Sin Arancel de por Medio – Episode 3

The Migration and Security Crisis in Latin America

Full Transcript

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Renata Zilli: Welcome to Sin Arancel de Por Medio, ECIPE's Spanish-language podcast.

I am Renata Zilli.

Oscar Guinea: And my name is Óscar Guinea.

Renata Zilli: In this episode, we have the pleasure of speaking with Érika Rodríguez Pinzón, a sociologist and PhD in International Relations from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, with a diploma in advanced studies in political theory, public administration, and management. She has been an associate researcher at the Complutense Institute of International Studies and a professor of sociology of international development at the same university. She has also been recognised for three consecutive years as one of the top 100 women leaders in Spain in the academic category by Magazine.

She was also awarded the Merit Medal by the Council of Bogotá in 2018 for her work in favour of equality. Additionally, she was Special Advisor to the High Representative of the European Union for Relations with Latin America, Ad Honorem, and is currently the Director of Fundación Carolina, an institution that is part of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation, aimed at promoting educational and scientific cooperation between Spain and Latin America. Erika, welcome to the podcast.

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: Thank you very much.

Oscar Guinea: Erika, in addition to your distinguished academic career in Spain, which Renata has explained very well, you were born in Colombia and have worked on projects regarding the evaluation of public policy on anti-narcotics laws. In one of your articles, you mention a paradox regarding the security paradigm in Latin America. On one hand, it is the most peaceful region in the world with few wars, but at the same time, it is the most violent.

Can you explain this paradox?

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: Yes, Latin America is a region whose countries have resolved most of their disputes diplomatically. There are no major war tensions, and no arms race has developed in the region. However, it is the region with the highest homicide rates in the world.

So, in terms of human cost, it is indeed a region deeply affected by violence, despite this not being the type of violence related to the usual conflicts we see in other parts of the world. The Latin American paradox is that this situation of peace – as the most peaceful region due to the absence of wars – is a region where its inhabitants live in constant fear. Not the fear of a bombing, but the fear of being killed in a robbery, a fight, or during a theft.

Therefore, the region is strongly marked by insecurity and violence. However, it has not been the focus of international attention because it is a region that does not have major conflicts.

Oscar Guinea: Very well, very interesting. Another aspect I would like to ask you about. At ECIPE, we closely study the phenomenon of globalisation and the international exchange of goods and services, but we do not delve into the trade of illicit goods.

Today, there is talk of a health crisis due to synthetic drugs like fentanyl, but three decades ago we were discussing cocaine, and before that, marijuana. These changes also alter smuggling routes, with new actors emerging while others disappear. In short, could you tell us about these changes and the transformation of illicit trade in Latin America?

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: Yes, much of the insecurity we talked about earlier is linked to the presence of organised crime, although not all of it, but a significant portion of the violence is connected to this. Latin America is perhaps, sadly, synonymous with organised crime because it is in this region where, in general, drug trafficking, crime, and illicit economies have best taken advantage of the benefits of globalisation. What are the advantages of globalisation?

Mobility, the reduction of borders in terms of the movement of factors and capital, especially capital, and the use and exploitation of local competitive advantages. This is what has allowed illicit economies to flourish, particularly drug trafficking, but in a way, I advocate for depersonalising the agenda because it is not only about drug trafficking.

There has been a deep expansion of the portfolio of illicit businesses and a blurring of the lines between what is illicit and what is licit. These actors have increasingly taken advantage of local advantages, meaning the major illicit international economies, such as drug trafficking or human trafficking, which are among the most well-known, have begun to associate with other business models and economies that provide them with sustainability and room to manoeuvre, making them highly resilient to changes. This expansion of the portfolio first gives them power because they do not only control their part of the business or drug trafficking locally, for example, but also begin to control other sectors: small-scale credit, financing, extortion, and the trafficking of goods like avocados, for example, or even salmon in Chile or university degrees in other countries. They turn many goods into illicit items, gaining increasing control, which also provides resilience against demand changes, fluctuations in the dollar price, and, of course, changes and strengthening of measures to combat these factors.

