

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ **Colombia** **Authorities apprehended most wanted crime lord while rural violence persisted, particularly in key trafficking routes including Pacific coast, Bajo Cauca and Venezuelan border.** Authorities 23 Oct arrested leader of country's largest criminal organisation, alias Otoniel, in joint army, air force and police operation in Antioquia department; President Duque hailed capture as "biggest blow against drug trafficking in our country this century". Fierce fighting involving armed groups and military sparked mass displacements along Pacific coast, including of over 230 people from indigenous reserve in Nariño department mid-Oct, and of over 400 in Cauca department around 20 Oct as military engaged in heavy fighting against Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidents and National Liberation Army. UN also reported inter-urban displacement accelerated in Oct in Buenaventura port city, Valle del Cauca department, due to armed group competition for territorial control. Social leaders in Antioquia and Córdoba departments throughout month reported increasing threats from Gulf Clan, one of country's main criminal organisations, and other armed groups. Attacks on social leaders continued at high level. Notably, unidentified assailants 1 and 7 Oct killed three activists in Putumayo department; 6 Oct attacked teenage son of spokesperson of national coca growers' union in Córdoba department. String of attacks on security forces late Sept-early Oct left several dead across country, including two police in Santander de Quilichao municipality, Cauca department, 9 Oct. Violence against former FARC members persisted with at least two killed in Cauca department week of 9-15 Oct. Govt 6 Oct said it deployed 14,000-strong military unit to Norte de Santander department near border with Venezuela; move came one day after Caracas reopened land border with Colombia after two-year closure. Constitutional Court 1 Oct extended mandate of Truth Commission, created by 2016 peace accord, for another nine months; Commission had been set to finish its work in Nov, but has yet to deliver its final report. International Criminal Court 28 Oct said it had shelved preliminary probe into crimes committed during Colombia's nearly six-decade civil war, saying it would leave investigations to domestic institutions.

➔ **Ecuador** **Tensions ran high as protests erupted over soaring fuel prices.** Authorities 22 Oct announced 12% increase in fuel prices, said new prices will be frozen. Move aimed at appeasing growing social tensions over fuel prices, which in last year have risen by over 40%, however failed to contain indigenous groups-led protests. Thousands 26 Oct took to streets to protest rise in prices, calling for freeze at lower rates; Defence Minister Luis Hernandez same day said dozens arrested for blocking roads and at least five security forces injured. Main indigenous group 28 Oct suspended protests after govt's invitation to negotiate. Meanwhile, President Lasso 18 Oct declared state of emergency for 60 days to address drug trafficking violence and prison insecurity; measure implemented amid rising homicide rates and following deadliest prison riot in years, which left over 100 dead in Guyaquil town late Sept.

➔ **Venezuela President Maduro suspended talks with opposition in protest against extradition of top ally to U.S.** Cape Verde 16 Oct extradited businessman and Maduro's close collaborator Alex Saab to U.S. on money-laundering charges. In response, govt immediately suspended talks with opposition, ahead of third round scheduled for 17-20 Oct in Mexico City; authorities same day also rearrested six oil executives, including five U.S. citizens, who had been under house arrest in capital Caracas on embezzlement charges. Opposition's negotiating team and Norwegian facilitator 17 Oct urged govt to resume talks. Meanwhile, diplomatic spat erupted between EU and Caracas. In effort to reassure those concerned that EU election observation mission might "legitimise" regional and local elections scheduled for 21 Nov, Borrell 8 Oct said mission's report, not its presence, would "legitimise or de-legitimise" process; govt same day condemned "interventionist" attitude and accused EU of favouring opposition. UN 14 Oct confirmed it would be sending expert panel to monitor elections. Opposition remained divided over fate of one of country's major overseas assets, Colombia-based chemical company Monómeros, which has been under opposition control since 2019 and filed for bankruptcy in Sept. Senior member of opposition leader Juan Guaidó's interim govt, Julio Borges, 12 Oct reiterated overseas assets should be supervised by multilateral agency rather than politicians. Guaidó's Voluntad Popular party figure Leopoldo López same day insisted on extension of interim govt's mandate when it expires in Jan 2022, arguing Maduro's govt would otherwise regain control of overseas assets. Guaidó 12 Oct also said 2015-2021 opposition-controlled National Assembly had approved decree to designate new board of directors at Monómeros; other opposition parties however immediately rejected claim, said they had only approved establishment of commission of inquiry into Monómeros' administration. Central Bank 1 Oct slashed six zeroes from bolívar currency to facilitate its use amid hyperinflation. Govt 5 Oct reopened border with Colombia after two-year closure due to political and diplomatic crisis. Imprisoned former Defence Minister Raul Baduel, considered political prisoner by opposition, 12 Oct died officially of COVID-19; UN and U.S. in following days called for independent investigation.

