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The Violation of Human Rights in Latin America Derived from the Covid-19 Pandemic Administration

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Abstract

There is no doubt at this stage of the solid evolving global relevance of universal human rights in a complex global scenario like everyone faces today. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns have produced, and are still causing, an overwhelmingly negative impact on the standard citizens' lives. As drastic as it is, such affirmation is sustained in the serious deterioration in a considerable number of democracies around the world, but especially reflected in Latin America, a region of six hundred (600) million inhabitants (Werthein & Abrantes, 2021). This research aims to assess the scope of the violation of individuals' basic human rights caused by the COVID-19 pandemic administration in Latin American countries. Unreasonably extended lockdowns and other misleading and inappropriate measures implemented by different Latin American administrations have had unsurmountable and dramatic consequences for the region's inhabitants. Many Latin American governments have inadvertently put in place two (2) excluding options for their populations affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It had to be either healthcare and fight against COVID-19, on the one side, or economic sustainability, on the other, but not the two (2) simultaneously. Losses of thousands of lives, economic devastation, thousands of business shutdowns, millions of job losses, and educational catastrophes have all affected essential freedoms and individuals' basic universal human rights recognized by modern constitutions, including those in Latin America. As discussed, these are the resulting consequences of governments' failure to build up necessary resources, be readily prepared to face catastrophes of this

sort, and act with integrity and transparency in managing public funds. Both quantitative (i.e. numbers and statistics) and qualitative (i.e., secondary data) methodologies have been used to arrive at very relevant conclusions. Sustainable results of this research reflect how mismanagement of the pandemic, including corruption practices by certain Latin American governments, has led to catastrophic consequences in healthcare and the economic field.

Keywords: Human rights, violation, Latin America, pandemic, corruption

Introduction

Since the end of 2019, the world has faced an unexpected and tremendous never-ending nightmare. The eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a severe and devastating impact on the different countries around the globe. In quite relevant geographic areas, including Latin America, the detrimental consequences of the pandemic, and especially of the unreasonably extended lockdowns and other mismanagement actions, are visibly reflected in a deterioration of democracies, the transformation of democracies into autocracies, as well as violations of basic universal human rights (Beteta, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic tests societies of the world's most unequal continent, where many depend on informal work for their livelihood. Social distancing measures directly affect their livelihoods and make immediate social assistance imperative. The crisis also challenges political leadership, as some presidents emerge as strong, unifying leaders while others face complex difficulties in a continent where trust in formal political institutions is historically low. Today, it is absolutely clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of millions of people. They were compelled to change their lives, as the interaction between human beings has been disrupted. The state of enormous uncertainty has been dominating people's lives.

The present article will focus on Latin America, where the adverse effects of never-ending lockdowns and other misleading actions have had catastrophic effects on the rule of law, and specifically on the principle of the supremacy of the constitutions, which are considered to be, in this part of the world, the fundamental law of the State. Many democratic governments have taken undue advantage of the pandemic outbreak by purportedly and illegally stepping into infringement and violations of individual rights and guarantees widely recognized by those constitutions. In the case of non-democratic governments (i.e., Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela), human rights violations have even been aggravated. Either because those lockdowns and other restrictive actions have largely overextended in time and have resulted in undue severity (they should be known as non-intelligent lockdowns), or because the different

governments have only taken an insufficient reactive rather than a proactive approach to face the lack of vaccines, hospital and medical infrastructure and materials, the result was an apparent and devastating deterioration of democratic institutions in the Latin American region.

It is essential to review the basic universal human rights recognized by western-style constitutions in Latin American countries. Identifying those rights is crucial to portray the dimension of those infringements and violations by legitimate and non-legitimate governments. That is to say, those political authorities who have been appointed to public office through free elections and those who have not have, for various reasons, a legitimate standing. It is true that under international human rights law, States can limit the exercise of most human rights if it is necessary to protect the rights of others or collective interests. However, it is necessary to thoroughly assess the seriousness and extent of those restrictions and the length of time they have been in place. This is to determine whether or not they have legal and practical sustainability, considering that human rights have a supreme value and priority. A critical response to this dilemma is that government actions should not have disproportionately harmed common citizens' interests, such as recognizing and protecting human rights (Lebret, 2020).

It is true that the institutional and economic performance of democratic governments, especially in Latin America, has been disappointing and frustrating for a very long period of time (Fukuyama, 2015). If someone couples the failure of citizens' expectations with the governments' mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unreasonably extended lockdowns, the rise of protest demonstrations should not be taken as a mere surprise by anyone. This is not, in any way, a justification for such disrupting demonstrations. Still, it is only conscious reasoning to understand why citizens step out and protest in situations when their fundamental universal human rights have been flagrantly infringed or violated. The capacity of the States in Latin America has not followed the necessary pace to meet citizens' demands in a pandemic scenario. Such failure has been obvious, namely, there were not enough hospital and medical supplies and infrastructure and insufficient medical staff to satisfy the overwhelming demands of infected patients, among other very serious gaps and deficiencies. More importantly, healthcare workers heavily exposed to infections have not and are not having adequate and reasonable access to personal protective equipment, safety procedures, and diagnostic protocols necessary for safe working conditions (Delgado, Wyss Quintana, Perez, Sosa Liprandi, Ponte-Negretti, Mendoza & Baranchuk, 2020). In addition, there has been a lack of enough vaccines necessary to reduce the number of infections, and, therefore, the number of casualties has strongly increased. Non-compliance with vaccine programs has

unfairly assigned vaccines to government officials' family members and political parties' active members, constituting flagrant corruption practices.

