

Next Regime Change: US Election Meddling Targets Brazil | Mark Weisbrot

The US Regime-Change Industrial Complex is currently working in over-drive when it comes to consolidating Washington's power over the Western Hemisphere: The next country on the chopping block is Brazil and its only the latest in many regime change operations the USA has been conducting over the past 70 years in Latin America. Economist Mark Weisbrot joins me to discuss Brazil's election and Washington's influence across Latin America. He examines household debt, central bank policy, Argentina's dependence on international lending, and the political power of dollar sanctions. Their conversation explores Venezuela, Bolivia, Haiti and Ecuador, contrasting economic sovereignty with external intervention. Weisbrot also distinguishes humanitarian aid from political interference, challenges prevailing accounts of Bolivia's election crisis, and considers whether the region's current rightward shift can deliver lasting improvements in ordinary people's lives. Mark's Links: Center for Economic and Policy Research: <https://cepr.net> Mark Weisbrot's research and articles: <https://cepr.net/people/mark-weisbrot/> Article on Brazil's election: <https://cepr.net/publications/los-angeles-times-trump-and-rubio-fight-to-sway-brazils-election-and-control-the-hemisphere/> Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support Neutrality Studies: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Neutrality Studies shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Time Stamps 00:00 Introducing Dr. Mark Weisbrot 03:11 Brazil: Lula, Bolsonaro and household debt 07:58 Trump's pressure on Brazil and the courts 14:41 Argentina, dollar debt and sanctions 27:38 NGOs, USAID and humanitarian aid 33:44 IMF policies and Bolivia's election crisis 47:00 Haiti, Ecuador and economic sovereignty 57:52 Brazil's prospects and Latin America's future

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today, for the first time, with Dr. Mark Weisbrot, a senior economist, co-founder and co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, D.C., and a good friend of Jeffrey Sachs, who was so kind to introduce us to each other. Mark, welcome.

#Mark Weisbrot

Thanks, and thanks for inviting me.

#Pascal

It's great having you because you, as an economist, have been looking very closely also at the things that were happening at the moment in South America and Central America. And, you know, the whole idea for this talk was that Jeffrey said, look, there are very important things happening in

Brazil that are flying under the radar. And you've been researching those. Can you maybe fill us in on what you're seeing there at the moment?

#Mark Weisbrot

Yes. Well, the big thing right now in the present is the election in Brazil, which is just a week from today. Actually, the second round of an election between Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party, who was first elected from 2003 to 2010, and then came back for his third term, and he's the incumbent. And then you have Flávio Bolsonaro, and he's a senator right now in Brazil, but he's mostly gotten where he is as the son of the president that Lula defeated in the 2022 election. And in that election, he did kind of what Trump did. He refused to accept the result, and there were people that actually rioted a lot more than even here. And he was convicted.

His father, Jair Bolsonaro, he was convicted of attempting a military coup because he tried to get the military involved as well. He couldn't get enough of the generals. And he was also convicted of attempting to destroy the rule of law in Brazil. And his son, who's running for president, is very close to him. He calls himself Bolsonaro 2.0. He kind of branded himself as a continuation, mostly, of that prior regime. And Lula, on the other hand, you know, he's got a whole story himself. I mean, he was, you know, in his first term, he left office as one of the most popular presidents in the whole world, with 83% approval. And he only didn't run because he was put in jail for 580 days for an alleged crime that was later annulled by the courts. And that's why he's in this situation facing the Bolsonaro family.

#Pascal

But according to the opinion polls that I've seen, or at least some of the reporting I have seen, actually it seems as if Bolsonaro has the better chance at winning next week, Sunday in a week, that is. What's the reason for that? It seems that Lula da Silva's approval ratings are not as high anymore as they used to be during his first term.

#Mark Weisbrot

Yeah, well, it's been a long haul, and I think... You know, it's true. In his first term, while he was in jail, he was still—the polls showed him with a 20-percentage-point lead if he were allowed to run for president from jail, and they wouldn't let him. So he was very popular. I think, you know, he did pretty well in his third term, too, in terms of reducing poverty by 27% and extreme poverty by 40%, and a large increase in the real wage. And so by all those measures, he did all right. I think the thing that hurt him was actually not his fault. It was—the Central Bank of Brazil has the short-term interest rate at 13.75%.

And the inflation is about 4.2. That's, you know, that's one of the highest real interest rates—policy rates, we call them—in the world. And Brazil has had that for most of the last few decades. We did a

paper on that years ago. And so it's really terrible because the lower-income groups, well, especially, they're averaging about 100% interest on their household debt. So you can see how, even though their real wage has increased, their family household income has increased substantially, and Lula also, you know, has social programs that the Bolsonaros wouldn't have, they can still feel those debt payments, especially in the lower-income groups, are taking away from that.