Renata Zilli: I find it very interesting how you highlight, Érika, that indeed, in illicit trade we can also speak of comparative advantages and disadvantages, which are ultimately being exploited for profit. I also find it very important, the point you make about how it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate the licit from the illicit and how this portfolio of businesses is now permeating the structures and institutions of many of these countries. This leads me to the next question I would like to ask you, which is the relationship between security and democracy. Latin America once prided itself on being one of the most democratic regions in the world, but now we are seeing how democratic systems globally are going through a severe legitimacy crisis. Fundación Carolina has published very relevant analyses on the effects, causes, and possible consequences of democratic erosion in Latin America, and I would like to link this with the topic of our conversation so far and the security crisis. I would like you to explain how these two phenomena are related, i.e., the growing insecurity in Latin America, which, as we've discussed, corrodes the institutions of the state, and how democracies can face this challenge, especially in relation to their citizens.

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: Well, yes, precisely one of the comparative advantages that organised crime has taken advantage of is the low density of the state. So, more than Latin America being a region where democracy was established, democracy is the regime of choice for its governments. However, there are two processes, two parts. One part has never been a full democracy in the sense that they are not states that have the capacity to control and offer, more than control, to provide benefits and equitable access to welfare and markets across their entire territory and population. These are states that have not operated fully in all their attributes, which makes them weak democracies in this sense. And these democracies have weakened, weakened by processes of autocracy, co-optation, or competition, by armed actors who, with leaders and operatives, have gradually taken control of regions in the countries. But also, because insecurity processes have led to a type of state action that is reactive and punitive, which ultimately undermines the rule of law. So, in Latin America, there is a vicious circle in which insecurity is the product of the low density of the state's coverage but also produces other phenomena.

The issue of low density, as I said, is a comparative and competitive advantage for armed actors because it allows them to engage in relationships and take advantage of this situation. In some areas, they will replace the state because it does not exist, because they can truly traffic or cultivate illicit goods there, as in many areas of Colombia or Peru, where illicit cultivation was allowed because there was no state presence. However, there are other areas where they even take

advantage of the state and operate alongside it, whether with or without conflict, such as in the trafficking and transit zones of illicit goods or migrants today, where there is much collusion with local authorities. Each actor operates, and there are simply areas where one operates and the other operates. The state collects taxes and provides some services, while armed actors take control of others. In some areas, they fully regulate social matters, such as around cities in slums, favela-like areas, or impoverished districts, where armed actors also have a significant power of social conflict management and territorial control. These spaces have been used to build and strengthen illicit economies. As I said, we must look beyond and see the resilience of organised crime, not just in large markets – which, of course, have given it all its power and armed capacity – but its social resilience is linked to that low density and constant presence that takes advantage of the differences in the local establishment of the state. That is why I take a somewhat depersonalised view, seeing, for example, extortion in cities as a very relevant phenomenon, but also as very local processes. We need to see them in the territory and understand how they operate differently in each part of it.

Renata Zilli: Yes, of course. As you said, organised crime is a portfolio of illicit activities ranging from narcotics to extortion, kidnapping, and other activities depending on the context. This presents a rather complex picture in some areas and countries. It seems that, while we can talk about resilience in some regions, at the same time, there is also social exhaustion due to this insecurity. As you mentioned, homicide rates are rising in many places, which creates discontent and, in some cases, desperation. We see that citizens are increasingly dissatisfied with democratic systems, as they do not solve the main issue – one of the state's key functions, which is ensuring security. So, we are also seeing another very interesting phenomenon about the trend of electing leaders or voting for politicians who promise greater security at the expense of the law, these new authoritarianisms in the region as the apparent solution to the security problem. I would like to ask you something controversial, then – this idea of a trade-off. Do you think this trade-off between democracy and security truly exists? We don't have a perfect translation for "trade-off" into Spanish, but this exchange, or dilemma between democracy and security, do you think it is a dilemma voters face in elections?

Will citizens go to the ballot and choose between democracy and security?

