

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ 🇧🇴 **Bolivia** **Risk of violent escalation around 18 Oct general elections rerun remained high amid govt crackdown on opposition.** Court 7 Sept ruled exiled former President Morales ineligible to run for Senate in Oct. Govt 9 Sept asked International Criminal Court to launch investigation into alleged “crimes against humanity” by opposition supporters during Aug protests. NGO Human Rights Watch 11 Sept accused govt of “abusing the justice system” to pursue Morales’ supporters and denounced terrorism charges against former president as “politically motivated”. Interim President Jeanine Añez 18 Sept dropped out of presidential race, citing need to unite vote against Morales’ Movement for Socialism (MAS); move follows large-scale Jubileo Foundation poll 16 Sept which found 40.3% of Bolivians plan to vote for MAS presidential candidate Luis Arce. Meanwhile, several attacks targeted party supporters. Notably, unidentified assailants 17 Sept threw stones at right-wing Creemos party member in Oruro city; others 20 Sept pelted centrist Comunidad Ciudadana member with rocks in capital La Paz. Three top cabinet ministers 27 Sept resigned, reportedly because they oppose privatisation of regional electricity company in Cochabamba city.

↓ **Colombia** **Police brutality sparked deadly unrest, while violence in rural areas continued to take high toll on civilians.** After video emerged of excessive use of force by police against taxi driver during his arrest night of 8-9 Sept, large protests 9 Sept erupted in capital Bogotá and other cities; protesters set at least 22 police stations on fire across country and police fired live ammunition, leaving at least 13 dead in and around Bogotá 9-10 Sept. High Commissioner for Peace Miguel Ceballos 14 Sept alleged National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas and dissident Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) groups coordinated violence, while attorney general 18 Sept said govt had captured four members of FARC dissident cell in Bogotá. Following calls by National Strike Committee, which coordinated late 2019 protest movement, thousands 21 Sept took to streets in several cities to protest dire economic situation and poor living conditions. Supreme Court 22 Sept ruled in favour of citizen petition requiring govt to guarantee right of peaceful protest; govt next day said it would ask Constitutional Court to re-evaluate decision. Large-scale killings (with three or more victims) of civilians continued, leaving at least 12 dead in Bajo Cauca area of Antioquia and Córdoba departments (north west) where Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, one of country's main drug trafficking groups) and AGC splinter group Caparros fight for control of mining rights and drug trafficking routes, and ELN and FARC dissident factions also operate. Several massacres also recorded in Sept in Cauca and Nariño departments along Pacific coast, leaving at least 17 dead. In Alto Baudó municipality, Chocó (west), fighting between AGC and ELN 25 Aug-17 Sept displaced some 450 people and confined over 4,000 members of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities to homes. In testimony to Special Jurisdiction for Peace (established by govt-FARC peace deal), FARC party chief Rodrigo Londoño 9 Sept said forced recruitment was not FARC policy during civil war, sparking criticism from other political parties; FARC 15 Sept issued statement describing kidnappings as "grave error".

➔ **Venezuela** **Rifts widened within mainstream opposition over whether to contest legislative elections as President Maduro's govt maintained tight control on electoral framework.** Opposition led by Juan Guaidó 7 Sept reiterated decision to boycott 6 Dec legislative elections, with 37 parties signing "unity pact"; some factions, however, proceeded with election preparations; two-time presidential candidate Henrique Capriles registered to run again before 8 Sept deadline, said he might pull out if conditions do not improve. Guaidó 23 Sept called on UN member states to consider application of "responsibility to protect" doctrine to Venezuela, and 27 Sept announced formation of Commandos for Liberty and Free Elections, committees of local activists tasked with mobilising protests and coordinating opposition on the ground. Delays in election preparations and high rates of COVID-19 infection continued to cast doubt upon electoral calendar; independent research by Academy of Sciences 10 Sept predicted over 10,000 virus cases per day in Dec, while electoral authority yet to provide details on new electronic voting system. Head of govt-controlled National Constituent Assembly Diosdado Cabello 6 Sept said body would not draft new constitution before mandate expires in Dec. Series of protests late Sept erupted across country over petrol shortages and breakdown of basic services. International actors also remained divided over electoral process. High-level EU and EU-backed International Contact Group mission to Caracas 23 Sept sought six-month postponement and improvement in election conditions, notably by allowing foreign observers, while

U.S. special representative Elliott Abrams 27 Sept criticised move, saying Brussels did not consult Washington on the matter. Organization of American States Sec Gen Luis Almagro 17 Sept called those participating in elections “accomplices of dictatorship”. UN fact-finding mission 16 Sept accused security forces and intelligence agencies of “extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture” amounting to crimes against humanity since 2014, argued that Maduro and several ministers “were aware of the crimes”, and called for international prosecution of those responsible; govt immediately rejected allegations, claiming mission had been bought off.

