

# Americas

## QUARTERLY

# A HISTORIC YEAR

**Our look at Latin America's 2024 election super-cycle**



**Xóchitl Gálvez** and **Claudia Sheinbaum**, the two leading candidates in Mexico's June election. Either would be the country's first female president.

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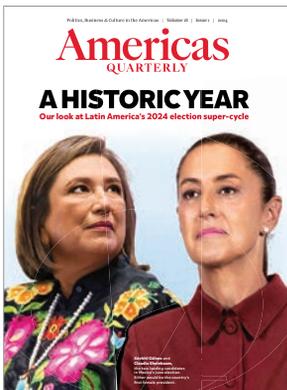
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# A Diverse Election Year

**Mexico's experience suggests electing women leaders may help address the declining faith in democracy seen elsewhere in the region.**



**2024 WILL BE THE BIGGEST ELECTION YEAR** in history, with some 4 billion people, or about half the planet's population, set to cast a ballot. In Latin America, the so-called super-cycle will see at least five presidential elections — enough to highlight several interesting and, in some cases, encouraging trends.

As our cover suggests, Mexico seems certain to elect its first female president in 2024. In recent years the country has become a world leader in gender equality in politics, with women now holding half the seats in Congress and also leading the Supreme Court and foreign ministry. It doesn't seem like a coincidence that Mexicans' satisfaction with democracy has doubled since 2018, according to pollster Latinobarómetro. That's largely due to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's popularity, but more Mexicans may also feel their leaders share their life experience and policy priorities. It's a formula other countries could emulate.

Elsewhere, the picture is more mixed, as Tamara Taraciuk Broner notes in her essay for this issue. El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele seems almost certain to win a second term, even though his country's Constitution forbids reelection. In Panama, the frontrunner is former President Ricardo Martinelli, who has been convicted on money laundering charges. Venezuela is scheduled to stage a vote in 2024, though the dictatorship has yet to commit to a date and almost no one expects voting to be free or fair. On the other end of the spectrum, Uruguay will hold an election that should reinforce its role as one of the world's strongest democracies. The Dominican Republic may also reelect its popular incumbent.

Where does that leave us? Recent years have seen democracies all over the region, and the world, come under stress — but find a way to resist, as Brazil, Guatemala and Peru did in 2023. There are no guarantees 2024 will have similarly positive outcomes. But efforts to ensure politicians resemble their constituencies as much as possible are not a bad start. 

# An Election Super-Cycle

Presidential elections in six Latin American countries will make history, test institutions and signal meaningful new trends in the region's politics.

*Our special report starts on page 18.*

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This year's contests will mark a turning point for the region.

*By Tamara Taraciuk Broner*

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El Salvador, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela prepare to elect presidents.

*By Rich Brown, Emilie Sweigart, Tara Hein and José Enrique Arrijo*

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Mexico's female leaders are showing the way.

*By Susan Segal*

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The country's historic opportunity is beset by serious challenges.

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Key indicators shed light on the country's economic, political and social reality.

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Dominican President Luis Abinader is a rare thing in Latin America: a popular incumbent.

*By Nick Burns*

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The Colombian master revolutionized aesthetics — and distilled his country's conflicts.

*By Daniel Rey*

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### **José Enrique Arrioja**

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Arrioja is the managing editor of *Americas Quarterly*. A Venezuelan-American journalist, he has covered financial markets and politics in Latin America for over 20 years at Bloomberg, *The Wall Street Journal Americas* and other outlets.



### **Tamara Taraciuk Broner**

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Taraciuk Broner is the Inter-American Dialogue's Peter D. Bell Rule of Law Program director. She was previously acting Americas director at Human Rights Watch.



### **Sebastián Zubieta**

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Zubieta is music director at Americas Society and a composer and conductor who has taught music in Argentina and the U.S. He has conducted early and contemporary vocal music and has presented his compositions throughout the region.



### **Alejandra Oliva**

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Oliva is an essayist, embroiderer and translator based in Chicago. She is the author of *Rivermouth: A Chronicle of Language, Faith and Migration* (Astra House Books, 2023).



### **Nick Burns**

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Nick Burns is an editor at *Americas Quarterly*. His work has been published in *The New York Times*, *American Affairs*, *New Left Review* and other outlets.

Tell us what you think. Please send letters to [Brian@as-coa.org](mailto:Brian@as-coa.org)



AQ's special report on a (relatively) bullish case for Latin America launched at an event in New York focused on the clean energy transition. AQ's Managing Editor José Enrique Arrijo, left, interviewed panelists Luisa Palacios and Mauricio Cárdenas of Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy.

Americas Quarterly



**Elohim Monard**  
 Political Analysis. Public Policy. (Dis/Mis)information. OSINT.  
 Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison ·  
 UW-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Valiosa exploración de [Andrea Moncada](#). Como peruano en el exterior desde hace un año, lo suscribo. La cito: "... hablé con una veintena de peruanos de entre 18 y 40 años que viven actualmente en el extranjero o tienen previsto abandonar el país a corto plazo. Varios de ellos consideraban que Perú ya no ofrecía las oportunidades profesionales que buscaban, y hablaban de miedo y desesperanza cuando se les preguntaba por las perspectivas del país."



**Alessio Mazzanti**  
 Mergers & Acquisitions and Capital Raising in the Americas | Managing Director at LatamIB  
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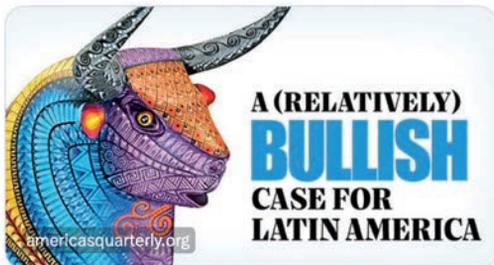
I recommend this article from [Americas Quarterly](#) for those who want to take advantage of this weekend and read an excellent article with positive expectations about Latin America that analyzes in depth and realism the improved forecast for the region as well as the challenges it still faces.



**José Antonio Ardavín**

@JAArdavin  
Jefe de la División para América Latina y el Caribe del Secretariado de Relaciones Globales de la OCDE. @OECD\_LAC Los comentarios son a título personal.

Great article for us, the stubbornly optimistic about LAC who try to create self-fulfilling prophecies. I keep this phrase "If the policy mix was better, the region might be growing 4% or 5% a year" from @BrazilBrian on @AmerQuarterly [americasquarterly.org/article/a-rela...](https://americasquarterly.org/article/a-rela...) @OECD\_LAC



**Mary Helen Spooner**

@MH\_Spooner  
Author and journalist who has worked in Chile, Bolivia, Mexico, Venezuela and Guatemala.

Excellent piece by Mat Youkee: The Darien Gap's Fearsome Reputation Has Been Centuries in the Making



**Alonso Castillo Cuevas**

@acastilloDC México se está quedando sin agua potable. Los ciudadanos están enojados. 57% de la población carece de acceso a una fuente de agua gestionada de manera segura" @AmerQuarterly

**Hari Seshasayee**

@haricito A refreshing take from @patricionavia portraying a unique angle of the Milei story, looking at what we can learn from two other countries, namely Chile and Colombia. Worth reading @AmerQuarterly @BrazilBrian

**Mark Feierstein**

@MarkFeierstein Want to understand the Argentine elections? There's no one better than @anaiparraguirre of @GBAOSTrategies.

**Lucinda Elliott**

@lucinda\_elliott So enjoyed this @BrazilBrian @AmerQuarterly: "AQ Podcast | Massa vs. Milei: Who Is the Favorite in Argentina?"

**Edmin De Los Santos**

@HablameLatiNo Folks, this is worrisome. As crime levels increase in #LatinAmerica, pro-gun positions are gaining strength in conservative movements across the region. According to @AmerQuarterly, some security experts attribute this trend to "U.S. style gun politics."

**Andre Pagliarini**

@apagliar This is a must-listen conversation, whether you're skeptical or supportive of the Biden administration's recent moves to lift sanctions on Venezuela in exchange for international observers (and other policies) in upcoming election



**Juan Nagel**

@juannagel  
Zuliano, Economista, Prof @uandes. I live in Chile. Eng/Sp

Latam offers great potential & equally great disappointments. @BrazilBrian & friends lay out their case for cautious optimism nicely.

Americas Society/Council of 1 @AS · Oct 17  
A new @AmerQuarterly special report is out!

After a tough decade, parts of Latin America are seeing the return of a cautious optimism. AQ's new issue explores where the opportunities are. [Show more](#)

SPECIAL REPORT  
**A (RELATIVELY) BULLISH CASE FOR LATIN AMERICA**





Indigenous supporters of Guatemalan President-elect Bernardo Arévalo attend a protest in Guatemala City in December, as elements in the government sought to obstruct the transfer of power. Nationwide protests helped pressure in favor of Arévalo's inauguration, set for January.

PHOTO BY LUIS ECHEVERRIA/BLOOMBERG/GETTY



THE BIG PICTURE



AQ

THE BIG  
PICTURE

Firefighters and volunteers combat wildfires in Bolivia after fires set for agricultural purposes blazed out of control in Rurrenabaque, Beni Department, in November. Slash-and-burn farming practices have drawn increasing criticism in the country amid drought and frequent out-of-control burns. Deforestation in Bolivia increased 32% in 2022, according to the World Resources Institute's Global Forest Watch.

PHOTO BY CRISTIAN CASTRO/AFP/GETTY







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MILITARY PRESIDENT

A supporter of Argentine President Javier Milei carries a placard outside Congress ahead of his inauguration in Buenos Aires in December. Milei did not move forward on dollarization, one of his main campaign promises, during his government's early weeks.

PHOTO BY LUIS ROBAYO/AFP/GETTY



THE BIG  
PICTURE



AQ

THE BIG  
PICTURE

Passengers ride Quito's metro on its first day of operation in December. Opening after a decade of construction and delays, the metro is Ecuador's first and features 15 stations along a 14-mile route.

PHOTO BY RODRIGO BUENDIA/AFP/GETTY



Próxima estación Carolina

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## AS HEARD ON THE AMERICAS QUARTERLY PODCAST

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



*“We have eyes wide open about the possibility that this [deal between the U.S. and Venezuela] actually won't happen. Internally we made very clear that this is not a sure thing, but it is absolutely worth the risk because the policy that we inherited was fundamentally flawed. It was not working. It left Venezuela worse off and has not actually led to change.”*

**—Juan S. Gonzalez is senior director for the Western Hemisphere at the National Security Council.**



*“For every global crisis that there is, Latin America has ... part of the answer, part of the solution.”*

**—Mauricio Cárdenas is professor at Columbia University and former finance minister of Colombia (2012-18).**



*“Some people think that society is becoming more polarized. Many social scientists have argued that the polarization is more prevalent among elites than among citizens. When you ask citizens, there's still a centrist tendency, but when elites are offering more and more polarized options, that also influences society. So we are seeing a trend that is dangerous because it can trigger greater polarization.”*

**—Claudia Heiss is head of political science at Universidad de Chile.**

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# Diego Ontaneda Benavides

*Co-founder and CEO,  
Latin American Leadership Academy*

*by Tara Hein*

**Teens in South Africa showed Diego Ontaneda Benavides how to drive social change. Now, he and co-founder David Baptista have built a leadership organization that has created a network of young change-makers spanning 17 Latin American countries.**

**AQ:** What is the Latin American Leadership Academy (LALA)?

**DOB:** LALA is a nonprofit that empowers young people to realize their full leadership potential through training and network-building. In six years, we've supported over 2,200 teenagers from 17 countries, with 70% coming from historically marginalized communities. Our graduates have started hundreds of social impact organizations and projects that now reach tens of thousands of people. This is our strategy to build shared, sustainable and scalable prosperity in Latin America.

**AQ:** How does LALA work?

**DOB:** We use social media and partner with schools, NGOs and public sector entities to find purpose-driven teenagers with a track record of serving their communities. At a one-week leadership boot camp, we teach them socio-emotional skills, for example, how to tell their story, mobilize others, form teams and fundraise. Then they enter LALA's community for life, getting access to a global network of mentors, university support and career partners.

**AQ:** What motivated you to co-found LALA?

**DOB:** Growing up, I attended private international schools in Lima. But when I was 12, my parents went



LALA 2019 boot camp participants in Medellín, Colombia

bankrupt, and I stayed in these elite schools thanks to scholarships. I later received a full scholarship to Williams College in the U.S. I kept thinking about how much potential the region was losing because other kids didn't have these opportunities. This conviction brought me to the African Leadership Academy in South Africa. There, I met amazing young people who had this incredible sense of purpose and determination. I couldn't get out of my head the idea that if Africa had those teenagers, Latin America must have them, too. **AQ**

Hein is an editorial assistant at AQ

THIS INTERVIEW HAS BEEN EDITED FOR CLARITY AND LENGTH

**Claudia Sheinbaum**  
MEXICO



# 2024 ELECTIONS: AN OVERVIEW



**Latin America's election super-cycle may  
bring new trends, including a brighter  
outlook for incumbents.**

*by Tamara Taraciuk Broner*

**Luis Abinader**  
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



**Nayib Bukele**  
EL SALVADOR



**I**N LATIN AMERICA'S 2024 electoral super-cycle, voters seem likely to reward leaders who address their most fundamental needs — in some cases regardless of whether they value democracy, clean government or the rule of law.

That is a notable shift, following several years in which a “throw the bums out” anti-incumbent sentiment was the prevailing trend in the region.

As readers of *AQ* know well, 20 of the last 22 free and fair presidential elections in Latin America dating back to 2018 have been won by the opposition, as voters lashed out against stagnant living standards, corruption and a surge in organized crime.

But that trend could change this year, thanks to leaders who have enjoyed some measure of success — even if it has come at a cost.

Indeed, in El Salvador, Nayib Bukele is poised for reelection due to his security policies — which have contributed to a reduction in crime, but also imprisoned thousands of Salvadorans without due process. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's preferred candidate Claudia Sheinbaum leads the polls in Mexico, leveraging the incumbent's popularity from social programs, despite his repeated attempts to undermine independent institutions. In Panama, former President Ricardo Martinelli, convicted for money laundering, is a leading candidate after having governed previously during a time of economic prosperity.

**Ricardo Martinelli**  
PANAMA



## 2024 ELECTIONS



Some of this year's elections will be more traditional. In the Dominican Republic, President Luis Abinader, whose popularity is based on an anti-corruption platform, is leading the polls. Uruguay remains a case study of how democratic institutions over time can deliver on people's concerns, though organized crime poses risks.

Venezuela merits separate treatment. While Nicolás Maduro's regime has committed to holding an election, almost no one believes it will be genuinely free and fair. Indeed, a true return to democracy demands more than having a vote.

The following is a brief overview of Latin America's elections — and one "election" — in 2024:



### EL SALVADOR Rights vs Security

SINCE ENTERING OFFICE in 2019, Bukele has taken several steps to erode democratic safeguards. In 2021, he used his majority in the National Assembly to politically take over the Supreme Court's Constitutional Chamber and the Attorney General's Office, adopt norms that enabled the dismissal of hundreds of lower-court judges, extend his control over the judiciary, and adopt legislation and a state of emergency that lowered crime rates at the expense of rights. The packed Constitutional Chamber paved the way for his reelection campaign, despite constitutional prohibitions.

Yet Bukele's popularity stems from policies that successfully reduced violence rates in a country previously plagued by horrendous gang crimes, through a strategy supported by a communications campaign.

In February's elections, the question is not whether Bukele will win (he will), but by what margin. A decisive win could further weaken political

opposition, independent journalism and civil society in a context of shrinking civic space. The elections follow a gerrymandering effort by Bukele, enhancing his party's chances for a legislative majority. This would later enable him to influence key appointments, including Supreme Court justices, Supreme Electoral Tribunal members and the attorney general.



### PANAMA The Return of a Convicted President?

THE HISTORICAL ALTERNATION in power between Panama's two traditional parties — Partido Revolucionario Democrático and Partido Panameñista — ended with Ricardo Martinelli's election in 2009. Despite corruption allegations, Martinelli benefited from an economic environment (and contracted debt) that allowed him to invest in infrastructure — including building Panama City's metro — which boosted his popularity. This led to the slogan *robó pero hizo* (he stole but delivered).

While polls favor Martinelli for the May presidential election, a major obstacle is Panama's constitutional ban on individuals sentenced to more than five years in jail. In 2023, Martinelli was sentenced to over 10 years for money laundering, and the U.S. has barred his entrance to the country. Martinelli has denied wrongdoing. As of December, a challenge to overturn his conviction was pending. If the conviction is upheld, he will not legally be able to run.

Given his past harassment of opponents and media and allegations that he cooped judicial authorities, analysts fear his political comeback may jeopardize the rule of law in Panama and invite reprisals against those who pursued charges against him.

If Martinelli doesn't run, the presidency is up for grabs. Having moved beyond the two-party system

## 2024 ELECTIONS



**Xóchitl Gálvez**  
MEXICO

after Martinelli's election, and the more recent permission for independent candidates to run, fragmentation makes it difficult to predict who could win and how they could govern.

