

# Latin America and the Caribbean

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## **Southern Cone**

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➔ **Brazil** Presidential elections took place largely peacefully, paving way for Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva’s victory in tight run-off against President Bolsonaro.

*Left-wing candidate Lula won presidential election in tight electoral race.* In second round of presidential elections held 30 Oct, former President Lula narrowly defeated incumbent President Bolsonaro with 50.9% of votes against Bolsonaro’s 49.1%, becoming latest in wave of left-wing electoral victories across Latin America. In speech delivered 30 Oct, Lula pledged to unite divided country, saying he “will govern for 215 million Brazilians, and not just for those who voted for me”. Foreign leaders, including U.S. President Biden and Russian President Putin, congratulated him.

*Bolsonaro had yet to concede defeat by end of Oct, but appeared unlikely to challenge vote.* Following months-long criticism over reliability of electronic ballot systems and threats he would contest result, Bolsonaro remained silent following vote, suggesting he will allow transition process to go ahead. By end of month, however, he had not conceded defeat, in contrast to most of his closest allies. Meanwhile, amid concerns of heightened risk of post-electoral violence, few incidents took place. Nonetheless, dozens of trucks drivers began blocking highways and demanding coup after polls closed, ongoing at end of month; unknown assailants 31 Oct killed man celebrating Lula’s victory.

*Calm largely prevailed after first round of voting despite small-scale incidents.* Following first round of elections held 4 Oct, some incidents took place ahead of final vote amid high tensions. Notably, Bolsonaro supporter was stabbed to death in Itanhaém, São Paulo state, 6 Oct; 29 Oct *bolsonarista* congresswoman chased Lula supporter with gun. Federal Highway Police, organisation closely allied with Bolsonaro, 30 Oct set up hundreds of roadblocks to delay voters in north east and other centres of support for Lula, allegedly affecting thousands of voters. Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes same day ordered highway police chief to immediately cease operations.

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## **Andes**

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➔ **Colombia** Govt announced formal negotiations with National Liberation Army (ELN) would start in Nov, while criminal outfits publicly expressed interest in peace talks; govt struck deal to advance rural reform.

*Govt made progress toward initiating dialogue with armed and criminal actors.* Amid President Petro’s ongoing efforts for dialogue with armed and criminal organisations as part of his “Total Peace” plan, govt 4 Oct announced it will begin formal negotiations with leftist guerrilla movement ELN in early Nov, with Venezuela serving as guarantor state. At least 22 armed and criminal groups have

now publicly expressed interest in peace talks with govt. Most recently, former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) chief negotiator and leader of dissident Segunda Marquetalia faction Ivan Márquez 18 Oct released video saying his group was open to dialogue; Comandos de la Frontera, Márquez-allied dissident front along border with Ecuador, day prior also announced interest.

*Govt struck deal securing land intended for conflict victims and farmers.* Petro administration 8 Oct reached deal with country's largest cattle association FEDEGAN to purchase 3mn hectares of land. Agreement is intended to help fulfil pledges made in 2016 peace accord between govt and FARC to redistribute land to victims of armed conflict, displaced persons and landless farmers, although details remain unclear.

*Govt continued to seek stronger relations with Venezuela, but issues remain.* Following re-opening of Colombia-Venezuela border late Sept, roughly 80 lawmakers from both countries' legislatures 21 Oct met at shared border at Villa del Rosario, Norte de Santander department, to participate in "Binational Parliamentary Meeting" to consolidate bilateral relations. However, in visit to border region 17 Oct, Petro criticised continued transit of goods through informal roads despite opening of formal crossings; also asked Venezuelan President Maduro to return to Inter-American System of Human Rights, which Venezuela left in 2013, in order "to deepen democracy" and eliminate "political persecution".

➡ **Ecuador Series of deadly prison riots prompted concern from UN over "dire situation" in prisons; high levels of violence persisted in Guayaquil city.**

*Spate of deadly prison riots erupted between rival criminal outfits.* Amid soaring levels of violence between rival gangs in Ecuador's prisons, clashes 3 Oct broke out at Cotopaxi prison in Latacunga town (centre), killing at least 16 and injuring 43. According to national prisons agency, prisoners fought with guns and knives before guards managed to re-establish control. Leandro Norero, alias "El Patrón", a money launderer, drug-trafficking financier and member of Los Lobos gang, was among those killed. Gang feuds in prisons persisted after Norero's death, indicating changing alliances. Notably, prison clash 5 Oct at Guayas prison in port city of Guayaquil left at least 13 dead and 22 injured. Second riot at Guayas prison 24 Oct, reportedly between two opposing gangs clashing over prison control, killed one and injured two. UN torture prevention sub-committee 6 Oct expressed concern over "dire situation" and called on state to take "immediate and additional measures to tackle the country's complex prison crisis". As of end of Oct, over 100 inmates had been killed during prison riots in 2022.

