



Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ **Colombia** Peace talks with FARC dissident faction and ELN suffered setbacks, though ceasefires held.

Govt negotiations with FARC dissident faction suffered setback. Fallout from late Oct local elections rocked three-month bilateral ceasefire between govt and dissident Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) faction known as FARC-EP Estado Mayor Central (FARC-EMC). Parties had reached agreement for military presence in El Plateado town, Cauca department (Pacific coast), for election day but disagreed on when military would leave. FARC-EMC's Carlos Patiño Front, dominant in El Plateado, 5 Nov pressured unarmed civilians to surround soldiers and force them to withdraw, which they did; FARC-EMC same day said it would pull out of negotiations for internal consultations but that bilateral ceasefire would remain. President Petro 7 Nov said pause in violence would only be upheld if dissidents returned to talks; group 17 Nov said it would return to talks with re-configured negotiating team; discussions due to restart early Dec.

Kidnappings strained negotiations with ELN. National Liberation Army (ELN) 2 Nov admitted to kidnapping Luis Manuel Díaz, father of Liverpool footballer Luis Díaz, in Barrancas municipality, La Guajira department (north), 28 Oct and his wife; police same day rescued wife but group held Luis Manuel until 9 Nov, sparking outrage over continued ELN abductions during ceasefire and talks with Petro administration. Govt 9 Nov issued statement urging ELN to stop kidnappings, which group 10 Nov rejected as "blackmail". Govt 17 Nov announced delay in starting fifth round of talks after ELN failed to respond to govt lead negotiator Otty Patiño's letter demanding meeting to discuss abductions. Amid public concerns over "total peace" policy, Petro 22 Nov replaced Peace Commissioner Danilo Rueda with Patiño. Meanwhile, ELN 6 Nov declared 72-hour armed strike in parts of Chocó department (Pacific coast) where group is under significant pressure from Gaitanista Self Defence Forces.

In other important developments. Gunmen 12 Nov assassinated second place mayoral candidate in Toribío, Cauca; attack follows late-Oct local elections, which saw significant losses for Petro's governing coalition and at least 77 protests or riots around voting stations and verification centres.

➔ **Venezuela** **Fallout from govt's suspension of opposition primary results continued, and tensions with Guyana ran high over Caracas' upcoming referendum on disputed territory.**

Govt-opposition tensions simmered over ban on presidential candidate. Tensions persisted over Supreme Court's 30 Oct decision to suspend results of opposition primary, which María Corina Machado – currently banned from running for office – won in landslide victory. Govt-controlled Supreme Court in same ruling described bans on politicians as “firm”, fuelling concerns govt will not allow fair vote in 2024 poll; U.S. official Juan González 8 Nov said in interview with Colombian television that Washington would take steps to snapback sanctions, provisionally lifted 18 Oct following govt-opposition agreement in Barbados, if Maduro administration did not lift ban by end of month; in sign of slight easing tensions, govt and opposition joint statement 30 Nov said barred candidates would be able to appeal against bans 1-15 Dec. Earlier, govt's chief negotiator and National Assembly president Jorge Rodríguez 17 Nov said govt would not accept “ultimatums from anyone”. EU, meanwhile, 13 Nov extended individual sanctions until May 2024; Rodríguez next day said govt would not invite EU to monitor elections while sanctions persist.

Tensions with Guyana escalated over disputed region. Tensions between Georgetown and Caracas spiked as latter prepared for 3 Dec referendum on contested Essequibo area, oil-rich region currently administered by Guyana. Plebiscite will ask Venezuelans if they agree to reject International Court of Justice's (ICJ) jurisdiction over region, create state called Guayana Esequiba and grant its population Venezuelan citizenship. Guyana continued to protest referendum, claiming Maduro govt seeks to use vote to justify region's “annexation”. U.S. defence officials 27-28 Nov visited country to “deepen partnership”.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador** **Justice system struggled under state of exception, and Congress granted President Bukele leave of absence to contest Feb 2024 polls.**