In 2023, massive demonstrations took center stage as tens of thousands flooded the streets — the largest protests since the country's return to democracy in the 1990s. The uproar was against the government's attempt to renew a mining concession to a Canadian company, which was recently declared unconstitutional. While environmental issues were not a top voter priority, candidates' mining ties could influence the electoral outcome.



### **MEXICO** **Undermining Electoral Integrity**

THE JUNE ELECTIONS are critical for the future of Mexico's democracy. They take place in a con-

text of attempts by President López Obrador and his Morena party to undermine independent institutions, including the National Electoral Institute (INE). Tensions heightened after the Supreme Court struck down measures targeting INE's personnel, elections monitoring capabilities and budget independence. The president's attacks on the court, coupled with a proposal of a constitutional reform to elect judges by popular vote, raise alarms of democratic backsliding. They follow harassment of political opponents, independent media and civil society groups, alongside escalating militarization.

Nonetheless, López Obrador remains highly popular, partly due to his austerity measures, social policies, poverty rate reduction, and his perceived closeness to the people, fueled by his daily press conferences.

For the first time since 2000, when Mexicans voted to end 70 years of one-party rule, the state is actively supporting the ruling party's candidate, Claudia Sheinbaum. Sheinbaum, Mexico City's mayor and López Obrador's political heir, will benefit from

## 2024 ELECTIONS



government resources and media access. Her main rival, Xóchitl Gálvez, faces the challenge of leading a diverse coalition. While either would be Mexico's first female president, there is still uncertainty around the future of women's rights, as neither candidate has done much to champion this cause.

While polls currently favor Sheinbaum, the margin of victory is unclear — and that will have a big impact on Mexico's future. A decisive win in legislative elections for Morena could strengthen its hold on Congress, potentially perpetuating López Obrador's populist project by further undermining checks and balances, if Sheinbaum does not clearly distance herself from López Obrador. Alternatively, a narrow victory for Gálvez raises questions about López Obrador's acceptance of defeat.



### **DOMINICAN REPUBLIC** **Stability Favors the Incumbent**

THE RULING PARTY, Partido Revolucionario Moderno, took office in 2020 with an anti-corruption agenda, following massive social mobilization after the Odebrecht scandal. Under President Luis Abinader's administration, an independent attorney general was appointed, leading criminal investigations into former government officials and individuals close to former President Danilo Medina. Despite inflation and reduced growth rates, the country maintains relative economic stability. Abinader's handling of the pandemic enhanced his popularity.

Abinader, who faces a divided opposition and is leading the polls, seeks reelection based on his anti-corruption initiatives, particularly appealing to voters in middle- and high-income urban areas. He has also urged the international community to ad-

dress Haiti's crisis, seemingly aiming to secure more support, including from the country's right wing.

The outcome of President Abinader's success in the first round in May remains uncertain. Regardless, the upcoming elections do not pose a major challenge to the country's democratic stability.



### **URUGUAY** **Electoral Financing**

URUGUAY STANDS OUT as an example of democratic coexistence. Institutions serve as the channels for addressing citizen demands. Trust in institutions, including but not limited to political parties, sets the country apart from the rest of Latin America.

Despite an increasingly hostile rhetoric (by Uruguayan standards) in the incipient campaign, the electoral year — with a first round in October — and transition will likely transpire calmly. Candidates must articulate strategies to tackle structural challenges, including grave prison conditions, disparities in access to basic services, and crime. Observers should closely monitor the results of the June primaries, especially within the left-wing coalition Frente Amplio, as a closely contested vote is expected.

The increasing presence of organized crime in the country highlights the need to improve regulations on private electoral financing. Existing legislation lacks clarity on disclosing private donations expenditures, excludes reporting on private funding for primaries, and overlooks oversight for online campaign spending. Also, the electoral court's limited capacity for effective oversight reduces the accountability process to a mere formality. At the time of writing, an imperfect bill with some improvements is pending.

**Nicolás Maduro**  
VENEZUELA



## VENEZUELA

### The Day After

AS VENEZUELA'S PRESIDENTIAL vote gets closer, efforts to facilitate elections that are as close to free and fair as possible are essential. They should align with the European Union's 2021 electoral observation mission roadmap. Key measures include allowing disqualified candidates to run, enhancing separation of powers and judicial independence, and abolishing the comptroller general's authority to strip citizens of their political rights.

Despite the opposition's overwhelming election of María Corina Machado as their presidential candidate in the October primaries, she remains arbitrarily disqualified from running for office. In a country with no judicial independence, the government responded by prosecuting the primaries' organizers and members of Machado's team. Meanwhile, the government engages in political negotiations with opposition representatives on

electoral conditions and a humanitarian agreement, but their successful implementation looks unlikely. Simultaneously, discussions with U.S. authorities focus on securing sanctions relief in exchange for certain concessions.

While sanctions relief and legitimacy from internationally recognized elections are potent tools to incentivize those in power to embrace a democratic transition, they are not standalone solutions for resolving Venezuela's debacle. Analyzing how accountability for international crimes can serve as leverage will be essential.

Without a serious conversation about what the day after will look like for those in power, the 2024 election will not lead to a democratic transition — and may well be used by the Maduro government to legitimize a repressive regime. [AQ](#)

|||||  
Taraciuk Broner is director of the Peter D. Bell Rule of Law Program at the Inter-American Dialogue

## 2024 ELECTIONS

# MEET THE CANDIDATES

An overview of the leading candidates in this year's presidential races

by Rich Brown, Emilie Sweigart, Tara Hein and José Enrique Arrioja



### El Salvador FEB. 4

SECOND ROUND (IF NEEDED) MARCH 3



Nayib Bukele



Joel Sánchez



Manuel Flores

### Panama MAY 5

SINGLE-ROUND ELECTION



Ricardo Martinelli



Rómulo Roux



Martín Torrijos



Ricardo Lombana

EL SALVADOR: SURVEY INCLUDES THE THREE LEADING CANDIDATES IN AUGUST POLLING FROM THE UNIVERSIDAD FRANCISCO GAVIDIA.

PANAMA: SURVEY INCLUDES THE FOUR LEADING CANDIDATES IN OCTOBER POLLING FROM CID GALLUP.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: SURVEY INCLUDES THE THREE LEADING CANDIDATES IN NOVEMBER POLLING FROM CID GALLUP.

PHOTOS: EL SALVADOR: WIKIMEDIA; SÁNCHEZ: TWITTER/LLEGOJOEL; FLORES: WIKIMEDIA; PANAMA: WIKIMEDIA (3), LOMBANA: TWITTER/RICARDOLOMBANAG;

# Dominican Republic MAY 19

SECOND ROUND (IF NEEDED) JUNE 30



Luis Abinader



Leonel Fernández



Abel Martínez

# Mexico JUNE 2

SINGLE-ROUND ELECTION



Xóchitl Gálvez



Claudia Sheinbaum

# Uruguay OCT. 27

SECOND ROUND (IF NEEDED) NOV. 19



Carolina Cosse



Álvaro Delgado



Yamandú Orsi



Laura Raffo

# Venezuela

SINGLE-ROUND ELECTION



María Corina Machado

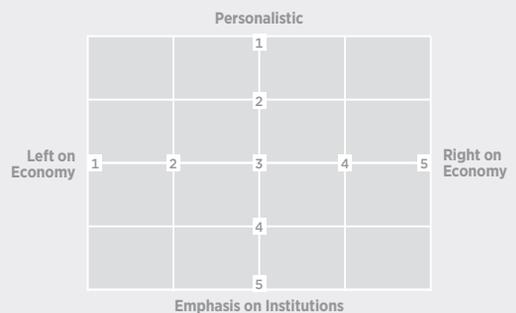


Nicolás Maduro

*At the time of publication, the candidates were not yet confirmed, the timing was to be determined and it was unknown whether free and fair conditions would be in place.*

## IDEOLOGY

AQ asked a dozen nonpartisan experts on El Salvador, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela to help us identify where each candidate stands on two spectrums: left versus right on economic matters, and a more personalistic leadership style versus an emphasis on institutions. We've published the average response, with a caveat: Platforms evolve, and so do candidates.



MEXICO: SURVEY INCLUDES CANDIDATES LEADING NOVEMBER POLLING FROM *EL FINANCIERO*.  
 URUGUAY: SURVEY INCLUDES CANDIDATES FROM PARTIES POLLING ABOVE 10% WHO LED POLLING WITHIN THEIR POLITICAL BLOCS IN AN OCTOBER SURVEY FROM EQUIPOS CONSULTORES.

PHOTOS: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: WIKIMEDIA (3); MEXICO: WIKIMEDIA (3);  
 URUGUAY: WIKIMEDIA (3), RAFFO: TWITTER/LAURARAFFO; VENEZUELA: WIKIMEDIA (2);



**Nayib Bukele** 42

NUEVAS IDEAS

INCUMBENT



*“We are showing the new face of El Salvador to the world.”*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

Bukele comes from a prominent business family and was mayor of San Salvador (2015–18). In 2019, he became the first president since the 1980s not from the FMLN or ARENA parties. As president, he has led a controversial crackdown on gangs that has delayed or denied due process for many defendants, but has contributed to a sharp decline in violence. El Salvador was the hemisphere’s most violent country in 2015, with a murder rate of 103 per 100,000 inhabitants. By 2022, that figure had fallen to just 7.8.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

Bukele has a 90% approval rating in some polls and is dominating surveys ahead of the election. His security policies are popular and he and his inner circle have largely avoided the corruption accusations that plagued previous Salvadoran leaders. His current run for president defies a constitutional ban on consecutive reelection, but a friendly Supreme Court approved his bid, reflecting Bukele’s growing power over other branches of government.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

Bukele is expected to win by a wide margin. However, rising food prices are a vulnerability even as overall inflation cools; food insecurity affects almost half the population. Some also resent his anti-democratic moves to accumulate power, and the sweeping civil rights violations of his gang crackdown that has left nearly 2% of the adult population incarcerated.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

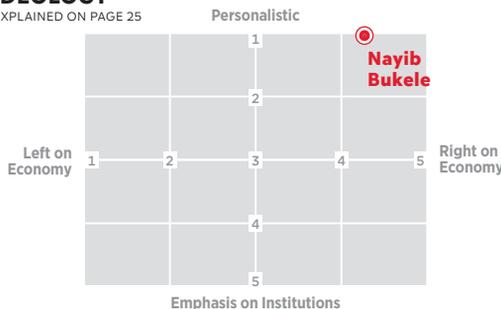
Bukele’s success against street-level crime has earned him broad support throughout the country in rural and urban areas and among people of all social classes and education levels.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

Bukele will maintain his gang crackdown and likely focus on infrastructure projects and other public works like the enormous new National Library. He will also seek a new agreement with the International Monetary Fund to boost economic growth.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25



**Manuel Flores** 58

FARABUNDO MARTÍ NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (FMLN)

FORMER LAWMAKER



*“My job is to restore trust in the FMLN.”*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

Flores started in politics in his hometown of Quetzaltepeque, where he was elected to the city council in 2000. Three years later, he was elected mayor and served three terms before winning a seat in Congress in 2012. As a lawmaker, he successfully pushed for El Salvador to open diplomatic relations with China. The FMLN limits their legislators to two terms, so he did not run for Congress in 2019.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

Bukele’s popularity is so high that other challengers may not have much of a chance. But Flores has not been implicated in the corruption scandals that have shaken his party and placed two former FMLN presidents under investigation. The party has a core of die-hard organizers who will try to persuade former FMLN voters to return to the party.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

The FMLN lost over 1 million votes between the 2014 and the 2019 presidential elections amid corruption scandals.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

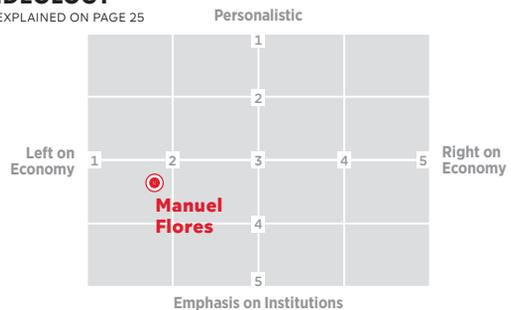
The FMLN maintains a small base of loyal leftist backers in towns and cities where support for the party stretches back to the years of El Salvador’s civil war. However, Flores does not necessarily have the support of all FMLN members; he secured the party’s nomination after running unopposed.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

Flores would seek to resolve controversial social issues like abortion and same-sex marriage through plebiscites. He has also said he would attract foreign investment to El Salvador, likely in part by strengthening relations with China, and increase spending on a range of social programs.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25





**Joel Sánchez** 55

ALIANZA REPUBLICANA NACIONALISTA (ARENA)

BUSINESSMAN



*"If a policy is working, we won't destroy it. We'll continue it and improve it."*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

A businessman from Cojutepeque, Sánchez emigrated to the U.S. when he was 19. A resident of Dallas, Texas, he founded a commercial cleaning and maintenance company that now operates in several U.S. cities, Mexico and El Salvador. He has advocated for Salvadoran migrants seeking legal residency in the U.S., but has never before run for public office. He was first proposed as a presidential candidate by Citizen Resistance, an anti-Bukele civil society coalition.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

Sánchez trails Bukele by a wide margin in the polls, and most observers see victory as highly improbable. But he may gain some traction among the Salvadoran diaspora, benefiting from a new law that makes it easier to vote from abroad. His message focuses on improving the economy. ARENA has national reach, and he may also be able to convince other opposition parties to support him.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

Bukele is overwhelmingly popular, and Sánchez is unlikely to catch up before the election.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

ARENA's supporters are concentrated in San Salvador. They are primarily private sector leaders and those who operate or work in small and medium-sized businesses. Sánchez may also garner support from the Salvadoran diaspora and other smaller parties.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

Sánchez would focus on economic growth, seeking to boost job creation and investment by loosening regulations. He would specifically encourage the Salvadoran diaspora to invest in the country and participate more directly in its economy and politics.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25



**Ricardo Lombana** 49

MOVIMIENTO OTRO CAMINO (MOCA)

LAWYER



*"The powerful corrupt are scared, because the party's over for them."*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

Lombana is a lawyer and politician who served as a diplomat in Washington under President Martín Torrijos (2004-07). He later worked as an executive at the newspaper *La Prensa* before founding his law firm in 2013. In 2019, he ran for president as an independent, finishing third with 19% of the vote.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

In the aftermath of national demonstrations in 2022 and 2023 that crystallized discontent with the traditional political class, Lombana's independent bona fides have earned him supporters and momentum. He is viewed as a "clean" candidate in a race dominated by discussions of corruption. Panama's election is decided in a single round, so in a split field, he could win even without the support of a major party.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

Lombana had spoken positively about the Cobre Panamá mine contract that sparked the 2023 demonstrations, and changed his rhetoric when the protests were underway. This may limit the support he can channel from the protest movement. He is also inexperienced at a tumultuous time when many voters may be looking for a seasoned, steady hand.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

Independents and a wide swath of the protest movement, especially younger voters, may be attracted to his campaign because he is not affiliated with traditional political parties. As a centrist slightly to the left of the other major candidates, he has some support among unions even as he remains broadly pro-business.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

Like the other candidates profiled here, he supports pro-business policies but also the closure of the copper mine at the center of the national protests, as well as tougher anti-corruption measures and lowering the price of medicines. He would immediately call a referendum on a range of constitutional reforms. He would strictly enforce water and environmental laws, put more police on the streets, require ships flying Panama flags to employ at least 25% Panamanians, and expand training and vocational programs.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25





**Ricardo Martinelli** 71

REALIZANDO METAS (RM)

FORMER PRESIDENT



*"If we don't change direction, we're going straight to the precipice."*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

A prominent businessman, Martinelli won the presidency decisively in 2009. For the next five years, he oversaw a widespread expansion of infrastructure and social spending, new trade agreements with the U.S., EU, and other countries, and a marked increase in jobs and investment. However, in 2023, a Panama court sentenced him to 10 years for alleged corruption. He is appealing and denies wrongdoing.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

Martinelli remains popular after overseeing economic growth and falling crime rates as president. He is leading in the polls as he portrays the investigations against him as politically motivated, drawing on his acquittal on illegal surveillance charges. He is a talented campaigner, portraying himself as a disruptor of an unpopular political class, as he did in 2009.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

Panama's courts may disqualify him from the race, and corruption accusations could dent his popularity. In January, the U.S. sanctioned him for involvement in "significant corruption." In December 2021, his two sons pleaded guilty in the U.S. on bribery charges related to government contracts with Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht and were released from U.S. prison in January 2023.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

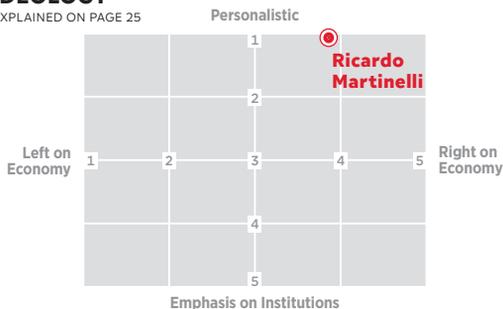
Martinelli has a strong base among those who benefited from his presidency's poverty reduction, job creation and infrastructure investment. He also appeals to voters seeking a balance of experience and disruptor credentials, including those abandoning the extremely unpopular ruling PRD party.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

