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Homicide Rates in Fragile Democracies: Reflections on the Paradoxes of Latin America

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Abstract

This article analyzes the relationship between the quality of democracy and homicide rates in Latin America. Our hypothesis is that governments with authoritarian tendencies in Latin America do not necessarily have higher homicide rates than those without these tendencies. Our research focuses analyzing the "quality" of democracy in four countries: Brazil and Colombia, categorized as "weak democracies", and Peru and Bolivia, considered "hybrid regimes." Secondary data obtained from the Economist Intelligence Unit, Our World in Data and the World Bank Group websites were used for this analysis. Findings indicate that weakening of institutions is an important contributor to homicide rates in weak democracies (Brazil and Colombia). However, this factor has less of an impact on homicide rates in hybrid regime countries (Peru and Bolivia), where the fragility of democracy coexists with lower homicide rates.

Index terms— latin america; fragile democracies; state institutions; homicides.

1 Introduction

his article seeks to analyze the relationship between homicide rates and different government regimes to determine if democracies with "weaker" institutions tend to have higher homicide rates. Research focused on data from four countries: Brazil and Colombia -both classified as "weak democracies" by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU, 2022) -and Peru and Bolivia -classified by the same institute as "hybrid regimes." All countries suffer from the deterioration of democratic institutions, albeit to different degrees with a differential impact on homicide rates.

The term "weak democracies" refers to political regimes whose institutions formally exist but have flaws that compromise the consolidation of democracy. Flaws stem from factors, such as corruption, clientelism, inefficient governance and a loss of trust in public institutions (Boulding, 2010, Kapstein and Converse, 2008; Levitsky and Murillo, 2013; Waldmann, 2006). Also, present is political interference from powerful elites and a lack of state autonomy (Levitsky and Murillo, 2013; Levitsky and Way, 2012). Although data sources make a distinction between "weak democracies" and "hybrid regimes," we decided not to focus our analysis on this distinction due to its tenuous nature; thus, for the purposes of this theoretical reflection, all the countries mentioned are considered "weak democracies."

Analyses were based on secondary data extracted from the annual reports and historical series available on the websites of the Economist Intelligence Unit, Our World in Data and the World Bank Group, organizations with a long tradition of expertise in organizing data on social phenomena and global issues. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) is a research and consulting firm that provides economic and political analyses for organizations around the world; Our World in Data (OWID) is a non-profit organization that makes data on important global issues available to the public; the World Bank Group (WBG) is an international financial institution that provides loans and assistance to developing countries. These institutions are interested in issues related to democracy, crime and homicide rates, as these factors affect economic development, poverty and contribute negatively to economic development.

By analyzing the fragility of democracy in Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, this article has the potential to contribute new insights to the social and political sciences. To date, little research has been conducted on

45 the fragility of democracy and/or weakening of democratic institutions and their effects on violence, especially
46 homicide rates. This discussion is particularly relevant today because some democratic countries, including those
47 with consolidated democracies, are facing new challenges as authoritarian rulers come to power. At its core,
48 our analysis focuses on the relationship between weakened democracies and homicide rates; we seek to verify if
49 homicide rates in countries with authoritarian tendencies differ from those without these tendencies.

2 II.

3 Literature Review

52 Democratic fragility and the rise of authoritarian regimes are phenomena that marked Latin American history
53 throughout the 20th century. These processes extended into the first decades of the 21st century, affecting
54 various ideological orientations. According to Burchardt (2017), changes in ideological orientation do not
55 substantially transform political practices in Latin America, as elites and various interest groups often alternate
56 their terms in power. Thus, we observe only slight variations in the nuances of political practices in relation to
57 previous authoritarian regimes. According to this author, even progressive governments, which once challenged
58 conservative elites, end up adopting similar practices and, when in power, also engage in the task of undermining
59 democratic institutions. Waldmann (2006) points out that dictators in Latin America, regardless of their
60 ideological affinities, have historically sought to weaken legal foundations and informal social norms; these changes
61 help them impose their agendas more freely. Even with the wave of redemocratization in the 1980s, many Latin
62 American countries were unable to establish solid democratic orders (Ibarra, 2011;Martins, 2015). Job (1992)
63 and Santos (2014) argue that governments often fail to provide essential services for their people, thus creating
64 a context conducive to instability and vulnerable to authoritarian take over.

