results become known.

Ernest Hemingway opened his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) with a well-known poem by John Donne on the interdependence of human beings:

“No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less. As well as if a pomontory were. As well as if a manor of thine own or of thy friend’s were. Each man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. Therefore, send to know for whom the bell tolls, It tolls for thee.”

Let’s watch the news this year, because the bells that toll in 2018 will not sound just for a specific region and people, but for us all.





February

Costa Rica will choose a president, two vice presidents and 57 deputies Feb. 4. Those elected will be responsible for leading the country on the 200th anniversary of its independence, in 2021. Costa Rica embodies a **Latin American success story**, with its sustained growth and global prominence in environmental policies.

In October 2017, a **University of Costa Rica** survey showed that, although assessments of the government of Luis Guillermo Solís—a member of the Citizen Action Party (**PAC**)—remain stable, perceptions of corruption as one of the country’s key problems have increased, and unemployment continues to top the list of issues that most concern the population.

Last July, PAC chose former Minister of Labor and Human Development and Social Inclusion Carlos Alvarado (37 years old) as its candidate, a man who seeks to consolidate the country’s center left. His main rival will be National Liberation Party (**PLN**) candidate **Antonio Alvarez Desanti** (40 years old), the two-time president of the Assembly of Costa Rica. PLN had a shaky start to its campaign: Johnny Araya, the 2014 presidential candidate and one of **Antonio Alvarez’s** close collaborators, submitted his resignation due to being under investigation by the Attorney General for influence peddling.



February 4



First Round of Presidential Elections

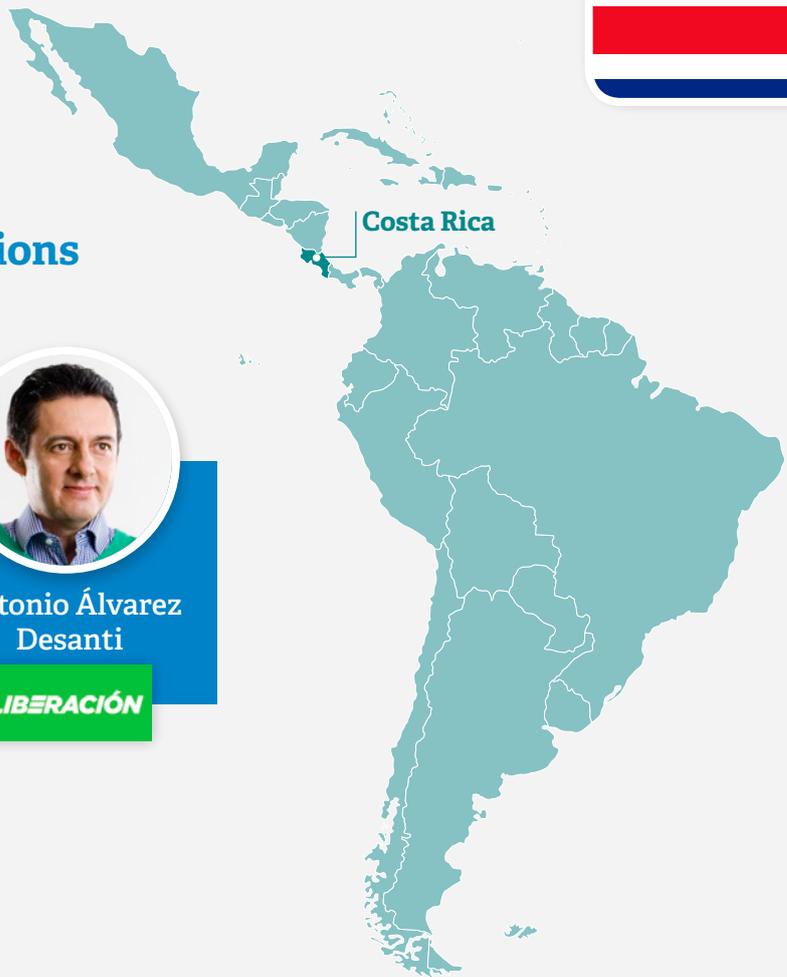
Candidates



Carlos Alvarado



Antonio Álvarez Desanti



Legislative Elections



March

Five million **Salvadorans** will be called to vote in March. They will choose 84 deputies of the Legislative Assembly and representatives for each of El Salvador's 262 municipalities. Very few Salvadoran elections, either legislative or presidential, have been held peacefully since 1992, constituting a tradition of parliamentary confrontation. According to the World Bank, **El Salvador has the slowest-growing economy in Central America**. On the brighter side, the country has seen significant improvements in education and literacy.

