



SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

# Domestic military missions in Latin America: Civil-military relations and the perpetuation of democratic deficits

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## Abstract

Latin American militaries are today in many regards inoperative and obsolete as an instrument of defence. Yet, they seek to maintain their organisational power and privileges. Governments, on the other hand, lack the adequate means to fight criminality, persisting poverty and social inequality. In an apparent win-win situation, Latin American governments have used the military as a wildcard to step in where civilian state capacity falls short, including for urban and border patrols, literacy campaigns and to collect garbage, among many other tasks. The military's manifold internal use has been defended mainly based on pragmatic reasons. We argue instead that the ostensive pareto optimality between militaries and governments has had negative effects for civil-military relations from a democratic governance point of view that takes into consideration the efficiency and effectiveness of how the state delivers basic services across different policy areas.

**Keywords:** Civil-Military Relations; Democratic Governance; Internal Security; Military Missions; Latin America

## Introduction

Latin America is widely known as a region where interstate conflicts have rarely escalated into war.<sup>1</sup> Since the end of the dictatorships in the late 1980s and 1990s, a concerted effort to foster relations between states rendered the spectre of an armed confrontation even more unlikely. At the same time, however, Latin America suffers from some of the highest rates of violence and crime.<sup>2</sup> In many countries the police, far from being a solution, have become part of the problem due to corruption and a lack of preparedness. Latin American populations place consistently higher trust in the military than in the police,<sup>3</sup> despite the former being often under-funded and lacking an enemy against whom to defend the homeland. In this scenario, governments have turned to the military to guarantee internal security and to meet an additional range of basic necessities, which other, civilian state agencies have been unable to address. The tasks

<sup>1</sup>Kalevi Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Nicole Jenne, 'The domestic origins of no-war communities', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 24:1 (2021), pp. 196–225, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-020-00188-7>}; Arie Kacowicz, *Zones of Peace in the Third World: South America and West Africa in Comparative Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup>Robert Muggah and Katherine Aguirre, 'Citizen Security in Latin America: Facts and Figures', Strategic Paper No. 33 (Rio de Janeiro: Igarapé Institute, 2018); Carlos Vilalta, José Castillo, and Juan Torres, 'Violent Crime in Latin American Cities', Discussion Paper IDB-DP-474 (Interamerican Development Bank, Institutions for Development Sector, 2016).

<sup>3</sup>Latinobarómetro, *Serie de Tiempo: Confianza En Las Instituciones Nacionales* (Santiago: Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2021), available at: {<https://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp>}.

range from innocuous ones like providing haircuts in remote communities to fight parasites, to tasks that have been met with suspicion, such as collecting waste when the disposal service is on strike or the custody of ballot boxes in elections, to such invasive ones like prison security and public order. The military has mostly accepted these tasks without presenting any meaningful opposition given its historically strong sense of responsibility for the state and *la patria*, values that are expressed in the ideas of internal order and stability and that are deeply engrained in its role conceptions, the ‘shared view regarding the proper purpose of the military organization and of military power in international relations’.<sup>4</sup>

Even in those countries where the post-dictatorship legal frameworks kept the military from internal missions, namely Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, in recent years the distinction between external defence as the domain of the armed forces and internal security as the domain of law enforcement agencies has become increasingly blurry. An extreme example in this regard is El Salvador, where a presidential decree enables the army to cooperate with the police in border surveillance based on the consideration that exceptional circumstances demand military support. The decree has been renewed time and again over the past 27 years, turning the exceptional into normal and thereby challenging the country’s legal framework. Also in other parts of Central America, Mexico, and Brazil, the military’s involvement in the fight against organised crime, once declared a ‘temporary measure’,<sup>5</sup> has lasted for more than a decade without any visible improvement of security.

Many regional observers and especially policymakers hold that the military’s internal use is justifiable on practical grounds, highlighting the lack of civilian state capacity, societal demands for security and basic services, as well as the armed forces’ organisational strength and logistics capacity.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the use of the military internally is warranted, as a provisional instrument, as long as there is no suitable (civilian) alternative to solve a problem and until such an alternative is available. It is surely uncontroversial that the collaboration of the military is necessary and legitimate in emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, determining the end of their ‘provisional’ deployment tends to be almost impossible: societies begin to normalise the extraordinary, the state ‘forgets’ to build alternative capacities, and the military integrates new operational experiences into its organisational structure and role conception.<sup>7</sup> The idea of the military as the ultimate guardian of the state, which goes back to the wars of independence, has survived as part of the military’s self-image despite the democratisation processes of the 1980s and 1990s. Today, the armed forces no longer claim a direct hold on power but to a greater or lesser extent still ‘expect and seek to act’ in different areas of the state,<sup>8</sup> a posture that is unlikely to change as long as governments call upon the military to fill in where civilian state capacity falls short.

<sup>4</sup>Pascal Vennesson et al., ‘Is there a European way of war?: Role conceptions, organizational frames, and the utility of force’, *Armed Forces & Society*, 35:4 (July 2009), p. 630, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X08317994>}.

<sup>5</sup>Sonia Alda and Carolina Sampó, *La Transformación de Las Fuerzas Armadas En América Latina Ante El Crimen Organizado* (Lima and Madrid: Ejército del Perú, Real Instituto Elcano, 2019), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup>Gustavo A. Flores-Macías and Jessica Zarkin, ‘The militarization of law enforcement: Evidence from Latin America’, *Perspectives on Politics* (27 December 2019), p. 4, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719003906>}; David Pion-Berlin, *Military Missions in Democratic Latin America*, Politics, Economics, and Inclusive Development (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); David Pion-Berlin, ‘A tale of two missions: Mexican military police patrols versus high-value targeted operations’, *Armed Forces & Society*, 43:1 (January 2017), pp. 53–71, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X16631084>}; Carolina Sampó and Valeska Troncoso, ‘La violencia vinculada a la criminalidad en Brasil y el papel de las fuerzas armadas en la búsqueda de la seguridad pública’, *Revista De Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad*, 10:1 (2015), pp. 89–109.

<sup>7</sup>Rut Diamint, ‘¿Quién custodia a los custodios? Democracia y uso de la fuerza en América Latina’, *Nueva Sociedad*, 278 (2018), pp. 33–4; Rut Diamint, ‘¿Excepcionalidad versus institucionalidad? Los militares y la pandemia’, in Eduardo Levy Yeyati and Soledad Guilerá (eds), *Pospandemia: 53 Políticas Públicas Para El Mundo Que Viene* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Evaluación de Políticas Basadas en Evidencia, Universidad Torcuato di Tella, 2020), pp. 177–8.

<sup>8</sup>Rafael Martínez, ‘Objectives for democratic consolidation in armed forces’, in David R. Mares and Rafael Martínez (eds), *Debating Civil-Military Relations in Latin America* (Brighton, UK and Chicago, IL: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), p. 32.

Against the pragmatic view stands compelling evidence on how domestic threats and non-traditional military missions account for weak civilian control and even Latin America's military dictatorships.<sup>9</sup> Reviving the ghost of *coup d'états*, from this perspective the excessive use of the military is understood to undermine the rule of law and threaten its subordination under civilian control. What is at stake is the preservation of democracy.<sup>10</sup> In the same line, the argument advanced here rejects the extensive use of the military. However, we broaden the focus beyond the goal of democratic survival to shed light on the consequences the internal use of the military yields on civil-military relations and the functioning of democracy in terms of its performance and quality; aspects that are also highlighted by the concept of good governance. Adding to a literature that is largely based on single cases, by placing civil-military relations within the broader context of democratic governance we demonstrate how the military's wide-ranging internal missions have perpetuated democratic deficits across Latin America.

The point that civil-military relations are more complex than the institutionalised control of the military and the absence of *coups d'états* is today well established.<sup>11</sup> The newer frameworks of civil-military relations refer variedly to concepts such as effectiveness, efficiency, modernisation of bureaucracy, civic political culture, and democratic governance of the security and defence sector, among others.<sup>12</sup> Building on these insights, we argue that in order to capture the implications the military's internal use has on civil-military relations it is necessary to take into consideration standards of democratic governance not only in the security and defence sector, but more generally. More specifically, we draw on recent evidence from Latin America to show that the internal use of the military has negatively affected the quality of democracy in at least four regards. First, it challenges the rule of law in that the permanent or near permanent involvement of the military in internal affairs is inconsistent with the majority of Latin America's constitutional provisions and legal frameworks. Second, it shielded the armed forces from modernising reforms, including reducing their size. Third, it has prevented the development of civilian capacities to find solutions to internal problems. Fourth, it worked to foster undemocratic tendencies in that it undermined the legitimacy of civilian authorities. Furthermore, the military's use to fight organised crime is widely known to lead to human rights violations. We do not deal with this last, already well-documented, negative consequence for democracy as it mostly applies to internal security missions only but not to other missions such as developmental ones that are also part of the study objective here.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Michael Charles Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Brian Loveman, *For La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America* (Lanham, MD: SR Books, 1999); Alfred Stepan, 'The new professionalism of internal warfare and military role expansion', in Abraham F. Lowenthal (ed.), *Armies and Politics in Latin America* (rev. edn, New York, NY: Holmes & Meier, 1986); Alain Rouquié, *El estado militar en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1984).

<sup>10</sup>Samuel Edward Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), p. 12; Diamint, '¿Quién custodia a los custodios?', p. 34.

<sup>11</sup>On recent articulations of this argument, see Vincenzo Bove, Mauricio Rivera, and Chiara Ruffa, 'Beyond coups: Terrorism and military involvement in politics', *European Journal of International Relations*, 26:1 (March 2020), pp. 263–88, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066119866499>}; Aurel Croissant et al., 'Beyond the fallacy of coup-ism: Conceptualizing civilian control of the military in emerging democracies', *Democratization*, 17:5 (October 2010), pp. 950–75, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2010.501180>}.

<sup>12</sup>Andrew Cottey, Timothy Edmunds, and Anthony Forster, 'The second generation problematic: Rethinking democracy and civil-military relations', *Armed Forces & Society*, 29:1 (October 2002), pp. 31–56, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X0202900103>}; Thomas Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei, 'Towards a new conceptualization of democratization and civil-military relations', *Democratization*, 15:5 (1 December 2008), pp. 909–29, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340802362505>}; David Pion-Berlin and Rafael Martínez, *Soldiers, Politicians, and Civilians* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>13</sup>For recent examples of how the militarisation of public security compromises human rights, see Astrid Valencia and Diana Sánchez, 'Some Things Never Change: Repression and the Militarization of Public Security in El Salvador', Amnesty International (2020), available at: {<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/10/repression-militarizacion->

Our case against the internal use of the military is different from standard arguments as it looks broadly at the different aspects of democratic governance to examine the effects on civil-military relations. Doing so allows us to point to long-term, more far-reaching risks for democracy stemming from an expanded set of military roles that result from operational experiences, and are facilitated by already existing role conceptions about the military as a guarantor of public order and stability. Due to the latter, even those that are hesitant to see the military's traditional mission of territorial defence watered down maintain a sense of duty to do anything in the name of *la patria*. The article adds to the existing literature by explaining in detail the risks for the quality of democracy, which are generally mentioned only in passing if they are mentioned at all.

