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## FEATURED Q&A

# How Well Is Chile's Gov't Dealing With a Rise in Migration?



The Chilean government last month sent troops to its border with Peru and Bolivia amid a rise in undocumented immigration. Soldiers are pictured with migrants in February in Chile's Tarapacá region. // Photo: Chilean Government.

**Q** Chile's government in late February sent troops to its border with Peru and Bolivia in an effort to curb a rise in undocumented immigration. Chilean Interior Minister Carolina Tohá said the government is also in talks with officials in the neighboring countries on how to strengthen border security. What has led to the rise in illegal crossings into Chile? How well is President Gabriel Boric's government responding to the increase in arrivals? How will the troop deployment affect Boric politically?

**A** Jorge Heine, research professor at the Pardee School of Global Studies at Boston University and a former cabinet minister in the Chilean government: "More than the massive rise in undocumented immigration in northern Chile that some anticipated would take place this summer, what has happened is the continuation of the steady trickle of Venezuelans, Colombians, Peruvians, Haitians and Bolivians slipping into Chile across its northern border, many doing so from Bolivia, at the rate of about 400 a day. They come to Chile driven by economic opportunity to a country with a large services sector and one of the highest per capita incomes in the region. Once inside Chile, they camp out in town squares and beaches, with the consequent disruption of daily life for regular residents and the ensuing political fallout. According to a CEP poll, immigration is among the top six most significant problems demanding government attention. In response to this, the government deployed the army to increase control at border crossings, along with the national police. Though critics, including some parliamentarians in the government benches, refer to it as a militarization

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## TODAY'S NEWS

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## Chile's Boric Reshuffles Cabinet After Failed Tax Reform Plan

Chilean President Gabriel Boric shuffled his cabinet for the second time since he took office a year ago, a move that came after lawmakers shelved his government's tax reform proposal.

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## Argentina's Economy Could Shrink by 3 points Amid Drought

A historic drought that has hit Argentina since last year could shrink the country's gross domestic product this year by three percentage points.

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## Nicaragua's Gov't Suspends Ties With the Vatican

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega ordered the closure of the country's embassy to the Vatican in Rome, as well as of the Vatican Embassy in Managua.

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Ortega // File Photo: Nicaraguan Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Mexico Slams U.S. Calls for Troops in the Country

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Friday slammed U.S. Republican legislators for calling on U.S. troops to be sent into Mexican territory following the killing of two U.S. citizens a week prior, Bloomberg News reported. "They have the arrogance to say that if we don't fight crime in Mexico, they're going to pass an initiative in Congress so the armed forces of the U.S. intervene in our territory," López Obrador said during his morning news conference. "We won't allow it. And not only are we not going to allow it, we are denouncing it." The president added that Mexican Foreign Minister Manuel Ebrard will meet with U.S. officials in Washington today to "respond directly" to the lawmakers and discuss bilateral efforts to address the fentanyl crisis more broadly. U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) last week said he would introduce a bill that would "set the stage" for the United States to send troops into Mexico, saying it was time to "get tough" on their neighboring country, The Hill reported. The comments came after four U.S. citizens were kidnapped in the border city of Matamoros in Tamaulipas state on March 3. Two of them were later found dead, after gunmen allegedly belonging to the Gulf Cartel opened fire against the victims. Five people were arrested last Thursday in connection with the incident, Reuters reported.

## Chile's Boric Shuffles Cabinet After Defeat of Tax Reform Plan

Chilean President Gabriel Boric on Friday shuffled his cabinet for the second time since he took office a year ago, a move that came after lawmakers shelved his government's tax reform proposal, Bloomberg News reported. Boric named Alberto van Klaveren as his foreign

relations minister, replacing Antonia Urrejola. He also named Jessica López as his public works minister, replacing Juan Carlos García in the post. Boric also tapped new ministers of culture, sports and science, in addition to 15 undersecretaries. "I am calling on my team to go work out in the field, to continue on the current path and to step on the gas even more," Boric said. "We aren't starting from scratch," he added. Last Wednesday, Chile's Congress shelved Boric's tax reform plan, which was seen as necessary for his aim to expand social programs, Reuters reported. The rejected measures included Chile's first wealth tax, Bloomberg News reported. Boric, who marked one year in office on Saturday, saw his approval ratings fall to just 25 percent at the end of January before they rebounded to 35 percent early this month, Reuters reported. Kenneth Bunker, a political analyst at Politico Tech Global, told Reuters that the cabinet changes may not be enough to address the government's underlying problems. "I think this government's main problem has been political and strategic, not sector-based, and these cabinet changes are sector-based," said Bunker. "So the problems the government has with sloppiness, timing, when to address topics or not ... aren't going to be solved with this cabinet change," he added.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Argentina's GDP Could Fall by 3 points Because of Drought

