

10-2-2008

Costa Rica at the Top Of Democratic Development List For All Of Latin America

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Costa Rica at the Top Of Democratic Development List For All Of Latin America." (2008).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/9647>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Costa Rica at the Top Of Democratic Development List For All Of Latin America

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Costa Rica Central America

Published: 2008-10-02

Costa Rica is at the top of this year's Latin America Democratic Development Index (Indice de Desarrollo Democrático de América Latina, IDD-Lat 2008). For six consecutive years the conservative (Christian Democrat) Konrad Adenauer Foundation has analyzed and evaluated the performance of democratic institutions, leadership, and societies in 18 Latin American countries. This is the first time any Central American country has taken top spot. This is especially significant in light of the isthmus having fallen as a whole in the 2007 rankings.

The 2007 drop was not through any fault of Costa Rica; last year's report said it was "because the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala show the largest inter-annual fall comparative with the IDD-Lat rankings for the prior year." Costa Rica did not have far to go to reach the pinnacle of the rankings it had been in second place behind Chile last year. This year the countries switched spots.

Countries are scored according to a formula that takes into account behaviors along four dimensions: * Dimension I Measures the basic conditions of democracy and is used simply to qualify a country for inclusion in the listings. * Dimension II Respect for political rights and civil liberties. This includes citizen electoral participation and the country's measured standing on an index of political rights and an index of civil liberties. Gender equality in all branches of government is measured, as is citizen awareness of rights and liberties.

Dimension III Institutional quality and political efficiency. In this, a country's position on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is taken into account as is political party participation in the legislatures. Legal, political, and social accountability are assessed as are indicators of destabilization and government crisis.

Dimension IV Exercise of effective power to govern. Here there are two subdimensions: 1. Capacity to generate policies that ensure welfare. Infant mortality, proportion of GDP spent on health care, urban unemployment, households beneath the poverty line, spending on education, all are measured. 2. Capacity to generate policies that ensure economic efficiency.

These are a country's standing on the index of economic freedom, per capita GDP, consumer price index, income disparity, national debt, and investment index. All these variables are assigned values from 0-10. The data are gathered from a variety of sources, including the World Bank, Industrial Development Bank, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and others. Costa Rica obtained its top position in a year when more countries found themselves losing ground than gaining.

Said the study, "Even though the index average continues to rise, the number of countries that lost points is higher than last year. In 2007 eight countries had fared worse, and this year, ten." Last year's winner Chile was one of those losers. In 2007, Chile had 10.36 points; this year, Chile finished second with 9.67. Costa Rica, by contrast, went from 9.71 to 10.00. Thus, had Chile not lost ground, Costa Rica would still be in second place, even with its gains.

Costa Rica is also the only Central American country that the index classifies as of "high" democratic development. According to the criteria, "high" is from 7.51 to 10, "middle" is from 4.51 to 7.50, and "low" is from 1.0 to 4.5.

How the region fared, Costa Rica

In capturing first place, Costa Rica improved about 6% in total across all dimensions except on economics. On Dimension II it was marginally better, about 2%, than last year. This was the result of better participation of women in institutions, which made up for a slight decrease in voter participation and rights awareness. On this dimension, Costa Rica ranks third overall, but well ahead of other countries of the region.

The same was true for Dimension III. Costa Rica was well ahead of the isthmus, but only third overall on corruption perceptions and accountability. Year on year, it held steady. On the economic subdimension IV, Costa Rica was best overall, but still slightly down from 2007. Per capita GDP and indebtedness were better, but the country lost points for a widening of the income gap as conditions worsened for people on the lower end of the scale (see NotiCen, 2008-09-18).

Costa Rica made its biggest gains on the social indicators of Dimension IV, both against other countries and against itself in 2007. Almost all criteria improved. Infant mortality, for instance, was 16% better. Only public spending for education remained static.

Panama

Occupying fourth place on the list of 18 was Panama. Second in the isthmus, its overall score of 6.50 was still well below that of Costa Rica. Compared with 2007, the country managed to improve by a solid 10%. On respect for political rights and civil liberties, Dimension II, Panama stayed relatively stable, falling a bit on gender. Because of that, it ranks fifth overall on this dimension, worse than last year. Improvement on corruption perceptions and accountability raised Panama's Dimension III showing, rising to third place overall in this category and improving its 2007 performance by one place.

On capacity to generate economic policies, Panama fell. Per capita GDP was better, gaining 11%, as were debt and investment. But other indicators in the category were worse. The country lost three places overall, dropping to 13th place, far below the regional average. Panama also dropped on the social sub-dimension because of lower spending on health and education. Still, unemployment, infant mortality, and secondary education all improved since last year to eighth overall, better than average.