According to Our World in Data publications, Latin America is losing the fight against COVID-19, and human rights enforcement is in real danger. When measuring the number of casualties as a percentage of the total population, 9 out of 10 countries in the region are at the top of this slot. Vaccination campaigns have appeared to be very slow and chaotic, and therefore, they have not been successful in stopping the virus circulation among the population. Notwithstanding the extended-lasting lockdowns and human rights restrictions imposed by governments in the region, the number of casualties in the region in terms of population is still the highest. Numbers appear to be overwhelming in all sectors, as will now be reflected. A recent United Nations (UN) report has reflected that in 2020, an additional twenty-two (22) million people in the Latin American region will be plunged into poverty. In addition, nearly sixty (60) million people fell out of the middle class. According to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the population of Latin America represents less than nine percent (9%) of the world's population and has suffered over a quarter of the world's casualties due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The post-pandemic era certainly presents a historic opportunity for the region to launch a truly transformative agenda. However, there is still a long road ahead to repair the health and economic damages that the pandemic has caused and is still causing.

Methodology

This research aims to analyze the impact of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic on human rights in Latin America, which has resulted in serious violations in several areas. It has first been necessary to give an overview of the Latin American context after having suffered the consequences of the pandemic on the political, healthcare, and economic fronts. In addition, the research has been designed to establish a cause-and-effect relationship which, in this case, is reflected in the mismanagement of the pandemic by several Latin American governments and its negative consequences on basic universal human rights, deriving in their violation and restriction.

Qualitative and quantitative data have been used and collected from relevant books, websites, and other publications. In terms of qualitative data, secondary data has been used to support results and conclusions. Such data provides evidence of flagrant violations and restrictions of human rights in Latin America as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As far as quantitative data is concerned, tables and figures related to the number of casualties, lockdown index, the impact of lockdown index on the gross domestic product (GDP), stringency index, the share of vaccinated population, and violation of

democratic standard index, clearly reflect how human rights in Latin America were violated and restricted. In this sense, it has been considered that there was a need to look at both quantitative and qualitative data to gather evidence on the cause-and-effect relationship that has been established, namely, that the mismanagement in the fight against the pandemic in certain countries in Latin America has caused devastating effects on the economy, healthcare, education levels, and governments' institutions, with infringement and violations of fundamental human rights.

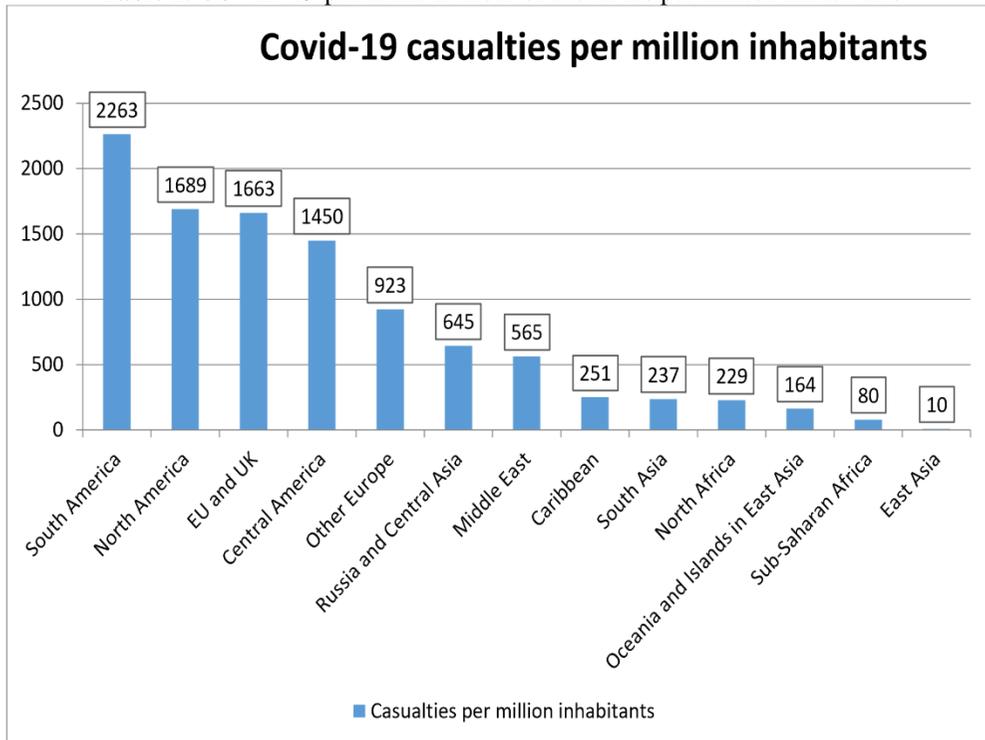
The research design and its aim also had ethical and philosophical considerations. How has this been reflected? Corruption practices and violations of integrity principles and standards have also been taken into account to assess whether or not a violation of ethical conduct by Latin American governments has been common in the mismanagement of the pandemic and has played a key role in the violation of human rights. Even though the World Health Organization made an international and overwhelming call for fair, transparent, and equitable access to vaccines and treatments, in Latin American countries, there has been and still is extreme pressure on governments to secure vaccines for the population. Why? Corruptive practices have threatened and are still threatening massive access to vaccines, as there has been an evident lack of transparency in the development, procurement, supply, and distribution processes, which have had a very negative effect on the different pre-established vaccination programs (i.e., Argentina).