65 In search of some degree of governability, state institutions become bargaining chips and are manipulated by
66 those who wish to extract advantages from those in power. According to Ellis (2017), widespread corruption, a lack
67 of transparency, and the absence of accountability generate widespread distrust (Jiménez, 2012;Lavalle and Vera,
68 2011;Willis, 2017). This, in turn, undermines government legitimacy and fuels political polarization (Murillo,
69 2019;Power and Jamison, 2005). In this context, opponents are persecuted obsessively and systematically;
70 attempts are also made to limit independence and interfere with the division of powers (Vitulo, 2001).

71 According to Briceño-León (2012), institutional weakness and corruption lead people to resort not to justice,
72 but to violence. The absence or inefficiency of justice encourages ordinary people, and even public officials, to
73 take the law into their own hands. In this context, widespread transgression of the law is the most common
74 response; at the same time, the state becomes complicit in illegalities due to its inability to carry out its function
75 (Cruz, 2011;Weber, 2021).

76 According to Osorio (2013), security institutions are in a particularly delicate position because they are
77 directly subordinate to the executive branch of government, making them susceptible to political and budgetary
78 interference. This accentuates inefficiency, which leads to an increase in crime rates, in general, and homicide
79 rates in particular. Opportunistic politicians take advantage of this context, using state weakness as a campaign
80 platform. They propose themselves as saviors by mobilizing popular dissatisfaction, promising to solve problems
81 with simplistic solutions. These solutions usually involve making democratic and legal parameters more flexible;
82 sometimes these parameters are even eliminated, which, among other consequences, aims to legitimize an increase
83 in police brutality. In this context, responsible public agents are not punished and may even be offered impunity
84 (Blumstein, 2007, Lafree andTseloni, 2006;Malone, 2013).

85 As the state loses its capacity to respond to the public, and state institutions fail to provide essential
86 public services, faith in the democratic system and its legitimacy weakens (Magalon and Kricheli, 2010). In
87 Latin America, ineffective law enforcement, widespread corruption and slow responses to crucial issues, such as
88 the increase in violence and the strengthening of criminal organizations, create a highly unstable atmosphere
89 conducive to the emergence of punitive non-state control (Elkins, Ginsburg and Melton, 2009;González
90 Zempoalteca, 2023). To avoid assuming their institutional failure for good, Latin American states do take
91 action, but in an extremely selective way. As a result, law enforcement is often poorly founded and precariously
92 executed. The police are the closest and most visible state institutions to ordinary citizens and are the first to
93 experience the effects of public distrust; thus, they are seen in the region as a thermometer for the quality of
94 democracy.

95 In the region, police institutions are historically conservative and have had difficulty adopting democratic
96 values; they act with "selectivity," which harms the poorest segments of the population. Attempts to investigate
97 excess use of power against selective groups fails in the face of a corporatism, operating with a "self-preservation"
98 instinct. In addition, these public agents deal with the lack of objective delimitation of their role as police in a
99 democratic society (Reiss Jr., 1992;Yüksel, 2015).

100 Yet, the increase in violence and homicides in Latin American countries returning to democracy after decades
101 of authoritarian regimes is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. These issues cannot be entirely explained by
102 the quality of democratic institutions. In some countries in the region, democratization did not signify profound
103 reforms in the institutions. This, thus, allowed criminal organizations to grow stronger and occupy spaces of
104 power where the state had limited presence (Berg and Carranza, 2018;Cruz, 2019;Pérez, 2013). Gallo (2014),
105 discussing the legacy of dictatorships in Latin America, argues that the transition to democracy in many countries

106 in the region was marked by "amnesty" agreements that guaranteed impunity for perpetrators of human rights
107 abuses during authoritarian regimes. This weakened the state's ability to maintain control and order. As a
108 more recent component of this equation, we must consider the COVID-19 pandemic, whose impact has further
109 exacerbated social tensions in the region, which may have contributed to the escalation of violence in general
110 (Gomes and Carvalho, 2021).

111 In this sense, the increase in homicides following the return to democratic normality in Latin America can be
112 attributed to a combination of factors, of which the quality of democracy is just one component.