A historic drought that has hit Argentina since last year could shrink the country's gross domestic product this year by three percentage points, the Rosario Grains Exchange (BCR) said in a report on Friday, adding to already-soaring prices and a weakening peso currency, Reuters reported. The BCR estimates that the historic dry conditions could cut \$19 billion off the country's GDP in 2023, compared to last year, as crop forecasts for Argentina's main grains harvests have been continuously reduced in recent weeks. The government expects

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Colombian Gov't and ELN Guerrilla Advance in Ceasefire Negotiations

The government of Colombian President Gustavo Petro and the left-wing National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group have taken "the first steps" toward a bilateral, national and temporary ceasefire, the ELN's Pablo Beltrán said Friday, Reuters reported. The peace talks with the ELN, Colombia's oldest remaining rebel group, have been a priority for Petro during his first seven months in office as he has vowed to bring "total peace" to Colombia. The two parties closed their second cycle of negotiations in Mexico City last Friday.

## Nicaragua Suspends Ties With the Vatican Amid Embassy Closures

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega ordered the closure of the country's embassy to the Vatican in Rome, as well as of the Vatican Embassy in Managua, a senior Vatican source said on Sunday, Reuters reported. The suspension of diplomatic relations comes days after Pope Francis compared the Nicaraguan government to a dictatorship. Last month, Bishop Rolando Álvarez was sentenced to more than 26 years in prison in Nicaragua on charges including treason.

## Colombia's National Police Lifts Protesting Goldminers' Road Blocks

Colombia's national police on Friday lifted blockades put in place by protesters in the Andean country's Antioquia and Córdoba provinces, Reuters reported. Goldminers blocked off roads in protest of authorities destroying their machinery; disrupting movement and cutting off supplies of food and medicine in a dozen rural municipalities. The machines were endangering the lives of people and the environment, the government said.

GDP growth of 2 percent this year. The South American nation is among the world's leading grains producers and exporters, especially for staples such as soybeans, corn and wheat. The BCR report also said the drought could gravely affect state revenues, with taxes on grains exports plummeting by more than \$2.3 billion in the 2022-2023 harvesting season. Argentina has been undergoing its hottest summer on record since last November, when the first of nine heat waves was recorded, compared to the usual four or five in the summer, the Buenos Aires Times reported. Extreme heat and a lack of rainfall are expected to continue into Argentina's fall season, according to the National Meteorological Service.

## BUSINESS NEWS

# Mexican Unicorn Secures \$90 Million in Debt Financing

Mexican unicorn Clara secured \$90 million in debt financing from U.S. debt provider Accial Capital, Reuters reported Sunday. Clara, a company that offers corporate credit cards and expense management solutions, is seeking to expand its operations in Brazil and boost its customer base in the South American country from a current 2,000 to up to 5,000. The company expects to quadruple the 600 million reais (\$114.98 million) it earned in 2022. "We've been in the Brazilian market for over a year and we see the operation continues to grow even faster than the operation in Mexico did initially," Clara's chief executive, Gerry Giacomani, told Reuters. The company, which also has a branch in Colombia, is valued at \$1 billion. Brazil is expected to become its largest operation by the end of 2024. The new funding represents the second debt facility it has secured in less than a year, after having received a \$150 million debt line from Goldman Sachs in August, Reuters reported. "It is important to have the right combination, the right mix of capital," Giacomani said in response to the company's reliance on debt financing.

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of immigration policy, the government, led in this by Interior Minister Carolina Tohá, one of Boric's best evaluated cabinet members, didn't have much of a choice. For some time now, Chile, traditionally not a recipient of large numbers of undocumented immigrants, has been struggling with this situation. The government is working on a new national immigration policy, expected to be announced in the next few months. According to one estimate, there are half a million undocumented immigrants in Chile, a country with a total population of 19 million."

**A Peter M. Siavelis, professor of politics and international affairs at Wake Forest University:** "In the last five years, immigration to Chile has skyrocketed, with the country's foreign-born residents now comprising almost 10 percent of the population, up from only 1 percent in the early 1990s. Most immigrants are arriving from Venezuela, where deep economic crisis has caused a refugee and humanitarian catastrophe, with simultaneous political unrest and economic instability in Peru, Bolivia and Haiti pushing more undocumented immigrants toward Chile's borders. Government officials point to a dramatic rise in human trafficking, and the drug and weapons trade on Chile's northern frontier as the rationale for the troop mobilization. President Gabriel Boric's decision to send troops came as a surprise to many only one year into his term, as he campaigned on a progressive platform, citing immigration as a human right. Still, the immigration explosion has been accompanied by a rise in crime—and particularly a type of violent crime unfamiliar to most Chileans. In the minds of Chileans, and prompted by xenophobic narratives promoted by conservative politicians, the rise of violence is often tied to this new wave of immigration. Because Chileans consistently cite crime and violence as the most important issues facing the country, the government ignores immigration at its own peril. Still,

the policies will not likely stem the flow of immigrants as they seek new and clandestine ways to enter the country. In this sense, Boric will gain political points in the war of perception, while doing little to stem the flow of immigrants that will keep immigration on the table as a long-term hot button issue in Chilean politics."

