Peru protests: 17 dead in fresh clashes as calls grow for President Boluarte to resign

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By Dan Collyns

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At least 17 people have been killed in fresh clashes between protesters and security forces in Peru as rolling anti-government protests turned deadly again, pushing the overall death toll to nearly 40 in the nationwide unrest after the [ousting and arrest of former president Pedro Castillo](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/07/peru-president-detained-pedro-castillo-coup) a month ago.

Monday’s bloodshed took place near the airport in the city of Juliaca in the southern region of Puno, as demonstrators fought running battles with police. Social media images showed gunshots wounds and clouds of smoke as protesters threw stones using slings and used metal plates as shields.

Other footage appeared to show a man being given CPR and images of injured protesters arriving at the hospital. A boy died in an ambulance that had been blocked from reaching the hospital by protesters.

The rising death toll comes amid growing protests calling for President Dina Boluarte to resign, Congress to be shuttered and Castillo to be freed from jail. Boluarte was Castillo’s vice-president who replaced him after he attempted to [shutter Congress and rule by decree](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/07/peru-parliament-dissolved-impeachment-vote-coup-fears) on 7 December.

In a televised address late on Monday, Peru’s prime minister, Alberto Otárola, defended the security forces’ response, saying: “We will not cease in our defence of the rule of the law.” Flanked by ministers, he claimed violent groups financed by “foreign interests and the dark money of drug trafficking” were trying to “destroy the country”.

Otárola said the police had been attacked with homemade weapons, and that while he regretted the deaths he blamed Castillo’s attempted “coup d’etat” for stirring the unrest. He added his government was defending the “peace and tranquility of 33 million Peruvians”.

Speaking at a “national agreement” meeting earlier on Monday with representatives from the country’s regions, Boluarte said she could not grant some of the protesters’ key demands and accused them of not understanding what they were asking for. “What you are asking for is a pretext to continue generating chaos,” she said.

However, Peru’s ombudsman’s office said on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/Defensoria_Peru/status/1612576796469497856): “We ask the forces of law and order to make a legal, necessary and proportional use of force and we urge the state prosecutor’s office to carry out a prompt investigation to clarify the facts.”

The International Committee of the Red Cross [tweeted](https://twitter.com/CICR_LIMA/status/1612624143391887360): “We are very concerned about the continued escalation of violence in the protests in Peru, which has led to the loss of dozens of lives.”

Defence minister Jorge Luis Chavez said 75 police were among the injured. He said they had come under attack from firearms and explosives during a five-day assault in Juliaca near Peru’s southern border with Bolivia.

But calls for Boluarte’s resignation continue as Otárola and his cabinet faced a vote of confidence in congress later on Tuesday.

“Massacre after massacre does not solve absolutely anything,” [tweeted](https://twitter.com/javierto65/status/1612603051113586689) Javier Torres, editor of a regional news outlet Noticias Ser. “It is urgent to bring forward the elections as soon as possible and the resignation of Dina Boluarte!”