Authorities renewed state of exception amid concerns of violations in prisons. Legislative Assembly 8 Nov extended state of exception for twentieth time. Mass arrests put pressure on justice system, with 85% of 5,000 people released from prison between March 2022 and July 2023 still awaiting trial. Human rights organisations continued to denounce violations in prison. Notably, NGO Cristosal 1 Nov reported that 191 persons had died in custody since March 2022. Meanwhile, authorities in Mexico 8 Nov arrested Salvadoran MS-13 gang leader Elmer Canales, 9 Nov extradited him to U.S.; U.S. claimed authorities released him from prison in El Salvador in Jan 2021, boosting claims widely reported in Salvadoran media that President Bukele negotiated directly with gangs to reduce violence.

Election Tribunal approved Bukele's bid for second term. Electoral Tribunal - which is elected by govt-controlled Congress – 3 Nov approved President Bukele's candidacy for 2024 presidential election despite constitutional ban on consecutive presidential re-election. Bukele 28 Nov said he would ask Congress for leave of absence from presidency for six months to allow him to run; Congress 30 Nov

granted permission for period 1 Dec to 31 May 2024, with current head of National Directorate of Municipal Works due to replace Bukele in his duties.

➡ **Guatemala Judicial attempts to undermine August presidential election result continued to fuel political instability; more moves against President-elect could fuel mass protests and unrest in coming weeks.**

Judicial persecution threatened to cause further turmoil. In moves that could spark further unrest, Public Prosecutor's Office 16 Nov opened investigation into President-elect Arévalo, VP-elect Karin Herrera and four other politicians for allegedly promoting May 2022-June 2023 student protest; judiciary accused them of destruction of cultural property, illicit association and influence peddling, and asked Supreme Court to remove their immunity; fears rose that removal of immunity or arrest of President-elect in December would lead to mass protests. Earlier, Supreme Electoral Court 2 Nov confirmed suspension of Arévalo's party Movimiento Semilla over alleged anomalies during its creation; original suspension issued in July but only became legal after electoral period ended 31 Oct. Public Prosecutor's Office 22 Nov levelled same charges against two other politicians. Arévalo and Herrera 16 Nov said charges were "spurious" and an "assault on democracy". Prosecutor's office also issued arrest warrants for 27 other individuals for their role in university protest.

Congress appointed Supreme Court judges. Constitutional Court 7 Nov ordered Congress to elect magistrates for Supreme Court of Justice and Court of Appeals before end of Nov, reinvigorating process on pause since 2019. Congress 15 Nov elected thirteen magistrates to Supreme Court of Justice, some of whom have been accused of corruption, triggering protests in capital Guatemala City; 21 Nov appointed Appeal Court magistrates.

International and domestic actors reiterated support for Arévalo. Indigenous leaders and private sector actors 1 Nov signed "Action for Democracy" charter with Arévalo, which reiterated support for election result, and pledged to defend and strengthen democratic institutions. Meanwhile, twenty countries from Organization of American States Permanent Council 15 Nov voted that Prosecutor's Office sought to undermine democracy, while U.S. and EU continued to threaten sanctions. EU electoral observation mission 13 Nov presented final report which found no fraud in vote and concluded results were legitimate.

➡ **Honduras Appointment of temporary Attorney General fuelled political tensions, and govt extended state of exception for eighth time.**

Selection of new Attorney General sparked political crisis. Tensions over selection of new Attorney General spiked after Congressional Permanent Commission, formed of eight pro-govt and one opposition legislator, 1 Nov appointed Johel Zelaya to act as interim chief prosecutor. Move triggered controversy as many deemed commission, appointed by legislative president and ally of President Castro, Luis Redondo, bypassed legislative debate. Opposition criticised appointment as power grab and 11 Nov organised protest in capital Tegucigalpa. Despite promising not to carry out "selective persecution", Zelaya 9 Nov removed several investigative and former opposition judicial officials. Civil society, private sector and international community condemned irregular naming of Attorney General, with U.S. 7 Nov announcing Honduras would not receive certain funds, citing failure to combat corruption.

