

Forum: Special Political and Decolonization Committee
Issue: The question of civil unrest and political instability in Latin America
Student Officer: Emmanuel Tasos
Position: Co-Chair

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Dear delegates,

My name is Emmanuel Tasos and I am honored to serve as the one of the two Co-Chairs of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, also known as the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly. I was also present in last year's PS-MUN and I am thankful to have been accepted as a Student Officer at this year's conference. This will be my second time serving as a Student Officer.

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee greatly interests me because of the dire political problems that plague our world: the conflicts between countries are issues that require a great deal of careful consideration but are also multifaceted: there are many different factors to consider and demand in-depth analysis, which can produce fruitful solutions.

As a Student Officer, I have been entrusted with the task to help you research the topics of the Agenda, form your resolutions and promote your countries' policies. Which is exactly what I aim to do with this study guide: to give you the necessary information on the topic for the resolutions and the conference as a whole. Therefore, I sincerely hope it proves helpful. The civil unrest in Latin America involves a great number of countries and conflicts and therefore you should successfully aim to propose the most effective solutions possible.

I am looking forward to meeting you all at the conference.

Best regards,

Emmanuel Tasos

INTRODUCTION

The region of Latin America has long been plagued with problems of civil unrest and political instability. Since the end of the Second World War, the region has experienced a large range of problems, from economic crises to coup d'états and to drug-related activities. Even today, there is a high risk of civil unrest and political instability, in no small part due to the relative ineffectiveness of certain measures or long-standing internal issues. Many Latin American countries already have serious problems with their economies, criminal organizations and political stability, among others, which seriously affect them to this day. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) produced a report which, for 2014, predicted the following:

- Argentina, Bolivia and Venezuela are among the countries that are at a very high risk of experiencing civil unrest in the forthcoming years.
- Brazil, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and Peru are among the countries that are at a high risk of experiencing civil unrest in the foreseeable future.

These results show the risk of potentially violent protests that exists right now in the region, which may hamper the further economic growth of the region and actually hurt the countries even more.

The issue is a multifaceted one, as the civil unrest is caused by many factors simultaneously. Hence, since Latin America has started to become a significant economic and industrial center, it is an imperative to solve these problems as quickly as possible to prevent the occurrence of any further problems in the near future with political instability or violent protests.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Latin America

The area known collectively as Latin America contains all American countries speaking Romance languages (Spanish and Portuguese). This region involves almost the entirety of South America and a large part of Central America and the Spanish-speaking islands of the Caribbean.

Civil unrest

A civil unrest is a situation in which many of the people in a country are angry and hold protests or act violently. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

USAN

An acronym that stands for Union of South American Nations (also commonly known as UNASUR based on its Portuguese name). Its main purpose is to unify the South American countries and to help solve any problem that may arise, especially in the economic sector. Its subsidiary bodies are Mercosur and CAN (Andean Community of Nations), two economic bodies that help the countries of South America forge economic alliances with each other and deal with any economic or social problem they may face.

Cacerolazo

A type of demonstration in which people march with casseroles (hence the name) and bang them in protest. It has been performed on many occasions around the world.

Coup d'état

A coup d'état is a sudden attempt by a small group of people to take over the government usually through violence. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The civil unrest in Latin America has manifested itself in many of the countries in the region. The area has long been plagued by a string of problems, including the actions of criminal organizations and drug dealing, poverty, economic issues and political instability (especially corruption problems). This study guide will focus on more recent examples of civil unrest (an arbitrary time frame being the past 30 years), while for organizational reasons, the following system will be used to denote the source(s) of the problem for each country:

Color of index	Cause of civil unrest
***	Criminal activities & drug-related incidents
***	Economic issues, poverty & living standards
***	Political instability, corruption and political dissidence

Criminal activities and drug dealing in Latin America

The area of Latin America serves as a host for a number of criminal groups, which operate on a regional basis and perform illegal actions for profit. Perhaps the most important and influential criminal group operating in any Latin American country right now is the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army), a guerrilla army that has been fighting against the Colombian government since its inception in 1964. The FARC and the government have been engaged in a bloody conflict for many years without any permanent cessation, something that has greatly reduced the trust of the people in the government and led to many protests, both against the government and against the FARC. Many other criminal groups enjoy great political power in other countries of the region, such as in certain provinces of Mexico, Honduras and Peru or the “mara” street gangs in El Salvador, where the government is usually unable to deal with such groups.