Southern Cone and Brazil

➔ **Brazil Political tensions continued to run high as special parliamentary commission called for criminal charges against President Bolsonaro for mishandling COVID-19 health crisis.** News investigation project "Pandora papers" 3 Oct revealed Economy Minister Paulo Guedes had deposited several million dollars in tax heavens. Guedes 20 Oct suggested govt might lift spending cap to pay for increased social spending; following announcement, dollar price spiked, stock market crashed and four economy ministry top employees resigned next day. Bolsonaro 21 Oct released video in which he said COVID-19 vaccines could cause AIDS; announcement immediately sparked widespread condemnation, and social media groups Facebook and Instagram 24 Oct removed Bolsonaro's video from their platforms, categorising it as "fake news"; YouTube next day removed video and suspended Bolsonaro's account for a week. Senate's commission investigating govt's role in COVID-19 pandemic 26 Oct recommended that Bolsonaro be tried on criminal

charges – including for alleged crimes against humanity – for his handling of health crisis; same day asked Supreme Court to request Facebook and Twitter to ban Bolsonaro’s accounts indefinitely and requested access to records of Bolsonaro’s internet activity. Meanwhile, Supreme Court Judge Alexandre de Moraes 21 Oct issued arrest order against close Bolsonaro ally Allan dos Santos, now based in the U.S., for alleged role in disseminating fake information and anti-democratic actions; de Moraes 28 Oct warned “digital militias” linked to Bolsonaro would continue to “spread hatred, conspiracy, fear and to influence the elections” in 2022.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador President Bukele continued to face mounting opposition from civil society.** Around 4,000 people 17 Oct took to streets in capital San Salvador, decrying Bukele’s “antidemocratic” moves in past months, including ouster of Supreme Court’s Constitutional Chamber judges and potential plan to seek second consecutive term despite constitutional prohibition on re-election, as well as adoption of Bitcoin as legal tender; in attempt to hinder march, police reportedly set up checkpoints along main highways and stopped vehicles headed to capital. Bukele same day responded to critics with changing his Twitter bio to “Emperor of El Salvador”. In apparent attempt to stem nascent protest movement, National Assembly 20 Oct banned mass gatherings for 45 days, citing need to prevent COVID-19 spread, while exempting sporting and cultural events. National Association of Private Enterprise and José Simeón Cañas University 8 Oct called on International Monetary Fund, with which govt is negotiating \$1.3bn loan, to set conditions for any loan agreement to prohibit Bukele’s re-election and ensure ousted judges are restored. Inter-American Press Association’s annual report on press freedom 20 Oct ranked El Salvador 18th out of 22 countries, losing two positions compared to 2020. Meanwhile, U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to El Salvador Jean Manes 5 Oct urged authorities to abide by extradition agreement with Washington; comment comes after Supreme Court in Aug halted top MS-13 gang leader’s extradition to U.S.. U.S. embassy in El Salvador 31 Oct denied links to alleged plot to disband parliamentary group of Bukele’s New Ideas party, after party published recording in which individual negotiates, allegedly on behalf of U.S. govt, departure of two lawmakers from parliamentary group.

➔ **Honduras In possible game-changing move ahead of 28 Nov general elections, top opposition parties formed alliance.** Opposition parties Liberty and Refoundation (Libre) and Salvador de Honduras 13 Oct formed alliance and rallied behind Libre’s Xiomara Castro as presidential candidate, with view to offering her stronger platform against ruling party candidate Nasry Asfura. CID-Gallup poll 8 Oct had previously indicated Asfura leading race with 21% voting intention, followed by Castro and Salvador de Honduras’ candidate Salvador Nasralla with 18% each. Congress 7 Oct approved reforms to Penal Code and anti-money-laundering law, which among other changes, identify civil society organisations investigating corruption as “Politically Exposed People” – those who are more vulnerable to being involved in bribery and corruption by virtue of their position – and expand definition of crime of usurpation, which could lead to criminalisation of protests. Critics, including head of public ministry’s anti-

corruption prosecution office, same day argued changes part of effort to protect members of Congress from corruption investigations. Public ministry 18 Oct detained ruling National Party of Honduras mayor of Talanga town, Roosevelt Eduardo Aviléz López, and some of his family members, on money-laundering charges.

