

## PEACE IN THE REGION WITHOUT WAR

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At the close of 2019, and, thus the close of the decade, the question of peace in Latin America comes heavy to the ear. In the last year, Colombians have fought to see a peace agreement implemented. Mexicans have elected a new leader to keep waging an old drug war. Venezuelans face a constitutional crisis amidst economic freefall. Bolivians, Hondurans and Nicaraguans at least have called on their presidents to resign. Protests have arisen in almost every country in the region.

Unfortunately, results from the latest measurements of peacefulness in Latin America suggest that current

events should come as no surprise. However, the data are not entirely straightforward. On conventional indicators of peacefulness —those that capture armed conflict— Latin America does well, and certainly much better than it would have on these metrics just 25 years ago. Today, Latin America is the only region in the world not engaged in war and, consequently, is more peaceful than the global average on several indicators of ongoing conflict and militarization. And yet, Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico are amongst the 25 least peaceful countries in the world. The number of people killed by homicide in Mexico is the same as that of those killed by armed conflict in Yemen. Millions of Latin Americans are displaced; the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that, in 2018, “Venezuelans fled their homes at an average of 5.000 people a day (UNHCR, 2018: 3).” And terrorism —a form of violence highly correlated with civil war— is escalating in the region.

This article uses the latest years’ worth of data and research from four projects by the Institute for Econom-

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<sup>1</sup> The opinions and analysis herein are those of the author, and do not reflect the position of the Institute for Economics & Peace. However, much of the research presented here comes directly from the 2019 Global Peace Index and the 2019 Global Terrorism Index, of which Ms. Hagerty is the contributing author for regional analysis, and various editions of the annual Mexico Peace Index, of which Ms. Hagerty is the lead author and researcher. Ms. Hagerty would like to acknowledge Thomas Morgan, Senior Research Fellow, for the data analysis behind the Global Peace Index and Global Terrorism Index, and Dr. David Hammond, Director of Research and Paulo Pinto, Research Fellow, for that of the Positive Peace Index.

ics & Peace (IEP) to understand the paradox of peace in Latin America, exploring and contextualizing the trends identified in key indicators.

### Measuring peace

The Global Peace Index (GPI), produced annually by the IEP, measures the peacefulness of 163 countries using 23 indicators organized into three domains of peace: militarization, ongoing conflict and safety and security. The GPI is the world's leading measure of peacefulness both because of its widespread use and because it takes a multidimensional approach to measuring improvements and deteriorations in peacefulness. As is especially the case in Latin America, 'peace' is no longer understood as simply the end of war. While the GPI recognizes that armed conflict, interpersonal violence and terrorism have unique properties, by measuring them using different indicators, the peace index captures the fact that all forms of violence impact our experiences of peaceful lives.

The GPI categorizes Latin American countries in two of its nine world regions: South America and Central America and the Caribbean, which includes Mexico because the country's experience of peacefulness is much more similar to its southern neighbors than its northern. The full list of Latin American countries measured by the index is included in table 1.

Building upon its work developing the first comprehensive measure of global peacefulness, the IEP publishes three other indices that are called upon here: the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), which offers an annual analysis of data from the Global Terrorism Database produced by the University of Maryland; the Positive Peace Index (PPI), which, rather than levels of violence, measures the attitudes, institutions and structures of peaceful societies; and the Mexico Peace Index (MPI), which uses a similar methodology to that of the GPI to measure peace at the subnational level in Mexico.

The measurement period for the GPI is March to March of each year; as such, the 2019 results reflect events from March 2018 to March 2019. Similarly, the other indices capture events of the year prior to their publication. Thus, most of the data discussed in this article is current to 2018. However, the precise peace and conflict events captured in the indices are less telling than the overall trends and the interpretation of the data. If anything, Latin America's results from 2018 make plain how the region got where it is today.