Latin America is a heterogeneous region of 33 states. For practical reasons, we concentrate the analysis on 11 states that are either critical cases and/or represent Latin America's different sub-regions: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay in the Southern Cone; Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru in the Andean region; El Salvador and Nicaragua in Central America, and Mexico. Together, the chosen cases allow for breadth in the observations. The data we use to illustrate particular arguments are drawn from a wide range of different sources, including press reports, the International Institute for Strategic Studies' annual assessments of military capabilities and defence economics (Military Balance), national statistical records, the Latin American Security and Defence Network's Comparative Atlas of Defence, the annual Latinobarómetro surveys, and others. The more in-depth case-based evidence, although necessarily selective, was chosen to illustrate phenomena that we will either flag as common in the region or mark as an exception to demonstrate the democratic risks of involving the military broadly in internal missions.

The article begins with a review of the literature on civil-military relations, the quality of democracy, and domestic missions of the armed forces. Next, we discuss Latin America's spectrum of military missions and the practical view in favour of the armed forces' internal involvement. The subsequent sections present the empirical evidence to show how the military's engagement in domestic missions has stretched the constitutional and regulatory principles of the armed forces' doing. Furthermore, we will demonstrate how it disincentivised both the development of civilian state capacity and military reform, as well as the development of a strong democratic political culture. The last section summarises and concludes.

### Civil-military relations, the quality of democracy, and the internal use of the armed forces in Latin America

Civil-military relations describe a diverse set of relationships between different civilian actors and the military. While studies in political science have traditionally focused on relations between political elites and the military leadership,<sup>14</sup> we conceive of the military as an institution and of civilians as society in general terms to examine the effects of internal military missions on democratic governance. Specifically, we highlight how the prolonged internal use of the military has negatively affected four democratic standards: the rule of law, state capacity to deliver basic services, as well as external and internal security, and a democratic political culture. These are also highlighted by the concept of good governance, which embodies the principles of effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, participation, and equitability.

To be sure, the military's domestic use is certainly not the only factor to blame for Latin America's deficits, which have complex roots going back to colonial times. What is more, the historic lack of civilian state capacity is often cited as one of the chief factors driving politicians to rely on the armed forces as 'substitute institutions' to step in where other capacities are of short

seguridad-publica-el-salvador/}; José Miguel Vivanco, 'Militarization: Colossal Error', Commentary, Human Rights Watch (2020), available at: {<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/03/militarization-colossal-error>}.

<sup>14</sup>Risa A. Brooks, 'Integrating the civil-military relations subfield', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22:1 (11 May 2019), p. 380, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-060518-025407>}.

supply, based on the (wrong) myth that the armed forces are capable administrators.<sup>15</sup> However, as we will argue, the strong correlation between the use of the military for domestic tasks and what has been described as ‘endemic state weakness’<sup>16</sup> manifested in low performance indicators across policy areas should *also* be seen as one of cause and effect.<sup>17</sup> After all, the availability of the military wildcard whose deployment tends to be considered legitimate wherever civilian capacity is lacking sets off pressures to develop an effective state apparatus.

The theoretical link between internal missions and the military’s involvement in politics is well established. In his classic work *The Soldier and the State*, Samuel P. Huntington maintained that a professional military, one that has expertise in (external) defence, service responsibility, and high levels of corporateness, respects civilian authority.<sup>18</sup> However, professionalism gets weakened if the military is deployed for ‘non-military’ missions such as community support, thus weakening civilian control. Qualifying the argument, Alfred Stepan developed the concept of the ‘new professionalism of internal security and national development’, whereby military role expansion politicised Latin America’s armed forces often to the point of taking power.<sup>19</sup> John Samuel Fitch later argued that a democratic conception of military professionalism may be compatible with developmental and internal security functions. Still, he warned that the “developmentalist” variant requires stronger policy controls by civilian authorities’ to prevent the military from assuming a tutelary role.<sup>20</sup> According to Rut Diamint, even after Latin America’s democracies consolidated it has been necessary to restrict military missions to external defence. Reflecting the military’s historic role conception, ‘soldiers still think that they represent the true national interest’, and therefore governments should avoid providing them with a ‘direct and privileged relationship with society’ through internal missions.<sup>21</sup>

One strand of the civil-military relations literature argues that the nature of the dominant threat determines whether or not the armed forces are subordinate to civilian control. Again, the consensus is that all else equal, higher internal threats and the military’s deployment to face these have a detrimental effect on civilian control.<sup>22</sup> External preoccupation distracts the military from domestic politics and, at the same time, propels civilians to actively involve themselves with defence matters to exercise control functions.<sup>23</sup> In turn, internal missions such as counterterrorism ‘pull’ the military into politics since governments depend on their expertise at the same time as they ‘push’ the military into politics by providing them with opportunities to assert their preferences.<sup>24</sup> Beyond the question of civilian control, however, most of the theoretically-oriented, general and Latin America-specific literature has paid little attention to the implications of internal missions on

<sup>15</sup>Rut Diamint, ‘A new militarism in Latin America’, *Journal of Democracy*, 26:4 (2015), p. 156, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0066>}; Eric Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

<sup>16</sup>David Pion-Berlin and Harold Trinkunas, ‘Democratization, social crisis and the impact of military domestic roles in Latin America’, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 33:1 (2005), p. 10.

<sup>17</sup>On the lack of state capacity in Latin America, see Miguel Ángel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), pp. 2–10; Robert H. Holden, *Armies without Nations: Public Violence and State Formation in Central America, 1821–1960* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010); Guillermo O’Donnell, ‘On the state, democratization and some conceptual problems: A Latin American view with glances at some postcommunist countries’, *World Development*, 21:8 (August 1993), pp. 1355–69, available at: {[https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(93\)90048-E](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(93)90048-E)}.

<sup>18</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Belknap Press, 1957).

<sup>19</sup>Stepan, ‘The new professionalism’.

<sup>20</sup>John Samuel Fitch, *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. xx.

<sup>21</sup>Diamint, ‘A new militarism in Latin America’, pp. 166, 156.

<sup>22</sup>Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military*; Paul Staniland, ‘Explaining civil-military relations in complex political environments: India and Pakistan in comparative perspective’, *Security Studies*, 17:2 (22 May 2008), pp. 322–62, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410802099022>}.

<sup>23</sup>Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military*.

<sup>24</sup>Bove, Rivera, and Ruffa, ‘Beyond coups’.



the quality of democracy broadly conceived. Yet, as Lindsay P. Cohn also puts it: ‘While “civilian control of the military” may seem like a narrow issue, it is closely connected to the larger web of civil-military relations and, fundamentally, to democratic governance.’<sup>25</sup>

David Pion-Berlin’s work is one of what is probably only a handful of exceptions that have openly challenged the internal mission – weakened control orthodoxy of the classic civil-military relations paradigm. According to Pion-Berlin, internal missions are detrimental to democratic standards only if they are inconsistent with the military’s capabilities and proclivities.<sup>26</sup> If the military is well equipped to carry out internal tasks, their deployment is justified by a lack of state capacity as long as the duration and scope of the operations are defined by civilian authorities.<sup>27</sup> A similar, practical reasoning was expressed as early as in the 1960s, echoing those militaries that sought to legitimise the military-led authoritarian regimes at the time: the armed forces’ ‘technical proficiencies and organizational formats should be exploited [...] for socially useful purposes’.<sup>28</sup> Civic action in particular was described as an ‘exciting prospect’ that ‘would not only make a substantial contribution to national development but also, hopefully, provide soldiers with a sense of service and participation in national efforts’.<sup>29</sup> Not that different, still during the period of Latin America’s democratic consolidation in the 1990s, another US observer argued: ‘If national well-being depends on a particular task being carried out, and no institution other than the military can undertake it successfully, then the military’s assumption of that responsibility is appropriate.’<sup>30</sup> Yet, it was deemed appropriate only if the military’s involvement would be ‘transitional’, temporally restricted, and defined by a clear timetable.<sup>31</sup> These authors fail to pay attention to the fact that once involved, it is difficult for the military to give up its missions particularly if those increase its popularity. Once engaged in a new mission, the armed forces will likely develop vested organisational interests even if the mission was initially rejected.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, as we will argue below, policymakers have used the justification of temporary deployment to use the military on a near constant basis for domestic purposes. It is thus that the internal use of the armed forces has perpetuated democratic deficits in Latin America.

Apart from the studies discussed so far, there is a considerable number of contributions written in Spanish and published mostly in regional outlets.<sup>33</sup> While often overlooked,<sup>34</sup> this overwhelmingly case-based and descriptive literature still offers valuable insights and empirical data. Interestingly, few authors from the region hold a principled view

<sup>25</sup>Lindsay P. Cohn, *Statement of Lindsay P. Cohn before The Senate Armed Forces Committee Hearing on Civilian Control of the Armed Forces* (Washington, DC, 2021).

<sup>26</sup>Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, ‘Democratization, social crisis and the impact of military domestic roles in Latin America’; Pion-Berlin, *Military Missions in Democratic Latin America*.

<sup>27</sup>David Pion-Berlin and Craig Arceneaux, ‘Decision-makers or decision-takers? Military missions and civilian control in democratic South America’, *Armed Forces & Society*, 26:3 (April 2000), pp. 413–36, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X0002600304>}.

<sup>28</sup>Lyle N. McAlister, ‘Changing concepts of the role of the military in Latin America’, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 360:1 (July 1965), p. 93, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626536000108>}.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>30</sup>Louis W. Goodman, ‘Military roles past and present’, in Larry Jay Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds), *Civil-Military Relations and Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 37.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 40–1.

<sup>32</sup>See Christoph Harig and Chiara Ruffa, ‘Knocking on the barracks’ door: How role conceptions shape the military’s reactions to political demands’, *European Journal of International Security* (forthcoming, 2022).

