

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

↓ **Colombia** **Violence rose across country, with numerous attacks on security forces and increased insecurity at border with Venezuela.** Leftist guerrilla National Liberation Army (ELN) and dissident group of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) accused of launching attacks 27 Jan on security forces in Cesar, Norte de Santander, Cauca, Valle del Cauca and Antioquia departments, leaving one military dead and dozens injured; armed men same day burnt two UN vehicles in Guaviare department (south east). In east, confrontations between ELN and dissident FARC's 10th Front early Jan erupted in violation of previous non-aggression agreement. Violence rose over control of illegal economies, causing up to 50 deaths; Attorney General's office 5 Jan reported recovering 27 corpses presumably linked to 10th Front in Fortul, Saravena and Arauquita municipalities in Arauca department and in Cubará municipality, Boyacá department. Clashes 10-14 Jan in Venezuela's Apure region and Colombia's Vichada department led President Duque 4 Jan to deploy two military brigades to Arauca, prompting mutual accusations from ELN and 10th Front of collaboration with military; Venezuela 16 Jan announced deployment of military at border with Colombia. Violence however persisted; car bomb attributed to 10th Front 19 Jan killed one and wounded five in Saravena city (Arauca). UN 18 Jan reported over 1,500 displaced by violence during month; UN Envoy to Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu 21 Jan asked UN Security Council to strengthen state presence at border with Venezuela. Meanwhile, violent attacks persisted elsewhere. Along Pacific coast in Valle del Cauca, ELN 7 Jan injured 13 members of police's anti-riot unit in Cali city; FARC dissidents 24 Jan killed leader of National Indigenous Guard in Buenos Aires municipality; clashes between criminal organisation Clan del Golfo and ELN 28 Jan prompted mass displacement in Bajo Calima village. According to civil society group Indepaz 13 massacres (murder of three or more persons) took place across country 3-28 Jan, killing 39 in total; Indepaz 31 Jan said at least 14 social leaders killed during Jan. In lead-up to presidential elections set for May 2022, former Congresswoman and guerrilla hostage Ingrid Betancourt 18 Jan announced candidacy; presidential campaigns 29 Jan officially started.

➔ **Venezuela** **Opposition gained Barinas state, ruling socialist stronghold, in elections rerun, govt quashed attempt to trigger recall referendum against President Maduro, and violence surged at Colombian border.** In Barinas (south west), opposition candidate Sergio Garrido 9 Jan secured victory with 55% of vote in rerun of gubernatorial elections, adding to three governorships previously gained by opposition in Nov elections against 19 for ruling party; result reflects govt's loss of support in rural heartland, holds symbolic significance as state had been run by late President Hugo Chávez's family since 1998. Opposition alliance 4 Jan extended "interim presidency" of former President of National Assembly and opposition leader Juan Guaidó but drastically cut accompanying bureaucratic structure. National Electoral Council (CNE) 17 Jan approved three petitions to trigger presidential recall referendum (as per constitutional provisions allowing such poll, subject to support of 20% of electorate, when president's mandate reaches mid-term). Council 22 Jan however imposed impracticable conditions on signature collection, requesting all 4.2mn signatures be

collected in one day on 26 Jan; in response, opposition figures Nicmer Evans and César Pérez Vivas same day requested Supreme Tribunal to review CNE's decision, said they would use all legal means to get referendum. CNE 27 Jan said Maduro recall could not move ahead as opponents had only gathered over 42,000 signatures. Juan Guaidó 23 Jan called for Venezuelans to organise peaceful marches on 12 Feb to demand free and fair presidential elections. Fighting between National Liberation Army guerrilla group and dissident faction of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia known as 10th Front flared on Colombian border (see Colombia). Authorities 16 Jan announced fresh military operation in Venezuela's Apure state to "strengthen the territorial defence system" and fight Colombian armed groups. International Criminal Court 19 Jan granted authorities three-month extension to inform court about investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed in country notably during crackdown on antigovt protests in April-July 2017.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador** **President Bukele continued to tighten authoritarian grip as controversial legislative decision prompted thousands to protest and revelations about media surveillance program sparked anti-govt outcry.** Legislative Assembly 11 Jan abolished 1993 decree designating 16 Jan "Day of commemoration of the Peace Agreements", renamed it "National day of the victims of the armed conflict" as move appeared to reflect President Bukele's position on issue of peace agreements which he described as a "farce". In protest, some 2,000 former guerrilla, army veterans, human rights victims, and social and feminist organisation members 16 Jan marched in capital San Salvador; police checkpoints same day reportedly tried to prevent others from across country to join. Civil society groups Citizen Lab and Access Now 12 Jan reported that Pegasus surveillance program found in 35 Salvadoran activists and journalists' devices, including 22 of media outlet El Faro, who had often clashed with Bukele; govt next day denied links with Pegasus or its producer while Association of Journalists of El Salvador 14 Jan requested Attorney General's office to launch investigation. Attorney general 24 Jan confirmed allegations currently under investigation. Court 10 Jan authorised Attorney General's office to inquire and seize electronic devices of seven current and former prosecutors who had investigated Bukele's govt for acts of corruption, including negotiations with gang leaders, on suspicion that they may have leaked details of ongoing investigations to El Faro. Attorney General's office 12 Jan charged former ARENA party presidential candidate, Norman Quijano, with illicit association and electoral fraud; court 18 Jan issued arrest warrant against him. Meanwhile, rating agency Moody's 13 Jan warned El Salvador's bitcoin trading threatens sovereign credit rating; Bukele 15 Jan dismissed warning. International Monetary Fund 25 Jan urged govt to remove Bitcoin's legal tender status.