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: The problem is that it is framed this way, isn't it? So, the political offer presents it as a trade-off between democracy and security, when in reality it is a false dichotomy, because we cannot talk about security without the rule of law being in place. Especially in Latin America, where the state has been a provider of insecurity. That is, these are not states that operate equally; in fact, they have been deeply violent states. Violence has been a form of political action, and it is a form of political action. You are Mexican, and you know very well that violence is committed as a form of political action with the co-optation of actors and impunity, above all. And the state has been a provider of insecurity because we remember the severe crisis within state security forces during the protests of 2019, the misconduct in their actions, the disappearance of people in many countries, 124,000 missing in Mexico, a similar figure in Colombia, but we still have dictatorship processes that did not end clearly with truth, justice, and reparation processes, civil wars with severe long-term social consequences in Central America. So, we are not talking about a situation where we started with social justice and it deteriorated due to organised crime, but rather a situation of social injustice and the rule of law not operating fully. Moreover, this has caused a historical break. It is not the same the relationship that Latin Americans have with security forces in many cases as it is in Europe or North America, because the legitimacy of these forces has often been questioned due to their own misconduct and lack of social control. That's one point.

The second point is this idea of imposing punitive solutions, especially prisons. We have clear evidence that it does not work, basically because prisons are completely overcrowded in Latin America. It has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, but also one of the highest prison overcrowding rates, and this has made prisons uncontrollable. So, using the punitive system as a control system has first turned into a social crisis, because those who go to prison are particularly from certain social backgrounds. And in a space where crime, again, takes advantage of the

advantages given to it – and one of those advantages is that we gather all the people who could be counted on for their actions in the same space, we pay for the premises, we pay for the facilities, and they take control of them. So, the prison system does not work because it doesn't really offer alternatives for returning to active social life, and above all, productive life. Clearly, it is counterproductive in this sense. It is filled with small offenders, not the major offenders. Drug laws have been particularly active in filling prisons, but very little in terms of social reintegration.

And the last point, which I find most relevant in terms of democratic challenges, is that insecurity, in this idea of fear and the constant threat, has deepened social fragmentation. So, it has not only deepened the gap between the state and society, between systems of representation, making them seem even more illegitimate or incapable of providing services, but society itself has fragmented further. Societies that were already structurally fragmented by social class, by race, by the exclusion of large groups, deepen their fragmentation when they see the other as dangerous. In many cities in our region, when we see a young person with certain attire or in a particular area, we cross to the other side of the street. We know how the dangerous looks, and this is extremely serious because what fragmentation means is that my fellow citizen is not an equal subject of rights like me, but rather a source of fear. What is a possibility of invasion or war for us in Europe is, in Latin American cities, the neighbour – and increasingly, that neighbour is an immigrant, a young person, or someone of a certain race. This results in the creation of groups that look inward, creating a deeper fragmentation that undermines the social contract, and that's where we have a problem. So, there are those who choose certain leaders to bring back security, as if it had ever fully existed, but very much against others who are seen as dangerous, unproductive, or not representative of our values. This social fragmentation makes it harder to overcome the structural gaps that Latin America has faced throughout its history, particularly inequality, which lies at the root of this fragmentation.

Renata Zilli: Yes, of course. You bring up a very interesting category to discuss in this last point because the solution also seems fragmented. So, despite all of us in Latin America suffering from the same crisis, there is no consensus on the responses. That is, there are no solutions to restore the social contract and put citizens back at the centre, without leading to these spaces of social fragmentation that you mention.

Oscar Guinea: What you've talked about is very interesting, Érika, but I imagine that many of our listeners are now wondering about El Salvador and Bukele's policies. What is your opinion on the crime reduction measures and the solution he has implemented with the mega-prisons?

