

# Securitisation and its impact on human rights in Latin America

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**Abstract:** *In Latin America, securitisation policies and their rhetoric have been part of historic challenges to the rule of law and are very much a part of current challenges in a new security agenda designed to combat complex crimes, such as terrorism, money laundering, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and common crimes affecting citizen security. These policies are also manipulated in order to disable dissent and weaken the right to accountability. Securitisation is at the heart of the current interventionist tactics, and their impact on the respect for human rights. Securitisation links public security to a discourse of war, and builds on a friend/enemy dichotomy. In the collective imagination, the perception of fear connects with and feeds back into the discursive and practical instrumentation of securitisation and the threats to (physical or moral) integrity that it seeks to confront. These issues are explored mainly by reference to the invocation of the National Security Doctrine during the dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America, and through the criminalisation of human rights defenders in the more recent democratic era. Initiatives based on the human security paradigm are also considered, in light of their desired contribution to a possible desecuritisation strategy.*

**Key words:** *securitisation; Latin America; National Security Doctrine; criminalisation of human rights defenders*

## 1 A violent region

In Latin America there is great concern over the incidence of crime and violence. One in four citizens in the region state that insecurity is the main problem in their lives, even worse than unemployment or the state of the economy (IACHR 2009). Latin America accounts for just over 8 per cent of the world's population, but more than a third (35 per cent) of homicides worldwide. According to recent studies by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), 400 homicides are committed in Latin America every day, that is, four every 15 minutes. The region's annual homicide rate in 2016 is over 20 per 100 000, more than three times the world average, six times that of the United States and 20 times that of the United Kingdom (IDB 2016).

Globally, the homicide rate of males (9,9 per 100 000) is almost four times higher than that of females (2,27 per 100 000). Latin America

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matches this trend, but its indicators are four times higher (30 per 100 000). When adding the age dimension, a specific victim profile becomes visible: The number of male victims aged 15 to 29 exceed more than four times the world average for this group. Also, two-thirds of homicides (66 per cent) are committed using firearms.

The latest UN global survey of homicides distinguishes three types of killings: delinquency related; interpersonal; and socio-political. Latin America ranks first in all three types (UNODC 2013). Young male victims of homicide are particularly affected by organised crime and gang violence. Interpersonal homicide – committed by a close family member or partner – disproportionately affects women, and makes up two-thirds of the total. According to the United Nations (UN) Observatory for Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNO), in absolute terms, with 466 femicides in 2016, Honduras is the country with the highest total number; El Salvador, Argentina and Guatemala rank second, third and fourth, with more than 200 femicides each in the same year (data available at <https://oig.cepal.org/en>). These figures correspond to the annual quantification of homicides of women 15 years of age and older, murdered on the basis of gender. According to these figures, while men primarily die in public spaces, female victims mostly are murdered inside the home.

Some countries in the region have common problems involving the proliferation of highly-complex crimes, such as drug trafficking; money laundering; trafficking in persons; irregular migration flows; and, above all, criminal networks with the capacity to corrupt public officials and penetrate the structures of states.

In 2016, the war on drugs in Mexico became the second most lethal conflict in the world (only surpassed by Syria). As a business where murder is commonplace, drug trafficking is an enabler of insecurity. Nevertheless, countries such as Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, which are also part of the drug route to the United States, have the lowest homicide rates in Central America, as opposed to their neighbours in the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador). In the latter, gang violence has placed them as the world's highest homicide sub-region. Colombia, despite achieving a one-third decrease in deaths associated with the internal armed conflict, remains one of the 20 most violent countries in the world. On average, 33,5 people were killed daily during 2016; more than 12 000 Colombians, in one year. In Brazil, the police force is one of the deadliest in the world and, according to official sources, there are 161 daily homicides resulting from confrontations between gangs and the security forces (IDB 2016).

These figures present the region as one of the most dangerous places on earth. The region has since the mid-1950s had homicide rates five to eight times higher than those in Europe and Asia (UNODC 2013). What is more, Latin America remains the only region on the planet where, on average, the levels of violence have invariably intensified since 2005.