<sup>33</sup>Among many others, see Edgardo Amaya Cobar, ‘Militarización de la seguridad pública en el Salvador, 1992–2012’, *URVIO, Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios de Seguridad*, 12 (2012), pp. 71–82; Marcos Pablo Moloeznik and Ignacio Medina Núñez, *Proceso de militarización de la seguridad pública en América Latina: Contextualizaciones latinoamericanas* (2019); Sampó and Troncoso, ‘La violencia vinculada a la criminalidad en Brasil y el papel de las fuerzas armadas en la búsqueda de la seguridad pública’.

<sup>34</sup>See, for instance, the claim that ‘academic scholarship has remained relatively silent on the role of the armed forces in domestic security’, which can only be sustained ignoring the academic output of mostly Latin America-based scholars. Flores-Macías and Zarkin, ‘The militarization of law enforcement’, p. 2.

against domestic military missions.<sup>35</sup> Most acknowledge that the reasons to deploy the military internally are pervasive, especially with regards to crime, while at the same time highlighting risks such as human rights violations, corruption, and the politicisation of the armed forces if the militarised approach is used as a long-term measure.<sup>36</sup> Yet, with a number of exceptions that have mostly been published for a Latin American readership, the effects on democratic governance of internal missions, especially those other than fighting crime, have received scant systematic attention and will therefore be the focus of this article.

Before we demonstrate how the military's domestic involvement prolonged democratic deficits in Latin America, in the next section we describe the region's spectrum of military missions. We further offer an explanation of why, in a region that has repeatedly experienced grave human rights violations under military rule, the armed forces are once again called upon to take on internal tasks.

### Latin America's spectrum of military missions

Latin American militaries have traditionally assumed a central role in nation and state-building. In a region where territorial pacification and political centralisation lasted well into the twentieth century, governments typically depended on the support of the military to remain in power.<sup>37</sup> This ensured that the military, as an institution, was generally relatively well resourced and maintained its continued relevance and visibility in the countries' public and often also political life. Thus, infrastructure building and other types of community support have long been part of its operational experiences and role conception.

Yet, over the past two decades, in most countries the spectrum of military missions has expanded. Contrary to the general assumption that it is the military that pushes for a greater organisational role, across Latin America it has instead been pulled by civilian authorities to assume new tasks and even get involved in politics.<sup>38</sup> Evidence from some countries shows that the military was at times reluctant to assume internal missions.<sup>39</sup> In Chile, a former presidential envoy to the country's Araucanía region that has long been riddled by a violent conflict between the indigenous Mapuche community and the state over territory and autonomy, complained publicly that the armed forces were 'reticent' to support the police in handling arson attacks: 'In my opinion, it is unheard of that they arrive at the meetings with lawyers in order to say that they cannot do what one would like them to.'<sup>40</sup> Most often, however, the military has followed governments' calls to get into 'the first line of support from the State to citizens',<sup>41</sup> especially when it comes to natural disasters, national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and other, more permanent tasks of community support that involve few risks

<sup>35</sup>An exception is Héctor Luis Saint-Pierre and Laura Donadelli, 'El empleo de las fuerzas armadas en asuntos internos', in Günther Maihold and Stefan Jost (eds), *El Narcotráfico y Su Combate: Sus Efectos Sobre Las Relaciones Internacionales* (México, DF: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014), pp. 61–75.

<sup>36</sup>Amaya Cobar, 'Militarización de la seguridad pública en El Salvador, 1992–2012'; Sigrid Arzt, 'La militarización de la procuraduría general de la república: Riesgos para la democracia Mexicana', USMEX Working Paper Series 2003–04 (2003), pp. 1–36; Lucía Dammert and John Bailey, '¿Militarización de la seguridad pública en América Latina?', *Foreign Affairs En Español*, April to June (2007), pp. 61–70.

<sup>37</sup>Centeno, *Blood and Debt*; Holden, *Armies without Nations*.

<sup>38</sup>Kristina Mani, 'The Soldier Is Here to Defend You': Latin America's Militarized Response to COVID-19, *World Politics Review* (2020), available at: {<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28700/from-peru-to-venezuela-military-forces-take-the-lead-in-coronavirus-responses>}; Deborah L. Norden, 'The making of socialist soldiers: Radical populism and civil-military relations in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia', in Mares and Martínez, *Debating Civil-Military Relations in Latin America*, pp. 155–80.

<sup>39</sup>Maiah Jaskoski, *Military Politics and Democracy in the Andes* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

<sup>40</sup>Bárbara Vial, 'Enfrentamos grupos de carácter guerrillero, muy preparados y muy armados', *El Mercurio* (14 March 2021).

<sup>41</sup>Guillermo Saavedra, 'Chilean Ministry of Defense recognizes 6 outstanding military women', *Diálogo* (8 April 2021), available at: {<https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/chilean-ministry-of-defense-recognizes-6-outstanding-military-women/>}.

while, at the same time, tend to fetch public support. Against the backdrop of the military's traditional role conception as a state and nation-builder and seeking to maintain its institutional benefits, civilians have successfully pulled the institution into new missions.

Other than defence, which continues to occupy a dominant place in the role conception of Latin American militaries even if in practice they do not fight wars, the tasks they have been carrying out on a frequent basis can be grouped together into four missions: national development, protection of the environment and natural resources, public security, and surveillance of borders and prison perimeters. Table 1 provides an overview of the tasks pertaining to each of these missions for the cases considered in this study.

Cooperation in national development, which has a long-standing tradition in Latin America, refers to all activities that aim at enhancing social well-being. Mexico's army, for instance, has organised soup kitchens, Brazil's military runs vaccination campaigns, and the Bolivian army distributes food aid to the elderly and school children. Environmental protection and the protection of natural resources include programmes like the fight against illegal mining in Colombia or reforestation in Mexico, an activity that is also carried out by El Salvador's military, together with the cleaning of the country's lagoons. Internal security is closest to the military's traditional mission of defence although with important differences with regards to its objectives, instruments and the legal principles that regulate the exercise of legitimate violence. As we will further detail below, except for Mexico and Ecuador, Latin America's constitutions clearly distinguish between external and internal security and exclude the armed forces from the domestic sphere save for legally declared exceptions. Nevertheless, to different degrees all Latin American militaries are today engaged in either protecting critical infrastructure or fighting terrorism, crime, drugs or human trafficking, among other internal security tasks. Similarly, border control has turned from being an exceptional task to an established mission. Uruguay and Chile were the last countries to change their legislation in 2018 and 2019, respectively, for the military to support the police in curbing crime and other, unwanted cross-border flows and movements.

Why, in a region with a history of authoritarian rule and domestic political violence have governments relied on the armed forces to carry out the missions described above considering that the risks of the military's domestic involvement are well known? The status quo favours both the military and governments, to the detriment of democratic governance.<sup>42</sup> A broad spectrum of military missions serves Latin America's armed forces' corporate interests in that it justifies defence spending in a context that has rendered traditional territorial defence increasingly obsolete. While one may object that the armed forces only welcome tasks that conform to their self-identity as professional soldiers, it is worth recalling that considerations of internal security have justified not only the military's involvement in politics, but also its long-standing role conception as a force for development.<sup>43</sup>

Governments, on the other hand, have mainly relied on the military as a sort of wildcard to make up for a persistent lack of state capacity to provide basic services and security. Latin American states have historically struggled to centralise power and pacify their territories. Still today, as Miguel A. Centeno puts it, 'the Latin American state cannot be called a Leviathan' capable of maintaining order and institutional autonomy.<sup>44</sup> The military has thus become an affordable, legitimate, and indeed often indispensable substitute. Governing without military support has been an impossibility for the region's many 'improvisational' states which, in the absence of a strong sense of national allegiance, are constantly obliged to attract and keep the strongest forces within a fragile ruling coalition.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, by avoiding debating military reform,

<sup>42</sup>Martínez captures this situation when he argues that Latin America's militaries risk turning into lamplighters and scarecrows. As lamplighters, military institutions remain modelled upon a defence function that in its traditional form has become obsolete. As scarecrows, the armed forces perform necessary functions, for which they, however, are ill-equipped. Rafa Martínez, 'Las fuerzas armadas y los roles a evitar después de la pandemia', *Revista de Occidente*, 474 (2020), pp. 9–22.

<sup>43</sup>Stepan, 'The new professionalism'.

<sup>44</sup>Centeno, *Blood and Debt*, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup>Holden, *Armies without Nations*, p. 26.



**Table 1.** Military missions in Latin America other than defence.

| Development assistance  | Protection of the environment and natural resources  | Public security   | Surveillance of borders and prison perimeters         |
|---|--|---|---|
| Medical campaigns/<br>dental check-ups/<br>distribution of<br>medicine      | Cleaning of lakes to conserve<br>the local flora and fauna                                     | Control of<br>demonstrations and<br>large gatherings      | Access and exit<br>control                            |
| Literacy campaigns  | Prevention of wildfires  | Fight against human<br>trafficking                        | Security within prison<br>perimeters                  |
| Construction and<br>maintenance of road<br>infrastructure                   | Closing of illegal mining sites  | Confiscation of<br>weapons                                | Inspection of people,<br>objects and<br>vehicles      |
| Community support:<br>construction,<br>plumbing, electricity,<br>carpentry  | Surveillance of generation<br>and distribution facilities<br>of hydrocarbon and<br>electricity | Maintenance of public<br>order and crime<br>prevention    | Immobilisation of<br>aircrafts, boats and<br>vehicles |
| Distribution of benefits<br>for school children<br>and vulnerable<br>groups | Reforestation and military<br>garden centres   | Deployment of troops<br>in areas with high<br>crime rates | Patrol  |
| Garbage collection  | Persecution of illegal logging   | Aerial search for coca<br>and marihuana<br>plantations    | Arrests   |
| Elaboration of<br>cartographic maps<br>and nautical charts                  | Conservation of endangered<br>species  | Anti-terrorism<br>operations                              | Drug seizures<br>(cocaine and<br>marijuana)           |
| Agricultural<br>development projects  | Conservation of reserves and<br>protected areas  | Plantation eradication                                    | Protection of<br>merchant ships                       |
| Soup kitchens   | Protection of non-renewable<br>natural resources   | Surveillance of critical<br>infrastructure                | Surveillance of the<br>maritime platform              |
| Fumigation campaigns<br>against dengue                                      | Surveillance against cattle<br>theft   | Destruction of drug<br>production sites                   | Surveillance of the<br>airspace                       |
| Protection of cultural<br>property  | Crop fumigation  | Protection of social<br>leaders                           | Fight against piracy                                  |
| Haircuts  | Logistics support to scientific<br>programs  | Reaction to<br>kidnappings                                |   |

Source: Authors' elaboration based on RESDAL, Atlas comparativo de la defensa en América Latina y Caribe (2016) and Samanta Kussrow (ed.), Misiones principales y secundarias de los ejércitos: casos comparados latinoamericanos, RESDAL (2018).

governments have been able to maintain cordial if not friendly relations with the armed forces, thereby relying on what Huntington called 'subjective control'.<sup>46</sup> In this situation of apparent pareto optimality, the United States' policies towards Latin America have further legitimised the military's internal use. Whether it concerns illegal drugs, health, migration, or natural disasters, since the 1990s but especially since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the United States has pushed the idea that the varied challenges in these areas constitute national security threats that can and ought to be met with a military response by Latin American governments.<sup>47</sup> However, it should

<sup>46</sup>Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*.