*Violent crime continued to plague Guayaquil amid calls for more resources to curb insecurity.* Authorities 15 Oct ended state of emergency, imposed in Aug following escalation of violence in Guayaquil, and military departed city streets. However, violence persisted unabated. Notably, authorities 15-17 Oct recorded 15 violent deaths in city; Guayaquil and Durán cities 21-23 Oct reportedly experienced their bloodiest weekend of 2022 so far, with at least 21 murders recorded. Meanwhile, Guayaquil's police force 14 Oct incorporated 1,564 new officers into its ranks as part of plan to add 30,000 new officers to National Police across three years. At ceremony, Interior Minister Zapata called on President Lasso for more resources to combat rising insecurity.

➔ **Venezuela**    **Opposition agreed on schedule for primaries ahead of 2024 polls, govt suffered diplomatic setbacks at UN human rights council, and U.S. imposed new laws to curb Venezuelan migration.**

*Opposition agreed on timetable for primaries, but faced challenge at Organization of American States (OAS).* Amid claims that Mexico talks between govt and opposition alliance Unitary Platform could soon resume, Platform representatives mid-Oct met in Panama with head of U.S. Venezuela Affairs Unit Ambassador James Story. According to 14 Oct report by Reuters news agency, opposition leaders agreed to hold primaries in June 2023 ahead of 2024 presidential election. However, 19 Oct communiqué outlining rules for primaries did not mention enlisting collaboration of National Electoral Council, suggesting participation could be severely curtailed due to inadequate technical capabilities; participation could also be limited as most members of Venezuelan diaspora, now around seven mn, will not be able to participate due to onerous conditions for registration and lack of access to consulates. Meanwhile, at OAS General Assembly held 5-7 Oct in Peru's capital Lima, motion challenging status of opposition leader Juan Guaidó's representative, Gustavo Tarre, as Venezuela's permanent representative at OAS failed to obtain required 2/3 majority. However, 19 members backed proposal to discuss removing Tarre, indicating region's growing impatience with recognition of "interim govt".

*Internationally, govt suffered diplomatic setbacks on human rights front.* UN Human Rights Council 7 Oct voted to extend mandate of Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela by two years; body, which FM Carlos Faría same day described as "designed for interventionism", mid-Sept had reported that human rights violations have been govt policy under President Maduro since 2014. In further setback for govt, Venezuela 11 Oct lost bid for re-election to UN Human Rights Council, obtaining only 88 votes compared to Costa Rica's 134 and Chile's 144.

*U.S. announced plans to expel Venezuelans entering U.S. illegally to Mexico.* In bid to curb rising numbers of Venezuelans entering U.S., Washington 12 Oct announced it would begin applying former President Trump's Title 42 provision of immigration law to Venezuelans, meaning those who enter U.S. without visas will be expelled to Mexico, which agreed to host them (see Mexico).

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## **Central America and Mexico**

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➔ **El Salvador**    **Govt continued crackdown on gangs amid seventh renewal of state of exception since March; relations with Western partners grew more strained.**

*Authorities launched major military operation targeting gang members.* Gang-related homicide early Oct prompted govt to launch massive military operation in Comasagua municipality (centre west). Over 2,000 soldiers and police 2 Oct surrounded and closed off town of 12,000 inhabitants to search for members of MS-13 gang, and arrested at least 155 gang members in following days; Attorney General's Office 16 Oct charged detainees with "illicit association" and other crimes.

*State of exception renewed for seventh time amid concerns over human rights.* Then human rights ombudsperson Apolonio Tobar 14 Oct released report revealing that between 27 March (when state of exception was first imposed) and 3 Oct, his

office had received 3,777 complaints of human rights violations; despite allegations, Legislative Assembly same day renewed state of exception for seventh time. Although measure remains popular among Salvadorans, survey published 18 Oct by Central American University revealed growing awareness of state of exception's limitations; notably, 51% of interviewees feared it would not solve gang issue and over 30% knew someone unjustly detained.

