



SPECIAL REPORT

# 2015 Elections: A change in the Latin American Economic and Political Cycle

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**d+i** LLORENTE & CUENCA

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LLORENTE & CUENCA

## 1. INTRODUCTION

2015 will be just apparently less intense from an electoral point of view than those celebrated in 2014. Last year, there were seven presidential elections throughout Central America (El Salvador, Costa Rica and Panama) and South America (Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia and Uruguay). However, only two additional presidential elections will be held in 2015 (Guatemala and Argentina), but the current year will see three legislative elections where much is at stake: El Salvador, Mexico and Venezuela.

There will also be local elections in Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia and Colombia and two countries will commence experiencing a clearly pre-electoral period: Peru and Dominican Republic.

Thus, the electoral picture for 2015 is as follows:

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS	
Guatemala	September 11
Argentina	October 25
LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS	
El Salvador	March 1
Mexico	June 7
Venezuela	End of November
LOCAL ELECTIONS	
El Salvador	March 1
Bolivia	March 29
Uruguay	May 10
Paraguay	May 24
Colombia	October 25

Source: Own elaboration

**“2015 could likely become the year of political change rather than continuity”**

In the pages that follow, the aforementioned elections and its similarities and differences with the elections of 2014 will be analyzed. In this regard, the past year was characterized by the triumph of the parties that were currently in power in 5 of the 7 cases (El Salvador, Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia and Uruguay) and the confirmation of the predominance of certain forces or leaderships which were reelected (Juan Manuel Santos in Colombia, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil) as well as specific parties (Frente Amplio in Uruguay and FMLN in el Salvador).

By contrast, 2015 could likely become the year of political change rather than continuity. These elections will take place in a changing economic cycle marked by slowdown, volatility, devaluation of the local currencies against the U.S. dollar and drops in the prices of commodities –not only in relation to oil, but also copper, gas and soy–. This will

cause, in turn, less income and financing capability for the States as well as cuts in public spending which will entail increased discomfort and, possibly, protest votes against governments.

## 2. 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Indeed, both in Guatemala and Argentina, the opposition parties have many chances to come out on top, although the parties currently in power also have some chances of emerging victorious.

This theory is historically backed up in Guatemala, as alternations have been taking place since 1990; no party has ever held to power for more than a term in the Central American country: Christian Democrats came to power in 1986 with Vinicio Cerezo and in 1990 he was not even a candidate for the elections that Jorge Serrano Elías won with MAS. In 1996, Álvaro Arzú became president with PAN, but was defeated in 1999 by FRG, headed by Álvaro Portillo.

In 2003, FRG with Efraín Ríos Montt as candidate finished third and the presidency became a battle between Óscar Berger (GANA) –who ultimately won– and Álvaro Colom (UNE). Four years later it would be Colom’s turn to become President, as he beat Otto Pérez Molina in the second round, who would come on top in the elections of 2011.

Now, the Patriotic Party (PP) led by Pérez Molina seeks to put an end to

### GOVERNMENT-OPPOSITION ALTERNATION IN GUATEMALA

1990	MAS beats UCN, the second most voted party in 1985.	DC, in power since 1986, does not even make it to the second round.
1995	Pan comes on top and FRG second.	UCN –second most voted party in 1990– and DC –third most voted party in 1990– formed a coalition and finished third.
1999	FRG wins, the second most voted party in 1995.	PAN, in power from 1996 to 2000, is beaten by FRG.
2003	GANA emerges victorious, UNE finishes second.	FRG, in power from 2000 to 2004, finishes third and does not even make it to the second round.
2007	UNE beats the Patriotic Party.	GANA, in power from 2004 to 2008, finishes third and does not even make it to the second round.
2011	The Patriotic Party beats LIDER in the second round.	UNE, in power since 2008, does not even have a candidate.

Source: Own elaboration

**“The government must also face the challenge of dealing with the clearly populist speeches of Manuel Baldizón”**

this curse that governments have been experiencing in Guatemala. As re-election is not possible in the Central American country, PP is strongly supporting former Minister of Communications of the current President, Alejandro Sinibaldi.

The problem for the Patriotic Party is that by the time the elections take place, it will already be very worn: it has not solved the main problem of the country (insecurity) which was its cornerstone during the electoral campaign of 2011 (a firm hand against crime). Furthermore, the economy continues growing at a very slow pace and, were this not to be enough, President Pérez Molina is now at odds with the business elite. The past year has witnessed a clear deterioration in public management: the government has held a bitter confrontation with the employers' organization due to tax increases and both President Otto Pérez Molina and his party's candidate have been linked to the Brazilian Petrobras scandal: the operation known as “Lava Jato” currently being carried out by the Brazilian Police against former managers of Petrobras, who allegedly received bribes to hire certain companies in order to carry out infrastructure works.