He would push for a commission to draft constitutional changes on critical issues, including mining and anti-corruption efforts. He would invest in infrastructure and expand public transit systems, including the Panama City metro, while attempting to cut other types of spending.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25



**Rómulo Roux** 59

CAMBIO DEMOCRÁTICO (CD)

LAWYER



*"This government has had the money ... it just hasn't had the will."*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

Roux is an experienced lawyer and consultant. He was president of the board that oversees the Panama Canal and was later canal minister (2009-12) under President Martinelli. He then briefly served as Martinelli's foreign minister until he resigned in 2013 to seek the center-right CD party's presidential nomination. He lost and became the CD party president.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

Roux secured the CD nomination and ran for president in 2019, losing to current President Laurentino Cortizo by just a narrow margin — less than 3%. He is a proven campaigner and is viewed as a competent administrator.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

Roux performed well in the 2019 election, but he was not running against Martinelli, as he is now. Many of those who supported Roux in 2019 likely now support Martinelli. Moreover, he has worked for over 30 years at Morgan & Morgan, a high-powered law firm implicated in the Panama Papers scandal that also represented the mine at the center of last year's protests.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

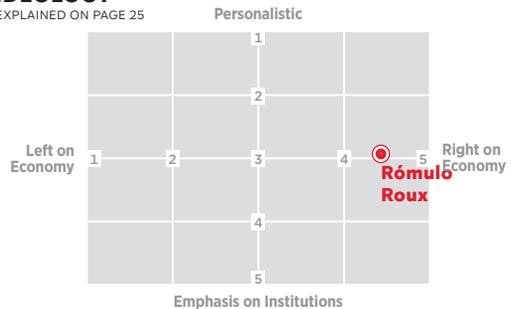
Roux has the support of much of the CD party, which has one of the country's top national campaign machines and has been popular since its founding in 1998. He is popular among fiscal conservatives and the country's medium to large business sector.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

He would be especially aggressive in reforming social security to shore up its finances. He would likely cut taxes and spending as he promised as a candidate in 2019, and also slash red tape. He has said he would cut the National Assembly's budget to subsidize medicines and crack down on roadblocks as a form of protest, which he has repeatedly condemned.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25





**Martín Torrijos** 60

PARTIDO POPULAR (PP)

FORMER PRESIDENT



*“We set an example of responsibility for how to manage public finances.”*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

Torrijos was president from 2004-09. He is the son of General Omar Torrijos, who led Panama’s military dictatorship from 1968 until his death in 1981. He worked in business before starting in Panama’s politics in 1992 as a youth leader in the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD) party, founded by his father. He rose quickly within the party, serving as vice interior minister from 1994-99 before winning the presidency.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

As president, Torrijos began a popular expansion of the Panama Canal, approved through a referendum, and invested in effective anti-poverty programs. He also reformed social security to keep it solvent — a significant task ahead for the next administration.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

The PRD is deeply unpopular, and Torrijos is still closely associated with it, even though he left the party as a dissident before the 2023 demonstrations. Moreover, as president, he was forced to walk back some of his reform proposals, including on social security, after they sparked sizable protests.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

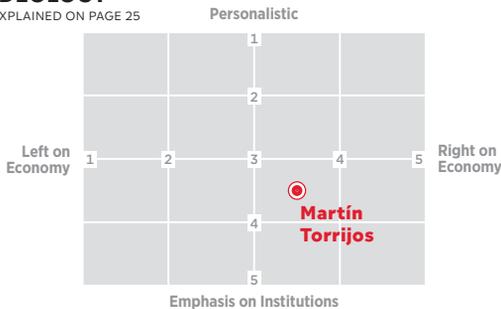
Torrijos is popular among older nationalistic and conservative-leaning voters who remember him for reducing poverty and expanding the canal. He may also be able to draw large numbers of disaffected PRD voters looking for a new party.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

He has said the government should cut salaries for members of Congress and reverse spending increases for local government bodies. He also calls for stricter enforcement of water management laws, new health centers and special development zones for small cities.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25



**Luis Abinader** 56

PARTIDO REVOLUCIONARIO MODERNO (PRM)

INCUMBENT



*“The Dominican people are very intelligent and know what is best for them, and they know that today there is a president who does not accept corruption.”*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

A wealthy former businessman with experience in the tourism and construction sectors, Abinader is running for president for the third time. In 2016, he placed second with 35% of the vote, and in 2020, he won with 52.5%. Abinader campaigned on an anti-corruption platform, and his victory broke 16 consecutive years in power for the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (PLD).

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

Abinader has maintained high approval ratings, buoyed by a strong post-COVID economic recovery as his administration kept the country open to tourism. During his term, authorities have undertaken large-scale anti-corruption probes, and in 2022 he signed a landmark asset forfeiture bill into law. Amid a dispute with Haiti over the digging of a canal, Abinader suspended issuing visas to Haitians and temporarily closed the border, which has proven popular.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

Some observers note that the opposition is more organized today than it was in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election. Abinader’s critics have argued that his administration’s anti-corruption push has focused disproportionately on the PLD.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

Abinader has broad support, and may secure more backing from higher-income brackets, as well as from voters in the capital, which has been led by PRM mayors since 2016.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

The incumbent would continue private sector and tourism development. Abinader has pursued public-private partnerships, such as last year’s contract to turn Puerto Duarte into a cruise terminal. He would likely maintain his stance on Haiti, continuing the construction of a border wall. Abinader has stated that international assistance is required to address instability in Haiti, noting at the 2023 UN General Assembly that there can never be “a Dominican solution to the Haitian problem.”

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25





**Leonel Fernández** 70

FUERZA DEL PUEBLO (FP)

FORMER PRESIDENT



*“Our role, that of the Fuerza del Pueblo, has been to rebuild the social base of support and the electoral base that we had in the PLD.”*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

Fernández served three presidential terms (1996–2000, 2004–08 and 2008–12). He spent part of his childhood in New York, joined the PLD in 1973, and left the party in 2019 after losing its presidential primary, alleging fraud. Later that year, Fernández founded the Fuerza del Pueblo (FP) party, and in the 2020 presidential election, he placed third with 8.9% of the vote.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

Some voters might recall Fernández as a reformer and modernizer who prioritized infrastructure improvements, such as the metro system in Santo Domingo. If there is a runoff between Abinader and Fernández, the FP candidate will have the backing of other opposition parties. The FP, PLD and Partido Revolucionario Dominicano agreed to support whichever candidate from their alliance makes the runoff.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

Younger voters might not remember his terms in office. Those aged 18–30 make up 27% of registered voters. An October survey from Gallup–RCC Media found that 35.7% said they would never vote for Fernández, compared to Abinader’s 24.2% and Martínez’s 22.9%. In that survey, 46.2% said there was less corruption under Abinader than under Fernández and his successor, Danilo Medina.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

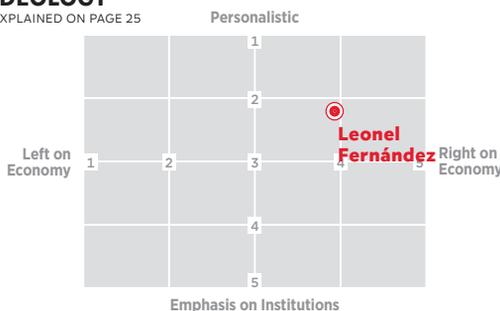
Despite splitting from the PLD, Fernández has support from some sectors of his old party. FP’s ranks have increased; in mid-2022, the party’s electoral rolls stood at approximately 1 million and reached over 2 million by September 2023.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

Fernández’s platform includes calls for wealth redistribution and social justice, noting the country’s persistent inequality despite sustained economic growth. Infrastructure is on his agenda, along with public safety and environmental protection. In September 2023, he stated that the conflict with Haiti should be resolved via diplomacy, criticizing the Abinader administration’s troop deployment.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25



**Abel Martínez** 51

PARTIDO DE LA LIBERACIÓN DOMINICANA (PLD)

MAYOR OF SANTIAGO DE LOS CABALLEROS



*“A transformation is needed to bring order to the mess of public services, high prices and crime.”*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

This is Martínez’s first presidential run. A three-term former congressman, he served as the president of the Chamber of Deputies from 2010–16. In 2016, he was elected mayor of Santiago de los Caballeros, the country’s second-largest city, and was reelected in 2020. Martínez has won five consecutive elections and has been involved in the PLD since the 1990s.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

The PLD is a well-organized political machine, and Martínez is perceived as an effective manager in his city. He has prioritized sanitation improvements, claiming that Santiago de los Caballeros is the “cleanest” city in the country, which has contributed to his popularity. Known as a law-and-order politician, Martínez has called for increased migration control, which has proven popular among some voters.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

Martínez is competing against two politicians with executive branch experience. In a November survey from CID Gallup, he reached 15% of voter intention, while Abinader polled at 54% and Fernández polled at 29%. In recent years, there have been high-profile corruption probes into individuals associated with the PLD, which may diminish voter support for the party.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

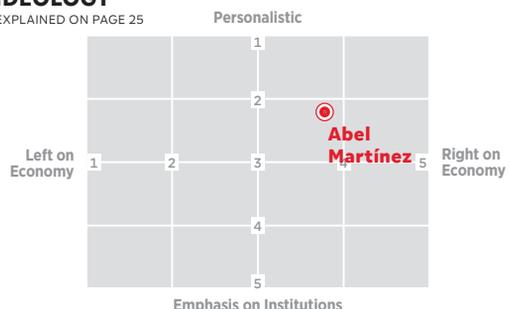
Martínez will likely find support from residents of Santiago de los Caballeros and those who favor his hardline rhetoric on immigration. He has the backing of fellow PLD member and former President Danilo Medina (2012–20). Like Fernández, he will receive support from an opposition alliance if he makes it to a second round against Abinader.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

Martínez has presented a tech-focused security plan. He would install panic buttons in higher-crime areas, create 200 new specialized security detachments and crack down on illegal firearms. Martínez may enforce stricter immigration policies; he has described the presence of undocumented Haitians in the Dominican Republic as “an overflowing invasion.”

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25







**Carolina Cosse** 62

FRENTE AMPLIO (FA)

MAYOR OF MONTEVIDEO DEPARTMENT



*“Uruguay cannot endure another five years of everyone for themselves.”*

**HOW SHE GOT HERE**

An electrical engineer by training, Cosse entered politics in 2007 as director of Montevideo’s information technology division. She was appointed president of the state-owned telecommunications company ANTEL by President José “Pepe” Mujica in 2010 and served as minister of industry, energy and mining under Tabaré Vázquez (2015–19). In 2019, Cosse finished second in the Frente Amplio (FA) presidential primaries with 25% of the vote. After serving briefly in the Senate, Cosse took office as mayor of Montevideo in November 2020.

**WHY SHE MIGHT WIN**

Cosse’s record in national politics and as Montevideo’s mayor has elevated her profile. Her progressivism, including her commitment to feminism and inclusive development, positions her as a leading figure in her left-wing coalition.

**WHY SHE MIGHT LOSE**

Her leftist views and urban-focused trajectory might cost her support in rural areas, possibly hindering her chances in the general election. Cosse has faced criticism for the cost overrun during the construction of the ANTEL Arena, a project started while she led ANTEL and completed after her tenure there. In the FA primaries, she will face off against Yamandú Orsi, a candidate with significant support, particularly among the coalition’s more moderate sectors.

**WHO SUPPORTS HER**

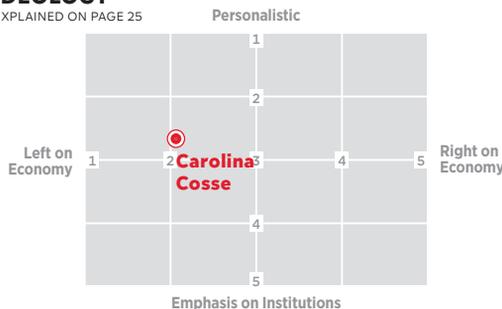
Cosse garners support from the leftmost factions of the FA, including the Communist and Socialist parties. She is likely to attract support from women within the FA who want to see a female president.

**WHAT SHE WOULD DO**

She had yet to release a platform at the time of writing, but her record hints at her priorities. As mayor, she implemented measures to counter pandemic job losses, technical assistance for small businesses, and efforts to improve waste collection and management. As minister, Cosse advocated for small and medium-sized companies in the mining and telecommunications sectors and diversified the energy grid.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25



**Álvaro Delgado** 54

PARTIDO NACIONAL (PN)

PRESIDENTIAL CHIEF OF CABINET



*“We put the country on its feet, and it began to walk.”*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

Delgado, who trained as a veterinarian and holds an agroindustrial management postgraduate degree, started his career in the agricultural industry. He was a member of the lower house of Congress (2005–15) and the Senate (2015–20) representing Montevideo, and serves as chief of Cabinet to President Luis Lacalle Pou. Delgado has said he would resign to run for president, without specifying when.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

Delgado’s prominent role in Lacalle Pou’s Cabinet has given him a broad platform. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, press conferences made him the face of the government’s response, which was generally perceived as effective. This positions him to capitalize on the administration’s high approval rating, especially during its first two years.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

Recent scandals have shaken Lacalle Pou’s administration, leading to several resignations from top Cabinet members. Delgado’s central role in the government, combined with a perceived lack of charisma, may alienate voters.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

Seen as a capable administrator, Delgado is supported primarily by the Aire Fresco movement of the PN, where he is seen as a successor to Lacalle Pou. This endorsement may rally support from the president’s followers, including pro-market voters. PN mayors from Uruguay’s interior, a party stronghold, have also supported his candidacy.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

While he has been reserved about his presidential plans, Delgado would likely uphold the current administration’s policies. He has defended government achievements like education and social security reform. Delgado is likely to continue pushing for the professionalization of the state, increased efficiency and greater trade liberalization — Lacalle Pou has sought free trade agreements with China and others, despite Mercosur’s rules against bilateral trade deals. Delgado has also emphasized investing in innovation, science, technology and the knowledge-based economy.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25





**Yamandú Orsi** 56

FRENTE AMPLIO (FA)

MAYOR OF CANELONES DEPARTMENT



*"It will not be a government of friends. It will be a government of capable individuals committed to assuming public office, with a sense of responsibility and ethics."*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

A former high school history teacher from a farming family, Orsi is serving his second term as mayor of Canelones, the nation's second-most populous department. He entered politics in 2005, initially serving as the general secretary of the department under the Movimiento de Participación Popular (MPP), Mujica's party within the FA coalition. Orsi held this position for a decade before being elected mayor in 2015.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

Orsi is seen as the inheritor of Mujica's legacy within the MPP. He is backed by the party's leftist base and by more moderate factions within the FA due to his consensus-building approach to policymaking. Though known for his willingness to dialogue, Orsi has criticized Lacalle Pou's administration, potentially striking a chord with voters disillusioned by the PN.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

His relatively moderate views that appeal to a broader electorate would be an asset in the general election. However, they could be a liability in the left-leaning FA primaries, where more progressive voters might favor Cosse.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

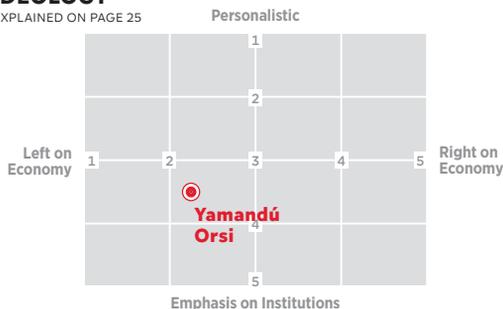
Orsi's roots in Canelones, in some ways a microcosm of Uruguay with its mix of rural and metropolitan areas, provide him with experience governing both city and countryside. This diverse background could garner broad support from the coast and the interior, possibly attracting more centrist voters beyond his coalition.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

Orsi considers himself "from the left," and believes in "that old Uruguayan tradition where the state did not leave anyone behind." Orsi has also courted U.S. investment in the country — including in fighting organized crime, where he suggests the U.S. could foster regional coordination. As mayor, he promoted initiatives to attract global businesses, like Google, to Canelones. Orsi has also emphasized the importance of fostering commercial relations with China as an export destination for raw materials, and has stated that he does not want to put "all the eggs in one basket."

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25



**Laura Raffo** 50

PARTIDO NACIONAL (PN)

PRESIDENT OF THE PARTIDO NACIONAL'S MONTEVIDEO COMMISSION



*"We are not to the left or right of anyone."*

**HOW SHE GOT HERE**

Raffo ran for public office for the first time in the 2020 Montevideo mayoral race as part of the Coalición Multicolor, which includes the PN and the Partido Colorado. She received 40% of the vote and lost to Cosse. An economist by training, she gained national recognition through TV roles and by writing about economic issues for a broad audience in national outlets. With a corporate background at ManpowerGroup, Microsoft and SURA, Raffo also served on the board of directors of Banco Santander in Uruguay (2018-20). She hails from a political family — Raffo's father was a minister in President Luis Alberto Lacalle's administration.

**WHY SHE MIGHT WIN**

A supporter of the current administration, yet different enough to offer voters a change, Raffo could capitalize both on the administration's popularity and its shortcomings.

