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FEATURED Q&A

What Might Changes at Twitter Mean for Latin Americans?



Political discourse is prevalent in Latin America via Twitter. Billionaire Elon Musk is seeking to buy the platform, though he said Friday that the deal was “temporarily on hold.” // File Photo: Marten Bjork via Unsplash.com.

Q While political discourse takes place on all forms of social media, it is extremely prevalent in Latin America over Twitter, where heads of state and politicians take to the platform to connect with people and argue with one another. Billionaire Elon Musk’s plan to take over Twitter could shake up the composition of the region’s digital town hall, author James Bosworth said recently in his Latin America Risk Report. Musk said on Friday that his deal to buy Twitter is “temporarily on hold,” but if the deal proceeds, what changes could Musk make to the platform, and how would they affect Latin America’s digital political discourse? Would Musk be able to do away with rules against threatening language, as well as software that identifies and takes down disinformation-spreading botnets, as he has suggested? What sorts of changes need to happen in order for social media to offer both a freer and fairer platform for the exchange of ideas?

A Doug Cassel, emeritus professor of law at Notre Dame Law School and U.S. nominee to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 2017: “After Elon Musk’s expected takeover of Twitter, the prospects for political dialogue healthy for democracy in the region, already troubling, may become even worse. Money matters. Musk’s wealth—estimated at \$265 billion—is nearly 10 times the gross domestic product of El Salvador, and about the same as the GDPs of Chile or Colombia. According to the World Bank, three quarters of the region’s residents have access to the Internet. Nearly all of those use social media, of which Twitter’s 100 million or so

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Chile Convention Entering Final Phases in Rewrite of Constitution

Chile’s Constitutional Convention is entering its final phases of rewriting the country’s charter. It is scheduled to produce the draft document by July.

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General Motors Agrees to 8.5% Wage Hike at Mexico Plant

The automaker agreed to the wage increase at its pick-up truck plant in the Mexican city of Silao.

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Venezuela Offering Stakes in State-Run Companies

The government of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro is today planning to offer stakes of between 5 percent and 10 percent in several state-run companies. The government is seeking needed investment for companies that were nationalized decades ago.

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Maduro // File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Chile Constitutional Convention Entering Final Phases of Work

Chile's Constitutional Convention is entering its final phases of rewriting the country's charter this week, Bloomberg News reported Friday. Starting on Tuesday, a committee is to begin proofreading the draft constitution for any contradictions or mistakes, another group will begin to write a preamble in order to introduce the document's central principles, and another group will hold a vote on provisions that will govern the period of transition to the new charter, the news service reported. The convention is scheduled to produce the document by July, and Chileans are to vote on it in a referendum on Sept. 4. "We want to provide both calm and certainties for the transition between the old and new constitution," said the convention's vice president, Gaspar Dominguez, Bloomberg News reported. "That requires broad and coordinated work with those who will be responsible for implementing it," he added. In some of the convention's latest votes, a plenary session last Friday approved a measure saying that the board of Chile's central bank should consider factors including climate change and employment when making decisions on monetary policy. The convention previously approved a measure guaranteeing the central bank's autonomy. Last week, the convention also approved measures giving both labor unions and companies roles in the country's social security system, guaranteeing unions and workers the right to go on strike, and also stating that Chile's health care system will be comprised of both public and private providers, Bloomberg news reported. In a poll published last week by Cadem, 48 percent of respondents said they would reject the new constitution, two percentage points higher than in a previous survey. "Among the proposals that generate the most concerns are those centered around pension funds, changes to the justice system, questions around the definition of a plurinational state and the implications of having new

autonomous territories," Chilean Senator Carolina Goic told the Advisor in a Q&A published April 15. "The proposed political system under discussion would also put an end to bicameralism—doing away with the Senate—and in so doing, putting at risk the checks and balances needed for a healthy democracy," Goic added.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Venezuela Offering Stakes in State-Run Companies

Venezuela's government today is planning to offer stakes of between 5 percent and 10 percent in state-run companies, including Internet and telephone services providers, as well as a petrochemical producer, the Associated Press reported Saturday. The sales of the stakes in the state-run companies come decades after the government seized control of them and are now a move by the government to pump needed money into operations that have suffered from years of mismanagement and neglect, the wire service reported. "We need capital for the development of all public companies," President Nicolás Maduro said last week at a televised event. "We need technology. We need new markets, and we are going to move forward," he added. Among the companies that Maduro has targeted for private investment are Internet and telephone service provider CANTV, its subsidiary Movilnet, petrochemical company Petroquímica de Venezuela and a mining-focused conglomerate, the AP reported. Some shares of CANTV have long traded on Caracas' stock exchange. However, the sales may generate little interest from buyers other than ones with ties to the government or those comfortable taking on a high degree of risk, the AP reported. Venezuela remains under sanctions imposed by the United States and other countries, and the small percentages of the companies that Maduro is seeking to sell would not give private investors enough decision-making power in order to push for improvements. Venezuela has seen some