According to the data published by newspaper Valor Económico, Sao Paulo, the detectives found in the office of the director of the construction company OAS, José Aldemario Pinheiro Filho, written documents on which Sinibaldi and President Otto Pérez Molina were mentioned. The newspaper states that the detectives believe the document suggests that the

enterprise spent USD 1 million to fund the Sinibaldi's Presidential Campaign, through its political adviser, Antonio Solá, of Spanish nationality. “20xUS\$50,000” supposedly wrote Pinheiro.

The government must also face the challenge of dealing with the clearly populist speeches of Manuel Baldizón. The features that Flavia Freidenberg (academic specialized in this type of political phenomena) considers define populism (“an individualized and paternalistic leadership”) are evident in Baldizón.

His party, Libertad Democrática Renovada, Líder, is based on him and his gestures seek to gain the favor of the people. For example, by attracting celebrities from the football sphere. D.C. United Striker, Carlos “el Pescado” Ruíz and goalkeeper Juan José Paredes, who plays at Club Comunicaciones, are the two latest signings of the opposition party.

Baldizón lacks a defined ideology, which explains why he is seeking to gain supporters from the right-wing spectrum by allying with parties such as Corazón Nueva Nación (CNN). As explained by academic Pedro Trujillo: “*Lider needs to increase its center-right support to gain urban votes, where the party is clearly trailing behind, and that could be the complementary objective of the alliance with CNN. With the support of the army and headed by Lieutenant Colonel Otto Bernal, CNN could gain votes – Congressmen– which could then be transferred to Lider –just like*

**“Baldizón is the favorite to win, but in a very volatile and fragmented context”**

*they left UNE— or it could also become Mr. Manuel’s mother ship in case he needs to use a plan B”.*

Manuel Baldizón, who appeared in the meetings of year 2011 holding a Bible in one hand and the constitution in the other, directly stimulates the most simple citizenship instincts. “He is a demagogue and a dangerous man for democracy, even more dangerous than Alfonso Portillo. He represent all vices and everything negative that the Guatemalan political scene has to offer”, told Marco Antonio Barahona, Director of the Central Institute of Political Studies (INCEP), to the Magazine Crónica.

Baldizón, who was defeated by Pérez Molina in 2011, aims to fulfill an unwritten rule in Guatemalan elections: the politicians who finished second in an election manages to win the next one. This happened to Álvaro Portillo in 1995 (finished second and won in 1999), Óscar Berger (finished second in 1999 and won in 2003), Álvaro Colom (second in 2003, won in 2007) and Otto Pérez Molina (second most voted in 2007, emerged victorious in 2011).

Baldizón is the favorite to win, but in a very volatile and fragmented context, since candidates such as Sandra Torres, ex-wife of Álvaro Colom who wanted to become a presidential candidate four years ago, also seek to make it to the second round.

All these reasons (political wear of the government, populist philosophy of Baldizón and the long history of government changes in the Central American country) suggest that there might be political changes in Guatemala in 2015.

**Argentina, pro-Kirchner vs anti-Kirchner**

The Argentinian political battle will be quite open, as occurs in Guatemala.

The first reason being the fact that the government has not announced its candidate yet. The main option is Daniel Scioli, Governor of Buenos Aires, the least *pro-Kirchner* pre-candidate of that part of the political spectrum. Cristina Kirchner, who has not yet publicly supported any candidate—in an attempt to preserve her power and influence— might prefer other *pro-Kirchner* politicians, such as Minister Florencio Randazzo. Her final decision will ultimately depend on who can give her a higher degree of power and influence while obtaining good results in the elections of 2015.

The range of *anti-Kirchner* opposition is very wide and highly fragmented, as at least three groups can be named:



Source: Crónica Magazine

**“The campaign will be marked by the economic crisis gripping the country and the financial difficulties arisen through vulture funds and insecurity”**

- Firstly, anti-Kirchner Peronism, which supports Sergio Massa.
- Secondly, the non-Peronism center-right-wing, which supports the mayor of Buenos Aires, Mauricio Macri.
- And lastly, the great coalition between UCR and the left-wing spectrum (particularly Socialism), which currently has great divisions (for example, in relation to forming an alliance with Mauricio Macri) and many presidential candidates (Julio Cobos, Hermes Binner, Ernesto Sanz).

The alliance between UCR, the Socialist Party and several groups of the center and left-wing of the political spectrum –UNEN– is living a difficult time after the departure of the coalition of Elisa Carrió. Radicals and socialists (Hermes Binner) have chosen to continue united and rejected the Carrió’s proposal, who suggested allying with Mauricio Macri. UCR decided to form a small anti-Kirchner coalition (socialists and radicals) instead of creating a broader coalition that went from right-wing parties (Macri) to left-wing groups.

