



INSTITUTE FOR INTEGRATED TRANSITIONS

Stability without Shortcuts: Overcoming Reductionist Debates on Security in Latin America

Martha Maya

March 2026

Executive Summary*

Latin America faces a profound security crisis with no short-term fixes. One particularly visible aspect of the crisis is the region's disproportionate share of global homicides: while Latin America is home to only 8% of the world's population, it accounts for roughly 33% of global homicides, making it the most violent region in the world.

Making matters worse, the crisis is accompanied by weakened state capacities, eroding trust in democratic institutions and increased public support for authoritarian measures. With all of this in play, public debate on security issues has become trapped in simplistic narratives, often presented as a clash between hard versus soft approaches.

IFIT's paper, *Seguridad sin atajos ni pretextos: desmontando el debate reduccionista en América Latina*, presents a third way, exposing the flawed assumptions embedded in the binary framing of solutions and introducing more balanced alternatives.

Current premises	Better premises
Criminal actors can be clearly differentiated from their sources of support and resources, allowing them to be identified and eliminated.	Organised crime operates through adaptive networks that are enmeshed with formal economies and social structures, making purely group-focused responses insufficient.
Security in Latin America depends primarily on the presence of and control by security forces.	Security requires cross-institutional responses that better integrate investigative and prosecutorial dimensions.
Inequality and poverty are the main causes of Latin America's extraordinary levels of insecurity.	Inequality and poverty are worsened by insecurity.
Creating more mega-prisons can significantly help to resolve the region's security crisis.	Systemic reforms in prison governance and justice administration will have a bigger impact.
Organised crime in Latin America is centered overwhelmingly on drug trafficking.	Criminal groups already operate profitably across highly diversified markets and sectors.
Negotiation and dialogue initiatives will weaken security.	Negotiation and dialogue initiatives can co-exist with coercive measures and enhance long-term institutional stability and effectiveness.

Over time, Latin American countries can significantly reduce the current crisis of violence and insecurity. To do so, however, will require a discarding of today's reductionist assumptions about what is driving the crisis and what is needed to overcome it. An updated and more evidence-based set of premises is urgently needed.

* This publication is an English-language executive summary of [*Seguridad sin atajos ni pretextos: desmontando el debate reduccionista en América Latina*](#) (IFIT, March 2026).



INSTITUTE FOR INTEGRATED TRANSITIONS

© 2026 Institute for Integrated Transitions
Recinte Modernista de Sant Pau
Pabellón Sant Leopold
Carrer de Sant Antoni Maria Claret, Num. 167
08025 Barcelona, Spain

www.ifit-transitions.org
info@ifit-transitions.org



Scan for more information