**A Martina Cociña-Cholaky, post-doctoral researcher at Universidad Estatal de O'Higgins in Chile:** "In Chile, since 2018 there has been a significant increase in reports of entries through unauthorized crossings. This became more acute in 2021, with more than 56,000 registered. Most are Venezuelans, who since 2018 have constituted the largest community of foreigners in Chile. There are several reasons for the increase in irregular migration, one being the requirement of consular visas in 2018 and 2019 for Venezuelans and Haitians which, due to their scarce granting (around 13 percent), have hindered their regular entry, making the crossings more precarious. Barriers to regular access have intensified during the pandemic, when mobility was restricted. Another factor is the serious crises in countries such as Venezuela, which have had an impact on forced displacement. In spite of this, Venezuelans have not been granted greater humanitarian protection; moreover, refuge as a protection mechanism has been almost nonexistent in Chile in recent years. Irregular entries to Chile concentrate on the northern border with Peru and Bolivia, an extensive and porous territory that is difficult to control. President Boric, since his inauguration in 2022, among other measures to manage mobility, has extended the 'Constitutional State of Emergency Exception' in the northern macro-zone, enabling the armed forces and police to implement strategies to strengthen border deployment, increasing surveillance resources. This year, with the new critical infrastructure law, troops have been deployed there to carry out identity checks, searches

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and arrests. The decision to extend public order functions to the armed forces, an untrained agency to deal with human mobility, may entail a high political cost to Boric's government."

**A** **Peter DeShazo, visiting professor of Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies at Dartmouth College and former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs:** "It is a cruel irony that while some 450,000 Venezuelans have migrated to Chile to escape the havoc wreaked by the Maduro regime and more are still attempting to enter, during the Pinochet dictatorship in the 1970s, then-democratic Venezuela took in thousands of Chileans as political refugees or economic migrants. Migration from Venezuela, combined with migrants from Peru, Haiti and elsewhere, has increased the percentage of the foreign-born population in Chile by a factor of four in just 10 years. Traditionally a country of low immigration, this sudden influx of migrants is generating domestic pushback and constitutes a difficult humanitarian, political and policy challenge for the Boric administration. Polling shows rising crime rates and insecurity to be an important concern of Chileans, with migration—however unfairly—often linked in the public mind to crime. It is no wonder, therefore, that a recent poll showed 93 percent approval of the administration's decision to send military personnel to the northern border areas to reinforce civilian authorities. Boric's point person in this initiative—Interior Minister Carolina Tohá—is one of the most prominent and well-regarded cabinet members and her presence at the border sent two key signals: government commitment to 'regularize' migration and civilian control over a seemingly militarized response. Boric himself visited the North last week. His recent moves on migration appear to be improving his low approval ratings as he marks one year in office."

**A** **Patricio Navia, clinical professor of liberal studies at New York University and professor of political science at Universidad Diego Portales in Chile:** "With the lockdowns during Covid, many immigrants who previously entered the country legally via land started to enter the country illegally through the border with Peru and Bolivia. As Chile adopted stricter requirements for the entry of Venezuelans and Haitians, when the border was open, many immigrants continued to enter the country illegally. The Boric administration has struggled to offer an adequate response to the problem. After those who are now in government severely criticized former President Piñera's response to immigration, the current left-wing government finds itself in the same difficult predicament as the previous right-wing government. Whereas the administration wants to control the border and seeks to require all immigrants to respect the law, the reality is that many immigrants attempt to enter Chile illegally, knowing that they will not be easily deported once they are in the country. The government has now deployed the armed forces to the border, but that will have little effect. The armed forces will not use lethal means to prevent immigrants from crossing the border. Their presence will only make the illegal entry more dangerous and will provide opportunity for illegal smugglers to expand their business. Chile is one of the most popular destinations for illegal immigrants in South America. Politicians need to replace rhetoric with pragmatism to secure the border and design a mechanism to control migration. As elsewhere, Chileans welcome immigrants, but they are increasingly worried about the rapid growth of the immigrant population and about the state's lack of capacity to control the influx of immigrants. The conditions are brewing for a strong anti-immigrant movement to make electoral gains and to stoke fears and discrimination against immigrants."

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