But that is actually, that's really Flávio Bolsonaro's fault, because he was the one who made, in his term right before Lula, he gave the central bank its complete independence from the executive branch, which a lot of the neoliberal economists especially—and it's almost standard for economists to see that as a good thing—but not all. I mean, a lot of us see that when you take away any accountability of a central bank, you're asking for trouble, because they're not going to look out for the employment or wages of the population. Although Lula did succeed still in bringing unemployment down to record levels from, I think it was, 9-point-something to 5.4%. But still, it hurts them. It's hurting them very badly, I said, the lower-income groups, through these huge interest rates and therefore debt payments.

#Pascal

So the answer to my question before is actually, it's the economy, stupid. So the economy is not running well. You still have too high inflation in Brazil. You have the—in that case, with that kind of rate from the central bank, you would also not have a lot of investment, I suppose, private investment into a lot of infrastructure projects and so on, because it's more profitable to keep money in the banks and have it there.

#Mark Weisbrot

No, the economy has done fairly well in terms of growth, in terms of real wage growth. They've done okay. It's really the debt service that is the big complaint, because it's just these huge interest rates and debt payments, and they're paying a fairly high—again, lower-income groups especially are paying a fairly high percentage of their income for debt service.

#Pascal

Hey, just a very quick note: the best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on neutralitystudies.com. Links below. See you there. Now, Donald Trump has, of course, also weighed into this election, and he wants very much Bolsonaro to win and Lula to lose. And, you know, there's a lot of talk in my part of the internet that if that happens, maybe the B of BRICS might actually be leaving the BRICS kind of, you know, framework. What are your assessments there?

#Mark Weisbrot

Well, I don't think it... Oh, yeah, I mean, I can't see them in BRICS. Yeah, I mean, this guy's really right-wing. And, you know, that's something I think... It's a little bit scary, you know, the kind of horrible, mean things these people have said. Both Jair and...

#Mark Weisbrot

And Flávio. And, you know, he told a fellow congresswoman, Jair did, that he wouldn't rape her because she was too ugly. And he praised—they both have praised—the military dictatorship that was prior, you know, that ended in the late '80s. And Jair has said things like, you know, you won't get anywhere. Oh, he said the dictatorship, the mistake they made was they didn't kill enough people. And there's a whole, you know, pile of these kinds of comments. I think that's kind of important. I'm not doing it just, you know, to wage war against them or something. I think because you look at the, you know, they're a lot like Trump and his team in some of the things. I mean, Trump has made these—you've seen the statements from him about annihilating the population of Iran.

He said that twice already and threatened that. And, you know, I think—and then you have Hegseth, who—and this is relevant to Latin America because he was just in Ecuador a few weeks ago—and he said to the president of Ecuador, "I'm really looking forward to coming there and helping you kill a lot of bad people." And helping in the killing, I should say, he said, of a lot of bad people. And he can barely talk about—you know, he calls himself the Secretary of War very deliberately—and he's always talking about lethal and lethality. And then, of course, they've blown up all those boats on the coast of South America. And by the way, Flávio supports that too.

And he supports the war in Iran. And so that, you know, if you want to get into it, that's really why the election has been kind of turned into a kind of regime change operation, with all the things that Trump has done. You know, he weighed in to try and stop the trial of Jair Bolsonaro. Flávio lobbied him to put more restrictions on Brazil, and he did it. And so you have, you know, he had tariffs starting at 25, and then during the campaign season here, he's weighed in a few times with things that were pretty obviously deliberately designed to intervene in the justice system and also to harm the economy with the tariffs. And people actually reacted badly to that part.

#Pascal

Right. What is your assessment of the justice system in Brazil? Because one thing we see time and time again, actually even in the United States, is that when some political means fail, then what you retreat to is lawfare. And you do try to get the main opponents, strip them of their rights, put them in prison, and so on. I mean, it's what happened to Lula, right? And then it's what's happening to Bolsonaro. It's like, you know, the top heads of these parties and these movements then get indicted and whatnot. And we see that in other places.

We are seeing it in Romania, how lawfare is used in order to get rid of the most popular opposition candidate. Actually, it is something that happened to Donald Trump. And I still judge—I'm not a fan of Donald Trump at all—but the kind of lawfare that was used in order to try to convict him of a very, very weird felony of, like, accounting fraud, that still strikes me as something that, you know, is paramount to lawfare. And how independent are these Brazilian courts, in your opinion? Well, uh...

#Mark Weisbrot

I don't think there's really lawfare on both sides here. I mean, I agree with you. There were some cases. That case you mentioned, I think, was weak in the United States. And I do think that the law, you know, the courts have been abused, you know, in numerous cases before Trump even was elected. And so that happens. But this is not a case of it, really, because, first of all, Bolsonaro really did—I don't see it was even a question—they were trying to overthrow the government, you know. And so that's what he was accused of.