<sup>47</sup>Arturo Alvarado, 'The Militarization of Internal Security and Its Consequences for Democracy', paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC (2–5 September 2010, 2010); Alejandro Frenkel, '“Disparen contra las olas”: Securitización y militarización de desastres naturales y ayuda humanitaria en América Latina', *Íconos: Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 64 (30 April 2019), pp. 183–202, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.>

not be forgotten that also the US-critical members of the Venezuelan-led Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) have used the military increasingly for domestic purposes.<sup>48</sup>

The following sections delve into how the proliferation of military roles has prolonged democratic deficits in Latin America in four regards: the rule of law, military reform, the development of civilian state capacity, and lastly, the fostering of a democratic political culture.

### The failure of legal security

The distinction between external and internal threats to the state has been an integral part of Constitutionalism from its very beginnings. As the French revolutionary Constitution of 1791 read:

All branches of the public force employed for the security of the State against enemies from abroad shall act under the orders of the King. ... No body or detachment of troops of the line may act in the interior of the kingdom without a legal requisition. ... Requisition of the public force within the interior of the kingdom appertains to the civil officials, according to the rules determined by the legislative power.<sup>49</sup>

Based on this distinction, a division of labour between the armed forces and the police gradually emerged in liberal democratic states. Constitutions have further regulated exceptional circumstances that threaten public order or state survival through legal figures like the state of emergency, martial law, or the state of war. In such atypical situations, fundamental citizen rights may be restricted, and the control of public order handed over to the military given that three conditions are met. First, the sole objective of such extraordinary measures must be to re-establish order and security; secondly, they must apply for a specific period of time only; and thirdly, they must be approved and supervised by the legislature. Consequently, turning the exceptional into a structural condition by normalising the militarisation of public order runs against constitutionalism's separation between internal and external security. As this section will show, several Latin American countries failed to uphold the legal provisions that regulate military deployment, including constitutional principles. In a region where the rule of law has historically been and continues to be uneven and weak,<sup>50</sup> this failure of legal security contributes to eroding political rights, civil liberties as well as accountability mechanisms.<sup>51</sup> In Brazil, for instance, legal debates around the deployment of the armed forces in heavily crime-stricken areas have contributed to create an image of state violence as morally superior to criminal violence, rendering already marginalised populations even more vulnerable.<sup>52</sup>

José Julio Rodríguez Fernández and Daniel Sansó-Rubert Pascual classified Latin American countries according to their position with regards to the military's role in internal security.<sup>53</sup> Among the countries considered here, those that have largely maintained the traditional paradigm are Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. Bolivia, Brazil, Nicaragua, and Peru are classified as

17141/iconos.64.2019.3435]; Loreta Tellería Escobar, *Fuerzas Armadas, Seguridad Interna y Democracia En Bolivia: Entre La Indefinición Estratégica y La Criminalización Social* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2004).

<sup>48</sup>Norden, 'The making of socialist soldiers'.

<sup>49</sup>French Constitution of 1791, Title IV, Arts 7, 8, 10.

<sup>50</sup>Holden, *Armies without Nations*.

<sup>51</sup>Guillermo A. O'Donnell, 'Why the rule of law matters', *Journal of Democracy*, 15:4 (2004), pp. 32–46, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0076>.

<sup>52</sup>David P. Succi Junior, 'Violence and moral exclusion: Legitimizing domestic military operations in Brazil', *Armed Forces & Society* (8 February 2021), available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X20988106>.

<sup>53</sup>José Julio Rodríguez Fernández and Daniel Sansó-Rubert Pascal, 'El recurso constitucional a las fuerzas armadas para el mantenimiento de la seguridad interior: El caso de Iberoamérica', *Boletín Mexicano de Derecho Comparado*, XLIII:128 (2010), pp. 747–58.

having a ‘flexible’ position, while those favourable to involve the armed forces in internal security are Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Mexico. However, of this latter group only the constitutions of Ecuador and Mexico designate internal security as a mission of the armed forces, thus putting the blurring of internal and external security on firm legal ground.<sup>54</sup> As shown in Table 2, all other countries give the military a supportive role only in the case of necessity or exceptional circumstances.

Despite the exceptionality clause in El Salvador’s constitution, governments have used the military systematically to fight crime. In practice, this meant that the armed forces have been deployed for more than a decade in the country’s most dangerous prisons, at illegal border crossings, and in some of the most crime-affected urban areas. Without the constitutionally required state of exception formally declared, however, the military’s law enforcement activities have contravened the legal order.<sup>55</sup> Colombia, for its part, has invoked a state of internal commotion as provided for in the constitution repeatedly during the presidency of Álvaro Uribe (2002–10). The fight against drug cartels and the guerrilla have gradually trivialised this constitutional principle, turning the state of internal commotion into something akin to normalcy and a bureaucratic hurdle at the most. More alarmingly, even after the state of internal commotion ended, the armed forces have still been deployed to fight the *narcos*, organised crime, and the guerrilla in the country’s dense jungle areas.

The constitutions of Brazil, Nicaragua, and Peru recognise that the armed forces should in principle stay out of internal security. In the case of Bolivia, this is codified in the framework law of the armed forces (*Ley Orgánica de las Fuerzas Armadas*). However, all these countries have interpreted the exceptionality clause extremely flexibly to the effect that it no longer presents an effective legal restriction. In Brazil, the constitutional requirement that the military can only be deployed if the police is overburdened, is often presented as a result of political negotiations rather than an assessment of necessity. Nicaragua has used its armed forces on a nearly permanent basis to fight drug trafficking and organised crime and to protect strategic installations. While the division of labour between the military and the police is clearly defined in Bolivia, President Evo Morales (2006–19) used the former frequently to safeguard public security. Similarly, as indicated in Table 2, in Peru the armed forces have continually been involved in border control and anti-crime operations.

Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay have largely maintained the traditional paradigm of excluding the military from domestic security. However, in recent years legislation was modified in all three countries towards legalising some intervention of the armed forces. Uruguay adopted a new Border Law (*Ley de Fronteras*) that changed the military’s role designation in 2018. Implemented in 2020, the *Ley de Fronteras* allows for military operations in designated, unpopulated border areas to carry out law enforcement. Similarly, Chile in 2019 allowed the armed forces to be deployed at the border to support the fight against drug-trafficking and organised crime. The presidential decree was amended in 2021 to include countering illegal migration and human trafficking. In Argentina, the strict separation between internal and external security was temporarily blurred through several regulations adopted during President Mauricio Macri’s term in office (2015–19). Macri turned internal security into a key topic during his administration and decreed the military’s deployment in anti-narcotics operations and to guard strategic objects. Yet, what had been a radical and controversial change to Argentina’s post-dictatorial defence policy was revoked under Macri’s successor, Alberto Fernández.

Apart from legal documents, Latin America’s defence white papers, security strategies, and other relevant policy documents list among the main strategic priorities the protection of natural resources, the fight against crime and illegal drugs, investment in science and technology, as well as

<sup>54</sup>See Art. 158 of the Constitution of Ecuador and Art. 89 of the Constitution of Mexico.

<sup>55</sup>Flores-Macías and Zarkin, ‘The militarization of law enforcement’, p. 12.

**Table 2.** Military missions according to constitutional, legal, and political provisions.

| Mission \ Country                            | Argentina | Bolivia | Brazil | Colombia | Chile | Ecuador | El Salvador | Mexico | Nicaragua | Peru | Uruguay |
|--|-----------|---------|--------|----------|-------|---------|-------------|--------|-----------|------|---------|
| <b>Constitutional missions</b>               |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| National defence                             |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Defence of constitutional order              |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| National development                         |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Internal security                            | **        | *       | *      | **       | **    |         | **          |        | **        | **   | *       |
| Catastrophes and disasters                   |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Election support                             |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Guarantee the stability of the government    |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Peacekeeping                                 |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| <b>Environmental protection</b>              |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Fishing                                      |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Forests                                      |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Mining                                       |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Hydrocarbon                                  |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Hydrological sources                         |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| <b>Public security</b>                       |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Citizen security                             |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Border control                               |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Organised crime and illegal drug trafficking |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |
| Control of prison perimeters                 |           |         |        |          |       |         |             |        |           |      |         |

\* Only in the case of necessity

\*\* Only under exceptional circumstances

Constitutional provisions

Provisions established by law

Provisions in policy documents

Source: Authors' elaboration based on different national sources and RESDAL, *Atlas Comparativo de la Defensa en América Latina y Caribe* (2016), chaps 1, 7.

natural and man-made disasters.<sup>56</sup> Tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and hurricanes are almost permanent threats in some Central American countries, and the enormous wealth in natural resources in the region has attracted both speculation and looting. Doubtlessly, these involve problems that require states to activate specialised bodies to protect the environment. Yet, the armed forces, who have been pushed to support the task in most countries, have neither the legal competence nor are they trained to articulate the necessary preventive policies. As Table 2 shows, the designation of such tasks to the military is nevertheless generalised within the region.

The above further emphasises the point that the spectrum of military missions in Latin America is rather broad, which is reflective of historical military role conceptions as a guardian of the state. Problematically for the quality of democracy, we demonstrated that in several cases the internal use of the military has stretched constitutional principles sought to limit the area of competency of the armed forces or, even worse, violated them. The fact that constitutional and other legal provisions are bent in Latin America is neither new nor exclusive to military deployments.<sup>57</sup> Yet, it represents a risk for democratic governance as it puts additional strains on the rule of law, which is ultimately what makes both civilian authorities and the armed forces answer for their actions. Thus, it is ultimately the rule of law that protects the population from wrongdoing when the armed forces are deployed for internal tasks they are not necessarily prepared for, such as when excessive force is used in law enforcement operations.