So far, the vote intention polls put Scioli in the lead (around 25% of the votes), followed by Massa (20%) and Macri third, although gradually closing the gap (15-18%). Scioli faces a major handicap: he does not have the real support of pro-Kirchner groups and the economic situation (inflation and dropping GDP) goes against his

wish of representing continuity with change, which is what the Governor of Buenos Aires has proposed so far. The campaign will be marked by the economic crisis gripping the country and the financial difficulties arisen through vulture funds and insecurity, one of the problems affecting the population.

As noted by the Argentinian political analyst Carlos Pagni *“if the productive deterioration were to weaken that support (towards Cristina Kirchner), Massa would come on top. The cornerstone of Massa’s campaign is recession. For the middle classes, not particularly keen on Peronism, Massa is a suspicious person. They supported him last year, when he emerged as the “hero” to fight pro-Kirchner groups. But they are now supporting Pro (Macri) and FA-Unen, which represent an even bigger break with the Government. When voters compare both options, they come to the conclusion that Massa shares some traits with pro-Kirchner parties”*.

But that is not the only problem Massa has to face. Pagni considers that *“apart from having to conquer the non-Peronism universe, Massa must face the lack of territorial development beyond Buenos Aires. He is trying to solve this dual challenge by seeking radical allies in several provinces ruled by Peronism; but this approach will not be enough. Massa’s success might depend on a deeper socioeconomic deterioration. Were the number of unsatisfied people to increase, mainly related*

**“Argentina is closer to post-Kirchnerism rather than Kirchner continuity”**

*to the fall of wages and loss of employment, he would be the most prepared candidate to attract voters. Thus, Peronism is divided between Frente para la Victoria, whose main candidate is Scioli and Frente Renovador, led by Massa, which work like communicating vessels regulated by the level of recession. And what about the non-Peronism option? Macri and his party, Pro, control the city of Buenos Aires, but they lack the kind of development that Massa has throughout the country. In contrast, FA-Unen controls Santa Fe, where socialism is in power and has the territorial structure of UCR, making it a real option in other provinces. However, FA-Unen lacks a promising candidate. Sanz, Cobos and Binner have yet to stand out”.*

Therefore, Argentina will see a very close presidential elections in 2015, in which, for now, three candidates are standing out among the rest. Sergio Massa and Daniel Scioli seemed like the only real presidential candidates until mid-2014, but Mauricio Macri has joined them and with great force. The three of them are obtaining almost identical results and depending on the poll, either Massa or Scioli are in the lead. What all polls agree on is the huge growth Macri has experienced.

In addition, Massa and Macri are trying to get UCR's support, a party without strong leaders, highly fragmented and atomized, but still with an important enough structure as to be nationally relevant. Massa can grow and

become the most viable option to defeat pro-Kirchner parties, appealing to the “useful” vote. And this is exactly what Carrió herself feared the most when she proposed the UNEN-Macri alliance: without UCR's support it could be Massa, who has a better structure and more territorial support, and not Macri, who battles against Scioli in the second electoral round.

What seems certain, as noted by analyst Fernando Laborda in newspaper La Nación, is the fact that Argentina is closer to post-Kirchnerism rather than Kirchner continuity: “With less than a year in office remaining, the current President has no tools to implement any large financial enhancements. Political and social costs of any adjustment would be immediate, whereas supposed benefits would be enjoyed by the next national government. Politics control the economy, and the power project of Kirchnerism is above any national project in the medium- or long-term. Taking into account the aforementioned context, nobody expects Cristina Kirchner to ease the future burdens that the next President will have to face, especially considering it seems unlikely it will be one of her trusted colleagues, not even to the potential candidate of Frente para la Victoria, Daniel Scioli. It may be argued that the transition between the current Head of State and her successor will greatly resemble the one that took place in 1999 between Carlos Menem and Fernando de la Rúa. Recession, with its

**“It seems that these elections will confirm the political polarization that has characterized the Central American country since the end of the civil war during the early 90s”**

*consequences: unemployment and exchange rate lag, are two of the features that both transitions share”.*

### 3. 2015 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

Three countries will hold legislative elections in 2015 and, given their political importance, they could have significant consequences on the governance of the nations involved: El Salvador, Mexico and Venezuela.

#### Polarization Continues in El Salvador

The Central American country will see the battle between the current party in power, FMLN and Arena on March 1. It will be a good test to check whether the strong polarization that characterized the presidential elections still remains; the victorious candidate (Salvador Sánchez Cerén, FMLN) won by only 6,000 votes over the opposition (Norman Quijano, center-right-wing Arena).

While it is true that legislative and municipal elections that take place concurrently are different from presidential elections, both forces consider these elections as a test: center-right-wing Arena in order to confirm its progress and FMLN to verify it is still ahead.

