

NWX-WOODROW WILSON CENTER

Moderator: Maria-Stella Gatzoulis
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Coordinator: ...standing by. Today's call is being recorded, if you have any objections you may disconnect at this time. All participants will be in a listen-only mode until the question-and-answer session of today's conference. At that time you may press Star 1 on your phone to ask a question. I would now like to turn the conference over to Mr. (Richard Burns) the Editor of The Wilson Quarterly. Thank you and you may begin.

(Richard Burns): Good morning everyone, thank you for calling in to our Ground Truth Briefing on Latin America in 2019 and particularly how it was a year of protest across the continent.

In The Wilson Quarterly we had officially ran a very comprehensive roundup of country experts called Postcards from the Edge and when I came up with the title part of what I was wondering was what edge exactly. So I think that's what we're really going to talk about today. There are some commonalities and there are some major differences within all of these countries.

So I would like to turn it over now to our moderator (Cindy Orenson) who is the Director of our Latin American Program here at the Wilson Center.

Thanks (Cindy).

(Cindy Orenson): Thank you (Richard) and thanks to everyone who's joined us. In 2019 the depth and the ferocity of the rage spilled into streets in countries across the Americas took leaders in those countries by surprise as well as many long-time observers.

Latin America of course is no stranger to street protests and the causes of this new wave of protests were diverse and there are no real easy generalizations but there are common threads. One is economic stagnation in the region over the last several years. This slowdown which at times has been an outright recession has eroded standards of living and threatens the gains of the middle class and the working poor coming from the so-called Golden Decade of the early 2000s.

A second common thread has to do with the growing distrust and dissatisfaction in Latin America with the institutions and practices of representative democracy. With the incapacity of democratic systems to deliver key public goods things like quality education and healthcare, security and infrastructure, corruption has inhibited service delivery and contributed to public cynicism.

How have governments responded to this outpouring of discontent? Will the dialogue and the reforms that have been underway be sufficient to calm the streets? What are the broader implications for the future of political democracy? And what does this all mean for young people who make up the bulk of protestors in many countries but may not necessarily know how to channel their participation in the streets into lasting political change.

We have four outstanding experts to address these issues in the cases of Chile, Columbia, Bolivia and Venezuela. Our first speaker is Dr. (Rosanna Castilioni) who is an Associate Professor in the Political Science School at Chile's Universidad Diego Portales. Our second speaker is (Jim Schultz) who has lived in Bolivia for years and is the Founder and Executive Director of the Democracy Center.

Our third speaker is Dr. (Michael Penfold) a current Fellow in the Latin American Program who joins us from Caracas. He is also a full Professor at IESA, the Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administracion. And finally (Catalina Lobo Garedo) is the Spanish Editor of the Global Investigative Journalism Network. She joins us from Bogota.

So first we'll ask our speakers to make opening presentations. We'll follow with some questions from me. And if those of you who have joined us on the call wish to get in the queue to ask a question please press Star 1 so we can come back to you at the end. (Rosanna) the floor is yours.

Dr. (Rosanna Castilioni): Thank you very much (Cindy) for the presentation. As you know Chile experienced a dramatic wave of protests since October 18, 2018. Mobilizations were largely peaceful but were also tainted by looting, violence against police forces and destruction of infrastructure.

Additionally the National Institute of Human Rights argued that nearly 1000 Chileans were injured by security forces' rubber pellets. It later was shown that they contained other materials such as lead. So at least 220 protestors ended up with severe eye problems. By the end of February 36 protestors lost their lives.

Mobilizations extended with ups and down up to early January and then entered a sort of recess particularly in February. But this recess did not reflect a decreasing level of social tensions but the time of the year. In the (unintelligible) now what we are, you know, which it ended our summer break.

These protests resumed these past few days. Yesterday for example we had several metro stations shut down due to demonstrations. On March 1 we had mobilizations of bikers for example and a series of mobilizations will take place during March, they are already scheduled, the most important of which will take place in March 8 in the context of the International Day of Women.