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: El Salvador is a good example, as it is a place where insecurity had reached such levels that citizens' lives were completely conditioned, absolutely conditioned. The use of public space, all forms of productive activities in the economy, both formal and informal, were all affected by insecurity and the presence of criminal actors. The particularity of this situation is that it was a human and social tragedy, but at the same time, it was a situation very specific to a criminal structure that is not the same as the ones present in the rest of the region. What happened in El Salvador is that yes, it was very widespread crime because they are youth gangs that have a very significant cultural component. They are youths, and the aesthetic representation – tattooing the name of the gang on their foreheads – this doesn't happen in the drug cartels. In the Juarez cartel, no one tattoos "Juarez cartel" on their forehead, nor did Pablo Escobar ever say "drug trafficker" on his forehead. It's a structure with a very specific culture, a social characterisation, and it's also related to migration processes and the return of migrants. These deportations, which are so common nowadays, are disorganised deportations with no capacity to transmit information, which gave gangs the opportunity to return and establish themselves in Central America, specifically in El Salvador.

Now, the problem is that Bukele's approach has been successful, but it is only successful in the short term. We do not know the sustainability of this process due to its lack of transparency, because many of the things he criticised from previous governments are happening, such as negotiations with gang structures. But also, the case of El Salvador is unique to El Salvador. That is, this specific gang structure, a gang that works for drug trafficking but is not the one that controls the business – meaning it does not make the big profits – is a very predatory social structure because its economic

centre was not only illicit businesses but also local extortion. So, these measures can be useful in the short term, for example, for controlling prisons. Everyone knows that if we do not control the prisons, no system will work. If there is no sovereignty over the prisons, obviously there is a gap, but why can't we control them?

The fundamental point is this: is force enough to control them? It hasn't been so far. It's not just about taking the prisons; there have to be systems in place to allow people to leave prisons and not continue re-offending so that this becomes sustainable in the long term. There need to be systems that prevent young people from being recruited. One of the biggest problems, and Mexico is a very good example, and Colombia is another excellent example not widely known internationally, is the recruitment of young people by criminal structures. What are we doing to prevent this recruitment from happening? El Salvador is bringing people into prison before they're fully integrated, but in Mexico, it has become more of a system of slavery, forced recruitment, and in Colombia, it's been very similar. If these problems are not solved in the long term, the solutions will not be sustainable, and in El Salvador, we are already entering the third or fourth wave of violence. As I said, the problem is that no one plays. El Salvador had to deal with the worst, playing with the weakest of the criminal structures. The Mara has nothing to do with the Juarez cartel, the Sinaloa cartel, the Gulf Clan, or the Aragua Train. That's one.

The second is that not all of these groups operate in such fragile social systems. Not all operate in such weak systems; many are so powerful that they have become very sophisticated, and the level of sophistication of the Mara is very low. The sophistication of the cartels is very high. Others operate in much more efficient commercial structures. The Mara is very inefficient in many things because it has a cultural and socialisation component. What really kept people in the gang was a sense of belonging. In the case of the Aragua Train, which is a very good example, it operates more like a commercial structure with franchise systems. This is completely different.

So, what we need to understand is the complexity of the phenomenon we're dealing with and not generalise solutions because, frankly, what has been done so far doesn't work. Not even in Colombia's history with the elimination of the major cartels has the approach been applicable to other regions. Here, we need to operate on a central level, on a local level, especially on the local level, strengthening local capacities because that is where the power, strength, and resilience of crime lies. Other areas must be operated at the regional level, where the trafficking happens, but there are no easily scalable solutions because we need to account for the criminal structure.

And I would like to make an aside here because Renata talked about the role of civil society. I've painted a very negative picture, but we also need to highlight something important, which is that a large part of the insecurity and the struggle against punitive measures has been driven by civil society itself. Civil society plays an important role; the mothers of victims have been a fundamental figure in the search for justice and reparation. They are the ones who, often, are the faces behind the processes of young people being recruited into crime. It's the parents, the mothers.

Renata Zilli: Yes, I mean, in Mexico's case, the searching mothers and all these grassroots groups trying to identify the disappeared are truly a force that challenges state institutions and reveals the state's own shortcomings. But it's good that you mention the importance of civil society in this context.

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: And the mothers who take their children out, well, apart from the Central American migration of children, it is because they are trying to save them from being recruited by criminal groups. So civil society is stepping up where the state has often failed.

Oscar Guinea: Very well, to move on to the last section, I would like us to discuss the migration phenomenon and how it relates to the security issues in the region. While there are various types of migration within Latin America, such as the exodus of Venezuelans to Colombia and other countries, most migratory flows go from south to north, towards the United States. And in recent years, we have seen a tightening of US immigration policy.

