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FEATURED Q&A

Has Nicaragua's Ortega Secured His Grip on Power?



Hundreds of people were killed in protests that erupted in April 2018 against the government of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and his wife and vice president, Rosario Murillo. // File Photo: Nicaraguan Government.

Q The government of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega earlier this month denied an Organization of American States delegation from entering the country, the OAS said. The commission was seeking to enter Nicaragua as part of a peace mission to discuss a "pacific solution" to the Central American nation's political crisis, following months-long protests against the Ortega administration last year and failed diplomatic talks with the opposition. What is the OAS mission's purpose, and what implications does its denied entry have for its work? To what extent has the situation in Nicaragua returned to normal, and what prospects exist for dialogue between the opposition and the government going forward? How strong and unified is the opposition, and what are its chances against Ortega in the scheduled 2021 presidential election?

A Mónica López Baltodano, Nicaraguan lawyer and political scientist: "It is terrible that a decade had to pass, and hundreds of Nicaraguans had to be murdered, to understand that Ortega-Murillo were not an ordinary authoritarian regime, but rather a strong dictatorship, with the autocratic control of the entire state and society. The international community is just beginning to understand that. The rejection of the OAS commission reflects very well this dictatorship's philosophy: 'Here, I command, and no one has to get involved, unless I decide so.' But, although Ortega is reluctant toward the OAS today, if he has to maneuver with it later, for his own political convenience, he will. For the moment, he does not feel that he has to give in to an OAS lacking

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

U.N. Human Rights Council to Probe Venezuela

The U.N. Human Rights Council will open an investigation into human rights abuses in Venezuela. The country has seen 6,000 killings related to security operations since last year, the United Nations has said.

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ECONOMIC

Puerto Rico Oversight Board Files Debt Plan

Puerto Rico's federal financial oversight board filed a long-awaited restructuring plan that would eliminate a major portion of the U.S. territory's debt. The plan is subject to a court's approval.

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POLITICAL

Peru's Vizcarra Calls for Vote of Confidence

Peruvian President Martín Vizcarra has called on Congress to deliver him a vote of confidence. A no-confidence vote could allow Vizcarra to dissolve Congress and call new elections.

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Vizcarra // File Photo: TV Perú.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.N. Human Rights Council to Investigate Venezuela for Abuses

The United Nations Human Rights Council will investigate Venezuela for human rights abuses, following a vote Friday in Geneva, Newsweek reported. The resolution to authorize the establishment of a fact-finding mission was presented by the Lima Group, a bloc of Latin American countries and Canada, and European nations. The mission will seek to document abuses “with a view to ensuring full accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims.” The United Nations has said that there have been 6,000 killings in Venezuela related to security operations since last year. Many of those deaths are likely to have been extrajudicial killings, the United Nations has said. Last July, U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet released a report with statements from witnesses who said Venezuela’s Special Action Forces manipulated crime scenes and evidence and also planted weapons and drugs to make it appear that they had resisted arrest, BBC News reported. Venezuela’s ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Jorge Valero, denounced Friday’s resolution, saying the Lima Group “follows to a T instruments handed to them by the American empire,” Newsweek reported. The United Nations mission will seek

to work with Venezuela’s government in order to gain access to facilities in the country, in particular, detention centers. In a resolution last Thursday, Venezuela said it would allow U.N. staff “unlimited access to all regions,” but Valero said the government did not intend to cooperate. The vote on Friday was approved 19-7. Among the countries that voted against it were ones that face allegations of human rights abuses of their own, including China, Cuba, Saudi Arabia and the Philippines. The United States was notably absent from the session, following its withdrawal last year from the Human Rights Council. [Editor’s note: See [Q&A](#) on Venezuela in last Thursday’s issue of the Advisor.]

Peru’s Vizcarra Calls for Confidence Vote Amid Political Crisis

Peruvian President Martín Vizcarra on Friday called for a confidence vote from lawmakers, which, if rejected, would allow him to dissolve Congress and call new elections, La República reported. Peru’s Constitution allows presidents to dissolve Congress and hold fresh elections if lawmakers deliver two votes of no confidence in the president or the administration’s proposed policies. Lawmakers have already taken one no-confidence vote against Vizcarra’s government. “It’s clear the democracy of our nation is at risk,” Vizcarra said in calling

NEWS BRIEFS

Demonstrators Demand Moïse’s Resignation in Violent Haiti Protests

Thousands of Haitians took to the streets on Friday in violent protests to demand the resignation of President Jovenel Moïse, the Associated Press reported. In Port-au-Prince, demonstrators attacked a police station, looting it of ammunition and Kevlar vests. Moïse has faced calls for his ouster amid accusations that his allies embezzled and wasted proceeds from a Venezuelan subsidized oil program.