**WHY SHE MIGHT LOSE**

Raffo does not enjoy complete backing from the ruling party, as several critical sectors of the PN favor Delgado's candidacy. One of her primary supporters, Lista 71 — a faction within the PN — has faced various scandals in recent months.

**WHO SUPPORTS HER**

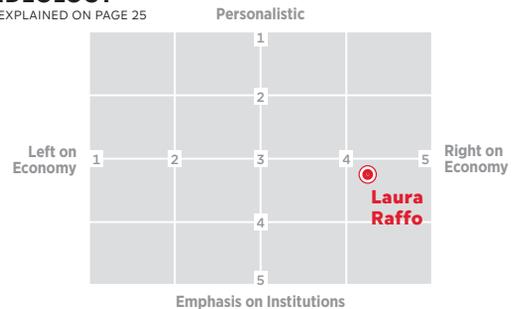
In July 2023, Raffo led the creation of Sumar, a new faction within the Partido Nacional. Raffo may appeal to PN voters who are younger, more urban and socially progressive, while retaining the fiscal conservatism emblematic of the party's base.

**WHAT SHE WOULD DO**

If elected, Raffo has said that she would pursue a "second phase of transformations" building on Lacalle Pou's administration, emphasizing a technocratic approach to policymaking. She has vowed to lower the cost of living by reducing bureaucracy and modernizing state processes. Raffo has also advocated for public safety reforms and facilitating mothers' participation in the workforce.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25





**María Corina Machado** 56

PLATAFORMA UNITARIA

FORMER LAWMAKER



*“The Maduro regime is in its weakest position ever.”*

**HOW SHE GOT HERE**

An industrial engineer turned politician, María Corina Machado overwhelmingly won opposition primaries held in October 2023. She has moderated her positions in recent years after long being seen as an extreme figure even among some in the opposition. In June, the nation’s comptroller barred Machado from holding public office for 15 years in a case universally seen as politically motivated. At the time of publication, it was unclear whether Machado would be allowed to run.

**WHY SHE MIGHT WIN**

Machado might win a free and fair election — something almost no one expects this vote to be. Polls suggest most Venezuelans want political change amid unbridled inflation and an exodus of more than 8 million people in recent years. If Machado is somehow allowed to campaign and connect with everyday Venezuelans, the situation could become unpredictable.

**WHY SHE MIGHT LOSE**

Maduro seems determined to retain power, and his dictatorship is almost certain to prevent Machado from getting anywhere close to victory.

**WHO SUPPORTS HER**

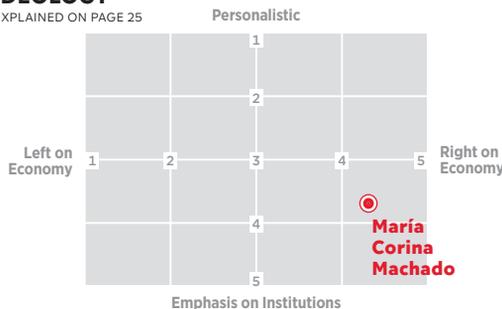
Machado enjoys support across the political spectrum, including among some in the traditional *chavista* base. Voters from what remains of Venezuela’s middle class and diaspora are also expected to vote overwhelmingly in her favor.

**WHAT SHE WOULD DO**

Machado would bring a stabilization program to correct economic distortions and re-anchor government institutions dismantled after more than two decades of corruption and mismanagement. She wants to open the energy sector to private investment, privatize PDVSA, the state-owned oil company, and restructure the nation’s debt into a single bond. She would also launch a vast reindustrialization program and reinsert Venezuela into the international stage.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25



**Nicolás Maduro** 61

PARTIDO SOCIALISTA UNIDO DE VENEZUELA

INCUMBENT



*“The presidential elections will come, the people will vote, the people will choose and, well... we'll move on.”*

**HOW HE GOT HERE**

A dictator who assumed power in March 2013, Maduro formally seeks a third term that would extend his rule beyond that of his predecessor, Hugo Chávez. Maduro won his second term in an undemocratic election in 2018. Maduro’s rule has been marred by human rights abuses, political prosecution, corruption and the erosion of institutions. According to the IMF, Venezuela’s gross domestic product declined by more than 75% between 2013 and 2021, the most for a country not at war in the last 50 years.

**WHY HE MIGHT WIN**

Virtually no one expects the election to be free or fair. Maduro controls the government apparatus, including critical institutions such as the electoral authority, the Supreme Court, the entire judicial system and the army. As of publication, the government-controlled courts had barred the leading opposition candidate, María Corina Machado, from running.

**WHY HE MIGHT LOSE**

Polls suggest Maduro is highly unpopular. Some observers draw comparisons to Chile’s 1988 plebiscite, when Augusto Pinochet sought popular validation for his dictatorship but lost control of the process, lost the vote, and ultimately allowed a transition to democracy. However, such a scenario in Venezuela is seen as extremely unlikely.

**WHO SUPPORTS HIM**

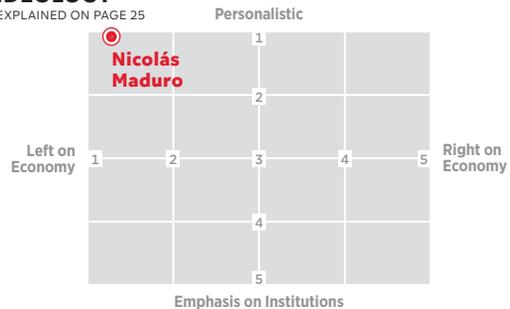
Maduro still retains some support from low-income segments of the population who receive subsidies and benefits from social programs, although their value has eroded due to rampant inflation and economic mismanagement.

**WHAT HE WOULD DO**

Maduro would likely strengthen relations with Russia, China, Iran, and certain Latin American nations such as Cuba and Colombia, while continuing different iterations of populist policies to stay in power.

**IDEOLOGY**

EXPLAINED ON PAGE 25



# The Road to Gender Parity

**Mexican women are showing the way for other countries.**

*by Susan Segal*



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

**V**ERY FEW PEOPLE would have guessed even six months ago that there would be two female candidates competing for the presidency of Mexico.

But there are — and on October 1, 2024, Mexico will inaugurate its first female president, either Claudia Sheinbaum or Xóchitl Gálvez. It is difficult to find any other country where the two main candidates for the presidency are both women, let alone in Latin America.

This should not be totally surprising, however, given the transformation of women assuming public sector leadership in Mexico over the last five years. There is now gender parity across most of the public sector. Women now make up half the Cabinet, lead the Supreme Court and make up at least 50% of Congress. In fact, Mexico stands fourth out of 185 countries in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's ranking of women's representation in legislatures. Finally, seven of 32 governors are women.

The result is an ever-growing pool of women experienced in politics and in the art of governing. This is great news, as studies show that women are more likely to build consensus and advocate for a socially inclusive agenda. A female president will also be an amazing role model for all women in Mexico and across Latin America — not just in the public sector, but in the private sector.

For me, I can only dream of the day when we have parity among male and female leaders across all countries of the hemisphere. And while this may take several years to accomplish, Mexico is certainly an outstanding step in that direction. **AQ**



# VOTO LATINO 2024



**Ione  
Molinares**



**Gustavo  
Valdés**



**Jorge  
Dávila**



**Gonzalo  
Alvarado**



**Al  
Cárdenas**



**María  
Cardona**

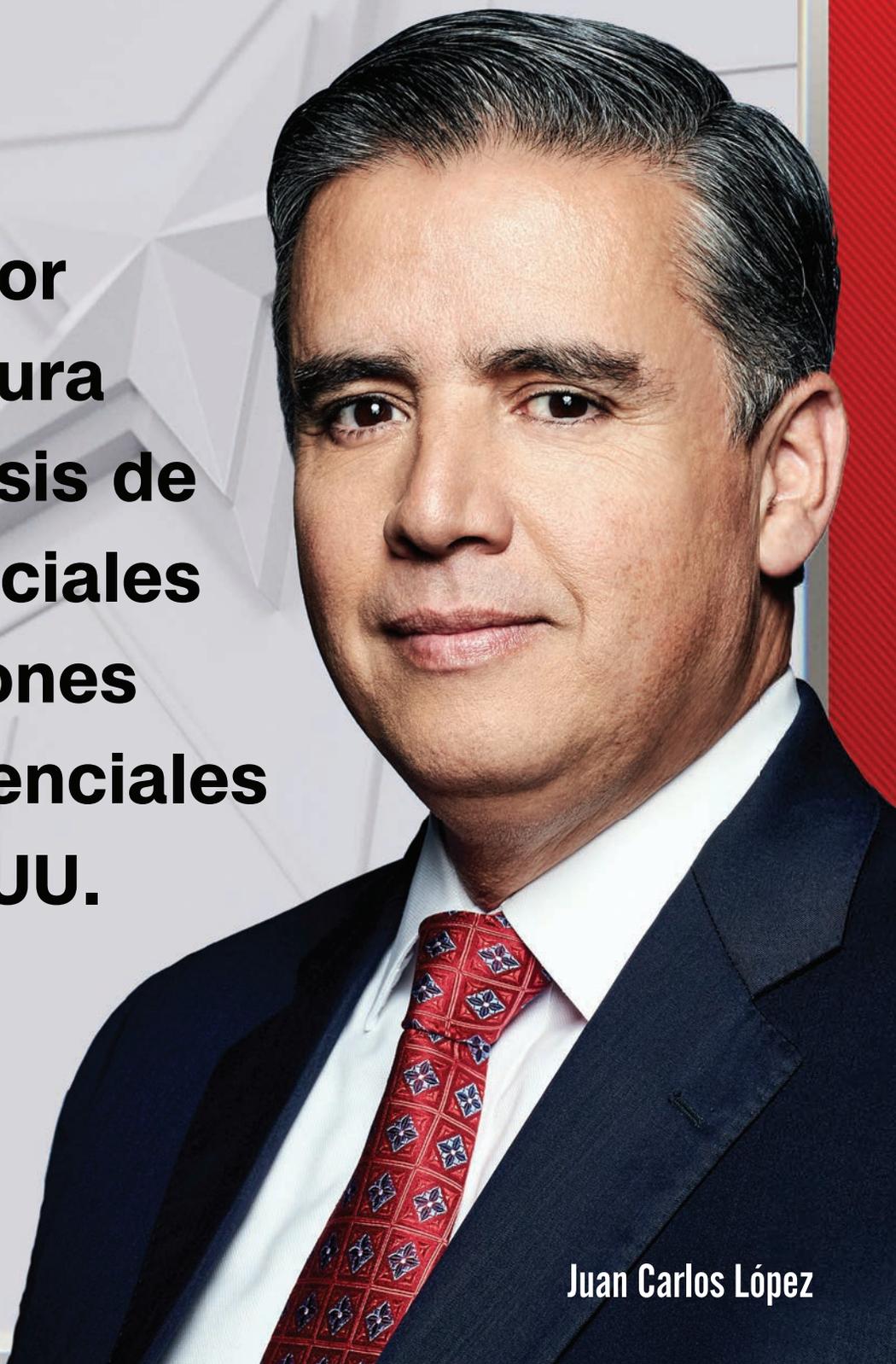


**Octavio  
Pescador**



**Rocio  
Vélez**

**La mejor  
cobertura  
y análisis de  
las cruciales  
elecciones  
presidenciales  
de EE.UU.**



**Juan Carlos López**



SPECIAL REPORT

# GUYANA'S REAL CHALLENGE

**Sudden oil wealth can be a blessing—  
or a curse. Which path will this  
South American nation take?**

**BY JOSÉ ENRIQUE ARRIOJA**

Construction workers at  
the site of Silica City,  
a brand-new "smart city"  
being built 30 miles outside  
the capital, Georgetown.

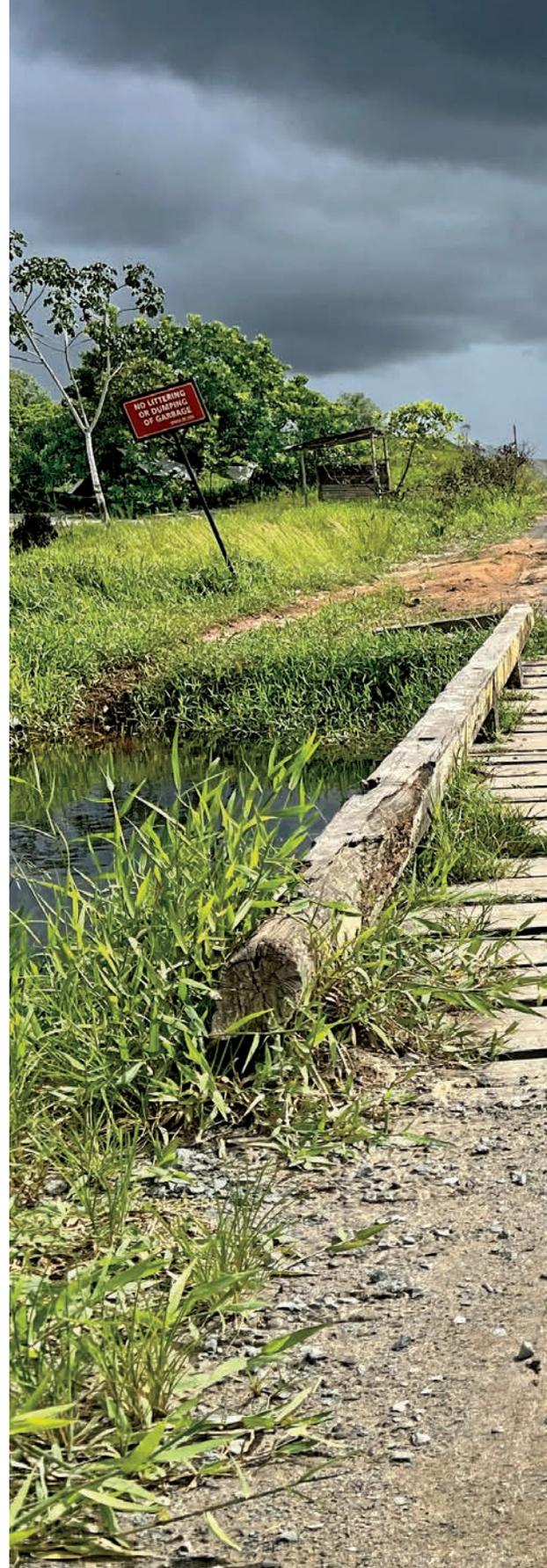
**GEORGETOWN** — If there's a symbol of both the immense promise and risks of Guyana's future, it might be the project known as Silica City.

The brainchild of President Irfaan Ali, the goal is to build an entirely new “smart city” in the tropical savannah some 30 miles south of the capital, Georgetown, near the international airport. Close to \$10 million in construction contracts were awarded in February 2023; there are plans for an 18-hole golf course, housing for 60,000 people, schools, industrial parks and more. Architects from the University of Miami will help design Silica City's master plan; investors as far away as Singapore and South Korea have expressed interest. The government says it may take 20 years to finish, but it expects people to start living there as soon as this year.

For now, it's little more than an empty field. When I visited on a Friday morning in November, getting to the construction site required crossing two wooden, single-lane bridges. A handful of ununiformed workers were setting the foundations of future streets and sidewalks; there were a few cement mixers, but no cranes or generators. The only real sign of the project's scope was a cursive “Silica City” sticker attached to the side window of a contractor's SUV.

Such is life, perhaps, in a country still in the early stages of a potentially transformative oil boom. It has been eight years since the discovery off Guyana's coast of oil now believed to total 11 billion barrels. That would be a huge find for any nation, among the top 20 reserves worldwide. But for Guyana, a country of only 800,000 people, it means more oil on a per-capita basis than even Saudi Arabia. With the economy already growing at a 38% pace in 2023, and an estimated 21% in 2024, some are calling this “South America's Dubai,” a place where no idea — even a new city — is too ambitious.

But anyone with a sense of history knows Dubai is not the only possible outcome — that oil for many countries has been less of a blessing than a curse. My native Venezuela is just one example, along with Angola or Congo, of how sudden resource wealth can fuel social conflict, destroy democracies and hollow





**Silica City** is being marketed as a “smart” and “green” housing development for young professionals, which will sit on 3,000 acres of highland upon completion. It is expected to have commercial and industrial zones, medical facilities, schools and an 18-hole golf course. It is being touted as a symbol of the new Guyana. A single-lane wooden bridge connects the future complex to one of Guyana’s main roads.

# “In Guyana, the risk of the resource curse is particularly strong.”

—Jay Mandle, professor, Colgate University

out other productive sectors of a nation’s economy. Large-scale building projects like Silica City have, in other countries, sometimes become monuments to inefficiency and waste.

During a week-long trip to Guyana, I interviewed numerous government officials as well as members of the political opposition, civil society, the private sector and everyday people. I saw clear signs of promise: plans for new schools, hospitals and critical infrastructure befitting a country where, according to projections by the International Monetary Fund, per-capita GDP could theoretically rival Italy or Japan by the end of this decade. But I also saw how far Guyana still has to go: narrow roads, derelict buildings, piles of garbage in the streets and polluted water canals, testimony to a country still suffering from 12% unemployment and 48% poverty even amid this incipient boom.

