

[Back to previous page](#)



document 1 of 1

LATIN AMERICA: Weak institutions plague Andean region

OxResearch Daily Brief Service. (Sep 04, 2012).



Find a copy



http://sfxhosted.exlibrisgroup.com/nps?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:book&genre=unknown&sid=ProQ:OxResearch&atitle=&title=LATIN+AMERICA%3A+Weak+institutions+plague+Andean+region&issn=&date=2012-09-04&volume=&issue=&page=1&au=&isbn=&jtitle=&btittle=LATIN+AMERICA%3A+Weak+institutions+plague+Andean+region&rft_id=info:eric/&rft_id=info:doi/

Abstract

Weak institutions in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru.

The central Andean region -- Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador -- has long been a key area in Latin America where democratic institutions have been the weakest. Comparative opinion polls point to the extent to which institutions are held in low esteem by large proportions of the population. Strong economic growth in recent years has not changed these views.

Full Text

SUBJECT:Weak institutions in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru.

SIGNIFICANCE:The central Andean region -- Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador -- has long been a key area in Latin America where democratic institutions have been the weakest. Comparative opinion polls point to the extent to which institutions are held in low esteem by large proportions of the population. Strong economic growth in recent years has not changed these views.

ANALYSIS: Impacts.

It building faith in democratic institutions will remain a steep challenge.

Governments tend to use autocratic measures to overrule social and political opposition.

Party systems are largely absent, weakening a key link between state and society.

Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru have all encountered bouts of instability in recent years that have raised serious questions about the strength of their democratic institutions:

Bolivia. Prior to President Evo Morales taking office in 2006, Bolivia experienced several years of political turbulence, with four administrations succeeding one another in swift succession after 2001, and one president, Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, forced to resign in the face of major anti-government riots.

Ecuador. Likewise, before Rafael Correa became president in 2007, there had been a series of short-lived governments, with two presidents -- Jamil Mahuad (in 2000) and Lucio Gutierrez (in 2005) -- forced to resign well before their allotted terms were completed.

Peru. There has been greater democratic continuity in Peru, at least since 2000 when Alberto Fujimori was forced to relinquish the presidency having been re-elected in elections of dubious democratic legitimacy earlier that year. In 1992, Fujimori himself overrode the constitution in a 'self-coup'.

Political instability.

In two of these three countries, the current presidents have encountered bouts of opposition which they have construed as attempted coups, though in both cases such claims appear exaggerated:

In Bolivia, a wave of violence in 2008 took place in the east of the country. This led to the expulsion of the US ambassador who, allegedly, had been involved in providing support for a 'coup'.

In Ecuador, there was a police rebellion in 2010, which Correa argued was part of an attempted coup against him by right-wing forces (see ECUADOR: Failed 'coup' strengthens Correa - October 4, 2010).

In Peru, President Ollanta Humala recently labelled opponents of the giant Conga mining project as 'extremists'. The dispute has damaged his approval ratings and forced two cabinet reshuffles.

Executive-legislative relations .

A cause of democratic weakness in all three countries has been the subservience of the legislature to the executive:

In Peru, a proliferation of small, weak parties has undercut the power of Congress in recent years. Opinion polls consistently point to lack of faith in elected representatives; with a survey carried out by Ipsos Apoyo between August 14-17 showing that approval of Congress is at 20%.

In Bolivia, landslide presidential victories in 2005 and 2009 effectively reduced the power of the legislature, and particularly opposition groups within it. The ruling Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) currently has an absolute majority in both chambers. Parliamentary opposition is ineffectual.

In Ecuador, the legislature has traditionally had greater power vis-a-vis the executive, and institutional gridlock has been a cause of political instability. The balance has shifted under Correa to the detriment of the legislature, although presidential impeachment is contemplated in the constitution. Correa enjoys considerable support in the legislature, but not an absolute majority, which has frustrated his attempts to introduce important pieces of legislation.

Political parties .

The absence of competitive party politics is another major cause of democratic weakness:

The absence of a strong party system is most notable in Peru, where Humala recently faced desertions from his left-wing coalition (see PERU: Desertions will not unnerve government - June 19, 2012). The party system collapsed in the late 1980s and has never properly recovered. The political scene is dominated by inchoate, personalist groupings that fail to represent public opinion in any consistent way. They lack roots in society, and are -- in essence -- electoral vehicles.