**TABLE 1**

<b>CENTRAL AMERICA &amp; THE CARIBBEAN</b>				
<b>REGIONAL RANK</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>OVERALL SCORE, 2019</b>	<b>CHANGE IN SCORE, 2018 TO 2019</b>	<b>GLOBAL RANK</b>
1	Costa Rica	1,706	-0,06	33
2	Panama	1,804	-0,02	47
3	Jamaica	2,038	-0,041	83
4	Dominican Republic	2,041	-0,032	84
5	Haiti	2,052	-0,002	87
6	Cuba	2,073	0,027	91
7	Trinidad and Tobago	2,094	0,041	93
8	El Salvador	2,262	-0,01	113
9	Guatemala	2,264	0,054	114
10	Nicaragua	2,312	0,377	120
11	Honduras	2,341	0,065	123
12	Mexico	2,6	-0,04	140
<b>REGIONAL AVERAGE</b>		<b>2,132</b>	<b>0,03</b>	
<b>SOUTH AMERICA</b>				
<b>REGIONAL RANK</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>OVERALL SCORE, 2019</b>	<b>CHANGE IN SCORE, 2018 TO 2019</b>	<b>GLOBAL RANK</b>
1	Chile	1,634	-0,012	27
2	Uruguay	1,711	-0,043	34
3	Ecuador	1,98	0,018	71
4	Argentina	1,989	0,034	75
5	Peru	2,016	0,034	80
6	Bolivia	2,044	0,011	85
7	Paraguay	2,055	0,054	88
8	Guyana	2,075	0,034	92
9	Brazil	2,271	0,112	116
10	Colombia	2,661	-0,068	143
11	Venezuela	2,671	0,028	144
<b>REGIONAL AVERAGE</b>		<b>2,101</b>	<b>0,018</b>	

### Results in the region

The 2019 GPI showed the first improvement in global peacefulness in five years (IEP, 2019a). Overall, the world became almost one percent more peaceful, based on improvements in 86 out of 163 countries. However, results were not distributed evenly around the globe. While the Middle East began to recover from a decade of war and unrest, and Europe and Russia reaped the benefits of improvements in the neighborhood, the Americas have had a reversal of trend. Central America and the Caribbean had the largest deterioration of any region in the world from 2018 to 2019, followed by North America and then South America. But, while the deterioration in Central America's average score was largely driven by the severe breakdown in peace in Nicaragua, South America saw a more widespread decline, with eight out of 11 countries becoming less peaceful in 2019. Furthermore, two Latin American countries suffered deteriorations that rank them amongst the five largest in the world: Nicaragua and Brazil.

Nicaragua fell 54 places in the GPI rankings from 2018 to 2019. The deterioration in Nicaragua's score was so severe that it pulled down with it the regional average for Central America and the Caribbean.

The report gives the following for Central America's, and Nicaragua's, results:

Seven Central American countries improved while five deteriorated, but, as is typical of breakdowns in peacefulness, the falls were larger than the improvements.

Civil unrest, violent crime and border disputes characterized the last year in the region. Protestors have called for the resignation of presidents in both Nicaragua and Honduras. Refugees fleeing violence in the region have congregated on Mexico's southern border with Guatemala, seeking access to Mexico and the United States.

...[P]eaceful protests against social security reforms [in Nicaragua] were met with police violence in April of 2018, and conflict between the government and opposition escalated over the following year. At least 325 people were killed, and protestors have called for the resignation of former Sandinista leader President Daniel Ortega, who has held the office since 2006. Economic collapse in Venezuela has exacerbated the situation, with drastically diminished aid to Nicaragua forcing cuts to government benefits and eroding political and economic stability (IEP, 2019a: 14).

Brazil recorded the fifth largest fall globally, dropping ten places just last year and thus impacting the average for South America. The southern continent recorded the following developments:

Only Colombia, Uruguay and Chile improved in South America last year, while the rest of the region deteriorated. Venezuela is now the least peaceful country in South America, and Brazil recorded the fifth largest fall globally, with nine indicators deteriorating and only one improving.

Safety and security are the chief challenges in the region, which is the only continent free from war —exempting drug wars. The

upside for safety and security were marked reductions in the homicide rate in Uruguay, Ecuador, Argentina and Guyana. Venezuela and Colombia also recorded reductions, but they are still amongst the 10 highest rates in the world.

...[P]opulation displacement and political instability escalated significantly in the region, not least because of turmoil in Venezuela. Venezuelan migrants have been fleeing economic collapse, putting pressure on their neighbors, especially post-conflict Colombia. After years of shortages and hyperinflation, President Nicolás Maduro's legitimacy was directly challenged in January of 2019 when head of the National Assembly Juan Guaidó declared himself president. Despite international support for Guaidó, Maduro has retained power, with the backing of the military, and at the time of writing, the political crisis remained unresolved.

