

# Latin America and the Caribbean

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## Andes

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➔ **Bolivia** Political tensions continued but unrest in streets appeared to subside as electoral court formally called for new elections. Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) early Jan set general election rerun for 3 May. Constitutional court 15 Jan approved extension of mandate of national and local authorities, including president, deputies and senators until inauguration of new govt. Former President Morales, leading Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party's electoral campaign, 19 Jan named former economy minister Luis Arce as MAS presidential candidate, and former FM David Choquehuanca for VP, after TSE late Dec dismissed requests to stop MAS from participating in election. Indigenous activists expressed discontent, and demanded Choquehuanca leads ticket. Judicial authorities 20 Jan launched investigation against Arce and other MAS leaders for alleged corruption. Interim President Jeanine Áñez 24 Jan announced her candidacy in presidential election after having ruled out running, sparking criticism from allies and opponents; after asking all ministers to resign for "new stage of democratic transition", Áñez 28 Jan unveiled new cabinet, replacing three ministers. Interim govt 17 Jan deployed army in several cities and regions known to be Morales's strongholds ahead of planned protests by indigenous groups on occasion of Plurinational State Day 22 Jan, also day that should have seen new govt take office following last Oct general elections; indigenous groups protested against interim govt notably in El Alto city and Chapare province but no major clashes reported. U.S. 23 Jan said it would send ambassador to Bolivia for first time in a decade. Interim govt 24 Jan cut diplomatic relations with Cuba in response to Havana's alleged "constant hostility".

➔ **Chile** Anti-govt protests continued at lower intensity, while govt moved forward with preparations for plebiscite on constitutional reform. Demonstrations reduced to once a week in capital Santiago, and occasionally elsewhere but clashes between protesters and security forces continued. Notably, protesters 3 Jan set fire to San Francisco de Borja church in Santiago, dedicated to serving national police; security forces 24 Jan fired tear gas and water cannons at protesters in Santiago. Govt moved ahead with preparations for 26 April plebiscite on whether to draft new constitution, and whether members of future special constituent assembly should all be elected or half should be elected and half should be current members of parliament. 23 parties announced support for constitutional reform, six opposed. President Piñera 15 Jan proposed reform to pension system, core issue in protests. Public opinion poll which surveyed 1,496 people 16 Jan showed distrust of institutions continuing to grow, with 5% trusting govt, 3% Congress, 2% political parties, and 6% approving of Piñera.

➔ **Colombia** Allegations of extrajudicial surveillance by military intelligence shook govt, while clashes between armed groups continued notably in west, displacing civilians along Pacific Coast. After President Duque late Dec replaced head of military Nicacio Martínez, citing personal reasons, local media 13 Jan reported govt dismissed Martínez after discovering that he oversaw illegal surveillance of Supreme Court judges, opposition members and journalists, allegedly using technology intended for combating armed groups; Martínez denied accusations but

attorney general opened investigation same day. Duque 9 Jan reported security improvements in 2019, notably 48% drop in kidnappings; but UN Human Rights spokesperson 14 Jan said “staggering number” of human rights defenders killed in 2019 raised concerns for peace process between govt and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Killings of social and community leaders spiked with 27 social leaders and five demobilised former FARC combatants reportedly killed throughout month. In Chocó (west), violence between Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, one of country’s main drug trafficking group) and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group continued, leading to more displacement; govt 9 Jan reported 80 community members displaced in Nuquí municipality following 5 Jan murder of indigenous leader. Community groups continued to call on govt to re-open talks with ELN to reduce violence. ELN early Jan offered several olive branches, symbol of peace, to govt; however govt maintained conditions that ELN release all hostages and unilaterally halt attacks and 16 Jan requested Cuba extradite ELN leader Nicolás Rodríguez Bautista, alias “Gabino”. Govt 12 Jan said it had thwarted plot to kill FARC political leader Rodrigo Londoño, alias “Timochenko”, reportedly orchestrated by FARC dissident leaders. National protests against pension reform, lack of education funding, political corruption, perceived failure to advance 2016 peace accord with FARC, and to prevent killing of rights activists restarted 21 Jan with massive demonstrations in major cities.

