

Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Brazil** Victory of far-right former army officer Jair Bolsonaro in presidential election 28 Oct raised widespread concerns over his past statements in support of authoritarianism, repression, state violence and economic nationalism; and for political reverberations of his win across region. During campaign dominated by issues of rising violent crime and political corruption, Bolsonaro praised Brazil's 1964-1985 dictatorship, said he would give police "carte blanche" to kill suspects in anti-crime drive, and threatened "clean up" of political rivals, saying leftist "outlaws will be banished from our homeland"; victory also raised concerns over respect for rights of LGBT people, women and indigenous groups. Bolsonaro 29 Oct pledged to relax gun control and cut govt advertising funds for "lying" media outlets.

➔ **Colombia** Clashes between security forces and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidents continued, while govt's continued suspension of peace talks with second guerrilla group National Liberation Army (ELN) prompted fears for escalation of violence. In Yarumal, Antioquia province (north west), govt 2 Oct bombed camp supposedly housing FARC's 36th Front dissident group commander, alias "Cabuyo", and killed two dissidents in 10 Oct clash, after group killed three employees of mining company 20 Sept. Army 8 Oct captured high-ranking dissident in Arauca (east). Military reported that 40th Front dissidents 15 Oct killed two soldiers in La Macarena, Meta province (south), while dissidents also attacked army in police barracks in Cauca (south west) 10 Oct. With govt-ELN negotiations still suspended, spate of attacks attributed to ELN during month reinforced fears that talks may collapse completely. Kidnap of five-year old son of mayor 3 Oct in town of El Carmen, Catatumbo (north east), caused outrage, with many believing ELN responsible; child released 9 Oct. Govt continued to demand ELN release remaining hostages (reportedly numbering ten) before talks resume; however full number of kidnapped unknown, eight presumed dead. ELN 18 Oct suspected of carrying out mass killing of at least sixteen people in Bolívar state in Venezuela, seen as sign of guerrillas' expanding operations. Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC) – country's main drug trafficking group – clashed with splinter group Caparrapos in Antioquia department 28 Sept, displacing over 300 people. Political killings of community activists continued, including murder of women's rights activist Maria Caicedo Muñoz, kidnapped 20 Oct by unidentified assailants and found dead 26 Oct in Rio Macay, Cauca. President Duque continued to call for tougher approach to drug trade and more international support for Colombia to deal with influx of Venezuelan refugees (see Venezuela). Duque also ordered deployment of additional 5,000 troops to Catatumbo, on border with Venezuela, to fight drug trafficking and illegal armed groups.

➔ **El Salvador** Official homicide figures continued to fall, with police chief 15 Oct reporting 2,657 killings since 1 Jan, 13% reduction on same period 2017, and dramatic increase in drugs seizures since 2015. Former gang truce mediator Raúl Mijango sentenced 12 Oct to thirteen years prison for benefiting from extortion rackets during failed dialogue process. Anti-corruption drive continued with attorney general (AG) 16 Oct issuing arrest warrants for 25 people including former President Funes, a former AG and businessmen for involvement in corruption scheme within AG's office. U.S. federal judge 3 Oct ordered U.S. administration to

temporarily halt its plan to cut Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program after finding insufficient evidence to end TPS for several countries, including El Salvador with 200,000 beneficiaries. U.S. President Trump 16 and 22 Oct threatened to suspend funding to region if migrant caravan from Honduras is not stopped (see Honduras).

