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## FEATURED Q&A

# Is Bukele Taking the Right Approach to Gang Violence?



"The Armed Forces do not seek confrontation. We do not want a war, we only seek to control the territories so that all Salvadorans live in peace," President Nayib Bukele said June 25, after three gang members were killed in a shootout with police. // Photo: Salvadoran Government.

**Q** El Salvador's new president, Nayib Bukele, on June 18 outlined a series of security policies to fight street gangs in the Central American country. Soon after, Bukele sent thousands of police officers and soldiers into the streets of San Salvador and other cities in order to retake territory that gangs have claimed. What are the most important parts of Bukele's security strategy, and will they work? To what extent have previous Salvadoran governments used similar policies, and how successful were they? What is at the root of El Salvador's difficulties in bringing down the country's homicide rate?

**A** Barry R. McCaffrey, retired U.S. Army four-star general and former director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy: "El Salvador is a disaster zone of incredible violence (20,000 murdered during the last three years), poverty (40 percent), corruption and government incompetence. The 12-year civil war killed 80,000. El Salvador is essentially a near failed state. One-third of the nation's population has fled abroad. Remittances from abroad are an astonishing 20 percent of GNP. The country staggers under a massive debt of \$9.5 billion. The 25,000 gang members are lethal, with more than 9,000 in prisons. The ineffectual national police (PNC) are a symbol of repression. Into this terrible crisis steps the new President Nayib Bukele. Young (37 years old), educated, a successful mayor of the capital San Salvador, an entrepreneur; he won the presidency on the first round (with 53 percent of the vote). Bukele is the first president in 30 years to win outside of the two major political parties. He is a new generation leader—fluent in English and clever with social media, with 700,000 Twitter fol-

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## Mexican Police Protest Against National Guard

An "open revolt" by hundreds of federal police officers continued into a second day, as uniformed officers blocked highways to protest plans to absorb them into a newly formed National Guard.

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### ECONOMIC

## Brazil Pension Overhaul Passes Final House Cte.

The bill passed by a 36 to 13 margin Thursday. If passed in the main chamber, the legislation, which can still be amended, will move to the Senate for a final vote, which may come by September.

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### POLITICAL

## U.N. Report Finds Venezuela Uses Death Squads

The United Nations has accused Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro of removing opponents with a "shocking" number of extrajudicial killings.

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Maduro // File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## U.N. Report Accuses Venezuela of Using Death Squads

In a scathing new report released Thursday, the United Nations has accused Venezuela's government under President Nicolás Maduro of a strategy of instilling fear in its population to retain power and removing opponents with a "shocking" number of extrajudicial killings, BBC News reported. Victims are arrested and shot, with crime scenes manipulated to suggest they resisted police. Special Action Forces, or FAES, described by witnesses as "death squads," killed 5,287 people in 2018 and another 1,569 by mid-May of this year, in what are officially termed by the Venezuelan government as "Operations for the Liberation of the People," The New York Times reported. The U.N. report is based on more than 500 interviews with victims and witnesses over the past year and a half. Witnesses reported how the FAES manipulated crime scenes, with agents planting arms and drugs and firing their weapons against the walls or in the air to suggest a confrontation to show the victim had "resisted authority." Venezuela's government received an advance copy of the report and issued an 11-page response

on Thursday, detailing points it considered erroneous, asserting that several suspects in such incidents had been imprisoned. "The analysis is not objective," Venezuela's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Venezuela's opposition, led by the head of the National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, has called for massive street protests today, Venezuela's independence day holiday. Although Guaidó appeared to be on the cusp of forcing Maduro from power earlier this year, when he won international recognition as Venezuela's legitimate interim president, his supporters worry demonstration fatigue could be setting in, as Maduro's repressive tactics take a toll. Meanwhile, Peru has invited China, Russia, Cuba, the United States and dozens of other countries to Lima on Aug. 6 to discuss the political crisis in Venezuela, Peru's foreign minister said on Wednesday, Reuters reported.

## Mexican Federal Police Stage 'Open Revolt' Against AMLO

An "open revolt" by hundreds of federal police officers continued into a second day Thursday, as uniformed officers blocked highways in and around Mexico's capital to protest plans to absorb them into a newly formed National Guard, El Universal reported. The protests came as the

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Electric Vehicle Sales Rise Sharply in Latin America

Sales of electric vehicles in Latin America grew 90 percent in 2018, with Mexico accounting for nearly half the expansion, Forbes reported Thursday, citing research from Bloomberg New Energy Finance. Colombia and Costa Rica also showed strong gains. While government incentives and targets helped boost sales, Latin America's electric vehicle market is far smaller than East Asia, Europe and North America, accounting for less than 1 percent of global EV sales last year, according to the report.

