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FEATURED Q&A

Should Mexico Do More to Keep its Mayors Safe?



Among the local Mexican officials murdered in recent weeks was Ambrosio Soto, the mayor of the town of Pungarabato, in Guerrero State. // File Photo: Town of Pungarabato.

Q Following separate attacks July 23 that resulted in the deaths of two mayors, Mexico's National Association of Mayors demanded that the federal government take action to help protect public officials, especially in areas identified as high-risk zones. The group noted that 40 acting mayors have been killed in the last decade and that many officials have received death threats. As the Mexican government reforms political institutions, is security of local public servants being seriously considered? What should Mexico's federal government be doing to protect mayors and local officials from organized crime? To what degree have criminal elements been able to erode Mexico's rule of law and democratic institutions through their tactics? How bad is Mexico's situation compared to peer countries within the region and around the world?

A Cristina Díaz Salazar, PRI member of the Mexican Senate and president of the Senate's Commission on Government: "In the initiative that he presented relating to security and justice, President Enrique Peña Nieto reaffirmed the urgency of revising the distribution of powers in the field of public security, in particular the need to rethink the formation of the country's policing institutions. Undoubtedly, the exponential growth of organized crime has increased corruption and violence. With this, a heightened security risk for the population becomes more likely. Despite the success of diverse strategies to combat these criminal groups, they have modified, proportioned and diversified their illegal activities. Faced with these circumstances, our various levels of government have not had adequate measures to combat this

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U.S. Sends 1,000 Spies to Rio to Help Protect Olympics

The U.S. intelligence community has sent analysts, law enforcement officers and other personnel to Rio de Janeiro to help protect the Games, which open today.

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Citi Creates \$3.5 Bn Credit Line for Argentine Clients

The financing will be available to corporate and institutional clients, said the New York-based bank.

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POLITICAL

Brazilian Senate Committee Votes to Proceed With Impeachment

A committee of the Brazilian Senate voted 14-5 to proceed with a trial that could result in suspended President Dilma Rousseff's permanent removal from office.

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Rousseff // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Brazilian Senate Committee Votes to Put Rousseff on Trial

A Brazilian Senate committee on Thursday voted to put suspended President Dilma Rousseff on trial in the full chamber on charges of breaking the country's budgetary laws, Reuters reported. The 21-member impeach-

“It is a coup by the Brazilian elite against the working class.”

—Senator Lindbergh Farias

ment committee voted 14-5 to proceed with the impeachment process. “The committee vote confirms not only that Rousseff knowingly broke fiscal laws, but also that she was a dishonest administrator,” Senator Ricardo Ferraço, one of the members of the committee, told reporters, according to Reuters. Rousseff is accused of manipulating government accounts in an effort to boost public spending ahead of her re-election in 2014. She denies the charges. On Thursday, Rousseff's backers expressed their disapproval of the process. “It is a coup by the Brazilian elite against the working class,” said Senator Lindbergh Farias, a member of Rousseff's Workers' Party, The Wall Street Journal reported. The full Senate is expected to vote on Tuesday whether to accept the charges against Rousseff, which would then lead to a trial that could produce a verdict by the end of August or early September. The Senate committee's vote came as world attention is focused on Brazil; the Summer Olympics open today in Rio de Janeiro. Last week, Olympic organizers had expected some 50 heads of state to attend the Games, but as of Wednesday, only 28 had confirmed their attendance, Reuters reported. Chief Justice Ricardo Lewandowski would preside over an impeachment trial. His office has said the trial could begin Aug. 26

and last approximately a week. Brazilian media surveys indicate that more than two-thirds of senators want to permanently remove Rousseff from office. If Rousseff is convicted, Temer would serve out the rest of her term, through 2018. The Senate suspended Rousseff on May 12, at which time Rousseff's vice president, Michel Temer, became interim president. Since then, Brazil's stock market and currency have strengthened amid Temer's pro-business policies.

Pessimism Rises Among Chileans: Surveys

The number of Chileans who are optimistic about the country's future has fallen drastically, with many expressing a pessimistic view of the government and any potential successors, two polls showed Thursday, Reuters reported. The number of Chileans polled who answered that their country was going “in the correct direction” fell to 18 percent from 41 percent a year and a half ago, according to a CERC-Mori poll. The government's approval rating was at 25 percent, according to the poll, which is the lowest rating since March 2014, when



Bachelet // File Photo: Chilean Government.

