# Introduction
# Dossier: Citizen In-Security

The language of 'security' is everywhere; yet as a real-life experience, 'insecurity' has become the defining feature of almost every sphere of 21st century life. Systemic risks, urban violence, state fragility, cybercrime, environmental collapse – these are all common reference points for those attempting to describe our present global condition. With the hindsight of a couple of decades, and as many have argued, the dawn of the new millennium appears today, therefore, as the moment when 'security' as we once knew it – as an activity focused on discrete external threats or serious ideological challenges – gave way to a tsunami of interlinking 'insecurities'. Today these security threats range from geological catastrophes, terrorist attacks and pandemics to the 'everyday' fears posed by petty crime, sexual and racial harassment, regular shootings, corner stabbings and, more generally, precarious forms of subsistence.[1]

As a response to this purported proliferation of 'insecurity', human, political, military, socio-economic, environmental and energy 'security' have become top priorities for local and national governments and international organisations alike. Behind all of this lies a storm of emotions triggered by a shared sense of permanent vulnerability and exposure – sometimes justified, but often just imagined.[2] These feelings feed that endless 'security-talk' that currently dominates public and private conversations in both the Global North and South, providing a script that is performed again and again in the countless 'security-theatres' that are springing up across our physical and digital worlds.[3]

Airports, supermarkets, parks, neighbourhoods, public and private buildings, living rooms, shopping centres and even our mobile phones, laptops and cars have become key sites in which this shared sense of alarm is negotiated by new deployments of security legislation, the expansion of police forces, the proliferation of private security firms, new vigilante groups, ever more sophisticated security (CCTV) camera systems, firewalls and cross-password protocols. And the story does not end there. As each of these security *dispositifs* is unveiled, a new round of threats emerges. And, once again, this circular process is sometimes justified, but on many occasions is just the new 'order of things'.[4]

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1 Mary E. Footer, Julia Schmidt and Nigel D. White, eds., *Security and International Law* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2016).

2 Jack Holland, '9/11 and Critical Terrorism Studies – the Emotion, Culture, and Discourse of the "War on Terror"' *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 14(4) (2021). https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.1982124

3 Bruce Schneier, *Beyond Fear: Thinking Sensibly About Security in an Uncertain World* (New York: Copernicus Books, 2003).

4 Michael Foucault, 'Confessions of the Flesh' (1977) in *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977,* edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980); Michael Foucault. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1989).

A secret password is no longer enough. A password with alphanumeric characters is no longer enough. An alphanumeric character password plus an email check is no longer enough. Where are we today? An alphanumeric character password with an inbuilt system to detect whether or not you are a human, in addition to a Multifactor Authentication System (MFA) that sends a 'push' notification directly to your phone for verification. Where will we be tomorrow?

Deep racial, gender, economic and spatial inequalities, the dismantling of public infrastructures, the abandonment of the dream of full-employment and an economic system that atomizes social relations while eroding the environmental conditions for existing in this planet – these are the root causes of this drama. But asking for such structural issues to be resolved seems to be asking for too much. 'Security', from this vantage point, is as much an urgent need as it is a comfort-blanket in these perilous times.[5]

The purpose of this dossier is to survey the relationship between this expansion of the language of 'security' on the one hand, and the ongoing proliferation of 'insecurity' on the other. The interdisciplinary, international and diverse group of authors brought together here for the first time to explore these questions take as their main focus of investigation the Latin American region and the concept of 'citizen security' (*seguridad ciudadana*).

In terms of their regional focus, Latin America is an ideal location in which to examine the discursive dynamics of the idea of security, as well as the socio-economic, political and environmental conditions that serve as the material background to so much security-talk today. Latin America – first battleground for colonial and post-colonial experimentation and, later on, for Cold War counter-insurgency strategies – has, since the 1990s, served as the seedbed in which projects like 'human security' and 'security and development' have matured into a flourishing new field of security practices. With the help of international organisations, including the World Bank, governments across the region have come to use the term 'citizen security' to explain these new security experiments in an effort finally to consolidate the elusive social contract with their citizens.[6] However, even as 'citizen security' has come to dominate the policy space in the region, the capacity of its *Leviathans* –of local- and national-level governments– to deliver on their side of the bargain through the provision of peace and welfare has turned out to be shaky and uncertain. In terms of homicides per capita, sexual violence, socio-economic and spatial segregation, the assassination of labour and human rights activists, the trade of narcotics and the illegal destruction of environmental resources, Latin American countries continue to top the charts. Just one statistic will help to illustrate this point: 37% of the world's homicides take place in Latin America, a region home to just 8% of the world's population.[7] Without seeking to flatten the huge complexity that lies behind the violence experienced by populations across Latin America, these terrifying figures give us a hint, nonetheless, of what is at stake in the debate about 'in-security' in the region.

