



## Latin America and the Caribbean

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### Southern Cone

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↓ **Brazil** Days after Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva’s inauguration as president, Pro-Bolsonaro protesters stormed govt buildings, demanding military coup.

*Rioters stormed govt buildings in attempt to reinstate Bolsonaro as president. Days after President Lula 1 Jan took office, supporters of former President Bolsonaro 8 Jan invaded presidential palace, Congress, and Supreme Court in capital Brasília, demanding military coup to reinstate Bolsonaro as president; they stole weaponry from vaults and caused millions of dollars in damage, including by smashing windows and furniture and destroying works of art. Lula same day declared state of emergency in Federal District, where Brasilia is located, until 31 Jan. Bolsonaro 9 Jan denied any involvement, claiming to have always acted lawfully.*

*Authorities arrested scores for attempted coup, evidence of army role in riots emerged. Police arrested over 1,500 protesters, 39 of whom were indicted by federal prosecutors on 16 Jan for crimes including attempted coup d’état. Supreme Court head Alexandre de Moraes 8 Jan suspended pro-Bolsonaro governor of Federal District Ibaneis Rocha for 90 days due to lack of action to contain protesters; Rocha 13 Jan responded, claiming army prevented police from removing pro-Bolsonaro protesters’ encampment in Brasília before riots. Police 10 Jan arrested former Commander of Federal District’s military police Colonel Fábio Augusto Vieira due to security lapses during riots; Vieira 12 Jan said army had twice blocked police from clearing encampment. Supreme Court 13 Jan approved request to investigate Bolsonaro’s role in protests. Authorities 14 Jan arrested Anderson Torres, Brasília’s security secretary and former minister of justice under Bolsonaro, on charges of “omission”; upon searching his home, they found draft decree that would allow electoral authorities to interfere with past presidential election results and annul Lula’s win. Lula 21 Jan fired army General Julio Cesar de Arruda for not following govt orders to dismantle pro-Bolsonaro tent. Police 27 Jan raided home of Leonardo Rodrigues de Jesus, Bolsonaro’s nephew, currently under investigation for role in riots.*

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### Andes

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➔ **Bolivia** Amid ongoing protests against arrest of right-wing opposition leader and Santa Cruz Governor Luis Fernando Camacho, opposition-led “national assemblies” took place across country.

*Santa Cruz unrest continued, protesters launched opposition assemblies.* Following arrest of Luis Fernando Camacho late Dec, protests persisted in Santa Cruz province during Jan amid clashes between police and protesters; Civic Committee of Santa Cruz president, Rómulo Calvo, 1 Jan stated that blockades around Santa Cruz would remain in place to deny province's resources to capital La Paz. Yet as concerns grew over economic impact of blockades, Civic Committee 16 Jan announced opposition-led "national assemblies" would take place 25 Jan in all regional capitals to discuss "new measures" to demand Camacho's release. Ahead of assemblies, protesters 18 Jan lifted blockades. Judge 19 Jan ruled Camacho must remain in detention while awaiting trial. Thousands 25 Jan attended Santa Cruz "national assembly", which pressed for Camacho's release via proposed Amnesty Law and called on all opposition forces to form political party to oppose ruling Movement for Socialism party in 2025 elections. Minister of Government Eduardo del Castillo 26 Jan dismissed "national assembly" resolutions as Santa Cruz citizens' "new coup adventure", Minister of Justice Iván Lima same day called them "unconstitutional".

*Govt and protesters faced criticism for violence.* Ombudsman's office 10 Jan reported 25 alleged human rights violations since protests began late Dec, and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and its Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression 17 Jan condemned "excessive use of force by the security forces and the acts of violence perpetrated by organised groups".

➡ **Colombia Govt's ceasefire announcement with five armed and criminal groups faced legal and political headwinds, while violence continued at high levels.**

*ELN peace talks faced first challenge with govt's ceasefire announcement.* Though President Petro 31 Dec announced six-month bilateral ceasefire with five armed and criminal groups, including National Liberation Army (ELN), ELN 1 Jan denied agreeing to any deal; group commander Antonio Garcia 3 Jan said govt's announcement amounted to "crisis" in negotiations. ELN and govt 17-21 Jan held emergency meeting in Venezuelan capital Caracas to address misunderstanding, 21 Jan said they had resolved crisis but had not agreed on any ceasefire. In interim, parties 17 Jan announced they would undertake mission in municipalities in Chocó department to observe humanitarian conditions in communities beleaguered by conflict between ELN and criminal group Gulf Clan. Meanwhile, police 23 Jan captured Álvaro Luís Montejó Rueda, who coordinated finances and logistics for several ELN fronts, in Cesar department.

