

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ **Colombia Territorial contests between armed groups continued to afflict populations in rural areas.** Suspected Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidents 5 Dec killed at least four members of indigenous community in Santander de Quilichao municipality, Cauca department (south west). National Liberation Army (ELN) guerillas 3-15 Dec imposed armed strike in Iscaundé and Guapi municipalities in south-western Nariño and Cauca departments respectively, prohibiting car and boat transport and reportedly confining over 4,000 people to their homes. Suspected ELN combatants 27 Dec killed family of five, including former FARC combatant, in Montecristo municipality, Bolívar department (north). Meanwhile, violence persisted in Antioquia department (north west) as drug trafficking group Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC) battled splinter groups; notably, spate of AGC attacks 11-13 Dec killed at least seven civilians in Caucaasia and El Bagre municipalities. Govt 4 Dec reiterated 31 Dec deadline for armed group turned political party FARC to turn over economic proceeds from decades-long conflict; FARC 15 Dec reiterated official position that all assets have been declared or provided to govt. Govt pursued efforts to restart aerial fumigation of coca crops, paused in 2015, despite vocal opposition from civil society organisations, which argue fumigation poses health, social and environmental risks, and effects on reducing cocaine supply still unclear. Environmental Licensing Authority 19 Dec held public audience; meeting was one of final steps required by Constitutional Court to restart spraying.

➔ **Peru Demands for repeal of decades-old agrarian law fuelled mass protests across country, leaving several dead.** Agriculture workers late Nov-early Dec initiated protests demanding higher wages; as protests spread northward from country's south, cutting off transit on highway critical to food supply for capital Lima, police 3 Dec intervened to disperse protesters in Virú town, La Libertad department, leaving one dead. Hundreds of workers from metallurgical plant in La Oroya town, Junín department, 4 Dec joined protesters and blockaded highway in La Oroya district, demanding govt turn over management of mining complex. Congress same day repealed agrarian law but 19-20 Dec failed to reach consensus on law's replacement, specifically clause on higher base salaries, prompting agricultural workers to renew protests 21 Dec. Congress 29 Dec passed agricultural reform bill, raising base salaries of agricultural workers by 30%. Workers' unions, who had been demanding increase in daily wage from \$11 to \$18, immediately decried bill as insufficient. Clashes next day broke out between protesters and police in Chao district, La Libertad department, reportedly leaving two protesters killed, while another individual died in vehicle stranded by protest. Meanwhile, earlier in month, National Police Commander General Orlando Velasco and two other generals 1 Dec resigned in protest at police reform program launched by President Sagasti following heavy-handed response to Nov protests against impeachment of former President Martín Vizcarra; Interior Minister Cluber Aliaga 7 Dec resigned, claiming that use of force by police in Nov was justified.

