



By: TA | AP Brief

What are the reasons for Latin America's hard shift to the right?



Right-wing populists have been making headway in some of Latin America's biggest economies, promising a strong-arm approach to combatting crime and **illegal immigration** as an answer to the **left-wing populism** that took hold in the region just a few years ago.

Although homicide rates have broadly declined across Latin America compared to a decade ago, spikes in some countries and a regionwide rise in other crimes have made conditions ripe for conservative populists to blame migrants and pitch heavy-handed strategies popularized by El Salvador's president, Nayib Bukele.

Disaffected voters are embracing such tactics despite concerns that they could encourage human rights abuses or threaten democracy.

Latin America and the Caribbean last year saw their combined average homicide rate drop by more than 5% compared to 2024, with the median rate reaching about 17.6 per 100,000 people, according to InSight Crime, a think tank focused on organized crime in the Americas.

But there are a few key exceptions. Drug-fueled killings have increased in Peru and Colombia, the world's top cocaine producers, as well as in neighboring Ecuador, whose major ports traffickers see as a gateway to European markets.

Last year, authorities tallied 2,400 homicides in Peru and 14,780 in Colombia, which were the most in each country since at least 2020. Killings rose a remarkable 31% in Ecuador year-on-year, to 9,216.

A limit to the public's patience

Although populist politics across the political spectrum have done well, only the right has offered short-term security solutions that will make voters feel safe withing months even if it comes at the expense of "democracy and human rights," said Adam Isacson, director for defense oversight at the Washington Office on Latin America organization.

Proposals offered by the left, such as community violence prevention programs, better police training, and judicial and prison reforms, take more time to bear fruit, he said.

It's absolutely what you're supposed to be doing, but people's patience runs out - Adam Isacson

"It's absolutely what you're supposed to be doing, but people's patience runs out," Isacson said of long-term proposals. "So, there come the Bukeles of the world saying, 'You want to feel better? We got this.'"

In Colombia, where swaths of the countryside have fallen into **renewed conflict**, pro-Trump businessman **Abelardo de la Espriella** has topped polls ahead of Sunday's runoff election as he takes his cues from Bukele.

In Peru, where extortion has increased fivefold in the past five years, Keiko Fujimori rocketed to a **June 7 presidential runoff** on a law-and-order platform, vowing to deploy the military in prisons and along borders as she leans on the authoritarian legacy of her disgraced late father, former President Alberto Fujimori.