Some key reforms of this so-called social agenda are being discussed right now. And the government has managed to get preliminary support of part of the opposition but they have not been yet approved. So for example now as we speak the debate in congress revolves around pension reform, universal daycare, healthcare reform, minimum income. So all these issues are there.

Regarding the plebiscite things are far from solved. First because support for the new constitution has been decreasing although the most likely scenario by far is that it will pass. Second is that support for a mixed constitutional convention has been increasing. This means that it is quite likely that the convention that will, you know, push for these or be working in these are reformed may be formed by legislations and members voted for this purpose. We still don't know that but it's not an unlikely scenario. If this happens even if Chileans vote for a new constitution changes might be much more moderate than protestors are expecting.

One aspect that I think is particularly alarming at this point is that polarization levels seem to be increasing. Since protests do not have a leader there is no

political party behind the process, there are no signs of political parties when there are demonstrations and there is not a common purpose I think that things can get very easily out of hand. As a result I am still a bit skeptic about what the future will look like for us. Thank you.

(Cindy Orenson): Thanks very much (Rosanna). Next we'll hear from (Jim Shultz). (Jim) please go ahead.

(Jim Schultz): Good morning, buenas dias everybody. If you had asked almost anybody in Bolivia or people who pay attention to Bolivia in the beginning of October if they thought that Evo Morales would no longer be the president by mid-November I think you would've found almost nobody who believed that. So these events were very surprising to everyone.

As I wrote in a long piece that I did called The Rise and Fall Evo Morales in the New York Review of Books, you know, this as everybody who pays attention in Bolivia knows this was a government that started with such hope and such power and such inspiration. I mean this, Evo's election in Bolivia was the equivalent of Mandela taking power in South Africa or Obama in the United States. It was transformative. And even people who were critical of Evo were caught up in that euphoria.

And he had a very successful first two terms especially. It's important to remember that the Morales government guided Bolivia through the global recession with growth every year. People were generally satisfied, certainly at the beginning there was rightwing opposition that embattled. But then there was a period of stability and stability is something Bolivia wasn't really very used to and I was there 19 years and stability was a rare thing.

I think the undoing of Morales really can be traced to a couple of things. The first is well really was about his desire to be President for at least 20 years and we don't know how long was really the plan. As many of you know Bolivia like many Latin American countries has had a pretty strict one-term limit on presidencies because of the history of corruption in countries like Bolivia and elsewhere that was lifted to two terms under the new constitution that Evo and the MAS political party supported.

His running for a third term was questionable. He had a legal argument that he made that most people sort of acquiesced to which is that his first term was under a previous constitution. But when Evo announced that he wanted to run for a fourth term I think that is when a lot of people began to smell a drift toward authoritarianism that made people very nervous and not just people who were traditional opponents of the government.

You had that combined with a real walking away from Evo of a lot of people on the left around environmental issues. The breaking point for that obviously was the TIPNIS march where you had the government repressing indigenous marchers over their desire to keep a highway out of their rainforest.

And as you know Evo's election, Evo's running for election for a fourth term was based on this really quite bogus Supreme Court decision, his hand-picked supreme court. But even though the constitution said he couldn't run again and even though a popular referendum that he had put on the ballot had people voting by a slim margin to not let him run for a fourth term the supreme court said well, you know, his human right to run for reelection forever is more powerful than the constitution and people saw through that as a power grab.

There wasn't really enough power in the street to stop that and this is always the dance in Bolivia is the electoral process and the protest process dance

together in different ways. And then you had the election itself and you had this experience of Bolivians.

And imagine this, you know, you had this very robust election and you have this rule that if you get less than 10% more than your opponent and less than 40% of the vote you head to a runoff and that's exactly what looked like was going to happen. And then all of sudden you had this mysterious, you know, 24 hours in which the ballots weren't being publicly reported anymore. And when it comes out the other side Evo miraculously has just over the amount of votes that he needs and people weren't having it.

And, you know, when I say people weren't having it people across the spectrum weren't having it. It just smelled bad and people had their own stories of seeing that their dead mother had cast a vote at the local table. And then the TV images of ballots being found that had been hidden and all these things.