Behind these figures are drug dealers or police officers; a paramilitary group; large or small criminal networks; a landowner; or simply a child that took a gun in exchange for an otherwise legally unobtainable sum of money. Behind these indicators is also the failure of a model of political intervention that has been in place for at least half a century. Two key

elements converge to explain the persistence and seriousness of violence: social inequality and the lack of an effective state response.

Social inequalities are connected to the systemic failures in the distribution of wealth, means and opportunities that constitute or generate welfare among different social groups. In this respect, the analysis by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) of economic and social development illustrates that Latin American economies have historically been characterised by a marked structural heterogeneity based on high levels of social inequality due to factors such as low diversification of production; the regressive distribution of income; a highly-stratified labour market; and stagnant social mobility mechanisms (ECLAC 2010, 2012 & 2016).

In terms of state responses, risk mitigation strategies are particularly costly. On average, the investigation of homicides takes up at least 3 per cent of the gross Latin American gross domestic product (GDP), a figure comparable to the annual amount invested in infrastructure (Jaitman 2015). The judicial branch, the public prosecutor's office, the security forces and the penitentiary system have failed to develop the capacities required to ensure crime prevention and legitimate action to repress crime and violence (IACHR 2009). Institutional fragility is accompanied by a sterile and polarised debate on strategies for intervention measures, either focused on re-engineering the punitive power of the state or on a generic improvement of social conditions.

Thus, a matrix of historically-ingrained social inequality, institutional fragility and an oblique debate between polarised positions aggravates the difficulties in implementing effective intervention measures in the area of security. This contributes to a profound crisis of credibility in political actors and politics in general. According to recent studies sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the *Comision Andina de Fomento* (CAF), there is a high level of mistrust in government, parliament, the judiciary, political parties and the police in Latin America, with approval ratings no higher than 35 per cent (Barometer-BID-CAF 2016).

Securitisation brings the perception that insecurity constitutes a force to which a greater force must be applied through the repressive state apparatus. Paradoxically, while securitisation rhetoric feeds into the perception of a lack of governability and fear, it impedes the design and implementation of medium and long-term responsive measures.

## 2 Securitisation

Securitisation empowers the state to legitimately resort to extraordinary means to guarantee the security of its citizens, and strengthen political, economic, social, cultural institutions, in order to avoid a conflict or the unfavourable impact of the threat. In the mid-1960s, with the implementation of the so-called low-intensity warfare strategy, 'securitisation' meant curtailing preventive/repressive tasks of police organs and bodies by decrees or states of exception, and placing these tasks under the supervision and control of the armed forces. In this complex process, public security was incorporated into military rule. As a result, various insurgent movements in the region were lumped together as

‘subversive threats’, and the intervention strategy used was the result of a combination of excessive use of the repressive apparatus of the state in conjunction with political propaganda.

The so-called Copenhagen School – influenced by constructivist sociology and the rise of language theories – has developed a theoretical framework on security as a social and intersubjective construction. The fundamental elements of the so-called ‘theory of securitisation’ consist of its nature as act speech and its intersubjective character. The consideration of security as a discursive act is based on the premise that the mere fact of pointing out a certain issue and describing it as a threat is associated with a specific rationality charged with symbolic power that forms a positioning based on the friend/enemy dichotomy, in which the use of the necessary means is legitimised to end this threat urgently (Williams 2003). The intersubjective nature is understood as the need for the threat to an object of reference to be so identified by the ‘securitising actor’, as recognised and approved by the ‘audience’ to which the message is directed.

Securitisation transforms ordinary political problems into perceived threats to security in a process of identification of existential threats, emergency action, and effects on inter-unit relations by breaking free from rules (Buzan et al 1998: 6). The concept of security is based on the idea of getting rid of threats and being able – whether as individual states or collectively – to maintain their independence in terms of their identity and functional integration against forces of change that are considered hostile (Buzan 1991: 432). Whenever there is a threatened object, a securitising actor will claim a right to extraordinary measures to ensure its survival (Wæver 2004: 13). The denomination removes the issue from the realm of ordinary politics into the realm of emergency politics, where it can be dealt with outside the sphere of the rule of law, giving the power to the securitising actor to redefine its meaning and erase any pre-existing meaning.

