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## FEATURED Q&A

# Are Protesters in Colombia's Cauca Achieving Change?



Indigenous groups in Colombia's Cauca region have filled the streets in protest in recent weeks. // Photo: Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC).

**Q** Members of indigenous communities have taken to the streets in recent weeks in the Colombian region of Cauca to protest government neglect and violence in the area, and also demand talks with President Iván Duque's administration. Demonstrators blocked the region's main highway, causing shortages of gasoline and food in some cities. At least 15 civilians and seven police officers were wounded during the protests, and one policeman was fatally shot. Duque claims illegal armed groups infiltrated the demonstrations. Why are indigenous communities in Cauca protesting, and what do they want to achieve? Which demands is Duque most likely to concede? How powerful are illegal armed groups in the region, and is there truth to Duque's statements regarding their involvement?

**A** Marcela Velasco, associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Colorado State University: "What you have is a political 'minga,' a type of collective action developed in the Cauca Department that mixes assemblies, protests and marches in contentious claim-making. They usually assemble in La María, in Piendamó. For the first time, this minga is expanding to La Delfina in Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca), a community on the road that connects Cali to Buenaventura, Colombia's main port. About 5,000 people are concentrated there, according to mingueros. Since their appearance in the 2000s, mingas are increasingly used to pressure policy change given decades of government non-compliance with accords ostensibly negotiated to address different indigenous demands (such as

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## TODAY'S NEWS

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### Canada's Supreme Court Sides With Chevron in Ecuador Case

The high court dismissed claims against Chevron Canada stemming from Ecuadorean villagers' attempts to force the oil major to pay a \$9.5 billion judgment in a long-running pollution case.

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### Argentina's Industrial Output Falls 8.5 Percent

The country's industrial production declined 8.5 percent in February as compared to the same month last year, according to the government's statistics agency.

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### Trump Backs Away From Threat to Close Border

U.S. President Donald Trump backed away from his threat to close the U.S.-Mexico border, now saying Mexico has one year to stem the flow of migrants and drugs into the United States.

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Trump // File Photo: White House.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Trump Backs Away From Threat to Close U.S.-Mexico Border

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday backed away from his threat to close the U.S.-Mexico border, instead saying Mexico had a "one-year warning" before his administration imposes tariffs and possibly closes the border if Mexico does not stem the flow of migrants and drugs into the United States, The Washington Post reported. "We're going to give them a one-year warning, and if the drugs don't stop or largely stop, we're going to put tariffs on Mexico and products, particularly cars," Trump told reporters at the White House. "And if that doesn't stop the drugs, we close the border." Later on Thursday afternoon, Trump said Mexico has been "doing a very good job in the last three or four days since we talked about closing the border," even though authorities in Mexico said their policies have remained the same. Late last week, Trump tweeted a threat to close the border if Mexico did not stop illegal migration to the United States. The threat

was met with widespread opposition, with business leaders, among others, warning that the impact of closing the border could be devastating. "We welcome the president's decision not to close the Mexican border," U.S. Chamber of Commerce Executive Vice President Neil Bradley said in a statement. He also said the Trump administration and Congress would work to ensure that U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which has shifted personnel away from handling commercial traffic at the border and toward processing migrants, has enough resources "to reduce the excessive wait times affecting legitimate trade and travel across the border."

## Brazil Seeks Rewrite of Coup References in School Textbooks

The government of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro is seeking a rewrite of school textbooks to refer to the de facto government that took power after the country's 1964 coup as a "democratic regime of force," the Associated Press reported Thursday. "Brazilian history shows that March 31, 1964, was a sovereign decision

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Police Kill 11 Assailants Seeking to Rob ATMs in São Paulo State

In a shootout on Thursday, police shot and killed 11 alleged robbers who were preparing for an ATM heist in São Paulo State, authorities said, Reuters reported. Another two men were arrested in connection to the plan to blow up machines at two locations to steal the cash inside. The alleged assailants drove up to the banks in the city of Guararema in five armored cars and carried high-caliber rifles and body armor, authorities said. The assailants and police exchanged fire, with the would-be robbers leading officers in a shootout through the city. No money was stolen, and no police or bystanders were reportedly injured.