And the breakdown of the rule of law, that was very real. And I don't—you know, the evidence was there. And I don't see that that could be called lawfare against him. And in terms of Flavio, I mean, he really did get millions of dollars from this banker, Daniel Vercaro, who is accused of the biggest fraud in the history of Brazil, eight billion dollars that had to be compensated to depositors. And so this is real. And I don't really see it. I don't see any lawfare on the current government's side.

#Pascal

Okay, and now we have this connection also that Donald Trump, of course, and Hegseth and Rubio and so on, they have been talking from day one about making the entire Americas, the Western Hemisphere, basically under U.S. control. They've been working on that for a while. And we can see, for instance, with Argentina, what this is leading to. There, President Milei is an ultra, what should I call it, ultra-right-wing or ultra-liberal neoliberal president figure who's been now, I mean, he had economic proposals, including getting rid of Argentina's currency and replacing it with the U.S. dollar.

I mean, this is how far the economic insanity is going over there. Can you maybe fill us in a little bit? Because we're also already two years, over two years into the Milei—where does Argentina stand now? But it is buddy-buddy. Milei is buddy-buddy. And Argentina votes on every single crucial issue at the UN, it votes the American way, including on Israel, of course, every single time. So there's a very staunch connection by now. And I suppose the idea of Donald Trump is to recreate that in Brazil.

#Mark Weisbrot

Yeah, he's really quite an extremist, Milei. He actually called for abolishing the central bank when he was running for president. And he was really rescued by the United States, which, in one day, the U.

S. arranged \$42 billion of credit from the IMF, the World Bank, and the IDB. The World Bank and IDB was over time; it wasn't going to come right away, but it was still—and then, of course, Treasury provided more, and even support for their currency. And that was really crucial. And so this is, you know, we can come back to Brazil, you know, in a bit, because this is a good example that you're giving of how the United States is intervening to accumulate a set of right-wing governments that will do what they want, not only in their own countries, which they don't care as much about, but support their foreign policy and attack other left governments as well.

And so, yeah, that's Milei. And he wouldn't, you know, I don't know how much you want to go into—you know, I'm an economist, so I tend to look at these things in economic terms. And you can see why that enormous bill was essential to Milei staying in power, because you have a situation where the majority of sovereign debt of Argentina is rated junk by the rating agencies. And people are holding it kind of like people here in the U.S. were holding stocks at the peak of the bubble, or the ones that, you know, knew it was a bubble. And so they're waiting to get out when something goes wrong. And that's why they had to give them that much money to stabilize the exchange rate and the economy and inflation, actually, as well. Because, you know, as the currency crashes, you get higher inflation.

#Pascal

Yeah, we do. And, you know, we see at the moment how the Trump administration—but I think it was not just the Trump administration, it was other U.S. administrations before—how they use this, right? They use the U.S. dollar in order to put pressure on governments. I mean, stark contrast, right? Argentina, which gets free money, \$42 billion in order to prop up the regime. On the other side, Cuba, which is literally, like, physically strangled of all economic goods and necessities of life.

And one more thing, just to pick your brain, I think the most important thing to understand about Argentinian sovereign debt is that most of it is denominated in U.S. dollars, right? It's like, you need these U.S. dollars. The peso doesn't help, so you need to get your hands on U.S. dollars somehow. And that's, to me, like—and I'm very much on the MMT side of things—you know, a basic, an original sin of a country if the majority of its debt is denominated in a foreign currency. Can you maybe speak to that a little bit and how this dynamic now is working out all over Latin America?

#Mark Weisbrot

Oh, yeah. You picked a really huge issue, because the dollar domination of the international financial system, the U.S. domination is what it leads to. And therefore, they can put economic sanctions on any country—or not any country, but most countries in the world. And they, you know, and that's scary. They use that to scare all of Latin America. And of course, they have an example right there of an economy that was destroyed. Well, first there's Cuba too, but the one that was most destroyed by sanctions, probably in world history, was Venezuela. You know, from 2012 to 2020, they lost three quarters of their economy. Most of that was under the sanctions that started in 2015.

#Mark Weisbrot

And that was three times the size of our Great Depression. Okay, there's never been a depression like that without a war, really. And that's what they did. And everybody can see what they did. And so when Trump stands up and threatens Honduras in the November election that if they don't vote for his candidate, Asfura, that they're going to be punished, they took that seriously. And that election was only—that was less than one percentage point, too. And Colombia, too, he threatened as well in April. And that was also a close election. That was less than one percentage point. So you see, that gives them so much power, the sanctions. And it's real economic violence. And that's what I mean, that it's so important that people understand the economics of what does it do?

