



Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

↓ **Bolivia** Protests broke out in Santa Cruz province following arrest of its governor, right-wing radical opposition leader Luis Fernando Camacho.

Authorities detained opposition leader for role in 2019 political unrest. Police 28 Dec detained right-wing opposition leader and Governor of Santa Cruz department Luis Fernando Camacho on “terrorism” charges for alleged involvement in country’s disputed 2019 elections and subsequent political unrest. Court 29 Dec sentenced Camacho to four months of pre-trial detention, next day transferred him to Chonchocoro maximum security prison in El Alto city near capital La Paz.

Tensions flared, with violent protests late Dec erupting in Santa Cruz. Accusing authorities of “kidnapping” Camacho, his supporters immediately began protesting in Santa Cruz province. Protesters 28 Dec erected roadblocks, set fire to several buildings, including regional prosecutor’s office, and briefly paralysed Viru Viru airport in apparent attempt to halt Camacho’s transit to La Paz. Civic Committee of Santa Cruz – institution defending regional interests, opposed to govt in La Paz and previously led by Camacho – 29 Dec announced 24-hour strike on 30 Dec. During strike, protesters blocked highways and torched several vehicles and buildings while police responded with tear gas. As clashes continued on 31 Dec, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Pedro Vaca 31 Dec said reports of “severe attacks” by police were emerging, urged authorities to “guarantee freedom of assembly”.

➔ **Colombia** Govt and ELN concluded first round of peace talks; authorities along with several armed and criminal groups declared ceasefires amid high levels of violence.

Govt and ELN agreed to de-escalate conflict in 2023 as first round of dialogue ended. Peace talks between govt and National Liberation Army (ELN) 12 Dec concluded in Venezuelan capital Caracas, with second round announced for 2023 in Mexico. Sides agreed to resume 2016 peace agenda, ratified permanent observer roles of UN Mission and Catholic Church, and added Chile and Mexico as guarantor states. Delegations same day announced agreement to de-escalate conflict and improve humanitarian conditions in Medio San Juan region (Chocó department) and Bajo Calima village (Valle de Cauca department), both along Pacific coast, starting in 2023. Sides 3 Dec also agreed to facilitate safe return of hundreds of displaced members of indigenous Embera community to their homes in Alto de Andágueda region (Chocó).

End-of-year ceasefires announced amid high levels of violence. ELN's Western Front Omar Gómez 13 Dec announced "armed strike" in Chocó and Valle de Cauca starting 15 Dec to combat "paramilitary" activity, likely referring to rival criminal group Gulf Clan. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidents and ELN also clashed during first half of month, notably in Caldono municipality (Cauca department). In positive move, ELN 19 Dec announced unilateral ceasefire 24 Dec-2 Jan, 20 Dec ended strike; by 24 Dec, FARC dissident groups, including Segunda Marquetalia, and other armed and criminal groups had joined ceasefire. Govt 31 Dec also announced six-month bilateral ceasefire with ELN, Segunda Marquetalia, Estado Mayor Conjunto and two right-wing post paramilitary groups; groups had yet to comment on announcement by end of month. Meanwhile, ombudsman's office 7 Dec said 2022 saw highest number of social leaders killed since 2016 peace accord.

In other important developments. President Petro and Ecuadorian President Lasso 14 Dec announced fresh efforts to combat border armed group activity. Petro 12 Dec signed decree freeing from prison some "front line" (Primera Linea) protesters from 2021 national strike as "gestores de paz", designation for civilians who can help mediate with illegal armed groups.

↓ Peru Failed attempt to dissolve Congress ended brief presidency of Pedro Castillo, prompting countrywide protests that turned deadly amid security crackdown.

