

# Latin America and the Caribbean

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## Andes

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↑ **Bolivia** **After tense electoral campaign, general elections – which returned Movement toward Socialism (MAS) to power – held largely peacefully 18 Oct.** MAS, party of former President Evo Morales, retained majority in both houses of Congress, while Luis Arce, its presidential candidate, secured victory with 55% of vote. Peaceful voting preceded by hostile pre-elections climate. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights office in Bolivia 2 Oct recorded at least 30 acts of violence against MAS sympathisers, other opposition parties as well as journalists between 6 Sept and 2 Oct. In country's largest city Santa Cruz, around 5,000 people 20 Oct protested against MAS victory, accused party of fraud. Right-wing Creemos party supporters same day set up vigils near electoral tribunal departmental centres in Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and Chuquisaca departments. Morales 29 Oct said he will return to Bolivia 11 Nov, after judge 26 Oct annulled arrest warrant against him for alleged sedition and terrorism. Outgoing parliament 29 Oct approved motion recommending that outgoing interim President Jeanine Áñez and 11 of her ministers face justice for responsibility in late 2019 violence, which left around 30 dead.

↑ **Chile** **Chileans approved rewriting of dictatorship-era constitution seen as symbol of neo-liberal economic model, amid one-year anniversary of protests over inequalities.** Referendum on new constitution, one key demand of protesters in late 2019, held 25 Oct; 79% in favour of instituting specially elected body of citizens to draft new constitution to be submitted to referendum by mid-2022, paving way for end to constitution in place since General Augusto Pinochet's military rule (1973-1990). In celebration, tens of thousands gathered overnight 25-26 Oct in capital Santiago's central square. Earlier in month, series of demonstrations took place to commemorate one-year anniversary of Oct 2019 protests over austerity and inequalities, which left some 20 people dead. During anti-govt protest in Santiago, policeman 2 Oct reportedly pushed teenage boy from bridge into Mapocho river; as demonstrators circulated video of incident, Office of the Ombudsman for Children same day denounced "attempted homicide" by police forces; police next day denied allegations, while govt ordered investigation. Thousands 19 Oct protested in cities across country, notably against police brutality; several riots and looting incidents reported; notably, masked individuals set fire to police headquarters and two churches in Santiago.

➡ **Colombia** **Social unrest remained widespread and armed groups continued to consolidate territorial control.** Thousands of indigenous people mostly from Cauca department (Pacific coast in south west) 19-20 Oct protested in capital Bogotá, demanding protection from armed groups, dismantling of paramilitaries, rural reform and reopening of peace negotiations with National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas; 21 Oct joined National Strike Committee-led demonstration in Bogotá against President Duque's social and economic policies; national strike day protests across country were significant but smaller than in Sept. Meanwhile, armed groups continued to expand territorial control and harass

populations. In apparent show of force, drug trafficking group Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC) 2 Oct tagged walls in 60 municipalities in ten departments; in pamphlet dated "Oct 2020", AGC in Sucre department (north) declared all indigenous and social leaders "military targets". ELN 9 Oct and again later in month reiterated willingness to negotiate bilateral ceasefire with govt and called on authorities to fully implement 2016 govt-Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) peace accord; govt maintained ELN had not met minimum conditions for talks including release of all hostages and cessation of criminal activity. Govt 25 Oct said recent military operation had killed Jaime Arias, alias Uriel, commander of ELN's Western War Front, in Chocó department (west). Three senior FARC senators 3 Oct said FARC was responsible for 1995 assassination of senator Álvaro Gómez Hurtado and five other public figures; members of ruling Democratic Centre party thereafter called for senators to resign; Hurtado's relatives, who believe others are responsible for killings, rejected FARC's statement as unfounded. UN Sec-Gen Special Representative in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu 14 Oct raised concerns over rising rural violence and killings of former FARC combatants, after UN Mission in Colombia late Sept reported 19 ex-FARC combatants killed 27 June-25 Sept, bringing total of ex-FARC combatants killed since peace accord to 224.