What do they do to these economies to really destroy them? They cut off their foreign exchange. They cut off their access to credit. And it really—the economy can just completely collapse. And that's what they did to Venezuela. And so, this is the threat that they have all over the world. Now, you mentioned the international financial system and BRICS and everything. And I think this will change. Unfortunately, you know, everything looks kind of grim now. I mean, Trump was able to win seven out of the last seven elections in Latin America. And this is, you know, I mean, Latin America is... It had this huge change in the 21st century, as you know. Most of the governments were left of center.

And it was at least, I don't know, 15 governments had left-of-center governments, and they became independent for the first time. And the economics of that is really important because they changed their economic policies. And you had, you know, from 1960 to 1980, you had the worst economic growth failure in the history of Latin America, barely 5.4% growth over the whole time, worse than 100 years, actually. Not the whole, maybe the whole, but 100 years. And then in 2000, things changed because you started—they started electing all these left governments, you know, starting with Chávez and Lula and the Kirchners in Argentina, and then Bolivia and Uruguay and Paraguay and, you know, Nicaragua and El Salvador. I won't go through them all.

#Pascal

But one thing that is also important is not just that they're leftist governments, but a lot of them are actually kind of the nationalist flavor, or the national flavor of them. They understand themselves. I mean, we need economic policies of liberation, right?

#Mark Weisbrot

That's exactly right. And they really changed the whole continent in that time. And just the statistic that I like to use that shows the magnitude of the changes: the poverty rate for Latin America, it dropped from 46 to 28 percent from 2002 to 2014. And the prior 20 years, it had not even gone down at all. Okay.

#Mark Weisbrot

And so that was a huge change. And, you know, we went through all the countries, and we were fighting, of course, to help them defend themselves because the U.S. intervened in almost all of those countries to undermine and, in several cases, succeeded in overthrowing governments—in Bolivia, Honduras, Haiti three times, twice in the 21st century. And, you know, go ahead.

#Pascal

The United States literally invaded Venezuela, kidnapped its president, and has now a collaborationist Vichy regime-type of situation there, which literally has already signed over all of the oil rights to U.S. corporations. And we can see then, I mean, it's just a beautiful example of how it works. You take out the political roadblock, then you threaten: either you work with me, or I'm going to do the same to you. Then you put in U.S. corporations.

#Mark Weisbrot

I mean, this is 19th-century type of— it is 19th century.

#Pascal

As in U.S. fruit company kind of a type of colonialism. It's quite mind-boggling to me.

#Mark Weisbrot

It is, but some of it is Trump, okay? Rubio was not—I don't think that was his first choice. He wanted the old-style regime change because he more cares about controlling the hemisphere and getting rid of the Cuban government. That's his main goal. Trump, you can see, he does—I mean, look, I have a conservative epistemology. I don't try to say I know what people are thinking, but Trump doesn't—he doesn't give evidence of really having policy goals. Many of these things are just distractions for him. I think part of the reason he decided to have the war with Iran was because the Venezuela thing worked so well for him that he thought the same thing would happen there.

But I think the 19th-century part of it, of just going for the oil—you can look at all those interventions, over a dozen really, in Latin America by the U.S. in the 21st century, and almost none of them had anything to do with corporate or financial interests. They were really about power. And I really can go through, like I said, I could go through all of them with you. And it is different, okay? Rubio is more, you know, he's a neocon, and his way of looking at the world overlaps quite a bit with the so-called security state here—the State Department, the Pentagon, the foreign policy committees of Congress, all of the institutions of the 18 intelligence agencies. You know, they don't like Trump at all.

Okay, because they can't trust him. But that's what Rubio does. Rubio is corrupt. He's a bridge to the so-called normal foreign policy, imperial policy of the United States. And so he's not interested in taking the spoils of war, as Trump, I think, openly said. He wants the power, and that's why Brazil has been so important to him, because this is a country—if he gets Brazil with a loyal ally, they're going to help him constrain the political choices of the whole hemisphere. They'll play a role in that, and that's why he wants it right now.

#Pascal

How important in this development, actually, of influencing and regime-changing countries in Latin America in order to bend them to the economic necessities and will of the United States, how important in that is this NGO sector? I mean, one of the things we've learned, especially about how the United States influences European countries and actually also, I mean, the whole of Eurasia, one very important way is that the CIA arm of infiltration was spun off in the 1980s by Reagan into the National Endowment for Democracy, which then started sponsoring all of these NGOs and giving them money. Most of them are on the neoliberal side of things, of course. And they then get the structural influence over time by, you know, publishing newspapers and policy reports and briefs and getting really into the weeds of the domestic political and economic discourse. For Latin America, how big is this NGO infiltration operation of the United States?

#Mark Weisbrot

Well, I think it's definitely a part of the story. I mean, you can see in 2002, in the coup in Venezuela, there were documents that were obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. And I actually published them on the web, and The Secret did. And one of them showed the State Department funding the groups that organized to overthrow, you know, the military coup of 2002. And, you know, one of the leaders of that was María Corina Machado, who's in the news now a lot as a possible presidential candidate there. And so you did have that. You had Bolivia when they had a secessionist movement of the right wing.