### The failure of military reform

It is through the military, together with the police, that the state exercises its monopoly on the use of force. Yet, defence is a public policy such as health or education, ‘thus making it susceptible to political and financial constraints’.<sup>58</sup> Just like any other state institution, the military is held to carry out its duties to satisfy the needs and demands of the people it serves. To meet these exigencies, it needs to go through a process of constant evaluation and improvement. However, by frequently entrusting the military with duties other than its core functions, governments have diverted attention away from its basic tasks and prevented it from engaging in the process of continuous evaluation and readjustment. In this section we argue that the military’s prolonged and abusive internal use has prevented the for any state institution necessary process of permanent adjustment. Consequently, many countries have maintained militaries that are in many regards ineffective as an instrument of defence, though useful to fulfil a range of internal missions that tend to be popular among the people.

Except for Panama and Costa Rica, which have no armed forces, there has never been a serious debate in Latin America whether it is necessary to have a military.<sup>59</sup> The changing dynamics of the global as well as the regional security environments have nevertheless raised questions about the usefulness of Latin America’s armed forces. At the global level, the end of the Cold War spurred a general debate on the nature of future threats, changed dominant risk perceptions across the world and consolidated a shift in the meaning of security from a state-centric, military conception towards a multidimensional understanding of security affecting different groups and

<sup>56</sup>Xira Ruiz Campillo and Francisco J. Verdes-Montenegro Escánez, *Seguridad y Defensa En Latinoamérica: De Los Libros Blancos de La Defensa a La Cooperación Regional*, vol. 100, Documento de Trabajo Opex (Madrid: Fundación Alternativas y Ministerio de Defensa de España, 2019).

<sup>57</sup>Holden, *Armies without Nations*, p. 27; Mark Ungar, *Elusive Reform: Democracy and the Rule of Law in Latin America* (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner Publishers, 2002).

<sup>58</sup>Raphael C. Lima, Peterson F. Silva, and Gunther Rudzit, ‘No power vacuum: National security neglect and the defence sector in Brazil’, *Defence Studies*, 21:1 (2 January 2021), p. 4, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2020.1848425>}.

<sup>59</sup>The country closest to this position is probably Uruguay. See David Altman and Nicole Jenne, ‘Uruguay: No country for a military?’, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1864>}.



individuals.<sup>60</sup> All of this pointed to a central question: was the military still the most suitable instrument to protect citizens from substantially different threats? In addition to this global trend, Latin America's local circumstances further reinforced the military's 'situation of "structural unemployment"'.<sup>61</sup> Historically characterised by low levels of international competition that only rarely escalated into war, with the return to democratic rule the risk of an armed conflict was further diminished.<sup>62</sup> The military, now with an even lower probability to be called upon to perform traditional functions of territorial defence, had difficulties to find a new role after its political involvement had ended or was at least significantly reduced. Like in other parts of the world, it welcomed a range of new missions as a means of justifying defence budgets including peace-keeping, humanitarian aid and disaster relief, state building and, in some cases, internal security. However, while many Western democracies simultaneously embarked on reforms to creating smaller, highly skilled militaries and flexible force structures, similar modernisation efforts failed to occur in Latin America. Around the world, territorial defence has remained 'the ultimate justification of national armed forces' but, at the same time, the most powerful militaries 'have become organizations specialized in crisis management in a broader sense' to adjust to the new circumstances.<sup>63</sup> In Latin America, this conversion failed to take place.

The region's military capacities today are limited to the extent that some countries fall short of keeping their armed forces operable. Table 3 illustrates this based on the loss of air combat readiness in seven of the eleven countries under study. Over the past decade, only El Salvador and Peru have invested in comparatively costly air power and Chile has maintained its capabilities. All others stood less prepared for air combat in 2019 than they did in 2009.

Taking into account that air power is vital for defensive purposes but that its use for other tasks is limited, the lack of investment as demonstrated in Table 3 indicates that governments have looked at defence not as a priority. This claim is supported considering the comparably large size of many Latin American militaries, which withstood the structural imperative of downsizing during the post-Cold War period.<sup>64</sup> Drawing on Pion-Berlin and Martínez, we use a population/military indicator that divides the number of civilians per soldier by one hundred.<sup>65</sup> This produces a scale with easily comparable values between one (large militaries) to ten (small militaries). Following Pion-Berlin and Martínez, a population/military balance above four qualifies as a deployment model based on a functional logic as it pertains to the category of consolidated democracies.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the smallest armed forces proportional to the national population are those of Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Nicaragua. While Argentina reduced the size of its military drastically during the democratic transition, Nicaragua's was downsized gradually over the past 25 years. Mexico, in turn, increased the number of active-duty personnel between 2007 and 2019, mainly due to the military's deployment in the fight against illegal drugs. A similar case is El Salvador. After initially scaling down its military, the past decade has seen a renewed increase that brought it back to the levels of the late 1990s. Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia have in recent years shown a trend to reduce their militaries but still range below the threshold of an optimal size. This is even more the case for Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay, which have maintained

<sup>60</sup>Christopher Dandeker, 'The military in democratic societies: New times and new patterns of civil-military relations', in Jürgen Kuhlmann and Jean Callaghan (eds), *Military and Society in 21st Century Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2011), pp. 27–43; Timothy Edmunds, 'What are armed forces for? The changing nature of military roles in Europe', *International Affairs*, 82:6 (2006), pp. 1059–75.

<sup>61</sup>Alexandre de S. C. Barros and Edmundo Coelho, 'Military intervention and withdrawal in South America', *International Political Science Review*, 2:3 (1981), p. 344.

<sup>62</sup>Jenne, 'The domestic origins of no-war communities'; Kacowicz, *Zones of Peace*.

<sup>63</sup>Philippe Manigart, 'Restructured armed forces', in Giuseppe Caforio and Marina Nuciari (eds), *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military* (Boston, MA: Springer, 2006), pp. 413, 414.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>65</sup>Pion-Berlin and Martínez, *Soldiers, Politicians, and Civilians*, p. 304.

large militaries deployed throughout their territories but that do not necessarily correspond to a functional logic maximising operational capacity.

On the one hand, the lack of modernising reform, including downsizing, has been a consequence of the military's bargaining power as governments have relied on it to solve internal problems. For its organisational interests, the military will typically resist downsizing in order to maintain its budget, privileges, and political clout. On the other hand, however, labour-intensive organisations have suited civilian governments more than would highly technological ones, whether for handing out food packages during the pandemic, carrying out literacy campaigns or patrolling urban areas. It is illustrative that five of the eleven countries under study have formally maintained obligatory conscription (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico) and another three voluntary conscription (Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru), with conscript armies having been considered ill-suited to meet contemporary demands for highly professional, flexible rapid reaction forces. In fact, there have been relatively few civilian attempts to reduce the size of the military. With defence policy not being seen as a priority area, Latin American governments have shown little interest in developing capital-intensive, modernised forces. Instead, the military has been looked at as an instrument that should count with a large workforce for extensive territorial deployment with little technological capacity to support socioeconomic development, provide basic supplies and assistance in disasters. Thus, some procurement programmes have been implemented to improve the military's ability to undertake internal tasks.<sup>66</sup>

The lack of reform is also visible in the use of the military abroad. Among seven dimensions of the restructuring process that has taken place in advanced industrial states, Manigart identified the 'multinationalization of formerly national military structures'.<sup>67</sup> As Nina Wilén and Lisa Strömbom demonstrate, *collective* defence and *collective* security have become the core roles of contemporary militaries in industrialised, democratic countries alongside national security,<sup>68</sup> with the majority of military operations being carried out by multinational forces. A comparison of Latin American troop deployments abroad with four referent countries in Europe – Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain – shows that there are remarkable differences in this reform dimension. Table 4 distinguishes deployments in UN missions from non-UN missions. UN missions refer essentially to peace operations, and it is here where the Latin American countries under study have almost exclusively participated. Only El Salvador, Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay have contributed to non-UN missions, which were likewise peace operations safe for El Salvador's relatively small deployment in NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The Europeans, in contrast, have consistently deployed more troops in non-UN missions, which indicates a greater use of the military as an instrument not only for defensive reasons but of foreign policy more broadly.

Generally speaking, expeditionary missions require a substantive level of professionalism, technological sophistication, and interoperability. In many of Latin America's militaries, these elements are deficient.

Considering the above, it is clear that most of the time Latin American governments have looked at the military not as an instrument primarily for defence against conventional and unconventional threats and neither of collective security. Instead, and in line with the military's traditional role conceptions, it is plausible to argue that at least some have used the military as a welfare-enhancer to provide relatively secure jobs. As shown in Figure 2, from the countries under study those with the highest unemployment rate in 2019 tended to have a smaller population/military balance (PMB; meaning that they have a large military relative to their population).

<sup>66</sup>See, for instance, IISS, 'Chapter eight: Latin America and the Caribbean', *The Military Balance*, 120:1 (1 January 2020), p. 403, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/04597222.2020.1707970>}.

<sup>67</sup>Manigart, 'Restructured armed forces'.

<sup>68</sup>Nina Wilén and Lisa Strömbom, 'A versatile organisation: Mapping the military's core roles in a changing security environment', *European Journal of International Security* (forthcoming, 2022).

**Table 3.** Loss of air fighting power (2009–19).

| Country     | Fighter, fighter/ground-attack and attack aircraft fleets, 2009 | Fighter, fighter/ground-attack and attack aircraft fleets, 2019 | Evolution within ten years |         |
|-------------|---|---|----------------------------|---------|
| Argentina   | 99  | 30  | -69                        | -69,7%  |
| Bolivia     | 15  | 0   | -15                        | -100,0% |
| Brazil      | 316   | 97  | -219                       | -69,3%  |
| Chile       | 75  | 74  | -1                         | -1,3%   |
| Colombia    | 49  | 34  | -15                        | -30,6%  |
| Ecuador     | 59  | 25  | -29                        | -49,2%  |
| El Salvador | 5   | 14  | +9                         | +180,0% |
| Mexico      | 10  | 0   | -10                        | -100,0% |
| Nicaragua   | 0   | 0   | -                          | -       |
| Peru        | 32  | 67  | +35                        | +109,4% |
| Uruguay     | 16  | 12  | -4                         | -25,0%  |

Source: IISS, *The Military Balance* (2010) (2020).

For the cases of Argentina, Brazil, and Nicaragua, this is true only when the military police is included as part of the military (as we did in Figure 2). As mentioned above, Argentina and Brazil have small militaries relative to their population, although together with Colombia they have the largest armed forces in absolute numbers. The strong correlation between unemployment and size of the military suggests that one among several factors that explain why in some countries governments have abstained from downsizing the military was the desire to prevent further increases in unemployment rates and thus a higher risk of political instability.