And this culminated in the OAS report and all these other things until finally at the beginning of November you had a classic case of the government, the Morales government trying to repress the protests in the street. These mass protests in every city across the country, every single city including places where Evo had been quite popular like Cochabamba and La Paz.

And then it all fell apart particularly when the police in Cochabamba and again this was not the captain, these were not the leadership, the rank and file basically said we're not going into the street to oppress our families. I'm not going to go out and tear gas my daughter. And this started in Cochabamba and then over the course of about 24 hours there was a mutiny of the police departments across the state, I mean I'm sorry, across the country.

And then you had this very peculiar 48 hours in which nobody really knows except for a handful of people who were directly involved what happened. But you definitely had this feeling that everybody was stacked against Evo and then you have this very controversial statement by the head of the military who comes out on a Sunday morning and says, I believe that the only way that the country is going to find peace is if Evo resigns from the presidency.

Now there's been a ferocious debate of does that constitute a coup or not constitute a coup. And my position has always been no one really knows. It's always troublesome in Latin America when the military puts its finger on the scale but it's a lot more complicated than that. And it's really important to recognize that this was not the military coming out of nowhere and saying this to Evo.

The country was shutdown with protests across the country and then Evo left. And then we had this very peculiar period for about 48 hours in which nobody really knew who the president was going to be.

One of the most eerie texts that I had I was exchanging obviously messages and calls with people was from the best constitutional scholar in the country I know and I asked him who is the president. And he texted me back on WhatsApp, "Who knows."

So now we have this interim president of Anez which is very troublesome. You know, and the interim government has one job and that's deliver clean elections and go home and that's obviously not the way she's handling it.

There's been violent repression against people. There has been an undermining of the legal system. And then you have her announcing that she's going to run for the presidency in this election coming up on May 3 so you

once again have the people looking at a government that simultaneously controls the mechanics of the election and very much has stake in the outcome.

What will happen again the rules are that if you don't get 40% of the vote that you, and you don't finish more than 10% over your opponent then there is a runoff? And that is most likely what we're going to have. It seems quite likely that the MAS slate is going to make the runoff.

And then it's a question of who the second will be. It will be either Anez the acting president or Carlos Mesa the former president who was Morales' lead opponent. We can get into this in the question and answers.

Whether the country moves back to some form of stability after the election I think has a lot to do with who the two candidates are in the runoff and how they conduct themselves. If it's MAS versus Anez I don't think either side's going to accept it. If it's Mesa versus MAS I think we might actually have an election people will respect but we'll see.

So that's a quick summary and we can get into more details as people wish.

(Cindy Orenson): Great next we'll hear from (Michael Penfold). (Michael) please go ahead.

Dr. (Michael Penfold): Yes thank you good morning. Venezuela has experienced three different waves of social protests in the last five years since Maduro came to power in 2013. We had a first very large social protest movement driven by students demand in 2014. Then we had an even bigger wave of social protests in mid-2017 following the Supreme Court's attempt to strip the national assembly from its constitutional prerogative. And obviously after Juan Guaido

was sworn in as interim president in early 2019 we had a third wave of protests.

I think there are two elements I want to highlight. The first one is that unlike many other waves in Latin America of social protest each one of these protests has been followed by a further deterioration of human rights, of civil and political rights and even democratic breakdown in Venezuela. So unlike other countries where social protests has been followed by concessions and openings the different waves in Venezuela has been followed by actually a closing of the regime in the country.

The second difference I would say and I think it's an important one that helps us understand a little bit of the dynamics and learning of the regime is that the first two waves in 2014 and 2017 were massive social protest waves. That is they were very large groups of people protesting for several months and instead in 2019 we had historically the largest number of social protests in the country but did not have in terms of scale the same size.

So really the key question in Venezuela is to understand why haven't we observed the kind of social protests we saw in the past which could've helped Guaido actually to promote and dislodge Maduro from power and therefore promote regime change.