The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (**FMLN**), to which the current president Salvador

Sanchez belongs, is not one of the Assembly's primary parties. **ARENA** (Republican Nationalist Alliance) has the most weight, with 35 deputies. FMLN's objective is to flip the parties with more influence in order to speed Salvador Sanchez's reforms and pave his way to the 2019 presidential elections. If ARENA manages to increase its number of deputies, however, imminent pressures can be expected.

One week after the elections in El Salvador, on March 11, Colombians will elect their Congress members (102 seats in the Senate and 166 seats in the House of Representatives). This first major vote could give some clue as to what will happen in the presidential elections in May.

March 4



Presidential Elections

Possible candidate



Salvador Sánchez



Legislative Elections



Municipal Elections



March 11



Legislative Elections



April

With elections scheduled for April 22, **Paraguay** is next, voting on the president, 125 parliamentarians, 17 governors and 18 Parlasur parliamentarians. Over the last decade, the Paraguayan economy grew at an average rate of 5 percent, an increase greater than those of its neighbors, giving it ever more access to international capital markets.

In 2013, President **Horacio Cartes** of the National Republican Association-Colorado Party (**ANR**) took over from **Federico Franco** of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (**PLRA**). Cartes won the elections with

45.8 percent of the vote, ahead of the 37.19 percent that went to Efraín Alegre (PLRA).

Currently, ANR dominates the political scene: it has an absolute majority in the Congress, holding 65 of the 125 seats and 12 of the 17 governorships. **Santiago Peña**, ANR's official candidate, and **Mario Abdo Benítez** are competing for the candidacy, while trying not to threaten the party's unity. Meanwhile, **Efraín Alegre** will again be the PLRA candidate, continuing to seek alliances with former President **Fernando Lugo's** Guasu Front.

April 1



Second Round of Presidential Elections



April 22



Presidential Elections

Candidates



Santiago Peña



Mario Abdo Benítez



Efraín Alegre



Legislative Elections



Municipal Elections



May

Colombia will be center stage for Latin America's spring elections, with the first round of their presidential elections taking place May 27, and the second round, if necessary, June 17.

Juan Manuel Santos' administration ends August 7, as stipulated in the Congressional approval of Nov. 30, 2016, of the **peace agreement** between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP).

Santos' opposition has been forging alliances to combine fragmented support, with the aim of claiming Palacio de Narino. Sergio Fajardo, former mayor of Medellin and former governor of Antioquia, joined forces with the Green Party's Claudia Lopez and the Alternative Democratic Pole's Jorge Robledo to try to earn the vote that rejects traditional parties. One of the three—most likely Fajardo—will be the candidate of what is known as the **Colombian Coalition**.

Sunday, Nov. 19, the **Liberal Party** chose **Humberto de la Calle** as its candidate. In his acceptance speech, he expressed his interest in forming an alliance with the Colombian Coalition. It is yet unknown if **Gustavo Petro**, a senator for the Alternative Democratic Pole, will join this group or run alone.

Their main opponents will be **German Vargas Lleras**, former vice president (2014-2017) supported by the Radical Change Party and Social Party of National Unity (Party of the U), and the citizen group Mejor's presidential candidate, **Juan Manuel Santos**. [According to the polling predictions](#), Fajardo has 15 percent of voter intention, Gustavo Petro 17 percent and German Vargas Lleras 14 percent.

Recently, the Democratic Center—the conservative, neoliberal party that supported both former President Uribe and former President Pastrana—signed an electoral alliance that will probably select **Marta Lucía Ramírez** as their candidate, putting another competitive choice for president into the race.

May 27



First Round of Presidential Elections

Candidates



Sergio Fajardo
(Possible candidate)



Germán Vargas Lleras



Marta Lucía Ramírez





July

Mexico's July 1 Election Day is expected to be complex and historical. We will witness an unprecedented number of changes and events in the political system, including the re-election of legislators, the coalition government and the running of independent candidates. More than 3,000 positions are at stake, including the presidency, 128 senate seats, 500 deputy positions and nine governor's titles.

