

2018 will see over 350 million Latin Americans – constituting half of the hemispheres population gearing up for presidential and legislative elections. Latin America has been going through rapid political changes in recent times. This cycle of elections is coming at a time when, according to the Latin American Public Opinion Poll (LAPOP), the support for democracy in Latin America has been experiencing a sharp decline. Conflict and corruption continue to pose problems in certain countries of the region. In addition, slower growth rates in terms of the economy have been insufficient to meet the demands of the middle class and have rather led to higher inequality and poverty in the region. These revelations are supported by greater dissatisfaction with institutional governments. The elections shall serve to be important in terms of analysing the direction and political intensity of change in Latin America, the region that has 15 percent of the world's oil reserves, large stocks of minerals, a quarter of its arable land and a third of its fresh water.

In recent years, unaffiliated or independent candidates have continued to multiply with each election cycle because of corruption which weakens and disqualifies traditional political players, and an evident lack of leadership and governance. This opened the doors to fresh, new and potentially bad actors, and has cultured a phenomenon in which traditional politicians are seen as outsiders. Leaders such as Jair Bolsonaro from Brazil and Sergio Fajardo in Columbia could be seen as advents of this movement against the traditional political classes. The regions experience with corruption shows the angst and frustration that the masses have against political establishments. Anti-authoritarian regimes in support of a freer press and democracy has brought these issues in the limelight. Populism looms over this election and an anti establishment propoganda has promulgated such a phenomenon. The region is characterized by inequality where electoral campaigns in which funding disparities are stark and evident. In addition, the misuse of state resources is a major corruptive force in the electoral process, as it introduces or exacerbates power inequalities and gives unfair electoral advantage to incumbents. For instance in Brazil, the Electoral Tribunal is trying to produce new resolutions to address challenges around money in elections that is not fully controlled (Brazilian interlocutors have estimated that three percent of election campaign funding comes from public funds, two percent donations from individuals, and the rest from businesses).

Taking the long view, Latin America has experienced general improvements over the past few decades. While social and economic progress — especially poverty reduction and job creation for the region's 163 million young people — recently slowed, the overall trends are positive. More recently, inflation has curbed and now hovers at around 8.3 percent. The big question for Latin America in 2018 is whether voters will embrace the populist anger and nationalist pride that seems to be sweeping much of the world? Will the region witness a

populist relapse Or Will the moderate left strategize well enough to win in Brazil, Columbia and Mexico?

Its impossible to know at this point but the stakes are clearly huge.Policymakers and investors around the world could do nothing but just pay close attention to the same.

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