Southern Cone

➔ **Paraguay Tensions ran high following military operation against armed group.** President Abdo 2 Sept said military operation against Paraguayan People’s Army (EPP) in northern guerrilla camp near Yby Yaú city, left two “rebels” dead same day; Argentinian FM 4 Sept said victims were two Argentinian girls visiting their fathers in rebel camp. Security operation brought harsh criticism of govt; opposition parties 4 Sept decried govt’s “rush to bury the bodies of these girls before they had even been identified” and NGO Paraguay’s Human Rights Coordinator same day said incident “bears all the hallmarks of a fresh state crime”. After EPP 9 Sept abducted former VP Óscar Denis Sánchez and his assistant Adelio Mendoza in Amambay department, reportedly in retaliation for previous incident, Interior Minister Euclides Acevedo 10 Sept said EPP had started “war” against govt. EPP 13 Sept said Denis would be killed unless govt released two imprisoned EPP leaders, next day released Mendoza.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador Amid ongoing political tensions between govt and judiciary, reports emerged of officials conducting informal negotiations with criminal groups.** Newspaper *El Faro* 3 Sept reported senior state officials including director of prisons Osiris Luna have been negotiating since at least Oct 2019 with MS-13 gang leaders in jails to reduce homicides and secure electoral support; President Bukele same day denied allegations but Attorney General’s Office 4 Sept opened investigation and 7 Sept raided penitentiary system headquarters and two jails. Attorney general 16 Sept issued fresh arrest warrant for former President Funes on charges of illicit association, arbitrary acts and neglect of duties in relation to 2012 “gang truce”. Tensions between executive and judiciary persisted. Supreme Court 15 Sept ruled requirement to test negative for COVID-19 within 72 hours of landing in El Salvador, introduced by airport authorities 11 Sept, is unconstitutional; Bukele next day said measure would remain in force; attorney general 23 Sept opened investigation into possible felonies by presidential staffers for disregarding Court’s order. Institute for Access to Public Information 10 Sept criticised govt’s Aug changes to freedom of information act that make it more difficult to obtain public information from govt institutions. Group of U.S. Democratic lawmakers same day expressed “deep concern” over govt’s “hostility toward independent and investigative media outlets”, echoed by six Republicans 23 Sept who also warned that

alleged negotiations with MS-13 would legitimise gang. Bukele 8 Sept asked VP Ulloa to draft constitutional reforms “in accordance with current societal needs”; Ulloa 17 Sept said reforms would not touch on country’s political system or alternance in power but declined to clarify their scope. Military 21 Sept denied judge investigating 1981 El Mozote massacre, in which army killed around 1,000 civilians, entry to military archives; judge 23 Sept rescheduled inspection for 5 Oct, but Bukele next day said he will not allow access.

➔ **Guatemala Amid persistent tensions between Congress and judiciary, authorities launched attacks on press.** President Giammattei’s ally and head of controversial coordination cell within govt Miguel Martínez 9 Sept filed criminal complaint against *Plaza Pública* newspaper for threats, harassment and extortion, after it reported same day that Martínez and Giammattei are business partners. Public Ministry 12 Sept opened investigation after police officers previous day reportedly beat and arrested Vox Populi journalist Sonny Figueroa shortly after he published article criticising Martínez’s role in govt. Authorities 22 Sept arrested journalist Anastasia Mejía in Joyabaj municipality, Quiché department, on sedition charges; NGO Committee to Protect Journalists 28 Sept called for immediate release of Mejía and for govt to “guarantee that journalists can report freely without persecution”. NGO Human Rights Watch 9 Sept called on judiciary and Congress to “end their relentless attacks” on human rights ombudsman Jordán Rodas for “his defence of sexual and reproductive rights”. Election of Supreme Court and appeal courts magistrates remained stalled in Congress after Attorney General’s office in Feb revealed irregularities in selection process; Congress leaders 9 Sept created working group on issue. Following Aug murders of NGO worker and land defender, NGO International Land Coalition 9 Sept expressed concern over violations of rights of members of indigenous and peasant organisations. Prison inmates in Guatemala City 3 Sept took four guards hostage in response to govt transferring Barrio 18 gang leaders to different prisons in attempt to curb extortion orders; inmates released guards next day. Health Ministry 8 Sept recorded 21,000 cases of acute malnutrition.