Abstract concepts, such as violation of democratic standards and restriction of rights caused by the governments' mismanagement of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and the fear of contracting the virus, cannot be easily measured. Millions have lost their jobs, thousands of businesses were closed, students were restricted from having regular classes (there is a considerable number of Latin American families who cannot afford a laptop or other technological resources), circulation has been limited or banned, and other violations of basic universal human rights have occurred. Latin American governments' mismanagement actions have exacerbated the pandemic's psychological and healthcare negative effects. Those abstract concepts have been turned in this research into measurable observations making good use of operationalization. Operationalization has been used to reduce subjectivity and increase the reliability of the data that has been collected. A good sample of this operationalization is the magnitude of the violation of democratic standards and the extent of the stringencies imposed during the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America.

Results

The information included in this section is focused on reflecting comparative data of Latin America and other geographical regions, among other types of data. Results do not respond to any particular questionnaire but constitute random indicators that strongly impact human rights violations/restrictions in different aspects, as shown below.

Table 1. COVID-19 pandemic number of casualties per million inhabitants

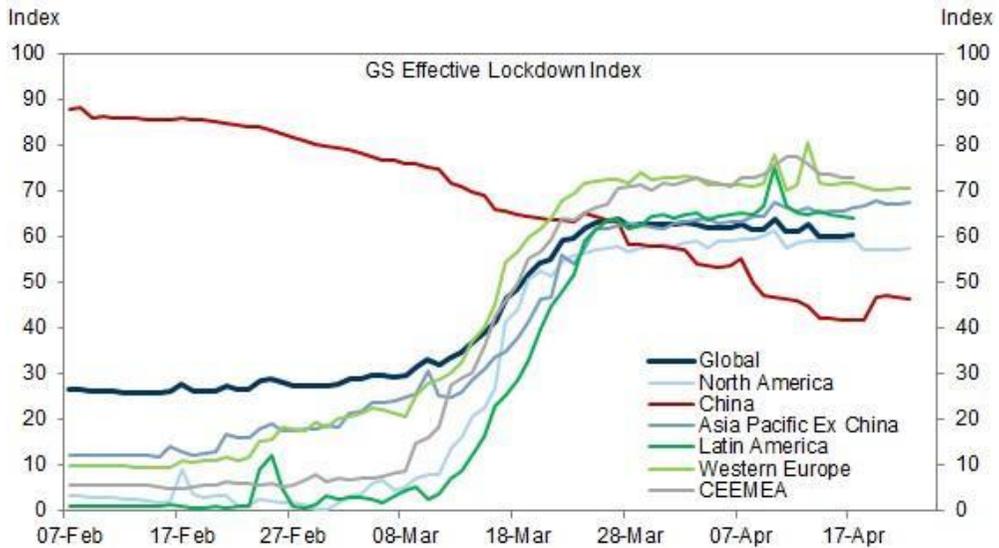


Source: Worldometer June 30, 2021 Report

Results: Latin America (South America and Central America)
COVID-19 deaths per million inhabitants: 2263

Despite high ELIs (as defined below) in Latin America, the casualties ratio per million inhabitants shows that Latin America has been hit more than the European Union & UK, South Asia, Countries Non-Members of the European Union, Middle East, Russia & Central Asia, Oceania & Islands in East Asia, North Africa, East Asia, and the Caribbean. Such ratios are worse than all of those in all regions shown in **Table 1** above:

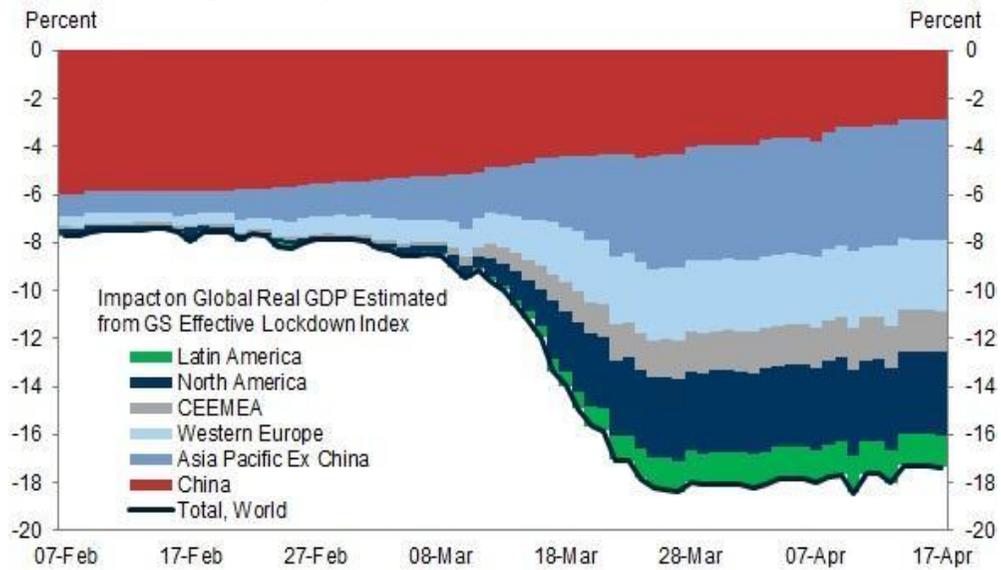
Figure 1



Source: Oxford University, Google, Apple, Wind, Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research. 2020. The “Effective Lockdown Index (ELI)” provides equal weight to a “virus policy” measure—an adjusted version of the Oxford index—and a “social distancing” measure—a summary of the Google data

Results: The ELI for Latin America is higher than the Global ELI in China and North America and lower than in Western Europe. Despite this, the number of casualties per million inhabitants in Latin America is higher than Western Europe, the UK, and North America.