Another issue related to criminal activities in the region is the illegal drug dealing rampant in the region; most drug cartels active right now have their bases in Latin American countries, especially in Mexico, Colombia and Peru, where the greatest

amounts of illegal substances are grown and cultivated. These areas are one of the main spots of opiate drugs (heroin and morphine) production and marijuana cultivation and exportation around the world. The extremely developed drug trade is also one of the main reasons behind the elevated crime rates in general in most of these countries; in many countries, drug cartels resort to murders even quite often involving civilians, while even killing fields are not an uncommon phenomenon. In Mexico, for instance, the government has waged a bloody war against the drug cartels, leading to thousands of deaths and many protests against both the cartels, with the most recent being the protest over the 43 missing students in early 2014.

Political instability in Latin America

The history of Latin America involves many instances of political instability. Ever since the Second World War, the region has experienced many conflicts, as the area served as a great military asset for the USA and the USSR during the Cold War. These two super-powers exerted a great influence on the region, trying to gain allies; this led to the fragmentation of the region and the creation of many new states. This separation, however, also led to the existence of many authoritarian and military regimes, as well as a great deal of political instability even in times with democracy, since there are often huge disagreements about the policies of the different politicians who are in power.

Historically, the region has seen great changes in constitutions, regimes and heads of state who had varying success, whether these changes were enforced through a coup d'état or peacefully through elections. Most of the countries in the region have experienced at least some sort of military ruling or corruption scandals at times of democracy. Some coup d'états and subsequent dictatorships of the region are infamous even today, such as the reigns of Augusto Pinochet in Chile and Fidel Castro in Cuba. Other countries that have experienced long periods of dictatorships or military reigns are Brazil, Nicaragua, Peru, Panama, Haiti, Suriname and Venezuela.

Economic issues and poverty in Latin America

The region of Latin America has, for a very long time, suffered from various economic problems. These economic problems date their way back to the 1980s, when Mexico started exhibiting economic problems. The devaluation of the Mexican economy led to the devaluation and mistrust in other Latin American countries as well, resulting in serious economic problems for most Latin American countries ever since. Even today, a large part of the population lives in relative or extreme poverty, there is a very high index of social inequality and not all people have access to basic public services. This lack of basic amenities has led to many demonstrations against the governments. However, some countries have managed to lift themselves out of this situation, e.g. Brazil (which exhibited tremendous growth and now focuses on combating hunger and social inequality) and Costa Rica.

Case studies of Latin America

Here are some case studies of Latin American nations that have experienced problems with political instability and civil unrest in the past 30 years, as well as some other significant incidents:

Argentina *** **

The major causes behind all cases of civil unrest observed in Argentina are the economic situation of the country and corruption of the country officials. The first case where a massive civil unrest occurred was the 1989 riots, which were a protest by the people against the hyperinflation measures imposed on many commercial products and the food shortage noted in many areas of the country. After a few years, this unrest was followed by the 1999-2002 economic crisis and near-bankruptcy; the country was plagued with hyperinflation and burdened by a huge debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The economic remission led to the December 2001 riots, which lasted for a few days and eventually, combined with increased disapproval of the ruling government, led to President Fernando de la Rúa's resignation the following year.

There has been further civil unrest in recent years against the reign of the current President, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (pictured here), who succeeded her husband after serving as First Lady from 2003 to 2007. Her reign was initially well-received, as she continued her husband's policies that led the country out of the economic crisis and made the Argentinean economy flourish once again. However, as time has progressed, the situation in Argentina has started to deteriorate in many levels, including allegations of corruption of officials and human rights violations against the government of Fernandez. Among the more recent protests are the 8N demonstration and the 2012 cacerolazo against the



measures taken by Fernandez. The country now finds itself in the middle of another, more serious economic crisis, due to their inability to repay their loans to the IMF. This new economic situation has again led to protests in the region and Fernandez's popularity has fallen even further, amid allegations of corruption of highly-ranked officials of the Argentinean government.

Brazil *** **

Like most Latin American countries, Brazil has also had issues with political instability since the second half of the 20th century. The country was ruled by the military between 1964 and 1985 before finally establishing a democratic regime through elections. However, the governments of José Sarney, Fernando Collor de Mello and Itamar Franco that followed were plagued by corruption scandals and did little to help the country recover. In 1995, when Fernando Henrique Cardoso was elected as President, he introduced the Plano Real, which changed the official currency of Brazil to the Real (which is still used today) and greatly improved the situation of the Brazilian economy, solving the problems of hyperinflation and poverty for many regions of the country. Both Cardoso and the President that succeeded him, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, implemented measures that helped the economy of Brazil grow substantially, to the

point of rivaling European superpowers such as Germany and France and being a part of the BRICS group of quickly developing countries. However, despite the large economic growth, Brazil still has issues with social inequality and public services, which it still tries to eliminate.

