



Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ 🇨🇴 **Colombia** Govt’s “total peace” policy advanced as ceasefire with ELN gradually took hold and is due to take full effect in August, lasting 180 days in longest bilateral ceasefire ever concluded with guerrilla group.

Bilateral ceasefire with National Liberation Army (ELN) advanced. Govt and ELN 6 July ordered their forces to end offensive activities as sides gradually implemented June ceasefire agreement, set to take full effect 3 Aug and then last for 180 days; if successful, agreement will be longest bilateral ceasefire ever concluded with guerrilla group. Parties 14-15 July released two documents detailing protocols and monitoring mechanisms for full ceasefire, though civil society and grassroots groups criticised lack of explicit civilian protections. In lead up to cessation of offensive activities, ELN conducted several operations that raised concerns about its interpretation of agreement: group 3 July kidnapped soldier and her two children in Arauca department (north west), releasing them four days later; ELN’s Western Front 4-13 July held armed strike in Chocó department (Pacific coast), limiting citizens’ movements and prohibiting shops from opening.

Petro administration agreed to open talks with FARC dissident faction. Govt 8 July agreed to formal peace negotiations with dissident faction of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) known as FARC-EP Estado Mayor Central. First stage of dialogue will aim to re-establish confidence after several months of communication breakdown, followed by official talks with 12 govt negotiators and six insurgents; attorney general 28 July lifted arrest warrants of militants who will form negotiating team. Govt did not renew ceasefires with several groups that ended 30 June, including Segunda Marquetalia dissident group and Sierra Nevada Self Defense Forces. Meanwhile, President Petro 23 July named former paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso, currently incarcerated in U.S., as a “gestor de paz”, a role that would allow him to serve as intermediary between govt and armed and criminal groups, notably Gulf Clan.

Oct local election cycle began. Individuals running for mayor, councillor or departmental legislator in Oct polls had to register candidacy by end of July. Official campaign begins in Aug amid concerns elections may escalate political tensions in conflict-affected regions as armed and criminal groups seek to assert influence, either by threatening or implicitly supporting candidates.

↓ Ecuador Govt imposed emergency measures following assassination of mayor and fresh spate of gang violence in Ecuador's prisons, prompting violent backlash from criminal groups.

In port city of Guayaquil, clashes 22 July erupted between rival gangs in Litoral prison and continued for several days, leaving 31 inmates dead and 14 injured. Meanwhile, inmates from 13 prisons across country 24 July went on hunger strike, demanding better food and sanitary conditions, with some taking guards hostage. As unrest soared, President Lasso 25 July declared 60-day state of emergency throughout Ecuador's jails and authorised deployment of 2,700 soldiers to wrest back control of Litoral prison. Authorities 25 July announced armed forces had re-established "total control" of Litoral and all prison hostages were released following day. Emergency declaration triggered violent backlash from criminal groups: notably, gunmen in Guayaquil city 25 July looted store and burned bus; and in Esmeraldas city inmates took 15 prison guards and two other staffers hostage while armed assailants attacked police unit. Only two days before, Lasso 24 July had declared another emergency in Manabí and Los Ríos provinces, as well as Durán city, after gunman 23 July killed mayor of Manta city (Manabí) in shooting that left one other woman dead and four wounded. Violence prompted key presidential contenders in upcoming Aug election to promise tougher security policies amid escalating criminal gang violence.

➡ Peru Large anti-govt protests took place in Lima and other departments across country.

Amid simmering political tensions, notably since former President Pedro Castillo's arrest in Dec 2022, tens of thousands 19 July marched in capital Lima and other departments, while others blocked highways around provincial towns, namely in Puno and Cusco; protests were largely peaceful, though riot police in Lima fired tear gas at protesters attempting to enter Congress carrying rocks and bottles. Protesters were calling for President Boluarte's resignation, as well as closure of Congress, early general elections, work on a new constitution and Castillo's release, signalling widespread distrust with country's main democratic institutions. Fresh protests took place 29 July, which marks Independence Day, with police briefly clashing with protesters and attacking at least three journalists. During the Independence Day speech in Lima, Boluarte called for a great "national reconciliation" and urged Congress to delegate legislative powers to executive for 120 days to tackle crime with greater efficiency.