113 4 III.

114 5 Research Methodology

115 This study takes a descriptive approach, using secondary data published by the EIU. In 2023, the EIU, the
116 research and analysis division of The Economist Group, published a historical series on the democracy index of 167
117 countries, from which microstates were excluded because their populations were too small. The historical series
118 constructed by the EIU is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, government
119 functioning, political participation and political culture, with scores ranging from "0" for weak democracies to
120 "10" for strong democracies.

121 We also used data from the historical series made available by the World Bank Group, which regularly
122 systematizes data extracted from the Homicide Statistics of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
123 (UNODC). This data, in turn, is collected both nationally and internationally from the criminal justice and
124 public health systems, as well as from other regional and international agencies, such as the Organization of
125 American States, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

126 We also analyzed data from the Our World in Data, which uses government documents and reports from civil
127 society organizations regarding the quality of democracies to construct democratic stability scores. The scores
128 established by the OWID are the following: for countries with low stability (scores from 1 to 2.49), stability with
129 flaws (scores from 2.5 to 4.49), regular political participation (scores from 4.5 to 6.49) and solid stability (scores
130 from 6.5 to 8.49) and countries with excellent stability (scores from 8.5 to 10).

131 These institutes acquire data from the countries' governments. Some governments keep their data more up-
132 to-date than others; thus, the tables and figures presented in this article show slight differences in their time
133 frames. Brazil and Peru, for example, only have data up to 2020, and Colombia and Bolivia up to 2021. To
134 further delimit the analyses of Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia regarding the general state and condition of
135 their democracies, we focused on the "Government Functionality" category in the historical series from 2013 to
136 2021.

137 The four study countries were chosen because they all share borders with the Amazon region. They also
138 have difficulties solidifying their democratic institutions and experience high crime rates due harboring routes
139 for international criminal organizations. Given the geographical scope of the region under analysis, collecting
140 primary data would be expensive, complex and time-consuming. Data collection would be further complicated
141 by fragility of the institutions in these countries and the risks involved in penetrating territories full of illicit
142 activities. Given this scenario, the choice of secondary data from international sources seemed the most viable
143 option -one which is also capable of providing a comprehensive view of the problems affecting the functionality
144 of democratic institutions in these Latin American nations.

145 6 IV.

146 7 Results

147 Latin America experienced a sharp decline in democracy rankings between 2006 and 2022; towards the end of this
148 period, more precisely between 2020 and 2021, this decline was more pronounced, possibly due to the impacts of
149 the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, the region's score improved slightly due to the suspension of pandemic-related
150 restrictions, but this was not enough to completely reverse the general downward trend that has been observed
151 since 2006.

152 Figure 1 shows the dynamics of this trend for the twenty-four IGlobal Journal of Human Social Science Most
153 Latin American countries saw a decline in their 2022 indices as compared to 2021; yet, nine countries saw growth
154 and two remained stable. Although there are robust democracies in the region, such as in Uruguay, Costa Rica
155 and Chile, whose performance values raise the average, the general trend remains unchanged since these countries
156 have small populations, representing only 4% of the regional population. It is important to note that 45% of the
157 region's inhabitants live under "hybrid" or "authoritarian" regimes, while 62% of citizens live in countries that
158 have experienced a drop in the quality of democracy.

159 Data displayed on Table 1 shows the quality indices, with reference to the "government functionality" aspect
160 and the political regime adopted. Figure 2 shows "democratic stability" indices for the four studied countries,
161 considering the effectiveness levels of democratic institutions and the degree to which they are accepted by citizens.
162 In the last four years, Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia have experienced social and political instability, which
163 explains the trends observed on Table 1 and in Figure 2. In 2022, presidential elections in Brazil were extremely
164 polarized due to the dispute between the incumbent president, the far-right politician, Jair Bolsonaro, who

165 governed from 2019 to 2022 and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a leftist-oriented former president who governed from
166 2003 to 2010 (Zilli and Couto, 2017).