Figure 2: Impact of ELI on Gross Domestic Product (GDP)



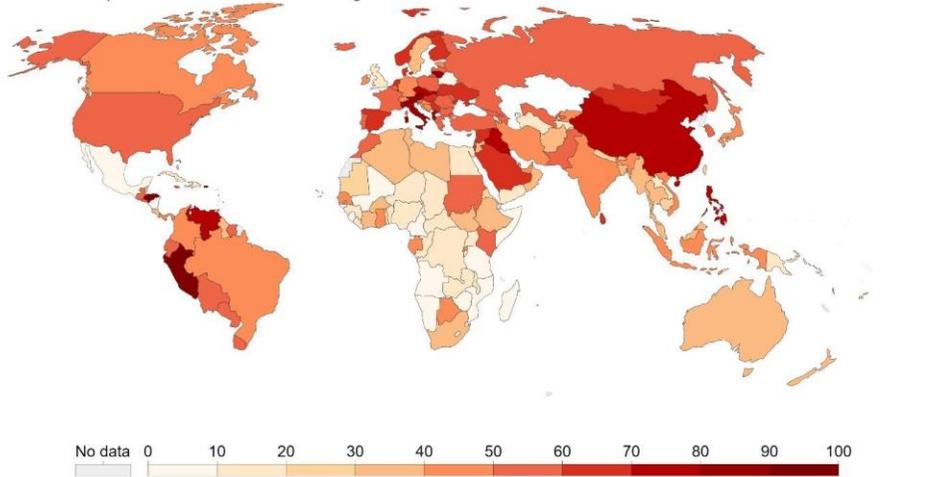
Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Results: There is a direct relationship between a high ELI and a high GDP fall. Comparing Figures 1 and 2, the former shows that the ELI in Latin America is higher in a given period of time compared to ELI Global, ELI North America, and China. A high ELI has caused Latin America to have the highest GDP fall compared to other geographical regions such as North America, China, Western Europe, and the Asia Pacific.

Figure 3a: Stringency Index March 15, 2020, published July 29, 2021, showing Latin America Source: Our World in Data

COVID-19: Stringency Index

This is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest). If policies vary at the subnational level, the index is shown as the response level of the strictest sub-region.



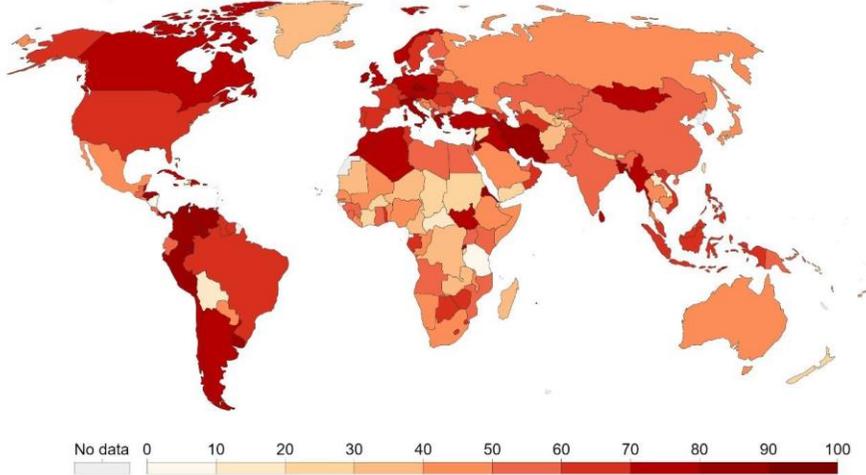
Source: Hale, Angrist, Goldszmidt, Kira, Petherick, Phillips, Webster, Cameron-Blake, Hallas, Majumdar, and Tatlow (2021). "A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government ResponseTracker)." *Nature Human Behaviour*. – Last updated 29 July 2021, 09:50 (London time)
OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

Source: Our World in Data

Figure 3b: Stringency Index March 16, 2021, published on July 29, 2021, showing Latin America

COVID-19: Stringency Index

This is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest). If policies vary at the subnational level, the index is shown as the response level of the strictest sub-region.

