Latin America’s new right has mastered the politics of anger. It has learned to campaign against crime, inflation, corruption, cultural change, and “the caste,” promising voters a clean break from exhausted parties and dysfunctional states. But the harder task begins after election night, and that is where the new right is likely to stumble. In Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and El Salvador, conservative and right-populist leaders have discovered that the state they inherited is not a blank slate; it is a thicket of veto points, entrenched interests, social demands, and institutional constraints.

The deeper problem is not just governing skill. It is governing contradiction. The new right often campaigns as an insurgency against political elites, then enters office needing those same institutions, coalitions, and civil servants to make policy work. Its leaders promise speed and decisiveness, but they arrive in office with narrow legislative support, fragile party machines, and economies that cannot be fixed by rhetoric. They inherit publics that want lower prices, safer streets, better jobs, and stronger welfare systems at the same time. That is a very difficult menu for any government; it is especially brutal for a movement that often prefers symbolic confrontation over patient bargaining.

Colombia is a useful warning. The country’s political system gives opponents many ways to slow, dilute, or block reform, and right-wing forces have used those levers before against Gustavo Petro’s government. The broader lesson is that Colombia’s politics are not built for easy victories; they are built for stalemate. Even when a right-wing coalition wins national power, it still has to govern through courts, Congress, governors, unions, and social mobilization. That means slogans about restoring authority collide quickly with the practical need to compromise with the very institutions the movement often denounces.

Argentina shows another version of the same dilemma. Javier Milei came to office promising to slash the state, crush inflation, and humiliate the political class with a chainsaw. He did achieve a dramatic reduction in monthly inflation early on, and his fiscal adjustment produced a budget surplus. But the price was recession, falling purchasing power, and a

surge in poverty, while his government also faced the challenge of turning shock therapy into sustainable growth. That is the central problem for the new right in office: austerity can be sold as moral cleansing, but governing requires more than shrinking the state. It requires building a new social contract, and that is much harder when millions of citizens feel the pain before they see any reward.

El Salvador offers the most striking example of the new right’s appeal and its risks. Nayib Bukele’s popularity rests on an extraordinary security turnaround and an image of command, but the cost has been a steady consolidation of power. The country’s political system has been bent around the executive, with the legislative and judicial branches subordinated to Bukele’s project. That may look like strength, but it also reveals the movement’s core weakness: when a right-wing government solves governance problems by weakening accountability, it may win short-term control while hollowing out the institutions needed for long-term stability. In that sense, the model is less a blueprint for normal governance than an emergency regime built around a single leader.

Brazil demonstrates the danger from the opposite direction. Jair Bolsonaro showed how a right-wing president can ride social resentment into office without building a coherent governing coalition capable of sustaining institutional trust. His presidency became a stress test for democracy, culminating in the 8 January attack on state institutions after his defeat. Bolsonaro’s case matters because it shows the temptation that follows frustration: when the right cannot govern through institutions, it may try to discredit them. But undermining the system to save a political project is not governance; it is a path to democratic breakdown.

Chile may become the clearest test of all. José Antonio Kast’s rise represents a major shift to the right, but his success at the ballot box does not erase the structural reality of a fragmented legislature and a society still divided over security, immigration, and the role of the state. The right can win by promising tougher borders, stronger policing, and fiscal discipline. Governing, however, will require more than punitive rhetoric. If Kast tries to move

too fast, he risks meeting the same resistance that has frustrated presidents across the region: organized opposition, coalition fractures, and voters who support "order" until it starts to cost them jobs, wages, or public services.

One reason the new right struggles is that it often governs as a coalition of mismatched factions. In Colombia, libertarians, evangelicals, security hardliners, and anti-left activists may unite to win elections, but their agendas diverge once in office, especially on taxes, gender policy, social spending, and state reform. In Argentina, Milei's anti-state ideology has collided with the basic requirement of preserving enough administrative capacity to collect revenue, manage inflation, and keep the economy from breaking apart. In both cases, the right's political alliance is easier to assemble in opposition than to maintain in power.

A second pattern is the gap between order and legitimacy. Bukele's El Salvador shows that dramatic crime reduction can buy enormous political capital, but it also normalizes executive overreach and weakens democratic checks. That may be politically effective, yet it leaves the system brittle: once institutions lose autonomy, there are fewer guardrails if the leader makes mistakes or the security model stalls. The same logic haunts other right-wing projects in the region. Short-term victories against crime or inflation can be real, but if they rely on permanent emergency politics, they create a government that is strong on command and weak on legitimacy.

A third case is Brazil's warning about backlash. Bolsonaro's movement showed that right-wing insurgency can thrive in polarized environments, but it also demonstrated how quickly an anti-system project can collide with constitutional limits and mass mobilization. The effort to bend institutions in service of a leader can mobilize supporters for a time, but it also provokes resistance from courts, civil society, and rival coalitions. The result is not stable conservatism; it is chronic confrontation. That is a poor foundation for governing a region that needs credibility more than spectacle.journals.

What comes next

The new right’s governing challenge is structural, not accidental. Latin America is marked by fragmented parties, low trust, inequality, and weak state capacity, so any government that comes in with a winner-take-all mentality is likely to hit a wall. Right-wing leaders can campaign effectively by channeling fatigue with the left, but once in office they must solve problems that do not yield to ideological purity. Inflation, insecurity, corruption, and stagnation demand coalitions, technical competence, and patience.

That is why the new right often appears most powerful just before it governs. It speaks with certainty in a system that rewards certainty, but it must then confront reality on reality’s terms. If Latin America’s new right wants to last, it will have to learn that governing is not the same as winning. Right now, that is the lesson it has not yet learned.