Developing countries have often used the state as an employer ‘of last resort’.<sup>69</sup> While many have argued that oversized public employment is motivated by the desire to generate and distribute rents, in the case of Latin America the main driver has likely been to provide a form of social insurance.<sup>70</sup> This can be evidenced, for example, in sporadic debates in Uruguay about the possibility to reintroduce military service. Thus, the draft has been presented a solution to drug addiction and a beneficial option for ‘*ninis*’, youths that neither study nor work.<sup>71</sup>

The lack of structural reform is troublesome from a democratic governance perspective. Quite apparently, Latin American militaries are to a greater or lesser extent ill-suited to face what are arguably the most likely future scenarios of national defence: situations that require technological superiority and rapid deployment instead of mass armies on the battlefield. This lack of preparedness is even more problematic since defence expenditures as a percentage of government spending have remained comparatively high over the past two decades. Figure 3 contrasts the average defence spending in Latin America, Europe and Canada, together with those of selected Latin American and European countries individually. While Europe’s average defence spending as a percentage of total spending oscillated between 3.1 per cent and 2.3 per cent, the Latin American average ranged between 6.5 per cent and 5 per cent. In both cases, the numbers steadily declined until 2016; though unlike in Europe, where the percentage of defence expenditures

<sup>69</sup>A. Gelb, J. B. Knight, and R. H. Sabot, ‘Public sector employment, rent seeking and economic growth’, *The Economic Journal*, 101:408 (1991), pp. 1186–99; Dani Rodrik, ‘What drives public employment in developing countries?’, *Review of Development Economics*, 4:3 (October 2000), p. 231, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9361.00091>}.

<sup>70</sup>Rodrik, ‘What drives public employment in developing countries?’.

<sup>71</sup>La Diaria, ‘Mujica: Servicio militar obligatorio podría “ser un camino” para tratar drogadicción’, *La Diaria Política*, 10 (2019), available at: {<https://ladiaria.com.uy/politica/articulo/2019/10/mujica-servicio-militar-obligatorio-podria-ser-un-camino-para-tratar-drogadiccion/>}.

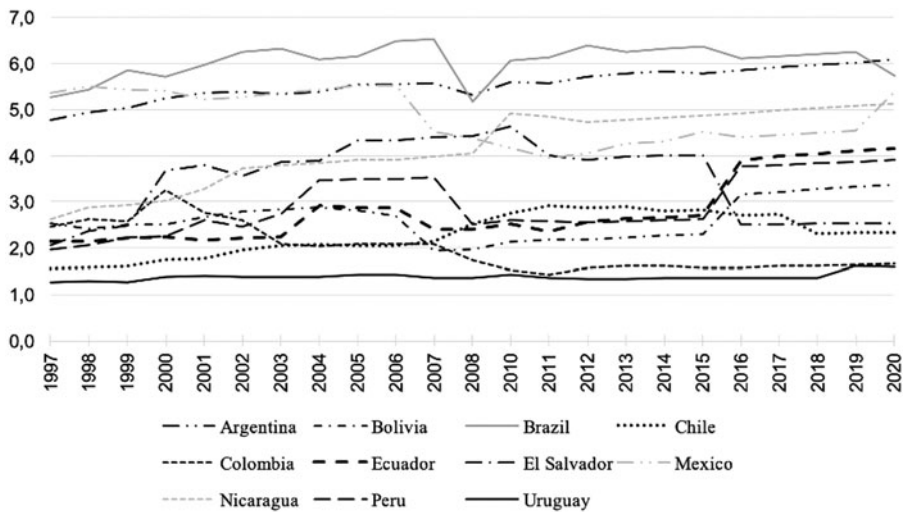


Figure 1. Active soldiers according to population/military balance (1997–2020).

began to increase in the years after, it remained stable in Latin America at 5 per cent. It is evident from Figure 3 that there are differences between the countries of one region. Argentina, for instance, is a clear outlier in Latin America. Nevertheless, the overall picture demonstrates that Latin American militaries receive a comparably greater share of government expenditures even though they fail to meet standards of effectiveness in what is their formally designated core function of national defence. Spending in the region does not reflect investment in air power nor in other aspects of modern defence, but the payment of salaries and pensions of often over-sized militaries.

While the internal use of the armed forces by itself surely cannot account for the failure of military modernisation, especially in Latin America's mainly middle-income countries, in this section we argued that it had important effects in lowering structural incentives to embark on military reform. Although the causal relation is difficult to show, taken together, the different factors discussed point strongly to the military's developmental and internal security functions as reasons why the armed forces are not held to standards of military effectiveness and thus, democratic governance. One may argue that internal deployments are democratic in so far as they reflect popular trust in the armed forces. Yet, apart from other negative consequences stemming from the extended use of the military internally, we argued in this section that it is cost-ineffective in so far as it incentivised the maintenance of inflated armies and therefore fails to live up to democratic standards.

### The failure of civilian capacity development

By not challenging the military's traditional role conceptions as guardians of the state and *la patria* and instead relying on the military for domestic purposes governments have – intentionally or unintentionally – exacerbated the difficulties to develop civilian capacities to meet democratic standards. In this section, we advance two arguments to support this point. First, a broad spectrum of internal military missions has hampered the development of civilian capacities of control in the security and defence sector. Secondly, the military's deployment in policy areas other than defence has 'pushed aside and undermined'<sup>72</sup> those institutions pertaining to the respective policy

<sup>72</sup>Diamint, 'A new militarism in Latin America', p. 158.

**Table 4.** Troops deployed in missions abroad (2010–19).

| Country     | Deployment | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|-------------|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Argentina   | UN         | 983  | 991  | 994  | 844  | 829  | 343  | 441  | 283  | 251  | 251  |
|             | non-UN     | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    |
| Bolivia     | UN         | 259  | 223  | 231  | 233  | 232  | 24   | 19   | 15   | 13   | 14   |
|             | non-UN     | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    |
| Brazil      | UN         | 2237 | 2236 | 2198 | 1698 | 1665 | 1223 | 1298 | 243  | 264  | 256  |
|             | non-UN     | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    |
| Chile       | UN         | 523  | 519  | 518  | 483  | 439  | 350  | 414  | 23   | 17   | 17   |
|             | non-UN     | 21   | 22   | 22   | 15   | 15   | 15   | 15   | 15   | 15   | 15   |
| Colombia    | UN         | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | 3    | 3    | 3    |
|             | non-UN     | 354  | 354  | 354  | 354  | 354  | 354  | 354  | 354  | 275  | 275  |
| Ecuador     | UN         | 89   | 80   | 76   | 78   | 62   | 10   | 10   | 10   | 6    | 9    |
|             | non-UN     | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    |
| El Salvador | UN         | 63   | 64   | 59   | 96   | 95   | 186  | 194  | 162  | 213  | 270  |
|             | non-UN     | –    | 24   | 24   | 24   | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    |
| Mexico      | UN         | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | 4    | 12   | 5    | 8    | 8    |
|             | non-UN     | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    |
| Nicaragua   | UN         | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    |
|             | non-UN     | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    |
| Peru        | UN         | 396  | 390  | 393  | 406  | 401  | 199  | 389  | 233  | 232  | 230  |
|             | non-UN     | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    | –    |
| Uruguay     | UN         | 2474 | 2389 | 2160 | 2168 | 798  | 1458 | 1441 | 1180 | 944  | 948  |
|             | non-UN     | 58   | 58   | 58   | 58   | 58   | 58   | 58   | 58   | 41   | 41   |

(Continued)



**Table 4.** (Continued.)

| Country            | Deployment | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|--------------------|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| European Countries |            |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Germany            | UN         | 283  | 249  | 179  | 235  | 179  | 161  | 405  | 763  | 568  | 571  |
|                    | non-UN     | 6351 | 7206 | 6666 | 5812 | 3028 | 2491 | 2645 | 3100 | 3418 | 3029 |
| Italy              | UN         | 1756 | 1704 | 1167 | 1155 | 1219 | 1190 | 1413 | 1082 | 1051 | 1072 |
|                    | non-UN     | 5034 | 5025 | 4989 | 3510 | 2265 | 1661 | 2738 | 3995 | 3644 | 3412 |
| Portugal           | UN         | 150  | 154  | 4    | 1    | 48   | 3    | 3    | 154  | 168  | 190  |
|                    | non-UN     | 399  | 431  | 319  | 348  | 237  | 261  | 259  | 86   | 296  | 311  |
| Spain              | UN         | 1068 | 1072 | 977  | 587  | 590  | 614  | 609  | 629  | 631  | 635  |
|                    | non-UN     | 1592 | 1590 | 1481 | 947  | 431  | 498  | 476  | 1056 | 1276 | 1467 |

Source: Based on data from IISS, *The Military Balance* (2011–20).

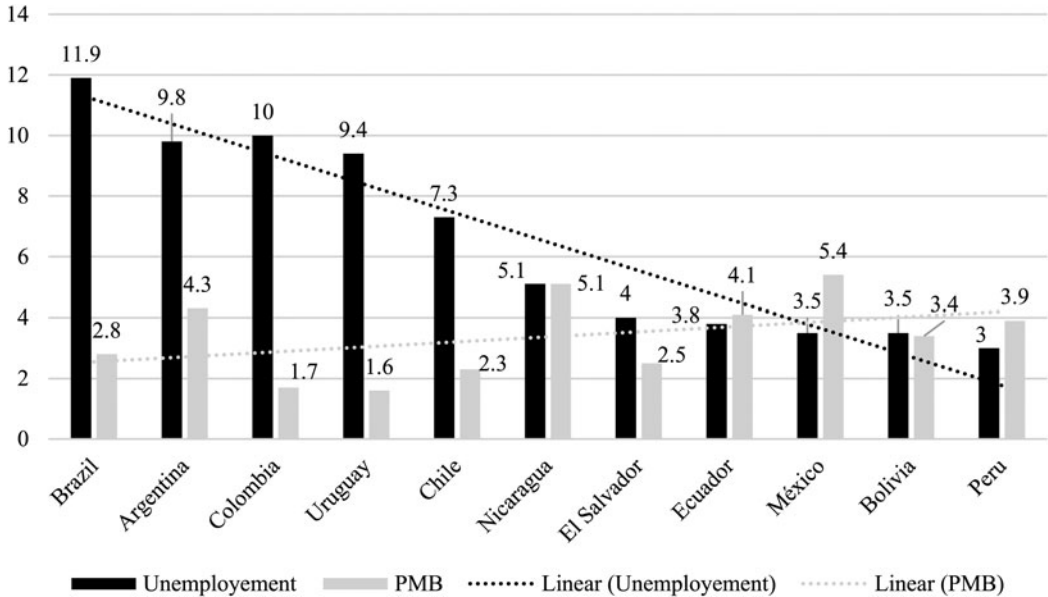


Figure 2. Unemployment relative to population-military balance (2019).