NEWS BRIEFS

U.S. Coast Guard Finds Seven More Survivors From Capsized Boat

The U.S. Coast Guard said Friday that it had found seven more survivors off the coast of Puerto Rico from a boat that capsized while carrying Haitian migrants, killing 11 people, The Guardian reported. In all, crews rescued 38 people. Of the survivors, eight remain hospitalized, a Coast Guard spokesman told Reuters. The boat was spotted on Thursday north of uninhabited Desecheo Island, which is part of the archipelago of Puerto Rico, The Guardian reported.

Mexico Seeking to Raise Fertilizer Production

Mexico is seeking to triple its fertilizer production in an effort to push up local agriculture production and stem consumer price inflation, the government said in a statement on Sunday, Reuters reported. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said that he would be expanding a program providing free fertilizer to farmers in Campeche, Quintana Roo, Tabasco and Veracruz, among other states. Consumer prices in Mexico increased 7.68 percent in the first four months of 2022, Reuters reported.

Peru's Economy Grows 3.79% in March

Peru's economy grew 3.79 percent in March as compared to the same month last year, Peru's statistics agency said Sunday, Reuters reported. Most economic sectors have been improving, but the mining sector contracted following months of social protests from Andean Indigenous communities, which affected production, the statistics agency added. The reported economic growth in March fell short of the central bank's 4 percent growth prediction. The Peruvian finance ministry estimates that the Andean country's economy will grow 3.6 percent this year.

positive economic indicators in recent months. Following years of hyperinflation, Venezuela's level of inflation in March hit its lowest level in a decade, finishing this year's first quarter at 11.4 percent. Prices have stabilized in part due to wider circulation in the country of hard currencies, such as the U.S. dollar. "At the economic level, the results of the first quarter continue to point to a recovery in Venezuelan activity," Asdrúbal Oliveros, director at economic analysis firm Ecoanalítica, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published April 18.

BUSINESS NEWS

General Motors Agrees to 8.5% Wage Hike at Mexico Plant

General Motors agreed to an 8.5 percent wage increase at its pick-up truck plant in the Mexican city of Silao with independent union SINTTIA, labor representatives announced Thursday, Reuters reported. The wage hike, one of the highest raises in the Mexican auto industry's recent history, is the first major raise since the start of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA. The free trade agreement seeks to close the large wage gap between U.S. and Mexican workers, Reuters reported. The SINTTIA union, which in February became the first independent labor union in the Silao plant's history, said that in addition to higher wages, the deal with General Motors also includes a 14 percent increase in grocery vouchers, a mandatory day off on Dec. 24 and larger bonuses, Reuters reported. The union and General Motors are also set to form working groups to discuss sexual harassment case protocols, a program to fight inflation in the next few years and work schedules. In a statement, General Motors Mexico said it is committed to workers at the Silao plant, "who have been key to the outstanding performance of the manufacturing complex for 27 years and with whom our company will continue its history in the country," the Detroit Free Press reported.

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users account for more than 10 percent of all digital interactions. True, the region's most followed tweeters tend to be athletes and artists. They typically tweet more about sports scores and songs than about social policy. But many political provocateurs tweet, and their falsehoods generate echo effects. Enter Musk. He criticizes 'content moderation' policies. Twitter used them, for example, to cancel 2,700 fake Russian accounts that disrupted the 2016 U.S. election and later suspended Donald Trump's account after he repeated lies that the 2020 election was 'stolen.' Musk invokes free speech to argue that canceling Trump was morally wrong and ineffective. If regional tweeters were constructive contributors to democratic debate, perhaps the free speech obligations of governments should be extended to private companies such as Twitter. But many tweeters undermine democracy. In Guatemala, for example, smears and threats posted on social media drove honest judges and prosecutors into exile. Reasonable content moderation, within bounds, is healthy for democracy. Musk's Twitter, one fears, will not be."