➔ **Honduras Political tensions increased ahead of 2021 general elections while social unrest remained high, particularly in capital Tegucigalpa.** Congress 10 Sept failed to pass new electoral law, with some opposition groups claiming it did not address crucial issues including possible creation of second round of election. National Electoral Council 13 Sept nonetheless approved electoral calendar, including primary elections set for March 2021, generating criticism from opposition. Left-wing opposition Freedom and Refoundation Party (Libre) deputy Juan Ramón Flores 27 Sept said party will take to streets to demand approval of law. Unrest over lack of revenues and salary arrears amid COVID-19 pandemic continued, including protests in Tegucigalpa by minibus drivers 1 Sept and teachers 7 and 25 Sept. Police 15 Sept used tear gas to disperse some 1,000 anti-govt protesters gathered in Tegucigalpa on occasion of Independence Day. Members of Garífuna indigenous community 4 Sept protested in Tela town, Atlántida department (north) to demand that govt secure release of community leaders abducted in July by armed individuals in police outfits. *El Heraldo* newspaper 22 Sept reported 36 massacres (defined as killings of three or more) in 2020. After report, more large-scale killings took place 25 Sept in Tambla municipality, Lempira department (west), and 26 Sept in La Ceiba municipality, Atlántida (north), leaving eight dead in total. Unidentified gunmen 27 Sept killed

journalist Luis Alonzo Almeydas in Comayagua city, Comayagua department (centre). Security forces 1-14 Sept destroyed eight airstrips used by drug traffickers in Gracias a Dios department (Caribbean region) and 11-13 Sept dismantled two coca plantations and two laboratories in Colón department (north). U.S. court 10 Sept delayed sentencing of President Hernández's brother Tony Hernández – found guilty in 2019 of drug trafficking – from 16 Sept to 10 Nov. National Anti-Corruption Council 7 Sept alleged coronavirus-related corruption has cost govt \$11mn; prosecutors called several high-level officials to testify in COVID-19 corruption cases, including FM Lisandro Rosales 10 Sept.

➔ **Mexico Criminal violence remained high while political tensions emerged over 2021 budget.** Armed group-related violence continued, particularly in Baja California state (north) and central states of Colima, Michoacán, Guanajuato and Morelos. Notably, gunmen 1 Sept killed eight people attending funeral in Cuernavaca city (Morelos); 17 Sept attacked another wake in Celaya city (Guanajuato), killing five; and 22 Sept attacked taco stand in Irapuato city (Guanajuato), killing five. President López Obrador 1 Sept said “atrocities” – defined as acts of violence that include mutilation and torture – no longer occur in Mexico, but NGO Causa en Común 8 Sept reported 1,850 such attacks between Jan and Aug. Decapitated body of crime reporter Julio Valdivia, who recently covered clashes between local gang and police forces, was found 9 Sept outside Córdoba city, Veracruz state (Gulf Coast in east), bringing number of journalists killed under current administration to 17. Dozens of prominent journalists and intellectuals 17 Sept called on López Obrador to protect journalists and stop his attacks on “freedom of expression”. Govt 9 Sept presented 2021 budget including no significant stimulus investment despite expected economic fallout of COVID-19 pandemic, but major increases for armed forces. UN Human Rights Chief Michelle Bachelet 14 Sept and prominent civil society organisation Semáforo Delictivo 21 Sept expressed concern over increasing militarisation of public security, with freedom of information request 6 Sept showing 31% more soldiers deployed across country than at any point under two preceding administrations; budget also included cuts in funding to federated states and municipalities, prompting ten governors 7 Sept to accuse federal govt of granting some states preferential treatment. Women's rights groups early Sept occupied National Human Rights Commission's offices in several locations, including in Mexico City 9 Sept, to decry govt's lack of response to femicides.