Source: The World Bank, Unemployment, total (percentage of total labour force, modelled ILO estimate), available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS> IISS, *The Military Balance* (2020).

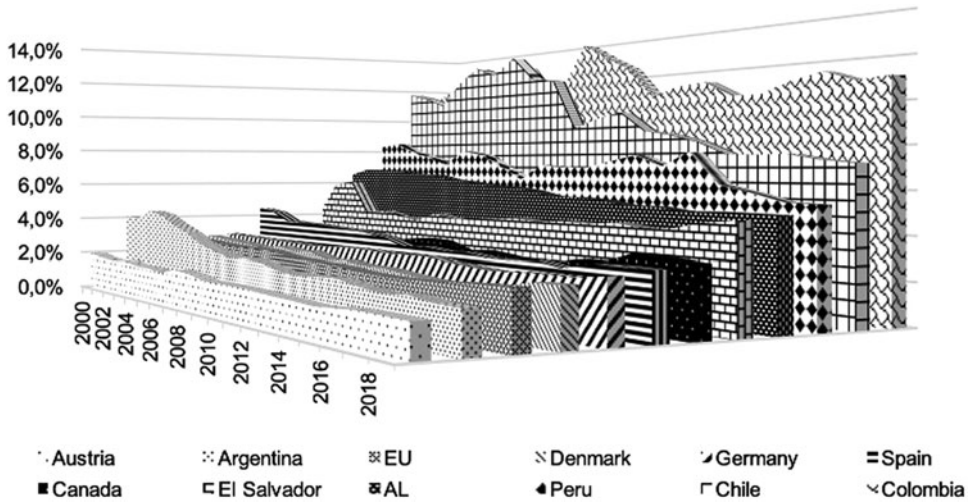
area. Whether it is in health, education, transportation, housing or else, the lack of state capacity to provide basic services has been pervasive across the region. The phenomenon was famously captured by Guillermo A. O'Donnell's categorisation of 'brown areas' where local power systems substitute any meaningful presence of the state. A notorious example of such brown areas are Latin America's shanty towns; Brazil's *favelas*, Peru's *villas miserias*, and Mexico's *invasiones*, where access to water and electricity is limited, crime rates often range well above the national average and 'police interventions ... tend to be unlawful themselves'.<sup>73</sup> To be sure, we do not claim that the military's internal use is responsible for the lack of civilian capacity across Latin America. Instead, we argue that it has constituted one obstacle besides others to develop viable states able to provide basic services while also acknowledging the circular process through which state weakness has created favourable conditions for the military's internal deployment.

With respect to the negative effects of domestic military tasks on civilian capacities of control, the literature on civil-military relations in Latin America is fairly unanimous in that civilian involvement in the defence sector has been extremely low.<sup>74</sup> Among the factors that explain this 'attention deficit',<sup>75</sup> at least at the level of decision-making, is the absence of any meaningful civilian career in defence. Local security and defence experts are heard, but their advice seldom translates into policies. In addition, turning the armed forces into a wildcard that could

<sup>73</sup>Miguel A. Centeno and Agustin E. Ferraro, 'Republics of the possible', in Miguel A. Centeno and Agustin E. Ferraro (eds), *State and Nation Making in Latin America and Spain: Republics of the Possible* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 6, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139342667>.

<sup>74</sup>Rafael Duarte Villa and Nicole Jenne, 'By all necessary means? Emerging powers and the use of force in peacekeeping', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41:3 (2020), pp. 407–31, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019.1698691>; Lima, Silva, and Rudzit, 'No power vacuum'; David Pion-Berlin and Harold A. Trinkunas, 'Attention deficits: Why politicians ignore defense policy in Latin America', *Latin American Research Review*, 42:3 (30 October 2007), pp. 76–100, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2007.0031>.

<sup>75</sup>Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, 'Attention deficits'.



**Figure 3.** Percentage of government spending on defence, Europe and Latin America (2000–19).  
 Source: Data from SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, available at: <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

potentially be used in any governance sector whenever needed added further to the lack of incentives to get civilians engaged in defence. A considerable part of what the armed forces do in many countries falls within the areas of competence of the ministries of interior, public affairs, education, and others and has thus little or nothing to do with conventional military core functions. As the military's fundamental purpose of territorial defence gets diluted, opportunities to foster civilian involvement in the area are missed. In Brazil, one observer explains: "The Armed Forces have an office in Congress in charge of providing information on the military and national defense to legislators. This office has certainly hampered the emergence of a civilian legislative advisory system specializing in defense issues."<sup>76</sup>

The absence of civilian expertise and engagement in the defence sector has obvious consequences lowering the quality of democracy in that it weakens control and oversight to hold the military accountable. In addition, the apparent lack of (civilian) government interest leads to less effective policymaking. Considering the 22 Latin American states other than the Eastern Caribbean island states, it is illustrative that except for Chile and Argentina no country counts with a coherent set of regularly published defence policy documents.<sup>77</sup> Since 1995, a total of 56 such documents have been published, including defence white papers, national directives and policies, strategies and plans. However, these are either rarely updated or appear as collections of different strategy and planning documents that lack a clear integration. Brazil, for instance, the country that has the highest number of defence and security policy guidelines published over the past 25 years, has two National Defence Policies (1996, 2005), two Policies of National Defence (1998, 2008), three Defence White Papers (2012, 2016, 2020), one Paper of Defence and Environment (2017), one National Policy of Defence and National Strategy of Defence (2020) and one document Scenarios of Defence (2020). Chile has published four Defence White Papers, though these have not been updated since 2017 but instead have been complemented by a National Defence Policy in 2020. While the frequency and consistency of publishing policy documents is not the same as the quality of the policy itself, it is nevertheless

<sup>76</sup>Email exchange with Octavio Amorim Neto, 8 February 2021.

<sup>77</sup>Authors' collection.

a strong indicator for the viability of national defence plans and policies.<sup>78</sup> With little civilian interest in the military as an instrument of defence, it is no surprise that Latin American governments have attended policy programming and planning in that area only sporadically.

Considering civilian capacities in substantial policy areas, it is worth remembering that their weakness has been one of the main reasons cited in favour of the pragmatic position to have the military involved in a broad range of tasks. Accordingly, the use of the military exclusively for defence is a luxury only rich countries can afford.<sup>79</sup> Against this view, we argue that the military's domestic involvement has worked against the development of crucial capacities that would bolster the legitimacy of the state in the long run and thus generate the means to afford the necessary 'luxuries', in addition to allow cutting down on defence budgets.

The military's crowding out of other institutions has arguably been most visible in internal security and with respect to the police.<sup>80</sup> As countless examples illustrate, the so-called approach of *mano dura* (iron fist) has never actually worked to improve public security.<sup>81</sup> Quite to the contrary, there is ample evidence that it has often aggravated or even caused the phenomenon it seeks to address.<sup>82</sup> Paradoxically though, *mano dura* policies have time and again been implemented. The use of the military to fight crime and illegal drugs has usually begun as a short-term measure but ended up serving as a long-term instrument. Meanwhile, the necessary police and justice reforms have been postponed, as it is most evident in the cases of Brazil, El Salvador, Mexico, and Nicaragua.<sup>83</sup> What is more, using the military in internal security operations has drawn the police more strongly into the military's orbit, thereby altering the civil-military relations equilibrium further. This happened in Mexico, for instance, where the civilian Federal Guard was replaced, in 2019, by a National Guard strongly influenced by the armed forces and made up of personnel from the former Federal Guard, the military police, and naval police.<sup>84</sup>

Other than internal security, in most Latin American states the armed forces have held important responsibilities in civilian aviation as well as coastal and marine security. Strikingly, the only country in the region that created a coastguard independent of the Navy is Argentina.<sup>85</sup> While these areas are managed by civilian agencies in other parts of the globe, the fact that the military has long assumed these tasks in Latin America meant that the prevailing arrangements have rarely been questioned. Similarly, in line with the military's traditional role conceptions, it has served as a provider of social welfare benefits, such as in the case of Peru's Valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers (known as VRAEM). One of the main coca-producing regions, in recent years governments have organised civil-military welfare campaigns in the VRAEM to provide medical and legal assistance and to deliver food, clothing, and civic

<sup>78</sup>Thomas-Durell Young, 'The failure of defense planning in European post-communist defense institutions: Ascertaining causation and determining solutions', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41:7 (10 November 2018), pp. 1031–57, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2017.1307743>.

<sup>79</sup>Raúl Benítez Manaut, 'Las relaciones civiles-militares en una democracia: Releyendo a los clásicos', *Revista Fuerzas Armadas y Sociedad*, 19:1 (2005), p. 166.

<sup>80</sup>See, for instance, Alvarado, *The Militarization of Internal Security and Its Consequences for Democracy*, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup>Casey Delehanty et al., 'Militarization and police violence: The case of the 1033 program', *Research & Politics*, 4:2 (April 2017), available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168017712885>.

<sup>82</sup>Amaya Cóbar, 'Militarización de la seguridad pública en El Salvador, 1992–2012'; Diamint, 'A new militarism in Latin America', p. 158; Aurora Moreno Torres, 'Seguridad democrática y militarización en Colombia: Más allá del conflicto armado', *URVIO, Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios de Seguridad*, 12 (2012), pp. 41–56; Tellería Escobar, *Fuerzas Armadas, Seguridad Interna y Democracia En Bolivia*.

<sup>83</sup>Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 'The militarization of law enforcement', p. 11; Luiz Eduardo Soares, 'The national public security policy: Background, dilemmas and perspectives', *Estudos Avançados*, 21:61 (2007), pp. 77–97; José Manuel Ugarte, 'Qué cambios se están produciendo en las fuerzas armadas Latinoamericanas?', *Revista Política y Estrategia*, 135 (2020), p. 61.

<sup>84</sup>See Ugarte, 'Qué cambios se están produciendo en las fuerzas armadas Latinoamericanas?', pp. 61–2.

