

HMUN 2020

Haarlem Model United Nations

Student Officer:

Victor-James Verhelst

Issue:

Addressing the deteriorating political stability of South America and its democracies

Forum:

UNASUR





HMUN 2020

Issue: Addressing the deteriorating political stability of South America and its democracies

Forum: Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (UNASUR)

Name: Victor-James Verhelst

Position: Deputy-President

Introduction

South American democracies have longly suffered, but especially in 2019. The continent has longly carried the labels of corruption, inequality, and violence. Today the region continues to destabilize as the people of South America have woken up in protests to proclaim their anger and the necessity they feel for a change. Having the basic needs for survival such as food and water has now, in many parts, become a privilege. Latin America and the Caribbean are said to be the third most democracy intensive region of the world just behind North America and Europe. However, the typical South American democracy differs from traditional European or American ones. Defining the state of democracy has become difficult in South America due to constant instability provoked by changes in government but also corruption that decides what's best for the country. The Venezuelan crisis has raised questions on the topic and serves as the best example of failed democracies turning into authoritarian regimes, a growing trend amongst politicians in South America that needs to be stopped. Some 11 of 16 countries that have transitioned to democracy since 1977 and have remained so without interruption says AS/COA. Additionally, the region maintains the highest rates for electoral participation and freedom of religion in the world. Then what explains the recent struggles amongst the people and how will they be solved? Chile, Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru are all going through times of crises. It is about time to solve the deteriorating political stability of the region.

Definition of Key Terms

Full democracy

Full democracies are nations where civil liberties and fundamental political freedoms are not only respected but also reinforced by a political culture conducive to the thriving of democratic principles. (Democracy Index)

Imperfect democracy

Imperfect democracies are characterized by weaknesses in governability, low levels of political participation and an undeveloped political culture.

Hybrid democracy

Hybrid democracies are generally described as having substantial irregularities in elections, oppression of opposition parties and greater weakness in governance.

Authoritarian regime

An authoritarian government is the form of government based on the principle of requiring obedience to the authority of one person or a small group of people. Other people must be obedient to the will of the government and they have little or no influence over the decisions made by the government.

Interim Government

An interim government is also known as a provisional government that is put into place in times of transition and uncertainty. It is a sort of emergency government authority that takes power whilst waiting for a new and stable government to form. These governments often appear in the cases of new nations or following the collapse of the previous governing administration.

General Overview

South America's political history and values go back to the times of Simon Bolivar, the liberator of Venezuela and la Gran Colombia. Simon Bolivar's view and opinion on democracy influenced the countries of the region to be ruled by dictators. He stated: "I fear that democracies, far from rescuing us, will be our ruin." Later, other political leaders such as General Antonio López de Santa Anna who founded Mexico's new constitution said "I fought for liberty with all my heart, but even one hundred years from now, the Mexican people will not be ready for liberty. Despotism is the only viable government here."

These values of authoritarianism have stuck to the continent as they ruled it through dictatorships for many decades. By the late 1970s, 17 out of 20 Latin American

