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# Bombings Put Normally Peaceful Chile on Edge

SANTIAGO, Chile—For a generation, Chile has been Latin America's most prosperous and stable country, but residents of this modern capital have been rattled by an increasingly violent bombing campaign that Thursday killed a 29-year-old man.

Since 2005, small, homemade bombs have been detonated at a rate of 30 a year, usually in the dead of night and in trash cans, ATM banking cabins and in front of closed businesses. Many Chileans saw them as little more than a nuisance, but on Thursday [Sergio Landskron was killed when a device exploded on a street in the heart of the city](#). His death came 17 days after a brazen, daylight attack in which 14 people were injured in what the Chilean government called [the worst bombing in decades](#).

The bombers haven't claimed responsibility in the recent attacks. Officials say they have no motive and have [only attributed the bombings to shadowy anarchists](#), adding to the apprehension in this city of nearly seven million.

Julia Torreblanca, 47 years old, said she froze in shock when the bomb that injured the 14 people exploded on Sept. 8 just feet from her convenience store in a busy shopping area that is part of a subway station, Military Station.

"I got really scared. It made me sick," said Ms. Torreblanca. "I never thought something like this would happen here."

That attack, which took place at a station adjacent to Chile's main military academy, came just after the U.S. and other countries warned their citizens about visiting Santiago because of the bombings.

The bombings, which have totaled 300 over a decade, have taken place outside churches, in front of banks and on streets in the vicinity of the presidential palace. Aside from the 2009 death of a suspected bomber, most had little impact on residents here, with no injuries to bystanders until this month, authorities said. But then came the Military Station subway attack, which took place when people were eating lunch.

"The use of homemade bombs isn't new, but lately we've seen a very disturbing change for Chilean society," said Xavier Armendáriz, the dean of the University of San Sebastián's law school and a former prosecutor that has investigated explosions.

The bombing came a few days before the 41st anniversary of the military coup that removed the government of socialist President Salvador Allende, which is normally a period of social unrest.

It also came at a complicated time for Chile's current center-left leader, President Michelle Bachelet, who has promised sweeping reforms to reduce inequality but is now facing growing pressure over the country's sharp economic slowdown. Ms. Bachelet's approval rating in September fell to 44%, its lowest point since she took office in March, according to a survey by pollster Plaza Publica Cadem.

"The bombs have put her on the defensive for the past couple of weeks. They have delayed her agenda," said Patricio Navia, a Chilean political scientist at New York University.

Chile's government has promised to crack down on the bombings, which officials have described as isolated acts of terrorism being carried out by a handful of anti-system extremists. Officials said they would use an antiterrorism law from the 1980s, when Chile was a military dictatorship, to help determine responsibility. The law includes long jail terms, extended pretrial detention and the use of anonymous witnesses during trial.

On Sept. 18, two men and a woman were arrested for the Sept. 8 bombing and the court gave prosecutors 10 months to collect evidence while two of the suspects, Juan Flores and Nataly Casanova, are held in prison. The third suspect, Guillermo Duran, is under house arrest at night. A lawyer for the suspects, Eduardo Camus, couldn't be reached for comment, but he told newspaper La Tercera that they weren't responsible for the bombing.

While the arrests were a relief for this city, Chileans' long-held sense of security was shaken again when the bomb that killed Mr. Landskron went off Thursday in a neighborhood where anarchist graffiti is common.

Teresa Sepúlveda, 66, was asleep when she heard the explosion that killed Mr. Landskron and went outside with other neighbors. "We heard him screaming, it was terrible," she said.

Authorities said that Mr. Landskron had been manipulating the explosive when it went off. But they said they haven't determined if he was the bomb maker or a bystander who happened to pick up the device. Mr. Landskron's family said he was a drug addict who recently been released from prison for theft. They said he didn't have any strong political leanings.

"They killed my son," Mr. Landskron's mother, Ana Silva Umana, told a Chilean television station. "He is a victim of whoever put the bomb there."

Many in Santiago say they are puzzled by whoever is carrying out the attacks and struggle to understand their motivations in a normally calm city where residents are used to charming sidewalk cafes and shiny office towers.

"I'm outraged. This is a peaceful country," said Raúl Aburto, a 62-year-old who works for a private security company. "Chile has never had terrorism."

Professor Armendáriz said that anarchist cells aren't hierarchical and are made up of people from a variety of different socio-economic classes. He said they are mainly young people in their 20s, but also include individuals in their 50s.

Experts say the anarchists have a range of competing demands. Some want fellow anarchists held for attacks in Spain to be released. Others want more autonomy for Indians in Chile. Others protest U.S. foreign policy, and Chile's trade-friendly economy.

"What these diverse groups share is their complete rejection of the political and economic system," said Hugo Frühling, the director of the University of Chile's Institute for Public Affairs.

Officials say that the bombers, whether anarchists or other antigovernment groups, don't have popular support.

"These attacks have been condemned by practically all Chileans," government spokesman Alvaro Elizalde said. "Chile is a safe country and there is no doubt that the government and all the public institutions are going to ensure that these crimes are solved."

But previous efforts to punish suspected bombers hasn't always led to convictions. In 2010, 14 people went on trial for about 30 bombings that occurred from 2006 to 2009. A judge, however, threw out much of the prosecutor's evidence and the case fell apart, leading to the release of the defendants.

Almost three weeks after the bombing at the subway station, things seemed to be back to normal. Businesses are open. This city's streets are busy with pedestrians. But people were still on edge.

"There is a feeling of more insecurity, more tension," said Sebastian Morales, a 30-year-old who works at a store that sells cellphone accessories. "I've always felt safe in Chile, but now I'm much more alert."

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