In fact if you, if we look at sort of the theory of change that the opposition had in mind given the size of the constitutional crisis that we were facing after Maduro was attempting to formally start his second presidential period without being formally elected with the recognition from the international community was that what Maduro in order for Maduro to bring down Maduro what the regime needed to confront was international isolation, international sanctions and on the other hand social protests.

And Venezuela has experienced international isolation, it has experienced international sanctions but yet it did not experience the kind of social protests that the opposition thought that was going to be required to promote that change.

So the key question I'm going to say is why in fact the size of these protests have been diluted. Why they have not been able to scale up given the size of the economic and social collapse in the country.

Today Venezuela its GDP has basically it has, it contracted by more than 2/3. It has, it experience, it still experiences hyperinflation. And we're experiencing the largest migration crisis in the western hemisphere modern history.

So how do we explain this sort of paradox in Venezuela? I think there's several factors that help us understand this. One has to do with the repression. This is a regime that has a very important authoritarian dimension to it. What is interesting when we compare the different waves is that repression has taken different forms.

For example in 2014 the repression was conducted by sort of a parastate groups called Colectivos. In 2017 it was actually the armed forces through the National Guard that exercised the repression. And in 2019 under Guaido the opposition experienced a very strong repression from intelligence agencies and also from the police forces, FAES, which were in particularly trying to demobilize the popular sector.

The second factor has to do with social coercion. The regime has been very capable of demobilizing public sectors by conditioning access to food through

these food boxes called CLAP. And they have also used the police forces as a way to contain social demand on the collapse of public services particularly electricity and water and gas and cooking gas. And on the other hand in terms of the deterioration of their salaries and their income given the high degrees of hyperinflation that the country is experiencing.

Third factor has to do with the Venezuelan diaspora. Venezuela has experienced more than 4.2 million Venezuelans have left the country and that has had a huge impact in terms of the demographics of the country, in terms of the social dynamics of the country and also in terms of how people are generating their income.

Last year we had remittances of over \$4.5 billion in Venezuela which represent close to 6 to 7% of GDP which is huge. And this has created a whole different dynamic in terms of how the demographics works. You have a very old people starting to live in Venezuela with very young kids that they are taking care of. Whereas the more productive labor force is moving out particularly to other countries within Latin America.

And therefore with less young people in the streets, with more people trying to survive given the size of the economic crisis and the diaspora you have this phenomena that, you know, scaling up protests is increasingly difficult. That doesn't mean that the protests don't occur. In fact as I said they have been happening even at a larger number than other years but they're just not as big as one would imagine given the size of the economic and social collapse.

The other key aspect is that the regime has been very good at reducing the credibility of the opposition managing to dislodge Maduro for power and therefore to produce change. The demand for change in Venezuela's extremely high. It's over 82% of the people want political change in

Venezuela but over 35% of the people believe that that's not going to happen. So that's also creating at the level of public opinion a lot of difficulty mobilizing the population.

And finally I would say that the opposition has also been failing to develop a strategy that is more a grassroots oriented. Even though they have been facing, you know, extreme conditions in terms of the illegalization of different political parties, the persecution of different political leaders but yet the opposition has failed to adapt their discourse and their strategy to a changing social and economic environment.

They're very much focused on restoring democracy and restoring legitimacy but there's still very little social discourse in terms of how exactly they're going to be able to connect with people's demand and reconstruct public services in Venezuela.

I will end basically with where we are today. Guaido next week is calling for a march. He there with the opposition was hoping that this, after his successful tour in Europe and the US this was going to be a turning point in his domestic strategy. But it turns out that the difficulty to get people to mobilize on March 10 is much larger than what we believed.

And I think all of this is, you know, it's a good reflection on some of these, you know, on the importance of some of these factors that I have just mentioned. And I do believe that without this kind of social pressure on the domestic front it's going to be very difficult to move forward any attempt to change the political situation in Venezuela. So I'll leave it there (Cindy).

(Cindy Orenson): (Michael) thanks, pretty sobering for sure. (Catalina) Columbia.

(Catalina Lobo Garedo): Good morning everyone and thanks for this opportunity. Well Columbia has been for decades the most complicated country in the continent in terms of armed conflict. We had or we still have the longest armed conflict in Latin America.