From this perspective, securitisation is presented as a phenomenon of indeterminate content but with a specific form: the creation and discursive representation of one or more existential threats requiring immediate and exceptional actions in time to establish a particular relationship between the parties involved. This school proposes to move to scenarios in which ‘securitised’ issues become part of ‘politicised’ issues and tend to be subject to the normal mechanisms of accountability and public policy decisions, thus moving to a so-called ‘de-securitisation’.

## 2.1 Political use of securitisation: Need and fear

Fear is often the first and foremost tool of governmental discipline and social control. It is an effective way of intimidating collective wills predisposed to protest; of neutralising political adversaries; as well as confining the inhabitants of a territory to the realm of private life, dislodging the public forums of opposition voices that claim for themselves a share of power or that question privileges. The nomenclature of an enemy opens the door to demonisation and political insecurity. The feeling of insecurity promoted by ‘totalitarian movements’ involved not only the commodification of its adherents but also the sub-humanisation of scapegoats. Authors such as Arendt have over the years identified how political fear operates as an instrument of the ‘elite’ to govern social resistance. The demonisation of ‘the other’ has the immediate effect of

expanding government capacities. The ultimate aim is to generate indoctrination within the same group on the pretext of keeping the community united in the face of an 'evil' or 'danger' presented as 'on the outside'.

The second factor used as a source of securitisation policies is the invocation and construction of a state of necessity of such gravity as to (lawfully) compel the adoption of extraordinary measures. One of the problems posed by this complex relationship is the impasse in every justification of the exception, in order to ensure the vicious circle by which the exceptional measures attempting to justify the protection of democratic are the same that led to its ruin (Agamben 2003).

## 2.2 Securitisation and democratic governance: Threat of ungovernability

With its pessimistic and often conservative implications, the concept of governability entered the agenda of researchers and politicians in the 1970s. Ungovernability involves the joint product of a crisis of administrative management of the system of government and political support of citizens for their authorities.<sup>1</sup> The central dilemma of democratic governance, though, is that demands on democratic governance grow, while the capacity of democratic governance stagnates (Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki 1975: 9). This paradox arises from the combination of three types of challenges to democratic governance: contextual challenges;<sup>2</sup> internal challenges;<sup>3</sup> and intrinsic challenges.<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is the same successful operation of democratic government that gives rise to tendencies that impede its functioning, hindering its own governance. The 'overload' thesis is based on elements such as the involvement in the political activity of a growing proportion of the population; the development of new political groups, including ethnic minorities, regional and youth groups; the diversification of tactics and political means by which groups secure their ends; a growing conviction on the part of these groups that the government has a responsibility to satisfy needs; and an elevation in their conceived needs (Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki 1975: 163-164).

In Latin America, the concept of 'governability' acquired its own nuances during the 1970s and 1980s as it was framed within a process of debt crisis, adjustment and economic restructuring. This resulted in the political exhaustion of the conditions that shaped the post-war interventionist state and its subsequent redefinition in terms of reform of the state. In this sense, the appropriation of ideas such as 'delegitimation of

- 1 The text that laid the groundwork for the discussion and introduced the term in contemporary political language was *The crisis of democracy. Report on the governance of democracies to the trilateral commission*, published in 1975 by Michel Crozier, Samuel Huntington & Joji Watanuki.
- 2 Modifications in the 'external environment in which democracies operate and which are not products of the functioning of democratic government', for example, changes in the international distribution of military power.
- 3 Difficulties originated in the social and political dynamics of the societies themselves, for example, the emergence of new values that imply disenchantment of politics in the younger generations or that by different circumstances affect the basic cultural supports of (liberal) democratic legitimacy.
- 4 These arise from the very functioning of democracy, for example, the extension of rights and their mechanisms of enforceability.

authority', 'overloading the State' and 'fragmentation of interests' as threats to the management of politics and a threat to political security, operated against the background of the changing regional itinerary of breakdowns, transitions and democratic consolidations.

In Latin America, considering the impact of securitisation on human rights and democracy implies reflecting on the way in which social demands linked to fear and the need for possible threats (be they cultural, economic or ideological) are articulated and the nature of state responses, to show government capacity or governance. This involves questioning the limits of the state's police function and the costs that these societies are willing to pay in terms of freedom and democracy. As a consequence, when considering the present and the immediate past of the region, in connection with the impact of securitisation, the National Security Doctrine and the criminalisation of social protest come into focus.