A **Mary Hansel, former director of the Human Rights and Social Media Project at the University of California Irvine School of**

Law: "Elon Musk's recent comments suggest that if he takes the Twitter helm, he may implement changes to the company's content moderation protocols that threaten to undermine digital discourse in Latin America and elsewhere. Musk has referred to himself as a 'free speech absolutist' and posited that Twitter should be more 'reluctant to delete things.' These statements seem to align with a U.S.-centric approach to online speech. Pursuant to the U.N. Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, however, Twitter has a responsibility to respect international human rights law, as well as remedy any human rights abuses to which it contributes. Unlike the U.S. standard for freedom of

speech, the international right to freedom of expression provides for one's speech to be restricted to avoid infringing other people's rights and on other specified grounds. Musk has also said Twitter should defer to local laws in moderating content, explaining that, 'if people want less free speech, they will ask government to pass laws to that effect.' Yet, under the Guiding Principles, Twitter may have a responsibility to push back against local laws to the extent they conflict with human rights standards. Indeed, to its credit, the company has done so in several high-profile instances. Marginalized communities will bear the brunt of any approach to content moderation that is out of step with international human rights. Hate speech and online gender-based violence on Twitter have devastating impacts, causing members of such communities to self-censor or leave the platform altogether. Musk's 'free speech absolutist' approach, paradoxically, could end up silencing the voices of those most in need of being heard."

A **César Ricaurte, CEO of press freedom and human rights organization Fundamedios:** "I am not very optimistic about the changes Elon Musk will likely make to Twitter after he completes his acquisition of the platform. I consider a single individual owning a massive and global communication channel like Twitter to be bad news. Musk's plans are not clear, beyond his repeated invoking of 'freedom of speech' and the enormous potential that Twitter has if it is freed from certain restrictions. The problem is that there is a very tenuous line between free speech and discriminatory speech, hate speech and harassment and aggression against activists and human rights defenders. Any reforms that Musk undertakes on Twitter should consider values and principles such as transparency in content moderation, civil society participation and independent third parties involved in the fight against disinformation, protection of activists and human rights de-

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fenders, as well as respect for international human rights law. Musk has not announced any plans to reform Twitter with any of the principles listed above. Musk should call for a broad multi-stakeholder dialogue in which all interested sectors of society are represented. It would be imperative for this dialogue to lead to the creation of governance mechanisms that are more in line with the strengthening of fundamental freedoms in democratic societies. These are the ideas we should keep in mind when it comes time to assess whether or not Musk's Twitter reforms are on the right track."

A **Vanessa Rubio-Márquez, professor of political science at the London School of Economics and former member of Mexico's Senate and deputy government minister:**

"It is of the utmost relevance to know how a company that serves almost 400 million people around the world—almost one-fourth of those in Latin America—is run, as it has a tremendous influence on the way we communicate, perceive and understand the world and vote. Elon Musk's decision to purchase Twitter ignited the already growing debate around the regulation of social media. Twitter has been a public company since 2013 and is thus obliged to comply with a number of corporate government requirements, but there are questions around the additional regulation to which social media companies could be subject. It is no ordinary company. Content on the platform defines perceptions, their algorithms shape behaviors, their tone defines degrees of polarization and even violence in our societies. Twitter also collects users' personal information, including geolocation information, that must be carefully managed and stored. The key challenge ahead—in Latin America and the world as a whole—is striking a right balance between state and self-regulation, together with open oversight of this industry, which is necessary given the platform's social relevance. Four 'Ps' are going to define the debate around this specific regulatory environment in Latin

America: populism, polarization and pendular politics—quite an explosive mix in which Musk's entrepreneurial and innovation skills will be tested once again."

A **Edison Lanza, former special rapporteur for freedom of expression at the IACHR:** "The potential acquisition of Twitter by tycoon Elon Musk has fueled an important discussion on freedom of expression: who controls speech in the digital age. Constitutional law and international human rights law have established limits on governments' ability to interfere with people's freedom of expression. However, with the development of private Internet platforms, corporations have implemented community standards and algorithms to regulate speech. The discussions in Latin America about the need to regulate content disseminated over social media have grown in the past five years. There are dozens of projects under study in the region, and although regulations are often imposed with the best of intentions, solutions could be disproportionate and curtail freedom of expression. In their 2019 Joint Declaration, the United Nations and OAS Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression called for the development of transparent oversight mechanisms that guarantee independence and involve multiple stakeholders to address moderation rules of content that could interfere with the exercise of freedom of expression. The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) convened a summit in 2021 to discuss Internet freedom of expression in the Americas, with the quality of public debate, content moderation and digital literacy being the main agenda items. The news that the richest man in the world may acquire the main social network for public debate in the region reaffirms the need for the inter-American system to build standards to guide the regulatory processes and demand greater transparency from the owners of these social media platforms."

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Erik Brand

Publisher
ebrand@thedialogue.org

Gene Kuleta

Editor
gkuleta@thedialogue.org

Leticia Chacón

Reporter
lchacon@thedialogue.org

Mark Kennedy

Reporter
mkenedy@thedialogue.org



Rebecca Bill Chavez, President

Bruno Binetti, Nonresident Fellow

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Subscription inquiries are welcomed at ebrand@thedialogue.org

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