

# Latin America and the Caribbean

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## **Andes**

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➔ **Colombia National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla reiterated willingness to resume negotiations as it released prisoners, a govt precondition to resume talks, while armed groups exploited COVID-19 pandemic to increase control over territories.** Following mediation by International Red Cross, govt ombudsman and Catholic church, ELN 12 June released two people held in Arauca department (east) since early May, 15 June released six others, including former police officers, in Norte de Santander department (north east), and 18 June handed over army captain captured 7 June in Arauca. ELN chief negotiator Pablo Beltrán 16 June reiterated group's willingness to negotiate with govt; however, govt insisted group is still holding up to ten hostages. Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, one of country's main drug trafficking groups) 12 June also released minor in Bajo Cauca area of Antioquia department (north west). Amid COVID-19 pandemic, several municipalities in Antioquia reported throughout month that criminal groups including AGC and AGC splinter group Caparros imposed checkpoints to limit movement. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident groups also reportedly issued movement restrictions notably in Putumayo (south), Cauca (south west), and Amazonas (south) departments. ELN prohibited return of urban residents to rural areas in south of Bolívar department (north). Amid national COVID-19 lockdown, govt ombudsman early June warned that armed groups were recruiting children out of school; concerns also grew over rise in femicides and forced disappearances of women, as bodies of two women were found 16 June in Segovia and Fredonia municipalities, Antioquia. Amid high rates of COVID-19 transmission notably in Amazonas department along Brazilian border and in Barranquilla and Cartagena cities on Atlantic coast, govt extended nationwide lockdown until 15 July; in capital Bogotá and second-largest city Medellín, protesters sporadically blocked major roads to protest movement restrictions, delays in distribution of food aid, and corruption in management of aid. Killings of social leaders continued; authorities 24 June recovered body of activist Edier Adán Lopera, allegedly killed 15 June by Caparros in Tarazá municipality, Antioquia.

⬇ **Venezuela Political crisis escalated further as President Maduro's govt took series of steps to strengthen control over electoral framework and silence opposition ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for Dec.** After talks between govt and opposition led by Juan Guaidó over composition of new electoral authority (CNE) broke down early June, govt-controlled Supreme Court 12 June appointed new CNE with absolute majority for Maduro allies and no seat for Guaidó-led opposition; Supreme Court also ordered changes to electoral law expanding seats in National Assembly from 167 to over 200, increasing number of lawmakers elected through party list rather than individually and modifying method for electing legislators representing indigenous communities; opposition leaders including Guaidó immediately rejected ruling, insisted only National Assembly is constitutionally allowed to elect CNE members. In following days, Supreme Court named new leaders, representing dissident factions more lenient toward govt, for

two out of four parties that compose mainstream opposition – Acción Democrática 15 June and Primero Justicia 16 June – and 17 June threatened third party Un Nuevo Tiempo with same fate; Supreme Court also reportedly looked to dissolve fourth party, Guaidó's Voluntad Popular. International actors including EU, U.S., regional body Lima Group and EU/Uruguay-led International Contact Group mid-June condemned recent moves as further deterioration of political crisis. After EU 29 June imposed sanctions on 11 senior officials for “undermining democracy and rule of law”, Maduro same day ordered EU ambassador to leave country within 72 hours. Previously, govt and opposition 2 June said they had reached agreement with Pan American Health Organization to cooperate to raise funds to address COVID-19 pandemic; humanitarian organisations celebrated move as precedent that could allow broader agreements.

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## **Central America and Mexico**

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➡ **El Salvador Power struggle continued between, on one hand, President Bukele and, on the other, Legislative Assembly and Supreme Court, over terms of COVID-19 restrictions.** Bukele 4 June issued executive decree extending nationwide quarantine until 15 June; 6 June vetoed emergency bill passed late May by Legislative Assembly, which set out plan to restart economy 8 June. Supreme Court 8 June ruled 4 June decree unconstitutional. Legislative Assembly 12 June passed new bill to reopen economy; next day, Bukele said he would veto it and issued new decree to reopen economy in phases from 16 June onward. Amid increase of reported COVID-19 cases, Bukele 25 June sent legislative proposal to Assembly to reinstall rolling 15-day nationwide quarantine. Meanwhile, opposition party Nuestro Tiempo 13 June called on Assembly to lift Bukele's legal immunity for breaking rule of law and defying checks and balances on power; Bukele's supporters immediately branded move as coup attempt. Justice and public security minister 4 June boasted improvements in security in first year of Bukele's presidency, with 62% decrease in homicides and 36% decrease in disappearances since June 2019. Newspaper El Faro 13 June reported burials carried out with COVID-19 protocol suggest death toll may be higher than official figures.

