



# *Editorial*

POLITICAL ANALYSIS AND CORPORATE SECURITY UNIT

## ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

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## Iranian state terrorism: a reminder of a latent danger with global reach

Iran, an openly theocratic nation that has pretended to compose itself, in complacency with the prevailing Western Satu Quo at the international level, as a partial democracy by allowing the election of leaders under the prior approval of a clerical council (*New York Times*, 2021), in recent months, it has been the subject of much controversy due to its remarkable repression against the civilian population, which (by representing the overflow of social unrest due to the absence of freedoms) has triggered strong protests against the regime in search of its revocation (*France24*, 2022).

Although the phenomenon described above, designated as State terrorism due to the operational characteristics that have been priori described, is carried out against the civilian population itself, it's not a crime (*Vásquez*, 2010), seems to stand out as the main issue of concern in terms of security considerations, the truth is that, beyond being understood as a disproportionate manifestation of local scope, such unfortunate appreciation expressed through the obfuscation of freedoms, represents only a symptom (and not a minor one) of the dangerousness of an authoritarian government that, in its previously demonstrated capacity and willingness to exercise terror, may have repercussions on a global scale (*CCIU*, 2022).

In first instance, it's necessary to understand who currently holds power in Iran. The Ayatollah mandate, assumed since the Islamic revolution to take advantage of the disenchantment of the population with the monarchy in place, has been established, for all practical purposes, as a dictatorial mandate of Shiite strand (*France 24*, 2022), This is why, on religious grounds, it has been strongly opposed to countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, which represent the West's major allies in the Middle East (*El Mundo*, 2022).

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This fact, although it does not imply an absolute rupture with the super nations of antagonistic political-cultural worldview, has facilitated conflicting oppositions that, for the American framework of terrorist characterization, have been unjustifiable. An example of this is, of course, the support to cross-border paramilitary organizations such as Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Houthis, Hamas, Fatemiyoun, Al Haq, among others (*Dumitrascu, 2017*)(*Télam, 2020*).

Although the notoriety of these organizations, characterized as terrorists, has been considerably reduced since their effusive international persecution led by the United States, this has not implied that the government of Iran has broken ties with these armed groups, or even that it hasn't been, from the leadership of its own state forces, the architect of attacks also labeled as terrorists (*Council of Foreign Relations, 2007*).

In a worryingly active manner, the Islamic Republic under the mandate of the Ayatollahs has incurred in multiple attacks of homicidal intent against Israeli targets (especially Jews), Americans and even Iranian exiles in the far abroad of its borders, accumulating, in the last two years, thirteen events in four different continents, ostentatiously executed by the operation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (specifically the Quds forces fraction), which, operating in parallel to the operation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (specifically the Quds forces fraction), has been carried out by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, thirteen events occurred in four different continents, ostentatiously executed by the operation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (specifically the Quds forces fraction), which, operating in parallel to the conventional armed forces of the country, have been reinforced and instrumentalized since their formation for purposes of the style (*CCIU, 2022*).

Even if all these attacks have been thwarted, the scope of these Iranian intelligence forces, which have evoked extreme concern by targeting diplomats and business leaders as targets of animosity, is dangerously relevant to the global security establishment (*CCIU, 2022*).

Although this campaign of transgression may have been interpreted as a deliberate show of contempt, it has coincided with a singularly striking event: the sudden assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh (*CCIU, 2022*), the renowned Iranian scientist who, accused of secretly building an atomic bomb, was leading his nation's nuclear development program (*El País, 2022*).





The nuclear deal with Iran, a precedent for the long-standing rivalry between the two victorious World War II tycoons, was intended as a settlement for the easy use of nuclear power against opponents of growing U.S. hegemony in the 1950s and 1960s (*BBC News, 2021*). Given that the alliance on which this treaty was being consolidated had been established between a pro-Western monarchy and the US government, the ambitious proposal was extremely tempting, especially when one considers that Iran, recursively, had numerous uranium reserves for effective production (*Euronews, 2022*). With the establishment of an Islamic republic, the interests of providing nuclear permissions for Iran declined significantly as the West found itself a new enemy that could negatively compromise the world security balance (*Cemeri, 2022*).

**Figure 1:** Increased enrichment of uranium in Iran According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).



**Note.** The graph shows the considerable increase from 60% of stored uranium to 83% according to the IAEA. Taken from Iran 's 20% enRICHED Uranium Stockpile, Bloomerang, 2022, Bloomerang en línea (<https://www.bloomberglinea.com>). CC BY 2.0.