And after the peace treaty was signed with the FARC guerillas and the government of Juan Manuel Santos in 2016 there was hope that, you know, if the peace treaty was started to be, if it was implemented, you know, the country could move towards a different kind of democracy, a more modern democracy where other issues that had for years been ignored or postponed you could say held more social type discussion, a more socially type discussion on healthcare on pensions, on employment. Other kinds of things that were ignored for years could sort of find an opportunity to be discussed and to be reformed and to create a more structural reform.

And so on November 21 last year there was a huge unprecedented protest almost in every single city in the country (unintelligible). And people took to the streets and it was amazing because it was like a spring sort of what you call a spring anyways. And people thought that this was going to, you know, to really push forward some urgent reform.

The unions were the ones that called for these protests but this was beyond the unions. I mean the student leaders also had a very active participation in calling for these protests. But everyone just took to the streets the different kinds of sectors and this was unprecedented really. And there was really a question how long is this going to last. Like, is this really a new definition of Columbia's democracy or are we still going to be, you know, touring between the old ways and the new ways of discussion.

And the truth is the protests have lost momentum, you know, after this November (unintelligible). For the next few weeks people kept coming out into the streets and the government of Ivan Duque called for a national conversation. He set up some discussion tables. It's not really a negotiation it's more of a discussion and he set it up according to different themes or issues that people have been demanding.

But Christmas got underway and then Carnival got underway and the protests lost momentum and this has, you know, helped the government sort of earn some time. And the attitude now of most Columbians towards protests is that if people are blocking the streets or if they are engaging in terrorism or, not terrorism sorry, vandalism acts then they will not support these protests.

The most pressing issue right now is also that some of the ideas that were behind mobilizing protests like, you know, the pension fund and economic reform and other kinds of things they're losing also because security has increasingly been deteriorating. And the amount of human rights leaders and activists who live mostly rural areas or what you could call the periphery continue to be murdered and at an alarming rate.

The most recent UN human rights report says it, the Red Cross reports says it. Other armed groups that are not now the FARC or FARC dissidents project or, you know, new armed groups that have started taking over some of the areas that they controlled as well as the ELN guerilla which for years also dominated certain areas, have been more active. And this is something that, you know, it just deteriorated.

So who is in the opposition right now? The unions also lost all the support of the people. People (unintelligible) represented by the people who were calling for these protests. And other political leaders for example Gustavo Petro who

was the, who won something against President Ivan Duque. He is also perceived as a, the dangerous kind of populist toxic leader and many people don't really feel identified with him. Although he would be the one to represent a more let's say stand against continuing the same way and proposing real structural reform.

The other leaders that have been rising, the other political leaders that have been rising for example Claudia Lopez the mayor of Bogota. She's having her honeymoon period right now. Her approval ratings are close to 70% but it's still too early to see if she is the one who could represent some of the demands and some of the ideas that helped mobilize the protests in November.

For now the conversation, the national conversation is the last talks will be over by next week March 15 and there's supposed to be a report coming out to see what kind of things they have agreed on. But the national conversation didn't involve the unions or the student leaders that were calling for protests anyways. So I'm not really sure what they will achieve and what will happen with these conversations.

And I mean the hardest thing is Columbians needs to be torn between its past and its future and it seems that in rural areas still just, we're still living in an armed conflict situation. In the cities it's a different reality, it's a paler reality. And the discussion, the national conversation is very different when you're in the periphery or if you're in Bogota or Cali or Medellin, the main cities.

So who knows what's going to happen but for now it seems that the protests really are not happening and that they have lost a lot of support and a lot of momentum. And that there are no real clear leaders who are also, you know, making this happen. So who knows what will happen but for now it just lost all momentum really.

(Cindy Orenson): Great I have a couple of questions given the diversity of these cases it's hard to ask a question that cuts across but I'm going to start with (Rosanna).

There will be a plebiscite on April 26 for a new constitution. How likely is the process around the constitutional reform and the subsequent drafting of a new constitution likely to be able to grapple with this extremely complex set of demands of people in the street particularly the issue of inequality which to a degree I think unlike other countries in the region has been front and center in the protest movements in Chile even though Chile by Latin American standards is not the most unequal country.