Govt extended stringent security measures. Govt 21 Nov announced extension of state of exception until Jan 2024. Police 13 Nov claimed it had arrested 1,895 people, including over 700 from Barrio 18 and MS-13 gangs, since state of exception began Dec 2022. Meanwhile, security minister 8 Nov announced seizure of 48,600 doses of fentanyl hidden in container in Puerto Cortes, Cortes department (north), amid concerns of stepped-up drug production in Honduras.

In other important developments. President of main opposition National Party David Chávez Madison 28 Nov fled arrest after police prevented him from boarding flight to U.S.; same day, judge ordered Chávez's arrest in fraud case, which Chávez denies.

➡ **Mexico Criminal violence remained rampant, govt faced more backlash for high number of disappearances, and ruling party healed split ahead of 2024 presidential election.**

Criminal violence persisted at high levels. Authorities 13 Nov found Jesús Ociel Baena, second openly non-binary person to occupy magistrate position in Mexico, and partner dead at home; state attorney ruled incident murder-suicide but Ociel had received threats before, prompting rights groups, U.S. and Inter-American Court of Human Rights to call for full investigation. Meanwhile, security forces 3 Nov killed four members of alleged criminal group in Celaya city, Guanajuato state (centre), while another clash 11 Nov left three police officers and three suspected crime group members dead in Zacatecas city, Zacatecas state (centre). Armed assailants 19-22 Nov abducted three journalists and two relatives in Taxco, Guerrero state (south west). Armed men 28 Nov shot at four journalists returning from murder scene in Chilpancingo city, Guerrero state (south), injuring three; another journalist same day was also shot and injured in Michoacan state. Gunmen 21 Nov killed prominent activist documenting murders in León city, Guanajuato. Security forces 22 Nov captured alleged security chief for Sinaloa cartel faction in Culiacan, Sinaloa state (west).

Govt continued to face criticism for high number of disappearances. Former head of National Search Commission Karla Quintana 7 Nov accused govt of attempting to deflate official number of missing persons from 113,000 by using data from bodies other than official Search Commission; President López Obrador 13 Nov accused Quintana of manipulating data to discredit govt.

Ruling MORENA party presidential candidate and former FM reached agreement. Former FM Ebrard, who came second to Claudia Sheinbaum in internal MORENA vote to select presidential candidate, 13 Nov announced he would not leave party or run as independent in 2024 polls after "political agreement" with Sheinbaum.

In other important developments. Opposition forces and some MORENA members 7 Nov criticised govt over lack of budget allocation for areas affected by Hurricane Otis, which caused \$16bn worth of damage. Caravan of hundreds of migrants 5 Nov left Tapachula city, Chiapas state (south) on journey toward U.S. border.

➡ **Nicaragua Govt dismissed hundreds of justice officials amid ongoing crackdown; ties with Russia and China deepened as Managua formally withdrew from Organization of American States (OAS).**

Govt dismantled judiciary and continued crackdown on civil society. Govt late Oct dismissed President of Supreme Court and dozens of officials in justice system; by 6 Nov had removed 450 officers from posts, including four Supreme Court magistrates; media report 7 Nov suggested vacancies would be filled by loyalist politicians and former members of security forces. Govt 6 Nov proscribed 25 NGOs, including religious institutions and 27 Nov closed or dissolved fifteen others. Indigenous party YATAMA 13 Nov announced it did not know whereabouts of party leaders seized by security forces late Sept.