Oil Spill Contaminates Beaches Along Coasts of Eight Brazilian States

A mysterious oil spill has contaminated beaches across the coastline of eight Brazilian states, the country’s environment agency said Friday, Reuters reported. The spill has affected 3,000 kilometers of coastline on Brazil’s northeast region, with oil-coated birds and sea turtles washing up, according to environmental agency Ibama. The origin of the spill is still unknown, although authorities have ruled out Brazil’s offshore oil exploration activity as the source of the spill, the agency said.

Indigenous Protesters Demand Action on Fires From Bolivia’s Morales

A caravan of indigenous protesters is marching hundreds of miles in Bolivia’s fire-ravaged areas to demand that President Evo Morales declare the rise in wildfires a national disaster, with the aim of bringing international aid, Reuters reported Sunday. Morales has refused to make the designation ahead of the country’s October presidential election, despite public outcry and calls that he recognize that the fires—which have already burned an area bigger than Costa Rica—were beyond the government’s control, according to the report. [Editor’s note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Sept. 12 issue of the Advisor.]

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sufficient strength and determination. In the epidermis of our political life, it can be seen that terror is imposed on resistance. It is the image of exorbitant deployments of riot police and patrols against any outline of protest. This is the ‘normality’ of the dictatorship. But, below, the flow of popular resistance increases, the substantive, economic and social factors of the crisis are accentuated, and the political suffocation of society becomes more unbearable. The international community is more attentive. And most likely, all of this will explode again, either

by rebellion or by votes. The opposition has to overcome the illusion that, regardless of the conditions, elections will be won. That does not take dictatorship seriously. Nor is it only at a negotiating table that Ortega will be defeated. We need to combine strategies. Go back again, all together, to the streets organizing without exclusions—fight united for the real needs of the people and for real conditions for a credible and democratic electoral process. The unstoppable blue and white flow that once put the dictatorship at the edge of collapse can rise once again.”

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for the confidence vote in a televised address, the Associated Press reported. The standoff between Vizcarra and legislators came a day after lawmakers shelved a proposal by Vizcarra to hold early presidential and legislative elections. Vizcarra has pushed for the early vote, saying it is needed to break political deadlock. Vizcarra blasted lawmakers for dismissing his plan for an early vote “without even allowing a discussion.” Vizcarra has also been frustrated in his attempts to push through anti-graft reforms, which he says are needed in order to rebuild voters’ trust following successive graft scandals in recent years, Reuters reported. “It’s clear democracy is in jeopardy in our country, due to the congressional majority’s actions to take over institutions in order to guarantee impunity for itself,” Vizcarra added in his televised address. Vizcarra is calling for the confidence vote over his plan to change how justices of the Tribunal Court are selected. Lawmakers would accept or reject the changes as a sign of confidence in Vizcarra’s policies. The president and other critics, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, have criticized legislators, saying their selection of the magistrates is hasty and lacks transparency, the AP reported. [Editor’s note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Aug. 19 issue of the Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

Puerto Rico Financial Oversight Board Files Restructuring Plan

Puerto Rico’s financial oversight board last Friday filed in court a long-awaited debt restructuring proposal that would cut a major portion of the U.S. territory’s debt by more than 60 percent, *El Nuevo Día* reported. The so-called plan of adjustment covers \$35 billion of bonds and claims and more than \$50 billion of pension liabilities. If approved by a U.S. District Court, the plan would allow Puerto Rico to exit a form of bankruptcy that began in May 2017, Reuters reported. “This is the beginning of the end of Puerto Rico’s bankruptcy process,” José Carrión, who chairs the oversight board,

JOB POSTINGS

EDITOR’S NOTE: We are pleased to share Latin America-related job postings that companies reading the Advisor and others have posted recently.

China Telecom Americas: Vendor Manager, Latin America

Walmart: Director, Global Public Policy

International Rescue Committee: Regional Director, Latin America

NBA: Basketball Operations Liaison for Latin America

UNESCO: External Consultant, Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

Creative Associates: New Business Development Director, Latin America

Liberty Mutual: Head of Americas, Liberty Global Transaction Solutions

Abbott: Director, International Government Relations

told reporters following a public hearing on the plan, the wire service reported. Governor Wanda Vásquez, who began her term in August following the ouster of disgraced former Governor Ricardo Rosselló and a tumultuous replacement process, expressed her support for the proposal, even though it calls for reducing pensions for nearly 40 percent of the island’s government retirees. U.S. Judge Laura Taylor Swain, who is hearing Puerto Rico’s bankruptcy cases, is expected to confirm the plan in the first half of 2020, according to Natalie Jaresko, the board’s executive director, Reuters reported. [Editor’s note: See related [Q&A](#) in the June 28 issue of the Advisor.]