As of today, although the Biden administration has clarified its disinterest in continuing this development process (which, as of today, has been directed more towards energy functionality) (*Semana, 2022*), the truth is that this measure may not be enough to stop an unwanted acquisition of this catastrophic power, as the Iranian government has been progressively and discreetly increasing its technological capabilities for this purpose (*BBC News, 2022*). For this very reason, it has been emphasized that the establishment of a nuclear treaty could, contrary to its original purposes, represent a regulatory measure that could prevent the need for an abrupt geostrategic reconfiguration of security in the Middle East (*European Union, 2022*).

The recent death of Mahsa Amini, as a remarkable reminder of the State terrorism that took place in the context of the demonstrations (*BBC News, 2022*), has allowed us to turn our gaze to a nation that, due to anti-democratic assumptions and prevailing theocratic maxims, poses a risk to the world insofar as it has armed forces with a high operational range and, in a conceivable possibility, the capacity to create nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider that, even if Iran's power is dangerous, the classification of this country as a perpetrator of terrorism at different levels represents a criminalized vision of its actions, which, despite having repudiatory moral considerations, is not too far from the U.S. operation itself (*Tortosa, 2001*). Nuclear weaponry, ironically, has had greater diplomatic deterrent than wartime utility in its history (*Pobes, 2010*), which is why, although a matter of imperative necessity for global security, it may not ultimately imply the looming of catastrophic mortality.



# REGIONAL

## Arce's Government in Bolivia: A dictatorial legacy for Latin America?

The Latin American region was no exception to the proliferation of authoritarian regimes, as evident proof of this fact, without a doubt, were the numerous military dictatorships (mainly right-wing) established in its various nations throughout the twentieth century (*La Vanguardia*, 2020). With the global expansion of democratic rule (established with the U.S. victory in the cold war), and the rejection of the restrictions against freedom that occurred as a result of the heavy hand of these mandates, the establishment of regulated electoral systems with liberal institutions that echoed the now assumed Western principles represented a temporary halt to authoritarianism (*El País*, 2005).

Nevertheless, with the arrival of the Pink Tide in the region, there would be a regression towards less democratic instances. Socialism being established as a diluted inheritance of Soviet communism, the anteposition to the dictates of the first world, subjugating the instrumentalized Latin America of the third world, resulted in the broad reproduction of a left antagonistic to the US agenda in many countries of the region (Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, etc.) (*Lisa News*, 2022). Bolivia, the protagonist nation of this paper, emerged as one of the great representatives of this situation under the leadership of Evo Morales in the figure of the presidency until 2019, at which time, due to controversial elections, the executive was forced to abdicate (*BBC News*, 2019).

**Figure 2:** Victims of the repression committed by interim president Jeanne Áñez after the departure of Evo Morales



**Note.** The graph shows the number of victims of repression during the wait for new elections to be called in 2019. Retrieved from *Los 37 de 2019*, José Arias, 2019, *El Negocio de la Represión* (<https://el-negocio-de-la-represion.elclip.org>). CC BY 2.0





After the disastrous delegation of the post to Añez, the governing party Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS), which had served as the defending bench of the left-wing regency in the Senate, nominated Morales' former finance minister as presidential candidate, achieving, before international scrutiny, the legitimization of a fair victory (*Idea, 2020*). Although the candidate sought to distance himself from the disastrous mistakes made during the terms of his predecessors (*France 24, 2020*), Arce has seemed to denote, in a worrying way, repressive behaviors that have raised alarms about a possible return to the authoritarianism of former times, which has endured in nations such as Nicaragua or Venezuela, assuming, of course, the inexorable compromise of the security of Bolivian citizens (*Infobae, 2022*).

Although the information above is extremely logical for a retrospective evaluation of the antidemocratic phenomenon in the region, it's necessary to point out certain details that, given their omission, result in a wrongly biased understanding of this phenomenon. In the first place, it is important to mention that the conjuncture of the Pink Tide, in spite of implying many anti-democratic setbacks for many of its protagonist nations, does not correspond in a comparable or replaceable way, as a dictatorial wave, to a wave of anti-democracy in the region (*Bonnet, 2022*).

In this order, it can be understood that socialism, dissimilar to the classic establishment of communist republics, emerged more as a representative integration of a wing of the radical left in modern political systems than as an antithesis to the corresponding popular representation (paniagua, 2010). In fact, while it is true that the socialist phenomenon has turned out, in its historical evaluation, to be a resounding failure, the fact is that it has not been understood de facto as a civil liberty disabling establishment (*Cohen, 2011*). Curiously enough, this can be seen in the fact that according to the categorization of Freedom Random House (an organization in charge of evaluating the quality of democracies), Bolivia (66 points), accused of being understood as a dictatorship, has, surprisingly, a better score than Colombia (64), and is very close to the values of Ecuador and Brazil for the years 2021 and 2022 (s.f).