Trump's return has intensified this trend by deporting immigrants without regard for the law, and in an unprecedented move, deporting immigrants to countries other than their place of origin, such as the mega-prison in El Salvador we just discussed. My question is, how do you think Trump's immigration policy might impact the relations between Latin American countries themselves?

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: This has many facets. First of all, migration and organised crime. Migration is one of the most important sources of money for crime. The "coyotes" – we all know what a coyote is, the person who traffics people.

The whole chain that has been established, passing through the Darien, is linked to the presence of criminal gangs. The existence of human trafficking corridors is explained by the presence of groups that facilitate and benefit from these corridors, opening them up and making them viable. That's why they seek routes, offering services.

I also really enjoyed a Colombian film called Paraíso Travel, where two young people attempt to migrate illegally to the United States. They go to a travel agency, which explains how the trip will happen, selling it as a tourist package. This is partly what happens! And the agent explained the process, showing images of illegal migration while presenting it as a tourist package, with the coyote as our agent, our representative on the ground, which is terrible.

But we need to understand this: migration has become one of the flows that feed organised crime. When migration becomes more difficult and there are no organised migration processes, the one who benefits the most from this situation is organised crime, because the issue is that there is still a demand for workers. We are not talking about people migrating because they want to see Mickey Mouse; they are migrating because there are jobs. When migrants arrive, and I am an immigrant, we know there is work here, and the US labour market will be affected by deportations because there is demand for employment, there is demand for workers due to inequities, and it exploits cheap labour. But the market absorbs the workers. What makes migration flows change is the absorption of people. If the market absorbs them, there is space, and the market demands it, and people go. When the process is formal, what is the formal process for going to the United States? Practically, it doesn't exist. The formal channels for going are very limited, very, very limited. There are no formal channels for the labour market to incorporate people, precisely because if they incorporated them legally, it would cost them more. So, the market absorbs, but there are no formal channels for that migration process. Who benefits?

This is the connection, spaces, and then what does crime exploit? The spaces where states have no control. Why does it pass through the Darien? The Darien is not the ideal route, but it is the least controlled route. The entire Pacific coast of Colombia has historically been subject to the presence of criminal groups, with low state control. The spaces that have allowed this, nobody sees the number of people... How is it possible that so many people flow from other regions of the world to Chile, to then make the journey upwards? What corruption processes are behind this? These gaps in the state are what create and explain these flows.

Now, let's look at the social dimension of migration. The Venezuelan migration in Latin America is, in a way, a crisis due to its scale, intensity, and the short time in which it occurred, but the region has absorbed it quite efficiently, considering the scale of the flow. There are almost 3 million Venezuelans in Colombia. In Bogotá alone, nearly 350,000 arrived in one year. For a city and society to absorb such a significant flow is not a bad sign. We have managed to absorb it, of course with difficulties, and obviously, the Venezuelans who are listening know what they have gone through in this process. But Latin America has absorbed it with a certain flexibility, even compared to other regions. Have criminal groups arrived? Criminal groups didn't come because the Venezuelans arrived; they came because there were spaces where they could operate, and they would have come with or without the Venezuelan flow. It's like when Mexican cartels started operating throughout the region, and Mexicans don't flow from south to north or from north to south, exactly. It's because organised crime came because there was space for them to establish themselves. Those territories offered advantages for them to operate, and for the Aragua Train to

set up its branches. That's the key point. It's not just about the flow of people. This is a call to pay more attention to this generalisation that is often made. Migrants came because you had space where they could operate. If you had been Switzerland, this wouldn't have happened. It's evident. In Switzerland, they enter through the financial market, which is where its gaps lie.

But we need to see migration as part of the security problem, yes, but because of the failures in regulatory processes that have created migration with certain characteristics. They do not offer opportunities for other routes because they don't create other pathways. These failures fuel crime, and the other part is that Trump's policy won't necessarily be better, because the more restrictions they impose, the more resources organised crime gains, because those difficult and monopolistic markets are theirs.