➡ **Venezuela Govt remained on course to hold legislative elections 6 Dec and regain control of National Assembly, as mainstream opposition reiterated boycott strategy.** Opposition-led National Assembly 1 Oct approved "consultation" of electorate, to take place around election date, over current strategy of "national and international pressure" on President Maduro's govt and rejection of any vote held before conditions for free election are in place. Following 30 Sept announcement he would not present candidates for 6 Dec elections, two-time presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, formally a member of mainstream opposition, early Oct said he would continue to pursue electoral solution to political crisis. Govt-controlled National Constituent Assembly 9 Oct approved "Anti-blockade Law" enabling Maduro govt to avoid legal obstacles to international trade and investment and budgetary oversight of ensuing proceeds; legislation ostensibly aimed at circumventing U.S. sanctions. Bogotá-based U.S. Chargé d'Affaires for Venezuela Jimmy Story 15 Oct said Washington would continue to recognise mainstream opposition leader Juan Guaidó as president until free elections were held. Organization of American States 21 Oct passed resolution "affirming its profound concern at and rejection of the maneuvers to secure control by the illegitimate regime of Nicolás Maduro". Intelligence agency SEBIN 20 Oct raided media outlet *Correo del Caroni* in eastern Puerto Ordaz city, seized equipment and detained two staff members. Guaidó's Voluntad Popular party figure and former political prisoner Leopoldo López 23 Oct fled his hideout in Spanish ambassador's residence and was reunited with his family in Spain's capital Madrid next day; Venezuelan FM 25 Oct accused Spain of complicity in escape of "dangerous criminal". Chief prosecutor 27 Oct announced "terrorist financing" charges against Voluntad Popular coordinator Roland Carreno days after he was arrested by security forces. Amid COVID-19 pandemic, Maduro 18 Oct announced reopening of number of govt offices, as well as tourist facilities and other economic sectors, arguing number of cases is steadily decreasing, despite doubts expressed by independent doctors.

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## Central America and Mexico

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➡ **El Salvador** **Amid uptick in gang violence, tensions ran high between President Bukele's govt on one hand and Legislative Assembly and Supreme Court on the other over delays in salary payments.** Country 11 Oct saw uptick in violence, with 13 reported murders including six from mass killing in capital San Salvador's Concepción neighbourhood; police immediately detained 18th Street gang member but released him next day. Daily murder rate average for 1-22 Oct period reached 5.1, up from 2.3 in June. Legislative Assembly and Supreme Court of Justice employees late Sept-early Oct said Bukele's administration was withholding their salaries; Bukele 6 Oct said govt would pay salaries next day but could not pay certain funds allocated to municipalities, prompting hundreds of city halls' employees to stage protests and roadblocks in at least 11 locations across country 7 Oct. Supreme Court 12 Oct ordered govt to avoid delaying salary payments again; Bukele immediately rejected ruling and accused judges of being "corrupt and sold"; delegation of mayors 19 Oct sent letter to presidency demanding allocation of funds, saying 75 city halls are on brink of bankruptcy. In ongoing investigations of high-level corruption cases, Attorney General's Office 8 Oct froze four bank accounts and seized eight properties of former Defence Minister David Munguía Payés, alleging they had been obtained illegally.

