

Presidents of Bolivia, Argentina Get Highest Approval Ratings in Latin America

August 31, 2006

Presidents Evo Morales of Bolivia and Nestor Kirchner of Argentina are the most popular heads of state in Latin America, according to polls taken in the spring of 2006 and compiled by [Consulta Mitofsky](#).

Eight out of ten of those polled in Bolivia (81%) and Argentina (80%) expressed approval for their presidents, both of whom have generated controversy abroad with their nationalistic policies. Morales nationalized Bolivia's natural gas fields in May, angering their mainly Brazilian and Spanish owners. Kirchner has gained notoriety for refusing to allow foreign-owned utility and financial service companies to increase rates.

Next in popularity were presidents Álvaro Uribe of Colombia and Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, both of whom enjoyed 70 percent approval ratings. But Uribe and Chávez represent opposite ends of the political spectrum in South America. Chávez is known for his fiery anti-United States rhetoric. Uribe is a close-ally of Washington and a major recipient of U.S. anti-narcotics aid.

The Consulta Mitofsky report compiles the results of polls taken in 15 Latin American countries from April through June.

The least popular leader in Latin America, as of Consulta Mitofsky's report, was Ecuador's Alfredo Palacio (21%), who took office in April after Congress ousted President Lucio Gutierrez. But Palacio's presidency, like his predecessor's, has been crippled by strikes and protests. Former presidents Abel Pacheco of Costa Rica, who left office in May, and Alejandro Toledo of Peru, who finished his term in July, also ranked low in popularity, with 23 percent and 32 percent approval ratings, respectively. Both presidents were faulted for failing to do more to combat poverty, though Peru enjoyed robust economic growth of more than six percent during the last year of Toledo's term.

Only these heads of state were less popular than U.S. president George W. Bush, whose [approval rating](#) has ranged between 30 percent and 40 percent over the past three months.

President Vicente Fox of Mexico followed Uribe and Chavez as one of the most popular presidents, with a 62 percent approval rating, according to polls taken in May. If these rates hold, Mexico's president will leave office in December with about the same approval ratings he enjoyed at the start of his term in 2001, when he averaged 63 percent approval. Fox's [average approval](#) dipped to its lowest yearly average of 52 percent in 2002.

The Dominican Republic's Leonel Fernández and Brazil's president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva tied for sixth place among serving presidents with 58 percent approval ratings. Fernández leads a center-right government that took office two years ago during an

economic crisis. Lula, who faces re-election in October, is a founder of the center-left Workers' Party. The popularity of Lula, who is running for re-election in October, slipped earlier this year when corruption scandals buffeted his government. Nonetheless, polls taken in August by [Datafolha](#) and [Sensus](#) indicate that he may have enough of a lead over his closest rivals to win in the first round of voting.