And those groups definitely got some money, but it wasn't proven. And the reason I think it's quite definite is because, well, there was some record, but I think the main thing is that the Bolivian government asked to know where that money was going. And it was USAID at that time. They wouldn't tell them, and so he kicked them out of the country. And Brazil, as far as I know, has had a law for a long time that didn't allow—I'm pretty sure it didn't allow USAID, and I'm not sure what other foreign NGOs that it disallowed. And so you have some of that, but most of the time, yeah, the U.S. NGOs, I wouldn't say most of them are doing bad things.

I can't really say. I mean, I've seen them a lot. I've seen bad ones in Haiti. But I don't know how much of a force—I mean, I think Venezuela was a little bit of a special case because it was the first presidential election of a leftist since, I think, you know, Allende. And that's why Chávez—the stories I've heard, they had to convince him to run, because most of the left at that time thought that it

wasn't even worth it. If you ran for president, the U.S. would just get rid of you if you won. And I think that's what they're trying to establish now.

#Pascal

Yeah, probably. So it's actually not a new playbook at all. It's a very classic one, combining basically 19th-century colonial enterprises with Cold War tactics that have already been used during the Cold War. And don't get me wrong, I personally have a friend who worked in an administrative position in USAID in Paraguay. And I know they have good programs. They have programs that actually help, especially farmers and education programs in the sense of how to work the soil and stuff like that. And all of these are helpful programs. The problem is that they also have influence arms that then are geared toward policy interventionism, right?

#Mark Weisbrot

Yes. Can I respond to that? Because I'm really glad you said that, because I didn't want people to come away with the impression that most of what they do is bad. They really did save millions of lives, and millions of people are going to die if we don't— and that's what they're, you know, their work on diseases and, you know, HIV, for example. And those were really important. And I've seen projections that by 2030, 14 million people will die if those funds that Trump cut off are not replaced. And so it is terrible. And so, you know, I was answering your question about the NGOs and what they do. And even though I have these criticisms of the bad things they did, I think it's really important to restore that funding right now. The cost in human life is just so much more important than the risk that you get from them, you know, supporting the U.S.-chosen governments.

#Pascal

Yes. I mean, it's very important to emphasize that the humanitarian side of a lot of these efforts are real, and they're executed by people who are motivated to actually make a positive impact. The issue is when it then starts to swap over into this kind of political control mechanisms that they also can do. We see this in Ukraine. We see this in other parts of Europe, how this ideological part of the NGO sector then works. But let's get back to just also the economics of Latin America. You have a lot of cases, actually, where you looked at these regime change operations and how economic pressure is being used and what this then leads to in these countries. Can you maybe give us an overview just of how large this U.S. interventionism has been, not just is at the moment, but has been over time.

#Mark Weisbrot

Yes, well, first of all, there's the intervention in Latin America, and I mentioned a few countries. I think Argentina was definitely one of them. And, you know, some of the intervention is the IMF, and, you know, not all they do is, you know, determined to undermine governments. In fact, they had a

right-wing government in 2018. They made a loan, the biggest loan ever, and it really helped get rid of that government because they attached conditions to that, you know, pro-cyclical conditions. They called it expansionary austerity, and of course, it went the other way. The economy went into recession.

Then they doubled down and forced, you know, contractionary monetary policy on them. And so there's an example where they wrecked the economy that they gave the biggest loan ever because they wanted them to survive and defeat the left. So you have to also take into account the gross incompetence of some of these institutions and economists. But other than that, you know, it is true that the U.S. intervened in all these countries. I think... I think I made a list of some of them, and I put links to them in the last piece that I wrote in the L.A. Times last week. But, you know, you had Bolivia. I mean, first of all, I could name most of them by memory.

I mean, there was Bolivia, Honduras, Haiti, Argentina, Ecuador even. Where else? Nicaragua, El Salvador when the FMLN was there, and I'm trying to think of the—not forgetting—oh yeah, Paraguay as well. And so I'm going to leave—I know I probably left somebody off—but I think that, you know, Bolivia is kind of the classic example. That's the most recent. And that was just amazing. That case was so well documented. We wrote hundreds of pages on it. And not because it was complicated. That was the amazing thing, you know. And I won't go on for more than a couple of minutes here. But the basic story is there was an election there. And Emmanuel, are you there?

#Pascal

Bolivia. Can you give us the timeline? I mean, the years?

#Mark Weisbrot

Yeah, okay, so Evo was elected in 2005 and I think took office in 2006. And, you know, that country, by the way, was under IMF agreements for 19 out of the prior 20 years and has not grown at all. Okay. And, you know, I actually went down there when he was elected, and I met with him and some of the government officials. And one of the first things I asked is, you know, are you going to have the IMF agreement again? And, you know, the guy from the central bank said, no. And I said, well, you know that the rules of the game are here right now. If you don't take an IMF loan when they think it's appropriate, you don't get money from the World Bank, which is actually bigger, the Inter-American Development Bank.