167 Throughout his term in office, Bolsonaro cultivated distrust of the electronic ballot box system among his
168 supporters and threatened not to recognize election results after his defeat; he even plotted a coup d'état to
169 annul the results and remain in power. The coup attempt did not succeed, and Lula was inaugurated as the
170 president; yet Bolsonaro's supporters invaded the capital, the National Congress and the Supreme Court buildings.
171 These actions were aimed at mobilizing their supporters and the Armed Forces to join the coup attempt, but
172 democratic institutions resisted. However, the calls for a coup d'état resonated with some sectors of the Armed
173 Forces. Even though this group is a minority and not strong enough to achieve the coup's objectives, their actions
174 brought the light the weaknesses of the Brazilian democracy.

175 Colombia has also faced instability, especially during the 2020-2021 period. Instability is related to challenges of
176 the COVID-19 pandemic and a series of long-standing social and political problems, which have combined to fuel
177 an anti-system sentiment and the rejection of traditional party candidates. Against this backdrop, Gustavo Petro
178 came to power in Colombia. The president-elect was a left-wing leader who began his political career as a trade
179 union leader. However, when he took office, he adopted a pragmatic stance and formed a governing coalition
180 with center-leaning parties. This guaranteed him a majority in Congress and facilitated the establishment of
181 progressive reforms. Although social and political tensions were not completely eliminated, this strategy increased
182 governability and reduced pressure on democratic institutions.

183 Peru's democracy was severely tested in 2021, when Congress voted and approved the removal of the president-
184 the third impeachment attempt in his mere 15 months in office. Anticipating this outcome, President Pedro
185 Castillo announced that he would close Congress and call early legislative elections just before his removal was
186 to be voted upon. He planned to govern by decree, restructure the judiciary branch and impose a national
187 curfew. These actions, representing a coup attempt, quickly failed and the Peruvian Congress removed him from
188 office shortly after the announcement. He was then arrested and sentenced to 18 months in prison. Although
189 the coup attempt did not materialize, Peru's democratic institutions were severely shaken during the fifteen
190 months that Castillo was in power. Bolivia, for its part, has made efforts to restructure the state to be more
191 inclusive of minorities, mobilizing both indigenous and peasant organizations. This inclusion has increased
192 popular representation; yet, by challenging the current political order and negatively affecting the interests of
193 the elites, it has also generated conflicts and have left some sectors unsatisfied. Cocagrowers, for example, who
194 have historically presented themselves as representatives of the peasantry, oppose the central government; their
195 dissatisfaction is related to state repression of coca leaf production and threats to traditional access to and use
196 of water, which was in the process of being privatized. Despite regular elections and a democratic constitution,
197 Bolivia continues to be marked by limitations and inequalities. Bolivia has not yet to overcome its historical
198 exclusion of less privileged social segments, nor has it been able to control the power of the elites. Problems,
199 such as state violence against popular demonstrations and a lack of access to essential services, such as health,
200 education and water, continue to be factors that restrict and compromise the consolidation of the Bolivian
201 democracy.

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203 The conditions described above, and data shown on Figure 3 show an eclectic situation regarding homicide rates
204 in the four study countries in 2013 and 2021. Amid long-standing social and political fragilities and in the context
205 of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil and Colombia maintained high homicide rates, while Peru and Bolivia have
206 significantly lower homicide rates during this period.

207 Source: World Bank Group (2023). Brazil and Colombia are considered "weak democracies," yet are still are
208 better placed in the democracy ranking than Peru and Bolivia, which are considered "hybrid regimes." However,
209 there is a huge disparity between the rates of the former and the latter two. Brazil, for example, s has numerous
210 factors that influence homicide rates -ranging from poverty and social inequality -traditionally identified as drivers
211 of criminal activity -to a culture of impunity, which produces a deep-rooted mistrust in the police and justice
212 systems.

213 Between 2014 and 2016, Brazil faced an economic crisis and a substantial increase in crime. At the same time,
214 political events linked to corruption scandals, such as those described in Operation Car Wash (Operação Lava
215 Jato) provoked instability and led to demonstrations across the country. Reforms to the Social Security system
216 were made in an effort to curb public spending; yet another important reform, the federal tax reform, was not
217 put into action despite sustained efforts (Barreira, 2019;Silva, 2021;Spaniol, 2019;Zanetic, 2017).