### 3 Securitisation in Latin America

The consideration of security with biases of securitisation incorporates discursive and practical elements characteristic of a war-footing conflict situation. In this sense, the most conspicuous feature is militarisation as an intervention strategy on internal security issues. The incorporation of military forces and other military bodies in the fight against public insecurity while denaturalising their original functions contributes to building and reinforcing in the collective imagination the feeling of being in a state of war. Historically, securitisation had its more iconic representation during the application of the so-called National Security Doctrine.

#### 3.1 Securitisation outside the rule of law: National Security Doctrine

Between the 1960s and 1980s, the National Security Doctrine was the most complete expression of the militarisation of the concept of security. The Doctrine placed the military component at the centre of society, transcending typical military functions and becoming the contemporary military ideology of the greatest political impact in the region. Its historical roots originated in the militaristic tradition resulting from the wars of independence of the region. In the middle of the last century, the military forces again acted as an integrating agency of the state and not as an institution that should be integrated into it.

After World War II, with the continued influence of the United States, the advent of communism was identified as a threat to regional and internal security. Far from being considered an isolated episode or transitory conflict, the war against subversion was the main priority on the basis of which all the symbolic and material resources of the state were directed. The Doctrine placed the military as agents for defending the values and traditions of 'Western civilisation'. All those groups or individuals who did not accept this interpretation of international tensions were grouped together as enemies of or threats to the nation.

Militarisation was justified on the basis of the alleged weakness and disintegration of political institutions. When the perception of ungovernability and fear built a context of political threat and power vacuum, the military forces could claim popular representation through

moralising slogans, extreme simplicity in their assessments, a denial of political dialogue, a catastrophic vision of social change and the exaggerated reevaluation of the past. In this way, with the perceived ineffectiveness of political parties and civil actors and the absence of authority and leadership, the armed forces directly intervened to ensure stability (Costa Pinto 1969).

As an early form of securitisation in the region, the most striking effect of this doctrine was the intervention of the military – like a corporation – in areas of politics unrelated to their professional activity. There was a process of occupation of civil institutions in many countries of the region through different variants of *coups d'état*. Latin America continues to hold the unenviable record of being the region with the largest number of *coups d'état*, namely, 36.

In Brazil, the Doctrine was instrumental in preparing and justifying the military *coup* of 1964 against the government of Joao Goulart. In Argentina,<sup>5</sup> something similar happened in the overthrow of two administrations of different persuasions: one led by the Radical Party in 1966 and another by the Peronist Party in 1976. In Chile, the Doctrine helped to legitimise the democratic hiatus of 1973-1990; according to its perpetrators, a necessary action to prevent the 'communist revolution' of Salvador Allende's government. The 1973 *coup d'état* in Uruguay had its rationale in preventing the threat posed by the 'Tupamaro' national liberation movement. In Peru and Ecuador, the national security doctrine was implemented by democratically-elected civilian regimes. In the case of Paraguay, between 1954 and 1989, the dictator Alfredo Stroessner constructed a model of intervention more akin to old-fashioned militarism, but based on the same doctrinal principles as the National Security Doctrine. In Central America, the influence of the Doctrine was felt indirectly through the American conception of security in the context of the political and even military domination of the United States.

A secondary impact of the National Security Doctrine in Latin America was regional co-operation between dictatorships, such as that of Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973-1990); Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay (1954-1989); the National Reorganisation Process in Argentina (1976-1983); Juan Maria Bordaberry in Uruguay (1973-1985); General Hugo Banzer in Bolivia (1971-1978); the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua; the governments of El Salvador during their bloodiest years of civil war; and the Colombian government of Julio César Turbay Ayala with his well-known 'Statute of Security' (1978-1982). The repressive action of all these governments was unified through the so-called Plan Condor in South America (Dinges 2003), and Operation Charlie in Central America.