Castillo impeached after failed attempt to close Congress and rule by decree. Congress 1 Dec approved motion to initiate impeachment proceedings against leftist President Castillo, third impeachment attempt since he took office in June 2021, and summoned Castillo to respond to accusations of constitutional breaches on 7 Dec. Political crisis came to a head as Castillo 7 Dec attempted to dissolve Congress and replace it with an "exceptional emergency government". Political elites denounced "attempted coup" and Congress later that day voted to remove Castillo from power on grounds of "moral incapacity" and swore in VP Dina Boluarte as president. Shortly after, authorities detained Castillo on "rebellion" and "conspiracy" charges and transferred him to Barbadillo prison in capital Lima. Supreme Court 15 Dec extended Castillo's pre-trial detention to 18 months.

Protests erupted across country, turning deadly amid violent security response. Castillo supporters 7 Dec took to streets in Lima and southern Arequipa cities, demanding dissolution of Congress and immediate elections. In following days, protests spread to other regions, notably Apurímac and Ayacucho; demonstrators blocked highways and forced several airports to close, prompting govt 14 Dec to declare 30-day state of emergency. Ombudsman 16 Dec denounced security forces' use of firearms and tear gas as they clamped down on protests. As of 18 Dec, clashes between protesters and security forces had left at least 27 people killed and around 650 injured. In attempt to ease tensions, Boluarte 16 Dec proposed bringing 2026 elections forward to Dec 2023; Congress initially rejected proposal, but 20 Dec approved tentative plan for April 2024 polls.

Govt expelled Mexico's ambassador. Mexico, Bolivia, Colombia and Argentina 12 Dec released joint statement condemning "undemocratic harassment" of Castillo since he took office and urging new govt to respect "the will of the citizens pronounced at the polls". Mexican President Lopez Obrador next day reaffirmed his

support for Castillo while Mexican FM Marcelo Ebrard 20 Dec announced Mexico had granted Castillo's family asylum; govt same day expelled Mexican ambassador, citing "unacceptable interference in internal affairs".

➡ **Venezuela** **Opposition voted to dissolve Guaidó's interim govt amid ongoing efforts to forge united front ahead of 2024 polls; dialogue initiatives between govt and opposition remained strained.**

Opposition voted to end interim govt led by Juan Guaidó. Opposition-led National Assembly 30 Dec overwhelmingly voted to dissolve Guaidó's interim presidency, with 72 votes in favour, 29 against and eight abstentions, after opposition said interim govt was no longer "perceived as an option for real political change"; opposition parties seek united front with single candidate to run against President Maduro in 2024 polls. Guaidó 31 Dec warned that removal of interim govt would bolster Maduro's regime. Meanwhile, opposition 21 Dec announced plans to create executive committees to manage Venezuelan assets held abroad, such as Citgo Petroleum, currently managed by interim govt.

Govt held discussions with opposition parties outside Unitary Platform. Following resumption of Norwegian-facilitated Mexico City dialogue in Nov, opposition alliance Unitary Platform 3 Dec issued statement asking govt to schedule further meeting to discuss political issues, such as electoral reform; statement came amid Maduro's apparent reluctance to organise another meeting. Authorities 2 Dec held parallel talks with opposition parties outside platform, including several representatives of opposition coalition Democratic Alliance, while simultaneously labelling Unitary Platform members "terrorists". Govt's chief negotiator and National Assembly President Jorge Rodríguez same day said talks would yield agreement covering social, economic, political and electoral matters "in thirty days".

In other important developments. U.S. federal judge 23 Dec rejected attempt by close Maduro ally and businessman Alex Saab, currently detained in U.S. on money-laundering charges, to claim diplomatic immunity and avoid trial; Maduro has frequently demanded Saab's release.

Central America and Mexico

➡ **El Salvador** **Govt launched major offensive in Soyapango to combat gang violence as authorities renewed state of exception for ninth time; relations with U.S. remained tense.**

Campaign of mass arrests to tackle gangs continued. President Bukele 3 Dec launched offensive in Soyapango city (centre), deploying 8,500 soldiers and 1,500 police officers to cut off transit in and out of city and search houses for gang members. Ministry of justice 12 Dec confirmed apprehension of at least 375 alleged gang members in ongoing operation, next day announced that 60,000 alleged gang members had been arrested since state of exception began late March. In capital San Salvador, over 2,000 soldiers and around 230 police officers 24, 25 Dec surrounded Tutunichapa and La Granjita neighbourhoods to root out gang members. Meanwhile, Legislative Assembly 14 Dec extended state of exception for ninth time.