218 Previous studies on the incidence of crime, in general, and homicide in particular, point to the link between
219 broader socio-economic and political factors and increased murder rates. Thus, we can infer that corruption
220 allegations and the administrative irregularities that culminated in the impeachment of President Dilma in her
221 second term could explain the homicide rates of this period -insofar as they represented a weakening of state
222 institutions. From 2017 to 2018, poverty was reduced nationally, yet social inequalities and political instability
223 in the face of widespread dissatisfaction with the Michel Temer government (he was the former vice-president
224 who replaced Dilma Rousseff). Corruption scandals practically paralyzed the government until the beginning of
225 2018, when the new president took office. As a result, the quality of democracy continued to deteriorate.

226 From 2018 to 2022, under the government of Jair Bolsonaro, the country was plunged into a social, economic

227 and political crisis that lasted the entire four years of his government. Factors contributing to this crisis included:
228 mismanagement of the COVID-19 public health crisis, collision with the illegal exploitation of natural resources,
229 state sponsored hate speech, the systematic production and dissemination of fake news and the indiscriminate
230 release of arms and ammunition purchases. Paradoxically, Figure 3 shows that in 2019 and 2021, the homicide
231 rate decreased: from 29.6 in 2016 to 20.8 in 2020. Despite remaining high, rates had fallen from 29.6 in 2016 -the
232 year of Dilma Rousseff's impeachment -to 26.6 -recorded in 2018, the end of the Michel Temer government. These
233 data show that as the quality of the Brazilian democracy declined, homicide rates also paradoxically decreased.

234 In Colombia we see the opposite occurring. Here the country experienced a slow but steady decline in
235 homicide rates between 2015 and 2021, from 33.4 in 2013 to 27.5 in 2021. The decade beginning in 2010 was
236 characterized by rapidly growing social and economic inequalities, occurring in tandem with stagnating economic
237 growth. The latter resulted in greater income concentration and accentuated government delegitimization. While
238 implementing fiscal austerity measures to deal the economic crisis, President Juan Manuel Santos' government
239 began negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which culminated in a peace
240 agreement in 2016. This, directly or indirectly, consolidated the downward trend in homicide rates, as shown in
241 Figure 3; here we observe a decrease from 33.4 per 100,000 people in 2013 to 26.0 in 2016, reaching 24.2 in 2020,
242 with only a slight increase to 27.5 in 2021 (Norza Céspedes et al., 2020; Ríos and González, 2021; Ríos-sierra and
243 Bula-Galiano; Morales, 2019).

244 The decline in homicide rates in Colombia seems to confirm the link between the strengthening of democracy
245 and the decrease in homicide rates, unlike what happened in Brazil. Here, the state increased measures to improve
246 public safety, invested in the justice system and created the National Security Guarantee Commission (CNGS)
247 -whose function is to coordinate security activities between various government agencies. Finally, investigative
248 units within the Attorney General's Office, aimed at tackling organized crime and corruption, were created.
249 Added to these actions was the aforementioned agreement with the FARC and the demobilization of its fighters,
250 which has reduced the number of armed conflicts. These measures have helped, but rates still remain quite high,
251 showing there is more work to be done.

252 Peru, in contrast to Brazil and Colombia, has historically had low homicide rates, even though its democracy
253 is ranked far below them. An analysis of Peruvian data from 2013 to 2020 shows a stable downward trend in
254 homicide rates compared to Brazil and Colombia.

255 Peru has a tendency to mix formal democratic institutions with rulers who have authoritarian tendencies
256 and high levels of corruption. It has been home to controversial elections with fraud accusations and acts of
257 intimidation, all of which negatively affect public confidence in Peru's democratic institutions. The country
258 invested in negotiations for a peace agreement with the Shining Path group. The group gained power in 1980;
259 yet, its activities progressively lost intensity due to the arrest of its leader Abimael Guzmán in 1992. Although
260 the conflict ended with a negotiated peace agreement, the accord failed to resolve the structural problems that
261 motivated the conflict to begin with (Niño, 2020; Ríos, 2019).