The third fundamental feature is that military interventionism did not obscure the abstract ideological attachment to the institutions and values of Western democracy. In this sense, many interventions were justified in the name of democracy and the defence of institutions, and even of the

5 In Argentina, one of the precursors of the Doctrine of National Security was the CONINTES plan, sanctioned and put into practice during the government of Arturo Frondizi in 1958. The acronym meant 'Internal Commotion of the State', and consisted in placing the armed forces and security at the disposal of internal repression, allowing the militarisation of large urban centres and permitting the search and arrest of opposition leaders.

Constitution. Latin American armed forces formulated the Doctrine within an ideological frame of reference that implied the application, as a necessity, of an exceptional regime to safeguard security and democracy.

In order to fully comply with the priority function of security, the government had to consolidate all existing resources: political, economic, military, social and cultural, among others: ‘The need for an enemy to give meaning to military action and to reinforce corporate identity was replete with the discovery that other types of wars could be carried out’ (Rial 1990). The rigid military logic of the friend-enemy opposition then was used to create the concept of an ‘internal enemy’, transforming the circumstantial political adversary into an existential threat. Again, ‘the most important contemporary military change at the professional level was the replacement of the old professionalism of “external defence” by the new professionalism of internal security and national development’ (Stepan 1973). In this way, the military *coup* and ‘state terrorism’ were justified as a system of political action. This type of ‘terrorism’ is not only intended to identify and destroy current enemies and dissuade potential enemies, but also to convince ordinary citizens that their personal security is inevitably and obligatorily under the control of the regime. In this way, politics are conceived as a strategy and as a form of internal war with a high expectation of violence. Thus, the National Security Doctrine was converted from a macro-military theory of conflict into a hermeneutic tool to interpret social functioning in a key period of Latin American history.

Once the era of military dictatorships, characterised by serious human rights violations against the civilian population, was over in the mid-1980s, the countries of the region returned to civilian, democratically-elected governments. After the traumatic experience of decades of military rule, and a strong transitional process seeking truth, justice and reparations – under the slogan ‘Never Again’ – securitisation was confronted with conceptual and social boundaries based on the legitimacy of the rule of law, the international protection of human rights and the idea that there could be no legitimate political discourse outside the democratic system.<sup>6</sup>

There was considerable optimism about the benefits of political freedom and the possibility of achieving sustainable regional development from new institutional forms. The strong feeling of a ‘re-foundational’ process led to the opening of discussions and the implementation of new institutional arrangements, which sought to consolidate the minimum prerequisites of the rule of law and give greater effectiveness from democracy to governmental action. As a strategy, many democratic governments in the region sought to consolidate republican institutions by strengthening national constitutions, ratifying international human rights treaties and recognising their constitutional status, and seeking regional integration. However, this recovery of democratic institutions took place in a context of poverty and social marginality, high rates of infant

6 In 2001 the member states of the OAS adopted the Democratic Charter wherein they acknowledged democracy as a right of individuals, that governments have the obligation to promote and defend, and establish international collective mechanisms to protect it. Inter-American Democratic Charter, adopted by the OAS General Assembly at its special session held in Lima, Peru, on 11 September 2001.

mortality, low levels of education, predominantly agrarian economies and alarming levels of external indebtedness.

### 3.2 Securitisation and the rule of law: Criminalisation of human rights defenders

After navigating the perilous waters of the 1980s debt crisis, and the consequences of the neo-liberal 1990s (Foxley 1988), the new millennium re-edited securitisation through the criminalisation of social protest, but this time within the framework of the rule of law, with a regressive impact on human rights and democracy.

In this context, the threat of ungovernability was linked to three key areas. First, in economic terms, the threat to the maximisation of profits obtained from mega projects on the exploitation of natural resources where any opposition, such as the demand for territorial rights by the indigenous peoples of the Americas, is seen as a potential threat to national economic development. Second, the demands on the recognition of workers' rights are seen as a threat to competitiveness in a world market that seeks flexibility in labour regulatory frameworks. Third, in social terms, the recognition of the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons in some countries of the region, which have promoted debates on the rights to abortion, same-sex marriage and the recognition of same-sex parental families, often triggers perceptions of threat to entrenched national and cultural identities. Added to this, more sophisticated social organisations and the human rights movement have given their advocates significant public exposure at a time of political conflict. These three scenarios – opposition to extractive industries, regressive labour policies and public policies and legislation restricting freedom of choice in reproductive health or sexual diversity – have provided a context for new forms of securitisation in the region. The preferred tools for these new forms of securitisation include the use of the criminal law system against social activists and human rights defenders.