➔ **Mexico Criminal violence remained at high level, and security dialogue with U.S. kicked off.** Shootout between two criminal groups 10 Oct left 20 dead in Guadalupe y Calvo municipality, Chihuahua state (north). Unidentified gunmen same day killed four off-duty police officers in Zacatecas municipality, Zacatecas state (centre north). In Michoacán state (centre), unidentified gunmen 18 Oct attacked nightclub in Morelia municipality, killing six. Shootout between suspected criminal group members 20 Oct killed two foreign tourists in Tulum resort town, Quintana Roo state (south). In Tamaulipas state (north near U.S. border), clashes erupted between law enforcement and Gulf Cartel (CDG) in Matamoros town, leaving four CDG dead 17 Oct and at least another three killed 22-23 Oct, including cartel leader Ariel Treviño Peña, alias “el Tigre”. Interior ministry 5 Oct said 47 journalists and 94 human rights and environmental activists killed since start of President López Obrador’s term in late 2018, with perpetrators sentenced in only five and two cases respectively; also said state officials responsible for 43% and “organized crime” for 33% of attacks against journalists, which continued in Oct. Unidentified gunmen 26 and 28 Oct shot and killed two journalists in Guerrero and Chiapas states (south). Meanwhile, govt 6 Oct created Truth Commission to investigate grave human rights violations committed during country’s so-called anti-leftist “dirty war” between 1965 and 1990. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 8 Oct attended High-Level Security Dialogue in capital Mexico City to discuss new security cooperation agreement between U.S. and Mexico with view to replacing current Merida Initiative launched in 2007 to fight organised crime and associated violence. Authorities 6 Oct deported 129 Haitian migrants despite criticism from human rights and conflict prevention groups. In Hidalgo municipality (Tamaulipas state, north), authorities 8 Oct detained 652 mostly Guatemalan migrants bound for U.S. border, including 200 minors, 101 of whom were deported to Guatemala 12 Oct. Clashes 23 Oct erupted in Chiapas state (south) as law enforcement tried to contain thousands of migrants from Haiti, South America and Central America heading north.

➔ **Nicaragua Amid continued crackdown on dissent, President Ortega’s controversial fourth term bid in 7 Nov general election risks worsening country’s political instability and isolation in coming weeks and months.** Several attacks against opposition activists reported in Nicaragua and neighbouring Costa Rica. Notably, police officers 7 Oct temporarily detained opposition activist Kicha López at her home in Madriz department over allegations of plotting against govt; López’s mother reportedly injured during raid. In second attack recorded since Sept against Nicaraguan political activists in Costa Rica, armed individual 2 Oct assaulted and injured civil society activist Raiza Hope, who had fled to Costa Rica in 2018, in capital San José. Authorities 21 Oct arrested President and VP of lead business chamber, Superior Council of Private Enterprise, Michael Healy and Álvaro Vargas, on conspiracy and money-laundering charges. Authorities 4 Oct also removed Managua Appeals Court President Gerardo Rodríguez, apparently for admitting appeal filed by opposition Citizens for

Freedom (CxL) party against cancellation of its legal status. Ortega same day officially launched campaign for fourth term. International actors continued to denounce Ortega's authoritarian drift. U.S. State Dept 14 Oct said "electoral process has lost all credibility" due to Ortega's "undemocratic and authoritarian actions", and U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 22 Oct accused Ortega of trying to establish "authoritarian dynasty". EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell 18 Oct said Nicaragua is "one of the worst dictatorships in the world" with Ortega and his wife, VP Rosario Murillo, preparing "fake elections" to stay in power. Organization of American States (OAS) 20 Oct passed resolution calling for immediate release of political prisoners, condemning govt's "efforts to subvert the electoral process", and threatening to take further actions during OAS General Assembly in Nov.

Caribbean

↓ **Haiti** **Gang violence and kidnappings spiked in and around capital Port-au-Prince, sparking mass protests amid severe fuel shortages.** Gangs blocked delivery of fuel across country, notably seizing at least five petrol tankers in Cité Soleil commune week of 4-9 Oct. Suspected members of 400 Mawozo gang 16 Oct abducted 17 Christian missionaries including 16 U.S. nationals and one Canadian on outskirts of Port-au-Prince; authorities few days later said gang was demanding \$1mn ransom for each hostage, and Mawozo gang 21 Oct threatened to kill hostages. Several strikes and protests held throughout month to denounce escalating insecurity and fuel shortages. Notably, shops and schools in Port-au-Prince shuttered 18 Oct as part of nationwide strike. Haitian NGO Center for Analysis and Research in Human Rights 20 Oct said gangs kidnapped at least 119 people across country in first half of Oct, marking significant surge as entire month of Sept recorded 117 kidnappings; also said 90% of kidnappings committed in capital region. As fuel shortages threatened operations of medical facilities, G9 gang coalition leader Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier 25 Oct said he would ensure access to fuel terminals if PM Ariel Henry resigned. Meanwhile, repatriations of thousands of Haitians notably from U.S. and Mexico continued early Oct despite four UN agencies' warning late Sept that "dire" conditions in Haiti were "not conducive to forced returns". Former first lady Martine Moïse 7 Oct filed complaint against Henry and other officials for alleged involvement in assassination of President Moïse in July. Head of ombudsman-like govt agency Office of Citizen Protection Renan Hédouville 6 Oct claimed Henry was "major obstacle" in assassination investigation, called on UN Special Investigation Commission "to support judge...in charge of the case". UN Security Council 15 Oct extended mandate of Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), tasked to support political stability and governance, until July 2022.