The government says it is fully aware of the risks — and learning from other countries’ past mistakes.

“There is no resource curse; the resource is a blessing,” President Irfaan Ali told me in an interview. “It’s a management curse, and we are doing everything to avoid that.”

“We are not building an energy nation; we are building a diversified economy that is focusing on many areas of growth,” Ali said. In fact, Silica City is meant to be a hub for technology professionals and other industries currently struggling for space in the crowded capital, Georgetown. Resources from the oil industry will fund investments needed in tourism, food production, industrial development, manufacturing and biodiversity services, which will be “major growth areas of the future,” Ali said.

I heard similarly confident messages from others in Guyana. But there were also plenty of questions: Can a country with a history of ethnic tensions find a way to equitably share this extraordinary wealth?

How to avoid the slide toward one-party rule that has plagued so many other oil-rich nations? Is it ultimately self-defeating for a nation in the Caribbean, one of the regions of the world hardest hit by climate change, to bet so aggressively on oil? Will any other parts of the economy be able to compete?

“In Guyana, the risk of the resource curse is particularly strong,” Jay Mandle, an economics professor at Colgate University and a member of the University of Guyana Green Institute Advisory Board, told me. To overcome the risk, he said countries must usually nurture a robust private sector, with companies that “can withstand the temptation of confining themselves to the market provided by the energy sector, which becomes a very strong magnetic force.” But he pointed out that almost all Caribbean nations including Guyana lack a strong private sector, a challenge he described as partly a legacy of colonial rule. “It’s not just having adequate public policy,” Mandle said. Rather, it involves a much, much greater set of challenges.

## A LEGACY OF DIVISION

**M**ANAGING SUCH A QUANTUM LEAP in development would be challenging for any country — but perhaps especially for a nation as young as Guyana.

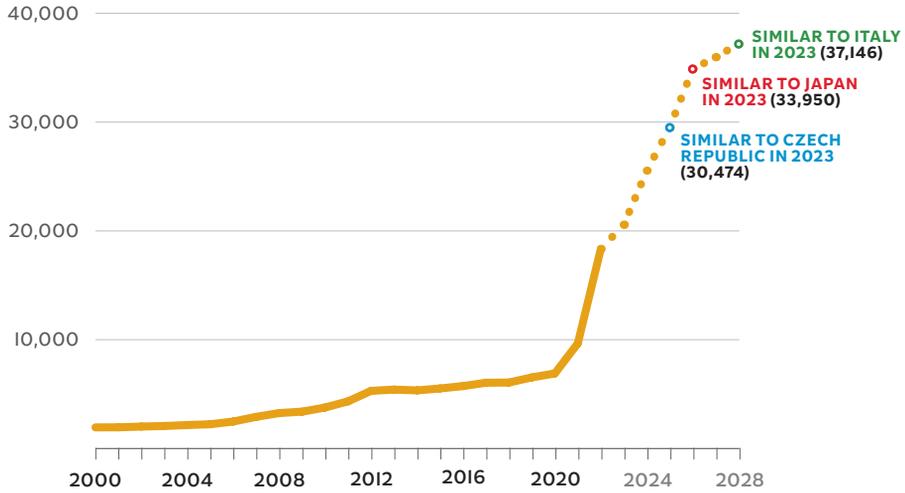
A former British colony, Guyana achieved independence only in 1966. In the years since, there have been repeated power struggles between the country’s ethnic Indian and African communities, which account for approximately 40% and 30% of the population, respectively. On a visit in 2015, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter spoke of a longstanding “winner-takes-all custom” in Guyana’s politics and said, “Efforts to change this system to a greater sharing of power have been fruitless.”

The most recent elections, in 2020, were plagued

## A rising star?

Guyana's GDP per capita may soon rival that of some developed countries.

GDP PER CAPITA, CURRENT PRICES (USD)



NOTES: DATES AFTER 2022 ARE PROJECTIONS. FIGURES ROUNDED TO NEAREST WHOLE NUMBER.  
SOURCE: IMF (2023)

## Guyana has the world's highest oil reserves per capita



NOTE: FIGURES ROUNDED TO NEAREST WHOLE NUMBER.  
SOURCE: RYSTAD ENERGY (2023)

**“We are not building an energy nation;  
we are building a diversified economy that  
is focusing on many areas of growth.”**

—President Irfaan Ali



by allegations that the then-ruling party coalition, A Partnership for National Unity + Alliance for Change (APNU+AFC), tampered with the vote. Only after a five-month legal battle did Ali's People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) take office, with the narrowest of majorities: 33 of 65 seats in parliament.

That's a questionable political framework for handling the abundance expected to pour in over the next decade. Guyana has gone from producing 75,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd) in early 2020 to almost 400,000 bpd today, on its way to a projected 1.2 million bpd by 2027. That would be about as much oil production as today's Qatar — a comparison that seems especially apt, given the countries' relatively similar size and, perhaps, economic ambitions.

"Guyana is very important because it is the fastest offshore oil development in the history of the world," Daniel Yergin, an author and member of the U.S. Secretary of Energy Advisory Board under the last four presidents, said in a recent interview with CNBC.

Oil has also posed new geopolitical challenges. In late 2023, tensions increased with Venezuela after its dictatorship revived a decades-old controversy over Guyana's Essequibo region. The two countries' leaders agreed to try to reduce tensions, but some expect Venezuela will be tempted to reassert its claims as revenues from the disputed region grow larger in coming years.

Indeed, the windfall is only starting. Contracts signed with ExxonMobil, Hess Corporation (recently acquired by Chevron) and China's CNOOC enable Guyana's government to receive 2% of oil production as royalties. After the companies deduct their operational expenses and recovery costs, they split the profit 50/50 with the government. Guyana's coffers netted \$1.2 billion in proceeds from these arrangements in 2022 — a number that could reach more than \$10 billion annually by 2030 once additional oil output and vast natural gas resources come online.

The fight over the money, and how it will be distributed among political parties and ethnic groups, is already at full tilt. When U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Georgetown last July, Aubrey Norton, the leader of the opposition, warned him that "a one-party state is emerging" in Guyana. The fear is that oil wealth will give the governing party so many

resources that it becomes almost impossible for it to lose elections — a classic phenomenon in petrostates worldwide.

Francisco Monaldi, a scholar and energy expert at Rice University's Baker Institute, said the association of Guyana's political parties with specific ethnic groups is concerning. In broad terms, Ali's PPP/C party is associated with people of Indian descent, while Norton's People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) is seen as representing the Afro-descendant community. Although there are nuances, this system means "the government has to be very transparent to the sector not in power so that it won't feel excluded from the national plans," Monaldi said.

"In the long run, that could lead to social conflicts that may derail Guyana's development process," he said.

## HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS AND MORE

**L**OCAL AND FOREIGN OBSERVERS have recommended reforms and new institutions precisely to prevent a future conflict.

Desmond Thomas, coordinator of the Electoral Reform Group, a civil society advocacy organization seeking to improve the nation's institutional framework, suggests new campaign finance rules as well as ensuring all parties have access to the local media in order to level the playing field.

"I believe that if we fix the electoral system, that at least will get us working together," Thomas said.

After the disputed 2020 election, a European Union mission suggested more than two dozen reforms, including forbidding the use of state resources for campaigning; transforming state-owned media into a genuine public broadcaster; and a new dispute resolution body. But a delegation led by Spanish lawmaker Javier Nart concluded last June that several of these recommendations were still pending, even as Guyana heads toward another election in 2025.

Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo, widely perceived as one of the country's most powerful leaders, downplayed concerns about a disruptive split ahead. He told me members of all ethnic groups are well-distributed across the parliament and the judiciary, and cited previous reforms to promote a more

inclusive, integrated society. Prosperity may also help paper over some divisions, he contended. “When the middle class grows, the country becomes more stable,” Jagdeo told me.

Meanwhile, efforts are underway to spread the wealth. The government has committed \$406 million to the health sector, primarily to build or expand 12 hospitals, including two regional hospitals, the construction of a new pediatric and maternal facility, and the building of six additional regional health care facilities. Well-known companies in the industry, such as Mount Sinai Health System, are already working in partnership with Hess Corporation to improve the operations of Georgetown Public Hospital, the nation’s largest. Under the agreement, Hess committed to invest \$32 million, while Ali’s administration will contribute \$1.6 million.

The government has also increased monthly payouts to pensioners like Hari Persaud, an 86-year-old who cut cane most of his working years at the nearby Versailles sugar estate. For the past two years, Persaud has received a one-off bonus in December equivalent to more than \$200, he told me one afternoon at his house in West Bank Demerara, on the outskirts of Georgetown. “I wish the government would give us education; we can have money, but without education, we are nobody,” he told me. The government has also granted more than 20,000 scholarships.

The opposition party has pushed for more — including the distribution of cash payments to the poor. But the government has been hesitant. “There is a misleading view that we are awash with money, and that’s not so,” said Jagdeo, the Vice President. “We have to stick to our plan and not get carried away with populism.”

Many outside experts acknowledge patience is needed. “Policymakers are now presented with the task of converting this dizzying pace of growth into an improved socio-economic reality for all people,” Yeşim Oruç, the UN Resident Coordinator for Guyana, told me via e-mail. “We know from experience around the world that this can be difficult. It takes time. There are no shortcuts.”

## A FOCUS ON INSTITUTIONS

**O**N THE ECONOMIC FRONT, Guyanese officials speak convincingly about the risks of oil.

But when it comes to long-term plans, the details can sometimes seem scarce.

Jagdeo told me Guyana’s difficult past makes it especially attuned to the need for smart fiscal management. At one point prior to the oil discovery, 94% of the country’s fiscal revenue was earmarked to repay debts, and the budget deficit was equivalent to 25% of GDP, he said. With decimated infrastructure and triple-digit inflation, many fled the country; about half the Guyanese population lives abroad, mostly in the United States and Canada.

“We are painfully aware that it requires even greater vigilance and fiscal discipline in this period. Windfalls are great if you use them well,” Jagdeo said at his party’s headquarters. “If you don’t make good use of them and don’t improve the welfare of society, they can be harmful.”

Progress on institutions that could manage the wealth over time has been slow, observers say. A sovereign wealth fund, known as the Natural Resource Fund, was created in 2019 and amended in 2021 to help the government finance its development priorities. The fund’s resources are deposited in Manhattan’s Federal Reserve Bank of New York, and the parliament approves annual transfers to the national budget. Last year alone, the contribution reached \$1 billion. While the fund is considered a step in the right direction, analysts point out that Guyana should continue with the creation of infrastructure and education funds to improve resilience and broader development. “Moving from a raw commodity-exporting economy to a services-based economy is not an easy task,” said Schreiner Parker, a managing director for Latin America at Rystad Energy, an Oslo-based research and business intelligence consultancy firm. “But through infrastructure and education investment, the chasm becomes less wide and the ultimate goal more attainable.”

**“I wish the government would give us education; we can have money, but without education, we are nobody.”**

—Hari Persaud, retired sugarcane cutter



# “Moving from a raw commodity-exporting economy to a services-based economy is not an easy task.”

—Schreiner Parker, managing director for Latin America, Rystad Energy

The opposition and observers have also called for the creation of a new Guyanese Petroleum Commission, similar to those in Brazil or Colombia, with the goal of removing day-to-day, partisan political considerations from industry management as much as possible. “The need for a system of checks-and-balances in the petroleum sector is imperative to avoid undue accumulation of power, and frankly, temptation,” Parker said.

But such a move is not imminent, officials told me. Vickram Bharrat, the nation’s Minister of Natural Resources, called an oil commission “something in the making,” but declined to say if it will be created in 2024. He said the administration already has a legal framework in place so the oil industry can operate in a “transparent and accountable manner,” with “adequate checks and balances.”

International development banks, including the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the nation’s largest multilateral creditor, are also trying to provide advice and funding to help Guyana avoid the resource trap. In 2022, the bank approved ten operations in the country for \$460 million and 32 technical cooperation agreements for \$18 million, for projects focused on resilient infrastructure development, human capital development in health and education, and strengthening Guyana’s institutions.

The formation of a national oil company similar to Pemex in Mexico or Petrobras in Brazil is out of the question, several officials including President Ali told me. Creating a state-owned company would require too much capital, and a managerial capacity Guyana currently lacks, they said. “We have seen experiences with state oil companies, and we are not ready for that,” Jagdeo said.

Instead, the money is being steered toward long-

term development plans. At present, the main link between Guyana and Brazil is a single-lane, red-clay road — one that Guyana plans to upgrade to a two-lane asphalt road. A planned bridge to Suriname will allow Guyana to sell more manufactured and agricultural products to its neighbor, which is also enjoying a surge in oil production. Completing the trade push, Ali’s administration is leading CARICOM’S 2025 food security initiative, which seeks to increase food production and intra-regional trade by 25% in that year.

It’s all a heady change for a country that just a decade ago had gold, rice and sugar as its top exports. Guyana’s Finance Minister Ashni Singh told me the government wants to expand agriculture beyond sugarcane and rice, planning the large-scale production of new crops such as corn and soy that will supply the domestic market and, eventually, the rest of CARICOM.

Whether these new sectors can cope with inflation and other side effects of the oil boom remains to be seen. While I was in Guyana, a single room at the Marriott Hotel cost \$380 before taxes. Several other downtown hotels had no vacancies, a common problem these days. Restaurant prices sometimes seemed reminiscent of New York: A humble meal of chicken and picanha in a rodizio-style restaurant on Alexander Street cost me \$42. Inflation is projected to remain above 5% for years to come.

The oil sector directly employs only about 6,000 workers. For other Guyanese, the pressure on prices has been tough to cope with. “Salaries are going one way, and the prices in a completely different direction,” one woman told me while lunching at a Popeye’s fast-food restaurant downtown, where I also went to find a cheaper meal. “At least I have a job. I don’t know how people manage to make ends meet,” she added.

## CLIMATE AND OTHER CHALLENGES

**L**OOKING AHEAD, several challenges are on the horizon.

Guyana is starting to produce oil at a time when net-zero emissions is a prominent objective in a climate change-driven world, and when much of the global agenda spins around decarbonizing economies. “We have a narrow timeframe to profit from,” Jagdeo said, referring to the peak oil theory, but avoiding discussing the details of such projections. “We want to create an environment for accelerated (oil) production.”

Showing the balance the country is trying to achieve, a green economy is also touted as priority. Ali wants Guyana to maximize the value of the nation’s forest, a principle already stated in the Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030, he said. In 2022, Hess Corporation agreed to buy \$750 million worth of carbon credits from Guyana under the United Nations Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation program (REDD). In 2009, Guyana also signed a \$250 million deal with Norway to protect 18 million hectares of forest.

Meanwhile, development of the oil sector is proceeding at warp speed. Minister Bharrat estimates that over \$50 billion will be invested in the oil sector this year, mainly in the Statbroek area operated by the joint venture led by ExxonMobil (45%) with Hess (30%), and CNOOC (25%). The block is still the only producing field in the country, and while I was visiting Georgetown, the companies announced that a third floating production, storage, and offloading (FPSO) vessel, Prosperity, started formal extraction operations. Companies like Total, Repsol and others are also expected to enter the production phase soon. The amount of money to be invested in the sector will “probably double” by 2030, according to Bharrat, as the country plans to have as many as 10 FPSOs in operation. Additional capital inflows will come to the gas sector “very soon” under the Natural Gas Strategy, he added.

What will happen to all that money? In my conversation with Norton, the opposition leader, he

complained repeatedly about the administration’s strategy of putting so much money into large-scale infrastructure projects. “We are on a trajectory of waste,” he said, expressing doubts about the government’s institutional capacity to plan and execute so many initiatives in coming years.

“What Guyana needs at this stage is a holistic plan,” Norton said.

Some analysts agree. Thomas Singh, a longtime professor of economics and director of the University of Guyana’s Green Institute, also sees a lack of planning. “I’m worried that the government is too focused on vacuous growth numbers while not paying attention to more meaningful social issues,” he said.

When I asked President Ali if his government’s present and future ambitions were consolidated in some kind of master plan, he said, “I’ve been writing a plan as we go along, because we don’t have the time to have a plan and then implement it.” But he also said the government intends to announce a new initiative, called the “One Guyana Developing Strategy,” in January, that will spell out the country’s pillars for growth going forward.

In my conversations with the president and other officials, it was clear there is no lack of grand plans in today’s Guyana. Ali spoke of a country that will use its newfound wealth to properly preserve its forest, while also building infrastructure that will “position Guyana as the number one player on food in the region,” allowing it to export to the Middle East and elsewhere. The country also hopes to develop its diplomatic might, taking a seat this year as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. In the future, there won’t be an international forum on climate, food or energy “where Guyana will be absent,” Ali said.