Renata Zilli: Yes, of course. Well, you're giving us this perspective. I was reminded of some immigration economics classes, the push and pull factors, which influence migration – the demand for labour in the United States, for example, tends to increase migration levels, or an appreciation of the dollar. There are many factors at play. But the last point you mentioned, about the political agendas of linking migration to security, is something we need to consider. But, as with all illicit markets, reducing supply, as you mentioned, in this case through stricter immigration policies, increases profits and gives these monopolistic effects.

But I would also like to give another spin to migration, and not just talk about unskilled migration, which is vulnerable to criminal groups and coyotes, but also other needs. Using these push and pull factors, I would like us to shift our focus to Europe, where we have seen an increase in Latin American migration. But here, I would like us to focus more on skilled migration, those young people seeking to enter the European labour market, which presents a different type of demand. Many of them might come through postgraduate scholarships offered by Fundación Carolina, which also serves to attract talent to Europe. I would like you to talk about the importance of skilled migration for the future of the European Union, especially now that it faces a demographic deficit of young people, and how these two regions can complement each other, returning to the centre of the discussion on comparative advantages.

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: Yes, when I talk about migration, I call for a more complex social view of migration. It's not just economic migration. When we look at very recent, very dramatic cases of people living in the desert, for example, you will see where they came from, and it turns out they weren't poor. They didn't migrate because they had nothing, they migrated due to social stagnation, a failure of expectations, but they were middle class. As I said, migration is not cheap.

So, we need to see it with more complexity. This so-called unskilled migration is often skilled in its country of origin, but they go because the labour market offers better pay, even for less skilled work. Now, regarding migration to Europe, as a Foundation, for example, our condition is return. We operate on a different logic: Latin America has enormous talent, and what we offer is the opportunity for training and social capital built during a visit to Spain, but we want to work in networks, for them to return and build a network with Spain, to strengthen the Latin America-Spain connection, rather than staying in Europe.

The formal migration processes and skilled migration also face serious challenges in Europe. Despite the demand for workers in Europe, it hasn't created easy conditions for recognising qualifications. To migrate as a skilled worker, you need to get a qualified job, but here we have loads of Uber drivers who are doctors or engineers when our system needs engineers and doctors. So, the formalisation of skilled migration systems in Europe does not fully operate. There's a huge challenge in that regard. The people who face the most resistance and who sacrifice many years in the migration process end up stabilising themselves as professionals, but that's a personal sacrifice that costs them years, and we lose years of productivity with an engineer working four years in Uber until their qualifications are recognised.

I did eight subjects to have my sociologist degree recognised. I haven't seen any sociologist who could kill someone in their profession, but why do they have so many procedures and difficulties

to recognise a qualification? So, we need to see that Europe still has huge limitations. Not all countries, but Spain, which receives the most, where the language facilitates Latin American migration, still has significant costs associated with the formal migration process, which need to be eased to align with the labour demand.

Another point is the creation of return pathways. Migration often becomes a trap because when you enter an illegal status or when, for example, the formalisation process is very long, or the labour market's rigidity doesn't allow return, Europe should be an open option. I can come, work, return if I have an offer in another market, train somewhere else, and come back. But when it's too rigid, for example, I've invested four years trying to get my qualifications recognised, and still don't have them, if I had a better offer, I couldn't leave because I've already invested too many years here. So, it becomes a trap that leads to precarious conditions. I accept precarious conditions and decrease my professional contribution because the high cost doesn't allow me to maximise my professional opportunities and talents.

So, we need to open things up by creating processes for migration to be more flexible, facilitating movement, return, and incorporation into the markets, so that talent can truly develop. When you set very high costs for staying and returning, and people know that if they leave, they can't come back, migration becomes a trap because it ends up accepting precarious conditions. And that's when you say, "but I was better off in my country," but the expectation that I will really overcome it, that I will get my qualification recognised and get a job in my field, and you spend a lot of time paying personal costs. But these costs are borne by all of us, because they are paid by the housing market, which becomes highly informal because there is a demand from people who haven't been able to formalise their situation and achieve their economic level. So, they enter illegally, which ends up strengthening irregular labour markets. So, let's look at it as a whole, with practices that need to be facilitated for talent and contribution to society, from a broader and less outdated perspective, especially as we are talking about a digital world in which all procedures and processes could be greatly facilitated to avoid these costs.