The 2018 elections will take place in a tumultuous political climate in which only 31 percent of Mexicans approve of the president's work; 70 percent believe "the country is on the wrong track."¹ The [International Competitiveness Index](#) indicates that Mexico's growth and progress in global competitiveness have dwindled due to its levels of corruption and violence—both pressing issues that will undoubtedly be paramount on next year's agenda.

The 2017 edition of *Latinbarómetro*² wrote that Mexicans "are disenchanted with democracy." Though in 2016, 71 percent agreed that "democracy may have problems, but it is the best system of government," currently, only 56 percent of adults feel this way. The study revealed that confidence in political parties has also fallen, with only 9 percent still trusting them.

These shifts have sharpened each party's focus on who will represent them. Given the context surrounding the elections, there exists a political reality in which parties have given priority attention to who their representatives will be.

For the Movement of National Regeneration (**Morena**) and the Labor Party (**PT**), which may well appear together on the ballot, **Andres Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)** is the top choice. Running for the

presidency for the third time, several surveys have placed him at the top.³

The **Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)** chose a person not affiliated with their party, [but who enjoys ubiquitous acceptance](#)—both inside and outside the institution: **Jose Antonio Meade Kuribrena**,⁴ the former secretary of Finance and Public Credit. He has also held key positions in the cabinets of Enrique Pena Nieto and Felipe Calderon Hinojosa (National Action Party).

There is a high probability that the Party of the Democratic Revolution (**PRD**), the National Action Party (**PAN**) and **Movimiento Ciudadano (MC)**, will merge into the Frente Ciudadano por Mexico; however, they are still negotiating to decide who will be the candidate leading this alliance. The possibilities they have considered thus far include PAN's President, **Ricardo Anaya**; the Mayor of Mexico City, **Miguel Angel Mancera**; and **Rafael Moreno Valle**, former governor of Puebla.

Major players like **Margarita Zavala**, former PAN member; **Jaime "El Bronco" Rodriguez Calderon**, governor of Nuevo Leon; **Pedro Ferriz de Con**, journalist; and **Maria "Marichuy" de Jesus Patricio**, member of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), will all work to reach the 860,000 threshold for signatures across 17 states⁵ the National Electoral Institute (INE) requires to register as an independent candidate for the presidency.

The electoral outcome in Mexico, for the first time, is highly uncertain, with a number of very competitive possibilities. We will witness a historical process in which the next president of the country could win the elections with only 30 or 35 percent of the vote.

1 El Universal. Aumenta aceptación de Peña Nieto tras sismo. 21 de noviembre de 2017. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/aumenta-aceptacion-de-pena-nieto-tras-sismo>

2 El Economista. Latinbarómetro y las urnas. 27 de noviembre de 2017. <https://www.economista.com.mx/opinion/Latinbarometro-y-las-urnas-20171127-0009.html>

3 Encuesta: Tras su destape, Meade le pisa los talones a AMLO rumbo a 2018. 28 de noviembre de 2017. <http://www.nacion321.com/encuestas/encuesta-tras-su-destape-meade-le-pisa-los-talones-a-amlo-rumbo-a-2018>

4 Animal Político. ¿Destape, imposición? No, los priistas dicen que desde hace un mes sabían que Meade era el bueno. 28 de noviembre de 2017. <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2017/11/priistas-jose-antonio-meade-destape/>

5 Animal Político. Cómo y cuándo puedes dar tu firma para apoyar a un candidato independiente. 16 de octubre de 2017. <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2017/10/firmas-candidatos-independientes-procedimiento/>



July 1



Presidential Elections



Candidates



Andrés Manuel López Obrador



José Antonio Meade Kuribreña



Possible candidates



Ricardo Anaya



Miguel Ángel Mancera



Rafael Moreno Valle



Margarita Zavala



Jaime Rodríguez Calderón



Pedro Ferriz de Con



María de Jesús Patricio



Legislative Elections



October

Oct. 7, **Brazil** will hold its presidential and legislative elections. Although there are still no official candidates, in a [survey published](#) in the newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo June 2017, Workers' Party **Lula da Silva**, who was president from 2003 to 2011, would be most likely to win the 2018 presidential elections, receiving a projected 30 percent of the votes. In second place is **Marina Silva** of the Sustainability Network, who was the minister of the Environment with Lula, followed by the Social Christian Party's **Jair Bolsonaro**. It is predicted there will be a second round of elections.