So I was wondering if you could talk about the plebiscite and how that relates to a process of broader reform. I'd also like to invite people who have joined us on the call if you'd like to ask a question of one of several of the speakers please press Star 1 to be in the queue thanks. (Rosanna).

Dr. (Rosanna Castilioni): Yes thank you so much for the question. I think that when I, first I would like to start with a brief clarification, I do not think that the fact that Chile's not the most unequal country in Latin America is really important or relevant in terms of how people politicize this issue.

You know, Latin American countries have been structurally very unequal since the beginning of time however in some countries at this point of history inequality became a political issue. So the fact that inequalities are being politicized from below is having an impact not the actual level of inequality I would say. It's the perception that people have on inequalities and even if they are willing or not to accept these levels of inequality.

Regarding the process today is how to know where we stand and what is going to happen basically because we don't know what the constitutional convention, drafting the constitution will look like. We know that now as you said in April 26 we will have a plebiscite that will decide whether we want a new constitution or not and what the mechanism is going to be. This means that people can opt to have a constitutional convention formed exclusively by individuals voted for this purpose or alternatively a mixed convention constituted by 50% congress people and 50% individuals elected for this purpose.

I think the second option if chosen we will probably see much more continuity than if the first one is chosen. But even in the first case parties, political parties have been highly involved in the process and the most likely scenario is that the individuals integrating in these convention will have ties to political parties.

The other problem is that the most progressive leftwing forces are highly factionalized. So if you have much more, this level of fractionalization these will not favor the forces that are pushing for change. So I do not think that, I think that one of the main risks of all these process is that we might have a much more status quo than the protestors want. I'm not saying this is good or bad I'm just saying that we might have much more continuity than some people are pushing for, thanks.

(Cindy Orenson): Great. Next question is for (Jim) and I'll announce the questions for everybody else so you can be thinking of it so we don't run out of time and can take questions from the audience. For (Jim), what would be a good outcome in May from the elections and what is a bad outcome. And what would that look like and which one do you think is most likely.

For (Michael) how is it possible in the face of so much repression both selective and more indiscriminate, how is it possible for the opposition to continue to mobilize the popular sectors of people who are suffering from the economic crisis. What would a reasonable strategy from the opposition look like?

And then finally for (Catalina), President Duque's approval ratings have taken a precipitous fall. He was elected with a historic level of voters, was the youngest president to be elected. Given his unpopularity and the, what you seem to be describing as a diffusion of the protest movement and its dissipation who is the likely beneficiary of the combination of unpopularity but not a lot of movement towards changing the status quo?

So let's take (Jim) first. Reminder again please press Star 1 if you want to ask a question. So we'll go in that order, we'll take (Jim) then (Michael) then (Catalina) thanks.

(Jim Schultz): Well I think a good outcome is democracy and peace. I think a bad outcome is the dissolution of democracy and violent conflict.

The democracy and peace route would be an election in May and I'm certain a runoff in June. I can't imagine somebody's going to win it without a runoff. That people respect the results of and that the two sides going into the runoff find some way to work respectfully with one another after the election.

The bad outcome is you have an election that people don't respect, that everybody goes back into the streets. That the sort of racism that is under the surface starts becoming more blatant.

To be honest I think if the runoff is between MAS and Carlos Mesa I think there's a chance of peace and democracy. I think if it is a runoff between Anez and MAS I think we're headed for trouble. That would be my sort of quick view of things.

(Cindy Orenson): Great. (Michael) please go ahead.

Dr. (Michael Penfold): Obviously that's the real dilemma that the opposition is facing on, you know, given the fact that it's so difficult to mobilize social protests at a large scale. You know, what are the different alternatives to push the regime to provide meaningful concessions that can move the country towards restoring constitutional rule and opening a democratic process.

And I think this is a divisive issue this idea of, you know, what should be done. There is, you know, one faction within the opposition that believes that the only way out is if we increase international pressure even further which looks like something that the US is trying to push by increasing now the use of secondary sanctions against different companies that have been helping the regime to bypass sanctions in particularly Rosneft from Russia.