Or sometimes even the private sector and the European Institute. And he said, yeah, we talked to the IMF, and they said that wasn't going to happen this time. And that was a really huge change. Okay, that was the positive change of the 21st century, is that the IMF had to back off in some countries. They couldn't force them to take that loan as they could have in the past. And they lost a

lot of power for those first years of the 21st century. But the interventions came in a lot of forms. And Bolivia was really one of the most outrageous because they had this election in October of 2018, I believe it was. And Evo was winning throughout the preliminary count.

This wasn't even the real count; it was a preliminary count. But he didn't cross the 10 percentage point threshold of a lead that he needed to avoid a second round. And then when the last 16 percent of the votes came in, he got to about 10.2 or 10.3. And his adversaries, right-wing adversaries, called it fraud. And they got support from Luis Almagro, the head of the Organization of American States. And so the media went with it too. And it was just a flat-out lie. And this is the amazing part, is that you could show it with just basic arithmetic. And we did that the next day. But the OAS stuck to it, and the right wing stuck to it.

And the military intervened and toppled the government. And so we fought against them the whole time. So did other people and organizations. And it turned out that it was pretty easy to prove. Like I said, you can look on the web, and there's hundreds of pages because there are a few academic economists who tried to show, you know, just manipulate statistics, basically, to try and show that there was something wrong. But what happened was very simple. It was just people who watch elections on CNN—you see it all the time. The last 16% of votes came from areas that were more pro-Evo, and you could see that in the data. It was so clear.

#Pascal

Probably the rural areas, probably the places up— That's right. And got a lot of subsidies. Yeah.

#Mark Weisbrot

And then we had a piece in The Guardian with 150 economists and statisticians signed it and just explained it exactly like that. And, you know, we could have gotten hundreds of thousands of high school math teachers, and maybe eighth grade too, because the data actually showed it. Okay, you could see it by comparing the areas that were reported in the first and the second part of that. There was a pause in between, but, you know, that was nothing. Okay, nobody did anything, and there was no evidence of any fraud of any kind. They never had any. And here was Almagro, and he stuck to it because, you know, if I had to guess, I would say it was because he wanted a second term from Trump as secretary general.

And he got that because, you know, he came from a left government. He was Pepe's minister in Uruguay. And so that's what he did. And the U.S. Congress intervened, you know, the Progressive Caucus, and they called the OAS into meetings, and they said, "Did you ever consider this possibility of what actually happened? Ever consider?" And they couldn't answer. And here's the U.S., 60% of the funding, but they didn't have enough in Congress to be able to force them to back off. And what

finally happened—I won't go through too long of a story because there's a lot to it—but on June 7th—well, yeah, I'll mention one other thing because Almagro kind of deserves this. I think he wrote a piece as the secretary.

It came from the secretariat of the OAS, but it was him. Everybody said so. And that's who is the secretary. That's who leads it. And it was accusing The New York Times of having supported Hitler, Stalin, Putin, and Castro, I think. That's right. It was just a wild piece, okay? And that's how pissed he was, because The New York Times, on June 7th, 2020, published an article saying—and he used some statistics from one of my colleagues now, Francisco Rodriguez—to show that there was nothing wrong with the count, that it was clean. And The New York Times said that it was a false narrative that had been in the media. They didn't say the media, but it was a false narrative that had been widely believed for all this time.

And so then they had to have a new election because everybody else moved. You know, in the U.S., what does happen a lot on Latin America is that much of the rest of the press will follow the Times. It is the most influential publication, I think, in this country on foreign policy. And Latin America is also an area where most of, you know, what Ben Rhodes from the Obama administration called the blob, you know, the foreign policy establishment, most of the blob doesn't care that much about Latin America. And so the media can get away with quite a bit. And I don't—I'm not going to criticize the media, okay, because I don't do that.

#Pascal

I'm a fan of that. You can criticize the media all you want. I mean, I'm not going to have to do your job, but go ahead.

#Mark Weisbrot

I know, but my mother told me when I was a teenager, "Don't criticize people who buy ink by the barrel." And so I just don't, you know. It's just—I mean, I will criticize them sometimes, but not very much. But you can read it and you can see it. And everybody—yeah, your audience, I'm sure, knows that the media reporting on Latin America is not good. And so that's what changed. And that is a really classic example of outrageous. And it shows what they can get away with, you know, because it's just straight math. You know, maybe I'm obsessed with that. It's just, if it's arithmetic, you know, and it's true, like, how can you just say it's false and get away with that? Get away with an actual military coup that is based on that actual allegation that it was. And the story that they told.