HMUN 2020

nations were ruled by dictators. However the whole continent saw a rapid transition to democracy, and according to many analysts, the rapid transition is the reason for its instability today. A culture is changed over time but when the power that leaders held in the dictatorships suddenly vanished and was given to many, corruption led to manipulated elections. The democratic concept was not clearly understood as it was new to the people and this left the leaders with the same power they had during the dictatorships. This has resulted in corrupt democracies where elections are manipulated to ensure that the power is maintained between a circle of individuals and families. These corrupt leaders continue to this day to fill in their pockets with dirty financing: something revealed in the Odebrecht scandal. Today the people of Latin America suffer from this political instability, especially in recent years with the ongoing Venezuelan Crisis which has obtained International exposure and concern. More recently, 2019 saw South America's population take the streets to confront their governments for a safer and cheaper life in countries such as Chile, Bolivia or even Colombia. These protests have increased further military violence and oppression, a serious issue in the region. In South America, many say only Uruguay can be considered a full democracy on the democratic spectrum. This spectrum classifies countries into four areas. There is the full democracy, where Uruguay is said to be the unique one with Costa Rica. Nine countries (Chile, Brazil, Panama, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, El Salvador, and Paraguay) are considered to be imperfect democracies. Additionally, Ecuador, Honduras, Guatemala, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela are classified as hybrids as there are substantial irregularities in elections. In terms of Authoritarian regimes, Cuba and Haiti are the only official ones but Venezuela might soon join them if the oppression and indifference of the government persist. South America faces chronic weaknesses in areas such as corruption, rule of law, inequality, and public security, therefore, making its democracies chaotic. It has some of the highest homicide rates in the world and anger within the population to the higher class has caused much more. 2019 has been a year of chaos for the region with Bolivia's president forced to resign after continuous protests and with Chile which suffered from 3 months of the most violent riots ever seen in the country, it had always been considered, the most stable country of South America. However, it was in turn challenged by its people and its democracy was put to tests. Peru also faced political instability as corruption investigations continued to plague its politicians as the fallout from the Odebrecht scandal threatens to overshadow

upcoming elections. Argentina, Colombia, and Venezuela continue to struggle internally as well whilst Bolivia is currently governed by an interim government. There is more than ever an urgent necessity to solve the political, social and economic situations in South America through intensive cooperation of its members and new initiatives on the topic.

Major Parties Involved

China

China has been one of the fastest-growing trade partners in South America in the past decade. It has always been a steady importer of its commodities, but its recent activity in the region has expanded to include infrastructure investment. Ecuador saw China build a massive hydroelectric plant that provides 35 percent of the country's energy. As for Argentina China has also built two nuclear power plants, a 152-mile-long motorway for Colombia, and a container port in northern Brazil. These investments have harnessed its economic power to rival the United States which is still, however, the main trader with the region, but it is now joined by Russia to threaten that position. China has the power to do many things in South America, one of many which are to stabilize the region through agreements, something not done yet by the country. Its influence on the region grows substantially by the day.

Russia

Russia has recently intensified its presence and influence in South America. It works closely alongside three countries: Venezuela, Brazil, and Colombia as it has benefited from their instability and socio-economic downfall to advance its own interests. Focusing on opportunities to gain a foothold in Latin America is a familiar strategy for Russia having done the same with Cuba during the Cold War. It used geographical positions to pressure the United States and many say it focuses on South America today for the same reasons. It has put a specific focus on Venezuela as Putin is one of the greatest supporters of Maduro's regime and has shown this by making Russia the principal arms dealer to Venezuela. The Russian National Oil Company, Rosneft, also made significant investments in several joint ventures with Venezuela's state-run oil company. Russia has become a major party involved in Venezuela's crisis.

The United States

HMUN 2020

The United States has always been an active party in South America, it has been its top trader for many years but has seen Russia and China invest much more than they have in recent years thus creating conflict between them. The US has actively expressed its concerns about political situations in the region, especially with the Venezuelan Crisis when it began sanctioning Maduro's regime and then recognized Guido as the legitimate leader of the Bolivarian State. The United States was actively involved in the coups of Latin America in the 20th century and continues today to be a major party involved mostly due to its economic footprint on the region.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of Event
April 14th, 2013	Nicolás Maduro is elected President of Venezuela, narrowly defeating opposition candidate Henrique Capriles. 1.5% of the vote separates the 2.
2015	Brazilian construction conglomerate Odebrecht is found guilty for corruption and bribery. From 2001 until 2016, Odebrecht paid \$788 million in bribes to government officials in return for contracts worth over \$3 billion.
April 3rd, 2016	The Panama Papers are leaked revealing millions of financial files many of which had to do with illegal matter such as, tax-evading and money laundering. The files are leaked from the fourth-biggest offshore law firm in the world, Mossack Fonseca.
January 23rd, 2019	Juan Guaido self proclaims himself president of Venezuela after years of crisis in the country leading to the economic and social destruction of the country. He is backed by many members of the UN such as the USA.