Ali suggested he is all but certain to seek reelection in 2025. “I’m not looking for a legacy at this moment,” he told me. “All I’m doing is working hard every day ... putting all my focus and energy on the advancement of Guyana.” Many others will be doing the same. **AQ**

Arrijoja is AQ’s managing editor

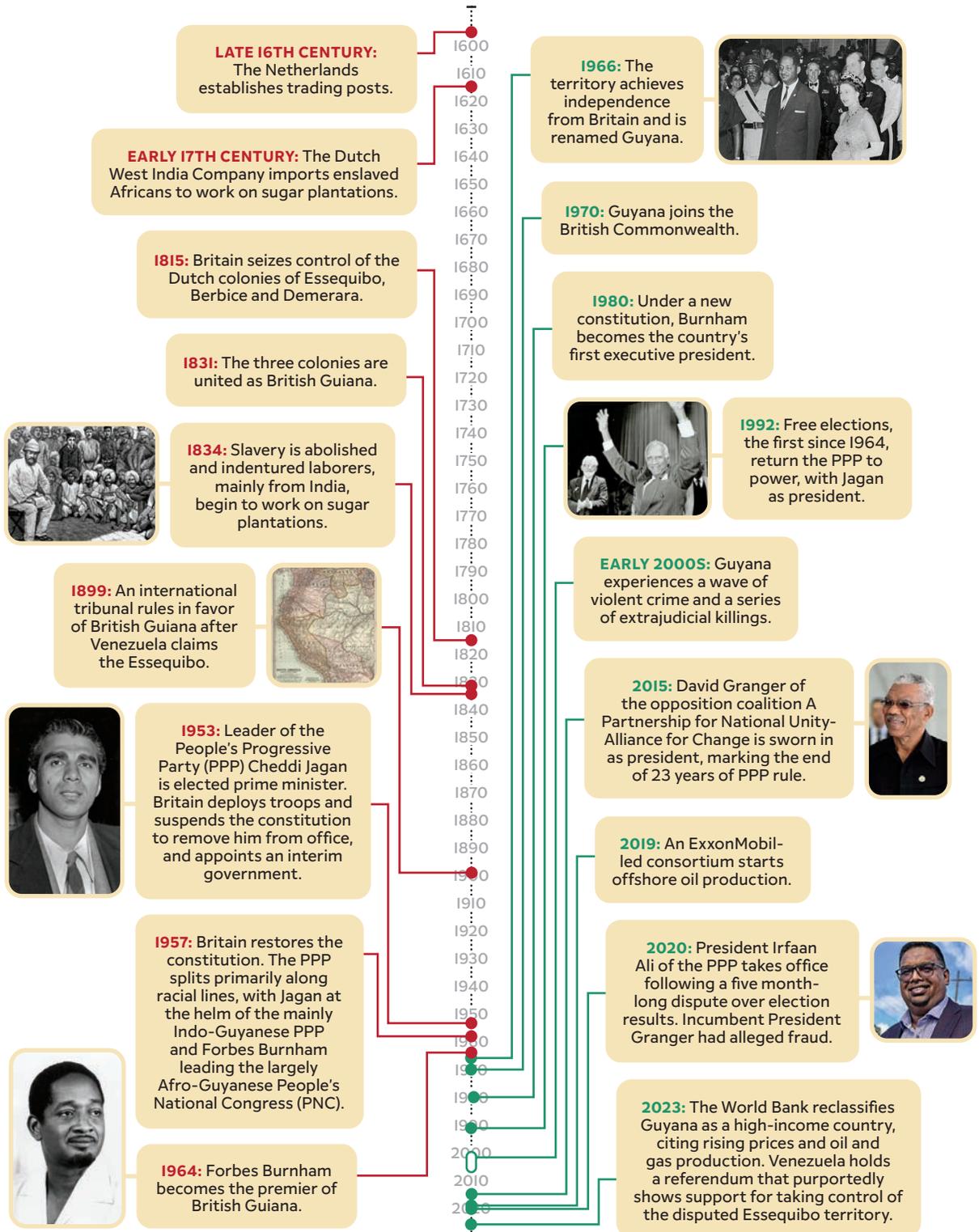
# Guide to Guyana

**The small South American country is making waves with an oil boom that could change its fortunes. AQ compiled key events, facts and data on its governance, society, economy and energy sector.**

*by Tara Hein and Emilie Sweigart*



# TIMELINE OF MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS



TIMELINE (RIGHT): KEYSTONE/GETTY; RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR/GETTY; EVARISTO SA/AFP/GETTY; LUIS ACOSTA/AFP/GETTY

## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES



Guyana has a hybrid **REPUBLICAN/PARLIAMENTARY** form of government.

SOURCE: U.S. CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE

2023 FREEDOM IN THE WORLD SCORE (WHERE 100 IS THE FREEST):



**CLASSIFIED AS FREE**

SOURCE: FREEDOM HOUSE

2023 WORLD PRESS FREEDOM RANKING:



**(OUT OF 180 COUNTRIES, WITH 1 AS THE FREEST)**

SOURCE: REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS PRESS FREEDOM INDEX (2023)

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL'S 2022 CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX



**OUT OF 180 COUNTRIES**

The CPI ranks countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. A ranking closer to 1 indicates a lower level of corruption.

SOURCE: TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL (2022)



Guyana is the **ONLY** country in South America where **ENGLISH** is the official language. Guyanese Creole (also known as Creolese), along with Amerindian and Indian languages, are also spoken.

GUYANA'S POPULATION IS APPROXIMATELY

**808,000**

and about half of Guyanese live abroad. Roughly 80% of the diaspora is in North America, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (12%) and Northern Europe and the United Kingdom (6%).

SOURCES: UNITED NATIONS POPULATION DIVISION (2022); MICHAEL MATERA, LINNEA SANDIN & MARIPAZ ALVAREZ, "THE GUYANESE DIASPORA", CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AMERICAS PROGRAM (OCTOBER 2020)

IN 2022, REMITTANCES ACCOUNTED FOR



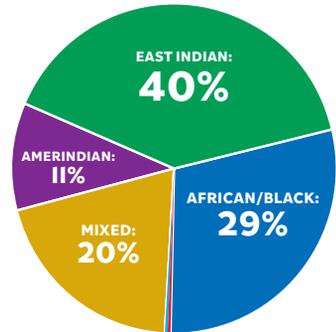
**OF GUYANA'S GDP,**

COMPARED TO LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN'S AVERAGE RATE OF

**2.6%**

SOURCE: WORLD BANK

ETHNIC GROUPS IN GUYANA

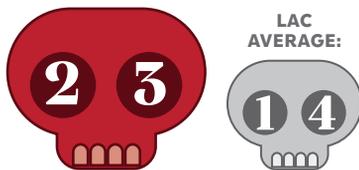


— PORTUGUESE: 0.26%  
— CHINESE: 0.18%  
— WHITE: 0.06%  
— OTHERS: 0.03%

SOURCE: NATIONAL CENSUS, BUREAU OF STATISTICS GUYANA (2012)

NOTE: AT THE TIME OF PUBLICATION, THE 2022 CENSUS HAD NOT YET BEEN PUBLISHED.

INFANT MORTALITY RATE (2021) PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS:



SOURCE: WORLD BANK

HOMICIDE RATE (2022):



**PER 100,000 PEOPLE**

SOURCE: INSIGHT CRIME

SHARE OF POPULATION LIVING IN POVERTY (2019):

**48%**

NOTE: POVERTY LINE OF US\$5.50 PER DAY IN 2011 PPP.  
SOURCE: WORLD BANK



SHARE OF LABOR FORCE IN INFORMAL ECONOMY (2019):



SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

## ECONOMY AND ENERGY

### Unemployment rate (2022):



**12.4%**

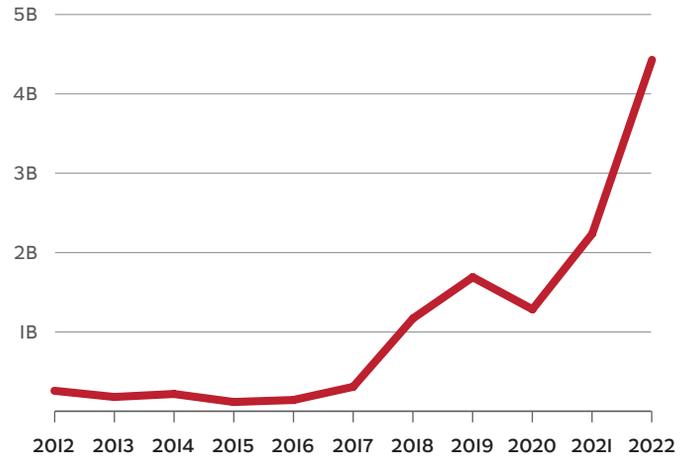
LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN'S AVERAGE:

**7.2%**

SOURCES: GUYANA RATE: WORLD BANK; REGIONAL RATE: INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

### Foreign direct investment booms in Guyana

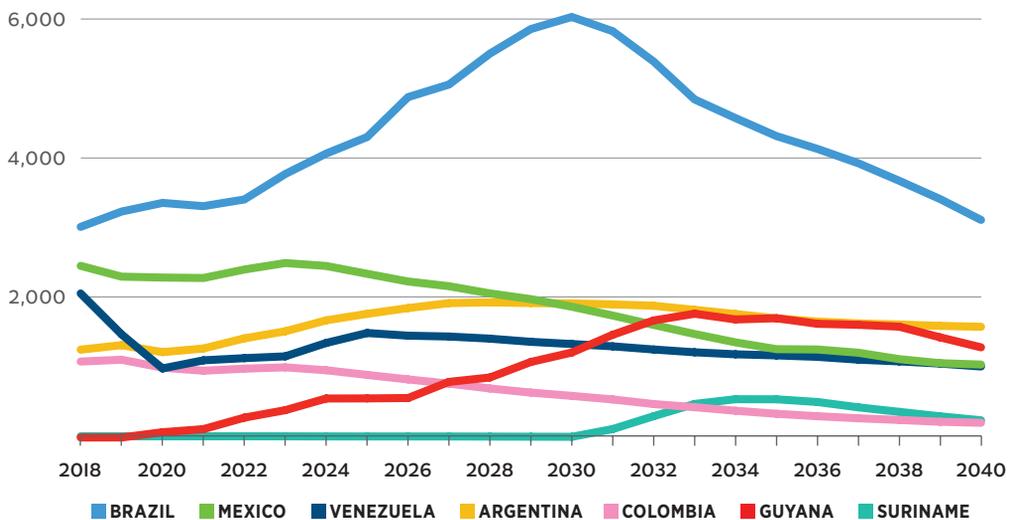
NET INFLOWS (BOP, CURRENT US\$)



SOURCE: WORLD BANK (2023)

### Guyana is projected to become one of Latin America's top oil producers

TOTAL OIL PRODUCTION (THOUSANDS OF BARRELS OF OIL EQUIVALENT PER DAY)



SOURCE: RYSTAD ENERGY (2023)



THE AQ PROFILE

# The (Rare) Popular Incumbent

**Elected on an anti-corruption platform, the Dominican Republic's Luis Abinader is bucking a regionwide trend.**

*by Nick Burns*

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See profiles of the candidates in the Dominican Republic's 2024 elections on page 29.

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Dominican Republic President Luis Abinader attends a parade in Manhattan in August 2023.



**T**HE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC'S president, Luis Abinader, is a rare thing in Latin America today: a popular incumbent who seems to be cruising to re-election later this year. With around 70% approval and a lead of around 25 points over his nearest competitor in polls, other politicians in the region might be tempted to wonder: What's his secret?

Some reasons are clear enough. Abinader, 56, took office in August 2020, just in time for an economic boom led by foreign tourists who deemed Dominican beaches to be an ideal escape in the wake of the pandemic. After shrinking 7% in 2020, the Dominican economy rebounded to 12% growth in 2021, 5% in 2022 and an estimated 3% in 2023. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently ranked it the country in Latin America where living standards were increasing most rapidly.

A former executive in the tourism industry, Abinader credits his success to a balanced approach in a region characterized by the left-right divide. "We have the formula of [being] pro-business, but also strong social programs [and] transparency. That's the only formula that works," he told *AQ* in an interview during a recent trip to Washington.

Dominicans see economic stability as the star accomplishment of Abinader's tenure, according to an October poll by Gallup and RCC Media. His increasingly tough stance on relations with Haiti, the crisis-torn country with which the Dominican Republic shares a border, has also won considerable public support at home — and criticism from human rights organizations. Construction began in 2022 on a controversial wall Dominican authorities want to span about half the length of the international border.

But the chief reason why Abinader won the presidency is an area where some critics say he still has work to do: fighting corruption.

Abinader's predecessors were shaken by numerous corruption scandals, including one involving the Brazilian-based construction company Odebrecht. Mass protests against graft broke out in 2017, creating a kind of before-and-after moment in Dominican politics. On issues of public corruption, "there's been an

awakening of civil society ... there's more participation, organized participation," said Claudia de Windt, an international lawyer from the Dominican Republic.

Abinader made cracking down on corruption a central part of his campaign, and once in office appointed as attorney general a respected former Supreme Court judge, Miriam Germán Brito. She has overseen sprawling corruption investigations with flashy names, reminiscent of those seen in other parts of the region, like Operación Antipulpo ("Operation Anti-Octopus"), Operación Calamar, Caso Coral and Caso 5G.

Results came quickly. The probes have ensnared several high-ranking officials in the Danilo Medina administration (2012–20), including former Finance Minister Donald Guerrero and former Attorney General Jean Alain Rodríguez. Guerrero was accused of orchestrating a scheme involving irregular payments for land taken through eminent domain. Rodríguez was accused of having deviated funds from the public prosecutor's office to fund a group supporting his own presidential ambitions. (Guerrero and Rodríguez have each denied the charges against them. Former President Medina himself has not been charged in the investigations.)

Those prosecutions and others have revived memories of the anti-corruption movement that swept much of Latin America in the 2010s — but lost steam by the end of the decade amid accusations of unevenly applied justice, "lawfare," or prosecutorial malpractice in places like Brazil and Colombia. Whether Abinader can move beyond such accusations and produce a lasting improvement in the rule of law in a second term is probably the biggest question facing his presidency today — with implications beyond just the Dominican Republic.

### Anti-corruption under Abinader

**I**N SOME WAYS, Abinader's push appears to have taken into account the lessons of previous anti-corruption drives in Latin America. Some reforms seem designed to give prosecutors more tools, rather than simply focus on spectacular, head-



Abinader, left, met with U.S. President Joe Biden at the White House in November 2023.

line-grabbing investigations.

For example, the passage of a civil forfeiture law in 2022, allowing for the state to recoup stolen assets, met with praise from anti-corruption experts and drew an explicit compliment from the U.S. State Department, which called it “a major achievement.”

The Dominican Republic has shown a marked improvement in the Capacity to Combat Corruption Index, a measurement of Latin American countries’ ability to detect, punish and prevent corruption, produced by Control Risks and AS/COA (the organization that publishes *AQ*). In 2020 it ranked third from last out of 15 countries measured, with a score of 3.26. By the 2023 edition, the Dominican Republic was in fifth place, with a score of 5.42.

On anti-corruption efforts, “the difference is huge” under the current government, Paola Romero, a lawyer and anti-money laundering specialist, told *AQ*,

pointing to the appointment of compliance officers to oversee public procurement across government ministries. “It’s been a huge step.”

Some observers have complained, however, of slow and unevenly applied justice. As in some other countries, the use of pretrial detention of the accused has been a point of contention. In November, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions declared Rodríguez’s detention “arbitrary” and called for his release. It took six months for the Public Ministry to read through its more than 12,000 pages of evidence in court in the *Caso Medusa* investigation, according to the Dominican press. Guerrero was released from pretrial detention in November.

The Dominican opposition has been highly critical of the way anti-corruption has been pursued under Abinader, pointing to the fact that the investigations have targeted officials from parties other



## Some analysts agree that for a true breakthrough to take place, the president must look deeper within his own government.

than the president's PRM party. "They're using the fight against corruption as a political weapon," said José Dantés, an official in the opposition Dominican Liberation Party (PLD), in an interview on Dominican television.

It's true that no major officials in Abinader's government have been prosecuted for corruption — though they have faced political consequences once allegations came to light. In August 2022, Abinader's chief of staff, Lisandro Macarulla, resigned after his name emerged in connection with the investigation into an alleged payments scheme coordinated by Jean Alain Rodríguez. Macarulla has not been formally charged with any crime. And in November 2023, Hugo Beras, head of a government transportation entity, requested unpaid leave after media reports of alleged administrative corruption in a traffic light contract (Beras denies he acted improperly).

Some analysts agree that for a true breakthrough to take place, the president must look deeper within his own government. "Now it's time for [Abinader] to take his fight against corruption to the next level and start looking inside, within his own government," said Geovanny Vicente-Romero, a political strategist based in Washington.

Meanwhile, efforts to entrench the independence of the public prosecutor's office through a constitutional amendment, a major goal of the administration, have bogged down in a legislature where his party lacks the necessary supermajority.

Asked if the culture around high-level corruption had changed, Abinader replied, "I think it has started to change. It has not changed completely."

"There is always the risk of going back," he told *AQ*. "That's why I want ... the attorney general to be independent on a constitutional basis."

### Eluding anti-incumbent sentiment

**A**BINADER'S ELECTION fits neatly into several regional trends: He was part of a wave of votes against established parties in Latin America. The PLD had ruled the country for 16 straight years under Leonel Fernández (2004–12) and then Medina. Fernández was also president from 1996 to 2000.