Managua strengthened ties with Russia and China, and withdrew from OAS. Commander of armed forces 7 Nov visited Russia to negotiate technical cooperation, reiterated support for Russia's war against Ukraine. Economic Congressional Committee 14 Nov announced National Assembly would soon ratify Free Trade Agreement with China. Meanwhile, Nicaragua 19 Nov formally withdrew from OAS following two-year process launched in 2021 by Ortega regime in response to condemnation from body about rights violations. Ahead of withdrawal, OAS members 8 Nov approved resolution calling for continued monitoring of rights in country.

Caribbean

➡ Dominican Republic Tensions with Haiti escalated as sides traded accusations of border violations.

According to Haitian govt, Dominican soldiers 7 Nov breached border wall near site where disputed Haitian canal is being built into Massacre River; Haitians immediately protested, setting up barricades at border and burning tires. Dominican authorities, however, argued wall does not delimit actual border and instead claimed group of Haitians had entered its territory and interfered with army patrols. Both countries regarded incident as act of provocation by other side. Haiti 8 Nov announced countries' FMs had agreed to de-escalate, though FM Roberto Alvarez next day questioned its neighbour's commitment. Haitian govt 14 Nov banned trade at Ouanaminthe border crossing. Haitian merchants 29 Nov attempted to forcibly break through border but were prevented by security forces.

➡ Guyana Tensions with Venezuela ran high over December referendum on disputed territory.

Tensions between Georgetown and Caracas spiked as latter prepared for 3 Dec referendum on contested Essequibo area, oil-rich region currently administered by Guyana. Plebiscite will ask Venezuelans if they agree to reject International Court of Justice's (ICJ) jurisdiction over region, create state called Guayana Esequiba and grant its population Venezuelan citizenship. Guyana continued to protest referendum, claiming Maduro govt seeks to use vote to justify region's "annexation". VP Jagdeo 23 Nov said U.S. defence officials would visit country late Nov.

➡ Haiti Ever-worsening gang violence displaced thousands, Kenya's supreme court blocked police deployment to Haiti, and negotiations to resolve political crisis failed to produce breakthrough.

Gang efforts to expand territory triggered mass displacement. Alleged members of Grand Ravine gang 1 Nov launched offensive in Mariani district south-west of capital Port-au-Prince to expand territory along National Route 2 and increase extortion opportunities; International Organization for Migration 6 Nov estimated 2,500 people were displaced in five days of fighting. Meanwhile, Iskar Andrice, one of G9 gang coalition's founders and key leaders, 12 Nov died in unclear circumstances; leader of rival Gpèp coalition Ti Gabriel next day launched attacks in several G9-controlled areas of capital's Cité Soleil neighbourhood to expand turf; OCHA 17 Nov said clashes killed at least 166 and displaced over 1,000. Iskar's successor David Ganier aka Black Alex Mana, 21 Nov killed by member of same coalition, James Edmond aka Benji, replacing him as gang head. Bel-Air gang 19 Nov launched offensive to invade Solino neighbourhood of capital.

Kenya's high court extended orders blocking police deployment to Haiti. Kenya's parliament 16 Nov approved govt request to deploy 1,000 police officers to Haiti as part of multinational support mission. Hours later, however, Supreme Court extended Oct order blocking deployment until it rules on case in late Jan. Kenyan President Ruto 21 Nov said mission should be 5,000-strong. Meanwhile, poll by Haitian company Diagnostic and Development early Oct found 70% of Haitians favoured deployment of international armed force.

Negotiations between interim govt and opposition made little progress. CARICOM (body of Caribbean nations) experts 8-14 Nov visited Haiti for fourth round of negotiations between govt and opposition but no agreement was reached. Meanwhile, president of High Council for Transition Mirlande Manigat 2 Nov criticised lack of progress in implementing Dec 2022 agreement between acting PM Henry, opposition and civil society to organise new elections.

Dispute with Dominican Republic over canal construction continued. Dominican soldiers 7 Nov breached border wall near site where disputed Haitian canal is being built into Massacre River; Haitians immediately protested, setting up barricades at border and burning tires (see Dominican Republic).