➔ **Honduras** **President-elect Castro faced her first political test as split within her party triggered dispute over election of National Congress head; deadly violence against activists and mass migration continued.** Tensions ran high during election of president of National Congress. In rejection of pre-election agreement signed in Oct 2021 between Libre Party and Honduras' Saviour Party (PSH), some 20 Libre deputies, with support of National and Liberal parties, 21 Jan refused to appoint Luis Redondo from PSH as temporary head of Congress and instead appointed dissident Libre legislator Jorge Cáliz,

prompting brawl in Congress; Castro 21 Jan called it “treason”, and Libre same day expelled 18 lawmakers (some deputies later rejected expulsion, deeming it not in line with party statute). Libre followers same day occupied Congress entrance to protest. Two parallel Congress sessions held 23 Jan, one confirming Cáliz, the other appointing Redondo. Castro 25 Jan offered Cáliz to join her cabinet as coordinator, Cáliz had yet to respond by end of the month. Amid tensions, Castro sworn in 27 Jan by judge, instead of head of Congress; Spain’s King Felipe VI and U.S. VP Kamala Harris, along with others, attended ceremony. Outgoing President Hernandez sworn in 27 Jan as member of Guatemala-based Central American Parliament, giving him immunity from prosecution during four-year tenure. Violence against social activists continued. Notably, unknown attackers 9 Jan killed Lenca community indigenous environmentalist and social leader Pablo Hernández in Lempira department, west of capital Tegucigalpa, triggering U.S. and EU condemnation; 10 Jan killed transgender activist Thalía Rodríguez in Tegucigalpa. Meanwhile, Guatemalan authorities 15 Jan dismantled caravan of 800 people composed mostly of Hondurans and Nicaraguans who had same day left Honduras’ San Pedro Sula city.

➔ **Mexico High levels of criminal violence notably targeting journalists continued; ruling party came in spotlight for corruption case.**

Deadly criminal violence continued. In Zacatecas state (centre), Cartel Jalisco New Generation (CJNG) 6 Jan left car filled with ten bodies in front of state governor’s office in state capital Zacatecas; police arrested two suspects. In Veracruz state (east), CJNG 7 Jan reportedly dumped nine bodies in Isla municipality and accused Veracruz official of collaborating with Sinaloa Cartel; 8 Jan dumped four bodies outside state capital Xalapa. Unidentified gunmen 9, 16 Jan attacked bars in Ciudad Juárez municipality, Chihuahua state (north), and Comalcalco municipality, Tabasco state (south), killing respectively three and six people. In context of regular clashes between CJNG and “United Cartels” coalition, unidentified gunmen 17 Jan killed five outside Tarecuato town, Michoacán state (centre). Armed men 27 Jan killed seven people in Zamora city, Michoacán state (west). Unidentified gunmen 29 Jan attacked army patrols in several towns of Michoacán, injuring ten soldiers; army accused local population of acting as “social base” for CJNG. Killings of journalists persisted. Notably, unknown assailants 12 Jan attacked journalist José Luis Gamboa in Veracruz port, Veracruz state (east); Gamboa three days later died from his wounds. In Tijuana city, Baja California state (north west), unidentified gunman 17 Jan shot dead photojournalist Margarito Martínez Esquivel outside his home; gunman 23 Jan shot dead journalist Lourdes Maldonado in her car. Electoral Court of Judicial Power 12 Jan confirmed ruling MORENA party would have to pay 4.5mn pesos fine (about \$190,000) after National Electoral Institute mid-Sept found 10% of Texcoco municipal workers’ wages (around \$600,000) had been used for party financing between 2013 and 2015; President López Obrador 18 Jan publicly expressed support toward Secretary of Education Delfina Gómez who was Texcoco mayor at the time. Head of country’s Commission for Refugee Assistance Andrés Ramírez 3 Jan said number of asylum applications in Mexico nearly doubled in 2021 from 2019, mostly from Haitian and Honduran migrants. U.S. 5 Jan began returning migrants to Tijuana city in restart of Trump-era “Remain in Mexico” migration policy.

