

Coronavirus: which will be the political consequences in the region?

Note from the Editor: Roberto Izurieta is Director of Latin American Projects at George Washington University. He has worked on political campaigns in several Latin American countries and Spain and has been an advisor to Presidents Alejandro Toledo of Peru, Vicente Fox of Mexico, and Alvaro Colom of Guatemala. Izurieta is also a political analyst at CNN en Español.

Man is a political animal, as Aristotle said. Politics encompasses all the activities of citizens' public life and its consequences invade private life, security, education and all aspects of life, including health.

For this reason, my last three articles have been on the coronavirus pandemic, as a contribution to make it easier for my readers to understand and cope with this historic world crisis.

Today, the coronavirus is making us feel the consequences of our politicians' decisions on our health and economic survival.

Should politicians also know about pandemics? No, we cannot expect our politicians to know everything there is to know about health, economics, security, etc. But we should expect them to choose their ministers and advisors well; to know how to listen to them and to be able to read their reports and briefings.

Unfortunately, many times we vote for populist candidates (Donald Trump, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Jair Bolsonaro, Boris Johnson) because they tell us what we want to hear, because they have the ability (or perhaps simply the cynicism) to make us believe that the bad things that happen are the fault of others, that as soon as we vote for them everything will be great. And when things go wrong, they can always resort to saying that those are fake news. These populist leaders have in common their initial reaction of skepticism and denial of the pandemic, contradicting their own experts and scientists around the world. Their irresponsible gamble has had no effect, but it contributed to the delay in prevention measures in their countries and that, in a pandemic, we all pay for it.

As I said in my first article in the series, the time will come (and I think soon) to share and spread the responsibilities. I'm not accusing irresponsible populists of causing the pandemic, but I'm convinced that denying its severity for as many weeks as they did (with the support of networks like Fox News), made it more difficult to deal with this pandemic with the necessary basic preparation, and that pays off. States and localities where governors are Republicans are those whose populations have breached quarantine. One possible explanation is that, once people assimilated the message of skepticism about the pandemic, it has been more difficult to convince them.

Much remains to be seen about the consequences of this pandemic in Latin America. One of the terrible characteristics of this challenge has been the lack of global capacity to carry out the necessary and timely tests (South Korea has been a positive example). Some countries in our region have been very active in seeking measures to contain the virus, but not all face this challenge with a similar macroeconomic situation. Many were surprised by this pandemic and its already serious economic consequences. I believe that presidents like Alberto Fernández of Argentina or Iván Duque of Colombia have done an excellent job. For Alberto Fernández it will not have been easy to call for

unity (for now, at the cost of Cristina Kirchner's silence). I hope and expect that the historic efforts of them and their citizens will bear fruit as soon as possible: well deserved.

One of the big unknowns about this virus is that we still do not know for sure how the climate influences its spread. Without a doubt, population density and the movement of its inhabitants will be determining factors in establishing the most affected places.

Personally, I used to think that the economic recovery could be as fast and strong as its fall in these weeks. Today I fear that it will most likely be more gradual, although I am still convinced that we will go faster to recovery than in the financial crisis of 2008.

Estimating both the development of the pandemic and the economic consequences are central to estimating the policy implications. After months in which millions must seek employment and have a lot of economic pressure, it is difficult for me to think that November will be a good scenario for Donald Trump. Of course, Trump will sing victory, he will say that he always responded and acted promptly in the face of this pandemic; but it is very difficult to receive popular support (even after an initial moment of unity and support) when the economic situation of families is very difficult. In general, in these scenarios, people are looking for change.

Will all governments in the region survive these challenges, and will it be proof of the enormous incompetence of some? In politics, especially when there is no transparency, much is hidden, interpreted and even distorted; but if there is one thing that is tragically much more difficult, it is to hide the dead.

Link: <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2020/04/09/opinion-coronavirus-cuales-seran-las-consecuencias-politicas-en-la-region/>