South America outperforms the global average in Militarization and Ongoing Conflict, although the latter deteriorated slightly due to violence and political turmoil in Brazil. Intensity of internal conflict escalated along with the rhetoric exchanged between President Jair Bolsonaro's right-wing *Partido Social Liberal* and the leftist *Partido dos Trabalhadores*. Meanwhile, conflicts between rival criminal organizations led to intensifying drug-trade related violence (IEP, 2019a: 17).

### **Wars with no armies**

Results in Latin America typify global trends. Globally, spending on militaries, the volume of weapons trading and the average rate of armed services personnel have all fallen substantially since the end of the Cold War. Wars between countries are on the decline, while formal alliances and diplomatic exchanges have

been steadily rising for almost a century. The number of soldiers killed in the last 25 years accounts for just three percent of battle deaths over the last 100 (IEP, 2018).

In Latin America, weapons imports have declined and contributions to UN peacekeeping operations have improved. Over the last decade, military spending has declined in more countries than not. South America's armed forces personnel rate has been steadily declining since 2008. Upon the ratification of the Colombian peace accord in 2016, Latin America became the first world region free from war. And yet, it is getting less peaceful.

While violence between armies has fallen, violence that affects civilians has risen. For the first time in history, one out of every 100 people on the planet are displaced by violence. Global deaths from terrorism reached the highest level recorded in 2014, and roughly half of these were civilians (IEP, 2018). On average, more than half of Latin Americans report not feeling safe walking alone in their neighborhoods, and their reported trust in police and security officers is the lowest in the world, despite the fact that rates of police officers and incarceration are amongst the highest. Despite recent progress, Latin America remains home to many of the highest homicide and violent crime rates in the world. In 2017, one out of every

three Mexican adults was the victim of a crime (IEP, 2019c), and the number of people killed by homicide in that country is the same as that of those killed by war in Yemen. That is the paradox of peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Homicide and violent crime are typically studied under the heading of “interpersonal” violence. Even in Mexico, where it is taken for granted that the trend in the homicide rate is driven by organized crime, official data do not distinguish between acts of interpersonal and interorganizational violence. Brazil is still counted in the ‘continent without war,’ while renewed drug-trade related violence came because a truce between the country’s dominant criminal organizations broke down in late 2016, leading to roughly 250 fatalities in the year following. Several groups in the northern state of Ceará renewed their truce in early 2019, in order to unite in attacks against security forces and infrastructure.

While tools like the GPI do require that homicides be counted separately from deaths from terrorism, which are counted separately from deaths in war, it remains important to consider whether and to what degree these forms of violence are actually distinct. On the one hand, it is undeniable that levels of truly interpersonal violence, such as domestic violence, are far too high. On the other, the casualties classed as homicide and

violent crime in many Latin American countries share characteristics of war: violence is frequently perpetrated by large organizations with names, political and economic goals, and interstate or international operations; trends in violence are responsive to governments’ political, economic and security strategies; similar factors lead disaffected youth to join militant organizations; acts of terrorism are increasingly common; and, in some cases, the level and frequency of violence rises to those of countries recognized to be in “official” wars.

**One thing leads to another:  
criminality, political violence and  
terrorism**

Of course, not every country in the region is facing violence on this scale. Rather, the similarities are sufficient to draw cautionary tales. The useful takeaway is that categories of violence are rarely fixed. GPI results clearly show that safety and security —as opposed to ongoing conflict or militarization— are the main challenges to peace in Latin America. However, it is useful to note that the GPI’s safety and security score includes both criminality and another rising form of violence that combines criminal behavior with political intent: terrorism.

The IEP’s 2019 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) showed unprecedented results for Latin America. Terrorism was on the rise throughout the region in 2018, which may come as a sur-

prise given the contemporary association between terrorism and religious extremism. However, terrorism is a tactic used by many ideological projects, and political terrorism, on the far right and the far left, reared its head in Latin America last year. And importantly, terrorism is highly correlated with civil war, making it an indicator to take note of.

Central and South America were the only two world regions to see escalation in the impact of terrorism in 2018. On average, the rest of the world improved. Of the 212 deaths from terrorism recorded in Central America and the Caribbean from 2002 to 2018, 13 per cent of those occurred in the last year of the study. Six out of the 11 countries in South America experienced worsening terrorism in 2018, resulting in the highest regional score yet recorded.