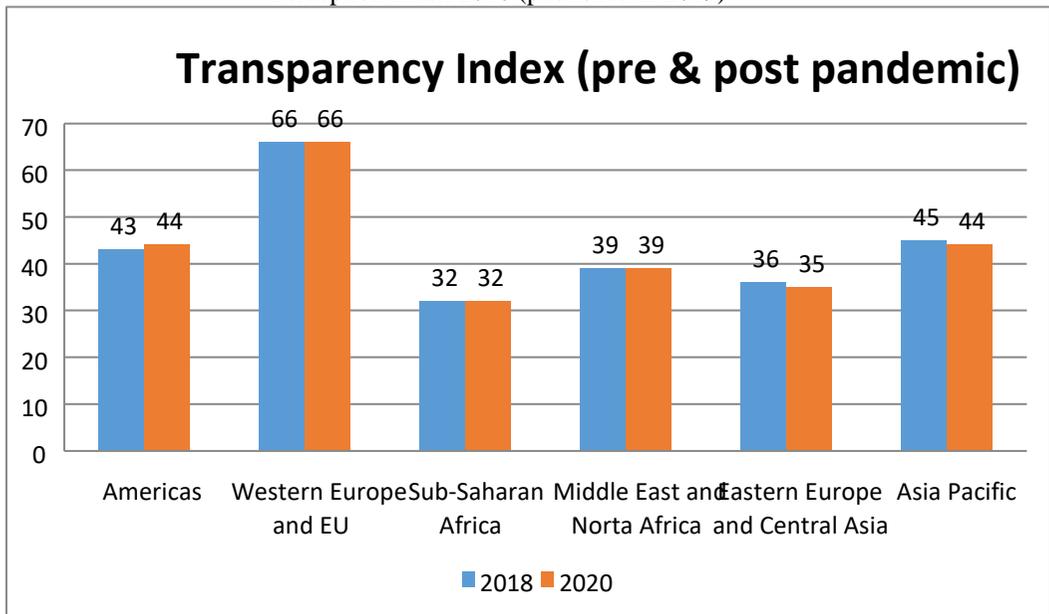


Source: Hale, Angrist, Goldszmidt, Kira, Petherick, Phillips, Webster, Cameron-Blake, Hallas, Majumdar, and Tatlow (2021). "A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government ResponseTracker)." *Nature Human Behaviour*. – Last updated 29 July 2021, 09:50 (London time)
OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

Source: Our World in Data

Results: The nine metrics used to calculate the Stringency Index are: school closures; workplace closures; cancellation of public events; restrictions on public gatherings; closures of public transport; stay-at-home requirements; general information campaigns; restrictions on internal movements; and international travel controls. Comparing Figures 3a and 3b shows the Stringency Index on March 15, 2020 (average 30) and March 16, 2021 (average 60) in Latin America, there is a significant deterioration of the fundamental universal human rights and freedoms in this region

Table 2: Transparency Perception Index 2020 (published in 2021) vs. Transparency Perception Index 2018 (published in 2019)



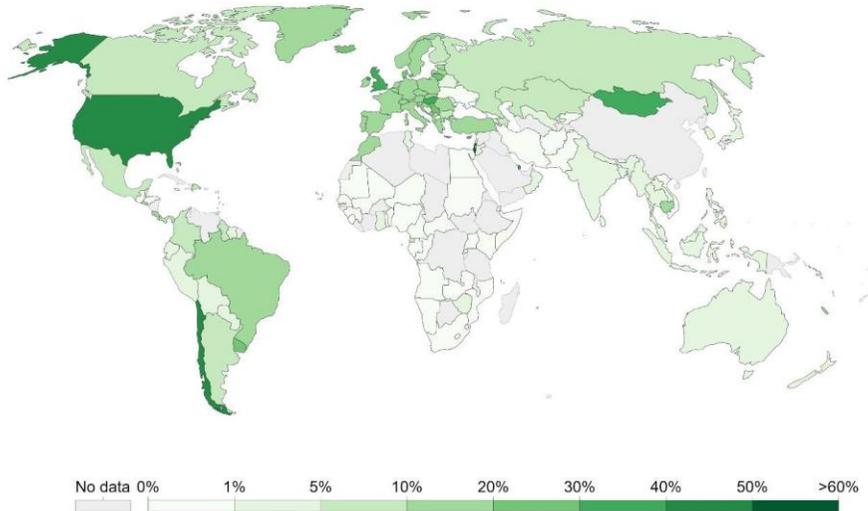
Source: Transparency International

Results: The Transparency/Corruption Perception Index elaborated by Transparency International in 2020 shows that the Americas (including Latin America) is a geographical region where transparency is seen as lower than that in the European Union and Western Union, and the Asia Pacific Region. When comparing Transparency Perception Index 2018 with that of 2020, there is a deterioration in the Americas (44 vs. 43,) and the highlights of such weakening in the index can be attributed to corrupt practices during the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis going through investigations of corrupt contracts, embezzlement, and inflated pricing of medical supplies like face masks and body bags in many Latin American countries.

Figure 4: Share of the Population fully vaccinated against COVID-19

Share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19

Share of the total population that have received all doses prescribed by the vaccination protocol. This data is only available for countries which report the breakdown of doses administered by first and second doses.



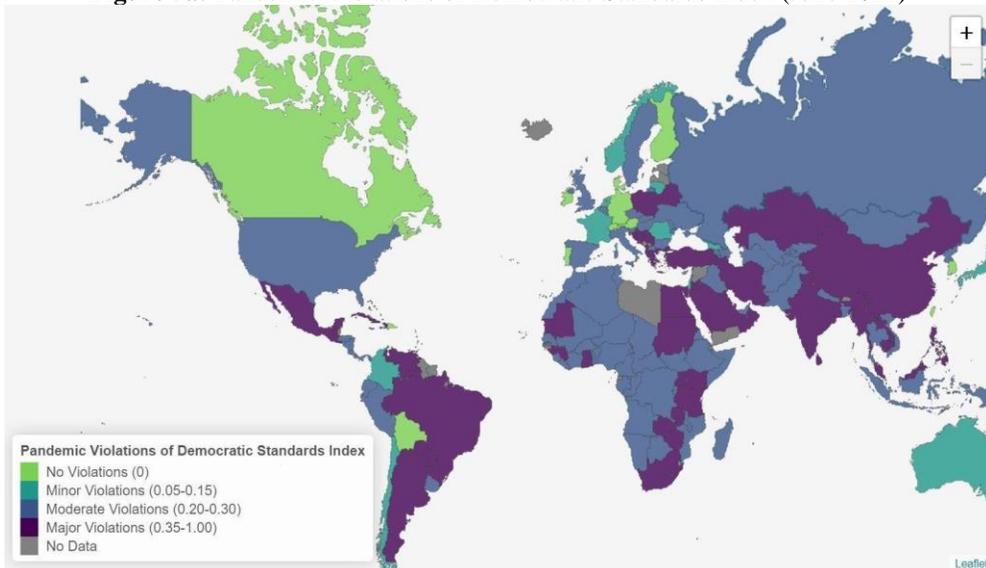
Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data – Last updated 1 June, 10:30 (London time)