Broad public support for crackdown continued, NGOs denounced abuses. NGO Human Rights Watch and Salvadoran group Cristosal 7 Dec published report

documenting hundreds of forced disappearances, torture, deaths in custody and arbitrary arrests under state of exception. Journalist association APES 21 Dec said freedom of press is in “critical state”. Nonetheless, crackdown remained popular, with news outlet La Prensa Gráfica 12 Dec publishing survey showing that 88% of 1,520 interviewees support Bukele and 85% consider security situation improved.

In other important developments. U.S. Treasury Department 9 Dec sanctioned two officials close to Bukele – Minister of Labour Rolando Castro and Bukele’s legal secretary Conan Castro – on charges of corruption and human rights violations. Meanwhile, Bukele 7 Dec announced govt had repurchased \$82mn of its sovereign debt bonds in attempt to calm market concerns around possible debt default.

➔ **Honduras State of exception came into effect in two cities marked by high levels of violence; govt and UN agreed on memorandum for next phase of international anti-corruption body.**

Govt imposed state of exception in some areas of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. Amid mounting pressure to combat apparent rise in extortion, President Castro 3 Dec signed executive decree imposing state of exception on 162 neighbourhoods in capital Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula city for one month, starting 6 Dec; authorities 6 Dec announced deployment of 20,000 security forces to ensure compliance. State of exception can be extended by Congress and suspends citizen’s freedoms of movement and assembly. Security minister 13 Dec announced that since govt had introduced measure, extortion had fallen by 40% and 228 gang members had been arrested. Shoot-out between security forces and gang members 19 Dec left two people dead, including one military police officer, in La Peña neighbourhood of Tegucigalpa. Police 29 Dec called for measure’s extension to several other cities.

Govt and UN signed memorandum to establish UN-backed anti-corruption body. Castro 14 Dec met with UN Sec-Gen António Guterres to discuss International Commission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras, next day signed memorandum of understanding on phases toward its establishment. Opposition National Party 10 Dec demanded that UN fully fund commission amid fears that govt funding could compromise commission’s independence.

➔ **Mexico Criminal violence remained high, authorities made further progress on controversial electoral reforms, and local protests over planned hydraulic works turned violent.**

Criminal violence persisted at high levels. In central Zacatecas state, unknown gunmen 6 Dec shot dead police officer in Guadalupe municipality. Also in Zacatecas, unknown assailants 19 Dec killed two police officers in separate events in state capital, Zacatecas city, bringing number of police officers killed nationwide in 2022 to 389. In central Michoacán state, authorities 4 Dec arrested alleged regional leader of Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), known as “El Panther”, in Uruapan city. In central Jalisco state, authorities 21 Dec captured Antonio Oseguera, brother of CJNG leader Nemesio Oseguera, in Tlajomulco de Zúñiga municipality. In central Mexico state, armed confrontation between security forces and suspected members of criminal group La Familia Michoacana 27 Dec left three dead. In southern Guerrero state, members of La Familia Michoacana 10 Dec gathered residents of El Durazno locality in Coyuca de Catalán municipality in a primary school and killed

seven of them. Meanwhile, NGO Reporters Without Borders 14 Dec identified Mexico as most dangerous country for journalists for fourth consecutive year.

Chamber of Deputies approved controversial electoral reform. After 6 Dec rejecting electoral reform proposed in April by President López Obrador, Chamber of Deputies 14 Dec approved so-called “Plan B”, which amends six secondary electoral laws and reduces structure and budget of National Electoral Institute (INE). INE board members same day issued statement pointing out that reform will jeopardise establishment of polling stations, vote counting, timely monitoring of radio and television stations, and oversight of political party activities and election campaigns.