The IEP's research portfolio offers the most insight into dynamics in Mexico, and it is the contagion of violence observed there, in the context of region-wide results, that is cause for concern. Peace in Mexico has been deteriorating since 2015, with the homicide rate reaching historic highs year after year. Mexico has the highest score possible on the GPI's internal conflicts fought indicator, based on conflicts between the government and multiple criminal organizations. The IEP's 2018 Mexico Peace Index (MPI) analyzed patterns of violence from 2015 to 2017,

finding that, in addition to an escalation in the decade-long drug war, the country was experiencing a concurrent rise in general lawlessness — crime and violence not necessarily related to the illicit economy (IEP, 2019c). The following year, 2018, Mexico experienced unprecedented levels of both terrorism and political violence.

The GTI reports that:

Mexico recorded a 58 per cent increase in terrorism in 2018, with a noticeable increase in attacks on politicians. There were 22 terrorist attacks last year, with a total of 19 fatalities. Attacks on politicians historically have been rare with only three recorded in the 15 years before 2018. However, the 2018 elections in Mexico were particularly violent, with at least 850 acts of political violence [terrorism or otherwise] recorded during the campaign period (IEP, 2019b: 44).

While the challenge of building peace in Mexico was never simple, it has now become clear that a security emphasis on drug trafficking is far too narrow. Unfortunately, the GTI suggests that increasing politicization of violence is not confined to Mexico.

Nicaragua recorded unprecedented levels of terrorism in 2018, amidst political instability, civil unrest and criminal violence. None of the 2018 perpetrators were known terrorist organizations, but right-wing extremism may have played a role in the rise in this type of violence. Most attacks were political in nature.

...[V]iolence by Colombia's armed groups has risen as progress in implementing the

peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, by its acronym in Spanish) has stalled in recent years. In 2018, FARC dissidents perpetrated 34 attacks, killing 24 people. In 2019, a group of FARC commanders announced a rearmament (Janetsky, 2019). The Ejército de Liberación Nacional, which has not yet signed a peace agreement with the government, but which did agree to a ceasefire in 2017, perpetrated 87 attacks in 2018, killing 48 people.

Bolivia had been free of terrorism since 2012 until two bombings in the space of three days killed 12 people and injured 60. The perpetrators of the attacks were unknown.

...[A]ttacks in Chile more than doubled in 2018 to 45, although no deaths were recorded.

Brazil recorded seven attacks and three fatalities in 2018, making it the worst year since 2002. The three deaths occurred when unknown assailants fired on the vehicle of councilor Marielle Franco, killing her and her driver, and one month later shot another man who was thought to be a witness to the Franco's murder. Five out of seven attacks were by firearm, consistent with the high levels of gun violence in Brazil.

Ecuador recorded four attacks last year, up from two in 2017. Two were bombings by unknown perpetrators, but the other two were perpetrated by the FARC, involving the abduction of five people on two separate occasions in attempts to trade hostages for arrested group members. All five hostages were killed (IEP, 2019b: 41).

### **An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure**

Rising criminality, terrorism and political violence have important policy implications, as the peace-

building infrastructure for addressing these dynamics is far less developed. Colombia is pursuing a traditional path to peace; although progress has come in fits and starts, there exists international precedent and a roadmap for transitioning an insurgent army toward a legitimate political party. The crux of that process is dismantling and reconstructing the organizational scaffolding that surrounds otherwise legitimate grievances (the rights to free speech, land tenure, and a decent livelihood, for example). However, a conventional peace process is unlikely to be sufficient where multiple organizations as well as unaffiliated individuals are perpetrating multiple forms of violence, often with relative impunity.

The answer —supported by two final insights from the IEP's peace data— is to meet a suite of problems with a suite of solutions.

The IEP's research has consistently found that breakdowns in peace are swifter and more severe than improvements —almost without exception. Thus, the prevention imperative is more than just rhetoric. Recovering from violence takes years —often decades. And so, every act of violence that can be prevented must be. Criminal organizations must be prevented from growing. Young Latin Americans must be deterred from joining gangs, cartels and violent political movements. Would-be terrorists must be stopped from acquir-

ing weapons. To know how to do that, we can look to the common characteristics of the world's most peaceful societies.

### **Positive peace in the region**

While violence escalated across Latin America from 2018 to 2019, there was a corresponding deterioration in positive peace, or the attitudes, institutions and structures that create peaceful societies. Negative peace, which is the concept measured by the GPI, is defined by the absence of violence; positive peace captures the presence of the social characteristics that reduce the number of conflicts and grievances in society and support the nonviolent resolution of conflicts that do arise.