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Source: Our World in Data

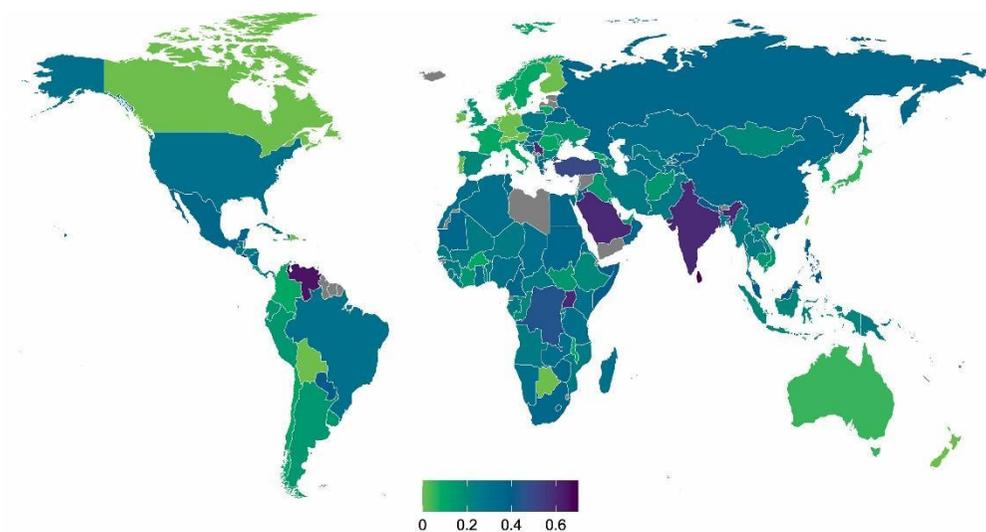
Results: Latin America is one of the geographical regions where only 10-15% average population has received all doses of prescribed vaccines. This is a meager percentage compared to North America (40% average), Europe (30% average), and Asia (20% average)

Figure 5a: Pandemic Violations of Democratic Standards Index (June 2021)



Source: V-Dem Institute

Figure 5b: Pandemic Violations of Democratic Standards Index (March to December 2020)



Source: V-Dem Institute

Results: The Pandemic Democratic Violations Index measures the following violations: (i) No time limit on emergency measures; (ii) Discriminatory measures; (iii) Derogations from non-derogable rights; (iv) Restrictions on media freedoms; (v) Disproportionate limitations on the role of the legislature and (vi) Abusive enforcement. When comparing Figures 5a and 5b, the

number, and seriousness of the violations, there has been a solid increase and aggravation of all types of democratic violations after comparing periods of the COVID-19 pandemic ranging from March through December 2020 versus that ending in June 2021.

Discussion

For this research, it is essential to identify the so-called basic universal human rights. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948, these are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education (as a considerable number of Latin American families cannot afford a laptop or other technological tools to have access to online education), and the right of circulation, among others. Everyone is entitled to these rights without discrimination, and even tourists, when entering a country, are allowed the right of circulation (Dordyak, 2017). The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which entered into force in 1976, seeks to promote and protect the right to work in fair and favorable conditions; the right to social protection, an adequate standard of living, and the highest attainable standards of physical and mental well-being; the right to education and the enjoyment of benefits of cultural freedom and scientific progress. The use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in this research has arrived at valuable findings. As a consequence of certain Latin American governments' mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic, regional GDPs plunged, social protection levels as well as citizens' standards of living dramatically deteriorated, and the right to work, educate, and receive education (on-site and online education) were severely affected. The right to work has been associated with the right to have a life, as having a job provides human dignity (Kaya & Yilmazer, 2019). However, millions of jobs were lost, and thousands of businesses suffered shutdowns.

Amnesty International has supported the idea that violations of human rights usually do not contribute to facilitating adequate responses to emergencies in the public health area, undermining their efficiency (Amnesty International, 2020a). The World Health Organization also requested countries to ensure that the measures taken to fight the COVID-19 pandemic should not negatively affect human rights. Most modern constitutions or fundamental national laws, including those in force in Latin American countries, recognize the protection and guarantee of basic human rights. Human rights are characterized as universal entitlements applicable to all individuals. They are solely focused on preserving and defending human

dignity. States must protect, promote and enforce human rights (Sikkink, 2014). Such traditional human rights can be identified as economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to health, education, fair remuneration, to enjoy cultural leisure, social security benefits, and the right to secure food, shelter, the right to circulate within and outside the countries' geographic boundaries, the right to receive and give education, the right to do lawful business, among other fundamental rights (May 2021). In accordance with international law, the right to life cannot be suspended even in emergency circumstances (Queensland Human Rights Commission, 2019). No doubt that the right to health care guarantees the right to life because it is closely related to human life. States are obliged to take action to prevent threats to public health and to provide medical care to those who need it. Indeed, in Latin America and even in developed economies, the COVID-19 pandemic has reflected strong deficiencies in healthcare systems and health inequities characterized in many cases by shortages of medical materials and equipment (Kalra, 2020). Also, some countries suffered a collapse in the health system and poor quality of medical facilities, which especially affected low-income sectors of the Latin American population (Bambra, Riordan, Ford, Matthews, 2020).