➔ **Nicaragua Amid growing international isolation, President Ortega’s govt continued authoritarian rift, operated rapprochement with China, and initiated steps toward dialogue with private sector.**

Daniel Ortega sworn in 10 Jan for fifth time (fourth consecutive) as president of Nicaragua following Nov elections widely perceived as rigged, and widespread criticism by international community. Those attending ceremony included Cuban President

Miguel Díaz-Canel, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, and Honduras' outgoing president, Juan Orlando Hernández; former Salvadoran Presidents Mauricio Funes and Sánchez Cerén, both nationalised Nicaraguans and accused of corruption in their country, also joined; Iranian Mohsen Rezaei, searched by Interpol for his role in 1994 bombing of Buenos Aires AMIA Jewish centre, also attended, prompting condemnation by Argentine and Organization of American States (OAS) 11 Jan and 19 Jan respectively. U.S. Treasury Department 10 Jan sanctioned six officials and revoked 116 visas. Costa Rica, Panama and Dominican Republic FMs 11 Jan labeled Nicaraguan crisis "urgent priority" for region. EU 10 Jan sanctioned seven officials and three state institutions including family members of Ortega and VP Rosario Murillo, police and Supreme Electoral Council; Switzerland 24 Jan joined EU sanctions. OAS Sec Gen Almagro 19 Jan reported to Permanent Council that govt did not respond to requests to allow visit of OAS delegation. In face of growing international sanctions, Nicaragua strengthened relations with China; notably, 10 Jan signed four bilateral cooperation and diplomacy agreements with Beijing. Meanwhile, some 70 opposition organisations, inside and outside the country, 9 Jan appointed seven-member National Council for the Democratic Transition. Govt continued to stifle dissent. National Assembly 19 Jan cancelled legal status of three university associations, and Chinandega criminal district judge 18 Jan sentenced for first time Nicaraguan citizen for violating cybercrime law. Judicial authorities 26 Jan reactivated trials of several political prisoners charged with "treason law". Meanwhile, VP Murillo 19 Jan announced govt will meet with private sector representatives; business association COSEP 27 Jan asked Ortega to establish dialogue with no preconditions.

Caribbean

➔ 🇭🇹 **Haiti Gang-related insecurity persisted, and U.S. detained several key suspects in President Moïse's assassination; end of PM Henry's mandate on 7 Feb could spark violence and further turmoil.** Suspected gang attacks continued unabated. Notably, unidentified gunmen 1 Jan fired shots outside cathedral in Gonaïves city hosting Haitian 218th independence anniversary celebrations attended by PM Henry in possible assassination attempt, killing civilian and wounding two; police 3 Jan cited attackers as "armed groups". Suspected gang members 6 Jan opened fire on reporters in capital Port-au-Prince, killing two journalists. Armed attackers 13 Jan kidnapped Cuban doctor, demanding \$100,000 ransom. Skeletal Senate (with ten out of 30 seats filled) 10 Jan reconvened for first time in a year; outgoing Senate President Joseph Lambert same day committed to leading sessions despite expiring term, affirming "2022 will be an election year". Organisations supporting major civil society initiative known as "Montana Agreement", created Aug 2021 with view to helping resolve political crisis, 14 Jan met for five days in Louisiana state (U.S.); 30 Jan announced plan for political transition helmed by Fritz Jean, well-known economist and former central bank governor, as interim president and Steven Benoit as interim PM. Rejecting political appointments, Lavalas, party of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, 29 Jan withdrew from Montana Agreement. While investigation into July killing of President Moïse stalled in Haiti, neighbouring authorities detained key suspects. Notably, Colombian military officer Mario Palacios was captured 3 Jan in Panama as he tried to return to Colombia, and then extradited to Miami city (U.S.), where U.S.

4 Jan charged him with conspiracy to kill Moïse. Following U.S. request, Dominican authorities 7 Jan captured second key suspect Rodolphe Jarr and 20 Jan extradited him to Miami, while Jamaican authorities 15 Jan detained former opposition Senator and suspect John Joel Joseph. Meanwhile, U.S. govt and others inside and outside Haiti raised concerns throughout month that expiry of PM Henry's mandate on 7 Feb (date when Moïse's term would have ended) could bring violence and further instability.