- November 10th, 2019** Resignation of Evo Morales, President of Bolivia after 19 days of violent protests in the streets of the country.
- October 14th, 2019** Protests in the streets of Santiago de Chile, these would go on for several weeks and later months, turning into violent riots and destroying the city.
- December 10th, 2019** Argentinien Alberto Fernandez is sworn in as Argentina's new president. He inherits the unenviable task of calming the country's spiraling economy.

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

The Venezuelan crisis has been a priority for the United Nations as the situation has evolved into a humanitarian crisis however very little has been achieved due to the aggressive Venezuelan armed forces backing President Maduro and the lack of cooperation from Maduro's regime. He has blocked the entrance to humanitarian aid on several occasions and UN resolution drafts in the UN Security Council offering for new elections in the country or providing humanitarian aid have all been vetoed by Russia and China.

In terms of Internally resolving the issue, like it is very well known, governments have turned to the armed forces to calm down violence and protests in the streets however the aggressiveness of these armed forces has simply encouraged further violence at the cost of many citizens, notably in Chile.

Possible Solutions

Solving a situation of such great dimensions will require years of action but there is still hope for Latin America. Firstly, economic involvement could be a prominent solution as it is known that political and social instability always has its roots in the weak or poor economy of a country. The EU which receives more appreciation from the Latin American population in contrast to the USA, for instance, could be a great contributor to this. Not only will this allow the EU to work in line with their new foreign policy to promote its interests and values abroad, but it could also influence stability considering that it embraces an agenda to encourage "prosperity, democracy,

resilience, and effective global governance" (European Commission). This could also serve as a way to diversify influence in Latin America which nowadays is dominated by Chinese economic influence, this will allow the EU to counter this growing influence. However, this should not lead to the EU steering economic policies in Latin America but more so to it contributing to Latin America's problems by funding for the development of these countries. The funding of new infrastructural projects could benefit both sides, as it could revitalize the economies of the region and decrease unemployment rates as well as help the EU with its agenda. Further leading to a decrease in possible grievances and uprisings like we have recently seen.

In conclusion, abstaining from political and military interventions in the region will be for a start to stabilize Latin American governments but working with them through economic assistance will encourage them to work for a more prosperous future for the people and for the country. The EU could play a great part in establishing stability through investments in infrastructure projects and could be even more effective if these projects encouraged the governments to abstain from violating humanitarian standards. In case of a continuation of violating humanitarian standards, sanctions could be implemented or fewer investments, however, given the situation it is vital that political or military intervention stays out of the initiatives to solving political instability in South America.

Bibliography

Sonneland, Holly K. "Chart: The State of Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean."

AS/COA, 12 Dec. 2019, www.as-coa.org/articles/chart-state-democracy-latin-america-and-caribbean.

Mitchell, Charlotte. "Latin America in 2020: Stories to Watch." *News | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera,

2 Jan. 2020, www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/latin-america-2020-stories-watch-191202204939337.html.



HMUN 2020

Sonneland, Holly K. "Chart: The State of Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean." *AS/COA*, 12 Dec. 2019, www.as-coa.org/articles/chart-state-democracy-latin-america-and-caribbean

AmerQuarterly. "New Study Ranks Democracy in Latin America." *Americas Quarterly*, www.americasquarterly.org/content/new-study-ranks-democracy-latin-america.

"Democracy Index." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 11 Feb. 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_Index.

Romo, Rafael. "Five Keys to Understanding Latin America's Turmoil." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 4 Dec. 2019, edition.cnn.com/2019/12/03/americas/five-keys-latin-america-protests-romo-intl/index.html.

Gurganus, Julia. "Russia: Playing a Geopolitical Game in Latin America." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-america-pub-76228.

Arana, Marie. "Tracing the History of Democracy's Failures in Latin America." *Time*, Time, 27 Aug. 2019, time.com/5662653/democracy-history-latin-america/.

"Solving Crises in Latin America." *Clingendael*, www.clingendael.org/publication/solving-crises-latin-america.