➡ **Guatemala President Giammattei dismissed health minister over allegations of mismanagement of COVID-19 crisis, while tensions with U.S. persisted over deportation of migrants.** Giammattei 19 June replaced health minister and three other Ministry officials; move followed investigation by Presidential Commission against Corruption into Ministry's alleged mismanagement of COVID-19 pandemic, including creation of ghost jobs – salaries collected without work being performed – and hiring of unqualified people, and newspaper Prensa Libre's 6 June accusation that Ministry had manipulated numbers of reported COVID-19 infections and deaths. Meanwhile, police reported they had arrested 24,800 people for violating COVID-19 lockdown 22 March-13 June. Amid concerns over potential spread of virus in overcrowded prisons, director of prison system 16 June said eight prisoners had died from COVID-19. Police 2 June reported improving security with 978 homicides Jan-May 2020, compared to 1,515 in same period last year. Criminal violence and local conflicts however continued. Notably, alleged smugglers 4 June set up roadblocks and attacked police precinct in San Marcos city (west). Violence also persisted in Sololá department (south), where govt

imposed state of emergency in three municipalities late May following deadly clashes over longstanding territorial dispute; after renewed clashes there 11 June left two dead, govt 25 June extended state of emergency for 30 days. Tensions with U.S. remained high over continued deportation flights amid COVID-19 pandemic and despite broader restrictions on international flights. U.S. under-secretary of state 5 June stated flights would continue; authorities reported 159 deportations 1-15 June; govt 23 June reported six new deportees tested positive for COVID-19.

➡ **Honduras Govt faced accusations of using COVID-19 crisis to stay in power, while controversial new penal code came into force.** Amid persistent opposition concerns that govt will use COVID-19 pandemic to call off general elections scheduled for 2022 and remain in power, head of National Electoral Council 9 June said body will not convene primary elections as planned in Sept due to delay in updating electoral register amid pandemic. President Hernández same day reiterated he will not run for re-election in 2022 and ruling National Party will hold primaries. Controversial penal code came into law 25 June despite objection from opposition, civil society and private sector who say code poses threat to freedom of expression and protects corrupt politicians and traffickers. Unrest and protests over food shortages and deteriorating livelihoods amid COVID-19 crisis continued nationwide, including protests in capital Tegucigalpa by govt workers 4 June and taxi and bus drivers 15 June. Concerns grew over COVID-19 spread in prisons with outbreaks reported at El Porvenir prison (north) and Támara prison (centre). Human rights organisations 15 June called for “humanitarian intervention” in Támara prison after authorities reported five inmates died of virus 8-14 June. Hernández was hospitalised 17 June after testing positive for COVID-19. Sentencing of Hernández’s brother, found guilty of drug smuggling by U.S. court in Oct 2019, delayed to 16 Sept.

↓ **Mexico Criminal groups' activity continued to drive record homicide rates, with 8 June deadliest day this year with 118 killings, while concerns persisted over both police brutality and violence against police.** Guanajuato state (centre), where Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) and alliance of smaller groups fight over territory, continued to concentrate highest number of homicides; notably, armed group 6 June attacked rehabilitation centre in Irapuato town killing ten. In Colima state (centre), unidentified assailants 16 June killed judge working on CJNG cases and his wife. With 2020 on course to become deadliest year on record, with 11,535 homicides nationwide Jan-April, increase of 309 from 2019, 8 June was deadliest day this year with 118 homicides. In Jalisco state (centre) capital Guadalajara, armed individuals reportedly working for police 5 June abducted 39 during protest against police following death of man in custody previous day; amid public outcry over police violence against protesters and fears of enforced disappearances of all 39, governor Enrique Alfaro 6 June apologised, claiming police had been infiltrated by organised crime groups, and said all protesters had been found. Police 9 June killed 16-year-old American boy in unclear circumstances in Acatlán de Pérez Figueroa town, Oaxaca state (south), prompting further outrage. Attacks on police continued including three police officers killed in Silao city, Guanajuato state 11 June, and police chief and deputy of Zamora city, Michoacán state (centre), killed 17 June; suspected CJNG 26 June ambushed Mexico City's police chief, wounding him and killing two bodyguards and civilian. Lack of coordination continued to plague govt's COVID-19 response. Health Ministry 10 June advised population to stay at home but President López Obrador next day called on people to return to "new normality".