Jair Bolsonaro, belonging to the political right, has gained great prominence; In December 2016, he received only 8 percent of intention to vote, but this rose to 14 percent in April 2017, then 16 percent in June. He has capitalized on the smugness a significant portion of the population feels when traditional politicians are involved in scandals.

Another party with significant influence is the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (**PSDB**). It had rallied great opposition against the presidencies of Lula da Silva and Dilma Rouseff and could count on the strong electoral pull of **Joao Doria**, current mayor of Sao Paulo. Though Doria is an emerging leader among the Social Democrats, he [has admitted](#) that his trajectory toward the presidency has lost strength; If

proven true, **Geraldo Alckmin**, the governor of Sao Paulo, will most likely lead the social democratic front instead.

A decisive key component will be whether Lula da Silva can run. He is currently convicted of corruption and could therefore be excluded from the elections. If his guilt is confirmed, the Workers' Party will have to choose another candidate at the eleventh hour, and their progress could be further weakened by countermobilizations in support of the former president.

The same day that Brazil chooses its president, **Peru** will choose 25 regional presidents, 195 mayors and 1,643 district mayors. **Peru is one of the fastest-growing economies in Latin America**, enjoying a favorable environment and prudent policies. Poverty rates fell in the 10 years from 2005 to 2015 from 45.5 percent to 19.3 percent, meaning more than 6 million Peruvians have risen out of poverty.

President **Pedro Pablo Kuczynski** of Peruvians for the Cambio (PPK) is navigating some swings in popularity due to the Odebrecht case. However, several factors, such as Peru's qualification for the 2018 World Cup for the first time since 1982 and Pope Francis' upcoming visit at the beginning of 2018 (in a country with a large Catholic majority), may help restore his popularity.

The Venezuelan Ambiguity

Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2017, **Nicolas Maduro** affirmed the following in a meeting with members of the armed forces:

"In the year 2018, rain, shine or lightning, we will hold presidential elections as mandated by our Constitution, and I trust in the vote of the people, in their conscience. I trust in democracy and freedom as the supreme value of our country."

Article 230 of the Venezuelan Constitution reads: "The presidential term is six years. The president of the Republic may be re-elected, immediately and only once, for an additional term." In view of this article, in October 2018, the six-year term for which Hugo Chavez was elected in October 2012 expires.

[The political and social panorama](#) in Venezuela is very complex, and the economic recession plagues the

daily life of millions of citizens. The opposition and a large part of the international community do not recognize the validity of the elections held Oct. 15, 2017, in which Chavismo triumphed, winning 18 of the 23 governor seats in dispute. Nor do they trust the democratic guarantees given for 2018.

To try to clarify the situation, the government and its opposition, the Coalition for Democratic Unity (Mesa de la *Unidad Democrática*), met in Santo Domingo Dec. 1 and 2. Both parties have accepted the presence of "chaperones," representatives from Mexico, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and Nicaragua.

The meeting agenda was of the utmost importance: guaranteeing clean elections, addressing the humanitarian crisis and releasing prisoners. The meetings' results have yet to be publicized.



October 7



Presidential Elections

There are no official candidates as of now



Lula da Silva



Marina Silva



Jair Bolsonaro



João Doria



Geraldo Alckmin



Legislative Elections

October 7



Municipal Elections

October



Presidential Elections



Key Questions

1. Why is the confluence of these Latin American elections relevant during 2018?

It is very unusual for electoral processes to transpire in Latin America's most influential countries during the same year. More than two-thirds of the Latin American population will be summoned to the polls. In other words, countries representing close to 80 percent of the region's GDP will be involved in elections at some point during 2018—a relevant and highly impactful political coincidence.

2. What is at stake?

From a socio-economic perspective, Latin America will determine the future balance of its economic growth and social impact.

It is not easy to build a consensus among analysts regarding Latin America's evolution as broad as the one we have today: Currently, there is a positive economic environment in Latin America, with sustained growth (3.5 percent on average) built on broad-based recovery.

This consensus is based on a condition: The continuation of the fiscal policies that have been put into practice by most Latin American countries. It is a trend that requires the addition, once growth has been sustained over time, of social matters, such as the growth of social center, called the "middle class," achieved by reducing poverty, correcting labor informality, increasing bancarization, etc.