## Walmart Reports Higher June Sales in Mexico

Walmart de México, the country's biggest retailer, said on Thursday that sales at stores open more than a year in Mexico rose 4.7 percent in June compared to the same month last year, Reuters reported. Including new stores, sales rose 6 percent. Last month Mexican government officials blocked Walmart from buying delivery app Cornershop over concerns it could not guarantee a level playing field for others in the grocery delivery market. It had offered \$225 million to buy the app, according to Reuters.

## Jamaica at Odds With Caricom Over Catastrophe Risk Insurance Fund

Legislators in Jamaica on Sunday were at an impasse with Caribbean Community partners over committing future payments to the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, or CCRIF, the Jamaica Gleaner reported. Meeting in St. Lucia, the Jamaica delegation "flatly rejected" calls by other countries to commit future CCRIF payments, beyond the \$20 million it has already paid into the fund. Jamaica argues the country has not benefited from the fund since it was established in 2007, because the island has not qualified for payouts despite damage due to heavy rainfall and hurricanes.

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lowers. Bukele came out swinging. He sent thousands of police and the Army into 12 municipalities. He is trying to regain control of the prisons. His central campaign promise is to combat corruption and confront gang finances. Bukele also promises to focus on the underlying causes of gang violence. He deserves international support. His nation is inextricably linked to the United States economically and politically. Trump just docked El Salvador \$115 million. Bukele's leadership could pull El Salvador out of their misery and injustice. It's time for the international community to support these hard-working people save their country."



**Adam Blackwell, vice president international at Development Services Group (DSG):**

"Insecurity in El Salvador is truly a wicked problem for which there are no simple or quick solutions. It is hard to comment on the security plan of the Bukele administration, as all we have seen is the Plan Cuscatlán, which was a campaign platform of 1,049 pages that devoted only 75 to security. There is a difference between politics and policy that does not translate clearly in Spanish. We have heard a lot of the popular political statements, which seem to indicate that there is an intention to continue with the

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government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador began deploying the National Guard to try to control migration and crime on the country's southern border with Guatemala. Police blocked a major expressway in front of federal police offices in the capital on Wednesday and at a Mexico City command center demanded a meeting with the security secretary, the Associated Press reported. López Obrador has given the military the bulk of the responsibility for the National Guard, as opposed to federal police, who worry their seniority, rank and benefits would not be recognized within the National Guard. López Obrador on Thursday called for a "thorough investigation" of the police force, calling organizers of the protests the "black hand" and suggesting corruption motivated their actions. Speaking at a news conference Wednesday, Mexican Security Secretary Alfonso Durazo assured reporters that the government would respect the police. "No transition is simple, and this one is no exception," Durazo said. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in Wednesday's issue of the Advisor.]

## ECONOMIC NEWS

### Brazil Pension Overhaul Passes House Committee

After 16 hours of debate, Brazil's long-awaited pension reform bill passed a key lower house committee Thursday and will proceed to a plenary vote in the coming days, the Financial Times reported. The bill advanced by a 36 to 13 margin. If passed in the main chamber, the legislation, which can still be amended, will move to the Senate for a final vote. With the legislation, far-right Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro hopes to reign in pensions payment obligations by \$250 billion over the next 10 years. The reform will lengthen the amount of time men and women must work before retirement. One of the major sticking points in the committee was cuts to federal and highway police benefits, *Folha de S.Paulo* reported. Speaking to reporters, Brazilian central bank

## THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

### Will Mexico's Troop Deployments Help Control Migration?

**Q** Mexico has deployed nearly 15,000 soldiers and National Guard troops to its northern border in an effort to stem the flow of migrants to the United States, the head of Mexico's army said June 24. Mexico has also sent 6,500 members of its security forces to its southern border in order to prevent migrants from going north. The moves come amid pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump, who has demanded that Mexico do more to halt migrants. How well will Mexico's troop deployments work to reduce the flows of migrants to the United States? What effects are Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's crack-downs on transiting migrants having on his popularity? Is halting migrants a good use of Mexico's National Guard?

