

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ **Colombia FARC dissident faction suffered new setback in neighbouring Venezuela, and violence continued notably along Pacific coast.** Two senior commanders of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident faction Segunda Marquetalia, Henry Castellanos (alias Romaña) and Hernán Darío Velásquez (alias El Paisa), killed 5 Dec in Venezuela's Apure state; local media including Colombian news outlet Caracol in following days said rival FARC dissident 10th Front suspected of carrying out attacks, though details remain unclear; killings strike symbolic blow to Segunda Marquetalia, which last May lost senior commander Jesús Santrich. In Norte de Santander department near Venezuelan border, bomb blasts 14 Dec killed two police officers at airport in Cúcuta city; one suspected suicide bomber also killed. Defence Minister Diego Molano immediately condemned "terrorist" act, said it bore hallmark of FARC dissident groups and National Liberation Army (ELN), though neither claimed responsibility. Also in Norte de Santander, suspected members of 33rd FARC Dissident Front early Dec clashed with other armed groups and 5 Dec reportedly threw grenade at voting station for election of municipal youth council in Tibú municipality, injuring three soldiers and two civilians. Meanwhile, fighting continued along Pacific coast. In Cauca department, FARC dissident faction Carlos Patiño Front 6 Dec announced armed strike in parts of Argelia municipality in attempt to cement territorial control, amid competition with Segunda Marquetalia and ELN for control of drug trafficking routes; 14 Dec lifted strike, but demanded change in military command in area. Indigenous communities from across Cauca 10 Dec marched to Cali, main city of Pacific coast, to protest rising levels of violence and lack of state response. Army 29 Dec said it had found corpses of seven men in rural area of Putumayo department (south), blamed FARC dissidents. Justice Minister Wilson Ruiz 2 Dec announced possible resumption of aerial fumigation of coca crops in Feb 2022; move follows National Environmental Licensing Agency's approval of govt's environmental impact plan for spraying, one of several pending conditions set in 2017 by Constitutional Court to restart aerial fumigation. Country's Registrar 22 Dec released official list of candidates for presidential and congressional elections scheduled to begin 13 March.

➔ **Venezuela Political stalemate persisted as opposition remained in disarray and electoral dispute continued over recent polls in Barinas state.** Following Nov win of ruling PSUV party in regional and local elections, protests 2 Dec erupted in Santa Rosalía municipality, Portuguesa state (south west) in response to disputed local election results; opposition supporters decried election fraud and demanded new elections after National Electoral Council (CNE) declared victory for ruling party candidate. Govt 3 Dec reportedly denied visa extension for EU observers, requiring them to leave on 5 Dec instead of 13 Dec as planned. In Barinas (south west), voters 4 Dec denounced Supreme Court's decision to invalidate election results and retroactively disqualify opposition candidate Freddy Superlano from participating in new elections scheduled for 9 Jan; ruling party 5 Dec named former FM Jorge Arreaza candidate. CNE 22 Dec named six civil organisations as

national observers for monitoring electoral transparency. Senior member and foreign affairs chief of opposition leader Juan Guaidó's interim govt Julio Borges 5 Dec resigned and called for dismantling of interim govt; repeated previous calls for overseas assets currently held in opposition's name to be transferred to trust, said current management "a scandal" and that they were being used for "personal ends". Meanwhile, Guaidó-led opposition leadership continued to resist calls for greater transparency, insisted "interim govt" must remain until free and fair presidential elections. U.S. Envoy Roger Carstens 8-11 Dec visited country to meet President Maduro and discuss welfare of detained U.S. nationals, including six jailed oil executives with no apparent breakthrough; Maduro continued to demand release of close collaborator Colombian businessman Alex Saab, recently extradited to U.S. on money-laundering charges. After govt launched legal action against Bank of England to regain \$1bn in gold reserves, UK Supreme Court 20 Dec said UK "unequivocally recognised opposition leader Juan Guaidó as president" rather than Maduro and referred case back to commercial court. Head of govt-led National Assembly 22 Dec called for session to discuss modifications to justice system, including reducing number of Supreme Court judges. Opposition-led National Assembly 27 Dec renewed its term and Guaidó's mandate as "interim president" for one more year.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador** **Despite maintaining great popularity, President Bukele continued to face protests amid strained relations with U.S. as Washington imposed new sanctions on govt officials.** U.S. Treasury Dept 8 Dec sanctioned prison system director and vice minister of justice and public security, Osiris Luna Meza, and chairman of govt body Social Fabric Reconstruction Unit, Carlos Amilcar Marroquin Chica, for corruption, accusing them of negotiating truce with gang leaders on behalf of govt, and granting privileges to gang leaders in exchange for lower violence and political support; also said Luna and his mother Alma Meza responsible for embezzling millions of dollars from prison system and stealing and reselling pandemic relief supplies. U.S. Treasury Dept next day sanctioned Bukele's chief of cabinet, Carolina Recinos, on accusations of heading "corruption scheme" and authorising "suspicious pandemic-related purchases". Bukele immediately denounced "absurd daily accusations" and claimed U.S. officials, including former Chargé d'Affaires in El Salvador Jean Manes, sought to halt actions against corrupt Salvadoran officials. Former senior anti-corruption prosecutor German Arriaza 28 Dec accused govt of making deal with gangs in 2019 to reduce murder rates and help ruling party win elections, said Bukele shut down his unit's probe into pact. Thousands 12 Dec demonstrated in capital San Salvador denouncing authoritarian drift and corruption of govt officials; Bukele same day accused U.S. govt of "fund[ing] communist movements against a democratically elected govt". Legislative Assembly 15 Dec stripped immunity of former presidential candidate for right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance party (ARENA), Norman Quijano, now member of Central American Parliament (PARLACEN), on accusations of paying gangs to support his presidential campaign in 2014; ARENA deputies immediately condemned move, saying PARLACEN, not legislature, has jurisdiction over case. Legislative Assembly 22 Dec re-elected Rodolfo Delgado to serve for three more years as attorney general; Delgado's decision last June to end