↓ **Venezuela** Political crisis deepened as MP Luis Parra, backed by President Maduro, and opposition leader Juan Guaidó both claimed National Assembly (AN) leadership after Maduro’s govt moved to take back control of opposition-dominated parliament. Ahead of scheduled vote to elect AN president for next twelve months, govt 5 Jan deployed National Guard to prevent opposition MPs from entering parliament building. Maduro’s new ally Parra, expelled from opposition Primero Justicia Party over allegations of corruption in Dec, declared himself AN president same day, but opposition said voting session did not reach quorum of 84 MPs (out of 167). Guaidó 5 Jan convened session away from parliament building, said 100 MPs re-elected him as AN president. Guaidó 8 Jan held session in parliament building after forcing his way past police cordon in standoff with security forces, but abandoned plan to hold new session there after paramilitary groups known as *colectivos* 15 Jan attacked convoy carrying several opposition MPs to parliament building and assaulted journalists. In defiance of order banning him from leaving country, Guaidó 19 Jan started foreign tour in bid to shore up international backing, meeting with leaders of Colombia, UK, France, Canada, U.S. Sec State Pompeo and EU foreign policy chief Borrell.

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## Central America and Mexico

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↑ **El Salvador** Security situation continued to improve with President Bukele reporting Jan as least deadly month since end of civil war in 1992, while Legislative Assembly (LA) passed historic law to protect victims of forced displacement. Govt 8 Jan reported homicides fell by 60% since Bukele took office in June 2019, totalling 2,398 in 2019; attorney general 13 Jan reported 3,202 disappearances in 2019, down from 3,679 in 2018; 8 Jan made combatting extortion his priority for 2020 after reports increased 17.2% in 2019, to 2,598 cases. Bukele reported smallest number of homicides in Jan since end of civil war in 1992. Public opinion poll which surveyed

1,204 people 16 Jan showed 91% approval rate for Bukele. LA 9 Jan passed bill to protect internally displaced persons notably by bringing together institutions to respond to and prevent forced displacement. On day of 28th anniversary of 1992 peace agreement 14 Jan, victims of 1980-1992 civil war continued to decry impunity for war crimes and demanded that they be consulted in formulation of National Reconciliation Law, which LA has been discussing since July 2016, when Supreme Court declared Amnesty Law unconstitutional. Prosecutors 9 Jan issued arrest warrant for prominent opposition politician Sigfrido Reyes, who left country in Nov, for embezzlement during his term as LA president from 2011 to 2015; judge asked international police organisation Interpol to issue red notice for his arrest. Attorney general 27 Jan initiated pre-trial procedure against former head of LA Norman Quijano, on charges of illicit association and electoral fraud, for reportedly meeting with gang members and negotiating their support for his presidential race in 2014.

➔ **Guatemala** After President-elect Giammattei took office 14 Jan, new govt launched corruption crackdown but civil society continued to raise concerns over alleged democratic backsliding. State prosecutors 15-16 Jan issued arrest warrants against eight senior officials for alleged corruption, prompting police to arrest former congresswoman and former mayor. Outgoing President Morales and VP Cabrera 14 Jan took oaths of office in Central American Parliament – parliamentary institution of regional organisation Central American Integration System – in Guatemala City; protesters and opposition denounced move as attempt to secure immunity from prosecution. In further attempt to delegitimise dismantled anti-corruption body International Commission against Impunity (CICIG), outgoing Congress 10 Jan recommended arrest of CICIG judges and prosecutors, accusing them of wrongdoing. Giammattei 16 Jan presented plan to create Anti-Corruption Presidential Commission to replace CICIG, and launched it 20 Jan. Controversial Law of Acceptance of Charges came into force 16 Jan, potentially reducing sentences by half for those involved in corruption cases who accept their guilt; civil society group Alliance for Reform same day filed plea against law to Constitutional Court on grounds that it promoted impunity; court same day suspended law temporarily. Caravan of migrants who departed from Honduras 15 Jan heading toward U.S. reached Guatemala-Mexico border 19 Jan; migrants clashed with Mexican security forces as Mexico, under pressure from U.S., denied them entry (see Mexico). FM Brolo 22 Jan said govt would maintain controversial Asylum Cooperation Agreement signed with U.S. in July 2019 which allows U.S. to transfer asylum seekers to Guatemala so that they can apply there.

➔ **Honduras** Mandate of anti-corruption body Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) ended, prompting backlash from civil society, while state of emergency in prisons continued. Mandate of Organization of American States (OAS)-backed MACCIH expired 19 Jan following govt and OAS's failure to reach agreement on its renewal; around 800 people protested in capital Tegucigalpa 19 Jan against cessation of body, with students, businesses, unions and opposition calling for national strike. U.S. House of Representatives 18 Jan condemned non-renewal of MACCIH, as did EU 22 Jan. Insecurity persisted: authorities reported 7.1% increase in homicides in 2019 compared to 2018, to 3,996 cases; bus drivers 13 Jan went on strike to denounce gangs' extortion. State of emergency in prisons, declared by govt in Dec after tide of killings shook prison system, continued throughout month. Amid continued regional

focus on migration, acting U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security 9 Jan visited Honduras to finalise migration agreement under which U.S. will send asylum seekers from other states in region to Honduras to apply for asylum there. Caravan of migrants – reportedly 1,000 at departure but growing to 4,000 – heading toward U.S. left Honduras 15 Jan; migrants reached Guatemala-Mexico border 19 Jan, clashed with Mexican security forces as Mexico, under pressure from U.S. govt, denied them entry (see Mexico).