But where other presidents elected on a wave of reaction against *los mismos de siempre* have seen their own approval quickly erode — such as Gustavo Petro in Colombia or Gabriel Boric in Chile — Abinader has been able to preserve public support and, according to analysts, build credibility in his own figure.

Often seen to have handled the pandemic competently, Abinader's government rolled out vaccines quickly compared to peers. While other tourism hubs suffered from the effects of the pandemic, the Dominican industry emerged stronger than ever, in part thanks to an approach that prioritized domestic vaccination and did not require quarantine or proof of vaccination for pandemic-era tourist arrivals.

"What we have done is [been] pro-jobs, but at the same time we have increased the social expenditure," Abinader told *AQ*. According to the IMF, the Dominican Republic's spending on social benefits has increased from 1.3% of GDP in 2019 to 1.6% in 2022, after a spike to 4.2% in 2020.

A key issue in domestic politics has been the spillover of a worsening crisis in Haiti and tensions in the Haitian-Dominican bilateral relationship. The flow of Haitians into the Dominican Republic, long established, has intensified amid political uncertainty and gang violence. Around a third of births in Dominican hospitals are to Haitian mothers as of June 2023.



Haitians deported from the Dominican Republic cross the international border between the two countries in September 2023, amid a continued international dispute.

The border itself became a hot political issue in September, when the Haitian government announced its backing for the construction of a canal that would divert water from the Massacre River, which Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic. In the ensuing controversy, Abinader took a firm stance, shutting the country's borders with Haiti for almost a month, at a cost to the local economy on both sides of the border, and suspending the issuance of visas to Haitian nationals. In November, the issue escalated again after an armed confrontation between Dominican soldiers and Haitian government forces.

In the runup to next May's presidential election, the border crisis has become a point of political contention. Fernández, running as the candidate of the Fuerza del Pueblo party, criticized Abinader for shut-

ting the border, citing its effects on the economy. Abel Martínez, the mayor of Santiago de los Caballeros, the Dominican Republic's second city, who is the PLD's candidate, said policy on the border should be run by an expert committee from which Abinader should recuse himself to avoid politicizing the issue.

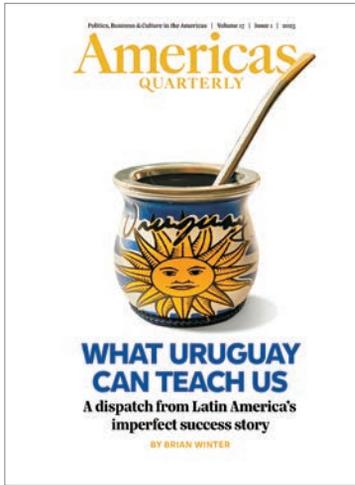
Abinader expressed his hope that the Kenyan-led, UN-authorized international security support mission, currently held up by a court challenge in Kenya, "could bring peace" to the country.

Asked about his government's policy on Haiti, Abinader told *AQ*, "What we are doing is to organize immigration. ... We have done a lot [for Haiti.] But we cannot do more, because we are not a rich country." AQ

Burns is an editor at *AQ*



ONE YEAR LATER



# In Uruguay, A Slow Pace of Change

**A year after AQ's special report, some say Uruguay's famously unhurried pace of reform needs to move faster.**

by *Álvaro Caso Bello*

**I**N HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS in March 2020, Uruguayan President Luis Lacalle Pou set a benchmark for measuring his own government's performance. "If by the end of my term, [Uruguayans] are freer [than today], we will have done things right," he said.

Now, as his term draws to a close and Uruguay prepares for elections in October, how has the country fared in approaching that goal?

Macro indicators show that Uruguay's big picture has remained largely stable — with little variation other than at the height of the pandemic in 2020. In July 2023, unemployment was at 7.8%, the same figure as five years before. While GDP growth decelerated in 2023, largely the consequence of a historic drought, the IMF forecasts an above-trend 3.2% growth rate for 2024. Measured by income, poverty has increased 2% when compared with five years ago. What some herald as remarkable stability, others see with concern, as 37% of the electorate have a pessimistic economic outlook.

Last year, in a special report on Uruguay's imperfect success story, *Americas Quarterly* described the way change is often pursued *a la uruguayana* in the halls of Montevideo: that is, slowly, but with an emphasis on consensus-building, such that once passed, reforms are most often definitive. In light of Lacalle Pou's promises for greater freedom, analysts





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*\*Source: OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results*

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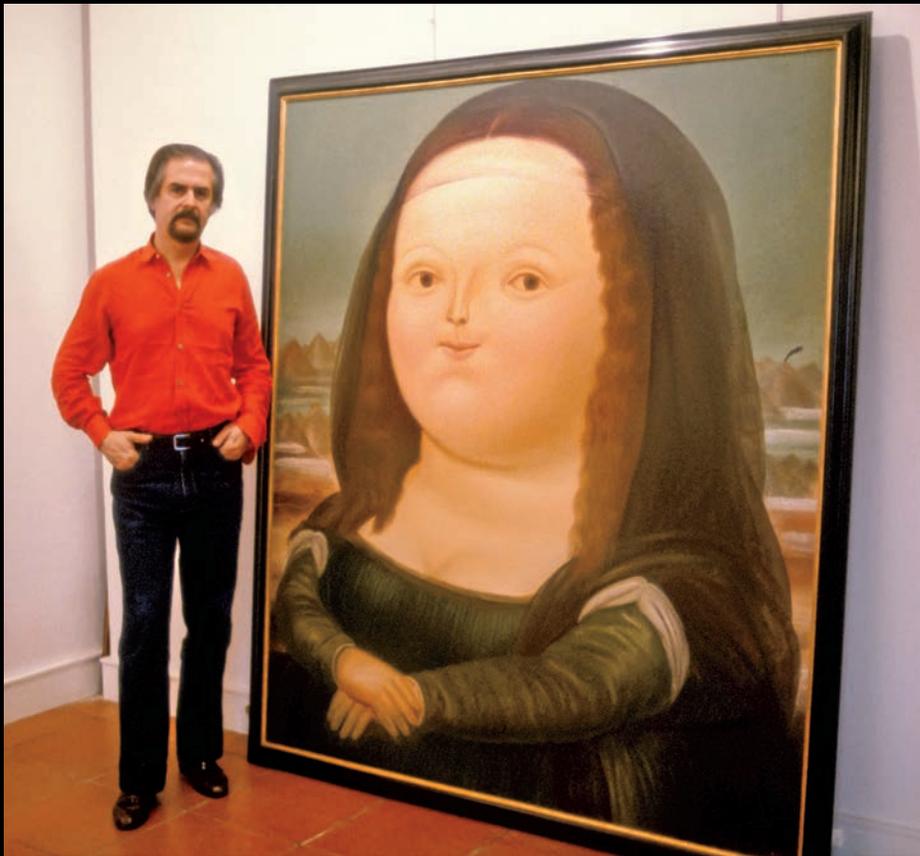
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# FERNANDO BOTERO

1932–2023

*The Colombian artist brought masterful understanding to a conflict-torn country. He isn't often thought of as highly political — but many of his best paintings satirized the powerful and sympathized with history's victims.*

BY DANIEL REY



Fernando Botero in his studio in Paris, circa 1982, with his humorous refashioning of the Renaissance masterpiece, the *Mona Lisa*.

**F**ERNANDO BOTERO'S art is instantly recognizable on account of its fulsome figures. The late Colombian painter and sculptor (1932–2023) is famous for hundreds of portraits, still lifes and sculptures that evoke everyday scenes — but many of his best, and least-appreciated, works are overtly political.

The son of a seamstress and a muleteer, Botero came of age during Colombia's undeclared civil war, known as La Violencia (1948–58). He sold his first piece of art at 16, and worked as a newspaper illustrator while still in high school. During the first half of his prolific career, Botero gained a reputation for humorous refashionings of Renaissance masterpieces such as *Pope Leo X* (1964), *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1978) and the *Mona Lisa* (1978). He also used his signature style to satirize the pomposity of Latin American clergymen, generals and dictators.

Although politics was not then a major theme in his art, Botero made powerful works that record and lament the Colombian conflict. For example, his mural *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1960) takes a biblical theme explored by the Renaissance master Peter Paul Rubens and brings it to the Colombian context. And in *Guerra* (1973), he paints scores of corpses, including his usual cast of clergymen, soldiers, politicians and prostitutes, as though they have been dumped in a silo.

Botero's work became more consistently political as violence in Colombia evolved from a predominantly rural and bipartisan conflict into a combination of guerrilla insurgency, drug trafficking and terrorism that afflicted cities such as his native Medellín.

Botero was personally affected. In 1994, he survived a near-kidnapping in Bogotá. A year later, terrorists from an umbrella organization representing several armed groups killed 23 people when they

blew up his sculpture of a dove in Medellín's Parque San Antonio. In response to the bombing, Botero inscribed the disfigured original with the names of the victims, and created a replica dove to be displayed beside it.

Botero's exploration of the Colombian conflict became much more frequent. In 2000, when he opened his exhibition *Testimonies of Barbarism*, he explained: "I was against that art that becomes a witness to its time, like a combat weapon. But in view of the magnitude of the drama in Colombia, the moment came when I felt the moral obligation to leave a testimony of such an irrational moment in our history."

In this period Botero painted works such as *The Massacre on the Best Corner* (1997) and *The Car Bomb* (1999). The characteristically soft contours of Botero's characters provide a sharp contrast between form and theme that, rather than trivializing terrorism, makes the paintings even more jarring.

A stylistic exception is *Mother and Child* (2000), a harrowing portrait of two skeletons in which Botero abandons his typically generous depiction of form. The painting, with its tender pose, is especially eerie given the scene's association with the Madonna and Child — the two Christian figures most associated with life. Resting on the mother's shoulder is a condor, a scavenger bird and a symbol of Colombia.

Not all of Botero's political art was so unequivocal. In *Pablo Escobar Dead* (2006), the leader of the Medellín Cartel lies peacefully on a ceramic-tiled roof, in front of the colonial city and green mountains, and beneath a dark sky. He is still holding a revolver. Botero paints Escobar as though he is merely sleeping. Medellín's violence is not resolved by the bullets in Escobar's stomach and face. The painting makes one expect that as the sun rises, so will Escobar.

In 2003, scenes from the Abu Ghraib prison out-

# FERNANDO BOTERO

side Baghdad led Botero to work on the most politically-charged subject of his career — the torture of Iraqi prisoners by the U.S. Army. In 2005, he unveiled nearly 200 drawings and paintings of human rights violations. The Abu Ghraib series was an artistic departure for Botero. Whereas his characters usually have inscrutable faces, Botero gives the prisoners expressions of pain, anguish and humanity. What is more, he hides the torturers from view, granting the prisoners the dignity of being the paintings' subjects. Even more than in *The Massacre on the Best Corner* or *The Car Bomb*, Botero's rounded forms stoke the viewer's pathos because their tender composition contrasts so starkly with the scene's brutality.

Botero believed the principal importance of his most political paintings was in bearing witness to events. "I am not making [politically] committed art — art that aspires to change things," he said in 2006. "I do not believe in that because I know very well that art does not change anything." Nonetheless, the Abu Ghraib series and the paintings of Colombia's violence are modern equivalents of Picasso's *Guernica*.

Botero may have been reluctant to paint these scenes, yet he produced some of modern art's most politically demanding works. Throughout his immense oeuvre, he was not only a humorist and a satirist, but a chronicler of ferocious violence. **AQ**

Rey is a British-Colombian writer based in New York with writing in the *Spectator*, the *Financial Times* and the *New Statesman*





Terrorists killed 23 people when they blew up Botero's *Dove of Peace* sculpture (remains pictured at right), in Medellín's Parque San Antonio in 1995. In response, Botero inscribed the blown-up sculpture with the names of the victims and created a replica, seen at left.



Official Portrait of the Military Junta (1971), an example of Botero's tendency to satirize the powerful.



Botero's exploration of the Colombian conflict became much more frequent in the 1990s, as in *Massacre on the Best Corner* (1997), above. "I was against that art that becomes a witness to its time, like a combat weapon. But in view of the magnitude of the drama in Colombia, the moment came when I felt the moral obligation to leave a testimony of such an irrational moment in our history," he would later say.

## FERNANDO BOTERO



In *The Car Bomb* (1999), Botero's rounded, tender forms contrast starkly with the scene's brutality.

## FERNANDO BOTERO



*Death of Pablo Escobar (1999)*

Botero's work became more political as violence in Colombia evolved from a predominantly rural and bipartisan conflict into a combination of guerrilla insurgency, drug trafficking and terrorism that afflicted cities like his native Medellín. Here, two renderings of the leader of the Medellín Cartel, Pablo Escobar.





Pablo Escobar Dead (2006)



Botero in Paris with his paintings of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. The series of 25 paintings and 22 drawings, inspired by the photographs and testimonies of Iraqi detainees, have been donated to the University of California, Berkeley.

## FERNANDO BOTERO



The *Dove of Peace* sculpture was created as a gesture of support for the peace deal agreement reached between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas, in 2016. During the funeral of Fernando Botero in Colombia, the sculpture accompanied Botero's coffin as he lay in state in the National Capitol of Colombia.



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# CULTURA



Gael García Bernal, left, in the title role in *Cassandra* (Film, p. 80)

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# Books

## Nonfiction

**A new book brings to life the history behind mass Central American migration to the U.S., but has little to say about the future.**

**Reviewed by Nick Burns**



***Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here: The United States, Central America, and the Making of a Crisis***

By Jonathan Blitzer

Penguin Press

Hardcover

544 pages

**A**S A YOUNG DOCTOR in El Salvador in late 1980, Juan Romagoza paid a heavy price for tending to the wounds of anti-government activists. Kidnapped by Salvadoran soldiers amid escalating state violence and guerrilla activity, Romagoza was interrogated and tortured for nearly a month, at one point under the supervision of a general named Vides Casanova.

After being hung up by his fingers and shot in the arm to ensure he'd never practice medicine again, Romagoza was released. He fled to Mexico and then the U.S., where in time he became a leading organizer in Washington, D.C.'s growing community of Central American migrants.

In the new book *Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here*, Romagoza's account, based on extensive interviews, is one of dozens of personal stories *New Yorker* reporter Jonathan Blitzer draws on to explain the phenomenon, decades in the making, of mass migration from Central America to the United States.

The story that emerges is one of unforeseen consequences of botched policy decisions by the U.S., and for Central America, tragedy and displacement on a vast scale. Mass migration began with refugees from wars between U.S.-backed militaries and left-wing guerilla groups during the 1980s. The total number of migrants in the U.S. from El Salvador alone went from 92,000 in 1980 to 459,000 a decade later.

In the 1990s, peace deals ended the wars — and Romagoza played a part in the effort to hold militaries responsible for abuses. Blitzer describes how he became a key witness in the 2002 U.S. civil trial of Vides Casanova, who was found liable for damages and later deported to El Salvador. The book's title refers to the words Romagoza uses to evoke the sense of meaning he felt after the wrenching experience of offering testimony against Vides Casanova — as if conjuring the presence of friends who did not survive the repression of the period.

But history was not finished with Central America, where peace did not pave the way to effective, equitable government. A conservative turn



The book pulls together far-flung strands of the migration phenomenon.

in U.S. domestic politics spurred mass deportations of Central Americans, including many who had become involved in gang culture on the West Coast. As deported gangsters consolidated their power, the conditions were set for another, much larger wave of migration to the U.S. in the 2010s, as people began to flee countries that now had the world's highest homicide rates. By 2019, Blitzer writes, 1 million migrants were arrested at the U.S. southern border, most of them from Central America.

*Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here* arrives at another inflection point for Central America. Repression is escalating in Nicaragua, where critics of the government have been stripped of their citizenship and exiled. Fragile democratic institutions are under attack in El Salvador, where President Nayib Bukele is seeking a second term in violation of the constitution, and in Guatemala, where at press time elite factions were seeking to block President-elect Bernardo Arévalo from power. "The overall governance situation in all these countries is pretty dismal," Eric Olson, a migration expert at the Seattle International Foundation, told me.

But at the same time, a tentative hope seems to be sprouting in some quarters, including among Bukele's many supporters at home, who applaud his crackdown on the country's gangs in spite of criticism from human rights groups — or among Guatemalans who see in Arévalo a prospect for change. Even as more Nicaraguans flee, the epicenter of migration is shifting away from Central America. Flows from the Northern Triangle countries have dropped below historic levels as more people leave crisis-torn Venezuela and Ecuador.

In its basic contours, Blitzer's account of the migration crisis won't surprise those familiar with the issue. Its great accomplishment lies in pulling together into a single narrative all the far-flung strands of the migration phenomenon: from politics and day-to-day life in Central America, to U.S. foreign policy and domestic politics, to the necessities and heartbreaks of migration itself.

Blitzer's is a reporter's book, presenting brief, digestible summaries of large-scale political events and social trends throughout the decades, interspersed with real-life stories about individuals caught in the

middle: the Honduran mother separated from her children at the border, the Salvadoran-American LA kid who founded an English-language training company after being deported to El Salvador.