262 Peru continues to be one of the largest cocaine producers in the world and drug-related crimes generally occur
263 in remote areas, unlike Brazil and Colombia, where the most lethal effects of this illicit activity are felt in urban
264 spaces. Thus, it is possible that a considerable proportion of homicides go unrecorded, which means that official
265 rates are likely underestimated. Peru has just as many social and political problems as Brazil and Colombia;
266 furthermore, its institutions are considered to be weaker than those of Brazil and Colombia, and yet Bolivia's
267 homicide rates remain very low. These facts challenge the idea that weak democracies are correlated with high
268 homicide rates. In the global democracy ranking, Peru occupies position 75, while its neighbors Brazil and
269 Colombia occupy positions 51 and 53, respectively. The relationship between the functionality of the government
270 -one of the factors that make up the institutional weakness index in Table 1 -and the homicide rates described
271 in Figure 3 shows the extent of this apparent paradox more clearly.

272 Similarly, despite facing a difficult economic situation, being one of Latin America's main cocaine producers,
273 and ranking well below Brazil, Colombia and Peru (as shown in Table 1 and Figure 3), Bolivia has even lower
274 homicide rates than Peru. The reasons for these low rates may be related to informal, traditional ways of resolving
275 conflicts that are still employed in isolated regions; here, punishment systems similar to vigilantism are often
276 used. In addition, disputes between groups linked to the drug trade have little expression in the urban space
277 due to the absence of a large consumer market (Rubin de Celis, Sanjinés Tudela and Aliaga Lordemann, 2012).
278 However, even if we assume that many murders are not reported in official record, Bolivia has extremely low
279 homicide rates, especially for a country with such a weak democracy -weaker than that of Brazil, Colombia and
280 Peru.

281 Between 2015 and 2017, there was a slight increase in homicide rates due to a wave of violence linked to an
282 increase in drug trafficking in urban centers, further exacerbated by an increase in poverty and social inequality.
283 This period was marked by political instability due to then-president Evo Morales' attempt at a fourth re-
284 election. Between 2017 and 2021, as shown in Figure 3, there was again a downward trend in homicide rates,
285 which can be attributed both to political changes and the impeachment of Morales and to improvements in the
286 economy. However, these factors do not have sufficient explanatory power to account for why Bolivia has the
287 lowest homicide rates despite being the worst-ranked country in the democracy indices among the four analyzed.

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V.

10 Discussion

Although the literature on the quality of democracy predominantly focuses on the fragility of institutions as a relevant factor in homicide rates, the data from Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia indicate that the weight of this factor needs to be further considered.

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise causes of homicide and its rate of occurrence -in part due to the way that each society constructs its perception of the role of state institutions. Equally complex is the task of capturing the subtleties present in how different societies attribute guilt to those responsible for homicides and how these events become part of the public record.

Although we might agree that the quality of democracy is related to the robustness of its institutions, and that these can play a relevant role in homicide rates, we must be careful not to make statements which can be easily challenged by data, as is the case with the countries analyzed. Without these precautions, one could make the mistake of presenting a partial and therefore inadequate picture of the homicide problem in different countries. We would, in this case, be purposely ignoring the differences imposed by facts; here, the data presented do not confirm a possible link between weak democracies or weakened institutions and homicide rates.

Therein lies what we referred to at the beginning of this article as the paradox of homicide rates in Latin America. This approach, that centered on the idea of institutional weakness, fails to accurately capture the multi-causality of homicide rates, which are characterized by a degree of subjectivity that only qualitative research can more accurately explain; without this, data show merely generic and distorted panoramas.

Data gained from international agencies, such as those used in this work, represent an essentially quantitative approach; this method proved to have a weak and generic explanatory power. In fact, as the data from the countries analyzed clearly show, the quality of democracy alone does not define trends in homicide rates. This quality appears as just one of the constitutive factors among many others involved in the dynamics of homicides.

We must question how the homicide phenomenon is usually portrayed; an inaccurate representation can lead to the formulation of public policies that are disconnected from the reality of the factors that contribute to homicide rates. For this reason, such policies become inefficient and irrelevant. We must challenge ourselves to consider why countries like Peru and Bolivia, which rank behind Brazil and Colombia in the ranking of democracies, have significantly lower homicide rates than the latter.

11 VI.

12 Conclusion

This study sought to examine the complex relationship between the quality of democracy and homicide rates in four Latin American countries: Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. Throughout the analysis, significant variations were observed in the overall scores with downward trends for some countries; this represents a challenge, as weaker democracies were shown to have lower homicide rates.

