At the end of the first four months of the year, Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa leads the ranking with an approval rating of close to 70%. Although he lost a little more than 10 points since the beginning of the year, his popularity was reflected in his overwhelming support for the constitutional referendum held in April. With a turnout of 82%, citizens supported the proposed changes in the role and powers of the armed forces in support of the police, increased penalties, extradition, possession and use of weapons, among others. However, they rejected the work-for-hours regime.

In the final stretch of his six-year presidency, AMLO is in second place with 59% approval. The average for his 66 months in office is 62%. Meanwhile, the country is heading towards the largest election in its history, which will take place on June 2. Although the gap between Claudia Scheinbaum and Xóchilt Gálvez has narrowed, the former continues to comfortably lead the polls with a margin of approximately 20%.

Javier Milei's popularity level has practically not moved since he began his presidency in December 2023, thus contradicting analyses that raised the possibility of a strong attrition. Although economic indicators show the deep effects of the recession, the government is able to credit a management achievement and knows how to capitalize on it: the deceleration of inflation.

In Brazil, Lula Da Silva faces the opposite situation. Economic indicators show an increase in employment and labor income. However, the rising cost of food is impacting his image, even among his own voters. Today he is 10 points below the approval level of his first 12 months in office.

In the last four months, Gustavo Petro held steady at 36%, a 6% rebound. Despite the failure in Congress of his health care reform bill, one of the government's flagships, the president seems to have gained initiative with direct appeals to the citizenry.

To understand why Milei holds his ground, Lula loses and Petro wins, it is key to analyze who capitalizes on the government's setbacks. In a highly polarized scenario such as Brazil's, mistakes are opportunities for a strengthened Bolsonarism. In Argentina, the same is not true. The opposition is more fragmented and is still too battered by the last elections to gain ground at the expense of unforced errors. Neither in Colombia. Petro failed to sustain his alliances but the opposition spectrum is divided. In this article we analyze it in depth.

José Raúl Mulino will be the next president of Panama as of July 1. The election was marked by several factors: the disqualification of the favorite candidate in the polls, a very high level of democratic dissatisfaction and rejection of public institutions, record voter turnout, high legislative fragmentation with independents as the first minority. To learn more, we invite you to read our last electoral report.
One president with high presidential approval in the midst of an economic crisis. Another that shows positive economic indicators but loses citizen support. A third one who is politically isolated but reaches his floor and bounces back. In this edition we will try to analyze why Milei's approval is sustained, Lula's drops and Petro's grows.

The key analysis that runs through the different points that will be presented here is who capitalizes on the government's setbacks. In a scenario of high polarization as the one we find in Brazil, they end up being opportunities for Bolsonarism. In Argentina, this is not the case. The opposition is more fragmented and is still too beaten by the last elections to gain ground at the expense of unforced errors. Neither in Colombia. Petro failed to sustain his alliances but the opposition spectrum is divided.

1. The economy

More specifically, inflation. A key factor to analyze the situation of both Milei and Lula.

One of the questions that appears again and again in the analysis of the Argentine situation is how long the climate of optimism will last if household economies do not feel the signs of improvement. The shock provoked by the economic measures led to think that the wear and tear could be very fast. However, five months after taking office, .

In an economic context much more favorable than Milei's, the rejection of Lula is increasing, even among his own voters. In the year and a half he has been in power, the level of employment has grown, real income has increased and GDP has grown more than projected. However, rising food prices are undermining his popularity, just the opposite of what is happening in Argentina. A recent survey conducted by CNT/MDA shows that the situation of the economy, unemployment and inflation is the third factor raised by those who once approved of the government and now reject it. In the same line, pessimism regarding the immediate future increased.

In Colombia, Petro is trying to capitalize on the achievements in terms of inflation reduction that emerge from the latest measurements of the National Administrative Department of Statistics. The cost of living is in third place among citizens' concerns, according to Ecoanalítica data. In first place is access to healthcare, 68% of the people surveyed by Invamer in April believe that healthcare coverage has worsened in the last year and a half. This is not a minor fact if one considers that the Congress has just rejected for the second time the health reform proposed by the government and that the project is losing support among citizens (DATEXCO).
2. The awkward relationship with the Legislative Branch

None of the three presidents has a comfortable situation in Congress, which means that they need to negotiate. On the other hand, there are no sectors with veto power, but they do have the capacity to tip the balance in the closest votes.

Legislative fragmentation is not a novelty in Brazil, where all the presidents of the last decades had to seek articulation spaces with the Central to pass laws. Today, tensions are over two tax reform bills and Lula is demanding from his own and others that there be more dialogue and negotiation. 59% of the people surveyed by IPEC consider that the government will have more difficulties in its relationship with Congress.

A key link in this dynamic is the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies, currently in the hands of Arthur Lira, Bolsonaro’s ally during his government.

The Chamber’s incumbent is third in the line of presidential succession and holds the powerful key to impeachment. The presidency of the Chamber will be contested again in February 2025, Lira cannot be reelected and the ruling party does not have the numbers to play strongly in that bid either. In the middle are the municipal elections in October.