➡ Venezuela As Maduro govt further harmed prospects for competitive 2024 poll, international actors stepped up efforts to reach deal on improving electoral conditions in return for sanctions relief.

Trend toward unfair presidential vote in 2024 persisted. International actors continued to condemn govt's late June announcement that opposition front runner María Corina Machado is barred from candidacy in 2024 presidential election; U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 6 July said Caracas could take number of steps toward free and fair vote but that Machado's disqualification "sends the opposite message". In another worrying move, National Assembly president and chief govt negotiator Jorge Rodríguez 13 July said there would be no European Union (EU) electoral observation mission during polls; decision significant as EU observers' presence was

key condition for opposition's participation in 2021 regional and local elections. Opposition Voluntad Popular party 27 July said govt confiscated passport of its candidate Freddy Superlano as he attempted to travel to Colombia.

Efforts to push through U.S.-Venezuela deal on electoral conditions ramped up. Amid growing concern about competitiveness of elections, several meetings between govt, opposition and international actors in July raised hopes of a deal that would see govt improve electoral conditions; in return, Washington would ease sanctions and provide guarantees for transfer of Venezuelan assets frozen abroad to UN-managed fund to finance improvements in public services. Opposition's chief negotiator Gerardo Blyde 10-13 July visited U.S. to discuss deal; French President Emmanuel Macron 17 July organised meeting between Blyde and VP Delcy Rodríguez on sidelines of EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) summit in Brussels, attended by presidents of Argentina, Brazil and Colombia; post-meeting statement highlighted need for negotiated solution and confirmed broad details of U.S.-Venezuela deal to improve electoral conditions.

In another important development. Former head of military intelligence Hugo Carvajal 19 July arrived in U.S. to face drug charges after being extradited from Spain; Washington accuses Carvajal of trafficking along with other senior officials, including President Maduro.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador Ruling party named President Bukele as their candidate for 2024 presidential poll, and Congress voted to allow mass trials for alleged gang members.**

Political parties held primaries to select candidates for Feb 2024 general election. Ruling party Nuevas Ideas 9 July nominated Bukele and VP Félix Ulloa as presidential and vice presidential candidates in Feb 2024 poll despite constitutional ban on consecutive presidential re-election; should Salvadorans vote for Nuevas Ideas, Bukele will be able to further consolidate power at all levels of govt. Two main opposition parties – conservative ARENA and leftist FMLN – 16 July announced Joel Sánchez and Manuel Flores as their respective candidates, with Hilcia Bonilla and Werner Marroquin as running mates.

Congress passed legislation enabling mass trials for alleged gang members. Legislative Assembly 12 July approved state of exception's sixteenth extension. Congress 26 July passed bill allowing courts to try alleged gang members in mass trials and increasing sentences for gang leaders from 45 to 60 years; up to 900 people can now be tried simultaneously if they hail from same region or are accused of belonging to same criminal group. Civil society and international bodies continued to raise concerns about human rights abuses under state of exception. Notably, a coalition of human rights groups 14 July denounced govt for third time at Inter-American Commission of Human Rights over arrest of innocent people and deaths of inmates; govt denied allegations.

↓ **Guatemala Judicial and other interference in presidential poll sparked political crisis and protests in capital, as external actors decried efforts to alter electoral process.**

Electoral turmoil erupted following first round of presidential vote. After surprise June election result, in which voters selected Bernardo Arévalo of centre-left Movimiento Semilla to take on front runner Sandra Torres of right-wing Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza party in Aug runoff, Constitutional Court (CC) 1 July suspended release of official results after several political parties, including ruling Vamos, claimed vote count was fraudulent. Recount concluded 6 July with minimal variation and Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) 12 July confirmed candidacy of Torres and Arévalo in presidential runoff; Public Prosecutor's Office (which is accused of corruption and acting in incumbent president's interest) next day raided TSE's Registry of Citizens office amid escalating tensions between the two.