In this sense, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has observed that 'criminalisation' through the legal and judicial system is employed as a tool through the filing of unfounded or criminal complaints that do not conform to the principle of legality or are incompatible with international human rights standards (IACHR 2015: 13). Accusations of the commission of criminal offences, such as 'incitement to rebellion', 'terrorism', 'sabotage', 'apology of crime' and 'attack or resistance to authority', are often preceded by stigmatisation by public officials or other influential actors whose interests are threatened by social demonstrations and human rights activism.

In the case of those who actively participate in social protest, the use of criminal law is aimed at restricting the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, through the invocation and enforcement of criminal offences in tension with the principle of legality, with justifications in line with public order and national security. The criminal offences often invoked range from 'attacks', 'rebellion', 'obstruction of public highways' to 'terrorism' (IACHR 2015: 13).

As indicated by the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples, 'one of the most serious shortcomings in the protection of human rights in recent years is the tendency to use laws and the administration of justice to

punish and criminalise social protest activities' (UN Human Rights Commission 2004). This action is implemented through the application of emergency laws, such as anti-terrorism laws and the by prosecuting demonstrators for common crimes.

Paradoxically, democratic regimes currently limit the actions of democratising agents, through domestic criminal law. Within the framework of the rule of law and with a strict practical and discursive attachment to democratic validity as a limit to any state response, there is a scenario of restrictions to the work of human rights defenders. Legal proceedings initiated against human rights defenders produce a chilling effect in the grassroots movements that intimidate them and hamper their work.

State officials seek to delegitimise or stigmatise human rights defenders in the eyes of society in order to use social pressure on judicial officials and thus prosecute criminal action against them. These actions involve smear campaigns accusing human rights defenders of the crimes of sedition, conspiracy or a threat to national security and the state.

During the course of social protests, human rights defenders are detained without an official warrant in order to deactivate demonstrations. In some cases, they are deprived of their liberty for unreasonable periods. The use of preventive detention, temporary prohibitions on demonstrations and meetings, and bail bonds are forms of criminalisation when in tension with the principle of the presumption of innocence, and these can become a *de facto* sanction, imposed even before there is a final sentence. The IACHR has indicated that preventive detention and the imposition of bail bonds in criminal proceedings has been used as a means of repression against certain groups of defenders who are not in a position to satisfy their financial requirements, such as indigenous and peasant leaders. In practice, keeping this alternative to preventive detention out of reach of members of disadvantaged communities reinforces vulnerability, discrimination and criminalisation (IACHR 2015). For instance, in Ecuador, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed concern over criminal investigations and convictions of social and indigenous leaders involved in public demonstrations against legislation on water management and development projects in Lake Kimsakocha. The Committee recommended that the state safeguard the right to freedom of assembly; regulate the use of force by law enforcement officers in connection with public demonstrations; and that the scope for the applicability of the criminal offences of sabotage and terrorism be clarified and restricted (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2012).

Human rights defenders are criminalised under the guise of protecting the honour of public officials. Freedom of thought and expression and appeal through domestic criminal law is seen as constituting a threat to public order. In a number of countries in the region, human rights defenders have faced prosecution by publicly criticising or participating in protest rallies against state authorities (IACHR 2015).

As part of the effects of securitisation, the financing of organisations dedicated to the defence and promotion of human rights through international co-operation has been limited on the assumption that organisations that receive funds from abroad encourage forms of

intervention by other nations on domestic politics, act as conspirators to destabilise the state, or support combined causes such as terrorism or similar crimes.

The extensive use of criminal offences, such as sedition or terrorism and other laws relating to state security against human rights defenders, involves equating social protest movements with subversive groups, a practice extended in the region during the 1970s and 1980s. Because of the vagueness of criminal offences punishing terrorism-related conduct, there is a wide discretion for the justice system in a context of securitisation.

