

NATION

Is boom, then slump, behind fiery Latin American protests?

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Chile is one of the richest countries in the region. Haiti is the poorest. Ecuador has a centrist government. Bolivia's is socialist.

Yet, from Port-au-Prince to Santiago, furious demonstrators were marching this week to demand fundamental change, part of a wave of often-violent protests that has set tires, government offices, trains and metro stations ablaze across Latin America and the Caribbean.

What's driving the protests thousands of miles apart, across countries with profoundly different politics, economies, cultures and histories? One important factor: Despite their differences, the countries hit by fiery protests this month saw often-dizzying commodity-driven growth in the first decade of this century, followed by a slump or stall as prices dropped for key exports. Even Haiti, its own economy largely stagnant, saw billions in aid from oil-rich Venezuela flood in, then disappear.

That pattern of boom then slackening is a dangerous one for less-than-agile leaders. It expands the middle class, creating citizens who feel entitled to receive more from their governments, and empowered to demand it. And it sharpens the sense of unfairness for those left out of the boom, who see neighbors prospering while they stand still or slide backward.

Chile, the world's largest copper producer, boomed from 2000 to 2014 before growth dropped off. The average Chilean still earns roughly \$560 to \$700 a month, income that makes it hard for many to pay their bills. Then, last week, an independent panel implemented a 4-cent subway fare increase that the Chilean government initially said was needed to cope with rising oil prices and a weaker local currency.

For thousands of Chileans, it was a final indignity after years of struggling as the country prospered. Clashes wracked Chile for a sixth day Wednesday, with the death toll at 18 in an upheaval that has almost paralyzed a country long seen as an oasis of stability.

"People went out to protest because they feel the government cares more about the

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