

## Conclusions

- Elections still give rise to political unrest. If the Electoral authorities are not trusted by the people, then such a situation can easily get out of control, as happened in Honduras. Electoral violence takes place both before and after elections, so the focus of international observers should not only be on election itself.
- The use of State Institutions (such as EMB, judiciary branch etc.) by the governing party in elections, is a common practise in Latin America. For example, when EMBs are formed by political parties, as is the case in Colombia, they are likely to serve the interests of the incumbent parties.
- The Electoral Observation Missions of the EU therefore play a crucial role on the day of the elections, because they are considered a trusted organization. The EU implements many programmes around electoral periods, such as follow-up on democratization, cooperation and dialogue.
- When talking about elections, we are really addressing the quality of democracy. Though popular support for democracy in Latin America is high, support for government, parliaments and political parties are among the lowest in the world. This situation offers populist or other less democratic people or organizations the possibility to fill that void. That is a setback for the development of the quality of democracy in the region.
- There is an improvement over the past 20 years of inclusion of underrepresented groups in politics. However, much more needs to be done in order to have true representative democracies.
- The Odebrecht and other corruption scandals show how corruption undermines democracy. In order to lower levels of corruption, and promote an equal playing field for all political parties, the political and electoral system needs to become better equipped to deal with these situations. Furthermore, electoral and judicial institutions need to have the capacity and budget to enforce and implement this legislation. Approval ratings of governments in Latin America are alarmingly low in general. This leads to the rise of populists.
- Judicial procedures are used to influence politics. The most notorious case at this moment is Brazil. The functioning of justice should be the same for all and should not be used for proselytist policies.
- The Peace Agreement in Colombia is an important achievement, and has given hope to many people in the country that long-lasting peace is possible. However, the upcoming elections could mean a setback for the implementation of the Peace Agreement, and for the peace negotiations with the ELN.
- The situation in Venezuela gives rise to political unrest and uncertainty in the country itself. Furthermore, the migrant and refugee flows to neighbouring countries affect the security situation especially in the border areas.



## Recommendations

- Keep a close eye on the development of democracies in Latin America, and continue to analyse the situation. Several countries are facing democratic regression. Furthermore, the discontent in the several Latin America countries can lead to populist or (semi) authoritarian regimes.
- EU: Elections are an important indicator of democracy. The EU should continue to support electoral observation missions in the region. The EU (EEAS, Commission, Member States) should also ensure follow up of the EU EOM recommendations between elections, as the reports of the EOMs are guiding documents to further the quality of democracy.
- NGOs and thinktanks: Play a role in its dissemination and follow up of the EOM reports. Make the EOM reports part of your lobby and advocacy strategy. Improve cooperation between EU, NGOs and thinktanks on these issues.
- EU/Member States/Donors: be patient and do not get blinded by macro-economic figures. Though most Latin American countries are middle income, one out of three people in the region is still living in poverty (ECLAC). Latin American countries are trade partners, but they are also still in the process of further strengthening their democracy. This process is not linear. Some countries have gone from dictatorship to democracy to authoritarian rule. Therefore, keep up the funding to strengthen democracy, human rights and the rule of law in order to improve the quality of democracy
- Fight voter abstention. Voters don't trust the political system and so they don't vote. But voting is crucial to changing the system.
- Anti-corruption efforts in countries are often selective; we should make sure that these regulations apply to all. Continuing to improve transparency and accountability is crucial.