Given his impressive grasp of all the far-flung aspects of the migration crisis, it comes as a surprise that Blitzer’s book provides little in the way of a high-level model of the forces involved and ventures few predictions about the future. Especially as we approach the present, the narrative is submerged under a tide of headlines from the Donald Trump and Joe Biden administrations — the former’s child separation scandals and tirades against Salvadoran gang MS-13, the latter’s hedging over pandemic-era mi-

gration policies — and can read a little like a recap.

One pressing question is whether, even amid uncertainty and democratic backsliding, the incipient sense of hope among some Central Americans might have something to do with downward migration trends. Recent research indicates that hope about the future — regardless of its basis — has a significant influence on people’s decisions to migrate. Whether hope becomes durable reality in any of the countries in Central America may remain unclear for some time. But the effects on migration may already be taking root. **AQ**

Burns is an editor at AQ

## Fiction

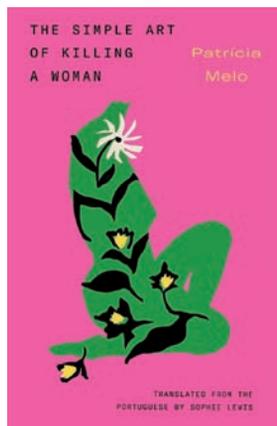
**In this novel set at the edge of the Brazilian rainforest, an accomplished noir writer investigates her most wide-reaching crime yet.**

**Reviewed by Alejandra Oliva**

**T**HE UNNAMED ATTORNEY at the heart of Patrícia Melo’s novel *The Simple Art of Killing a Woman* is haunted by one of Latin America’s biggest scourges: gender-based violence.

When her job sends her to Acre, a state in Brazil tucked between the borders of Peru and Bolivia, to document the trials of those accused of killing women, she uses the trip as an opportunity to escape her own suddenly violent boyfriend, and to understand her own history: Her father killed her mother when she was just a young child, an incident she witnessed but cannot remember.

While in Acre, she begins following the case of Txupira, a young Indigenous woman raped and murdered by three young men from leading Acre families. As she befriends the prosecutor in the case, she begins to investigate the collusion and corruption that results in the boys’ acquittals. As more murders begin piling up, she sinks into the rhythms and id-



***The Simple Art of Killing a Woman***

By Patrícia Melo  
 Translated by Sophie Lewis  
 Restless Books  
 Paperback  
 256 pages

iosyncrasies of life on the edge of the Brazilian jungle. Txupira's case is reflective of Acre as a state — it has one of the largest Indigenous populations anywhere in Brazil, composed of 15 distinct Indigenous groups, including three uncontacted groups.

The story of the attorney's investigation is interspersed with brief interludes, sometimes poetic, sometimes journalistic, dealing with other femicides documented in the narrator's research. Other passages follow her *ayahuasca* visions. In these sections, lushly translated by Sophie Lewis, the prose shines as the narrator joins a mystical community of women warriors, almost like the Amazons once imagined to live in the rainforest.

Here, as might be expected, the book tips into magical realism. Vaginas take to the air like vengeful birds, the living and the dead feast together on the ribs and thighs of rapists, mystical women rise out of lakes. The contrast between this liminal dream-like space and the real, often brutal world of Acre suggests that the only place where justice is possible is in the imaginary — in works of fiction like this one, in the dreams of women on the run from violent boyfriends.

Melo uses these dream scenes to point out the intersectional dimension of femicide, the ways that class and race and age affect who gets killed — femicide rates are 67% higher for Black women, for ex-

ample — and whether the killers face justice. But she occasionally falls into a sort of romanticized, soft-focus view of the Indigenous people of Acre. Whenever the narrator needs to find peace or escape from the violent, dangerous world of the courtroom, she retreats into an Indigenous community, which appears more or less untouched by gender-based violence — except, as in Txupira's case, when threats come from outside the community. Even though the book candidly depicts violence against Indigenous women, its vision of their communities as peaceful, paradisiacal places at times threatens to gloss over uncomfortable realities.

Melo, an accomplished noir crime novelist and screenwriter, has truly found her subject in *The Simple Act of Killing a Woman*. Through the lens of gender-based violence she is able to examine the inequity and corruption that undergird and reinforce it in Brazil, the country with the fifth-highest rate of femicide in the world. But the book's narrator only makes murkier the arguments at the heart of the book. Giving voice to a woman who, based on her class and geographical background, would be most likely to win a case against an abuser; allowing her, even in her dreams, to lead the charge for justice, Melo replicates the structures she attempts to illuminate. 

Olivia is a writer based in Chicago

## Upcoming Books

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

### FICTION

#### **You Dreamed of Empires**

Alvaro Enrigue  
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Riverhead  
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Horacio Castellanos Moya  
January 2024  
Literatura Random House  
184 pages

### NONFICTION

#### **Habsburgs on the Rio Grande: The Rise and Fall of the Second Mexican Empire**

Raymond Jonas  
April 2024  
Harvard University Press  
368 pages

#### **Puerto Rico: A National History**

Jorell Meléndez-Badillo  
April 2024  
Princeton University Press  
296 pages

# Film

## Drama

**An acclaimed filmmaker portrays a queer *luchador*'s dazzling rise, but leaves out the darker parts of his story.**

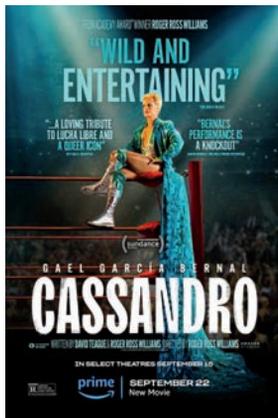
**Reviewed by Ena Alvarado**

**F**OR MOST OF ITS HISTORY, Mexican *lucha libre* has been the domain of brazen machismo. A new biopic, directed by Oscar-winning documentarian Roger Ross Williams and starring Gael García Bernal, revises this narrative. *Cassandro* tells the life of Chicano and gay wrestler Saúl Armendáriz, a now-beloved icon of the ring who earned success by defying prejudice and convention.

At the start of the film, Armendáriz wrestles as a *rudo* on the Mexican side of the border, in Ciudad Juárez. *Rudos* are the “heels” of professional wrestling: the bad guys who confront the good guys, also known as “faces.” In *lucha libre*, outcomes are mostly pre-established and fixed, turning matches into performed spectacles of “good” versus “evil.” As a *rudo*, Armendáriz always has to lose. But a new trainer injects new ambition, and Armendáriz realizes he could win by charming the crowds, if he were to craft a sufficiently captivating persona.

That persona became Cassandro. Under this new guise, Armendáriz becomes an *exótico* — a wrestler in drag. For his first act, he wears a tight-fitting red tank top and tiny shorts. In lieu of a traditional mask, he opts for makeup. Although he ends up losing, he elicits supportive cries from the crowd, teased and electrified by his risqué moves in between hits. Ensuing fights help crystallize Cassandro as a cheeky, flamboyant and enormously entertaining competitor.

Yet, for all of its delights, *Cassandro* also brings disappointment, sanitizing the tangled nature of a man’s choices and feelings in favor of Hollywood glitter and comfort. Consider the film’s dramatic climax: after a streak of good luck, Armendáriz lands a *lucha* with el Hijo del Santo, the son of Mexico’s most iconic and legendary *luchador*. Nervous and excited, he spends the night before at a club, drinking and doing drugs and hooking up with other men. Once back in his hotel room, he cries and receives consolation from his trainer. The real-life Armendáriz, back in 1991, slit his wrists and nearly died in



### Cassandro

Directed by  
Roger Ross Williams

Screenplay by  
Roger Ross Williams  
and David Teague

Distributed by  
Amazon MGM Studios,  
Double Hope Films  
and Escape Artists

Starring Gael García Bernal  
and Roberta Colindrez

Mexico, United States  
of America

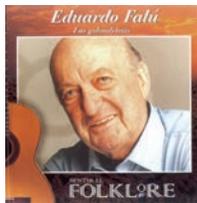


# Music

## AQ's Winter Playlist

**Our music critic writes on Latin American artists refashioning traditional poetic themes, and puts a spotlight on a fundamental instrument: the double bass.**

by **Sebastián Zubieta**



*Las golondrinas*  
by Eduardo Falú

*Palabritas y palabrotas*  
by Diego Lorenzini

*Coplas Escondidas*  
by Sofia Rei &  
Jorge Roeder

*Navega*  
by Jorge Fandermole

**T**HIS AQ PLAYLIST INSTALLMENT starts with a celebration of the centennial of legendary Argentine guitarist and composer Eduardo Falú. Over a five-decade career, Falú offered an elegant take on his country's folk music, with stylish singing and discreetly virtuosic guitar playing. His 1963 song “Las golondrinas,” with lyrics by Jaime Dávalos, turns the observation of a flock of swallows’ migration from a barn roof into a nostalgic meditation on the passing of time. Dávalos’ description of his intentions behind the poem are as evocative as the song itself: “I climbed on the barn’s roof and, laying on the still-warm zinc sheets, I looked up, trying to [see] all the swallows at once, without having to follow them one by one in their crazy flight through the deep blue.”

The song, written by one of the genre’s great power duos, is extremely popular among folk musicians in Argentina and has been covered several times. The composer’s interpretation highlights the song’s deceptively complex harmonies that veer subtly from the conventions of the style. The guitar playing is intricate and polyphonic, while Falú’s deep voice is full of curiosity and wonder.

In 2022, Chilean singer-songwriter Diego Lorenzini released *Palabritas y palabrotas*. Among the album’s 24 tracks is a minimalist, eerie version of “El romance del enamorado y la muerte,” a song written by his countryman Victor Jara, killed by the Augusto Pinochet regime 50 years ago, with lyrics from a late-medieval Spanish poem. Lorenzini’s version is like an electronic *milonga*, combining playful synthesized sounds and acoustic guitar, over which he layers his overdubbed voice in surprising arrangements that give life to the characters in this miniature play: the lovers, the narrator and death. The result is, as with the best covers, familiar, strange and dramatically illuminating. (Spoiler: the *enamorado* dies at the end.)

New York-based Argentine singer Sofia Rei and Peruvian bassist Jorge Roeder released *Coplas escondidas* in 2023. They each have successful



# Visual Arts

## Exhibition

**A testament in Los Angeles to a towering figure of Venezuelan art**

**by Benjamin Russell**



**Alfredo Boulton:  
Looking at Venezuela,  
1928-1978**

Getty Center

Los Angeles

**A** GROUP OF MEN AND BOYS pull at a fishing line on a beach on Margarita Island, off the Venezuelan coast. One man seems to pull harder than the rest, shorts and shirtsleeves rolled tight as he strains against the tension of the rope.

This image, at once modern and enduring, greets visitors to the Getty Center’s exhibition on the life and work of Alfredo Boulton — a testament to what he called the “exuberant beauty” of the Venezuelan people.

Taken in the 1940s and titled *Faenas del mar*, the photo is representative of Boulton’s aesthetic contributions to Venezuelan art in the 20th century. In the decades after his birth in 1908, Venezuela became a center of modernity in the Americas thanks largely to a booming oil industry. Boulton chronicled his country’s transformation on film, photographing people, landscapes and practices, in many cases for the first time.

*Alfredo Boulton: Looking at Venezuela, 1928-1978* makes clear that his influence extended far beyond the camera lens. Indeed, few figures have exercised the level of influence over the development of a country’s art and art history that Boulton did, even though he is little known outside Venezuela.

“Boulton is an amazing modern photographer, but he is someone who goes beyond that,” said Idurre Alonso, the curator of Latin American collections at the Getty Research Institute. “The big discovery for me was to understand how important he was in formalizing art history in his country.”

Made possible by the Getty’s acquisition of his archive in 2018, the ex-



*Faenas del mar, No. III, ca. 1944. Gelatin silver print.*



Left: *Flora, la belle romaine*, ca. 1940s, printed in 1990s. Gelatin silver print.



Right: *Ensayo para un Braque*, 1930s. Gelatin silver print.

hibition uses photographs, correspondence, albums, videos, papers and other material to point to who Boulton was both as an artist and as a man.

Born to a wealthy family in Caracas, Boulton was educated in Europe, influenced by Man Ray and other avant-garde figures. But many of the photos on display show Boulton's fascination with the land of his birth and its modern traditions. Margarita Island and the Venezuelan plains feature prominently, as do evocative portraits of men and women at work and play. One particularly striking image shows the bull-fighter Luis Sánchez Olivares in profile, an elaborate *traje de luces* draped over his shoulders. In another, Boulton's wife Yolanda poses as the Roman goddess of flowers and spring.

The exhibition also recognizes Boulton's contributions as a historian and advocate for Venezuelan art and artists. He documented every era in his country's artistic history, dating back to pre-Hispanic pottery, and in his lifetime published some 60 books, all while supporting and organizing exhibitions for friends and fellow artists such as Alejandro Otero and Jesús Rafael Soto.

Included too is Boulton's personal life, with re-

productions of his furniture, wall-size photographs of his home on Margarita Island, and screenings of films he took on trips to the plains and elsewhere. A book of collected essays accompanying the exhibit delves deeper into his life and legacy.

"In the book we talk about his importance, but it also gives us the opportunity to have a critical lens in the way we approach his work," said Alonso, who edited the collection. "There's a lot of things he covered and lot of things he didn't cover in terms of his historical research, for example."

By 1970 Venezuela had become one of the richest countries in the world, and while Boulton had done much to document its modern transformation, his gaze was at times incomplete. Still, however idealized his vision of the Venezuelan archetype depicted in photos such as *Faenas del mar* might have been, few figures did more to document and formalize Venezuelan art and art history. And as the Getty's impressive exhibition shows, we are all better off for it. **AQ**

Russell is a writer based in Los Angeles and Mexico City, and a former editor of AQ



Luis Sánchez Olivares, "El Diamante Negro," No. 2, 1952. Gelatin silver print.

# LATIN AMERICA AT A GLANCE

Economic growth in Latin America and the Caribbean will likely slow to 1.6% this year, compared to 2.2% in 2023, due to slower exports and tighter financial conditions, according to the UN World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) report published in January.



ARGENTINA BRAZIL CHILE COLOMBIA DOMINICAN REPUBLIC ECUADOR GUATEMALA MEXICO PERU VENEZUELA

## GDP GROWTH

2023 (projected)	-2.0%	3.0%	-0.1%	1.2%	2.5%	1.5%	3.4%	3.4%	-0.2%	0.8%
2024 (projected)	-1.5%	1.6%	2.0%	1.7%	4.5%	1.5%	3.5%	2.0%	2.3%	4.2%
2025 (projected)	2.6%	2.0%	2.4%	2.7%	4.8%	2.0%	3.6%	2.2%	2.9%	3.0%

PROJECTIONS CURRENT AS OF DECEMBER 2023

## ECONOMIC INDICATORS

2024 Inflation (projected)	199.7%	3.9%	3.5%	6.2%	4.1%	2.0%	5.5%	4.2%	3.1%	91.7%
2024 Unemployment rate (projected)	8.5%	8.3%	8.2%	10.5%	6.0%	3.9%	N/A	3.2%	6.9%	N/A
2024 Govt. deficit as % of GDP (projected)	-3.0%	-7.0%	-2.2%	-4.3%	-3.5%	-2.2%	N/A	-4.9%	-2.4%	N/A

PROJECTIONS CURRENT AS OF DECEMBER 2023

## SHARE OF TOTAL INCOME (%)

Decile I	2.4	1.2	1.9	0.9	2.5	1.9	N/A	2	2	N/A
Deciles I-IV	17.9	11.6	15.1	9.7	17.5	14.5	N/A	15.1	15.8	N/A
Decile X	29.3	40.6	35.4	44.5	29.3	34.5	N/A	34.6	31.5	N/A

DECILE I HAS THE LOWEST INCOME AND DECILE X HAS THE HIGHEST INCOME.

## PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL RATINGS

President	Javier Milei	Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva	Gabriel Boric	Gustavo Petro	Luis Abinader	Daniel Noboa	Bernardo Arévalo	Andrés Manuel López Obrador	Dina Boluarte	Nicolás Maduro
Approval	56%	54%	31%	26%	70%	58%	64%	55%	9%	19%

SOURCES: GDP growth forecasts, inflation rate, unemployment rate, government deficit as percentage of GDP: Bloomberg (December); Guatemala GDP and inflation: IMF (October); Dominican Republic and Ecuador unemployment: IMF (October); Income: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (November). NOTE: Figures rounded to one decimal place.

PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL: Argentina, Julio Aurelio - Aresco (Jan 2024); Brazil: Genial/Quaest (Dec 2023); Chile, Plaza Pública Cadem (Dec 2023); Colombia, Invamer (Dec 2023); Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala and Venezuela, CID Gallup (Sept 2023); Mexico, El Financiero (Dec 2023); Peru, Ipsos (Dec 2023). NOTE: Figures rounded to nearest percentage.

CANCILLERÍA ARGENTINA VIA COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA; CASA ROSADA VIA COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA; GETTY; SEBASTIAN BARROS/NURPHOTO/GETTY; FLICKR; ASAMBLEA NACIONAL DEL ECUADOR FROM QUITO, ECUADOR VIA COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA; GOBIERNO DE GUATEMALA VIA COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA; RADIO ZÓCALO NOTICIAS; WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION VIA COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA; GABY ORAA/BLOOMBERG/GETTY

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# AQ

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