Okay, the story was one of them actually intervening in that second 16 percent of the vote and changing the count. So there you go. That is a really big one. And, you know, this is the part I don't like to say because I don't want people to be overly pessimistic. But, you know, Bolivia is a mess today. And, you know, you look at Argentina, it's a mess today. And the U.S. and Germany, you know, the intervention in that country was the biggest one, was in 2012, I think, 11 or 12, when the

New York bank cut off 90 percent of Argentina's creditors, wouldn't allow them to pay their debt to Argentina. And that was a huge blow because they were on their way to, you know, join the Paris Club and whatever. They were doing quite well. They did extremely—you know, Argentina did very well under the Kirchners.

And all these countries did pretty well, as I can go through again, you know, for quite a while into the 21st century. And then, of course, there was the, you know, the world recession of 2009, which was very deep. I mean, that was the worst world recession for 75 years in terms of the loss of per capita GDP. So, but they did very well when they got control of their governments, and it's just like what you said, that they needed to be more nationalistic and believe in sovereignty to change those economic policies that they had adopted during the neoliberal conversion that Washington economists mostly imposed on the region. And I don't want to exaggerate it. It was also something that happened in the profession. There was a change of kind of ideology, really.

#Pascal

And I mean, I don't know how many of the cases that you studied have to do with these two countries, but one of the starkest contrasts to me when it comes to how the U.S. empire works is if you look at the difference between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. They are literally sitting on the same island, right? And one is under 150 years of total strangulation. Haiti being, of course, also the first country in the Americas that actually had a slave revolt, a successful slave revolt, and kicked out their colonial masters, which actually was the French at the time, for which they had to pay dearly. And again, they needed to pay for that. The other one, the Dominican Republic, I mean, is a tourist destination and resort country, which I don't actually know. But my estimation would be is that most of the productive facilities over there are probably American and, you know, Western-owned versus, like, locally owned. But maybe you could speak a little bit to that.

#Mark Weisbrot

No, the story of Haiti—I mean, one of my colleagues, Jake Johnston, wrote a book just this last, I don't know, within the last year. I don't have a good sense of time. And he wrote a book on Haiti and went through a lot of what you're talking about. He's just since the earthquake, but we've been working on Haiti. I actually, I've been working in Haiti since, you know, I did work—I don't do as much now—but since 1991, the coup, the first coup that the United States did, really did, the CIA. And Paul Farmer documented some of that in his books. And they overthrew the first democratically elected president of Haiti. And that wasn't the last time. They did it two more times, in 2000 and 2004, where they put him in a rendition plane, Aristide, and took him to Africa. And, you know, a lot of us fought as much as we could.

And I think the fighting did. You know, actually, the fighting did do something. I have to say that is one, and I want to make sure we get to that before the end, because the Congress of the U.S. really does have power. And you can see it right now with the War Powers Resolution. This really does

make a difference, actually, what they do here, more than other countries too, where the executive has more absolute power than they do here. The Congress can actually do. And I won't tell the whole story of the nineties, but basically, in the first coup, the Congressional Black Caucus forced Clinton to actually send the military into Haiti to put him back. Okay. And, but Clinton, you know, after that, he didn't oppose and really supported the toppling of his government as well, because he didn't do what the United States wanted to do.

And I think that chapter with the Black Caucus was real. Okay, he was really forced to do that. And he imposed certain conditions on Aristide, and Aristide didn't keep that, for one thing. He wanted him to get rid of the army and the section chief system in the countryside, which is kind of like the Ku Klux Klan here in terms of fascism. And he got rid of them both. That was one of the first things he did. And then there was the IMF and the World Bank, and he wanted to go along with them. I could go through that for a long time, but that's the history. But yeah, and Haiti is, you know, Haiti is not doing well today, and it's because of that history. I mean, this is the part—this is why, when I look at Brazil, I think what could happen to Brazil. I think it'll be harder, okay, because they don't really have the kind of—well, they don't have the level of violence that they would need to turn Brazil into what they would want it to be, okay, like they did in Haiti.

And so it wouldn't be so easy to make these changes permanent. I don't think Argentina is going to last either, you know, the right-wing government. Latin America is not really a right-wing place, you know, or if you look at the populations there and what they believe and want, most countries are not. You know, Chile had a dictatorship, and they built, you know, a whole right-wing movement there. And then, you know, Boric got in just recently. But that isn't even that country. You can see they moved to the left as well. And so I think that—I think it won't last, but it's really—the risk is a very serious risk. This is what happens to countries. Ecuador is really—that's another example. And the media barely touches that.

And my colleagues, of course, from Ecuador have written quite a bit on that and done a lot. And you can read what they've written. But Ecuador, you know, they had a left government for 10 years under Correa. It was extremely successful by any social and economic measures. And then, you know, a government that came allied with the United States—well, you know, not at first when they were elected. They were supposedly—that was Lenín Moreno. He was part of the left, and then he switched, and the country went to hell. You know, the lowest homicide rate, one of the very lowest in the hemisphere, was something like five. And now it's, what is it? It's at least four times that. I think it's higher than that right now.