Considering this assertion of classifications, it can be understood, with greater reason, that the integration of new policies of a more authoritarian

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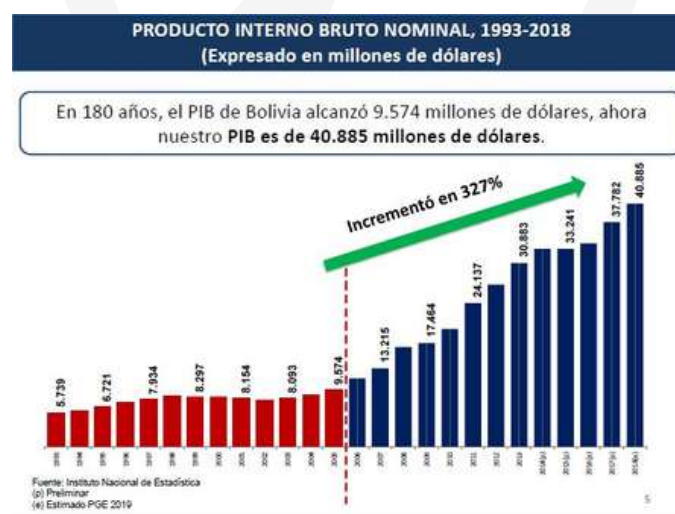


nature will be decisive to negatively tilt the balance in what is a vulnerable system such as the illiberal democracy in Bolivia (López, 2022). First, the ascension of former minister Arce was marked by strong protests following the modifications made by the Senate, dominated mainly by the MAS party, with the purpose of reducing the majorities required for the approval of certain proposed laws, which meant a worrying over-empowerment of the presidential figure (Guachalla, 2021).

On the other hand, Arce, although technocratic in his pretension to lead Bolivia in a rigorous and institutional manner, has engaged in the worrying exercise of persecuting the opposition, ordering the arrest (or according to cruder narratives, the kidnapping) of his main political detractor Luis Fernando Camacho under the accusation of conspiring in favor of the "coup d'état" that caused the resignation of Evo Morales (BBC News, 2022). To this fact, it is essential to add the rude response of the president through the use of public forces against the demonstrators who demanded the release of Camacho, to the point of causing the pronouncement of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) and its Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (RELE) in rejection of the repression demonstrated, which is denoted as a risk to public safety (Infobae, 2023).

The prosecution of Jeanne Áñez, despite having a more reasonable legitimacy given the numerous human rights perpetrations committed by the former president (see figure 2), is not exempt from being part of Arce's systematic retaliation against his opponents because, instead of pushing for a corresponding accusation through legal channels, the current president opted to execute a questionable legal stratagem based on the incrimination for alleged implications (Nueva Sociedad, 2022).

**Figure 3.** Bolivia's economic growth after Evo Morales' rise to power.



**Note.** Although the source of the graph may seem biased, the information can be corroborated with data provided by the World Bank. Retrieved from PRODUCTO INTERNO BRUTO NOMINAL, 1993-2018, Presidencia de Bolivia, 2019, Nodal (<https://www.nodal.am>). CC BY 2.0





Authoritarianism in Bolivia is not a new phenomenon (considering that Evo Morales himself was the architect of this application) (*El País, 2017*), and although it is inaccurate and hasty to call Arce's term of office a dictatorship, the similarities that exist, which compromise the guarantees of freedoms for the population, cannot be discredited. To a large extent, thanks to the hydrocarbon boom and the pertinent economic management, the MAS party found a political anchor to become a protagonist in the Bolivian game arena (see *Figure 3*).





# LOCAL

## Current Populism in Colombia: a danger for the institutionality that guarantees national security?

Populism in Colombia has been a term of permanent strategic use, wielded as a weapon of discredit against any political candidate who, in pretension, aspires to elected office through persuasion (rhetoric) catalogued as unfounded, irresponsible and, above all, dangerous (*Pécaut, 2014*). Despite this brief approach to the term, the fact is that its conceptual fixation has not been uniformly agreed upon, neither in the media arena, nor in the public arena, nor in the private sector (*Rebouças et al., 2022*), nor in common speech, being found, even in the academy, as a term certainly dissimilar among the approaches of scholars, which is why there is no agreed theory of populism (*Retamozo, 2006*).

At present, the political framework of a new left-wing government in power has brought uncertainty, as it has represented an unprecedented antagonism in regency with respect to the political continuity, marked by a path dependency (or institutional rigidity) of prominent prevalence towards the right-wing spectrum (*Meer, 2019*). Being the term populism, in the daily life, an almost direct translation attribution to panic currents such as "castrochavismo" (*AIL, 2020*), it's natural to think that, given the numerous accusations against the current president of Colombia of having discursive connotations that are dangerous for the institutionality, this represents a danger for national security.