➡ **Guatemala** Tensions continued over govt's campaign to expel International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which has been preparing case and possible charges against President Morales and others for illicit electoral financing. Constitutional Court (CC) 28 Sept rejected three out of eight appeals from govt against its ruling to allow CICIG chief Velásquez to re-enter country; army announced it would abide by CC ruling but govt 3 Oct reiterated its demands for UN to appoint new chief and deputy for CICIG, with Morales refusing to recognise Velásquez. Foreign ministry 16 Oct revoked visas for three CICIG officials and denied renewal to eight; in response, congress members filed appeals to CC. Chief prosecutor for electoral crimes 1 Oct passed case against Morales to congressional committee of inquiry; following committee's report, congress 16 Oct refused to remove president's immunity and passed new law reducing punishment for illicit electoral financing 18 Oct. Court 9 Oct sentenced former VP Roxana Baldetti to fifteen years in prison on charges of fraud, influence trafficking and unlawful association, in first of four corruption cases against her following CICIG investigation. President Trump 16 and 22 Oct threatened to suspend funding to region if migrant caravan from Honduras is not stopped (see Honduras). General Directorate for Migration 8 Oct revealed U.S. deportations of Guatemalans in 2018 already at 38,296, compared with 22,241 total in 2017.

➡ **Haiti** Tens of thousands of Haitians 17 Oct protested in capital Port-au-Prince against govt corruption including alleged misuse of funds from PetroCaribe (alliance giving Caribbean states access to cheap Venezuelan oil), demanding President Moïse's resignation; police reportedly opened fire and threw tear gas at crowds, killing one and injuring over a dozen. Moïse 22 Oct fired two govt officials and fifteen advisers reportedly linked to corruption. Protesters also angry at mounting financial crisis, health and human rights concerns, with 6 Oct earthquake that killed eighteen people adding to discontent. National Network for the Defense of Human Rights 1 Oct released report condemning country's poor human rights record.

↓ **Honduras** Mass "migrant caravan" attempting to reach U.S. created country's worst crisis since disputed Nov 2017 elections, while late Sept collapse of UN-led talks between President Hernández's govt and opposition on post-Nov 2017 electoral crisis, and increasing tensions in congress, reduced potential space to resolve crisis. Caravan began as call on social media for low-income Hondurans to travel to U.S. in large groups to avoid dangers of migrant route, prompting some 200 people to depart from city San Pedro Sula (west) 12 Oct; group grew to several thousands as it passed through poor and crime-affected villages. After crossing Guatemala, 5,000-strong group, estimated by NGOs to be 35% children, reached Mexican border 19 Oct, where they clashed with Mexican security forces. 26-year old Honduran migrant was killed 28 Oct by Mexican police. In response, and with more groups expected to join "caravan" movement from neighbouring countries like El Salvador (where new group of 150 people departed 29 Oct), U.S. threatened to cut all bilateral aid to Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, while opposition parties called for

Hernández's resignation and early elections. Response to crisis impeded by ongoing political deadlock and tensions in congress between Liberal Party and ruling National Party following accusations in Sept that latter had hired gang members during elections.

➔ **Mexico** Amid ongoing uncertainty over incoming govt's policies for improving public security in line with campaign pledges, President-elect López Obrador (AMLO) 24 Oct outlined much-anticipated security plan, includes hiring of 50,000 new recruits for armed forces and Federal Police, and division of country into 265 regions, in each of which army, navy and police would work under sole command structure – apparently undermining campaign promise to demilitarise public security provision– but under stricter human rights supervision. Specifics of police reform not announced. AMLO also said govt would create truth commission to investigate 2014 disappearance of Ayotzinapa teaching college students. AMLO's pick for public security secretary Alfonso Durazo 17 Oct said tasks of joint army-police forces would be 70% crime prevention and 30% “coercion”. Govt 8 Oct cancelled another five National Pacification and Reconciliation Forums due to security concerns. Army's commander-in-chief 8 Oct stated he considered possible legalisation of poppy cultivation and processing for domestic pharmaceutical industry, as suggested by AMLO's transition team, as potential way to reduce violence. Violence continued across country including clashes between criminal groups involved in drug trade and oil siphoning, targeted killings and femicides; 2018 on track to surpass 2017 as deadliest year for country, with 18,835 homicides registered Jan-Aug, representing 14.9% increase on same period 2017. Journalist Sergio Martínez killed 4 Oct in Tapachula, Chiapas state (south), eleventh journalist killed in 2018. At Guatemalan border in Chiapas, police in riot gear 19 Oct clashed with group of some 5,000 mainly Honduran migrants attempting to reach U.S. (see Honduras). U.S. 29 Oct announced deployment of some 5,000 troops to U.S.-Mexico border to prevent migrants' entry. Govt 17 Oct said it would deport members of group entering illegally but AMLO same day said he would protect Central American transmigrants (travelling through Mexico to U.S.) and provide Central American migrants with work visas. In 19 Oct meeting, U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo and incoming FM Marcelo Ebrard pledged cooperation, including on economic development in Central America to address root causes for migration.