As anticipated, Javier Milei’s relationship with Congress started off on the wrong foot. Here a series of elements were combined. On the one hand, a very ambitious bill that would inevitably generate resistance from different sectors of the opposition. On the other hand, an erratic negotiation that disorganized the opposition and dispersed the discussion along multiple lines. Finally, a very confrontational attitude of the President with the blocs interested in avoiding an early failure. With this scenario, the bill fell in the Chamber of Deputies to be reactivated weeks later with a more compressed format and more palatable for the opposition. Perhaps it is not too risky to say that an avoidable confrontation was sought.
Petro is the president who most felt the tensions with Congress. The central point in this relationship was his three major bills to reform the health, social security and labor systems. Particularly the insistence with the health reform had great costs in relation to his allies and resulted in his two consecutive rejections in 2023 and 2024. The President took note and announced the forthcoming presentation of a new bill, more limited and agreed with the actors of the health system, which the original proposal eliminated.

The tensions between the two powers were recently crystallized in two recent events. During a forum held in Santa Marta, he pointed out the urgent need for an agrarian reform in the country. He then called on Congress not to be blackmailed by corruption, at the same time that the National Electoral Council (CNE in Spanish) filed charges for facts linked to the electoral campaign. The president then returned to lash out in the networks with a “soft coup” and accused the CNE of being controlled by the opposition parties Cambio Democrático and Cambio Radical.

3. Citizenship in the streets

In recent weeks, the three governments saw themselves in the mirror of the streets. After 18 months of sustained decline, Petro seems to have gained some initiative with two calls to the streets. The first was whipped by his confrontation with the Supreme Court and what he considered an attempted institutional coup. It was a risky move but ended up working out well for the government. The second one was on May 1, a meeting in which he played again with the idea of calling for a Constituent Assembly. For some analysts, this Petro is more similar to that of the 2019 social outburst (a phenomenon that catapulted him to power). In line with this position, it could be suggested that Petro tried to move the political dispute to the streets.

Even if his leadership is not solid, he does not have in front of him a figure in a position to polarize with him and capitalize on allegations of corruption or legislative missteps. That said, we cannot ignore the fact that the rejection of the Colombian head of state is also taking the form of mobilizations. In April, he summoned no less than 400,000 demonstrators throughout the country.

In Brazil, the “thermometer” of what happened recently in the streets reflected the erosion of the presidential figure and the power of Bolsonarism. Lula had to speak before an almost empty square on Labor Day, while Bolsonaro was the figurehead of two massive demonstrations in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Finally, in Argentina, marches and strikes make the government uncomfortable and this became visible after one of the largest protests in the last 40 years, which was mobilized by the budget cuts to the university and science and technology system. The government felt the blow but did not acknowledge it. Again in this case, the key is who can capitalize on it.

The starting point

Although the presidents are at different points in their respective terms (Petro in month 20, Lula in month 16 and Milei in the fifth), there are commonalities and distinctions with respect to the starting point. All of them reached the presidency in the second electoral round, Petro and Lula with very tight results.

The Colombian president won by a meager margin of three points over Rodolfo Hernandez, an unexpected candidate who later disappeared from the national political scene (he even resigned his senatorial seat). By the 6th month of his mandate, the rejection rate was at the same level as the approval rate and crossed the floor of the votes that brought him to power.
Lula beat Jair Bolsonaro by only 1.8% of the votes, even though in the campaign the gap had been much larger. Bolsonaro was subsequently disqualified from holding public office, which, in principle, would make his aspirations for a second presidency impossible. However, he remains a central figure in Brazilian politics. The power of his space could be measured in the next municipal elections. It is worth remembering, however, that both Bolsonarism and the PT had poor results in the 2020 municipal elections. Petro, on the other hand, managed to hold a 50% approval rating for a year, today he is at the same level as Bolsonaro at his exit. In short, he did not manage to change the opinion of those who did not vote for him and is losing the favor of his own voters.

Finally, Javier Milei reversed the results of the first round, in which he came second, and with a margin of 11 points, much larger than anticipated by the polls. In spite of the rigors of the economic policy, his approval rating has not dropped below 50%, although some measurements are registering an incipient deterioration in the level of confidence in the government.

For the moment, the strong drop in inflation, perhaps the economic indicator with the greatest weight in the voting decisions of the citizens, and the fact that there is no opponent who can capitalize on his stumbles, are playing in his favor.

As we have argued in previous editions, the “cards” with which presidents play at the beginning of their term (citizen support, legislative power, polarization and fragmentation) may impose limits on their possibilities for action and growth. However, they can also be played to mark the terrain in which the opposition moves.
**Notas metodológicas**

This monitoring of presidential image compiles surveys on presidential image, presidential approval ratings and government approval ratings, developed in 18 countries in the region by a group of approximately 100 consulting firms and research centers.

The measurements are summarized as a simple average by country for the study period. Data sources are not weighted according to the methodology used, sample size or surveyor.

The averages corresponding to this two-month period are compared with those of previous two-month periods, using the same methodology.

Image of power is a report prepared by Directorio Legislativo’s research team.

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**Image of Power: surveys collected for March - April 2024 edition**

Every two months, IDP collects surveys from different outside sources and integrates them by means of simple average per country. We collected 51 surveys for this edition, as shown in the graph.

Source: Image of Power - Directorio Legislativo, based on the collection of public opinion polls from outside sources taken between March and April 2024.
**Directorio Legislativo** is a non-partisan and independent organization that for 15 years has been promoting the strengthening of legislative powers and the consolidation of democratic systems in Latin America through transparency, access to public information and dialogue with actors from the public, private, academic and civil society sectors.

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