# Social Movements Across Latin America: Latin America Spring

Latin American today is amid 'Primavera Latinoamericana' also known as the Latin America Spring. A series of escalating civil disobedience movements are happening all across Latin America protesting against the inequality, austerity measures, authoritarian rule and corruption scandals which have been taking place in the continent for decades now. The protests have been developing across separately throughout the year, but by October the protests have taken an active form throughout Latin American countries. Latin America has witnessed such unified protests historically during the severe austerity in the 1980s and again during the political and economic crises in Latin America from 1998 to 2002. A strong cause of the protest and the unifying element of these protests is the period of economic downturn and instability following a boom in the early years of the 21st century. The region comprises of countries with varying wealth and political leanings, the shared regional history gives these protests a fuelling background. South American Countries with a population of more than 425 million people are among the world's largest exporters and producers of Coffee in Colombia, Oil-rich reserves in Venezuela, Wine from Argentina and Chile, Natural gas in Bolivia, and Copper from Chile and Peru.

South American region is still considered to be one of the most unequal regions in the world. A huge gap exists between the wealthy and the poor in this region. The protests taking place today across this region are an indication that the people are no longer willing to tolerate the inequality and the skyrocketing prices of basic goods and services which are essential for survival.

## Chile: How the metro fare hike paved the way for a new constitution

The unrest in the country began by a student-led protest against a 30 pesos metro fare hike in Santiago in October 2019. The protests have since then broadened into a nationwide uprising against inequality. Higher cost of living, income inequality, privatization of healthcare, miserable pension schemes are the main causes behind these protests. Initially, a state of emergency was declared by President Sebastian Pinera to curb the unrest in the country. Although the country is no longer under a state of emergency protestors are furious over how the situation was handled by the use of tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets and pellets which have prompted the alleged abuse of rights of the people. According to Jose Miguel Ahumada, a political economist and associate professor at the University of Chile it is 'one of the most unequal countries in Latin America'.

Protestors have demanded a change in the pension system, higher wages, affordable healthcare, and education. Chileans have also demanded a new constitution. According to a poll, 80 percent of Chileans support replacing the current dictatorship-era constitution. A referendum has been promised in 2020 to ask the Chileans whether they want a new constitution. The constitution will be either a mixed citizen legislator or all- citizen convention. The process will require a two-thirds majority and ratification in a national referendum. A new

constitution is one of the main reasons why the protestors were out on the street along with immediate improvements in other aspects of life. It will be riveting to see the 2020 referendum and the nature of the new constitution that will be drafted by the government.

One of the cries in the rallies being 'It's not 30 pesos but 30 years' referring to the rough economic development in the country since the end of the military dictatorship 30 years ago. Most of the major financial gains in the country have gone to the richest people in the country. College tuition fees are highest in Chile, and as much as 75 percent of the average Chilean income goes to debt.

## Bolivia: Protests lead to the downfall of one of the longest- serving leaders in Latin America

Evo Morales was one of the longest-serving leaders in the continent until his resignation in November 2019, he is now seeking asylum in Mexico. Since October 2019, protests and marches have been occurring in the country with claims to electoral fraud in the general elections. The situation further escalated when Jeanine Anez declared herself as the acting president of the country.

Tensions first started on the night of the election result when the counting was paused inexplicably for 24 hours. In the final, result Mr. Morales got a slight 10 percent lead which he needed to win outright in the first round of the race.

Mr. Mesa the candidate who finished second said that his party was not consulted. In 2016, referendum the Bolivian people had rejected a measure that would have allowed Morales to run for a fourth term. Morales has been in power for 14 years. The protests won't stop. Latin Americans are not going to keep their dissatisfaction with themselves anymore. Bolivians are prepared to fight against five more years of Morales presidency.

Fresh elections have been promised in Bolivia by the self-appointed interim President, Jeanine Anez. Yet, the future of Bolivia remains dark. The socialist lawmakers which are a majority in Congress have rejected her appointment further deepening the country's crisis. The elections do offer fresh hope for the people in Bolivia only if they will be conducted in a free and fair manner. Carlos Mesa, the main opposition candidate has also announced his running while Morales party Movement for Socialism (Mas) has announced that it will put forward young candidates. It will be interesting to see if the people of Bolivia put their faith again in the Mas or will this be the beginning of a new history in the country.

## Ecuador: Mass movements lead to reversal in fuel subsidies

The Ecuadorian protests were a series of protests and riots against the austerity measures including the cancellation of fuel subsidies, adopted by President Ecuador Lenin Moreno and his administration.

Ecuadorian government took a loan of $4.2 billion from the IMF on the condition to cut off the budget deficits. The government cut down on fuel subsidies which were costing $1.3billion a year which in turn sparked protests across the country.

Protests came to an end after President Moreno signed a deal with the indigenous leaders. Moreno has promised to withdraw the International Monetary Fund backed austerity package named Decree 883 which included a sharp rise in the fuel prices. The indigenous leaders, in turn, promised to call off the protests. Ecuador has a long history of political and instability. Since 1997, the movements largely led by the indigenous groups have forced three presidents to leave the office. The last administration which was forced to resign was the Gutierrez government after it tried to implement harsh austerity measures with its agreement with IMF in 2003. People will now voice out their dissatisfaction with the government, and demand what is just and right without any fear.

## Haiti: People continue to demand the installation of a transitional government

Protests are still going on in Haiti since July 2018. The causes of the protest remain to be the increasing taxes on gasoline, diesel, and kerosene. It is not just the economic crisis that has sparked outrage among the people it is also the corruption charges at the highest level which have gone unnoticed. Although the country has received millions of dollars in aid since the earthquake in 2010 the public infrastructure and services have remained to be the same.

Haitian people from all walks of life are protesting demanding their right to know about the use of wealth by the government. Protestors are calling for the resignation of President Jovenel Moise. Haitians are furious over the shortage of fuel since the collapse of the PetroCaribe program under which Venezuela offered aid and cheap financing to several Caribbean nations to buy fuel products. According to reports, 6 million people live below the poverty line in the country out of which 2.5 million live below the extreme poverty line, relying on an income of $1.25 per day. The PetroCaribe program included funds for infrastructure development which never took place.

Latin America is a continent rich in diversity, we see people from all walks of life residing in there. From the poorest to the richest. What makes these protests unique is that right from the businessman to university professors to the common man everyone today is on the streets united by the protest culture asking fearlessly for what is rightfully theirs. The fact that the protests in Chile, Bolivia, and Ecuador are getting results is fuelling the protests more.

This is a strong indicator of the fact that despite our differences we all have the same basic needs. Unity always plays a big factor in any social movements, people of Latin America have shown unity and that is where they win.