Thanks to its newfound political stability, Brazil did not experience any serious civil unrest for more than 20 years until recently, when the Brazilian Spring took place in 2013. The Brazilian Spring (also known as the Vinegar Revolution (Revolta do Vinagre) because the marchers carried vinegar as a homemade antidote against tear gases and pepper spray) was a series of protests that

took place in the summer of 2013, starting out as a statement against the increased ticket fare for buses in many cities proposed by the



government of President Dilma Rousseff. However, it then escalated and led to the discussion and protest about a number of more issues, including the over-budgeting of the major sports events Brazil was assigned to organize in the following years (the 2013 Confederations Cup, the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics) and the lack of certain living standards in many regions. The protests ended in July 2013, right after President Rousseff decided to implement the measures the protesters were asking for, including the following:

- Criminalization of embezzlement and corruption from parliament members (pending as of 2015)
- Reduction of public transport prices
- Elimination of public transport taxes
- Control of inflation through a National Pact
- Dedication of petroleum royalties to education and health

Guatemala *** **

Guatemala has also experienced problems with political instability and protests. There have been many coup d'états in the country, the most significant of which arguably was the US-backed coup against Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 and the subsequent installation of US-backed governments for the next 40 years. Coming out of the 1996 Civil War, the country was in a dire economic and political situation and required significant economic help. As part of the reforms required, the Guatemalan government decided to maintain close ties with the US and Mexico in the hopes of achieving economic growth. However, despite the efforts of the government, there still are drug and crime problems in the country, as well as economic issues that still need to be solved. The country was also rocked by the Jueves Negro demonstrations in July 2003, amidst allegations of corruption, embezzlement, violence and crime. The government has since created the CICIG (International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala), which is dedicated to eliminating criminal activity by drug cartels or other groups in Guatemala.

Honduras *** **

Honduras has had a number of issues with political instability, following the example of other Latin American countries. The most recent example of this was the 2009 coup against President Manuel Zelaya and the installation of a military government, which has so far prevented Honduras from having a fully democratic government.

Furthermore, the country is still facing poverty issues and an overall lack of certain basic amenities for its citizens.

There are also many criminal organizations operating in Honduras on a regular basis; these groups are one of the main reasons behind the nation's problems. With Honduras being named as one of the most dangerous nations in the world thanks to the large numbers of murders committed, the criminal groups have managed to obtain some sort of power, especially in small regions.

Mexico *** **

Historically, Mexico has been a relatively unstable Latin American country. Among its basic political problems was the rebellion staged by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation against the government in 1994, as well as the inability of politicians to correct some of the main internal problems. The living standards for Mexicans were also low, despite the rapid economic growth from 1940 to 1980 and then the devaluation of the Mexican economy in the 1980s, which led to other economic problems in Latin America as well.

Mexico has been hugely affected by the operations of drug cartels and organized crime; these cartels have a stronghold on both the economy and governing of the nation, especially the Sinaloa Cartel, which is the most powerful right now in Mexico.

A huge and extremely prominent market of illegal drugs such as cocaine and marijuana, Mexico has lost millions of dollars in trying to stop the activities of drug cartels, with limited success. Since 2006, Mexico has embarked on the Drug



War against the drug cartels, which has led to the death of more than 40,000 people in the past 8 years. The prevalence of drug cartels and criminal organizations has led many people to organize protests, the most recent one taking place after the disappearance of 43 university students in 2014, an incident most probably related to

the action of drug cartels. The large-scale drug trade is also closely related to the great poverty present in many regions of Mexico.

Venezuela *** ** * ** *

Like many other Latin American countries, Venezuela has had large criminal rates, political instability and corruption and a great deal of inflation on many products due to its large oil reserves, which are also one of the main sources of income for the country. The tension in Venezuela has escalated since the death of former President Hugo Chávez in 2013 and the election of Nicolas Maduro in 2014. Many people organized violent protests against the newly elected government throughout 2014, as they were outraged by the result of the elections and believed the new government was corrupt. There was also outrage against the violent crime perpetrated and the lack of economic prosperity.

The protesters have yet to officially end the demonstrations, which have led to a violent clash between them and the government forces. There have been allegations of human rights violation by government forces due to the use of rubber pellets, tear gas and actual torture against protesters, while the setup of street barricades by the protesters has been condemned by the government as “disruptive” and as an attempt at a coup d’état instigated by the United States.

Similar events have also occurred in other countries of the region, especially in Bolivia, Haiti, Peru, Paraguay and Nicaragua, where political instability, economic issues and criminal activities are also common phenomena. For more details on relevant events please check the timeline section below.