Although studies aimed at elucidating factors responsible for homicide rates often state that several variables contribute to this phenomenon, the fragility of democracy is still the main factor attributed to high rates. Yet, these studies fail to account for the contradiction that exists between these theoretical premises and data that show that homicide rates are lower in countries with weaker democracies.

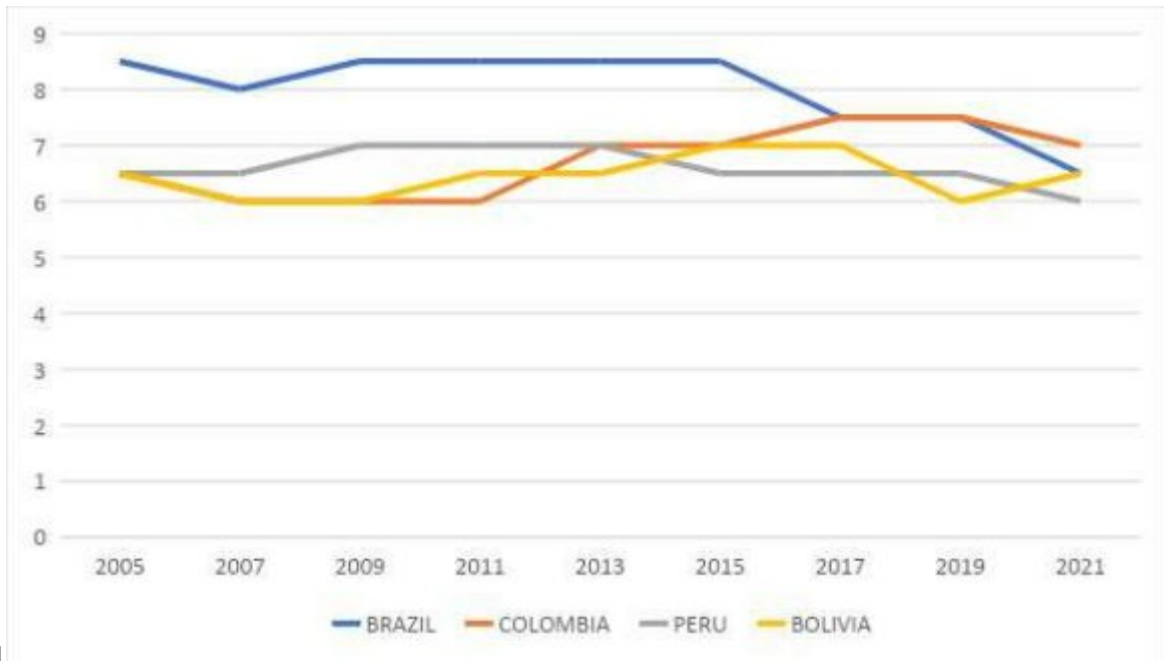
This apparent contradiction suggests that the relationship between democracy and homicides is intricate and multifaceted. In addition to the strength of institutions and the quality of democracy, factors such as security policies, policing strategies, crime prevention programs and anti-drug trafficking policies play a significant role in determining rates. Socio-economic status, income inequality, access to education, employment and health services also influence the homicide rates. In addition, historical contexts of social conflicts, political polarization and the influence of transnational criminal organizations, such as drug cartels and organized crime groups, cannot be ignored. The ability of these groups to operate in a country and the effectiveness of government measures to combat them certainly have an important bearing on homicide rates.

However, a comprehensive understanding of the disparity in rates between countries requires a multidisciplinary approach that takes into account, not only the quality of democracy and the strength of institutions, but also a series of other interconnected variables of a subjective nature. Analyzing these factors in isolation is not enough to explain the complex dynamics of violence and homicide in Latin America. On the other hand, understanding the role homicide plays in each society, as well as the various conceptions of justice, including those that are carried out in the absence of state institutions, may have greater weight in this matter.