#Pascal

It's the suicide rate that spiked through the roof.

#Mark Weisbrot

It's the highest. It's about the highest in the hemisphere, if it's not the very highest. And so this is an example.

#Pascal

Economic desperation, like people killing themselves because there's no economic future for some groups in society.

#Mark Weisbrot

Well, I think a lot of things happened. I mean, you know, there was a breakdown of the rule of law, I think, under the governments that took over. But it's worse than that now because the president won't even allow the largest political party in the country, which is the party that came from Correa. It's the largest party, and they won't let them participate as a party in the elections in November. And where's, you know, where's the outrage from any of the pundits and people who follow Latin America?

And this is something, you know, I have to say, that it doesn't look good for the intellectual elite, and even some—a large part, I'm not going to say all of them by any means, but a large part of the intellectual and academic classes of this country—that you had this amazing change in the 21st century, where for the first time, hundreds of millions of people had governments elected peacefully, okay? Not like revolutions like you had in Russia or China or other places where people had to fight wars to change society. And they changed these societies. They were real, serious social democrats, is what I would call them. Although, you know, they're often called radical and socialist and everything else. And, you know, they may believe in socialism, but their practices—

I mean, even Chavez, for example, after 13 years, he had created more jobs in the private than the public sector. And that's not because he wanted that. It's just what he had—you know, what the society had the capacity to do. Okay. And so they were social democrats. I would look at them as, in practice, social democratic governments, and they were elected. And you would think that people here would say, "Wow, this is a great moment in history. You know, it's never happened before, that people could make this kind of progress without any warfare." And instead, you know, almost everything you read treats most of those leaders, almost all of them really, as the bad guys in some way. Don't they? Isn't that what you see?

#Pascal

No, it does. It does. I mean, Kirchner doesn't have a good reputation also in the New York Times and other places, the newspapers. Lugo of Paraguay, Morales, Hugo Chávez. I mean, not to speak of Mr. Maduro, right? I mean, we've seen the vilification of this person very much. And just to be fair, these people do have certain aspects to themselves that I don't like. I mean, for instance, Mr.—in Venezuela, Mr.—now I just said his name just a second ago. Maduro. Mr. Maduro. He did, back in

2016—I think it was in '16—when he lost the majority of his parliament, he actually did delegitimize them and call in basically a second assembly. I mean, they do play these dirty tricks as well. But if we look at the economic performance of these governments, I mean, the ones that do put emphasis on national development, they actually tend to bring about some national development after one or two legislatures.

#Mark Weisbrot

Yeah. And I would also just add that Chávez had clean elections. You know, Jimmy Carter said that, and everybody else. Those were clean elections.

#Pascal

So, you know, nobody knows that if you ask around.

#Mark Weisbrot

And it's, you know, yeah, that's just what's reported.

#Pascal

Maybe just one minute in ending this conversation. What do you think is the most likely scenario for Brazil and for the South American continent now? I mean, we still have two years of Donald Trump. I don't see the system of the United States changing in any significant way in its approach towards the hemisphere.

#Mark Weisbrot

Well, Brazil, I think the polling is pretty close to the margin of error still. It's less than two percentage points. And I think that the PT, the Workers' Party, could still win. So we just don't know. We didn't know the first round either. And I think that that is definitely possible. And Lula is trying to do some things that benefit people, too, right now, which he did a fair amount in all of his terms. And so I think that's possible. And in terms of the future beyond that, you mean for the whole continent? I think the immediate future is not that good with all these right-wing governments and Trump. You know, Trump having the—Nixon had the madman theory.

If you could convince people that you were crazy enough to do anything, you know, even nuclear weapons is what he was thinking about, you know, then you have a lot more power. So that's a hard case, I think. But I think that there are definitely left movements there. Even in Ecuador, for example, they could quite possibly take the majority of mayors of big cities in the election. And so there are, you know, you could go through it country by country. It's at a low point, but I don't think this right wing has staying power because they don't have any plan that could really help people.

You know, even Trump did better in terms of macroeconomic policy, for example, than these people are getting ready to do and doing right now.

#Pascal

Okay, then thank you very much, Mark, for this assessment. If people want to find your work or follow your institute, where should they go?

#Mark Weisbrot

Oh, yes. You can get our work at CEPR. That's Center for Economic and Policy Research, CEPR.net. And you can sign up. Everything we have is free, and you can sign up for any particular publication that you want, and you won't get spammed either.

#Pascal

Wonderful. Then I will put links to CEPR.net in the description box below. And thank you for your time. We'll have you again and see what happens in this election. Mark Weisbrot, thank you so much for your time today.

#Mark Weisbrot

Thank you.