MAJOR COUNTRIES/ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THE ISSUE (incl. UN)

All countries that were mentioned before were involved in the issue of civil unrest and political instability, since they are the ones directly affected by it. All of them have, with varying success, tried to deal with their issues and to limit the civil unrest taking place. Brazil, for instance, managed to overcome the issue of the 2013 civil unrest by implementing certain political and economic measures to benefit their citizens. Some other countries and organizations involved in the issue are:

USAN (Union of South American Nations)

The USAN has had a very long history of trying to solve economic problems in South America, especially through the actions of its bodies Mercosur and CAN. It works in the spirit of unity among nations, which in many occasions leads to effective solutions for any economic issue that may arise.

UN Security Council and UNDP (UN Development Programme)

The UN has also been involved with the issue and has issues resolutions proposing measures on the issue. The UNDP and UNODA, affiliate members of the UN, have also helped the region in many matters, including economic problems and issues regarding civil unrest. There are two very important resolutions signed on the topic by the UN, which can be found below.

USA

The USA have been an indirect factor that has contributed to the problem in Latin America. They were one of the two pressure groups that led to the instability in the region and many of the military officials that went on to obtain power in their home countries had been trained in the so-called “School of the Americas”, while the US is still heavily involved in the area through its economic activities. While US intervention has been beneficial in some of the countries, especially in Mexico, others are critical of its overt meddling with their affairs.

TIMELINE OF RECENT RELEVANT EVENTS

Time	Event
December 1996	The Guatemalan Civil War ends after 36 years, having left the country in ruins, both economically and politically.
November 2000	Alberto Fujimori, Peru's President, exiles himself to Japan and faxes his resignation amid revelations of his corruption and embezzlement history.
December 2001	Riots take place in Argentina in response to the economic crisis that plagues the country.
December 2004	The USAN is formed as an alliance of South American nations after the Cusco declaration is signed.
March 2005	Carlos Mesa resigns as president of Bolivia in light of mounting protests, leading the country to new elections.
December 2006	The Mexican Drug War unofficially begins after President Felipe Calderon orders an operation against drug cartels in the state of Michoacán.
June 2009	Coup d'état in Honduras leads to the ousting and exile of President Manuel Zelaya.
January 2010	Haiti is struck by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake, which destroys many houses and pushes the country further to poverty.
June 2012	President of Paraguay Victor Lugo is impeached and replaced with Vice President Federico Franco.
June-July 2013	The 2013 Brazilian Spring erupts across the country during the 2013 Confederations Cup.
February 2014	Protests erupt in Venezuela after the election of President Nicolas Maduro.
July 2014	Argentina enters a new economic crisis due to unpaid debts to the IMF.
September 2014	43 students are reported missing in Mexico amid suspicions of drug cartel involvement, leading to protests against cartel violence and the government.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Due to the extent of the problem and the many factors that affect it, the attempts to provide a permanent solution have mostly been focused on the solution of the underlying causes by each nation separately. One such instance is Brazil, whose president, Dilma Rousseff, decided to evaluate the protesters' demands during the Brazilian spring and ceased the civil unrest by acceding to most of the terms that were asked of the government. The USAN has also attempted to aid in the situation by helping improve the relations between the South American nations and to ensure that there are few problems in terms of the economy through its affiliate bodies Mercosur and CAN (Andean Community of Nations).

There has also been some involvement by the United Nations in the issue, though this is still quite limited; the issue has been discussed at the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (which works under the jurisdiction of the UNODA) and the Security Council. In recent years, there have been the following resolutions by the UN on the problem:

- United Nations Security Council Resolution 330, March 21, 1973, S/RES/330
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 730, January 16, 1992, S/RES/730
- United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament, and Development, in Latin America and the Caribbean, December 2, 2011, A/RES/66/54

There also used to be the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA), which was in place until 1992, when it was removed as a result of the SC Resolution 730.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Economic reforms & increase of living standards

To this day, the area continues to face major economic problems and issues with poverty, both being important causes of political instability, common protests and civil unrest. Hence, a solution would be to propose economic reforms and provide financial aid to these countries, as well as attempting to make them more financially competitive, so that they can experience regrowth and combat the poverty issues that have been severely affecting them so far.

Dealing with criminal groups

The existence, but most importantly, the power many criminal groups enjoy in Latin American countries is one of the main reasons of civil unrest and even political instability due to their large influence. Hence, a very effective measure would be to combat the issue of drug dealing in these countries through the cooperation of the local governments with the UNODC (UN Office on Drugs and Crime), thereby launching an aggressive campaign funded by the UN to purge the countries of criminal groups and to help bring their members to justice. Furthermore, there can be embargoes and an increased border control to prevent the export of illegal drugs from the country and hopefully end the drug trade.

Political supervision and advising by the UN

The region has historically had significant issues with political instability, which means that the countries of the area require some mediation from external sources to properly function politically. Therefore, a special supervising and advising body could be devised, which, without actually interfering with the governments, would offer advice on different matters and help prevent civil unrest, while offering the citizens the services they require.

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