The IEP measures positive peace within an eight-pillar framework, developed on the basis of statistical analysis of the common characteristics of the world's most peaceful countries. Broadly, the world's most peaceful modern societies have:

1. Well-functioning governments;
2. Sound business environments;
3. Low levels of corruption;
4. High levels of human capital;
5. Acceptance of the rights of others;
6. Equitable distribution of resources;
7. Good relations with neighbors, domestically and internationally, and
8. Free flow of information (IEP, 2019d).

While the IEP was able to demonstrate this empirically within the last decade, the concept of positive peace is not new to peace studies. It is notable that peacebuilding practitioners have long advocated for peace processes that address “root causes,” that is, going deeper than the stated grievances of a conflict to understand what is not working in society. Even more so, where violence cannot be ended at a peace table, the underlying structure of society becomes more important. Thus, positive peace is particularly relevant in contemporary Latin America.

The IEP's 2019 Positive Peace Index (PPI) shows long-term progress for the region in important structural aspects of positive peace, such as gender equality, life expectancy, and GDP per capita (despite a few recent setbacks). These indicators of development and modernization are foundational for highly functioning societies, including those with low levels of violence. However, attitudinal and institutional indicators in Central and South America have deteriorated substantially over the last decade. Protestors in Latin American countries are not just suddenly sick of corruption, political polarization and income inequality; global datasets show these factors have been worsening for years.

Divergent trends in the components of positive peace can be a risk factor for escalating violence, due to the

way that peacefulness plays out in a society (IEP, 2019d). Peace is often thought of as a state of being, albeit one that is hard to pin down. In reality, however, in depth studies of peaceful—and unpeaceful—societies show that what we call peacefulness is the manifestation of multiple, interlocking social successes. For example, corruption is strongly associated with high levels of violence, to the degree that it is thought to have a corrosive effect on society. If the antidotes to corruption are transparency and the rule of law, institutional accountability processes and attitudes toward press freedom and government openness must support legal and societal structures.

Effectively, positive peace contains unpeaceful behavior, whereas weaknesses or imbalances create space in society for violations—be they corruption, exclusion, theft or acts of direct violence. If these violations mount, they can become grievances shared by large groups. And grievances along group identity lines too often become armed conflict. The puzzle in Latin America is why imbalanced positive peace manifests as criminality and, to a lesser but rising extent, terrorism. However, when understood this way, it is easier to make sense of the data: strong militaries and large police forces leave little room for the resurgence of the armed insurrections the region saw in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. But underemployment, informal markets, and corrup-

tion create space for organized crime, while social exclusion and economic inequality encourage political violence, from protests to terrorism.

Importantly, negative and positive peace are not so named because one is bad and the other is good; both realities together form a sustainable peace. Rather, negative peace captures an important absence—of violence and the fear of violence—, while positive peace represents the presence of a rich tapestry of protective mechanisms. It is art and culture supported by high-functioning and fair institutions. It is social and economic freedom embedded in safety and respect for the rights of others. It is each of these components, as numerous and diverse as the communities they must serve, supporting and reinforcing the others in a system of peacefulness.

This conception of positive peace holds great potential in a Latin American context, where tradition and modern movements alike are well-practiced at filling social and cultural spaces. Moreover, peace, stability, respect for human rights and effective governance based on the rule of law, as stated in Sustainable Development Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda, are fundamental for achieving the sustainable development Latin Americans are so adamantly demanding in the streets.

Many examples can be found of citizens and institutions using the hard lessons of not-so-distant history to strengthen the foundations of peacefulness earned at the turn of the century.

The Colombian peace accord takes such a systemic view; its 102 provisions collectively addressed all eight pillars of positive peace, and most of the agreement's stipulations targeted more than one. The national dataset recording the experiences of victims in Mexico, thus enabling research and evidence-based policymaking, was first implemented by civil society advocates (Villagrán, 2013: 123). The "constitutional thread" preserving the Bolivian government at the time of writing was found by a group of religious and political leaders committed to preventing martial law (Kurmanaev and Del Castillo, 2019). If such levels of professionalism, leadership and vision can rise to current challenges, the region can return to its path of progress and continue to leave each form of violence in the past.

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