

## Breaking news and analysis from the world of science policy



C. FAGAN, UPPER AMAZON CONSERVANCY

These inhabitants of the remote Peruvian Amazon village of Colombiana worry that isolated tribespeople will steal important possessions such as large metal cooking pots.

# Raids by uncontacted Amazon tribes raise fears of violence

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By [Heather Pringle \(/author/heather-pringle/\)](/author/heather-pringle/) | 1 December 2014 11:45 am | [1 Comment \(/latin-america/2014/12/raids-uncontacted-amazon-tribes-raise-fears-violence#disqus\\_thread\)](/latin-america/2014/12/raids-uncontacted-amazon-tribes-raise-fears-violence#disqus_thread)

In early October, inhabitants of three small indigenous villages along Peru's remote Alto Purús river returned home from voting in local elections to find that intruders had stolen many of their valuables. Gone were solar panels, shortwave radios, and shotguns. The raiders had also left a cooking fire

burning next to a house, setting fire to it. Following the forest trails of the perpetrators, trackers found something disturbing: Remains of the stolen goods littered campsites made by an isolated tribe in the region.

Normally quiet and reclusive, the tribespeople had no use for solar panels or radios. In fact, they did not even seem interested in carrying them back to their home deeper in the forest. Although thefts of clothes, food, or machetes had occurred before, raiding for these kinds of goods—which were costly but useless to the intruders—was a rare act of “hostility,” notes Chris Fagan, executive director of the Upper Amazon Conservancy, a nongovernmental organization headquartered in Jackson, Wyoming, that aims to protect the Amazon headwaters and its indigenous peoples. “We are seeing a dramatic change in behavior of these [isolated] people throughout the Peru-Brazil border.”

In recent months, government officials monitoring the territories of isolated tribes in those borderlands have reported other signs of trouble. In June and in August, for example, two different groups of isolated tribespeople emerged from the forest in the state of Acre in Brazil and made voluntary contact with Brazilian government scientists. Members of both groups said that they were fleeing violence from non-native people across the border in Peru. Those in the June contact, for example, told an interpreter that invaders had shot many of their old people and razed at least some of their homes.

It is unclear just who was behind these attacks. But Fagan notes that several different groups now threaten the region’s isolated tribes, from illegal loggers to drug traffickers operating coca processing camps and smuggling the products down the river systems. Moreover, in a satellite imagery study published in November in *Royal Society Open Science*, anthropologist Robert Walker from the University of Missouri, Columbia, and his colleagues found that a road bringing loggers and settlers into the region had penetrated to within 30 kilometers of a village inhabited by one isolated tribe. “The [wilderness] area that all these tribes and subtribes are sharing is getting smaller,” Fagan notes. The crowding adds to tensions.

Researchers have long worried that newcomers to the region could spread influenza and other diseases to the isolated tribes, which have little immunity. But now observers such as Walker are concerned that the October raids may incite attacks from inhabitants of the three affected communities—Nueva

Vida, Puerto Betel, and Santa Rey. Residents there face steep bills to replace their stolen gear, because all consumer goods must be flown in by chartered aircraft. "I hope that the villages will not retaliate," Walker says.

In the short term, the best way to defuse this anger, Fagan says, would be for the Peruvian government to step in and compensate the victims of the recent raids. "To lose those big pots and pans and shotguns is like someone coming and stealing your car," Fagan says. If the Peruvian government fails to do this, he adds, "people in the villages will start defending their possessions and that can lead to violence."

But more sweeping measures will be needed in the future to protect the region's isolated tribes, says Beatriz Huertas Castillo, an independent anthropologist in Lima who has been monitoring the welfare of isolated tribes in the Amazon borderlands. As a first step in this direction, she thinks the Peruvian government needs to thoroughly investigate what provoked the recent raids, gathering more detailed information on the threats facing isolated tribes in the Amazon borderlands. "Isolated people didn't use to attack these communities, so it is important to find out what is bothering them," Huertas says.

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The Amazon has diversity! It desperately needs social advocates to ennoble and empower trespass, theft, and destruction. "people in the villages will start defending their possessions and that can lead to violence." How DARE they defend themselves, their families, and their possessions against the deserving. Not in the United Sates, by law!

Support evolution - shoot back.

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