

# BelloThe ills of Latin American democracy

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THIS year marks the 40th anniversary of the start of the democratic wave that swept over Latin America and turned military dictators into political flotsam. It is an anniversary tinged with gloom. Democracy is in retreat worldwide, with scholars identifying more than two dozen countries

But the political malaise in Costa Rica goes much deeper. Support for the political system, measured on a composite index drawn up by LAPOP, has fallen from 87% in 1983 to 62% in 2016. Corruption is one reason. But this was far worse in the 1970s, observes Kevin Casas Zamora, a political scientist and former vice-president of Costa Rica. "It's a very easy explanation for very complex ills," he says.

Costa Rica is in many ways a successful country. It has opened up to globalisation, diversifying its economy with new industries, such as medical devices, ecotourism and renewable power. But politicians have failed to deal with rising crime, income inequality and poverty. That is partly because they have failed for many years