BUSINESS NEWS

Santander-Backed Fund Eyes New Latin America Ventures

Santander InnoVentures, a venture capital fund backed by Spanish bank Santander, is looking to Latin America for new opportunities, an ex-

ecutive said on Friday, just days after the fund completed an investment in Mexican financial technology start-up Klar, Reuters reported. Manuel Silva, a partner at Santander InnoVentures, said in an interview that the fund was seeking to boost investment in countries where Santander already has a presence, with a special focus on Brazil and Mexico. The two countries are Latin America’s largest economies, and they have the most active and fast-growing markets for so-called fintechs in the region, including start-ups that have been developing technologies ranging from electronic payments to savings and loans, according to the report. “We continue to seek out companies,” Silva told Reuters. “We invest mostly in markets where the bank is present because those are the markets where we can add most value for the bank, as well as for our investors.” Other markets of interest include Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Peru, Silva added. Santander Innovation participated in Klar’s \$57.5 million seed round in a combination of \$7.5 million in equity and \$50 million in debt last week, Santander said in a statement. It was the largest fintech seed round in Mexico’s history, the bank added. [Editor’s note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Aug. 14 issue of the Financial Services Advisor.]

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A **Adolfo Pastrán, director of digital news media at Informe Pastrán:** “Nicaragua’s government has said that the OAS’ mission constitutes a violation of the OAS principles’ nature and purposes, that the government has not requested nor authorized any commission and that it considers it as an unfriendly act against the Nicaraguan state’s national sovereignty. Consequently, it does not recognize any working group or commission that the Nicaraguan government has not requested, and which does not have its consent or a binding effect on the country. But Nicaragua remains in the OAS and in the inter-American system. There are no prospects for negotiations to resume, since the opposition broke with the talks in May. On the immediate horizon, we can only see reforms to the electoral law in order to strengthen the country’s institutional electoral system for the 2021 elections, within the country’s constitutional framework and the memorandum of understanding with the OAS. The opposition remains divided, atomized, fragmented and struggling for leadership. In polls, the opposition does not exceed 10 percent in terms of national political sympathy, while the FLSN maintains its social base intact. Most opposition candidates do not have popular support—they are little known. Additionally, they do not have economic and social proposals to lift the country out of poverty. They remain reclined on the United States and some other countries’ pressure, with a discourse that is disjointed with the population’s needs and concerns.”

A **Mario Arana, president of Am-Cham Nicaragua and member of the negotiating team of the Civic Alliance:** “The Ortega regime mistakenly thought that an offer to undertake unilateral electoral reforms—using the General Secretariat of the OAS’ assistance, offered in the context of the

negotiations between the Civic Alliance and the government—would be enough to put at ease the international pressure that potentially could suspend Nicaragua from the OAS and increase economic sanctions. By now it is clear that it will take more than that to satisfy the more general demands of the population and of the OAS. Respect for constitutional rights, justice and democracy, the release of political prisoners and the agreed agenda of the negotiations between the government and the Civic Alliance are, in fact, the elements that continue to be pending and would need to be addressed. In sum, the Nicaraguan regime would have to fully commit to the Democratic Charter of the OAS. The question is: will Ortega compromise on these demands or not? He will try to give the least possible concessions, if any, to preserve power. The challenge is that, whatever the agreement that is reached is, it must be based on consensus and not be unilateral, in order to achieve sustainability. If no agreement is possible, the prospects for the country are bleak. The government’s narrative of normalcy is far from being the case, and while part of the regime strategy is likely to promote deliberate division among the opposition, that is unlikely to happen. The opposition is progressively getting better organized, despite growing repression, and will continue strengthening as it has already decided to do so. And it will win the election, if it is clean. The question is whether there will be clean elections, or what tools may change this potential adverse prospect for representative democracy.”

Editor’s note: The Advisor requested a commentary for this issue from Nicaragua’s ambassador to the United States but did not receive a response.

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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Erik Brand
Publisher
ebrand@thedialogue.org

Gene Kuleta
Editor
gkuleta@thedialogue.org

Anastasia Chacón González
Reporter
achacon@thedialogue.org



Michael Shifter, President

Rebecca Bill Chavez, Nonresident Senior Fellow

Sergio Bitar, Nonresident Senior Fellow

Joan Caivano, Director, Special Projects

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