## Some 1.1 Million Children Affected by Venezuela Crisis: UNICEF

The number of Venezuelan children who are affected by the country's economic and political crises and who will need humanitarian aid is expected to more than double to reach 1.1 million, the United Nations children's agency, UNICEF, said Thursday. The number includes children who have been uprooted from Venezuela as well as those who have returned to the country.

## Argentina's Industrial Output Falls 8.5 Percent Year-on-Year in February

Argentina's industrial output dropped 8.5 percent in February compared to the same month a year earlier, government statistics agency Indec said Thursday, Reuters reported. It was the 10th consecutive month of declines, after falling 10.8 percent in January and 14.7 percent in December. Economists expect the South American country to see a median economic contraction this year of 1.2 percent, according to a Reuters poll.

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to expand indigenous lands, address human rights or end armed conflict). The 2019 minga's demands are fairly broad, but at the core mingueros want a political dialogue on several fronts: first, stopping the assassination of social leaders; second, protecting the peace agreement; and, third, concrete action for implementing 10 trillion pesos (roughly \$3.3 billion) promised to indigenous communities, which failed to appear in the government's national development plan. Indigenous organizations largely supported a political solution to armed conflict as the only way to reduce violence. The agreement reduced combat deaths but coincided with an increase in systematic attacks against social leaders, many of them indigenous, that organized to protect local resources, economies and environments. The gov-

ernment has largely failed to protect these people. President Iván Duque is slowly dismantling the peace accords, for example, by weakening the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP). As a public event, mingas attract all sorts of opportunistic supporters and antagonists of the indigenous movement or the government, including FARC dissidents. This is not surprising. The national press is full of reports that local enforcement is investigating FARC infiltrators but have offered little proof. President Duque is highlighting this as a way to discredit the protests and procrastinating on meeting with the protesters. He is letting the problem balloon and may have to agree to some of the demands, unless he is willing to exert excessive force against indigenous people, which could also backfire."

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of the Brazilian society. It wasn't the barracks that put Castelo Branco in the presidency," Brazilian Education Minister Ricardo Vélaz Rodríguez told newspaper Valor Econômico.

## BUSINESS NEWS

### Canadian High Court Sides With Chevron in Ecuador Case

Canada's Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed claims from Ecuadorean villagers attempting to force Chevron Canada to pay a \$9.5 billion judgment in relation to a case regarding pollution in the Andean country, Reuters reported. The dispute between Chevron and residents of Lago Agrio, an oil-rich area near the city of Nueva Loja in northeastern Ecuador, has been going on for years, with the Ecuadoreans claiming the oil company must pay for water and soil contamination caused from 1964 to 1992 by Texaco, which Chevron acquired in 2001. The villagers obtained a judgment against Chevron in an Ecuadorean court in 2011, but the company has no assets in the country. They have since turned to the United States, Canada, Brazil and Argentina to enforce the decision. Last year, an international tribunal ruled that the Ecuadorean court's ruling against Chevron was the result of bribery, corruption and fraud. The tribunal also found that Chevron's settlement with Ecuador years ago in the case absolved it of continuing liability. In 2017, the Court of Appeal for Ontario ruled that Chevron Canada was a separate entity, absolving it of its parent company's responsibility and ruling that the unit's shares and assets could not be seized by those seeking to enforce the Ecuadorean judgment. The Canadian Supreme Court's dismissal of a review of that ruling now makes the decision final, El Comercio reported. "Any further efforts by the plaintiffs' lawyers to continue this lawsuit in Canada would be an abuse of the country's legal system and a waste of its judicial resources," said R. Hewitt Pate, Chevron's vice president and general counsel, Reuters reported.

## CAPITOL HILL WATCH

A Look at U.S. Congressional Activity on Latin America

### Negotiations to Continue On Disaster Relief Bill for Puerto Rico: McConnell

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) will continue negotiating a disaster relief bill that has stalled over disagreements regarding assistance for Puerto Rico, The Hill reported Thursday. Negotiations will continue because "no action is not an option," the Republican senator said earlier this week as President Donald Trump blasted the island's leaders as "grossly incompetent." Trump has made clear he does not want to send more money to the island, alleging it has already received more than its fair share of disaster relief funds. In a tweet, Trump said Puerto Rico's government "can't do anything right" despite getting "far more money than Texas [and] Florida" for disaster relief. "The place is a mess—nothing works," he wrote. However, Democrats have refused to approve the current disaster relief bill, saying the \$600 million in nutrition assistance it includes for the U.S. territory is not enough. McConnell has been facing increased pressure from Republican lawmakers that want to see the bill pass, as it diverts significant funds to states with all-Republican Senate delegations, including Georgia, Iowa and Florida, The Hill reported.