Honduras

In tenth place overall with a total score of 4.41, Honduras remains in the low development category. Since 2007, it has fallen three places. Scores have fallen across the board, save on respect for rights, where it has not moved over the year. On institutional quality and political efficiency, Honduras is just slightly worse, but on the single criterion of accountability it has actually improved by 47%. Failure to improve anywhere else in the category, however, resulted in an overall slight decrease in score and a loss of four places in the rankings.

There was some improvement in per capita GDP but not enough to make up for stasis elsewhere in Dimension III. Honduras remains in 16th place. Even with improvements of 20% in infant mortality and 45% in employment, and a slight improvement in secondary education, Honduras was unable to avoid an overall decrease in this subdimension. The country is still below average in households below the poverty line at tenth place.

El Salvador

In 11th place overall, El Salvador has not moved since last year, although it has improved about 5% in its total score. It has slightly improved in ability to generate policies to guarantee welfare but skidded on respect for rights and civil liberties and on the economic sub-dimension. El Salvador has also done worse on the electoral indices of Dimension II. There has been some improvement in gender equality in the government but not enough to prevent sinking to 15th place in this category. El Salvador is above the average for Latin America on institutional quality and political efficiency, however, and scores for 2008 surpass those for 2007 by more than 11%.

The social sub-dimension scores also improved, with advances in infant mortality, health spending, employment, and secondary-education participation. Overall, El Salvador occupies 13th place on this dimension.

Nicaragua

Although hardly a standout, Nicaragua at 13th place is greatly improved. In 2007 it occupied the bottom rung of the ladder, 18th. It is the most improved of the countries. On respect for political rights and civil liberties, it is 12th overall. Nicaragua has surged strongly along the Dimension III criteria, 40%. Nonetheless, it remains six places from the bottom, well below the Latin America average.

It has also fallen in capacity to generate policies ensuring economic efficiency since last year. This is because it is in last place on corruption perceptions while the average for the region on this score has improved. Per capita income, debt, and investment have improved but not enough to move Nicaragua above 17th place. On the social subdimension there has been improvement since 2007 especially in infant mortality, health spending, and employment.

Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic, while not a Central American country, is grouped with them because NotiCen covers it and because it falls into the category of Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) countries. It is a notch below Nicaragua at 14th place overall and among the countries that have grown most since 2007, 24%. This represents an improvement of two ranks since then, to 14th place. On Dimension II, there was a slight decline in respect for political rights, but other measures held firm since last year, and gender equality was slightly better.

In Dimension III, institutional quality and political efficiency, the Dominican Republic remains below average, but it showed slight gains over last year. Scores were boosted as a result of a better showing in corruption perceptions, participation of political parties in the legislature, and in accountability. A 15% surge in per capita income boosted performance on the economic and income-gap scale, while indebtedness remained constant. On this subdivision, the Dominican Republic placed ninth, at the median for the 18 countries. Offsetting this, the country placed last on the social subdivision.

Guatemala

Guatemala has dropped in the rankings from 13th to 15th place. It has lost ground on all measures except institutional quality and political efficiency. It outranks only Ecuador on respect for political rights and civil liberties. Gender equality and insecurity performance has been dismal, with the factor of security falling 45%. The IDD-Lat 2008 in conclusion notes that the number of countries that lost status on the measures increased this year to ten, that only 17% of the countries rank in the high democratic-development category, and that fully half of them fall into the low category. This is an improvement however.

Honduras, Colombia, and Brazil rose into the middle category. El Salvador improved this year compared to last but has not found its way back into the middle category since falling from it in 2006. There has been a generalized economic improvement among all 18 countries with better numbers in per capita GDP, lower national debt, and somewhat better distribution of income. All of this has gone to raise the average in the economic subdivision from last year.

Another bright spot from the point of view of the study is that there have been fewer instances of what it calls the Factor of Democratic Abnormality, which it interprets to mean a strengthening of democracy among the countries. The rankings and scores for all 18 countries for 2008 were as follows: 1. Costa Rica, 10.000 2. Chile, 9.670 3. Uruguay, 8.717 4. Panama, 6.503 5. Mexico, 6.135 6. Argentina, 5.731 7. Peru, 5.020 8. Colombia, 4.660 9. Brazil, 4.520 10. Honduras, 4.408 11. El Salvador, 4.184 12. Paraguay, 3.861 13. Nicaragua, 3.860 14. Dominican Republic, 3.577 15. Guatemala, 3.444 16. Venezuela, 3.258 17. Bolivia, 2.843 18. Ecuador, 2.521

-- End --