➔ **Nicaragua** Tensions remained high amid continuing protests against President Ortega's govt and continued arbitrary and secretive trials against opposition activists. Violence against protesters reportedly resulted in several deaths during month; Amnesty International 18 Oct released report alleging govt used “military-grade weapons” in crackdown against protesters. After govt 29 Sept passed new law aimed at making protests illegal, police detained 30 protesters in Telica, Estelí and Managua (west); a dozen arrested 6-7 Oct and another 38 on 14 Oct. Supreme Court 8 Oct forbade journalists access to public hearings. Supreme Court 12 Oct admitted appeal against unconstitutionality of July's anti-terrorism law, however detainees continue to be accused of terrorism. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) 3 Oct warned of possible new phase of govt repression targeting independent journalists; at least 38 incidents involving violence against journalists reported since April. Anti-govt coalition Blue and White National Unity (UNAB) launched 4 Oct, composed of civil society, business, student and political movements; 7 Oct held national strike and met with Organization of American States

(OAS) Sec Gen Luis Almagro 18 Oct, handing him their proposals to strengthen democracy and justice in Nicaragua. Govt's international isolation continued; EU 2 Oct called on govt to cease use of force and free imprisoned peaceful protesters, in call reiterated by FMs from South American inter-governmental trade bloc MERCOSUR 15 Oct. After govt rejected OAS working group visit 17 Oct, working group 19 Oct presented second report at extraordinary session of OAS Permanent Council, during which Almagro aired idea of activating Article 20 of OAS Inter-American Democratic Charter which requires Permanent Council take decisions it deems appropriate for "restoration of democracy" in a member state. Govt 26 Oct did not respond to meeting request by IACHR President Margarete May Macaulay. Govt 1 Oct acknowledged crisis has caused \$1.18bn damage to economy, with 350,000 jobs believed lost; International Monetary Fund and World Bank predict around 4% reduction in GDP in 2018.

➔ **Venezuela** Amid deepening economic and social crisis, ongoing intransigence by President Maduro's govt and opposition leadership vacuum, EU foreign ministers 15 Oct discussed initiative by Spain, Portugal and Italy to seek negotiated solution to crisis; Spain denied any intention to ease international pressure on Maduro. After meeting, EU foreign policy chief Mogherini said sanctions would be maintained and conditions were not right for dialogue or mediation; EU will instead examine establishing "contact group" to explore possibility of negotiated settlement. Govt 8 Oct announced death "by suicide" of Caracas city councillor and political prisoner Fernando Albán, who had been held at national security police headquarters since returning from UN General Assembly 5 Oct; official explanation of his death widely questioned, with opposition claiming death was result of torture; foreign govts and international bodies called for independent investigation into Albán's death. Govt had accused Albán of working with exiled opposition leader Julio Borges – whom Albán met at UN – in planning Aug drone attack on President Maduro. UN refugee agency 1 Oct announced 1.9mn Venezuelans had left country since 2015. Chair of U.S. Senate foreign relations committee Bob Corker 8-10 Oct visited Caracas in 'private initiative' to hold talks with Maduro and some opposition figures. Colombia's second guerrilla group National Liberation Army suspected of carrying out mass killing of at least sixteen people in Bolívar state 18 Oct (see Colombia). Russian deputy finance minister 30 Oct met with govt officials in Caracas to discuss economic reforms to tackle financial crisis.