

Latin America: New cycle of popular resistance or new progressive cycle?

Via [ContraHegemonia](#)

Since the end of the second decade of the 21st century, there has been an increase in popular resistance to neoliberal policies in Latin America. The electoral triumph of Manuel López Obrador in Mexico and the defeat of Mauricio Macri in Argentina encouraged some international analysts to predict that these resistances heralded a new progressive cycle. The great popular rebellions in Ecuador and Chile wore down the rulers of those countries, Lenin Moreno and Sebastián Piñera.

As the pandemic spread across the continent, the question arose as to what its political effects would be. The coronavirus hit our continent particularly hard because of the high percentages of infected and dead people, but also because of the collapse of its economies and the fall in popular incomes.

Against the predictions that the epidemic would strengthen the right wing and state control of popular demonstrations through the propagation of fear or open repression, different events took place that deserve to be pointed out. Popular rebellions continued with those in Haiti and the successful National Strike in Colombia, whose resistance actions have lasted for more than a month. In Bolivia the MAS regained the government by electoral means, in Chile the right wing was defeated in the referendum and the election of constituents and in Peru there has just been the surprising triumph of the rural teacher Pedro Castillo in the presidential elections.

In this new scenario, the three countries where the neoliberal project was presented as more stable, and which formed the

basis of the so-called "Pacific Alliance" during the first decade of the 21st century, have been shaken by popular resistance. The Lima Group seems to have been left without a model country, without a military intervention force and without headquarters.

That all these events end up coagulating in the beginning of a progressive cycle is a possibility, but not the only one. In the case of Ecuador, for now, the popular efforts were not even enough to avoid the continuity of the neoliberal governments. The banker Guillermo Lasso replaced the discredited Lenin Moreno in the presidency. What will happen in Chile is unpredictable. The popular protest and the votes of the opposition have cornered for now the right wing and the "light progressivism" expressed in the Concertación. The Chilean people have managed to identify that these two forces are co-responsible for the failures of neoliberalism.

The situation in Brazil deserves our attention because it is the largest economic power and the most populated country in Latin America. What is happening there is not encouraging. The fact that Bolsonaro has been voted in and has remained in government for more than two years without major opposition mobilizations is worrying. It is very likely that Lula will win the elections again in 2022, which would be a favorable fact in the regional political chessboard. However, it is more likely that a new PT mandate will be an even more attenuated and aged version of the moderate progressivism that ruled that country for 13 years.

The prognosis for Brazil seems to be anticipated by what is happening in Argentina where the liberal progressive Alberto Fernandez embodies a moderate version of the policies implemented by the Kirchner couple for a decade. The Frente de Todos government, which was harassed by the right wing from day one, has not been derailed by the epidemic, and has been able to achieve some successes, in particular by its progress in the vaccination campaign. The abrupt fall in popular

incomes produced in the four years of Macrism has not been interrupted by the current government, which can at least blame it on the pandemics and the fall in economic activity. This justification on the adjustment of incomes, the recognition of some advances in terms of rights such as the abortion law, the criminal character assumed by the right-wing policy regarding the epidemic, and the fact that the government controls the main trade union centers and territorial social movements have prevented, for the time being, the generation of large popular protests. It is evident that the government, as well as the right wing opposition, are trying to build a political agenda for debate, avoiding strategic issues such as the control and administration of the Parana waterway (ports, Hidrovia), the productive model, the distribution of wealth, constitutional reform, etc. Once the agenda is agreed upon, the rift between "progressives" and "conservatives" is promoted.

In this new scenario, it is necessary to mention what has happened in recent years in countries that set out to go beyond progressive projects. Countries such as Cuba and Venezuela have paid for their defiance with the coordinated action of the great Western capitalist powers, which subject them to economic sanctions, some of them of surgical precision, to collapse their economies and starve their peoples.

The first merit of these social experiments of transformation on a national scale is that, living through very adverse times, such as the neoliberal wave that swept away all progressive governments in the region, they were able to prevent the institutional political powers from falling into the hands of the right wing. Venezuela lost control of its National Assembly for 5 years, but was able to recover it. In both cases, maintaining survival required concessions in the political and economic fields. However, what in Cuba have been orderly retreats, with clear explanations to the population

about the need to make some sacrifices or to take decisions that in better times they would not assume, in Venezuela has not happened in the same way. Maduro's government has gone backwards in an untidy way, at times, without clear explanations to the population and silencing voices that from within Chavismo have made denunciations or proposed alternatives. The emergency situation is common to both projects, but the responses are being tried out from different frameworks. In Cuba, the governing party is more solid, the leadership is more experienced, and after 50 years of revolution they have managed to build an economic matrix that makes them less vulnerable to the blockade and economic sanctions. In Venezuela they have faced the situation of running out of foreign currency for exports, because the blockade interrupted the supply of necessary inputs and stopped oil sales abroad, appealing to different economic manoeuvres, some of them of a clearly neo-liberal nature. In a country subjected to a permanent threat of invasion, dependence on the military sector increases and information gaps are legalized, which facilitates corruption. The PSUV continues to demonstrate efficiency as an electoral machine and social attention, but has shown itself impotent to exercise a political direction of the process, orienting and controlling those who assume government functions. However, and beyond the aforementioned facts that damage the institutionality, it is necessary to point out that the Venezuelan people, even in those who withdraw from politics, maintain revolutionary reserves. This is the application of why the majority of the population, which has seen its income fall sharply and the provision of basic public services affected, continues to resist and to oppose a return of the right wing.

As symbolic facts that illustrate the differences between the aforementioned processes, today Cuba is facing the epidemic with five vaccination proposals and will be one of the first countries in Latin America to vaccinate its entire population.

Venezuela not only does not produce vaccines but the acquisition of them has been delayed due to the blockade, which does not even yield in the face of the pandemic. The latest news is that Swiss banks have blocked funds destined to pay for vaccines from the Covax fund for that country. Even so, and thanks to the development of preventive medicine in popular neighborhoods and the discipline of the population, Venezuela is one of the least affected countries in the continent in terms of the number of infected and dead people.

Trying to synthesize what is happening in Our America, we can conclude that what is certain is that there is an increase in popular struggles and that there is a retreat of governments and neoliberal policies. Who will occupy this vacuum will be defined by the peoples. In some cases, known progressive proposals will be recycled with more conservative versions, in others possibilities of overcoming the limits of progressivism will open up. The most disruptive processes, badly hit by the neoliberal offensive of the last decade, will have in the new context, more oxygen to get back on track and less justifications if they want to abandon the original course. New surprises may appear, such as Pedro Castillo in Peru, who for some, will embody the Mariateguist ideal and for others, will lead to a new frustration like that of Ollanta Humala's government.

It is difficult to make predictions, but better times will surely come in Our America. Finally, it should be noted what sailors know well. Favorable winds are just that, better weather conditions to move forward. Building a sail to take advantage of them is the responsibility of each crew.

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