Sanitary, economic, social, and political conflicts are strongly disturbing the life of inhabitants in Latin American geography today. In many cases, these conflicts existed even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, nobody can doubt at this stage that the consequences of such a pandemic have exacerbated problems and have turned on a red light for societies that are suffering the emerging negative effects observed today. These are the conclusive findings drawn out from the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies that have been used and clearly support such affirmations. There is a direct relationship between democracies and the respect for human rights, which are even strongly reinforced in such a recognized system of government (Tak, 2019). The context is extremely challenging for both Latin American democracies and autocratic regimes in place today. It is well known that Latin America is the world's most unequal continent, where a relevant portion of the population depends on normal work for their own livelihood (Lacase, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has truly represented a strong challenge to political leadership in Latin America, where institutions are historically weak and do not enjoy the trust of the population (Acacio & Passos, 2020). Some Latin American leaders have increased their political power violating the principle of the division of powers to face the crisis of the pandemic. From Argentina in South America to El Salvador and Nicaragua in Central America, the current administrations in those countries have used the COVID-19 pandemic to incur different types of abuses of power, restricting and/or

deleting key human rights, with the sole intention of having no opposition parties in the political arena (Larrosa, 2020). In addition, in a worldwide rank reported by the World Health Organization, Peru is first with the highest number of casualties (5,915) per million inhabitants, Brazil is ninth with two thousand seven hundred and four (2,704) casualties, and Argentina is eleventh in the ranking with two thousand four hundred and forty-three (2,443) casualties per million inhabitants. Lockdown has been implemented as a way to reduce the spread and the potential contagion. These countries enjoy democratic governments which have emerged from free elections. Moreover, corruption is a serious threat to individuals' lives and established lifestyles, particularly when a health emergency such as the COVID-19 breaks out (Kos, Richard & Wasserstrom, 2020).

It is relevant to realize that transparent government administrations bring higher investments in healthcare and offer strong epidemiological surveillance mechanisms, which are key to fighting a pandemic and preserving human lives as much as possible (Layachi, 2020). Transparency International has referred to the COVID-19 pandemic not only as just a health and economic crisis but also as a corruption crisis, in the sense that those government administrations with higher levels of corruption have been in a highly weaker position to face the pandemic challenges. Undoubtedly, corruption has a severe impact on the Latin American States' ability to cope with their obligations to guarantee compliance with several universal human rights in a pandemic situation.

Unfortunately, this is the context in a great number of Latin American countries. Priority has been given to purchasing testing kits, medicines, patients' protective equipment, ventilators, unique beds, and other relevant medical devices, and that was the right thing to do because there were scarce existing supplies of this kind at the time the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. However, despite the urgency with which those supplies were required, the truth was that the purchasing processes had been characterized, in many cases, by an evident lack of transparency. According to Transparency International, direct purchasing mechanisms were used without complying with standard regular bidding processes, which were reflected in illegal and corrupt practices. In Colombia, such practices became a common standard. Procurement rules were eased, and there was an increase in public servants' discretion in awarding contracts, which generated favoritism, lack of transparency, and corruption. The negative consequences of such discretion have offset any potential benefits in promoting flexibilities in the procurement process for emergency reasons (Gallego, Prem & Vargas, 2021). Criminal and civil charges were brought against a good number of public officials working in procurement areas in Latin American countries (i.e., Argentina) for incurring corruption practices.

In Latin America, the sanitary and economic crises are closely linked. Despite very extended lockdowns, as reflected in quantitative data in the Results section, which have caused large economic devastation, country economies will require several years to recover. There were very high rates of casualties and very poor vaccination campaigns, Chile is an exception to this rule. According to Prensa Internacional magazine, Latin American countries have been very dogmatic when taking steps towards closing their economies. Peru is at the top of the rank, followed by Argentina in second place. In 2020, and just for comparison purposes, while the global gross domestic product (GDP) had a percent (3%) fall, the average GDP decline in the Latin American and Caribbean region was seven percent (7%), with certain countries declining between ten and twelve percent (10-12%). Such is the case with Argentina and Peru. In addition, in 2020, the workforce in Latin America worked 16% fewer hours, almost twice the loss occurred worldwide. After analyzing the key economic indicators in Latin America, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has considered that the recovery of Latin American economies would depend on the path of vaccination and its expansion. Further, in the G-7 meeting, which recently took place in England, the WTO expressed its fears that the steps taken by Latin American governments to provide vaccines to their population were not as fast as they should be. In addition, the WTO desires that developed economies like those of the countries conforming to the G-7 would reach a global agreement to provide developing countries with more extensive access to vaccines. Although countries in the G-7 have initiated the process of a massive donation of vaccines to developing countries, the WTO considered that an extra United States Fifty Billion Dollars (USD 5B) would be needed to accelerate the deployment of vaccine supply. While in Europe, the European Commission took very relevant actions to support short-time work and invested the amount of Euros Thirty-Seven Billion (Euros 37B) in supporting small and medium companies as well as the healthcare sector (Lebret, 2020), this was not clearly the case in Latin America. Subsidies and financial aid from the States were not sufficient for recovery purposes.