#### 4 A new agenda for securitisation: Multidimensional security

The rapid development of globalisation has made it clear that states no longer are the only main international actors. New risks and threats with cross-border dimensions have emerged, requiring international and inter-sectoral co-operation and solutions. This view was first reflected at the level of the Inter-American system in the discussions of the 2002 OAS General Assembly held in Barbados. This discussion was expanded in the 2003 Declaration on Security in the Americas, and was institutionalised in 2005 with the creation of the Secretariat for Multidimensional Security. In this process, a definition of multidimensional security was established, focusing on human rights and democracy through the promotion of economic and social development, and expanding the definition of security to cover new and non-traditional threats that include political, economic, social, health and environmental aspects (OAS 2003). This approach includes terrorism; transnational organised crime; drug trafficking; corruption; money laundering; arms trafficking; security challenges to and social exclusion of citizens; extreme poverty; natural disasters; pandemics; deterioration of the environment; attacks on cyber security; and access to weapons of mass destruction.

This perspective has encouraged a number of isolated civil society initiatives. In Honduras, the Partnership for a Fairer Society developed a project aimed at improving criminal investigations through institutional strengthening. In Venezuela, the Alcatraz Project offers work, sports and training to young people involved in criminal gangs. Brazil has experimented with community police officers in places of risk, in programmes such as *Fica Vivo* and *Pacto Pela Vida*. In Guatemala, '24-0' gives visibility to a campaign against lethal violence by promoting 24 hours without murders. The restriction on the carrying of firearms in Colombian cities has resulted in a decrease, albeit moderate, in murder rates. The implementation of harm reduction programmes on drug use produces interesting results in terms of the moderation of conflicts between young people in urban contexts, such as the cases of alcohol consumption regulation strategies in Bogotá (Colombia) and Diadema (Brazil). An interesting international co-operation effort, the *Instinto de Vida* campaign, which involves 30 civil organisations from the seven most violent countries of the region (Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Venezuela), was initiated in April 2017. The goal is to reduce homicides by 50 per cent over the next ten years through conflict mediation; firearm regulation; alcohol and drugs; the prevention of recidivism; guaranteeing access to justice and due process; and

strengthening the relationship between the police and the community (Igarrapé 2017).

For its part, the UN Human Security Trust Fund has sponsored initiatives based on the idea of human security as an ideal and a principle for management. This approach seeks to

protect the vital essence of all human lives in a way that enhances human freedoms and the full realisation of the human being. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms: freedoms that constitute the essence of life. It means protecting the human being against critical situations and threats (serious) and omnipresent (generalised). It means to use processes that are based on the strength and aspirations of the human being. It means the creation of political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that, as a whole, give human beings the cornerstones of survival, livelihood and dignity (Commission on Human Security 2003).

Dogmatically, human security is an approach arising from freedom and not from restriction. It articulates the ideals of peace, development and human rights. As a form of management, it seeks to ensure security in different dimensions (economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political) and conceives intervention in security from multiple angles and not simply as 'law and order'. In both senses, it involves an interesting contribution for the creation of de-securitized scenarios.

As a result, initiatives such as the 'Plan for fostering coexistence' in Sonsonate (El Salvador), 'Actions on public schools and health services' in São Paulo (Brazil) and support for the development of 'Participatory social protection solutions' in Soacha (Colombia) have articulated efforts of international organisations, states and civil society organisations with strategies for alternative interventions to securitisation. These interventions include the formation of municipal committees of citizen security and coexistence; the elaboration of diagnoses and strategies of intervention in areas with higher rates of delinquency; conducting awareness campaigns; the training of community agents to care for victims; the training of public officials; the training of community leaders in co-ordination with agencies dedicated to human rights; vocational training for young people from high-risk areas; the training of community leaders in sports, and art workshops; the creation of municipal offices for women and gender; psycho-social care for the prevention of risk behaviour; the creation of toxicology units; and the installation of municipal observatories on violence and delinquency.

All these measures share a multidimensional approach: They reject *mano dura* policies, and focus on communities specially affected by violence as a complex phenomenon. They also make it possible to deploy general (population-based) and targeted (at-risk population) prevention strategies, while intervening in both victims and those responsible for violence and crime. At the same time, they enable interagency work between state agencies at the sub-national, national and regional levels, incorporating the contributions of civil society organisations.