And but the truth is that so far despite this international pressure and the isolation the regime has been adapting to this new economic reality and in fact this has pushed the regime also to open up and liberalize certain, you know, particularly the FX regime. It has allowed for an incipient and rapid process of, you know, varying formal process of dollarization and this has created enormous differences.

But the truth is that in the domestic front despite this international pressure, you know, you're not getting that, the kind of outcome that you would expect

from a political perspective given the size of the economic contraction and the social deprivation that Venezuelans are facing.

The other option is electoral. The regime is facing internal pressures from certain groups to open up to new elections but Maduro wants to do this piecemeal that is he wants to hold legislative elections and he understands that he needs some international legitimacy to do this. A constitutional term for the opposition's national assembly's coming to an end by the end of this year and that poses a real sort of dilemma for how to face that reality.

There are factions within the opposition that believe that, you know, this is, that they should participate. Others believe that they cannot participate given the fact that the degradations of electoral conditions in Venezuela. And others I would say a third faction which is where I think Guaido is standing today believes that what it needs to be done is to use this reality to push the regime not only to open for legislative elections but also for presidential elections to legitimize all existing public powers in Venezuela.

So there's no clear cut answer to this, to this question (Cindy). I think at the end the opposition needs first of all to remain united. If because the regime is obviously playing a game where they want them to divide. And elections in this case is a good tool to do that.

And on the other hand I think they need to be realistic in terms of what they can achieve and not achieve. And depending too much on the international community I'm not sure it's going to do the work. But they need to come up with a domestic strategy that can actually start achieving some results.

(Cindy Orenson): Thanks, (Catalina). (Catalina) did we lose you? Sounds like we might have disconnected. Let's go to our first questioner (Maria Obusilad) if you're still on the line please go ahead.

(Maria Obusilad): Yes I'm here. Yes I have a general question, I'm curious how are these protests seen by the population in each of the countries. As (Catalina) said in Columbia these protests of last year was unprecedented but I still think that there's a lot of stigmatization against protests. I don't if this, this is probably related with the history of Columbia and the armed conflicts or every time there's like a protest it's immediately linked with rebels, with, you know, terrorists, vandals that are just here to, like, destroy, like, the peace and, you know.

And I'm also not sure, like, I also want to know how are these protests covered by the media in the other countries because I feel like in Columbia the media tends to focus on, oh if there is, like, some, like, violence or attacks against, like, buildings, yes they have to cover them but they usually focus on that instead of, like, covering the main reason for the protest. And they also, like, cover how people are affected in the communities, how they can't get to work or to their houses because there's blockages of the street and that makes people against the protest.

So even though the protests in Columbia last year were very unprecedented you still feel a lot of stigmatization and stigma from the society itself. Always saying oh so there's another movement that always criticizes the protesters or oh I don't go to protests, I work, I produce for my country because if you want to make your country a better place you just have to keep working. So basically they just want the status quo.

(Cindy Orenson): Who would like to take that question about the stigmatization of protestors and also the way the media is covering the protests?

Dr. (Rosanna Castilioni): I can say something very quick on that. I think that it is true, I mean there has been at least an attempt to stigmatize protests coming from most conservative sectors. At the beginning there was a sort of broad support for protests. This was unprecedented even in very well-to-do neighborhoods in Santiago there was a support for protests in October. Some comunas, some neighborhoods that never ever have people protesting had. So it was different.

But I think that as time goes by and the effect of recession are being felt and this mall for example shops in the main streets are suffering and these are middle class people working that are suffering this support is starting to, you know, fade away. So this is one of the things, I don't think it has been stable. At the beginning these protestors had support and now they are starting to lose it.

And the second thing is regarding the level of polarization. I think that at the beginning we had a lot of mobilization coming from people wanting change and now we are starting see mobilizations that are smaller in size but they still are there from more conservative sectors. So this is considering to polarization levels and we don't know how it's going to evolve.

