

Ex-president of Argentina faces charges

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BUENOS AIRES --

A federal judge charged former president Fernando de la Rúa with five counts of manslaughter Tuesday in connection with bloody street riots in December 2001 that accompanied Argentina's descent into economic crisis.

Federal Judge Claudio Bonadio said the former president is also being prosecuted on charges stemming from injuries to 172 other people during street clashes between demonstrators and police that year.

It was the first time a current or former democratically elected Argentine president has faced charges for the conduct of security forces under his oversight.

De la Rúa was not ordered detained and his lawyers have said he was innocent, leaving the details of police operations to subordinates.

De la Rúa resigned in December 2001, halfway through an elected four-year term as the country suffered the worst economic collapse in its history, with a sharp devaluation of its currency and a \$100 billion debt default.

At least 30 people were reported killed nationwide in street riots that year.

The judge has already filed similar charges against de la Rúa's former security chief and seven former federal police officers.

Fernando Chironi, a House lawmaker with de la Rúa's opposition Radical Party, said the former president could not be held liable under the criminal code for violent events that spun out of control.

"He was not directly responsible for those who acted below him," Chironi said, referring to police and state security agents.

Argentina has since staged a four-year recovery from the crisis.