<sup>85</sup>Nicole Jenne and María Lourdes Puente Olivera, 'The Navy-Coast Guard nexus in Argentina: Lost in democratization?', in Ian Bowers and Swee Lean Collin Koh (eds), *Grey and White Hulls* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019), pp. 245–69, available at: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9242-9\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9242-9_13).

education.<sup>86</sup> Although the campaigns are financed by the civilian National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs (DEVIDA), they have been coordinated, organised, and carried out by the military, whose protagonist role has prevented the empowerment of civilian structures to provide basic services in the poverty-stricken area. In 2015, a high-ranking DEVIDA official recalled that DEVIDA had to accept budget cuts as more funds were given to the Army: ‘Although I was upset at the time, later I could see that the Army really had done great things, things which my institution could never have done. With these resources, [then President] Humala [a retired army officer] turned the Army into a formidable construction agent.’<sup>87</sup> The fact that the military, but no civilian agency was in the position to take charge of infrastructure development indicates that it is the repeated fall-back on the former that has left the latter underdeveloped.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, too, the military has assumed a range of tasks that could eventually have been managed more cost-efficiently by civilian actors, including volunteer organisations and medicine students.<sup>88</sup> Tellingly, Uruguay’s Defence Minister remarked that ‘the best defence policy are the social policies’ the armed forces have been implementing during the pandemic,<sup>89</sup> underlining the argument that the military is not primarily seen as an instrument of defence but as a wildcard to be used where civilian capacity falls short.

### Tendencies of undemocratic political cultures

Another dimension of Latin America’s lack of state capacity is the absence of a social and political community unified by a national consciousness. In Weberian terms, states have lacked political legitimacy. Drawing on the argument that the internal use of the military foments a public narrative that depicts the armed forces as a capable actor *vis-à-vis* corrupt and incompetent civilians,<sup>90</sup> in this section we suggest that the military’s internal use in Latin America has contributed to undermine the legitimacy of civilian actors. This has yielded negative effects for the region’s democratic culture.

Throughout much of Latin America’s history, politics has been considered responsible for persisting poverty, inequality, and political instability. The military, in turn, which was among the first institutions of the Latin American state to consolidate during the late nineteenth century, has enjoyed considerable social standing and respect to the effect that military rule was seen as a viable means to modernise and develop.<sup>91</sup> This popular narrative has fed into the military’s role conceptions, particularly during those periods when it played a politically prominent role. The reputation of being incorruptible and effective has never reflected reality; however, in Eric Nordlinger’s words: ‘soldiers have sometimes mitigated some of the “sores” on the body politic: blatant corruption, extreme partisanship, inordinately coercive rule and turmoil.’<sup>92</sup> For different reasons, politicians have been considered inept to handle internal security, promote economic development and to provide basic services and it is reasonable to assume that the ideology of

<sup>86</sup>Sofía Isabel Vizcarra Castillo and Christoph Heuser, ‘Los estados en los márgenes: Soberanía y gubernamentalidad en el principal valle cocalero peruano’, *Sociologías*, 21:52 (December 2019), pp. 179–80, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1590/15174522-88054>}.

<sup>87</sup>Interview via Teams, 21 February 2021.

<sup>88</sup>See RESDAL, *La Labor de Las Fuerzas Militares En Contexto de Crisis: Covid-19* (Buenos Aires: Red de Seguridad y Defensa de América Latina, 2020).

<sup>89</sup>Uruguay, *García Dijo Que La Mejor Política de Defensa Son Las Políticas Sociales* (Montevideo: Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, 2020), available at: {<https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-defensa-nacional/comunicacion/noticias/garcia-dijo-mejor-politica-defensa-son-politicas-sociales>}.

<sup>90</sup>Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies Jr, ‘The politics of antipolitics’, in Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies (eds), *The Politics of Antipolitics: The Military in Latin America*, Latin American Silhouettes: Studies in History and Culture (rev. and updated edn, Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1997), pp. 3–14; Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics*.

<sup>91</sup>Loveman and Davies Jr, ‘The politics of antipolitics’; Finer, *The Man on Horseback*, p. 10.

<sup>92</sup>Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics*, p. 205.



'antipolitics' has persisted in Latin America's political culture after the latest wave of democratisation in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>93</sup>

Table 5 presents data on the quality of democracy. The three measurement indicators (V-Dem, the Fragile State Index, and the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index) are widely used and are presented together here to increase confidence in the respective values considering that both the meaning, as well as the operationalisation of democracy are debated. In addition, to capture how democratic/undemocratic a given political culture is, Table 5 shows data from the Latinobarómetro survey regarding people's attitudes towards democratic and undemocratic regimes from multiple years. The reported numbers in the last two columns are the averaged percentage of people who agreed with the following claims: 'Democracy is preferable to any other form of government', and 'I would not mind an undemocratic government if it solves the economic problems and creates employment.'

Two insights are relevant for the purpose of this study. First, although there is some variation across indices, the values coincide broadly in indicating how democratic a given country is. Secondly, combining the data, it is possible to divide the eleven countries considered into three broad categories: consolidated democracies with comparatively strong democratic political cultures, flawed democracies, and democracies under threat with relatively weak democratic political cultures. Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay belong to the first group; the second is comprised of Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil; and finally, Bolivia, El Salvador, and Nicaragua belong to the third group. Contrasted with the degree to which the military has been involved in internal missions (see Table 2), a correlation becomes apparent between the extensive use for domestic purposes and undemocratic tendencies. Accordingly, Argentina and Chile are the countries most restrictive about the military's internal functions. They are followed by Uruguay, Peru, Ecuador, and Mexico, which have used the military internally on a more regular basis but still in a limited fashion. Colombia and Brazil, together with the least democratic countries of Bolivia, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, have relied extensively on the armed forces to carry out a range of different domestic tasks on a regular basis. Although investigating the strength of the causal effect is beyond the scope of this study, the correlation supports the argument developed in earlier studies that the extensive use of the military fosters undemocratic attitudes, both within the military and society.<sup>94</sup> It is thus that the countries in question have less democratic institutions, procedures as well as political cultures.

## Conclusions

This article set out to shed light on the implications of Latin America's internal use of the armed forces for civil-military relations placed within the broader context of democratic governance. Drawing on selected evidence from across the region, we argued that internal missions have perpetuated democratic deficits in at least four regards. The military's frequent use internally has (1) challenged the rule of law as its deployment domestically often contravened existing legal frameworks; (2) shielded the armed forces from pressures to reform; (3) worked against the development of civilian capacities; and (4) undermined public confidence in the efficacy of democratic systems and civilians' ability to solve problems. This perspective offers a powerful counterargument to the widely-shared position that justifies the military's internal role together with its own role conception on pragmatic grounds, pointing to its logistical capacity and personnel strength, together with the chronic weakness and financial constraints of Latin American states. Smaller militaries with a similar budget would allow for substantive modernising reforms. Yet, downsizing would spark conflict with the military, leave a considerable number of people out of work and

<sup>93</sup>Loveman and Davies Jr, 'The politics of antipolitics'; Brian Loveman, 'Protected democracies: Antipolitics and political transitions in Latin America, 1978–1994', in Loveman and Davies (eds), *The Politics of Antipolitics*, pp. 366–97.

<sup>94</sup>Loveman, *For La Patria*; Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics*.

**Table 5.** Democratic culture in Latin America.

|             | V-Dem, Liberal Democracy Index <sup>(1)</sup> | Fragile State Index 2020 <sup>(2)</sup> | Democracy Index 2020 <sup>(3)</sup> | Support for democracy <sup>(4)</sup> in (%) | Support for non-democratic governments <sup>(5)</sup> in % |
|-------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Argentina   | 0.63  | Stable (46)                             | Flawed democracy (6,95)             | 68  | 37   |
| Bolivia     | 0,47  | Warning (75)                            | Hybrid Regime (5,08)                | 60  | 42   |
| Brazil      | 0,73  | Warning (73)                            | Flawed democracy (6,92)             | 43  | 56   |
| Chile       | 0,8   | Stable (42,5)                           | Full democracy (8,28)               | 56  | 32   |
| Colombia    | 0,43  | Warning (76,6)                          | Flawed democracy (7,04)             | 52  | 53   |
| Ecuador     | 0,45  | Warning (69,4)                          | Flawed democracy (6,13)             | 54  | 57   |
| El Salvador | 0,41  | Warning (68,9)                          | Hybrid Regime (5,90)                | 50  | 59   |
| Mexico      | 0,5   | Warning (67,2)                          | Flawed democracy (6,07)             | 48  | 47   |
| Nicaragua   | 0,3   | Warning (77,1)                          | Authoritarian (3,60)                | 54  | 56   |
| Peru        | 0,62  | Warning (67,6)                          | Flawed democracy (6,53)             | 53  | 38   |
| Uruguay     | 0,83  | Stable (33,4)                           | Full democracy (8,61)               | 76  | 36   |

Values indicating strong democratic culture.

Values indicating weak democratic culture.

(1) Varieties of Democracy Institute, University of Gothenburg. Scores from 0 to 1. Average 2000–20.

(2) Fragile State Index, The Fund for Peace. Scores from 1 (very sustainable) to 120 (very high alert).

(3) Democracy Index, The Economist Intelligence Unit. Scores from 0 (authoritarian) to 10 (full democracy).

(4) Latinobarómetro. Agreement with the claim ‘Democracy is preferable to any other form of government’, weighted average of data from 1995 to 2018.

(5) Latinobarómetro. Agreement with the claim ‘I would not mind an undemocratic government if it solves the economic problems and creates employment’, weighted average of data from 2001 to 2016.

deprive governments of a wildcard with an immense capacity for human and territorial deployment. Given these likely consequences, pragmatism has maintained the upper hand though it has come at a cost for the region's quality of democracy.

The study further adds to the civil-military relations literature in that it shows that internal missions are not only the outcome of immediate threats to sovereignty and order from within the state (for example, social unrest, terrorism, and organised crime), which in turn affect civil-military relations in negative ways. Instead, we show that it has been the use of the military as a wildcard to assume whatever function civilian institutions were unable to carry out that has yielded such harmful effects. In this context, it is relevant to restate that it has often been civilians who pulled the military into an ever-broader set of missions. On its part, the military appears to have played a rather passive role accepting what it allowed it to maintain its budget, size, and privileges. This insight sits uneasily with the position of those who have categorically opposed any deployment of the military beyond external defence on the grounds that it would turn Latin America's predatory militaries into a ticking time bomb that will end democracy. The argument advanced here is situated in between the categorical and the pragmatic view. While our focus has been on the defence of democracy, this focus is not limited to democratic survival but sheds light on its functioning, performance, and quality. The misuse of the military as a wildcard to fill in where civilian state capacity is lacking causes and prolongs severe democratic deficits. Over time, these could well lead to a return to praetorianism.

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