➡ **Mexico** Criminal violence remained high, particularly in central states, while security forces clashed with migrants attempting to enter country through southern border. In centre, Guanajuato state recorded 395 murders 1-27 Jan amid competition between Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) and alliance of local armed groups for control of oil siphoning, drug routes and drug retail markets; in Michoacán state, suspected members of unidentified crime group 20 Jan killed two soldiers and wounded ten police in ambush outside avocado industry hub Uruapan. Clashes between CJNG and rival group Los Viagras over north-bound trafficking corridors from Guerrero state (south) through Michoacán 11 Jan killed two alleged armed group members and police officer; clashes between same groups in Zirándaro, Guerrero starting 14 Jan killed at least ten and forced 800 civilians to flee. Suspected members of armed group Los Ardillos 18 Jan ambushed and killed ten members of indigenous community in Guerrero. Army 16 Jan killed eleven members of illegal armed group, reportedly after being ambushed in Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas state (south). In what observers lauded as effort to recognise scale of disappearances, govt 6 Jan reported 61,637 people currently classified as disappeared; previous govt maintained total was 40,000. Targeted killings of journalists and activists continued, with radio host Fidel Ávila, missing since Nov 2019, found shot dead 7 Jan in Michoacán state, women's rights activist Isabel Cabanillas found shot dead 19 Jan in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua state (north) and environmental activist Homero Gómez, missing since 13 Jan, found dead 29 Jan in Michoacán state. Amid regional focus on migration, caravan of Central American migrants, having departed from Honduras 15 Jan, reached Guatemala-Mexico border 19 Jan; after govt closed border 18 Jan under pressure from U.S., National Guard 19-21 Jan used tear gas and threw stones to prevent migrants entering country, leaving several wounded.

➡ **Nicaragua** Govt sought to ease growing international condemnation of human rights abuses, while opposition struggled to create cohesive front. In meeting with foreign diplomats 6 Jan to present outlines of govt's foreign policy for 2020, FM Denis Moncada said govt aimed to strengthen international cooperation, while defending principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. National Assembly (NA) 9 Jan announced eight focus areas for parliament including electoral reforms which will involve consultations with political parties but not opposition platforms such as Civic Alliance and Blue and White National Unity (UNAB). Govt 10 Jan launched "human rights and reconciliation" plan under which 7,500 local peace commissions reportedly created in 2019 would be used as arenas for reconciliation. Opposition gave contradictory signals as to its future unity. UNAB 4 Jan elected new political council. After UNAB founding member Civic Alliance 6 Jan reiterated it is separate from UNAB, both organisations 9 Jan said in joint statement they would continue to work together to defeat govt in upcoming 2021 elections, and 17 Jan announced formation of "National Coalition" open to civil society groups and political parties. Coordinadora Universitaria grouping of four university associations 15 Jan left Civic

Alliance for UNAB. Harassment of opposition continued including govt supporters 2 Jan throwing dye and stones at house of opposition activist Amaya Coppens in city of Estelí. Armed assailants 29 Jan killed at least two indigenous Mayangna people in attack reportedly linked to land disputes, on nature reserve in north.

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## **Caribbean**

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➡ **Haiti** Political instability loomed as President Moïse started to rule by decree and unveiled controversial plan to reform constitution. Following failure to hold parliamentary and municipal elections in Nov, Moïse 13 Jan announced mandates of lower house deputies and most senators had formally expired; security guards next day denied several senators access to parliament building; several senators said they would file lawsuit against Moïse for ending their mandate, while civil society condemned “dictatorial drift”. Moïse 17 Jan announced plan to overhaul constitution and put new draft to referendum to end “cycle of decades of political crises”; opposition denounced move as unconstitutional. Moïse 29 Jan initiated talks with opposition and civil society to find political solution; key opposition leaders boycotted talks, demanded change of govt. Insecurity persisted with gangs fighting for control of Cité Soleil neighbourhood in capital Port-au-Prince: gang members 11 Jan killed Judge Antoine Lucius; police 12 Jan reportedly extrajudicially killed individual suspected of having killed policeman 11 Jan.