anti-corruption accord with Organization of American States had fed friction with U.S.

↑ **Honduras** **Following months of heightened political tensions, country headed toward peaceful transfer of power as President Hernández recognised victory of outsider presidential candidate Xiomara Castro.** Outgoing President Hernández 1 Dec congratulated left-wing Liberty and Refoundation (LIBRE) party candidate Xiomara Castro on winning 28 Nov presidential election and called for “pacific and democratic transition of power”; Castro, first successful presidential candidate outside two traditional parties, due to become first female president in country’s history after taking office 27 Jan. U.S. VP Kamala Harris 10 Dec congratulated Castro on “historic victory”, expressed willingness “to increase economic opportunities, combat corruption, and deepen the partnership between the U.S. and Honduras”. National Electoral Council (NEC) 20 Dec released final presidential results, declaring Castro winner with 51.12% of votes, 14 points ahead of ruling National Party candidate Nasry Asfura at 36.93%; said turnout reached 68.58%. Meanwhile, controversy emerged over legislative elections also held 28 Nov. Candidates from various parties, particularly from Castro’s running mate Honduras’ Saviour Party, early Dec filed multiple complaints alleging fraud favouring candidates from both National Party and Liberal Party. NEC 7 Dec announced recount of almost 5,000 ballot boxes for legislative and municipal elections following at least 281 appeals; 28 Dec announced final results, with LIBRE winning 50 seats, National Party 44, Liberal Party 22, and Honduras’ Saviour Party ten. U.S. 2 Dec said Honduras, among other countries, was not invited to virtual summit for democracy to be held 9-10 Dec, citing “very disturbing activities” undermining democracy. Violence against politicians, political activists or civil society leaders persisted after 28 Nov votes. Notably, unidentified assailants 5 Dec shot and killed local leader of LIBRE party in Santa Cruz municipality, Lempira department. Armed individuals 8 Dec shot dead justice official in La Unión municipality, Olancho department, and next day killed lawyer in Danlí municipality, El Paraíso department.

➔ **Mexico** **Deadly criminal violence continued, while U.S. reinstated Trump-era “Remain in Mexico” migration policy.** In Tula City, Hidalgo state (centre), members of local oil theft gang Pueblos Unidos 1 Dec attacked prison and liberated nine inmates including group leader; authorities next day re-apprehended three, arrested ten people suspected of playing role in attack and reportedly put 12 security forces members under investigation. In Chinicuila municipality, Michoacán state (centre), internal displacements continued due to new waves of violence: clashes 7 Dec erupted between members of Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) and National Guard; CJNG 8 Dec exploded drones on civilians in Chinicuila, Villa Victoria. About half of 4,800 Chinicuila inhabitants fled during month, including mayor and 15 police officers who 10 Dec resigned denouncing lack of federal govt support. In Jalisco state (centre), armed clashes 7 Dec erupted between CJNG and Sinaloa Cartel in Teocaltiche municipality, leaving seven dead. In Cerritos municipality, San Luis Potosí state (also centre), police 8 Dec launched operation against reported members of criminal group, leaving five killed in shootout including one police. Meanwhile, several armed clashes 29-30 Dec killed at least 14 people in Zacatecas state (also centre). U.S. and Mexican officials 2 Dec announced restart of former U.S. President Trump-era “Remain in Mexico” policy which forced tens of