In fact, equality will mark these elections. According to a poll carried out by LPG datos, FMLN would have an advantage of only 0.3% regarding deputies and 2.1% in relation to municipalities at

a national level, compared to ARENA. The left-wing party would obtain 29.2% of the deputies' votes versus 28.9% of ARENA. As regards municipalities, the government would obtain 30.4% of the votes while the opposition figure is slightly worse, 28.3%. For the municipality of San Salvador, FMLN still leads with 38.3% of the votes, compared to the 30.7% granted to ARENA. This data confirms the polarization (FMLN vs ARENA) that the country is experiencing, since the third most voted political force in El Salvador is GANA, obtaining a mere 4.8% of the votes.

However, a different survey (University Institute of Public Opinion, IUDOP, of the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, UCA) also carried out in December, states that ARENA is ahead of FMLN in vote intention for the legislative elections of 2015. 30.8% of the respondents confirmed they would vote for ARENA in the deputy elections while 29.8% would vote for FMLN. As regards municipalities, 30.8% would vote for the former guerilla, 29.7% for ARENA and 4.9% for GANA.

Thus, it seems that these elections will confirm the political polarization that has characterized the Central American country since the end of the civil war during the early 90s. In addition, these elections will be very important in relation to the governance of the nation, especially for the FMLN, as it will try to win back the legislative majority it lost in the last elections of 2012. Anyhow, it does not seem

**“The legislative elections of June 7 in Mexico will also be key in the field of governance”**

likely for any party to obtain the simple majority in the Legislative Assembly after March 1, 2015. With ARENA and FMLN so close, the governance balance will be in the hands of small parties, GANA and PCN, which in turn will fight each other in order to conquer the third spot, key to granting majorities in the legislative elections. Great National Alliance (GANA) are favorites against National coalition (PCN), as it possesses strong local leaders and has carried out an important territorial work throughout the country for several years.

#### Legislative Elections in Mexico

The legislative elections of June 7 in Mexico will also be key in the field of governance. A few months ago, Enrique Peña Nieto and PRI faced this event clearly ahead of the opposition; they were going to achieve an absolute majority without any alliances. However, the recent events have clouded the aforementioned outlook: the killings in Tlatlaya and Iguala or scandals like the “Casa Blanca” (White House) bought by the wife of President Peña Nieto have had a negative impact. These incidents have created civil unrest and took the government by surprise and with no capability, at least yet, to give a strong answer that convinces the population.

Thus, the government and the official party, PRI, will face these elections weakened for several reasons:

- From the political point of view due to the accusations

made against the wife of the President on one hand and the Minister of Finance and right hand of the President, Luis Videgaray, on the other. These problems increased the already existing outrage, both at national and international level, generated by the Iguala case. The government seemed slow to react and when it finally did, it implemented measures that were not particularly well-valued by the population.

As pointed out by writer and analyst Jorge Casteñeda in the newspaper Milenio *“a political crisis has been sparked... and it can be divided in three moves: Tlatlaya in June, Ayotzinapa in September and the “White House” in November. Each of these events entailed demonstrations, critics and protests in Mexico and abroad (among the academic sphere, social networks and within radical groups throughout the country). It generated increasingly severe critics from different sources, both left- and right-wing, social society and business community. It also gave place to a double tacit confession by the Government: they underestimated the severity of assuming the validity of the rule of law and the redundancy of reforming it and by proposing several reforms in relation to security and justice, they recognized they had not done so”*.

- The economy is another weakness for the Government of Peña Nieto. The economic

**“The government will have to face legislative election that could channel the protest vote and leave the party weakened for the next three years”**

context of the region has changed and it will continue shifting, hindering the great objective of the administration: this slowdown will make it impossible, in the short term, for the benefits of the reforms to translate into greater and faster economic growth. The economic situation is at a delicate juncture, as well as the financial context, given the upcoming hikes in the policy rates of the Federal Reserve of the U.S., the devaluation of the Peso and the fact that the oil price dropped by 50% during the second half of 2014.

The government has lost much of its credibility and is in a difficult economic context. Thus, it will have to face legislative election that could channel the protest vote and leave the party weakened for the next three years. Three key years to complete the reform process initiated in 2012 and which, with the aid of the Pact for Mexico, has covered the period of 2012 to 2014.

The success cycle that the government hoped to complete will not become a reality. A cycle that started with the implementation of structural reforms which would boost the economy and attract foreign investment; therefore enhancing the growth and welfare levels. As Jorge Castañeda pointed out: “There are signs of an extreme weakening of the Government and the President with four years in power ahead. This

process seems to have no end, as none of the events that could solve this situation seem likely. Economy will not reach high growth levels in 2015. The drop of oil prices and the rising interest rates in United States will generate controllable financial problems, although they will create distress. It is hardly conceivable that the popularity of the President, his government and the official party will rise to previous levels, never very high either. The reforms will have partial and gradual effects, some more than others, but none in a spectacular manner. There are no reforms planned for the future, as this would create even more discomfort. A complete government revamp or holding early elections –common measures of Heads of State or Nations with parliamentary or hybrid regimes– is neither in the agenda nor in the DNA of President Peña Nieto”.

