

Police management in Venezuela:

Lethality and human rights violations.

*The report Panoramic Vision of Venezuela's police system (2000-2018), prepared by **Acceso a la Justicia**, presents a diagnosis of the police system in Venezuela during the time elapsed of the XXI century, that is characterized by having a budget deficit, information opacity, increase of deaths caused by police officers, empowerment and an expansion of the most deadly police forces, such as the feared FAES.*

Any attempt to make a diagnosis of Venezuela's police system faces a main obstacle, which is the lack of data and official indicators, as it happens with any area under study that requires data from public entities in Venezuela. Despite this, **Acceso a la Justicia** gathered a group of expert investigators, who analyzed annual results reports, authorities' public statements, official press statements, social media messages from the main government representatives and the news originated from those materials. The result of that effort is on the Report Panoramic Vision of the Police System in Venezuela (2000-2018) that covers beginning with the regulatory scope to the institutional operability.

When making the analysis it was found an ever growing number of deaths caused by police officers, many of them involved in illicit acts and corruption acts, the lack of capacity to reduce delinquency violence, opacity in the access to criminality numbers and violations of human rights characterize Venezuela's police system and these are some of the reasons that have caused a lack of trust in the security forces of the State.

The study allowed building alternative indicators that show a worrisome panorama from a perspective of search of institutional strengths and human rights protection.

Between 2010 and 2018, 23.688 people died at the hands of officers from the state's security forces. The majority of them (60%) in the last three years (2016-2019), 86% of those deaths were extrajudicial executions.

"The brutal increment of deaths at the hands of the country's security forces indicates to us that police forces in Venezuela do not comply with its main legal role which is to protect the rights of the citizens. State security forces have not been neither efficacious (for they don't comply with its objectives) nor efficient (given the high cost in human lives with socially damaging results)", it is indicated in the report.

An amendment that was not executed.

The report has six parts. On the first it is explained how the Venezuelan criminal system is constituted, integrated by 147 preventive police forces, the Scientific, Penal and Criminalistics Investigation Force (CICPC in Spanish) as an investigation force, the Public Ministry, the courts and the penitentiary subsystem.

Also deals with the National Commission for the Police Reform -CONAREPOL in Spanish- a high level consultation that was carried forward in 2006 to design a police model based on human rights respect, officers professionalization and the civil character of the service, which, although being an initiative that produced a great experience and possibilities, has not been implemented. Likewise, it touches upon the militarization of citizen's security and the increment of military organs in the police work.

The second part is devoted to the opacity that characterizes Venezuela's police system. It is impossible to access official sources. The only means to obtain information are some (few) web pages and social networks of the police institutions and the Ministry of Interior, Justice and Peace, areas that are generally used for political propaganda.

The third part talks about Venezuela's police system institutions. It indicates that the municipal police forces are responsible of at least, 11.5% of the deaths at the hands of the security forces in the country, the Bolivarian National Police of 30% via the Special Actions Force (FAES in Spanish), and the CICPC is the deadliest security force in the country, with 40% of the deaths caused by intervention of the public force.

Society's "policialization"

Even though during the investigation work it was difficult to access official information to elaborate detailed performance indicators and it is unknown with details and clarity the number of police forces existing in the country and its institutional and territorial distribution, what could be clearly observed was the abrupt increment in the number of police forces. Thus, society's "policialization" occupies the third part of the study. The frame rate has reached 557 police officers per 100.000 inhabitants, way higher than the international standard that suggests between 300 and 400 police officers per 100.000 inhabitants.

It also explains how the presence of police officers in the whole country and the creation of new divisions within security forces, like the deadly and feared FAES, have increased.

The fifth block of the investigation deals with the dimensions regarding the budget allocated to the police institutions, characterized by a great deficit despite the police system's size. The report indicates that the formal sustainability of these institutions over time becomes precarious, situation that open spaces to the personnel's search of alternative sources of financing, which increases and make options like corruption, attractive.

Human rights occupy the sixth part of the report. It shows a negative panorama as to the respect of fundamental rights. The high mortality, police hypertrophy and the licit budgetary deficit feed each other back in a deadly combination undermining the country's democratic institutionality and citizen's rights.

In spite of all the difficulties during the investigation, **Acceso a la Justicia** hopes this report, that constitutes an effort of systematization and analysis of all the available

information about this important institution of Venezuela's criminal system be of use for future studies, analysis and decision making on police and security matters.

And to you, Venezuelan, ¿how does it affect you?

The lethality of police violence and the impunity that police officers enjoy, make human rights violations permanent, and police forces deficient budgets and low salaries contribute to police officers seeking illicit means of financing and to them getting associated to corruption acts, which put citizens at risk, whom are victims of kidnapping and other crimes in which active police officers are involved.