Local protests erupted over hydraulic works. Residents of Xochimilco and Milpa Alta municipalities 2 Dec blocked roads in Mexico City to protest hydraulic works, which they said started without first consulting with local communities; police same day attempted to forcibly unblock roads, leading to violent confrontations that left over 20 people injured. Protesters 9 Dec lifted blockades after local govt agreed to suspend drainage works.

➔ **Nicaragua President Ortega’s crusade against dissent continued despite international condemnation; relations with Russia deepened further.**

Crackdown on civil society and Catholic Church persisted. Interior ministry 1 Dec revoked legal status of 100 NGOs, 10 Dec revoked 100 more. News outlet Confidencial 7 Dec reported that govt had shut down over 40% of NGOs throughout country since 2018. Govt 14 Dec closed International University for Integration of Latin America. Meanwhile, authorities 11 Dec arrested communications chief from Diocese of Matagalpa (north) and journalist working for Catholic TV channel TV Merced; authorities 13 Dec charged Matagalpa Bishop Rolando Álvarez with “conspiracy” and “spreading false news” and ordered his house arrest.

International and local actors continued to condemn govt repression. U.S. 2 Dec added Nicaragua to list of countries that restrict religious freedom. President of Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights 10 Dec said that state’s attacks on population could no longer be described as systematic violation of human rights, but rather as “policy of extermination”. Group of 34 Nicaraguan and international organisations 15 Dec called on UN Human Rights Office to renew mandate of Group of Experts on Nicaragua to investigate human rights violations.

Relations with Russia strengthened. Russian journalists 4 Dec arrived in capital Managua to train “Sandinista media”. Ortega 13 Dec authorised his ambassador in Moscow to sign agreement on cooperation in customs matters with Russia. President of Supreme Electoral Council and her Russian counterpart 14 Dec signed protocol on electoral cooperation with aim of “strengthening electoral models” of both countries. Ortega 23 Dec said “if Ukraine wins war against Russia, fascism imposes itself in the world”.

Caribbean

➔ **Haiti Security and humanitarian crisis persisted, govt signed political agreement pledging elections in late 2023, and talks on international military intervention yielded no significant outcomes.**

Dire security and humanitarian situation persisted. Gang violence continued unabated. Notably, at northern exit of capital Port-au-Prince, heavily armed bandits 26 Dec opened fire on highway in Bon Repos district, killing bus driver and injuring passengers before setting fire to two gas stations, supermarket and over a dozen vehicles. Violence continued to aggravate humanitarian crisis: UN Children's Fund 16 Dec said gang's blockades of ports and main roads continued to severely hamper transport of medical supplies. Meanwhile, cholera outbreak spread further, with 20,320 suspected cases and 377 registered deaths as of 29 Dec. Pan American Health Organization 12 Dec announced arrival of first shipment of 1.17mn doses of cholera vaccine; vaccinations began 18 Dec.

New political accord failed to win support of key political actors. PM Henry 21 Dec announced agreement with civil society groups, political parties and private sector to organise elections before end of 2023; accord establishes Henry's premiership until 7 Feb 2024. By end of month, over 600 organisations had endorsed agreement. However, number of major political actors, including leaders of civil society platform Montana Accord, had yet to sign it by 31 Dec.

Discussions on international intervention continued. During Canada's second fact-finding mission in Haiti 7-9 Dec, Canada's Ambassador to UN Bob Rae met with high-level political figures, including Henry and members of Montana Accord, who continued to insist on Henry's resignation. Although Montana Accord remains firmly opposed to military intervention, representatives 8 Dec told Rae that transitional govt would accept internationally backed "rapid police support" to help police subdue gangs. Rae 21 Dec said broad political consensus is precondition for security mission.

Foreign govts imposed further sanctions on Haitian political and economic elites. U.S. Treasury Department 2 Dec froze U.S. assets of two politicians for alleged drug trafficking and gang financing; U.S. State Department 9 Dec announced sanctions on former head of Haitian customs and Senator Rony Célestine. Canada 5 Dec sanctioned three of Haiti's most powerful businessmen for financing gangs, 20 Dec sanctioned two former govt officials.