The results of this study show the need for comprehensive public policies that address not only political and institutional issues, but also issues related to the peculiarities of cultural dynamics. Only through a holistic and collaborative approach, involving various sectors of society and with a wider range of methodological possibilities,



Figure 1:



1

Figure 2: Figure 1 :

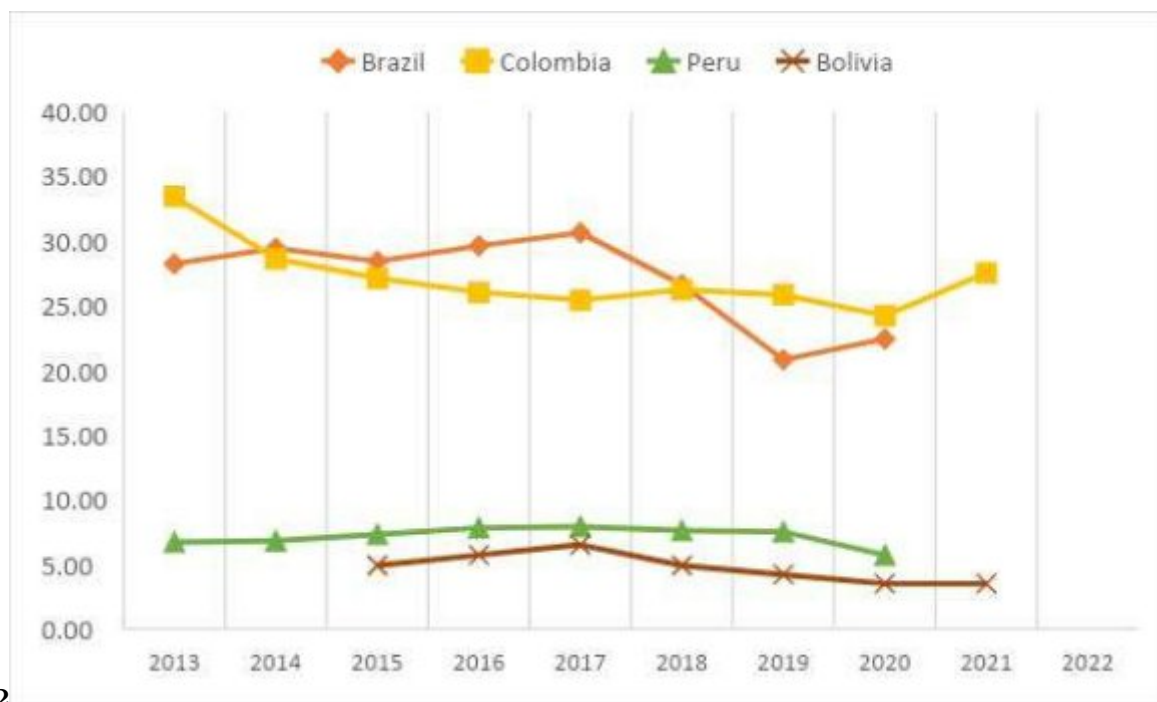


Figure 3: Figure 2 :

1

Year 2023

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(F

COUNTRY	General score	Position in rank	Variation re-cent	Government function-ality	Political regime
Brazil	6.78	51	-4	6.67	Weak democracy
Colombia	6.73	53	6	5.71	Weak democracy regime
Peru	5.92	75	-4	-	Hybrid political regime
Bolivia	4.51	100	-2	4.29	Hybrid political regime

Source: EIU (2022).

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Homicide Rates in Fragile Democracies: Reflections on the Paradoxes of Latin America Source: Our World in Data. Stability of Democratic Institutions (2023)2

Figure 4: Table 1 :

344 will it be possible to effectively tackle the challenges related to understanding homicide rates in the region. ^{1 2}
345 ^{3 4}

¹ Latin America is usually considered to be made up of

² countries, but this number increases when some dependent territories or nations are included or excluded; and even non-Latin colonized countries, the so-called Anglo-Americans. For this reason, Figure1, constructed with data provided by the EIU (2022), brings together data from 24 countries. main countries, taking their populations as a reference.© 2023 Global Journals

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⁴ The data available on the Our World in Data website was organized and initially published by the Bertelsmann Foundation (Bertelsmann Transformation Index 202 Available at <https://bti-project.org/en/downloads>)

346 [?sourc e=2series=VC.IHR.PSRC.P5country=BRA] <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx>
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