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FEATURED Q&A

Will Police Forces Undergo Reforms in Latin America?



Following the killing of George Floyd last month in the United States, protesters have taken to the streets in recent weeks in Latin America to demand police reforms. // File Photo: pxfuel.

Q The killing of George Floyd, the black man who died May 25 in Minneapolis after a white police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, has triggered protests in the United States and around the world against police brutality, racism and impunity. In Latin America, demonstrators have converged in locations including the Brazilian cities of Rio de Janeiro and Curitiba to protest crimes that police have committed against black people. In Mexico, protests erupted in Guadalajara, where protesters accused police of fatally beating a construction worker. What changes will result from the outrage in Latin America? Will police reforms occur in the region, and if so, what will they consist of? Where have police reforms succeeded, and how can they serve as a model for Latin American countries?

A Gladys Mitchell-Walthour, co-coordinator of the U.S. Network for Democracy in Brazil and associate professor of public policy and political economy in the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee: "Black movement activists in Brazil and throughout Latin America have fought against police execution of blacks since the early 20th century. Brazilian activists often refer to police violence against blacks as black genocide because the country kills such a high number of Afro-descendants. Groups such as Mothers of May (formed in São Paulo in 2006) and React or Be Killed (formed in Salvador in 2005) began before the U.S.-based Black Lives Matter, which began in 2013. Afro-Brazilians are three times more likely than whites to be killed by po-

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Former Mexican Governor Pleads Guilty in U.S. to Money Laundering

Jorge Juan Torres López, who was governor of the Mexican state of Coahuila for most of 2011, pleaded guilty in Texas to money laundering.

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BUSINESS

LATAM Airlines to Halt Operations of Argentina Unit

The airline's Argentine unit will indefinitely halt operations, though LATAM stopped short of saying it would completely close the subsidiary.

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POLITICAL

FARC Dissidents Kill Six Colombian Soldiers, Wound Eight in Ambush

Dissidents of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia launched the ambush in Caquetá department. President Iván Duque vowed to bring the attackers to justice.

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Duque // File Photo: Colombian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

FARC Dissidents Kill Six Colombian Soldiers in Ambush

Dissidents of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia ambushed a group of soldiers in Caquetá department, killing six of them and leaving eight others wounded, *El Tiempo* reported Wednesday. Following the incident, the Colombian armed forces on Wednesday held a special security council meeting in the city of Villavicencio in the Andean nation's Meta department. The meeting was led by Meta Governor Juan Guillermo Zuluaga, Gen. Luis Fernando Navarro and Gen. Eduardo Zapateiro, both of whom are commanders of the country's military. In the attack, FARC dissidents reportedly threw grenades at and opened fire on a patrol of 30 soldiers in the early morning of Tuesday, when the armed forces were carrying out an offensive operation involving an alleged leader of a dissident group known as GAO-r, *CNN en Español* reported. President Iván Duque expressed condolences, saying that "in the face of the miserable, excruciating terrorist attack ... these irregular groups will be confronted with complete forcefulness," *El Tiempo* reported. The military order is to "increase operations against the faction that attacked the soldiers" as well to guarantee security in the southern area of Meta, Navarro

said. In related news, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime said in a report Wednesday that the amount of land in Colombia devoted to growing coca, which is used to produce cocaine, declined last year, the Associated Press reported. The total area under coca cultivation fell 9 percent last year to 154,000 hectares, according to the report. The decline came amid efforts by Colombia's military to manually eradicate coca shrubs, but despite record-breaking drug seizures, the report said cocaine production in Colombia increased slightly in 2019 to one of the highest levels in recent years.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Mining Companies Start Resuming Operations in Peru

Peru's mining companies are beginning to resume operations, implementing preventive measures that include mass testing, isolation periods and revamped shift patterns, in a bid to reach 80 percent of product capacity by the end of the month, industry officials said, *Reuters* reported today. Peru is the world's second-largest copper producer, but months of strict quarantine to curb the spread of Covid-19 led to a 42-percent drop in the country's mining output in April, *Agence France-Presse* reported. The resumption of mining operations is key for

NEWS BRIEFS

Former Mexican Governor Pleads Guilty in U.S. to Money Laundering

The former governor of the Mexican border state of Coahuila on Wednesday pleaded guilty in a Corpus Christi, Tex., courtroom to laundering money through Texas banks, the *San Antonio Express-News* reported. Jorge Juan Torres López was the interim governor of Coahuila for most of 2011, a short stint that was marred by allegations of embezzlement. He is among several officials and businessmen from that state whom U.S. authorities have accused of laundering tens of millions of dollars embezzled from the state or collected from bribes.