➔ **Nicaragua Judicial moves sent chilling message to opposition and media.** In capital Managua, judge 3 Sept issued arrest warrant for three relatives of opposition platform Civic Alliance leader Juan Sebastián Chamorro over alleged tax arrears; judge 11 Sept ordered seizure of independent broadcaster Canal 12's assets as part of tax arrears case. President Ortega 15 Sept said he would seek to impose life sentences on those convicted of hate crimes; comment followed 12 Sept killing of two girls in Mulukukú municipality, North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region, but some in opposition including ex-vice minister José Pallais interpreted it as threat to opposition representatives; govt 17 Sept began gathering signatures to ask Supreme Court of Justice and National Assembly to introduce tougher sentencing guidelines. Police 25 Sept raided headquarters of feminist organisation María Elena Cuadra in Managua. Govt-controlled National Assembly 22 Sept started discussing bill that would increase scrutiny of citizens and organisations receiving foreign funds – dubbed as “foreign agents” – and ban them from participating in politics. Opposition

same day strongly objected to proposal. International actors expressed concern over intensifying state repression. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 10 Sept reported 45 govt opponents arrested by police since early Aug. UN Human Rights Chief Michelle Bachelet 14 Sept denounced persistent attacks against opposition and press, while U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo next day accused Ortega of “doubling down on repression” and becoming “a dictator”. NGO Amnesty International 30 Sept said govt was “preparing for a new phase of repression” in light of new draft laws that “attempt to silence those who criticise government policies”.

Caribbean

➔ **Guyana Ethnic clashes erupted between Indo- and Afro-Guyanese communities.** Suspected Indo-Guyanese assailants 5 Sept killed two Afro-Guyanese teenagers in Number Three village in predominantly Indo-Guyanese Mahaica-Berbice region in north east; incident followed conclusion in Aug of election standoff that divided electorate along ethnic lines. Hundreds of Afro-Guyanese in following days took to streets across Mahaica-Berbice, reportedly attacking Indo-Guyanese homes, businesses and individuals; police 7 Sept fired teargas and bullets at protesters in Mahaica-Berbice and neighbouring Demerara-Mahaica region, leaving several injured. Police 6-9 Sept detained seven individuals suspected of involvement in killings of Afro-Guyanese teenagers. Unidentified assailants 9 Sept killed Indo-Guyanese teenager, grandson of suspect in custody, in Number Three Village. Afro-Guyanese protesters same day beat Indo-Guyanese man to death in Bath Settlement, Mahaica-Berbice, after he opened fire at them. Former President Granger 7 Sept voiced support for protests, while President Ali same day urged de-escalation and vowed to take “strong” action against those fuelling racial hatred. Guyana Human Rights Association 8 Sept said killings were “a continuation of earlier ethnic upheaval”.

➔ **Haiti Series of protests erupted throughout month amid persistently high levels of criminal violence.** Police remained on “high alert” across country following late Aug murder of twelve people in capital Port-au-Prince by suspected gang members led by Jimmy Chérisier, alias Barbecue. Police 2 Sept arrested suspected leader of G9 coalition of gangs Albert Stevenson, alias Djouma; after G9’s 7 Sept ultimatum for his release expired, dozens 9 Sept protested near Port-au-Prince airport to demand his release. Anti-govt protesters 8 Sept clashed with security forces in Port-au-Prince and reportedly burned several govt vehicles; demonstrators accused President Moïse of orchestrating late Aug murder of prominent lawyer and govt critic Montferrier Dorcal, which Moïse denied. Hundreds of armed police officers from hardline police organisation Fantom 509 and their supporters 15 Sept blocked roads and set cars on fire in Port-au-Prince, demanding higher salaries plus release of police officer jailed since May on murder and arson charges, and accusing interim director of national police Normil Rameau, who launched six-month anti-gang operation in Aug, of failing to defend their interests; authorities 25 Sept released officer. National Food Security Coordination 9 Sept said 4mn people are food insecure in Haiti, up from 3.7mn in Sept 2019, as border with Dominican Republic remained closed amid COVID-19 pandemic.