However, to remain in the simplism of a short statement implies an insufficiency. Considering the findings of Jan-Werner Müller in his work *What is Populism?* (2016) in which he rigorously questions and contrasts the approaches to Populism and its applications, we find that, the precision of the term from a critical evaluation is incompatible with its colloquial outline. According to the author, in the first instance, the offering of great promises from the electoral discourse doesn't represent populism since this modus operandi is characteristic of the exercise of politics and not an exception. On the other hand, although the expression anti-establishment is usually seen as a precise definition of the term, it turns out to be only one of its properties, and not the absolute sufficiency of its implication.

*Although it may seem unthinkable, the confirmation of an existing populism does not imply, with absolute certainty, a profound rupture of democratic institutionality*





Regarding what, according to Muller, does correspond to populism (or at least, numerous features that facilitate a more consistent differentiation), it has to do with a homogeneous representation of the electorate, configured for its purposes as "people", under a devised narrative that, ultimately, exalts the candidate's own figure, from an anti-elite opposition. This connotation is also accompanied by a permanent appeal to a state of crisis, a moral bias towards one's own discourse, and a permanent state of opinion (Müller, 2016). With this clarification in mind, can this appellation be attributed to Gustavo Petro?

The candidate of the historical pact who, through his long-lived electoral strategy, finally won his victory as the exemplary head of the opposition, acquired his popular vestige (determinant of his good favorability at the beginning of his mandate), thanks to represent the otherness relegated by the hegemonic inheritance of a high-class mandate in power, while, at the same time, he frugally achieved his dissociation from catastrophic ideas (El País, 2022) associated him with his Venezuelan counterpart (Chávez), of whom he was a sympathizer (La Silla Vacía, 2018). The peculiarity of the matter is that, derived from the clumsy radical management against the left in Colombia, the right wing caricatured the accusations against the candidate (France 24, 2022), undermining the validity of statements that, on numerous occasions, have proven to be true.

**Figure 4.** Petro's favorability at the beginning of his term in office



**Note.** Retrieved from APROBACIÓN DE GUSTAVO PETRO SEGÚN INVAMER, , Invamer, 2022, Asuntos Legales (<https://www.asuntoslegales.com.co>). CC BY 2.0e





The discursive expression of Gustavo Petro, throughout his political activism, has been strongly marked by the opposition against the dominant elites, under denominations such as "Narco-State" or "Mafia State" to predecessor governments to his own (*W Radio*, 2020), which, although these accusations correspond with certain validity due to the corroborated links of Urbism with parapolitics (*Álvaro*, 2007), are reductionist.

On the other hand, the rhetoric of the use of the figure of the "people" has been a constant, as well as its persistent self-aggrandizement in the order of this guide (*Daza*, 2019), not to mention, of course, that he went so far as to propose a constituent of dangerous modifying capacity (*La Silla Vacía*, 2022), as well as he made allegations of electoral fraud on 11 different occasions, without any solid corroboration in his favor (*La Silla Vacía*, 2022), which implied, of course, a call for national destabilization, and therefore, the compromise of the security of the country.

However, although it may seem unthinkable, the confirmation of an existing populism does not imply, with absolute certainty, a profound rupture of democratic institutionality (*Berman*, 2017). One particularity of the Colombian experience has been, specifically, that it has allowed an endless number of undesired political manifestations except populism. As Daniel Pécaut rightly puts it (2014), the historical assimilation of violence in the nation has facilitated the composure of a society that normalizes catastrophic phenomena such as drug trafficking, armed struggle, and corruption, while, strangely, it remains abstemious of allowing any seed of the populist phenomenon (or its understanding of what it is), even ignoring its foundational relevance for Latin America.

Today, the danger of populism for democratic establishments cannot be denied, with the iconic case of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, for example,





being seen as the pinnacle of misfortune (*The New York Times*, 2017). However, it is necessary to understand that, in most cases (as happened recently with the Trump administration and more radical settlement of polarization in the United States) (Barberá-González & del-Fresno, 2019) populism usually implies the erosion but not the absolute dismantling of democracy (*The New York Times*, 2017). With the Colombian nation having one of the strongest institutional settlements in the entire region (which has survived dangerous justice reform proposals), the country has one of the strongest institutional settlements in the region (which has survived dangerous justice reform proposals) (Revelo-Rebolledo, 2008) and indefinite reelection in the first decade of the century (*El País*, 2010) (Villegas et al., 2011), it is unlikely that the current government will have a detrimental impact on security because of this cause, however, it is key to understand that in the long term, the situation could become darker if risky initiatives are not identified.

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