Argentine President Begins Voluntary Isolation as Covid Infections Rise

Argentine President Alberto Fernández has begun voluntary isolation amid a spike in coronavirus infections in the South American country, including several cases among the political elite, *The Guardian* reported Wednesday. Among them, former Buenos Aires Governor María Eugenia Vidal and Buenos Aires provincial legislator Alex Campbell have tested positive for Covid-19. Confirmed infections in Argentina have more than quadrupled over the past month, and the number of confirmed deaths increased from 373 one month ago to 878 on Wednesday.

Banco Sabadell to Use IBM's Cloud for Mexico Unit

Spain's Banco Sabadell will use the IBM Cloud for its mobile bank in Mexico, IBM said Wednesday in a statement. The bank will also use Red Hat Enterprise Linux in order to modernize its applications and provide services to its customers. IBM said it will manage Banco Sabadell's information technology infrastructure in Mexico.

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lice, and more than 15 times the number of Afro-Brazilians are killed by police in Brazil than black Americans are killed by police officers in the United States. Black Brazilians live in a genocidal country. Black Brazilian activists consider the myriad ways the state kills black people through low quality health care and little to no job prospects so that people are forced to engage in the informal economy. Police reform will not solve the problem of high unemployment and poverty in the Americas. Yet, addressing police violence is extremely important as police

officers disproportionately kill Afro-descendants. It is not clear to me that protests in Brazil under an extreme right government will lead to police reform. Marielle Franco, a black activist and politician in Rio de Janeiro who was assassinated in 2018, advocated for a demilitarization of the police. Police officers and secret squads should not have access to military-style weapons and vehicles. Lastly, as Franco advocated, economic and educational opportunities must be afforded to favela residents."

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Peru's economy, which also contracted by more than 40 percent in April, the government said this week. However, unions for mine workers in the country have expressed concern over planned shifts, which they argue are too long, and testing and protective measures, which they say need strengthening, Reuters reported.

“Around the end of June, I think we should be reaching 80 percent of production levels...”

— Pablo de la Flor

At least 41 large Peruvian firms have put in place government-mandated health protocols as they seek to reach full production capacity in the third quarter, industry sources said.

“Around the end of June, I think we should be reaching 80 percent of production levels that we were at before the quarantine,” Pablo de la Flor, executive director of the National Society of Mining, Petroleum and Energy, told Reuters this week. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the May 26 issue of the Advisor.]

BUSINESS NEWS

LATAM Airlines' Argentine Unit to Halt Operations

The Argentine unit of LATAM Airlines Group will indefinitely halt operations, canceling all domestic flights, the Chile-based airline said Wednesday, Reuters reported. The announcement marked LATAM's first major cutback since it filed for bankruptcy protection last month. The carrier stopped short Wednesday of saying it would completely close its subsidiary in Argentina, but it is unclear whether the unit will ever restart operations. While it will no longer operate domestic flights in Argentina, LATAM said it would maintain international flights that other subsidiaries manage, Reuters reported. A spokesman for the airline said

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

Can Peru Recover From a Double-Digit Drop in GDP?

Q Peru's economy could contract by 11 percent this year as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, financial services provider Banco de Crédito del Perú, or BCP, warned this month. If accurate, the forecast decline would be the country's sharpest economic fall in 100 years. What are the most important factors influencing Peru's grim economic outlook, and which sectors of the economy will be most affected? What is the government doing, and what else can it do, to help Peruvians weather the recession? What might recovery look like for Peru, and how long will it take for the economy to pick up again?