➔ **Nicaragua President Ortega's management of COVID-19 crisis continued to come under scrutiny, opposition created united front and govt faced further international pressure to ensure accountability for human rights abuses.** Opposition platform Blue and White National Unity 6 June sent letter to UN Sec Gen Guterres requesting special representative be sent to Nicaragua to help with political and public health crises; relatives of political prisoners 11 June said 45 political prisoners suffering from COVID-19 still jailed. NGO Citizen Observatory, whose members include health workers, continued to dispute govt's account of low number of COVID-19 cases and deaths, counting 1,688 possible deaths against govt-reported 64 as of 17 June. Major opposition parties and civil society organisations 25 June signed agreement creating National Coalition to "fight for justice, democracy and against the dictatorship" ahead of general elections scheduled for next year; signatories include Blue and White National Unity and other opposition platform Civic Alliance, whose hesitancy to sign agreement created internal rifts, with several figures announcing departure 17-25 June. International actors maintained pressure on govt to ensure accountability for human rights violations, including repression of opposition and civil society since 2018 protest movement. U.S. Senate 16 June passed resolution encouraging President Trump's administration to hold Ortega and allies accountable for human rights violations and to couple pressure with diplomatic efforts; at Organization of American States' Permanent Council meeting 24 June, Sec Gen Almagro suggested organisation declare rupture of democratic order in country; Switzerland same day imposed sanctions on six high-level officials sanctioned by EU in May in response to ongoing human rights violations and curtailment of democracy and rule of law, and urged authorities to uphold national and international laws on human rights.

➡ **Brazil Amid COVID-19 spread and controversy over gov't management of pandemic, political polarisation deepened as Supreme Court continued moves toward investigations of close allies of President Bolsonaro, and president's supporters took to street to protest against legal proceedings.** Following rise of tensions between Bolsonaro and Supreme Court after latter in recent months launched multiple investigations against close allies of president, including two of his sons, president's supporters 13-14 June protested in Brasília, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, launching fireworks on Supreme Court building in capital Brasília; then Education Minister Abraham Weintraub who attended demonstration in Brasília, said Supreme Court judges should be arrested; Weintraub resigned 18 June and left for U.S. after Supreme Court announced investigations against him over accusations of libel and disinformation. Amid Bolsonaro's supporters' call for military to close Supreme Court, Secretary of Govt General Luiz Eduardo Ramos 12 June said military would not intervene. 70 retired army officers next day published letter accusing Supreme Court of making politically-motivated decisions. Following Supreme Court order, authorities 15 June arrested pro-Bolsonaro protest leader Sara Giromini over accusations of raising funds for anti-democratic actions that could threaten national security. Amid COVID-19 spread, power struggle continued between Bolsonaro on one hand, and mayors and governors on the other after Supreme Court in April allowed local authorities to impose isolation measures amid COVID-19 pandemic; São Paulo 19 June and Rio de Janeiro next day extended quarantine until early July. Small-scale demonstrations took place 28 June in several cities against Bolsonaro's handling of COVID-19 crisis, which reached 1mn reported active cases and 50,000 deaths 19 June.

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## **Caribbean**

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➡ **Guyana Deadlock over results of March general elections persisted.** Electoral commission 7 June released preliminary results of national recount of votes, giving opposition leader Irfaan Ali's People's Progressive Party (PPP) as winner; incumbent President Granger's Partnership for National Unity and Alliance for Change (APNU-AFC) next day said it would go to court to challenge vote recount result and accused PPP of electoral fraud. Electoral Commission chairperson 16 June ordered Chief Election Officer Keith Lowenfield to submit final report on elections based on results of recount; final report 23 June invalidated over 115,000 votes and declared ruling APNU-AFC as winner; regional bloc Caribbean Community next day expressed concern over report, saying it "does not reflect the results of the recount process". In joint statement, U.S., UK, Canada and EU 24 June emphasised "every vote, cast by every voter" must be reflected in final declaration of election results.

➡ **Haiti Amid persistent political crisis and insecurity, tensions emerged over electoral calendar.** Govt repeatedly argued that President Moïse's term ends 7 Feb 2022 while opposition claimed term ends a year earlier; divergence caused by differing interpretations of political crisis that followed Oct 2015 presidential election. Organization of American States Sec Gen Almagro 5 June stated Moïse's term should end in 2022, prompting several human rights groups and opposition parties to accuse regional body of "meddling in Haitian affairs". Tensions between gov't and hardline police organisation Fantom 509 continued. Fantom 509

7 June erected barricades and set tyres alight in capital Port-au-Prince to demand Moïse's resignation; justice minister 10 June claimed group had "terrorist" intentions. Amid ongoing concerns over insecurity, PM Jouthe 25 June said govt was looking into allegations by human rights organisations that criminal groups were using police armoured vehicles; unidentified gunmen 27 June killed three at meeting of political party Regroupement des Patriotes Responsables in Delmas city. Pan American Health Organization 16 June reported "worrying trend" of high COVID-19 transmission in border region between Haiti and Dominican Republic. Deportation of migrants from U.S. continued; deportees included former paramilitary leader Emmanuel Toto Constant, whom authorities arrested upon his arrival 23 June on charges of murder and torture in 1990s.