But whether this monetary stability will become a reality depends largely on the electoral

outcome, as there may be reactions to the market, actions taken against monetary policies or exchange restrictions, to name a few possibilities. The future of the economy will depend, more than ever, on who holds the political and financial reins in the region's main countries.

3. Do we have any idea what the results will be?

As shown in this document, let us be clear: **nothing is decided.** Because the "decision-making fork" is split wider than ever, we are faced with circumstances that in previous elections would have been decidedly "remote," but are now considered perfectly plausible.

On the one hand, no one is sure of the magnitude of the "popular reaction—the populist and anti-systemic electoral result, specific in each country—that will arise as a result of citizen fatigue around a corrupt society; How strongly the discredit of the elites and perceived lack of economic improvements for the most disadvantaged will trigger popular reactions remains to be seen.

On the other hand, the growing Latin American middle class' conservative vote, increasingly broad and better-formed, should not be ignored. It will prefer a "continuity with reforms" that, with the necessary adjustments, would allow for continued development of a free market.

Either of these two scenarios and all their intermediate variants are fully possible in this complex electoral landscape.

4. We are not clear about the results, but do we at least know who is running for the elections?



The lack of confirmed candidacies is another curious element of these upcoming elections. Unlike previous elections, in which predetermined and consolidated candidates faced the lead-up to Election Day with more-or-less defined polls and trends, for the 2018 electoral processes, uncertainty reigns supreme.

Despite time pressure, certain countries' main parties and their traditional "quarries of presidents" continue to try and lock down their candidates and win coalitions. In fact, here we have a series of questions—true "keys of the 2018 Latin American electoral calendar" that, as they are answered, will allow us to trace a path that leads us to understanding the outcome of the upcoming elections in each country:

- Will Lula da Silva be able to run in Brazil's presidential elections, or will he be summoned back to the courts?
- Will Lopez Obrador strengthen his advantage in Mexico and start a new political stage, leaving PRI?
- Will Sergio Fajardo achieve an opposition agreement in Colombia, enabling him to contend with Vargas Lleras in the presidential race?
- Will there be elections in 2018 in Venezuela, and will they be carried out with all the guarantees of democracy?

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Team of Specialists

Alejandro Romero

Partner and CEO for the Americas at LLORENTE & CUENCA

Claudio Vallejo

Senior Director of Latam Desk Europe at LLORENTE & CUENCA

www.llorenteycuenca.com

LLORENTE & CUENCA

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

José Antonio Llorente
Founding Partner and Chairman
jallorente@llorenteycuenca.com

Enrique González
Partner and CFO
egonzalez@llorenteycuenca.com

Adolfo Corujo
Partner and Chief Talent and
Innovation Officer
acorujo@llorenteycuenca.com

Carmen Gómez Menor
Corporate Director
cgomez@llorenteycuenca.com

MANAGEMENT - AMERICAS

Alejandro Romero
Partner and CEO Americas
aromero@llorenteycuenca.com

Luisa García
Partner and COO Latin America
lgarcia@llorenteycuenca.com

Erich de la Fuente
Partner and CEO United States
edelafuente@llorenteycuenca.com

José Luis Di Girolamo
Partner and CFO Latin America
jldgirolamo@llorenteycuenca.com

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Daniel Moreno
Chief Talent
dmoreno@llorenteycuenca.com

Marjorie Barrientos
Talent Manager for Andes' Region
mbarrientos@llorenteycuenca.com

Karina Sanches
Talent Manager for
the Southern Cone
ksanches@llorenteycuenca.com

SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

Arturo Pinedo
Partner and Managing Director
apinedo@llorenteycuenca.com

Goyo Panadero
Partner and Managing Director
gpanadero@llorenteycuenca.com

Barcelona

María Cura
Partner and Managing Director
mcura@llorenteycuenca.com

Muntaner, 240-242, 1º-1ª
08021 Barcelona
Tel. +34 93 217 22 17

Madrid

Joan Navarro
Partner and Vice-president
of Public Affairs
jnavarro@llorenteycuenca.com