*Authorities faced legal hurdles to implement ceasefires with four other groups.* Despite complications with ELN, govt 4 Jan insisted it had agreed to ceasefires with remaining four groups – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident group calling itself FARC-EP, FARC dissident group Segunda Marquetalia and two post-paramilitary groups – and issued presidential decrees ordering cessation of operations against them; govt's decree indicated that it considers FARC-EP insurgency with political goals, making group eligible for negotiations. However, attorney general's office 13 Jan said it could not lift arrest warrants for other three groups, nor could ceasefire take place as these organisations are criminal outfits and lack political objectives. Legal crisis has meant military is effectively upholding ceasefire only with FARC-EP.

*Violence continued apace.* Amid lack of clarity around ceasefire arrangements, fighting between FARC-EP and ELN 10-12 Jan erupted in Arauca department, killing at least 11; FARC-EP accused military of working with ELN and said govt had therefore broken ceasefire, which Defence Minister Iván Velasquez 13 Jan denied. Meanwhile, military 11 Jan confirmed FARC dissident factions had kidnapped military sergeant in southern Cauca department; FARC dissidents 15 Jan kidnapped three soldiers in Nariño department, released them three days later.

↓ **Peru Protests rejecting Boluarte's take-over intensified across country, killing scores and prompting widespread concern nationally and internationally; new president resisted calls to resign.**

*Renewed protests left dozens dead as security forces clashed with protesters.* Protests, which first erupted in Dec 2022 after former President Castillo's impeachment, 4 Jan resumed after two-week pause in southern Puno, Cusco, Apurimac and Arequipa regions, and central Junin department. Protesters continued to demand immediate elections, closure of Congress, new Constitution and removal of President Dina Boluarte, who was sworn in 7 Dec following Castillo's removal. Violence 9 Jan escalated in Puno's Juliaca city, where clashes between protesters and police left 19 dead. Massive protests in capital Lima 19-20 Jan once more descended into violence, leaving one dead and dozens more injured as police used tear gas to push back protesters. Police 21 Jan arrested well over 200 demonstrators who had stormed university in Lima day before. As of 30 Jan, 58 people have died during protests.

*Boluarte refused to resign amid concerns over mounting violence.* Prosecutor's office 10 Jan opened investigation against Boluarte and members of her cabinet for alleged crimes of "genocide, aggravated homicide and serious injuries". UN same day released statement voicing concern for "rising violence", while EU 21 Jan condemned security forces' "disproportionate use of force". Boluarte 13 Jan apologised for violence but insisted she would not resign nor call constitutional assembly. Govt next day extended 30-day state of emergency in Lima and several other regions for another month. Boluarte 24 Jan called for "truce" and blamed "radicals" for violence, 27 Jan urged Congress to bring tentative April 2024 elections forward to Oct 2023; Congress next day rejected proposal but is set to vote again.

*Relations with Honduras and Bolivia grew increasingly strained.* Lima 9 Jan banned former Bolivian President Evo Morales and eight Bolivian citizens from entering Peru, accusing them of interfering in Peru's internal affairs. Morales, who has denounced Castillo's arrest as illegal, same day said ban aimed to "distract from human rights abuses". Foreign ministry 26 Jan recalled its ambassador to Honduras after Honduran President Xiomara Castro 24 Jan condemned Boluarte's "coup d'état".

➡ **Venezuela Opposition selected new parliamentary leadership, Mexico talks between govt and opposition stalled, and protests over low wages erupted across country.**

*Opposition elected new parliamentary leadership, exposing deep internal cleavages.* After mainstream opposition late Dec dissolved so-called "interim presidency" of Juan Guaidó, opposition-led National Assembly 5 Jan voted for new leadership, comprising three women, including incoming head Dinorah Figuera

from Justice First (PJ) party. All three are in exile and represent so-called “G3” – three largest parties in opposition alliance Unitary Platform – which are increasingly at odds with Popular Will (VP), Guaidó’s party. Exiled VP leader Leopoldo López 12 Jan accused several leading G3 politicians in Unitary Platform delegation to Nov Mexico City dialogue of allying with President Maduro, claiming delegation was “infiltrated”. In same briefing, López blamed PJ’s Julio Borges for failure of 2019 coup attempt, triggering prosecutors 16 Jan to issue arrest warrant for Borges. Meanwhile, opposition-led National Assembly 19 Jan named five-person executive committee to manage Venezuelan assets held abroad.

*Efforts to schedule next round of Mexico talks stalled over frozen assets.* Maduro govt refused to agree to schedule second meeting of renewed Mexico City talks with Unitary Platform until U.S. unfreezes funds promised under Nov agreement. Unitary Platform delegation 13 Jan met U.S. Assistant Sec State Brian Nichols in U.S. capital Washington DC to resolve issue, but returned without apparent progress. Maduro’s chief negotiator and National Assembly President Jorge Rodríguez 17 Jan said there was “no reason to continue a dialogue with people who don’t keep their word”.