*New allegations against senior figures of past collusion with gangs emerged.* Attorney General's Office 13 Oct formally accused former ARENA party presidential candidate Norman Quijano of negotiating with gangs to gain electoral support in 2014 elections. Meanwhile, news outlet *El Faro* 27 Oct published new evidence that authorities released senior MS-13 gang leader Élder Canales Rivera, alias "Crook," from prison in November 2021, despite multiple upstanding sentences adding up to over four decades in prison.

*In other important developments.* El Salvador was one of three countries to abstain in Organization of American States General Assembly's resolution 7 Oct denouncing Nicaraguan President Ortega's crackdown on dissent; 12 Oct did not participate in UN General Assembly vote to condemn Russia's pledged annexation of four Ukrainian territories.

➡ **Honduras Alliance between ruling Libre party and Honduras' Saviour Party reportedly fell apart, insecurity persisted, and efforts to establish international anti-corruption body proceeded at slow pace.**

*Ruling alliance reportedly broke down.* Political frictions surfaced after former President Manuel Zelaya Rosales, coordinator of ruling Libre party, 14 Oct announced alliance between Libre and Honduras' Saviour Party (PSH), which helped Xiomara Castro win 2021 presidential election, had "broken down". Although alliance had shown fractures since Oct 2021 formation, VP and head of PSH Salvador Nasralla had recently been criticising govt more frequently and publicly for bypassing him in executive decisions, leading to 14 Oct announcement. Gilberto Ríos, leader of Libre, 15 Oct blamed U.S. embassy in Honduras for collapse, claiming it was working with Nasralla to break alliance. Much-weakened coalition in Congress could threaten govt's ability to push through legislation.

*High levels of violence persisted, notably targeting journalists and women.* Gunmen 10 Oct shot dead journalist Edwin Josué Andino and his father in capital Tegucigalpa, marking fifth journalist killed in 2022; police next day said crime was planned by organised criminal structures. Reports 22 Oct emerged that 18th Street gang members had forced at least 20 families in Villa Nueva neighbourhood of Tegucigalpa to flee after receiving dead threats. Meanwhile, local feminist organisation "Visitación Padilla" Women's Movement for Peace 24 Oct called on govt to declare national emergency after reports emerged that 13 women had been killed across country previous week.

*Negotiations to establish anti-corruption body continued at slow pace.* MPs from Libre, National and PSH parties 19 Oct formed multiparty front in support of establishing UN-backed International Commission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (CICIH), for which negotiations have been proceeding at slow pace. Chancellor Enrique Reina 26 Oct said govt had received new memorandum draft from UN.

➔ **Mexico** **Deadly violence, notably targeting local officials, remained high, authorities continued to push through legislation extending military control over policing, and govt struck deal with U.S. to host Venezuelan migrants.**

*Lethal violence persisted at high levels, notably targeting local officials.* In south, unidentified individuals, allegedly linked to criminal outfit, 5 Oct stormed town hall of San Miguel Totolapan municipality, Guerrero state, killing at least 20 including local mayor, police officers and municipal employees; unidentified assailant same day shot dead local Deputy Gabriela Marin in Cuernavaca city, Morelos state. Also in south, in Tabasco state, unknown gunmen 11 Oct killed former mayor of Comalcalco municipality; unknown gunmen 26 Oct shot dead environmental activist in Santiago Jamiltepec municipality, Oaxaca state. In centre, unknown gunmen 15 Oct opened fire in bar in Irapuato municipality, Guanajuato state, killing at least 12; unknown gunmen 4 Oct shot dead activist looking for her disappeared daughter in Puebla city, Puebla state. In north, in Ciudad Juárez city, Chihuahua state, unidentified assailants 13 Oct shot dead former prosecutor for homicides against women and one other. Confrontations between armed groups 13 Oct left at least five dead in four municipalities of Sonora state (north west).

*Legislative process to deepen militarisation of public security continued apace.* Congress 13 Oct approved constitutional reform allowing armed forces to carry out public security tasks until 2028 instead of 2024; bill must now be approved by 17 out of 32 state legislatures to become law. As of 27 Oct, 13 states had approved reform. Meanwhile, Chamber of Deputies 11 Oct approved initiative allowing federal govt to take unused funds in financial system (bank accounts that have been inactive for over six years) to buy police equipment.