➡ **Guatemala** **Allegations of corruption continued to plague current and former govts, while tensions with Honduras rose over migration issues.** Opposition legislators 12 Oct reported irregularities in govt's purchase of emergency food in late Sept, and alleged financial subsidy destined for those most affected by COVID-19 pandemic had been distributed to at least 7,000 dead people since outbreak of pandemic. Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity (FECI) 16 Oct seized \$16mn in cash in house in Antigua town, near capital Guatemala City, tied to former Communications Minister José Luis Benito Ruiz; Attorney General's Office 20 Oct issued arrest warrant against Benito, who is fifth minister of former President Morales' administration being investigated for criminal activities. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 28 Oct announced "public designation" of First Secretary of Congress Felipe Alejos Lorenzana and former Deputy Delia Bac for role in alleged corruption, rendering them ineligible for entry to U.S. Meanwhile, attorney general 7 Oct issued administrative complaints against head of FECI and three FECI prosecutors, accusing them of corruption and money laundering; U.S. state department next day denounced charges, said attorney general must "prosecute the corrupt, not the anti-corruption prosecutors." As elections of Supreme Court magistrates remained stalled in Congress after Attorney General's Office in Feb revealed irregularities over selection process, Supreme Court 13 Oct passed ruling allowing current magistrates to stay in office. Police 6 Oct transferred 13 Barrio 18 gang members from Matamoros prison to different jails in attempt to prevent them from organising criminal activity while incarcerated. Tensions increased between Guatemala and Honduras over migration. As caravan of 3,000 Hondurans 1 Oct departed for Guatemala en route to U.S., govt same day declared state of prevention, allowing security forces to detain and deport migrants; authorities 4 Oct claimed around 3,300 migrants were sent back to Honduras, but accused Tegucigalpa of refusing to take back its citizens.

➡ **Honduras Armed group attacks on civil society activists continued, and tensions mounted with Guatemala over migration.** Armed groups continued to target human rights defenders, environmental activists and journalists following Sept uptick in murders. Notably, gunmen 13 Oct killed environmentalist Arnold Joaquín Morazán Erazo in Tocoa municipality, Colón department (north). Police 26 Oct reported 11.16 daily homicides across country for 1-25 Oct period, highest level in 2020. As part of ongoing anti-narcotic effort, security forces 8 Oct destroyed four hectares of coca plantations in San Esteban municipality, Olancho department (centre); weekly newspaper *Proceso* 23 Oct reported that counter-narcotic authorities had destroyed 331,500 coca plants and ten laboratories so far in 2020, mainly in Olancho and northern Colón and Yoró departments. Military police 21 Oct said 3.2 tonnes of cocaine had been seized so far in 2020. Tensions with Guatemala increased over migration. As caravan of 3,000 Hondurans 1 Oct departed for Guatemala en route to U.S., Guatemalan govt 4 Oct said 3,300 migrants were sent back to Honduras; Tegucigalpa immediately said only 1,000 migrants had returned and complained about Guatemalan govt's allegations that Honduras was refusing to take back its citizens.

➡ **Mexico Criminal violence continued unabated while Supreme Court endorsed President López Obrador's plan to hold referendum on prosecuting past presidents.** Armed group violence continued at high level notably in Guanajuato state (centre), where Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel (SRLC) and Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) compete for territory and oil siphoning. Amid concerns, first raised in Sept by former Justice Ombudsman of Guanajuato Juan Miguel Alcantara Soria, of possible alliance between Sinaloa Cartel and SRLC, authorities 1-7 Oct registered over 100 murders in state including 32 on 5 Oct; newspaper *Mazatlan Post* 6 Oct reported CJNG members extorting local business owners in Guanajuato city; authorities late Oct found at least 59 bodies in unmarked graves in Salvatierra municipality. Shootout between rival armed groups 3 Oct left six dead in capital Mexico City. Unidentified gunmen 29 Oct killed journalist Arturo Alba Medina in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state (north). Govt 7 Oct reported 77,171 people have gone missing since 2006 with 13,821 having disappeared during López Obrador's administration. Supreme Court 1 Oct endorsed López Obrador's plan to hold referendum on whether former presidents should be prosecuted, but removed any reference to past presidents in referendum question, framing it instead as whether "a process of clarifying political decisions taken in past years" should be undertaken; López Obrador next day hailed decision as "important step forward", while many others, including political commentators and human rights groups, criticised move as sign court lacks independence and justice is being co-opted. In U.S., former Public Security Minister Genaro García Luna 7 Oct pleaded not guilty in New York court to charges of collaborating with Sinaloa Cartel, trafficking and importing cocaine, and reporting false statements to U.S. authorities; Los Angeles police 15 Oct arrested former defence minister, General Salvador Cienfuegos, on charges of drug trafficking and money laundering. Amid COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn, López Obrador 8 Oct cut funding of 109 public trust funds, claiming officials had taken advantage of emergency funds. Govt 25 Oct admitted COVID-19 death toll was higher than official figures, revising total from 88,924 to 139,153.