thousands of Central American asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico for U.S. courts to hear their immigration cases; after U.S. President Biden issued new rescission memo, federal appeals court 13 Dec upheld order to reinstate policy. In Tuxtla Gutiérrez city, Chiapas state (south), truck packed mainly with Guatemalan migrants being smuggled northward 9 Dec flipped over, leaving at least 55 dead and 105 injured. U.S. and Mexico 14 Dec officially relaunched bilateral security operation with new agreement “Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health and Safe Communities” entering into force to replace 2007 Merida Initiative. UN Security Council 22 Dec approved Mexico’s resolution against arms trafficking.

➔ **Nicaragua Amid ongoing stifling of dissent widely condemned internationally, President Ortega sought rapprochement with China and Russia.** After Episcopal Conference in late Nov offered to mediate possible dialogue between govt and opposition, Auxiliary Bishop of Managua, Silvio José Báez (who went into exile in 2019), 5 Dec said “it is impossible to dialogue without re-establishing civil liberties”. Over 35 representatives of opposition and civil society organisations exiled in Costa Rica 7 Dec said conditions for dialogue with Ortega’s “illegitimate” govt not met. Meanwhile, authorities 13-14 Dec shut down 11 NGOs. As Ortega’s govt faced increasing international isolation, delegation comprising sons of Ortega and VP and first lady Rosario Murillo 6 Dec met Russian Deputy FM Sergei Ryabkov in Russia’s capital Moscow to seek to expand bilateral cooperation; Murillo same day asked U.S. and EU to lift sanctions on officials. Govt 9 Dec cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan, said People’s Republic of China “is the only legitimate government” as “Taiwan is an inalienable part of the Chinese territory”. Attorney General’s Office 26 Dec seized Taiwan’s embassy premises and handed them to China. Organization of American States (OAS) 8 Dec approved resolution urging Ortega to release all political prisoners and mandating OAS Sec Gen Luis Almagro to lead diplomatic efforts to convince govt to accept OAS good offices mission; Almagro 17 Dec requested extension of deadline until mid-Jan to report on progress; OAS mission would seek to facilitate implementation of comprehensive electoral reforms, repeal all legislation restricting political participation, and launch inclusive dialogue on new elections. EU Parliament 16 Dec adopted resolution notably calling for EU sanctions on Ortega. U.S. President Biden 21 Dec announced Nicaragua will only receive humanitarian and trade-related aid in 2022.

Caribbean

➔ **Haiti Amid persistent food insecurity and gang violence, political transition remained fragile.** Gang violence persisted as clashes between G9-affiliated Ti Bwa gang and Village de Dieu gang 1 Dec killed five civilians and wounded 12 in Martissant neighbourhood of capital Port-au-Prince. Also in Martissant, unidentified gunmen 24 Dec killed transport union coordinator Guy Polinice and two others, and 29 Dec shot at public buses, killing four and wounding four. Prisoners 31 Dec attempted escape at Croix-des-Bouquets prison, killing ten inmates and injuring four police officers. In small improvement, 400 Mawozo gang 5 Dec released three missionaries abducted 16 Oct, 16 Dec released all remaining hostages; police 9 Dec arrested gang leader Clerny Jonas alias “Ti Jonas”, operating in Jalousie, south of Port-au-Prince, 14 Dec arrested Cathel Jones, alleged leader of G9-linked gang Terre Noire, and 26 Dec arrested gang leader Johnny Charles alias

“Gato”. PM Henry 7 Dec announced fuel price hike; protesters 10 Dec took to streets upon its entry into force. Education Minister Nesmy Manigat 23 Dec said insecurity directly impacting nearly 200 schools in Port-au-Prince. Monitoring Office of 30 Aug Montana Accord tasked to support transitional arrangement 12 Dec created National Transitional Council, comprising 52 members from civil society organisations, political parties and independent political groups, set to elect provisional president and PM. International news outlet *New York Times* same day reported President Moïse had been compiling list of political elites and businesspeople linked to Haitian drug trade in months prior to his July assassination. U.S. Rep Andy Levin 7 Dec called on U.S. to support civil society coalition Commission for a Haitian-led solution to the crisis. Following UN report which said nearly half of Haiti’s population undernourished in 2018-2020, UN humanitarian agency 6 Dec requested \$373.5 mn in humanitarian aid for Haiti in 2022. In Cap-Haitien port city, north, a fuel tanker 14 Dec crashed and exploded, killing at least 90 civilians.