The problems PRI and the government have had are not less important than those that PRD, the left-wing party, had to face, since its Mayor and Governor was related to the events of Iguala in Guerrero.

The importance of this election is that a stumble by PRI would leave Peña Nieto politically wounded to continue passing the reforms he has been promoting since 2012, when he still has three years in power.

**“The legislative elections that will take place in the late 2015 are a great opportunity for the opposition, the Mesa de Unidad Nacional (MUD), to defeat Chavism”**

Furthermore, the legislative elections in Mexico may shed light on the war within the left-wing parties: PRD and MORENA, a political force led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Whoever emerges victorious will be in a good position to gain the presidential elections of 2018. As analyst Leo Zuckerman points out in the newspaper *Excelsior*, “*The ideal scenario for López Obrador would be obtaining better results than PRD. This would entail a shift from PRD towards Morena which would help López Obrador become, once again, the undisputed leader of the Mexican left-wing political sphere. The news is that Morena could actually obtain better results than PRD in the next elections, as shown in the poll published yesterday in newspaper Reforma*”.

#### **Venezuela, Pro-Chavez Majority Might Be In Danger**

Chavism is also in danger of losing its majority in Venezuela’s National Assembly. The legislative elections that will take place in the late 2015 are a great opportunity for the opposition, the Mesa de Unidad Nacional (MUD), to defeat Chavism and obtain a majority in the Legislative Elections. It is indeed a good opportunity because Nicolás Maduro’s popularity has deteriorated considerably during the last months and the economic situation has worsened as well and, quite possibly, will continue declining throughout 2015.

To gain ground (or at least not lose it), the Government of Maduro will not carry out the deep adjustments that the Venezuelan economy needs in 2015. An economy burdened by an inflation of approximately 60% and a drop in the oil prices that has placed the barrel of oil in the late 2014 below the 60-dollars mark. Because of the aforementioned points, an adjustment is needed, as pointed out by analyst José Guerra: “*without an exchange rate adjustment and an increase in the price of oil, there is no way of reducing the fiscal gap. They would have to extract many resources through taxes and deepening the recession. That being said, the recently passed laws with the enabling mechanism are a sign of contradiction... I do not know any government that cuts spending in an electoral year like 2015*”.

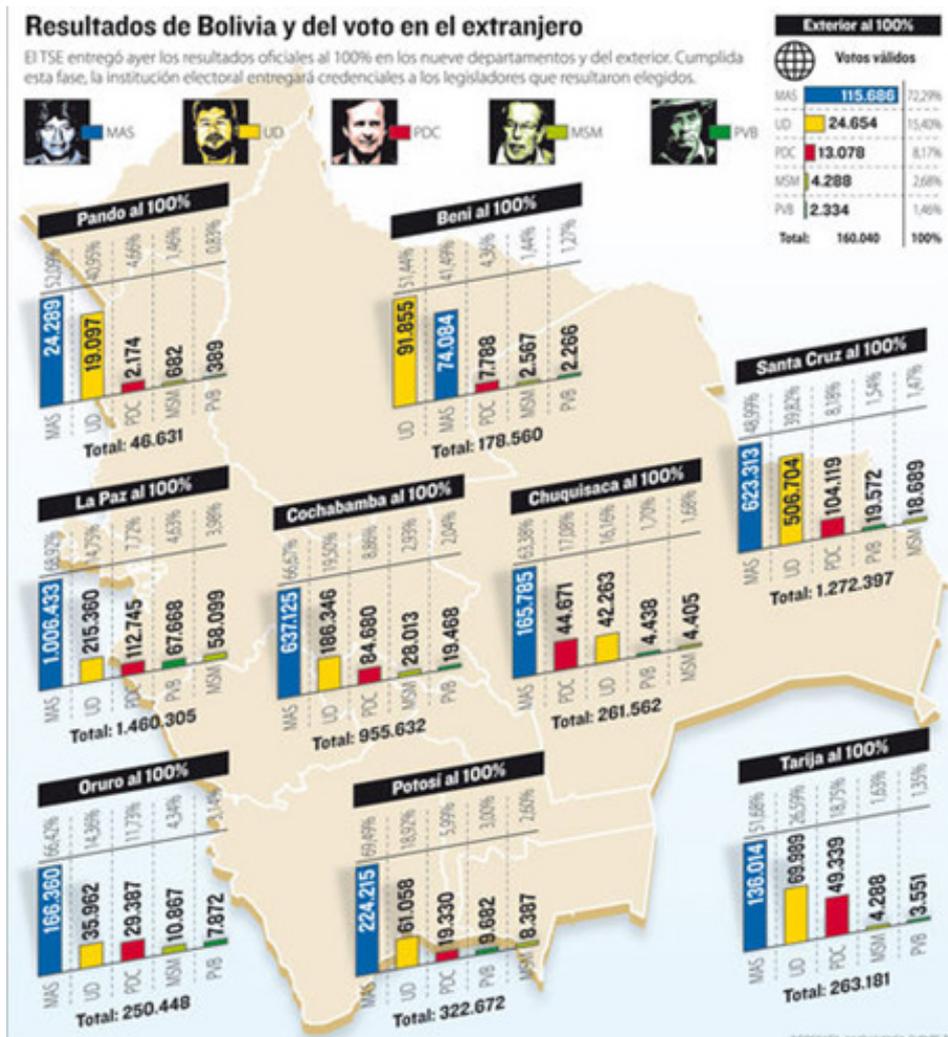
The regime will make a great effort to win the 2015 elections, since besides avoiding the adjustment, Venezuela has “declared a war” on the U.S. and vote mobilization will be really intense. “*In order to maintain peace and democracy in Venezuela we need a great electoral victory in the parliamentary elections of 2015*”, stated Maduro. These elections are essential for the President himself as losing the majority in the Legislative Chamber would severely wound him from a political point of view. Weakened by the opposition and with no power within the factions that form the pro-Chavez movement, he would not be able to benefit from the extraordinary powers granted through enabling

“Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador and Uruguay will hold local elections (provincial or municipal) with important cities such as Bogota, Montevideo or La Paz at stake”

laws and Mr. Maduro would face a much more severe control.

The opposition is not at its best either. Their members support two different candidates (Henrique Capriles on one hand and Leopoldo López on the other) and their leaders are imprisoned (Leopoldo López) or persecuted (María Corina Machado). However, at least for the moment, they have agreed to remain united to face an electoral process that could put an end to the pro-Chavez majority, something that has not happened since 1999. The Venezuelan opposition has reached

a basic agreement to continue with its current structure and stay united for the 2015 legislative elections. Representatives of the 25 parties and forces that form the Mesa de Unidad Democrática agreed on maintaining the current mechanism, with 2014 as a year with strong internal conflicts, including the change in direction of the coalition. This agreement contains seven points in relation to unity based on consensus, the end of internal projects, a pact of non-aggression and considering pro-Chavez parties as the main opponent they will have to defeat in the elections. The opposition is well aware that only united it will be able to get to power, particularly, considering how close they were from obtaining a victory in 2010 with 47% of the casted votes, compared to the 48.5% of the votes that PSUV obtained. And just thanks to an electoral law that over-represents majorities pro-Chavez groups could obtain, with 48.5% of the votes, 59% of the seats.



#### 4. LOCAL ELECTIONS

Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador and Uruguay will hold local elections (provincial or municipal) with important cities such as Bogota, Montevideo or La Paz at stake.

#### Elections in Bolivia

Local elections in Bolivia will be a test to prove whether MAS dominance throughout the nation translates into local power. MAS obtained positive results in all provinces of the country, except Beni, during the last presidential

**“President Morales has developed important alliances for this political event in order to administrate all 9 provinces of the country”**

elections of October 12, 2014. It even conquered a traditionally complicated province as Santa Cruz.

Now, President Evo Morales seeks to repeat the national victory at a local level. *“We have five years to work. I have a lot of hope and my dream would be obtaining victories in all provinces. We are always optimistic, we want to win everywhere”*, declared Morales after being reelected for the 2015-2020 term.

The government is facing a highly fragmented opposition (over 150 political forces between national parties and local movements) and divided into a few parties with real national scope and many with local aspirations. These elections will appoint governors, provincial assembly members, mayors, local officials, governors and magistrates in the province of Beni, development officials in the province of Tarija and regional officials in the Chaco region. Moreover, if a second round were needed in order to appoint governors, it would take place on May 3, 2015.

President Morales has developed important alliances for this political event in order to administrate all 9 provinces of the country (in 2010, he emerged victorious in 5 of them and since 2011, he is governing in 6 provinces). He has targeted Beni, Tarija, Pando and Santa Cruz, provinces that used to form the “Half Moon” and were the true opposition to the Government’s dominance. In La Paz, Oruro, Potosí, Chuquisaca and Cochamba, Morales’ MAS is unbeatable. “Masism” controls

those provinces and even has the power in Pando in alliance with Luis Flores y Tarija, after the suspension of the previous opposition governor, Mario Cossío, prosecuted for corruption.