Amalio Moratalla
Partner and Senior Director
amoratalla@llorenteycuenca.com

Jordi Sevilla
Vice-president of Economic Context
jsevilla@llorenteycuenca.com

Latam Desk
Claudio Vallejo
Senior Director
cvallejo@llorenteycuenca.com

Lagasca, 88 - planta 3
28001 Madrid
Tel. +34 91 563 77 22

Impossible Tellers

Ana Folgueira
Managing Director
ana@impossibletellers.com

Impossible Tellers
Diego de León, 22, 3º izq
28006 Madrid
Tel. +34 91 438 42 95

Cink

Sergio Cortés
Partner, Founder and Chairman
scortes@cink.es

Muntaner, 240, 1º-1ª
08021 Barcelona
Tel. +34 93 348 84 28

Lisbon

Tiago Vidal
Managing Director
tvidal@llorenteycuenca.com

Avenida da Liberdade nº225, 5º Esq.
1250-142 Lisbon
Tel. + 351 21 923 97 00

UNITED STATES

Miami

Erich de la Fuente
Partner and CFO
edelafuente@llorenteycuenca.com

600 Brickell Ave.
Suite 2020
Miami, FL 33131
Tel. +1 786 590 1000

New York City

Latam Desk
Salomón Kalach
Director
skalach@llorenteycuenca.com

Abernathy MacGregor
277 Park Avenue, 39th Floor
New York, NY 10172
Tel. +1 212 371 5999 (ext. 374)

Washington, DC

Ana Gamonal
Director
agamonal@llorenteycuenca.com

10705 Rosehaven Street
Fairfax, VA 22030
Washington, DC
Tel. +1 703 505 4211

MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN

Mexico City

Juan Arteaga
Managing Director
jarteaga@llorenteycuenca.com

Rogelio Blanco
Managing Director
rblanco@llorenteycuenca.com

Bernardo Quintana
Non-Executive Chairman
bquintanak@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Paseo de la Reforma 412, Piso 14,
Col. Juárez, Del. Cuauhtémoc
CP 06600, Mexico City
Tel. +52 55 5257 1084

Havana

Pau Solanilla
Managing Director
psolanilla@llorenteycuenca.com

Sortis Business Tower, piso 9
Calle 57, Obarrio - Panamá
Tel. +507 206 5200

Panama City

Javier Rosado
Partner and Managing Director
jrosado@llorenteycuenca.com

Sortis Business Tower, piso 9
Calle 57, Obarrio - Panamá
Tel. +507 206 5200

Santo Domingo

Iban Campo
Managing Director
icampo@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Abraham Lincoln 1069
Torre Ejecutiva Sonora, planta 7
Tel. +1 809 6161975

ANDES' REGION

Bogota

María Esteve
Partner and Managing Director
mesteve@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Calle 82 # 9-65 Piso 4
Bogotá D.C. - Colombia
Tel: +57 1 7438000

Lima

Luis Miguel Peña
Partner and Senior Director
lmpena@llorenteycuenca.com

Humberto Zogbi
Chairman
hzogbi@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Andrés Reyes 420, piso 7
San Isidro
Tel. +51 1 2229491

Quito

Alejandra Rivas
Managing Director
arivas@llorenteycuenca.com

Avda. 12 de Octubre N24-528 y
Cordero - Edificio World Trade
Center - Torre B - piso 11
Tel. +593 2 2565820

Santiago de Chile

Francisco Aylwin
Chairman
faylwin@llorenteycuenca.com

Néstor Leal
Director
nleal@llorenteycuenca.com

Magdalena 140, Oficina 1801.
Las Condes.
Tel. +56 22 207 32 00

SOUTH AMERICA

Buenos Aires

Mariano Vila
Managing Director
mvila@llorenteycuenca.com

Daniel Valli
Non-Executive Chairman for Southern
Cone
dvalli@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Corrientes 222, piso 8. C1043AAP
Tel. +54 11 5556 0700

Rio de Janeiro

Cleber Martins
clebermartins@llorenteycuenca.com

Ladeira da Glória, 26
Estúdio 244 e 246 - Glória
Rio de Janeiro - RJ
Tel. +55 21 3797 6400

Sao Paulo

Cleber Martins
Managing Director
clebermartins@llorenteycuenca.com

Juan Carlos Gozzer
Regional Innovation Officer
jcozzer@llorenteycuenca.com

Rua Oscar Freire, 379, Cj 111,
Cerqueira César SP - 01426-001
Tel. +55 11 3060 3390



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