Moreover, children of different ages and in every geographic region, especially in Latin America, where school shutdowns have been extended for very long periods of time, have been severely affected by the political, social, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and, in some cases, by mitigation actions and policies from different government administrations that may advertently or inadvertently have caused, in many instances, more harm than good. Undoubtedly, the negative impact on children will be lifelong, according to the opinion of qualified educational and healthcare experts. It is also apparent at this stage that the harmful effects of the pandemic will not be distributed equally among the world's population. Those severe

consequences are expected to be most damaging for children in the poorest countries, in the most unprotected neighborhoods, and in those children who are already in disadvantaged or more vulnerable situations.

According to reports prepared and submitted by the John Hopkins University, as of 3 December 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had claimed more than one million and four hundred thousand (1,400,000) lives and infected more than sixty-four (64) million people around the world. COVID-19 has strongly impacted people's access to healthcare worldwide. The Save the Children non-governmental organization recently issued a report that surveyed twenty-five thousand (25,000) participants in thirty-seven (37) countries, including several Latin American ones. The conclusion was that ninety percent (90%) of families had severe restrictions to access healthcare services and medicines (Ritz, O'Hare & Burgess, 2020). The pandemic and the inappropriate actions and mismanagement incurred by the governments to fight it have increased structural and societal inequalities. Levels of poverty have increased in Latin America, and traditional educational standards have been set aside. Millions of children ceased to have in-person classes and had no access to electronic and video devices to have online classes. The very negative impact on students' educational standards is evident and will be even more visible in the future.

Faced with an overwhelming crisis, Latin American governments have had, in general, reactive approaches to the pandemic. Except for Chile, which designed and implemented an aggressive vaccine program, there was no other relevant, proactive approach. There is a general belief that extended school shutdowns in Latin America have harmed and are still provoking lasting damage to a full generation. Empty classes are considered a real tragedy with no access to online education due to individuals inability to afford access to technological tools. There were Latin American governments that decided to close schools for an extended period. A common argument sustaining that decision was not focused on students' physical attendance. Namely, parents' circulation and gathering at school entrances and exits could increase COVID-19 circulation. Closures have also impacted working parents' daily routines, as many of them have to work from home to share time with their children. Poverty levels in Latin America have not allowed students to receive online education as they do not have laptops and wi-fi connections available.

On average, thirty-eight percent (38%) of workers in Latin America are employed in the informal economy, many of them without access to health or unemployment insurance. Expecting people living hand-to-mouth to comply with lockdown restrictions is perhaps unrealistic. While government-funded relief helped to alleviate this problem, it was probably insufficient. Implementing a lockdown correctly is critical in reducing its cost, and several

factors may prevent it. Some are particular to individual countries, but a few structural elements common to the region stand out. One is limited government capacity to enforce lockdowns, especially in more remote areas where law enforcement presence is weak. Combined with low trust in government and media, the result was that a certain number of citizens chose to ignore government mandates. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has warned about the need to adopt immediate strategies to face the labor crisis caused by COVID-19, which has led to the loss of at least thirty-four (34) million jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean. The situation could increase inequalities in the region even as early indications of recovery have been observed in recent weeks. Both qualitative and quantitative data in this research have contributed to giving an adequate frame to this Discussion section and supporting the findings outlined in *infra*.

Conclusion

At this stage of the twenty-first (21st) century, there is no doubt that basic universal human rights constitute true, significant, and supreme values in all modern societies. They are required to be fully protected by governments in any case. Findings in the Results section reflect a comparatively high number of casualties, a high Lockdown Index, the negative impact of such Lockdown Index on GDP (they should be known as non-intelligent lockdowns), both unfavorable and negative Transparency Index, an unreasonable strong Stringency Index, a low share of the fully vaccinated population as well as an increasing Pandemic Democratic Violations Index. Such findings reflect that many Latin American administrations have had a reactive versus a proactive and well-planned approach to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. They have incurred severe and serious mismanagement as well as a series of corruptive practices in their intent to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Mismanagement and corruption have resulted in an ineffective fight against the pandemic and have led to severe restrictions and violations of basic, essential and universal human rights. As analyzed in this research, those violations have not only negatively impacted citizens' lives (i.e., thousands of casualties, insufficient access to vaccines, no access to education, massive loss of jobs, business shutdowns, lack of medical infrastructure and supplies) but also on democratic institutions, converting some democracies into new real autocracies where lack of transparency and corruption practices have been and currently are common standards.

Undoubtedly, Latin American governments' actions reflect that, in general, they are not prepared, in any case, to face huge challenges brought by a pandemic and any other natural catastrophes. Improvement of all types of infrastructure, including healthcare, care centers personnel training, new

vaccine manufacturing, and distribution facilities, and pharmaceutical and medical device research centers are only a few examples of the actions that should be taken. Benchmarking with world-class practices and process excellence are two of the tools recommended to be considered in the short and long term for improvement purposes. The challenges that Latin American governments face during the post-pandemic era are huge. They should be prepared to reinvent themselves, thinking about planning and designing appropriate and effective policies to protect basic essential human rights and avoid further and more severe economic and social devastation.

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