*Fresh wave of labour unrest erupted.* Demonstrations occurred throughout month as public sector wages sank further in real terms, fuelled by substantial devaluation of bolívar currency. Teachers 9 Jan began nationwide protests over wages and conditions, prompting govt-backed armed civilian groups known as *colectivos* in Aragua state 14 Jan to threaten consequences; National Guard 19 Jan reportedly warned protesting teachers they could face reprisals by *colectivos*. Union representatives at state-owned Sidor steel plant in Bolívar state said authorities 9-12 Jan arrested at least 12 workers amid labour unrest. Public sector workers 23 Jan marched in cities across country, including Maracaibo (Zulia state) and Valencia (Carabobo state).

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## Central America and Mexico

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➔ **El Salvador** Authorities renewed state of exception for tenth time as President Bukele lauded improved security situation; Salvadoran debt remained high.

*Authorities once again renewed state of exception.* Legislative Assembly 11 Jan extended state of exception, cornerstone of Bukele’s administration, for tenth time. News outlet La Prensa Gráfica 17 Jan reported that more than 97,000 people, or 2% of country’s adult population, is now behind bars, making it highest imprisonment rate worldwide; Legislative Assembly 12 Jan reported over 61,000 people have been arrested since state of exception began in March 2022. Bukele 17 Jan declared that El Salvador had become “safest country in Latin America” and that state of exception would last “as long as necessary”.

*NGOs raised concerns over arbitrary arrests and deaths in custody in past year.* NGO Cristosal 5 Jan said it had received 3,086 complaints of human rights violations between March 2022 and 31 Dec, 97% of which were for arbitrary arrests. In its World Report 2023, NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) 12 Jan expressed concern for high number of arbitrary arrests and deaths of 90 people while in custody. In joint statement, HRW and Cristosal 27 Jan said leaked database belonging to

Ministry of Public Safety “supports findings of mass due process violations, severe prison overcrowding, and deaths in custody”.

*In other important developments.* News outlet *Elsalvador.com* 18 Jan reported that Bukele had increased Salvadoran debt by \$5 billion in his three years in office. Legislative Assembly 11 Jan approved controversial Digital Securities Law, allowing El Salvador to issue Bitcoin-backed bonds. VP Ulloa 3 Jan asked Brazil to rejoin Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, signalling willingness to engage with other countries in region.

➡ **Honduras Govt extended state of emergency amid efforts to tackle extortion, and congress failed to elect new Supreme Court members.**

*Govt extended and expanded state of emergency.* After govt imposed state of emergency in Dec 2022 to tackle apparent rise in extortion, Honduran Press Secretariat 7 Jan announced extension by 45 days and expansion to 73 other municipalities across country. Head of Police Gustavo Sánchez 3 Jan said police had dismantled 38 criminal gangs, apprehended 652 gang members and served 717 arrest warrants and that this had been done with “no complaints of human rights violations”. Meanwhile, shoot-out between security forces and gang members 30 Jan left one police officer dead in capital Tegucigalpa.

*First attempt to elect Supreme Court members failed.* Nominating Board 23 Jan published list of 45 candidates for election of new Supreme Court members, from which Congress elects 15 members. Political tensions simmered ahead of 25 Jan vote since court members are often elected along party lines. Notably, both ruling Libre party and opposition National Party throughout Jan accused each other of planning violent mobilisations on day of election. Congress 25 Jan failed to elect new Supreme Court members; unclear when Congress will convene for new vote, which must occur before 11 Feb deadline.

➡ **Mexico Criminal violence remained high, govt appointed military officer for key role in public security apparatus, and U.S. and Mexico struck migration agreement.**

*Scores of security personnel killed amid high levels of violence.* In north-western Sinaloa state, federal forces 5 Jan captured Ovidio Guzmán, leader of a Sinaloa Cartel faction and son of infamous drug trafficker “El Chapo” Guzmán, in Jesús Maria village; operation left at least 29 people dead, including ten military officers. In apparent bid to secure Guzmán’s release, cartel members same day set fire to shops and vehicles in area and shot at passenger plane in Culiacán airport. In northern Chihuahua state, leader of Los Mexicles criminal group, Ernesto Alberto Piñón de la Cruz, 1 Jan set off mutiny in Ciudad Juárez prison that left 17 people dead, including ten prison officers; he and 29 others escaped. Police 5 Jan killed Piñón in shootout in Ciudad Juárez. In central Mexico State, unknown gunmen 24 Jan killed seven people at gathering in Chimalhuacán municipality. In central Zacatecas state, unknown gunmen 28 Jan killed seven in bar in Jerez municipality. Violence targeting journalists also persisted. Notably, in north-western Sonora state, unknown gunmen 1 Jan shot at reporter Omar Castro.