*Govt agreed to host Venezuelan migrants turned away at U.S. border.* In move condemned by human rights groups, U.S. 12 Oct announced agreement with Mexico to send Venezuelan migrants back into Mexico under Title 42 provision of immigration law introduced during Trump era. Following announcement, migration authorities 15 Oct urged Venezuelan migrants to avoid irregular entry into their territory, saying it would make them “ineligible” for asylum in U.S.

➔ **Nicaragua** **Govt crackdown on critics continued despite global and regional criticism; tensions with West intensified amid new U.S. and EU sanctions.**

*Crackdown on civil society and Catholic Church continued.* Interior ministry 12 Oct revoked legal status of 100 NGOs, including 51 international organisations; 18 Oct revoked 58 more and 27 Oct 100 more, bringing total number of groups banned since Dec 2018 to well over 2,500. Crackdown on Catholic Church also persisted. Notably, authorities 13 Oct arrested priest from Santa Martha church in capital Managua; judge 14 Oct accused seven members from Diocese of Matagalpa of undermining national sovereignty and spreading false news. Meanwhile, National Assembly 13 Oct passed law giving govt-controlled National Film Centre authority to authorise all audio-visual productions made in country.

*International and regional actors continued to denounce repression.* Inter-American Court of Human Rights 4 Oct ordered immediate release of 45 political prisoners, citing health risks in “precarious detention conditions”. Argentinian

justice ministry 5 Oct opened investigation against Ortega, first lady Rosario Murillo and their closest collaborators to determine whether they had committed crimes against humanity. Organization of American States General Assembly 7 Oct approved resolution calling for release of imprisoned opposition figures, cessation of repression against civilians and end to persecution of church figures. El Salvador, Honduras and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines abstained from voting.

*Tensions ran high with U.S. and European Union (EU).* Following expulsion late-Sept of EU Ambassador Bettina Muscheidt and severing of diplomatic ties with Netherlands, EU 10 Oct declared Nicaraguan ambassador in Brussels persona non grata; 13 Oct extended sanctions against 21 officials and three govt entities for another year. Meanwhile, U.S. 24 Oct imposed sanctions on country's mining authority, along with another top govt official, and imposed visa restrictions on over 500 govt insiders and their families; Ortega 27 Oct said U.S. sanctions are forcing Nicaraguans to emigrate.

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## **Caribbean**

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### **➔ Haiti Political crisis deepened as anti-govt protests continued and gangs extended their control across major cities.**

*Gangs continued to extend their power, targeting security forces and economic assets.* Members of "Vitelhomme" gang attacked security personnel during month, 1 Oct killing National Palace security officer, 18 Oct killing Croix-des-Bouquets chief police commissioner, both in Tabarre commune, eastern part of capital Port-au-Prince. Meanwhile, members of "5 Seconds" gang 8 Oct attacked country's largest flour mill, and G9 gang alliance members continued to blockade Varreux oil terminal, disrupting fuel deliveries and exacerbating humanitarian crisis. PM Henry and 18 cabinet members 7 Oct formally asked international community for "specialised armed force" to unblock Varreux and secure fuel flow; group of senators 9 Oct demanded Henry defer "illegal" request. In special session held 17 Oct, UN Security Council discussed possible sanctions against gang leaders and their sponsors, unanimously approved 21 Oct; also proposed "non-UN international security assistance mission", but as of 28 Oct resolution draft had not been shared with member states. Meanwhile, U.S. Sec State Blinken 12 Oct announced security assistance and visa restrictions targeting Haitian officials and others involved in gang activity.

*Political crisis deepened amid ongoing anti-govt protests.* Protests demanding Henry's resignation continued, leaving unknown number dead amid security forces' heavy-handed response. Pitit Dessalines party leader Moïse Jean Charles 17 Oct called on demonstrators to target govt officials' homes and "buy machetes to lead the revolution". Assistant U.S. Sec State Nichols 12 Oct flew to Port-au-Prince for separate meetings with Henry, civil society platform Montana Accord Monitoring Office and Fritz Jean – selected by Montana Accord to lead transitional govt but whose relations with platform have since deteriorated – to resolve political crisis. Nichols urged all three to reach agreement, but political paralysis persisted.

*Fuel shortages continued to exacerbate humanitarian crisis.* Amid impact of fuel shortages on access to clean water and other basic services, health ministry 2 Oct

reported new cholera outbreak, with 2,200 suspected cases and at least 55 confirmed deaths as of 22 Oct.