

Call for Abstracts: deadline 15 December 2022

## **Mobilizations in Dangerous Contexts: Insights from Latin America and the Caribbean**

**Romain Busnel**, postdoctoral researcher at CEVIPOL, ULB

**Léa Lebeaupin-Salamon**, PhD candidate at CREDA, Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle

**Luis Rivera-Vélez**, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Lausanne, UNIL

According to the NGO Global Witness, Latin America is the continent where the most climate activists and land defenders have been murdered over the past decade, adding environmental issues to the long list of causes targeted for repression in the region. Collective action and mobilization, however, continued to flourish throughout Latin America, with innovative demands and surreptitious forms of action. Questioning this paradox of mobilization under dangerous contexts, this special issue aims to shed light on the roots of collective actions taking place under repression and criminalization in Latin American and Caribbean countries. Contributions should study how coercion influences protesters whether at the individual level or as collective mobilizations. The overall objective of the special issue is to analyze how these protests come to emerge in highly criminalized contexts.

Latin America is characterized by important economic and political inequalities reproduced by repressive practices, inherited from authoritarian regimes, where any form of protest was strongly illegalized, punished and repressed by the police or the army (Cardoso 1978; Collier 1980). After the democratic transitions of the 1980s and 1990s, these repressive practices hardly disappeared (O'Donnell 1996). They started being perpetuated at more local scales, against inhabitants and activists concerned about urban renewal projects, the expansion of agricultural frontiers, megaprojects for energy exploitation development or activities considered illegal. This reveals the continuity of authoritarian enclaves within local territories (Gibson 2012) with criminalization processes aimed at condemning and holding accountable any individual or group who oppose the law, the dominant social norms, or the orthodox economic model.

In the media, some of the abuses committed against the most marginalized populations are easily attributed to the development of "organized crime," presented as external to the State. However, advanced social science research invalidates this conclusion. Whether through the use of private security in urban areas (Davis 2006), or paramilitary groups to guarantee agro-industrial development (Grajales 2021), states continue to play an important arbitration role. They continue to provide the legal tools for the exercise of repression as much as they delegate their power to third actors to use violence (Briquet and Favarel-Garrigues 2010; Arias and Goldstein 2010) and repress potential political opposition forces and social movements (Doran 2017; Hernández Castillo 2019). Conversely, the state can also be a source of legitimization when it decides not to prosecute illegal acts. This false exoneration of the State with respect to the worst abuses committed is, moreover, strongly questioned by the protesters themselves,

who point to it and hold it responsible, as occurred with the murders and disappearances of the Ayotzinapa students in 2014, where the resulting mobilizations directly accused the Mexican State ("It was the State") (Knox 2022).

This general picture, where violence, intimidation and abuse persist at work, in urban (Arias 2006) and rural areas (Allain 2020), in factories (Delpech 2014) and in drug-producing regions (Blazquez 2022), invites us to question the conditions under which some mobilizations emerge. Indeed, while the most vulnerable populations are more affected by the use of violence (Koonings et al. 2006), we hardly capture the processes of subjectivation and agency of criminalized populations. While it is true that contexts of extreme coercion reduce the likelihood of collective action (Pommerolle and Vairel 2009), mobilizations have nevertheless emerged in recent years, whether by Andean coca farmers (Durand Ochoa 2014), self-defense groups against abuses in Mexico (Le Cour Grandmaison 2016), rural populations against mining, gas and oil projects (Buu-Sao 2021; Composto and Navarro 2012; Bastos and Leon 2014), women seeking abortions (Drovetta 2015), or migrants formed in "caravans" on the Guatemala-Mexico border (Huerta and McLean 2019).

Beyond their effects on the transformation of regimes or public policies, all these mobilizations question the success of collective action in the context of criminalization. In authoritarian regimes, protests tend to occur on a discrete scale, through the circulation of a hidden transcript among the dominated (Scott 1990) or through every day and subversive forms of occupation of urban space (Bayat 2012). Sometimes, protests also take a more visible form, by structuring themselves around pre-existing organizations and networks in the everyday life of those mobilized (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2003) or by promoting original interpretations of the law (Brabazon 2017, Meakin 2022). In these configurations, organizational resources are embedded in different spaces. Local spaces provide symbols for collective identities (Combes, Goirand and Garibay 2015), while transnational space provides non-negligible support (Delpech 2014; Pommerolle and Vairel 2009).

Following these investigations, this special issue will question, through localized research, how restrictions and criminalization influence protesters. This issue also invites us to examine the strategies used by activists to enable such mobilizations whether overtly polemical or rooted in the inter-individual level. To this end, potential contributors are invited to link their proposal to at least one of the following two axes:

1. **The emergence of collective action in criminalization systems.** This axis aims to shed light on the mechanisms of criminalization, the actors involved, but also the conditions that make the emergence of mobilizations possible. Central attention will be paid to the role of states, their institutions, and the relations they maintain with the actors involved. How does the State act to criminalize (or not) certain mobilizations? Which actors -public, parapublic or private- participate in criminalization and exactions? How do illegalization, repression, or intolerance limits, but also stimulate, mobilizations? How are these mobilizations legitimized among public authorities,

public opinion, or transnational arenas? What effects do these mobilizations have on regimes and public policies?

2. **Activist engagement under coercion.** This axis questions the consequences of these systems of criminalization on the engagement and careers of activists. What resources can activists mobilize in these situations? What are the consequences of these engagements in the private sphere, at work and in the daily lives of protesters? How do protesters create or recreate a contesting identity? To the extent that the boundaries between legality and illegality are porous and shifting, how are careers constructed or broken over time?

The call for papers is open to all social science articles. Comparative analyses and/or original methodological protocols are welcome.

The issue coordinators invite interested persons to **submit an abstract of a proposed article in English by December 15, 2022**. These abstracts, with a maximum length of 1000 words, should present the following elements: personal contact information and institutional insertion; chosen problematic, research fields, methodology, material used for demonstrations and outline of the argument. These abstracts can be written in English, Spanish or Portuguese, We will try to encourage publications in any of the three languages.

Responses will be sent in early January, and preselected candidates will be invited to submit a shorter abstract within 15 days for a proposed special issue in a social science journal specializing in English-speaking Latin America (e.g., *The Latin Americanist*, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, *LARR*). An exchange phase with the authors of the selected proposals will be organized during the month of April, before receiving the full articles for submission on May 30, 2023.

### **Contacts and submission**

Romain.busnel@ulb.be  
Lea.lebeaupin@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr  
Luis.riveravelez@sciencespo.fr

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