The opposition, particularly the alliance formed by Unidad Nacional and Movimiento Demócrata social (both part of Unidad Democrática, UD) and the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC) will face important elections where even their political future is at stake. However, UD, the second most voted force in the Presidential Elections of October 2014, as it united Unidad Nacional and Demócratas, exists no more. Its main leader, businessman Samuel Doria Medina, has confirmed that the agreement signed with Movimiento Demócrata Social (Demócratas) is not valid for the sub-national elections of 2015 and that there will only be coordinated actions between both groups for this political event; they will run individually. As pointed out by the Bolivian newspaper La Razón, *“With two thirds of ALP (Assembly) controlled by Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS), the opposition with parliamentary seats has no chance of becoming a threat in the national scene, and should therefore try to gain power in municipal and provincial elections to continue growing and become an important force for the 2019 elections”*. Doria Medina’s force has diversified its agreements with other parties in five provinces, yet no formal general alliance will be made with former governor of Santa Cruz, Rubén Costas, but mere specific agreements.

**“There is a consensus among the academic world in regarding these elections as more important for the opposition than for the government”**

There is a consensus among the academic world in regarding these elections as more important for the opposition than for the government. Political scientist Marcelo Silva considers that *“sub-national elections will define the opposition’s survival chances, not even its possibility of becoming a force to be reckoned with in the political arena”*. And sociologist María Teresa Zegada thinks that *“in the end, what is at stake is their options of continuing being a national force, its survival... its chances of having a voice”*.

At the municipal level, MAS is present in most of the municipalities in the country, 228 out of 337. But, in 2010, Masism lost important cities such as La Paz, Santa Cruz and Trinidad and only won in three provincial capitals: Cochabamba, Cobija and El Alto.

### Elections in Uruguay

In Uruguay the focus will be put on whether Frente Amplio can replicate the good results obtained in the inland provinces during the last presidential elections as well as seeing who becomes the new Mayor of Montevideo, the great Frente Amplio stronghold. Left-wing parties are the favorites to win in the capital, but the two sectors that divide the aforementioned group are maintaining strong internal disputes. Disputes that can have consequences at a national level, since the next President, Tabaré Vázquez, is closer to the moderate-left wing parties than to the left-wing parties, led by José Mujica.

Thus, two large coalitions within Frente Amplio are battling to place their candidate in the Municipality of Montevideo. The Frente Líber Seregni - center-left (Asamblea Uruguay, Nuevo Espacio and Alianza Progresista), headed by Vice President Danilo Astori, supporting the candidacy of socialist Daniel Martínez. The less moderate left-wing parties support Senator Lucía Topolansky (wife of Mujica), and she has the support of the “Group of the eight” (MPP, Communist Party and the 711 list of elected Vice President, Raúl Sendic, among others). Such is the division within the government that the governing body of Frente Amplio decided to allow the existence of several candidacies per province for the municipal elections of May.

For the opposition, particularly for the leader of the Partido Nacional (Partido Blanco), Luís Lacalle Pou, the provincial elections of May 2015 are an opportunity to consolidate his leadership for the upcoming presidential elections of October 2019. For these elections and to try maximize his options to beat Frente Amplio in Montevideo, the Partido de la Concertación was born, an instrumental force –a temporary alliance– through which Blancos and Colorados have joined forces. This coalition seeks to gain the gradual loss of votes affecting Frente Amplio since the municipal elections of 2000: during that year the left-wing obtained 56.36% of the votes, which rose to 58.47% in 2005 and dropped to 45.9% in 2010.

“Similarly, Colombia will be centered on seeing who conquers the capital”

### Local Elections in El Salvador and Colombia

In addition to Bolivia and Uruguay, there will be local elections in Paraguay, Colombia and El Salvador (the latter having Legislative Elections at the same time).

As regards El Salvador, the virtual draw between FMLN and ARENA in the legislative elections cannot be transposed to the battle to win in the municipality of San Salvador, where all the interest is centered. Nayib Bukele, FMLN, has a clear advantage over Edwin Zamora, ARENA. The poll carried out by CID Gallup shows that Bukele has an advantage of round 18 points over Zamora. 43% of the population will vote for Bukele, current mayor of Nuevo Cuscatlán and now candidate for Mayor of San Salvador, followed by Zamora with 25% of the vote intention.

Similarly, Colombia will be centered on seeing who conquers the capital. The left-wing parties have been in power in Bogota since 2004, thus becoming their electoral stronghold, although the corruption scandals during Samuel Moreno’s management (2007-2011) and the governance problems that Gustavo Petro had to face (2012-2015) have worn out the party. Yet, they have an important asset: Clara López. She was Mayor when Moreno lost his position for corruption, she leads the vote intention polls (25%) and has in her favor the good results obtained in the 2014 Presidential Elections, when she almost received two million votes (15%).

The aforementioned internal problems that the Colombian left-wing parties are having are the ones that Uribe will try to put to good use. After being the most voted party in the first round of the 2014 presidential elections and obtaining 45% of the votes in the second round, Uribe will try to occupy positions of power. Therefore, he aspires to win in Bogota with Mayor Candidate Francisco “Pacho” Santos, Former Vice President with Uribe and cousin of the current President. The government, anti-Uribe, supports Rafael Pardo of the Liberal party, former Labor Minister during the first Santos Government.