*Authorities drew criticism for further militarisation of public security.* President López Obrador 16 Jan appointed former army general and commander of National

Guard, Luis Rodríguez Bucio, as new sub-secretary of public security, renewing criticism against govt for entrusting military officers with civilian tasks. Supreme Court 24 Jan upheld controversial article of National Law on Registration of Detentions, which allows armed forces to make civilian arrests without informing police or public.

*In other important developments.* Mexico and U.S. 5 Jan announced agreement under which U.S. will accept 30,000 migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela; Mexico will accept 30,000 people from same nations having crossed, or tried to cross, U.S. border illegally each month. Trial of Genaro García Luna 16 Jan commenced in New York, U.S.; García Luna, public security secretary and chief war-on-drugs architect under former President Felipe Calderón, is accused of facilitating Sinaloa Cartel's drug shipments into U.S. and helping group evade capture.

➡ **Nicaragua Crackdown on Catholic Church continued, Indigenous groups condemned govt inaction on illegal settlers, and international actors urged release of political prisoners.**

*Ortega's repression of Catholic Church continued.* Authorities throughout month banned at least seven religious processions from taking place and attempted to stop at least three more across country as govt clamped down on religious gatherings. Public prosecutors 10 Jan started trial of Matagalpa Bishop Rolando Álvarez, accused of "conspiracy" and "spreading false news"; judge 16 Jan found priest Óscar Benavides guilty of "conspiracy to undermine national integrity and propagation of false news" and sentenced him to eight years in prison. In closed-door trial 23-26 Jan, authorities found six priests and one layman guilty of crimes of conspiracy and spreading fake news.

*Indigenous communities spoke out against govt.* Representatives of Miskitus and Mayangnas indigenous communities 5 Jan published open letter to President Ortega condemning state's inaction regarding so-called *colonos*, or "settlers", whom they accuse of invading indigenous lands, murdering members of local communities, causing environmental destruction and obstructing their communities' access to food and shelter. Police 26 Jan arrested 24 settlers after they reportedly attacked Indigenous community as part of land dispute in Bonanza municipality, North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region.

*International pressure to release political prisoners persisted.* U.S. Assistant Sec State Brian Nichols 6 Jan said "there has been no communication" with Ortega's govt but that U.S. was willing to engage if Nicaragua took "positive steps", such as releasing political prisoners and restoring "minimum rights" for all citizens. Chilean President Gabriel Boric 24 Jan called for immediate release of prisoners during summit of Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. Meanwhile, Ortega 11 Jan withdrew ambassadors from Chile, European Union, Ethiopia and Belgium.

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## **Caribbean**

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➡ **Haiti Police officers demonstrated against targeted attacks on national police, and authorities unveiled details of new political accord amid calls for continued dialogue.**

*Police officers mutinied amid repeated gang attacks on their officers.* Gangs 10-25 Jan carried out over five attacks on national police in different cities, leaving at least 14 officers dead, two wounded and two missing. Notably, Grand Grif gang members 25 Jan killed six policemen in Liancourt commune. Armed police next day launched violent demonstrations in several cities, notably capital Port-au-Prince, where they attacked interim PM Henry's residence and airport. Meanwhile, month saw overall increase in kidnappings in capital. Notably, unknown assailants 18 Jan kidnapped 29 bus passengers in Croix-des-Bouquets, outskirts of Port-au-Prince.

*Authorities published details of new political accord.* Authorities 11 Jan made public text of "21 December accord" between Henry and some members of opposition forces. Document called for creation of High Council of Transition, established 17 Jan, and Body of Oversight of Government Action to sit alongside Henry during transitional period until Feb 2024 when newly elected govt assumes power. Though document received support from some international actors, including European Union and UN, members of civil society platform Montana Accord continued to disregard it. U.S. Assistant Sec State Brian Nichols 5 Jan called for "broader consensus and greater flexibility among leaders from all sectors" to address political crisis. Meanwhile, institutional crisis 9 Jan peaked when terms of ten remaining senators ended, leaving Haiti with no elected officials.

*Discussions on multinational security mission continued.* PM Henry 1 Jan declared that request for national police support was not request for occupation or military intervention. UN Sec-Gen António Guterres 17 Jan reiterated "urgent need" for "international specialised armed force". Canadian PM Justin Trudeau 10 Jan said Canada is working with U.S., Mexico and Caribbean partners to ensure "we will have options" if situation deteriorates, reiterating importance of Haitian-led solution to security crisis. Canadian Ambassador to UN Bob Rae 18 Jan said foreign military intervention would have little sustainable impact.