However, despite the innovative – and even humanistic – nature of a concept of security closer to individual and collective rights and not as dependent on the *raison d'être* of the state, there is no lack of critical approaches to human security. For example, it is argued that the

overarching concept of human security is difficult to put into practice with a view to achieving concrete results (Rivera 2008: 14). Its dimensions, in terms of its lack of completeness and the difficulties they present in terms of atomised management, are also questioned by its critics. In this regard, it should be noted that for the purposes of truly effective inter-agency co-operation, it is necessary for the participants to enter into complex construction agenda agreements. It is obvious that all the agents involved should perceive the threat with an equal level of importance. Similarly, accountability and the evaluation of indicators require a complex harmonisation of interests between the parties involved and symmetrical shares of power.

Taking responsibility for greater safety means granting it its true scale, providing solutions in a context of respect for rights, and not limiting it to a reduction of risk to certain crimes through a discourse of threat and fear.

At present, security does not refer either directly or indirectly to the state, but involves a complex network of relations and links with other non-governmental spheres, such as citizenship, the business sector, economics and co-operation between nations. Similarly, the multifaceted nature of the problem requires interventions diagnoses of violence and crime as social, educational, economic and cultural phenomena, and not merely factual problems.

## 5 Final remarks

The theory of securitisation unveils the political nature of the discursive construction of threats and the manner in which they are invoked to build consensus and legitimise strategies to expand state police power. In the Latin American region, this dynamic operated in the imposition of the National Security Doctrine as from the 1960s, and currently operates by criminalising human rights defenders as a measure to counter them as perceived threats to economic development, order or state governability. The impact of securitisation in terms of the enjoyment of rights and democracy is evident. In the region's immediate past, it involved the breakdown of democratic institutions, the suppression of all political dissent through the death and torture of thousands of Latin Americans, and even the appropriation of identity. Currently, the criminalisation of human rights defenders limits the actions of the main agents of democratisation in the region. Intimidation, imprisonment and defamation alter the basic rules for the progressiveness and enforceability of human rights.

Its less obvious impact is the extent to which its simplified rhetoric makes it difficult to think about models of intervention for the new challenges that violence and crime present in the region. The classic concept of security was intimately related to military power. In the past, it was understood that the state should prevent and eventually reject military threats from other states, by defending sovereignty, independence and territory militarily. Thus, each state was called upon to preserve its own security by increasing its military capacity.

The complex Latin American scenario combines high levels of violence; high levels of social inequality; a skeptical and frightened citizenry; institutional fragility; a brutally repressive past; and a present marked by

criminalisation. To this must be added a fluid and polarised political debate and the legacy of past dictatorships that, symbolically and practically, linked order with repression. In Latin America today, criminal law is used as a tool to contain social conflicts connected with the right to territory, the workplace, sexual and reproductive rights and gender identity. The criminalisation of human rights defenders is the backlash of bringing complaints against public officials in cases of corruption, or in the context of the investigation of serious violations of human rights. In this context, punitive demagoguery and securitisation become keys to interpreting the new political scenarios of the region. Good examples are government-sponsored securitisation programmes, such as Plan Quadrant (Chile); Democratic Security (Colombia); *Plan Antimaras* and *Plan Mano Dura* (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador); Plan Merida (USA, Mexico, Central American countries); as well as various forms of regional spatial securitisation (territorial and virtual) co-operation.

The effects of the past currently are still felt, when demonstrations perceived as disorder are repressed and, conversely, when every attempt to steer the course towards order is denounced as repressive.

Therefore, the questions remain as to how to build consensus on security without appealing to fear; and how to incorporate the critical sense of securitisation theory into a security intervention agenda that promotes human rights.

The contributions of human security and the multidimensional approach seem to open an alternative path. However, much remains to be done in this regard, including how to promote strategies of political coordination between the states of the region for the construction of a common agenda on the matter of security; how to implement gradual and flexible intervention procedures in such a way that local strategies for the containment of violence and crime can be expressed; how to give financial sustainability to forms of interagency co-operation between states and civil society organisations; how to identify performance indicators that combine regional, national and local problems; and how to ensure the integration of human rights defenders in the design of public policies and their implementation.

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