Attempt to block Arévalo's candidacy deepened crisis. Shortly before TSE certified results, a judge (at behest of Attorney General's Office) 12 July suspended legal status of Movimiento Semilla over alleged irregularities in how party was created; legal experts claimed electoral law establishes that no party can be banned during electoral process. CC 13 July suspended decision to disqualify Movimiento Semilla, allowing Arévalo's candidacy in runoff, but Public Prosecutor's office continued investigations into party. Police 21 July raided Movimiento Semilla's headquarters amid widespread domestic and international criticism. Arévalo 30 July denounced "campaign of fear".

Efforts to reverse result sparked protests and international condemnation. Hundreds demonstrated throughout month, predominantly in capital, against efforts to change election results. External actors also criticised efforts to alter electoral process: notably, European Union 13 July said it was "deeply concerned by the continuing efforts to tamper with these election results"; Organization of American States' observation mission 19 July said some parties and actors had abused "legal instruments" and put "country's democratic stability" at risk; UN Sec-Gen 22 July urged authorities to "guarantee free expression of the will of electors"; and U.S. 24 July said "we are deeply concerned by ongoing efforts to interfere with the elections in Guatemala".

➔ **Honduras Castro administration enforced more punitive policies in response to latest wave of violence; UN experts arrived amid stepped-up anti-corruption efforts.**

Govt renewed state of emergency amid growing criticism. Govt continued to pursue tough security measures after June deadly prison riot and mass killings, with military police placed in charge of penitentiary system, deployment of soldiers in hotspots and restrictions on movement; in Cortés department (north west), night-time curfew in San Pedro Sula city began 4 July following similar measures late June in nearby Choloma city. Govt 5 July extended state of emergency for additional 45 days, prompting criticism. Notably, president of Union of Small Enterprises 5 July said curfews put 25,000 jobs at risk, while UN human rights office 7 July said militarisation of public security was detrimental to fundamental rights, drawing particular attention to reports of violence perpetrated by military police against prison inmates.

Momentum for creation of anti-corruption commission grew. Team of UN experts 9 July arrived to provide technical assistance for establishment of International Commission Against Corruption and Impunity (CICIH); mission will remain in country for six months. Civil society groups continued to urge govt to approve reforms established by UN before CICIH starts operating. In significant step, Congress 12 July repealed decrees known as “Impunity Pacts”, which granted its members protection from prosecution for corruption.

➔ **Mexico Criminal violence remained rampant, while President López Obrador’s attacks on opposition front runner in 2024 presidential poll prompted condemnation from electoral authorities.**

Criminal groups stepped up attacks on state forces, increasingly using explosives. Gunmen 3 July shot at interior minister of Tamaulipas state (north) on main road, though official was unharmed. Criminal group Los Ardillos 10 July orchestrated thousands-strong protest in Chilpancingo city, Guerrero state (south west), over arrest of two of its members; protesters blocked main roads, forced their way into state legislature and took 13 police officers and officials hostage, released them following day. Several improvised explosive devices (IED) in Tlajomulco de Zúñiga city, Jalisco state (centre), 11 July killed four police officers and two civilians; Jalisco Cartel dominant in state has increasingly used IEDs in neighbouring Michoacán.

Attacks on journalists and disappearances continued. Police 8 July found body of Luis Martín Sánchez Iñiguez, local correspondent for *La Jornada* newspaper, in Huachines town, Nayarit state (west); unidentified armed group 15 July killed reporter Nelson Matus in Acapulco town, Guerrero. Meanwhile, civil society organisations from Caborca and Pitiquito municipalities reported 1-2 July clashes between Sinaloa Cartel and rival Caborca group resulted in at least 15 disappearances and three deaths; collective known as Madres Buscadoras, which searches for disappeared, 4 July said it had uncovered clandestine graves containing dozens of bodies in Tlajomulco de Zúñiga; another search collective 14-15 July found bodies in graves in Reynosa city, Tamaulipas; UN 27 July accused army of obstructing investigation into 2014 disappearance of students from Ayotzinapa teacher’s college.