Oscar Guinea: Phenomenal, phenomenal. We'll finish with the last question, which we ask all our guests. It's a bit more creative, a bit more open-ended, and I want you to imagine a world where you are the one making all the decisions and there are no political or economic restrictions. If you had to choose one public policy that would positively impact security in Latin America, what would it be?

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: A public policy that impacts security? There are several, but one is related to the monopoly on drugs and its high profits, which should definitely be considered. I'm not saying legalisation is an option, but we know that removing the monopolistic characteristics of certain traffics could weaken the income they generate. It would also have an impact on the credit and precarisation of certain sectors. So, there are some public policies in this area that could be taken.

And others are related to weapons. Weapons in the region, the possibility of carrying them. In fact, right now in Colombia, there is a debate about whether to relax restrictions on carrying weapons as a security measure, and we know that's not the answer, because 48% of the violence isn't necessarily linked to crime, but to social conflict, where you might get killed because you had your music too loud or because your neighbour had it too loud and you complained.

So, I would consider those kinds of measures appropriate, but if I could implement one large policy, it might also be on fiscal matters, because the main weakness in public policies in Latin America has to do with their lack of economic sustainability, and they need resources. The universal tax census and income tax declarations would help improve both collection and the allocation of social policy benefits, because we don't have good data to focus on due to the lack of fiscal information on income and wealth, and this may be the root of the fragility and low effectiveness of public policies.

Renata Zilli: Thank you very much, Érika, for sharing your experience on Sin Arancel de Por Medio. Where can our audience follow you or Fundación Carolina on social media?

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: Well, Fundación Carolina is very active on social media. We're on Instagram, we have a YouTube channel where all the videos from our seminars and conferences are uploaded. We also have a website where you can access all our studies openly, because we publish everything publicly. Renata has attended some of our events, as has Oscar, and we invite you to check that out, the YouTube channel, the website, and our social media on X, Bluesky, and Instagram. I'm also there on my personal profile, but it's much less active than the Fundación's profile.

Renata Zilli: Thank you very much.

Érika Rodríguez Pinzón: Thank you very much, it's been a very interesting conversation, and a pleasure to be with ECIPE.

Renata Zilli: Oscar, what did you think of the conversation with Erika? What stands out for you?

Oscar Guinea: It's been a very interesting conversation. I'll mention two points. First, something we talked about at the beginning of our conversation, how organised crime has exploited the advantages of globalisation, both the comparative advantages of where to produce each product or provide each service, and how it takes advantage of the exchange of goods and the reduction of barriers to trade.

The second point is the security-democracy connection. What struck me about what Érika said is the problem of low state density and how it fuels criminality. This reminded me of something César Guerra Guerrero mentioned about Mexico and the importance of the rule of law in improving the wellbeing of citizens in Mexico. But Érika also said, and I think she's right, that historically, the state in many Latin American countries has also been a source of insecurity.

And you, Renata?

Renata Zilli: Yes, of course, I also found it super interesting and agree with the points you mentioned. Very relevant. I also find the idea she raised of not generalising organised crime and perhaps depersonalising it – I don't remember if she used that word – but not only seeing this phenomenon as a narcotics profit issue, but as a very large portfolio of illicit activities like extortion, kidnapping, which in each country or locality, depending on the social context, have different consequences but also different solutions.

And finally, the key issue with the United States. This paradox that the more restrictive the policies, the more they foster criminal structures and strengthen these groups' profits. So, the labour demand in the US is constant, but there are no channels, and as always – well, as there will always be demand – there are groups that exploit it, profit from it, and we don't have effective short-term solutions to resolve this crisis in the region.

Oscar Guinea: Very well, it's been an excellent podcast, and until next time.

Renata Zilli: Until next time. Don't forget to subscribe to the Sin Arancel de Por Medio Substack.