President Michelle Bachelet began her second non-consecutive term. Bachelet had been elected on the promise of raising taxes and overhauling education, pensions, the electoral system and labor relations. A drop in copper prices, however, hindered investment in Chile, while corruption scandals in the government left Chileans disillusioned with the political and business elite. Bachelet's plans have been criticized on both ends of the political spectrum,

NEWS BRIEFS

Earl Moves West Across Mexico After Raking Belize, Guatemala

Tropical Storm Earl traveled across Mexico's southern Gulf coast early Friday, after pounding Belize and northern Guatemala with torrential rains, the Associated Press reported. Some earlier forecasts had said Earl would weaken into a tropical depression overnight, but new predictions late Thursday night said it would maintain its strength as a tropical storm through Friday. Earl hit the coast of Belize Thursday morning as a Category 1 hurricane with 80 mile-an-hour winds, according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center.

U.S. Sends More Than 1,000 Spies to Rio to Help Protect Olympics

The U.S. intelligence community has sent more than 1,000 spies to Rio de Janeiro as part of Olympic security to protect spectators, U.S. athletes and staff at the Games, which open today, NBC News reported today. Hundreds of analysts, law enforcement and special operations personnel are already in Rio de Janeiro, according to a highly classified report on U.S. intelligence efforts, viewed by NBC News. More than a dozen Navy and Marine Corps commandos from the U.S. Special Operations Command are also in Brazil, working with Brazil's federal police and navy, according to senior military officials.

Colombians May Vote on Peace Deal Before Formal Signing: Santos

Colombia's government may ask voters to approve a peace deal with the FARC rebels before accords are signed, President Juan Manuel Santos said Thursday, Reuters reported. After negotiators reach an agreement on all points of peace deal, a vote could be scheduled, Santos said.

as well. The right-leaning opposition, which includes some from her own political party, says that her reforms are hurting the country's economy, while the political left says her reforms do not go far enough. Former President Ricardo Lagos called the current state of the government the worst institutional crisis Chile had seen since the 1973-1990 dictatorship. "In no moment since 1990 has there been a conjunction of such negative economic and political perceptions as there is at this time," said the CERC-Mori poll.

BUSINESS NEWS

Citi Creates \$3.5 Bn Credit Line for Argentine Clients

New York-based financial services corporation Citigroup created a \$3.5 billion credit line for corporate and institutional clients in Argentina, in order to support President Mauricio Macri's plan to bolster the country's economy by providing financing to the public sector and underwriting bonds in international capital markets for Argentine companies, Citigroup CEO Michael Corbat said in a statement. "We



Corbat // File Photo: Citigroup.

are committed to supporting the growth of Argentina and our clients in a country where we have had a presence for over 100 years," Corbat said. "We expect sustained growth in the coming years and look forward to putting our global network to work on behalf of our institutional clients." Since he took office at the end of last year, Macri has been seeking the support of international companies, traveling

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threat to Mexico and inhibit its growth. The lack of adequate measures is seen through transportation conditions, equipment, weapons and coordination. The conditions have been most evident in municipalities, in the governments closest to the people and which are most often violently affected by crime. This has worsened in states such as Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán and Tamaulipas, where authorities have had to intensify efforts to stop the growth of these organizations. Given the above, the Senate approved the Constitutional Reform of Security and Justice with the aim of restoring strength to police institutions in all three levels of government. Undoubtedly, events like the deaths of the mayors of San Juan Chamula and Pungarabato highlight the urgency of the constitutional reform in question and the need for us to continue working for the security of our country's population."

A **Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, program coordinator, and David Shirk, principal investigator of the Justice in Mexico Program at the University of San Diego:** "The assassination of current and former mayors as well as mayoral candidates in Mexico is a serious concern that affects governance, threatens the democratic process and undermines the rule of law. However, Mexico faces justice and security challenges on several fronts, including the poor performance of the criminal justice system and the inability to deal effectively with impunity, as well as corruption and inequality. The severity of these challenges and the urgency of their resolution

are difficult to overstate. Mexico has spent more than a decade approving reforms promoting rule of law, though impunity remains its core problem, as there is still systemic mechanisms lacking to bring criminals to

“ Security of public servants has not been seriously addressed, and there are no real policies to protect authorities.

— Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira & David Shirk

justice, and to prevent and punish pervasive corruption. Such threats to governance can only be addressed by promoting accountability and continued progress on security and justice reform. Particularly, security of public servants has not been seriously addressed, and there are no real policies to protect authorities, especially at the local level. Indeed, violence is relatively lower in Mexico than in several other countries in the Americas, and average for the Western Hemisphere; though, no other country in the hemisphere has seen such a large increase in the number or rate of homicides over the last decade. Thus, as the fight against organized crime is far from over, improvements in law enforcement are necessary. There is much work to be done, and sustained efforts to evaluate the problem and a sincere commitment are necessary to reduce the impact of Mexico's justice and security challenges."

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to France, the United Kingdom and Germany in the hopes of drumming up foreign investment after five years of little foreign direct investment in the South American country. The Argentine government is holding a three-day conference in September to unveil plans for as much as \$160 billion in infrastructure projects. The international opinion toward Argentina has been bolstered since Macri took office, due to

his early economic decisions, which have been seen as "business-friendly." He cut subsidies for utilities and ended a 15-year standoff with international holders of Argentina's defaulted debt, among other measures. Despite his efforts, the economy has entered a recession in the first quarter, and inflation rose to 15 percent following his move to allow the peso to float.

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A **Maria Velez de Berliner, president of Latin Intelligence Corporation:** “Impunity undermines Mexico’s reforms. The Center for Impunity and Justice Studies’ (CESIJ) 2016 Global Impunity Index rates Mexico’s impunity as the world’s second-highest. Impunity underlies the lack of trust Mexicans have in their law enforcement, legal system and other institutions of government. When

“**Impunity undermines Mexico’s reforms.**”
— Maria Velez de Berliner

75 percent of the police in Sinaloa, Veracruz, Guerrero, Mexico and Michoacán states cannot pass an honesty test, confidence erodes. When the full force of Mexico’s government cannot bring to justice the perpetrators of the forced disappearance of 43 students, trust in law and justice tanks. This is why only seven of every 100 crimes are reported, with witnesses becoming suspects. The Mexican government can take all the precautions it wants to protect its officials. However, when criminals know that, from police to witnesses to judges, all have a price that can be paid to skirt the law, no precaution can hold. When there are only 3.5 judges per 100,000 citizens, an overburdened legal system cannot cope with its load. This is why excluding payments, threats and extortion, fewer than 2 percent of Mexican criminals can expect to be caught; 28 percent of arrestees go to trial; only 4.4 percent are convicted; and fewer than 1 percent go to jail, where many buy special considerations. The laudable New Code of Criminal Procedure, one of Mexico’s main reforms, will do little to

turn the tide of impunity. This will require a complete change in legal and social culture that would take years, and which the New Code cannot accomplish by itself. The same can be said for the rest of Latin America, excluding Brazil, where legal changes have not dented impunity.”

A **Ruben Olmos, managing partner of Global Nexus in Washington:** “So far this year, at least eight mayors have been killed across Mexico—presumably by organized crime—an alarming number. It is important to note though, that the killings of local authorities, particularly mayors and heads of local security agencies, has increased over the last decade given the level of corruption found in these areas of government, low wages, which became a driver for drug cartels to bribe public officials; and by law changes made at the federal level. In recent years, mayors and governors were given more federal funds to combat cells distributing and selling drugs at the local level. With this, mayors became targets as they had to negotiate with criminal groups. The recent trend of killings highlights the need to push for additional security reforms to protect Mexico’s more than 2,000 mayors, especially those in critical areas. Currently, a special program called the Programa de Fortalecimiento para la Seguridad (FORTASEG), is led by the Ministry of the Interior and benefits just 285 municipalities, less than 10 percent of the total municipalities nationwide. There is no doubt that the government has a big responsibility in strengthening the rule of law in Mexico, but it is important to note that civil society and the business sector have their parts too. I believe this is already happening, which speaks to the country’s openness.”

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