### Rubio Criticizes Central America Aid Cut

"Reducing support" to Central America would be "counterproductive" to addressing the "humanitarian crisis" the United States is facing at the Mexico border as migrants try to enter the country, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) said on Twitter on Tuesday, days after President Donald Trump announced he was cutting off direct aid to Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, the so-called "Northern Triangle" countries. Trump says the Central American nations have done "nothing" to curb illegal migration to the United States, ABC News reported.

### Pelosi Announces Lawsuit to Block Trump's Border Emergency Declaration

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) on Thursday announced that the House of Representatives will file a lawsuit to block President Donald Trump's national emergency declaration to build a wall along the border with Mexico, The Hill reported. "The president's action clearly violates the appropriations clause by stealing from appropriated funds, an action that was not authorized by constitutional or statutory authority," she said in a statement. In February, Trump invoked a national security emergency after Congress declined to fulfill his request for \$5.7 billion for his promised wall along the United States' southern border. The move allows him to divert money appropriated by Congress for other purposes to the barrier's construction. Congress had passed a resolution to block Trump's emergency declaration, but the House last week did not meet the required two-thirds threshold to override Trump's veto. Fourteen Republicans sided with the Democrats in the vote. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the March 8 issue of the Advisor.]

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**A** **Sergio Guzmán, director of Colombia Risk Analysis:** “The evolution of the conflict with the indigenous people in Cauca now has a symbolic significance aside from being a catch-22. The minga will not lift the blockade until the president agrees to an in-person meeting, and the president will not agree to an in-person meeting until the road is clear. Until now, the government has acted with prudence and neglected calls for the use of force against the indigenous leaders, as aggressively using law enforcement would only make things worse. There is mutual distrust between the government and indigenous groups—both are legitimate in their own way. The government insists that the minga has been infiltrated by groups outside the law and that it will not sit down to negotiate unless the road is cleared and civil resistance is put to an end—and although there are extreme elements within the minga, this by no means encompasses the vast majority of the protesters. Meanwhile, the minga emphasizes that previous governments have failed to fulfill their promises of financing and land restitution, demanding that the government stand by its past promises and that the president become personally involved in reaching new agreements—which also holds true given that the prior administration only executed 6 percent of its budget for indigenous communities and Duque’s promises are akin to those of past governments. Duque has implemented a failed conflict management strategy to deal with the situation in Cauca. The government fears that if it gives in to the minga’s pressure, it will be perceived as a weak administration and will be called on by other sectors to be equally accommodating in the future. However, being inflexible could also be damaging for the government because it risks further escalating the situation and gravely affecting the national economy. The conflict will likely grow in the short term with other groups joining the minga—including Afro-descendants, coca growers,

FECODE teachers, displaced persons and campesino groups, many of whom have already announced their own intentions to march against the government.”

**A** **Juan David Escobar Valencia, director of the Center for Strategic Thought at Universidad EAFIT in Medellín:** “Protest is a right of any democracy, but when it violates the rights of other citizens, it is an illegal use of that right. Like many citizen groups in Colombia, indigenous communities have deficits that have not been addressed. But nothing justifies the actions in Cauca. Reading the demands that those who ‘protest’ are putting forth, it is evident that it is not an indigenous protest infiltrated by the guerrillas, but rather guerrilla action infiltrated by the indigenous people. What do requests regarding not accepting Guaidó as the temporary president of Venezuela and forbidding military overflights over his lands have to do with the demands of the indigenous community? Some groups that claim to represent the indigenous communities demonstrate that they pretend to be ‘Colombians’ for rights, but ‘indigenous’ for their duties. Some of the indigenous lands of Cauca are used for the cultivation of coca and are part of the logistics corridors of drug trafficking, which during these weeks have had a beneficial margin of maneuver for their activities. Requesting more land, being one of the largest landowning groups in the country, has no justification. Few groups in Colombia have received so much money and land, without any possibility of auditing said assets, and few social groups have shown such inefficiency in managing these benefits. The current government, unlike the past administration—which irresponsibly gave into requests by other extortive protests and indigenous representatives who use children and women as human shields—should only commit to what is allocated and financed in the national budget.”

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