(Jim Schultz): (Cindy) I can also respond to that if you'd like.

(Cindy Orenson): (Jim) go ahead please.

(Jim Schultz): You know, protests in Bolivia's kind of like breakfast, for most people there's something every day. And it's not just left or right. I mean it's just such a long, long history of protests.

And, you know, in Tiquipaya where I lived for so many years if somebody was mad about an issue with the local school you'd wake up in the morning and the roads would be shut and you would have to figure out a way to get around the road blockade to get to work. So there's a very, very high tolerance for protests and it comes from all sides.

Now the protests obviously in November and October were very different because normally a protest is it's some giant mass of people against the government. This was the people against the people and it was very frightening for folks there. And, you know, you have to understand it not just at a political level but at a sort of human level.

Like, I was on the phone with friends who are the parents and kids my kids went to school with who were saying there are cocaleros with dynamite two kilometers from my house. I don't care what the government has to do to stop them from getting into my neighborhood. And that level of fear, a lot of it well-founded.

I mean, you know, people were under attack. That turned into a license by the government to just do whatever it wanted. So you had the massacre at outside of Cochabamba and Sacaba. You had for a while this decree by the government that basically advanced immunity to all police and soldiers for anything they might do.

When you have a high level of fear that invites a high level of repression and authoritarianism. And it's not at that point political as much as it's just deeply personal. And you have that on all sides and that's the danger is this is a very different kind of protest situation. This isn't, you know, an uprising of the

people trying to hold the government accountable but it becomes a protest of one group of people versus another and that's kerosene and a match.

(Cindy Orenson): (Jim) thanks. We're going to take one last caller, we're out of time. (Darren Cochran) if you're still on the line please go ahead. Is (Darren) there?

(Darren Cochran): I am sorry.

(Cindy Orenson): Oh go ahead, go ahead, go ahead.

(Darren Cochran): Thank you and thank you guys for this conversation. It's been really enlightening. My question kind of pertains to everyone but it's focused on Venezuela. In regards to, you know, the humanitarian crisis that we're seeing unfolding in the country is that affecting some of the other domestic issues that we're dealing with in these other countries? I'm thinking specifically of Columbia but if anyone else has anything to talk about in this regard too I'd be really interested to hear kind of everyone's perspective on this.

(Cindy Orenson): Okay I think we've lost (Catalina) to talk about Columbia so if anyone else wants to address that question or make one final statement.

Dr. (Michael Penfold): Yes I mean I think the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela is huge. And I would say also that the international response to that humanitarian crisis is not of the size that it should given the scale of the migration process taking place right now from Venezuela particularly to other Indian countries like Columbia, Ecuador or Peru.

It's an issue that in Venezuela has been exacerbated I would say, by the collapse of public services and in particularly electricity. You have very large cities in the interior of the country that struggle with blackouts that can

happen four or five, even six times a day. And you have the second largest city in the country Maracaibo in the west part of the country is struggling on a daily basis with that issue.

In addition you have gas shortages for cooking which is also it put a huge strain particularly for the urban population living in the shanty towns that are dependent on access of this cooking gas. And that has also created enormous discontent.

I believe in terms of the international response the second aspect is that they have not been able at the scale they should be able to address the issue within Venezuela. We have a tension happening in the border. We have some support though not enough for Columbia and other countries. We have some multilateral organizations being able to create some funds available.

But I think this is the real challenge for the international community which is, you know, how to do, how to get this international support actually get into Venezuela given the size of the crisis. And despite, you know, even in the face of this country that it's been unable to shift politically and that it looks like it's this stalemate is going to be in place for quite a while.

That doesn't, so I would leave it there. But I think there is enormous challenges and the need to rethink really the strategies of how to deal with the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.

(Cindy Orenson): With that I think we're out of time. I'd like to thank all four of our speakers, (Rosanna), (Jim), (Michael), (Catalina). And thank you for joining us on the call. We will have audio along with some key quotations from this posted later today or first thing tomorrow. Thank you again for joining us.

(Jim Schultz): Thank you for having us.

(Cindy Orenson): Thanks.

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