➔ **Venezuela President Maduro secured vast parliamentary majority, regaining control of last branch of power outside his grasp.** In 6 Dec legislative elections, ruling party won over 90% of 277 seats in National Assembly; electoral authority same day reported turnout of 30.5%. Main opposition parties boycotted polls, saying conditions for free and fair vote were not met. Mainstream opposition leader Juan Guaidó 8 Dec said outgoing opposition-controlled National Assembly would remain only legitimate legislature until free and fair elections are held. In bid to demonstrate retained support from electorate, mainstream opposition 7-12 Dec held “popular consultation”, inviting participants to declare new legislature illegitimate and repudiate Maduro’s “usurpation” of presidency; organising committee 13 Dec said more than 6.4mn voted, but later reduced figure by around 670,000, citing technical difficulties. Guaidó 13 Dec called for nationwide demonstrations on 5 Jan to reject inauguration of new National Assembly. Guaidó-led assembly 26 Dec extended its term – due to expire 4 Jan – for another year and delegated assembly’s functions to small group of legislators, although largest party in Guaidó’s coalition, Democratic Action, abstained. Maduro 28 Dec called move “unconstitutional”, and Supreme Court 30 Dec ruled term extension invalid. U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo 7 Dec said Washington would continue to recognise Guaidó-led assembly as only legitimate legislature; U.S. Treasury 18 Dec issued new round of financial sanctions on several individuals and company for abetting “fraudulent” elections. Office of International Criminal Court’s Prosecutor 14 Dec reiterated there was “reasonable basis” to believe crimes against humanity had been perpetrated in Venezuela since 2017 anti-govt protests, committing to determine in 2021 whether to open full investigation.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador Tensions mounted between President Bukele and electoral authorities ahead of Feb 2021 elections and allegations of govt mismanagement of COVID-19 funds persisted.** Bukele 5 Dec said Supreme Electoral Tribunal was hiring private security contractors to transport ballots ahead of legislative and municipal elections scheduled for Feb, suggesting that tribunal is plotting electoral fraud. Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública's opinion poll, which surveyed 1,265 people, 8 Dec showed 64% of electorate intended to vote for Bukele's Nuevas Ideas party in upcoming elections. Meanwhile, govt's COVID-19-related spending remained under scrutiny after news outlet El Faro late Nov reported allegations of misuse of funds for hotels repurposed as quarantine centres; Court of Accounts 1 Dec accused finance ministry of blocking its auditors from investigating other possible irregularities. Police Chief Mauricio Arriaza Chicas 8 Dec resigned as deputy security minister ahead of vote in Legislative Assembly on whether his immunity should be lifted following alleged breach of duties; opposition accuses him of failing to make Finance Minister Alejandro Zelaya comply with lawmakers' order to give account of govt's COVID-19 spending. Attorney General's office 15 Dec opened judicial proceedings against Arriaza over "dereliction of duty" charges; judge 23 Dec dropped charges citing procedural flaws. Head of El Salvador Journalists' Association 16 Dec reported 114 attacks on press freedom between Jan and Nov, said such attacks had risen by 281% during Bukele's first year in office. U.S. 7 Dec extended Temporary Protected Status for Salvadoran nationals, which allows them to live and work in U.S., until Oct 2021. U.S. Congress 22 Dec passed bill requiring upcoming U.S. President Biden to submit to Congress list of corrupt officials in Northern Triangle, and curtailing military funding for Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

➔ **Honduras Amid challenges to electoral preparations ahead of votes this year, deadly attacks on community leaders persisted.** Lawmakers failed to approve new electoral law in its entirety three months away from primary elections set for March 2021, and ahead of general elections scheduled for Nov 2021. National Congress VP Antonio Rivera 4 Dec said elections are likely to be held under current electoral law. National Electoral Council 7 Dec said it had found inconsistencies in 500,000 out of 4.2mn fingerprints submitted for national voter registry, heralding prospect of further disputes over electoral process and legitimacy of results. Unidentified assailants 19 Dec killed journalist Pedro Arcángel Canelas in Dulce del Culmí municipality, Olancho department (east); 26 Dec killed community leader and candidate in upcoming legislative elections Felix Vasquez in Santiago Puringla municipality, La Paz department (south west); next day killed community leader José Adán Medina in Morazán municipality, Yoro department (north). After Eta and Iota hurricanes hit country last month, Honduran disaster agency 7 Dec estimated around 93,000 still in temporary shelters; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs next day issued alert about health-care provision after hurricanes destroyed dozens of health centres and hospitals. Anti-riot police in Santa Fe municipality in Ocotepeque department (west) 10 Dec tried to stymie caravan of 500 migrants en route to Guatemala from San Pedro Sula city in Cortés department (north west) over alleged failure to show IDs and negative COVID-19 tests; Guatemalan authorities next day reportedly arrested 67 migrants who had managed

to continue journey and cross into country. U.S. 7 Dec extended Temporary Protected Status for Honduran nationals, which allows them to live and work in U.S., until Oct 2021. U.S. Congress 22 Dec passed bill requiring upcoming U.S. President Biden to submit to Congress list of corrupt officials in Northern Triangle, and curtailing military funding for Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