As noted by the Colombian magazine *Semana* “*Bogota Mayor’s Post has traditionally been the most important prize of the local elections. During the last 12 years, that treasure was in the hand of the left-wing parties -twice for Polo Democrático and once for Movimiento Progresista-. In 2015, this battle will not only define the strength of the Colombian left-wing groups, but also to see if the capital decides to choose a new governance model. Although Clara López has a clear advantage over the remaining candidates according to current polls, it is yet to be seen whether the population of Bogota, after two horrendous left-wing governments, are willing to support a person with the same ideology.*”

Another interesting electoral battle will take place in Antioquia. This province is one of the main political objectives of all political

**“Many analysts consider local elections to be a kind of “third round” after the two rounds that the 2014 Presidential Elections entailed”**

forces. Winning in Antioquia is considered as a springboard for the Presidential Elections of 2018. Both pro-Uribe and anti-Uribe political parties will battle in Antioquia (Unidad Nacional of President Juan Manuel Santos) and current Governor Sergio Fajardo. If Fajardo were to win, he would become a potential presidential candidate to be considered for 2018.

Many analysts consider local elections to be a kind of “third round” after the two rounds that the 2014 Presidential Elections entailed. *Pro-Uribe movements will try to confirm hegemony by winning a good percentage of mayors and governors. The final result for the opposition will depend on the number of competitive candidates that Uribe’s party manages to recruit and its capacity to “nationalize” the local elections. All three parties of the Unidad Nacional coalition – Liberal, La U and Cambio Radical– decided to run with separate aspirations in traditionally pro-Uribe regions in order to counter the opposition emergence. After the Congress and the Presidency, the regional elections in October constitute a “third round” where Santos’ forces will battle Uribe’s horde. For the first time, none of the two leaders will be on the ballot”* states magazine Semana.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Only apparently will 2015 be a quieter year from an electoral point of view than 2014. It is true that there are only two

presidential elections (compared to 7 last year), but the presidential elections that will take place are very important and there is much at stake in the local and legislative elections.

Argentina can mark the actual start of the political shift in the region if the opposition emerges victorious: the anti-Kirchner parties represented by Sergio Massa or Mauricio Macri. Even a pro-Kirchner victory (particularly if it is Daniel Scioli, current candidate of the government) would entail great changes, as neither by nature, nor by ideology, can Scioli –much more moderate– be compared with Cristina Kirchner. So far, the governments have been obtaining victories (in 2014 5 governments remained in power out of 7 elections). But in 2015 that trend might change given the new economic context. As a consequence of the economic slowdown and growth drop, votes might favor change and punish governments that do not know, or cannot manage the positive context that Latin America experienced until 2013.

Furthermore, much is at stake in the non-presidential elections: the majority Nicolas Maduro might lose in the Venezuelan Legislative Elections, after 15 years of pro-Chavez dominance, the future of the reformist agenda of Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico, political changes in important cities such as Bogota, San Salvador or Montevideo or the hegemonic dominance of MAS in Bolivia, also at a local level.

**“The expectations of the population in relation to this new management are significant, even when there is much uncertainty and disbelief among people that no longer trust authorities”**

It will also be a pre-electoral year for two countries: Peru and Dominican Republic. Everything seems to indicate that Leonel Fernández will return to the Presidency of the Caribbean country after being Head of State from 1996 to 2000, 2004-2012 and achieving that his party remained in power from 2012 to 2016 with Danilo Medina as president.

Things are not so clear in Peru. Keiko Fujimori is still ahead in the polls but with an electoral ceiling she has not been capable of surpassing (30%). She is followed by Alan García, who aspires to become President for the third time in his career (1985-1990/2006-2011) and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, the man who seeks to unite the center-right electorate. And above all is the figure of current Minister of Interior for Ollanta Humala, Daniel Urresti, whose popularity and media savvy have made him a person to be taken into account, especially if he is capable of maintaining his current popularity.

However, the Peruvian electorate is frustrated with its political representation and lack of leadership within the political parties. Thus, the electorate is expecting an outsider, someone who changes the political scene with a new, different and energetic approach to fight insecurity and promote equity and opportunities for global economic growth; efficient public services and with general access and an institutional strengthening policy in the justice and tax system to fight corruption.

For now, the recent regional and municipal elections –25 regions and over 2,000 municipalities and districts– of October 2014 have entailed new leaderships to carry out important regional challenges to enhance infrastructure, health services, education, connectivity, sanitation and local public safety. The expectations of the population in relation to this new management are significant, even when there is much uncertainty and disbelief among people that no longer trust authorities.

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