**A** Nicolás Mariscal, member of the Advisor board and chairman of Grupo Marhnos in Mexico City: "On June 7, President Donald Trump announced that the United States and Mexico had reached an agreement and that the tariffs scheduled to be implemented by his government against Mexico were indefinitely suspended. Mexican negotiators persuaded Trump to back down from his threat by agreeing to an unprecedented crackdown on Central American migrants. The aforementioned initiative includes the deployment of the National Guard, a hybrid

institution that combines officers from the army police, naval police and federal police; along with additional apprehensions per week, accepting more asylum seekers sent back by the United States and other measures geared toward cutting immigrant flows drastically in a trial period of 45 days. Even though more than 20,000 soldiers have already been deployed to both borders, national official operations began on June 30, deploying 70,000 soldiers nationwide. Given the short time frame to deliver results, immigration might be the first major test for the National Guard. Hence, the president and his cabinet will work hard to demonstrate the effectiveness of the new militarized force. The performance will not only be evaluated by the U.S. government, as Mexican civil society and public opinion have also demanded responses, especially since President López Obrador started his term enunciating a humanitarian approach to immigration and has now inclined toward control-oriented policies. Will the National Guard be enough to reduce immigration and fulfill expectations? Only time will tell. Fortunately, that time will come shortly."

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**EDITORS NOTE:** The above is a continuation of the [Q&A](#) that appeared in Wednesday's edition of the Advisor.

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president Roberto Campos Neto said Thursday that concrete progress on Bolsonaro's fiscal and economic reform agenda is crucial to a benign outlook for inflation, Reuters reported. Although Brazil's economy faces risks from slowing global growth, Campos Neto noted the economy's large output gap is putting

downward pressure on inflation, for now. Many domestic and international businesses say they are holding off investing in the South American nation until the reform passes. The legislation's backers say the bill could work through Congress by September, the Financial Times reported.

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(failed) 'mano dura' policies of the past, perhaps to get past the 2021 congressional elections. I understand that as this goes to print they will announce phase two of the territorial control plan. Challenges will be to integrate prevention and reinsertion strategies, or you are just pushing the problem further into the shadows. The long-term policy discussion that El Salvador needs must be data-informed, evidence-based, enlist as broad a cross-section of society as possible and, more than anything, be courageous. There are very successful gang mitigation strategies that have been well tested in Los Angeles, Ecuador and Glasgow, to name a few. The international community rather than cutting aid needs to double down in helping El Salvador develop integrated and comprehensive strategies that go beyond repression only. Without this, we will continue to see the haunting photos of parents and their children dying trying to flee."

**A Ricardo Sosa, Salvadoran expert in criminology and security:** "One of President Bukele's main strategies is answering to the population's clamor for the recovery of territory under the influence and control of organized crime and gangs, which is why he's ordered the dissuasive presence of police and military factions in the historic centers of 16 municipalities that he and his security cabinet have targeted in this preliminary stage. Another focus is attacking gangs' financial flows, acquired through extortion of small businesses that operate in these cities. A third focus is prisons, where he ordered telephone operators to suspend cellphone signals within 72 hours, as well as the transfer of 1,624 prisoners to maximum security centers. The success of these policies will depend on the operational and financial sustainability, as well as in expanding them to rural communities, and the space for other pillars within the security policy, including prevention policies, treatment of prisoners, reinsertion and attention to victims. These first two weeks have been

based on the combat and repression pillar. Bukele's goal in terms of violent homicides is to decrease the rate by 10 percent this year. This would be positive, as well as diminishing petty crime to establish a new model of citizen security in El Salvador."

**A Yulia Vorobyeva, post-doctoral research fellow at Florida International University:** "Bukele's security strategy focuses on three areas: control of jails and prisons, cutting off illicit finances and strengthening the police. It has been launched with the plan to regain territory from street gangs through police raids and higher presence of security forces in crime-ridden municipalities. While the president is trying to distance himself from previous administrations, his strategy is essentially replicating heavy-handed (mano dura) policies used by governments since 2003. The state's punitive approach to crime, almost exclusively based on police repression and mass incarceration of suspected gang members, had adverse consequences. Hardline measures contributed to skyrocketing homicide rates and made major street gangs, the MS-13 and Barrio 18, even stronger. The main weakness of such an approach resides in ignoring prevention and social rehabilitation. Although the official discourse admitted the need for a comprehensive strategy as early as in 2004, in practice, each administration concentrated its efforts on repression, largely neglecting social programs. In his discourse, President Bukele seems to recognize the urgency to address the root causes of violence—poverty and social exclusion—by improving education, health and provision of basic services. However, his administration has not presented any plan to tackle underlying social problems, and the state response so far has been a set of short-term measures that had proven ineffective before. To achieve positive sustainable results, there must be a political will to invest in long-term social support, development programs and adequate services for marginalized areas."

## LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

is published every business day by the Inter-American Dialogue, Copyright © 2019

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**Latin America Advisor** is published every business day, except for major U.S. holidays, by the Inter-American Dialogue at 1155 15th Street NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005

[www.thedialogue.org](http://www.thedialogue.org)

ISSN 2163-7962

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