In Bolivia, where there was a similar crisis of traditional parties, these have been effectively replaced by the MAS, a relatively young party, but one which -- unlike Peru -- has developed strong ties with civil society. However, due to the lack of an effective opposition (see BOLIVIA: Morales re-election remains likely - March 19, 2012), Bolivia lacks functioning party system that can hold the government to account.

In Ecuador, similarly, the old party system underwent a crisis in the 1990s and early 2000s, and Correa was elected on a wave of revulsion against traditional parties and politicians. His party, Alianza Pais, is the strongest force in the country, but it lacks the ties to organised civil society that the MAS has in Bolivia and faces strong opposition from some social movements.

Authoritarian tendencies? .

The absence of strong democratic institutions has given rise to accusations of presidents having authoritarian tendencies:

Correa has probably come in for most criticism, particularly with respect to judicial institutions, the media, and indigenous leaders. He is accused of using his government's reorganisation of the judiciary to reduce branch independence and employing strong-armed tactics to silence the media and weaken indigenous organisations. These claims are somewhat exaggerated, although his policy towards opposition media outlets and indigenous leaders has been aggressive (see ECUADOR: Media regulation fuels protest - August 3, 2011).

Morales stands accused of harassing the opposition and forcing his opponents into exile. The government has been accused of using corruption allegations to seek the suspension of regional authorities who oppose it. The justice system is prone to executive influence.

Humala, in office for just over a year, has yet to be accused of authoritarian behaviour, although his government's unyielding handling of the Conga dispute has been widely criticised. A recent cabinet reshuffle (see PERU: New prime minister will be conciliatory - July 25, 2012) was designed to allay such criticisms.

Re-election .

In Bolivia and Ecuador, incumbents will almost certainly seek re-election under the terms of their countries's new constitutions. Both retain significant electoral support and can expect to win further terms. In Peru, it has been widely rumoured that Humala's wife Nadine Heredia may stand in 2016, but much will depend on how Humala's popularity varies between now and then.

The military .

Armed forces remain powerful actors behind the scenes in all three countries, though they are unlikely to be involved in traditional coup activity. Of the three, only in Peru is the army actively engaged in fighting insurgents -- the remnants of Shining Path, which are entrenched in drug-producing parts of the country. Humala's approval ratings have declined to around 40% since taking office amid social conflicts. However, previous administrations have survived with much less support, and the chances that he faces a fate similar to previous presidents in neighbouring countries are low.

CONCLUSION: In Bolivia and Ecuador, incumbent presidents will likely take advantage of their popularity and the weakness of their opponents to secure re-election. This risks weakening democracy in those countries. The ongoing scandal in Ecuador over the inscription of political parties in advance of the 2013 elections will do little to promote faith in democratic institutions. In Peru, the present government -- in office for one year -- will continue to struggle to assert itself.

Copyright Oxford Analytica Ltd. 2012. No publication or distribution is permitted without the express consent of Oxford Analytica.

Details

Subject	Politics; Social conditions & trends; Elections; Government; Armed forces; Political dissent; Political parties; Regions
Location	Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Latin America, Caribbean area
Classification	9173: Latin America 1210: Politics & political behavior
Identifier / keyword	Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Latin America, Caribbean area, Politics, Social conditions & trends, Elections, Government, Armed forces, Political dissent, Political parties, Regions
Title	LATIN AMERICA: Weak institutions plague Andean region
Publication title	OxResearch Daily Brief Service
Pages	n/a
Publication year	2012
Publication date	Sep 04, 2012
Year	2012
Publisher	Oxford Analytica Ltd
Place of publication	Oxford

Country of publication	United Kingdom
Publication subject	Business And Economics
Source type	Reports
Language of publication	English
Document type	News
ProQuest document ID	1037775184
Document URL	http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1037775184?accountid=12702
Copyright	Copyright Oxford Analytica Ltd. 2012. No publication or distribution is permitted without the express consent of Oxford Analytica.
Last updated	2012-09-19
Database	ProQuest Central

Copyright © 2015 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved. Terms and Conditions