➔ **Mexico Cartel violence continued unabated while authorities stripped foreign law enforcement agents of diplomatic immunity.** Along border between Michoacán and Jalisco central states, clashes between Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) and alliance of Michoacán-based criminal groups in Nov and early Dec killed at least 26 and displaced over 1,000. Suspected CJNG gunmen 18 Dec shot and killed ex-governor of Jalisco state Aristóteles Sandoval in Puerto Vallarta town. Violence also increased in Zacatecas central state: clashes between CJNG and Sinaloa Cartel over control of drug trafficking routes left at least 28 dead 14-18 Dec; unidentified gunmen 9 Dec killed director of media outlet Prensa Libre MX, Jaime Castaño Zacarías, outside Jerez city. Also in centre, suspected Santa Rosa de Lima cartel 18 Dec killed three suspected CJNG members in Celaya city, Guanajuato state. After President López Obrador 6 Dec called for stripping U.S. officials of diplomatic immunity on Mexican soil, Chamber of Deputies 15 Dec approved new national security law requiring all foreign law enforcement agents to relinquish diplomatic immunity; move widely seen as targeting U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency officials following diplomatic spat over Oct detention in U.S. of former Defence Minister General Salvador Cienfuegos on charges of drug trafficking and involvement in organised crime. Ahead of legislative elections set for July 2021, opposition parties Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), National Action Party (PAN) and Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) 5 Dec announced electoral coalition in bid to unseat ruling National Regeneration Movement (MORENA).

➔ **Nicaragua President Ortega took further steps to muzzle opposition and free speech ahead of 2021 presidential election.** Congress 21 Dec passed law essentially banning opposition candidates from running in presidential election scheduled for Nov 2021; bill gives Ortega unilateral power to declare citizens as “coup plotters” and “terrorists” – labels which he has often used to describe opposition – and ban them from standing for election. Organization of American States and EU immediately condemned move; U.S. Treasury same day sanctioned three public officials – Supreme Court VP, National Assembly deputy and police chief in second largest city León – for their support toward undermining “Nicaragua’s democracy”. Govt 23 Dec confiscated properties of media outlets 100% Noticias and Confidencial and of two NGOs which had been shut down after 2018 protests. Local militia 6 Dec killed member of Mayangna indigenous group in Bosawás natural reserve, Jinotega region (north). Following devastating hurricanes last month, residents in Bilwi town, North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (north east), 4 Dec demonstrated against govt, accusing authorities of withholding aid delivery to those who do not identify as sympathisers of ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2 Dec reported that govt imprisoned over 1,600 anti-govt demonstrators between April 2018 and May 2020. U.S. 7 Dec extended Temporary Protected Status for Nicaraguan nationals, which allows them to live and work in U.S., until Oct 2021.

Caribbean

➔ **Haiti Gang violence continued while authorities pursued efforts to reform constitution despite criticism.** Suspected G9 coalition of gangs 3 Dec attacked police patrols in capital Port-au-Prince's Village de Dieu, Grand Ravine and Delmas areas; no casualties reported. Unidentified gunmen next day shot dead three men in Port-au-Prince's Pétion-Ville commune. Clashes between rival gangs in Croix-des-Bouquets commune outside capital 17 Dec killed four. General Police Inspectorate 8 Dec questioned 70 police officers suspected of being part of Fantom 509 gang. Anti-govt demonstrations continued throughout month: thousands 10 Dec protested against spike in kidnappings in Gonaïves commune, Artibonite department (north), and Port-au-Prince, where they clashed with security forces. Meanwhile, govt pursued efforts to reform constitution despite widespread criticism from opposition, which views move as illegal: committee in charge of drafting new constitution early Dec said preliminary draft would be ready by 26 Feb and constitutional referendum would take place in March. Core Group for Haiti, which includes U.S., UN, Organization of American States and EU, 12 Dec expressed concern about broad powers conferred by two presidential decrees; Core Group said Nov decree creating National Agency of Intelligence (ANI) confers "quasi-judicial immunity [to ANI agents], thus opening the possibility of abuse", and another extends qualification of "terrorist act" to wide range of offences. Special adviser to President Moïse 16 Dec announced amendments to ANI decree. U.S. Treasury 10 Dec sanctioned two former govt officials and one former police officer for their alleged involvement in gang-led attack which killed 71 in Port-au-Prince's La Saline neighbourhood in Nov 2018. U.S. 7 Dec extended Temporary Protected Status for Haitian nationals, which allows them to live and work in U.S., until Oct 2021.