A Carlos Vargas, CEO of Vargas Alencastre, García y Asociados: “Covid-19's repercussions have severely affected Peru. In order to avoid falling into a health crisis due to the lack of medical services and supplies, as has been seen in other countries, the Peruvian government has decreed mandatory social isolation until June 28. In order to help the Peruvian population, different programs and subsidies have begun to be implemented, focused on helping independent, medium and small businesses. Such is the case of 'Reactiva Perú,' a subsidy granted by banks through public funds

focused on keeping the chain of payments of suppliers that exist in the active market, mitigating the repercussions of the virus on society. Multiple experts point out that there are five main pre-existing factors for which virus containment has not been possible: informality, logistics to stock up, massive crowds in markets, agglomerations in banks and multi-member households. Likewise, the Peruvian Institute of Economics pointed out that the halt in economic activity represented a paralysis of 50 percent of GDP. Among the sectors with the greatest impact are agriculture, fishing, mining and hydrocarbons, manufacturing, construction, commerce, transport, storage and services. Various state officials say that the economic recovery will be progressive and according to the recovery phases established in Supreme Decree No. 080-2020. This indicates that, for the moment, Peru is working at 44 percent of its economic capacity and will reach up to 80 percent at the end of the fourth phase scheduled for August. However, some experts in the field claim that the reactivation could take at least two years to recover.”

EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment above is a continuation of the [Q&A](#) published in the June 11 issue of the Advisor.

the Argentine unit will start a government process in the country before it can lay off its 1,715 employees there. LATAM in part blamed Argentina's government for its move to halt operations there. In an effort to curb the spread of Covid-19 in late April, the government of President Alberto Fernández banned all ticket sales for commercial flights until September, one of the world's strictest travel bans. In its statement on Wednesday, LATAM said it had been difficult to deal with “local industry actors” in Argentina, which “made it impossible

to foresee a viable and sustainable long-term project.” The coronavirus pandemic has hit airlines in Latin America especially hard as governments in the region have imposed strict travel bans and have also balked at providing state aid to airlines, the wire service reported. Colombian airline Avianca declared bankruptcy last month, blaming its financial problems on the “unforeseeable impact of the Covid-19 pandemic,” CNN reported. Avianca said it will continue operating through the bankruptcy process.

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A Yanilda María González, assistant professor in the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago: “Latin Americans have taken to the streets to protest ongoing deadly police violence, evoking historic protests taking place throughout the United States. But it’s far from clear whether Latin American police will face the types of reforms that have been enacted or announced by U.S. officials. My research on policing in Argentina, Brazil and Colombia shows how citizen demand-making and political competition often drive police reform outcomes. I find that when politicians do not perceive a broadly shared societal demand for reform nor face an electoral threat, they are reluctant to enact profound police reforms, which risk alienating a powerful bureaucracy whose cooperation they need. My work demonstrates that comprehensive police reforms are more likely when demands for police reform are shared by broad sectors of society—cutting across usual cleavages of race, class and geography—and when executives face a robust political opposition. These conditions led to the adoption of ambitious and far-reaching police reforms in Colombia and Argentina’s Buenos Aires province in the 1990s. In the absence of a shared societal consensus in favor of police reform and an electoral threat, politicians are unlikely to confront their police forces with challenging reforms, preferring instead to undertake symbolic measures such as firing a high-ranking official while leaving police autonomy and structures intact. Latin America’s police forces are in dire need of an overhaul, but such comprehensive reforms remain fragile even after they are enacted, often succumbing to police resistance and societal divisions. The pendulum has swung toward reform in

the United States, but it remains to be seen whether societal and political conditions in Latin American countries today will generate a similar reckoning.”

A Lucia Dammert, professor of international relations at the University of Santiago in Chile: “Police reform has been elusive in Latin America. Although being implemented for almost three decades, most initiatives have failed to increase accountability, transparency and civil control over police institutions. This is mostly due to lack of sustainable political will to implement structural

“**Most initiatives have failed to increase accountability, transparency and civil control over police institutions.”**

— Lucia Dammert

reforms, punitive populism that fuels debate strengthening police forces and even the discretionary use of violence, and strong political power of police institutions that thwart any reform process. In the post-Covid-19 era, police reforms will be harder to implement as governments need a strong force on the streets to ensure social distancing and other health-related measures in addition to crime control. Crime will increase due to economic crises, and police forces will continue to be the backbone of even weaker democracies.”

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