López Obrador railed against key contender in 2024 presidential election. President López Obrador’s continued criticism of opposition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez in daily press conferences prompted National Electoral Institute 13 July to issue order prohibiting him from commenting on electoral matters. López Obrador next day accused electoral authorities of trying to “silence” him and reiterated claims he had gathered information about public contracts awarded to Gálvez, saying he would seek judicial investigation.

➔ **Nicaragua Crackdown on Catholic Church continued, and opposition stepped up efforts to unify against Ortega regime.**

Govt’s religious persecution persisted. Govt 4 July revoked legal status of Fundación Fraternidad Pobres de Jesucristo and expelled nuns in charge of convent from country. Authorities 10 July arrested Fernando Israel Zamora Silva, chancellor of Siuna diocese, in capital Managua. Govt 27 July revoked legal status of 18 organisations, including several religious groups. Meanwhile, Church officials 5 July said Bishop Rolando Álvarez, sentenced in Feb 2023 to 26 years in prison for treason, remained incarcerated despite reports of his release.

Opposition sought to unify. Following exiled opposition's late June establishment of Monteverde Group, comprised of different opposition factions to consolidate united anti-Ortega front, group 9 July announced five official spokespersons including former presidential candidates Juan Sebastián Chamorro, Félix Maradiaga and Medardo Mairena.

In other important developments. UN human rights office 7 July condemned 2 and 5 July killings of two Indigenous people on Bosawas nature reserve along Atlantic coast; both victims were park wardens in protected area rife with settlers looking to clear land for farms and illegal mining and logging. International Court of Justice 13 July dismissed Nicaragua's case in dispute with Colombia over maritime borders and economic rights over area of Caribbean Sea.

Caribbean

➔ **Haiti Rival gangs struck fragile truce as violence expanded beyond capital, Kenya offered to lead multinational security force, and international actors urged compromise to resolve political crisis.**

Rival gangs struck truce amid widespread violence. Leaders of rival G9 and G-pèp gang coalitions 1 July agreed truce in Cité Soleil commune of capital Port-au-Prince; local observers expressed doubts about pact's durability as gangs did not commit to disarmament. UN 3 July said murders and abductions rose for fifth consecutive year, with homicides Jan-June 2023 up 67.5% on same period in 2022; report also said civilian self-defence groups, including Bwa Kale movement, killed at least 224 alleged gang members late April-late June (though movement's strength has since waned). Armed assailants 23 July attacked Liancourt town (Artibonite), burning down houses and building of local broadcaster as gang violence continued to expand beyond capital.

Kenya offered to lead multinational force. Kenya 29 July said it would consider leading multinational force with contribution of 1,000 police officers to support Haitian National Police (HNP), pending UN approval. Offer came amid growing calls for such a force. Most notably, CARICOM (body of Caribbean nations) heads of state 7 July stressed need to create a "humanitarian and security stabilization corridor under the mandate of a UN Security Council Resolution"; UN Security Council 14 July extended UN mission's mandate for one year and encouraged countries to provide support to HNP, including through deployment of specialised force.

International actors continued pushing for dialogue to resolve political crisis. UN Sec-Gen António Guterres 1 July urged all actors involved in political negotiations to make the concessions "necessary for the restoration of democratic institutions" during visit to Haiti, while U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken in 5 July meeting with acting PM Ariel Henry stressed urgency of achieving political consensus. CARICOM delegation 12-15 July convened Haitian politicians and civil society leaders for talks aimed at resolving crisis; meeting produced no agreement but delegation 18 July claimed progress toward reducing number of parties in dialogue and refining agenda for negotiations.

Humanitarian situation remained dire. World Food Programme 17 July said it was forced to cut number of people receiving emergency food aid in Haiti by 25% due to lack of funds.