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5 Luis Eslava and Lina Buchely, 'Security and Development? A Story about Petty Crime, the Petty State and its Petty Law' *Revista de Estudios Sociales,* 67 (2019). https://doi.org/10.7440/res67.2019.04

6 Robert Muggah, 'The Rise of Citizen Security in Latin America and the Caribbean' in *Alternative Pathways to Sustainable Development: Lessons from Latin America,* edited by Gilles Carbonnier, Humberto Campodónico and Sergio Tezanos Vázquez (The Netherlands: Brill, 2017).

7 Gerardo Lissardy, 'Por qué América Latina es la región más violenta del mundo (y qué lecciones puede tomar de la historia de Europa) *BBC News,* July 12, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-48960255

In their thinking about Latin America all the way from its northern borderlands with the United States and Central America to local municipalities and sporting events in Chile and Brazil, passing through the jails of El Salvador, the ecological and economic crisis in Puerto Rico, protests in Colombia, domestic violence in Ecuador and Peru's increasingly securitised Amazon region, the dossier's contributors offer the first critical socio-legal assessment of Latin America's persistent levels of insecurity, even in the face of new public policies like 'citizen security'. Notwithstanding the very diverse range of case studies, questions and approaches they deploy, their final assessment is clear. Instead of producing a more peaceful and prosperous reality, such initiatives have tended to perpetuate, if not to exacerbate, the multiple insecurities faced by the vast majority of Latin Americans. Moreover, these studies also reveal how profoundly Latin America's communities, governments and families have been reorganised by the various different dimensions of this new security agenda, from increasing levels of surveillance, to the turn to criminal and carceral responses to social conflict, to ever more heavy-handed approaches to social dissent and beyond. As Illan Wall has recently put it, in a world in which traditional sovereign powers and frameworks are being dismantled and questioned, an atmosphere of both overt and covert violence has begun to settle in (Wall 2020). Law, in this context, is playing a huge role in ingraining this quest for security into the fabric of governmental structures and social relations.

Together, as this suggests, the contributors to this issue bring to the surface the historical forces, socio-legal arrangements and governmental and technological shifts that have underpinned the securitisation of the region – a process that, ironically, has gone hand-in-hand with the de-securitisation of its everyday life. Via a series of situated, yet multi-scaled analysis, they trace the multiple and often uncomfortable connections between the 'high drama' that has accompanied the emergence of new security discourses and the 'low-level' but widespread human suffering that such discourses have systematically failed to halt, and may even have promoted. These range from new state-of-the-art policing surveillance strategies and metrics exercises in Brazil (see the contribution by de Assis Machado, Maciel and de Souza) and Chile (see the contributions by Contreras, and by Araya-Moreno) and novel law-and-order responses to social protests and domestic violence in Ecuador (see the contribution by Tapia Tapia and Bedford) and Colombia (see the contribution by Prada and Gonzalez),[8] to the militarisation of Indigenous territories in the Amazons (see the contribution by Merino and Quispe Dávila), the politics of mass incarceration in El Salvador (see the contribution by Bergmann and Gude), new emergency measures in Puerto Rico (see the contribution by Atiles), and the systematic criminalisation of migration flows from Central America into the US (see the contribution by Abrego and Cárcamo).

Explaining the persistence of the region's insecurity in the face of so much 'security-talk' has been a pressing task for all these authors, as it has for me and for the editors of the *Latin America Law Review*. As socio-legal scholars of law, security and international development, we felt compelled to put our own sense of that social disorder that has come to characterise the places and communities that are close to our hearts and our research into conversation with broader debates in law and the social sciences and humanities about security. We all agree that without critical scrutiny, the drive to strengthen the bond between the region's citizens and

8 The article by Maria Angélica Prada and Alexandra Gonzalez will be included in the next issue of the *Latin American Law Review*.

states through the language of security risks entrenching even-more theatrical forms of security,[9] where a politics of fear prepares the ground for the consolidation of ever-more regressive forms of legalism and political authoritarianism.

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to the *Latin American Law Review* and its editorial team for providing a platform for these interventions, and for opening up an important debate on the need to move beyond panic and alarm in our collective search for new ways of addressing the structural issues that keep on producing so much pain and violence in Latin American and many other parts of the world.

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