↓ **Nicaragua** Amid new round of international sanctions against President Ortega's rule, authorities dramatically scaled up crackdown on opposition and media ahead of 2021 presidential election. Govt-controlled National Assembly 15 Oct passed "foreign agents" bill, which increases scrutiny of citizens and organisations receiving funds from abroad and bans them from participating in politics; 27 Oct passed "cybercrime" bill that criminalises spreading "false and/or misrepresented information" online. Ahead of votes, European Parliament 8 Oct condemned proposed legislations as "repressive tool to silence" critics. Police 11 Oct surrounded building where members of opposition platform National Coalition were holding meeting in Masaya, south of capital Managua, and govt supporters threw stones at journalists covering event, injuring two. Relatives of political prisoners 3 Oct reported at least 53 of 113 detainees at La Modelo prison near Managua had begun hunger strike, and three had sown their mouth shut, in protest at incarceration; relatives and members of opposition Blue and White National Unity next day demonstrated in Managua to request prisoners' release, while Permanent Commission on Human Rights 20 Oct was denied access to La Modelo prison to verify detention conditions. Opposition group Civic Alliance 26 Oct announced they were leaving National Coalition they co-created, notably to protest alleged lack of representation of youth movements. International actors increased pressure on govt to abide by rule of law and carry out electoral reforms. U.S. 9 Oct imposed sanctions on two Ortega allies and govt-linked bank for helping govt "undermine Nicaragua's democracy", while EU 12 Oct extended framework for targeted sanctions against officials involved in human rights violations including repression of civil society and democratic opposition, and actions undermining democracy and rule of law, for another year. In resolution adopted 21 Oct, Organization of American States expressed concern over "deterioration of democratic institutions" and urged govt to agree with opposition on electoral reforms by May 2021.

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## **Caribbean**

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➔ **Haiti** High levels of gang violence and social unrest persisted. Death of student, reportedly shot in back by security guard during unemployment-related protest in capital Port-au-Prince 2 Oct, sparked days of social unrest. Protesters burned cars and blocked roads in several of capital's neighbourhoods; in response, security forces fired tear gas and live ammunition to disperse crowds, reportedly killing demonstrator 5 Oct. Meanwhile, gang violence remained high. Notably, gunmen on motorcycle 6 Oct shot dead police inspector on road to Port-au-Prince; assailants allegedly belonging to G9 coalition of gangs same day set houses alight and fired gunshots in Port-au-Prince's Bel Air neighbourhood, toll unknown. In statement to UN Security Council, UN Special Representative Helen La Lime 5 Oct said late Aug murder of prominent lawyer and govt critic Monferrier Dorval "epitomizes for many the weak state of rule of law in the country" and expressed concern that unrest "has become increasingly prevalent" in past few months; Security Council 15 Oct extended mandate of UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), tasked to support political stability and governance, until Oct 2021. Election officials 2 Oct reiterated legislative, presidential and municipal elections would take place "in the next months"; move follows Sept and early Oct protests in Port-au-Prince against

President Moïse's appointment of electoral council by decree. Amid economic, political and security crisis, Haitians continued to seek refuge abroad. Turks and Caicos Islands authorities 9 Oct intercepted boat carrying 206 Haitian migrants in Caribbean Sea. Dominican Republic 15 Oct deployed about 10,000 soldiers to border with Haiti to prevent undocumented migrants from crossing.