

# Latin America and the Caribbean

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## Southern Cone

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➔ **Brazil** **Former President da Silva launched presidential bid, and President Bolsonaro ramped up attacks on judiciary and electoral system.** As Oct presidential elections edged closer, former left-wing president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva 7 May announced presidential campaign against incumbent president Jair Bolsonaro; speaking at “pre-launch” rally (official campaigning begins in August), he called on Brazilians to “build an alternative path to the incompetence and authoritarianism that govern us”. His announcement came amid growing fears that Bolsonaro, citing alleged flaws in electronic voting system, might not admit defeat, which could raise risk of violence. Poll by Quest consulting firm 11 May gave Lula clear lead over Bolsonaro. Amid ongoing feud between Bolsonaro and Supreme Court, president 17 May announced he was suing Justice Alexandre de Moraes, citing alleged “attacks on democracy, disrespect for the constitution and contempt for fundamental rights”; Moraes had previously repeatedly accused Bolsonaro of spreading fake news, notably around COVID-19; Supreme Court 18 May rejected complaint. In petition to UN, 80 jurists and legal researchers 18 May said Brazil’s democracy and independent judiciary were under threat. Meanwhile, police 24 May said raid to capture leaders of drug-trafficking organisation in Rio de Janeiro city’s north killed at least 23, second deadliest police raid in Brazil’s history. Video of 38-year-old black man asphyxiated in police car 26 May went viral, sparking outrage online and prompting some to take to streets in town of Umbaúba, northeastern state of Sergipe, to protest against police violence.

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## Andes

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➔ 🇨🇴 **Colombia** **Amid tense atmosphere, first round of presidential vote held; electoral violence could rise ahead of second round scheduled for 19 June.** Colombians 29 May headed to polls amid tense electoral atmosphere. Leftist candidate Gustavo Petro won 40.32% of vote, falling short of 50% required to prevent second round; conservative candidate Rodolfo Hernández, who received 28.15%, will face Petro in run-off on 19 June. Attorney General’s Office same day processed 105 reports of possible electoral crimes and other disturbances. Election day saw localised incidents, but no major violence. Notably, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidents detonated three explosive devices in Caquetá (south) and Guaviare (south east) departments; same day killed polling jury in rural area of Vista Hermosa municipality, Meta department (centre). Also on election day, clashes erupted between FARC dissidents and National Liberation Army (ELN) in Normandía village, Arauca department (north). Earlier in month, criminal organisation Gulf Clan 5 May declared four-day armed strike in response to extradition 4 May of leader Dario Antonio Usuga, known as Otoniel, to U.S. Group ordered residents in areas under its influence to stay inside and “cease all social, economic, educational and cultural activities”. Strike affected at least 178 municipalities across 11 departments of northern Colombia; major city centres such

as Sincelejo and Montería effectively shut down, illustrating group's widespread and largely uncontested presence. Govt responded slowly, sending additional troops to affected regions three days after strike began. Ministry of defence reported five security forces killed 4-8 May, civil society said three civilians were killed. Chocó department (along Pacific coast), was among worst affected areas during and after strike; UN 17 May reported at least 14,600 people under forced confinement in southern Chocó in early May. Meanwhile, transitional justice mechanisms suffered setbacks. Military's appointee to Truth Commission 2 May resigned, alleging that forthcoming final report will be biased; credible sources indicated he may have been pressured by sections of security forces to resign. Otoniel's extradition marked significant loss for process, as it cut short his testimony before Special Jurisdiction for Peace Court (established under 2016 peace deal between govt and FARC to handle cases deriving from conflict).

➡ **Venezuela Prospects for revival of Mexico talks between govt and opposition continued to stall, and Unitary Platform took steps to unify opposition ahead of 2024 elections.** To encourage resumption of suspended Mexico talks between govt and opposition, U.S. officials 17 May indicated Washington would authorise U.S. oil company Chevron Corp to negotiate directly with Maduro govt and reportedly offered to lift sanctions against relative of First Lady Cilia Flores; leaders of both sides' negotiating teams, govt's representative Jorge Rodríguez and Unitary Platform's Gerardo Blyde, same day met to discuss possible return to negotiations. However, Rodríguez 19 May insisted that businessman and Maduro's close collaborator Alex Saab, who is awaiting trial on money-laundering charges in U.S., should participate in talks. U.S. president's top Latin America adviser Juan González 19 May said further easing of sanctions, which would allow foreign oil companies to resume production and sell on U.S. market, depended on progress toward free and fair elections in Venezuela; González added that Maduro govt would not be able to profit from oil sales and that such measures would be reversed if it reneged on commitments. News of potential sanctions relief prompted hostile response from some of Venezuelan opposition's allies in U.S. Congress, including Senate foreign relations chair Bob Menendez; U.S. Treasury Department 27 May renewed Chevron's licence under same restricted conditions, seemingly quashing hopes of talks resumption. Meanwhile, opposition group Unitary Platform, under pressure from Washington, took steps toward greater unity during meeting in Panama. In statement published 16 May, it announced decision to appoint former National Assembly president Omar Barboza as coordinator, introduce new decision-making process and hold primaries, possibly in early 2023, to choose presidential candidate for 2024 elections; also called for "deep consultation process with the whole country" to determine procedure for primaries. Issues such as participation in primaries of Venezuelans abroad and whether govt-dominated electoral authority should be in charge of organising primary vote still needed to be resolved by end of month. Maduro, who has consolidated political control over country and Chavista movement, 16 May reshuffled cabinet. Notably, former ambassador to Moscow Carlos Faría replaced Foreign Minister Félix Plasencia.

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## Central America and Mexico

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➔ **El Salvador Under renewed state of emergency, authorities continued mass detentions campaign to address gang violence; economic outlook deteriorated.** Legislative Assembly 25 May extended state of emergency, initially imposed in late March to deal with surge of gang violence, and approved \$10 mn budget increase to Attorney General's office for wiretapping. Authorities continued heavy crackdown to deal with gang violence. National Police 27 May said over 35,000 people arrested since 27 March; Attorney General 22 May said over 23,000 will remain in temporary detention while trials proceed. Security Minister 9 May said authorities released at least 168 wrongfully detained, while Central America University radio 17 May said 17 have died in custody. Human rights organisations continued to criticise crackdown; notably, NGO Cristosal raised concerns about almost 700 human rights violations by authorities, including numerous cases of arbitrary detentions, between 27 March and 24 May. Central America University polling institute 25 May released survey showing eight out of ten interviewees felt crime had decreased since state of exception, with 50% approving its extension. New evidence emerged about govt dealings with gangs. Media outlet El Faro 17 May published report with confession from high-ranking MS-13 gang members for killing at least 87 after fellow gang members were arrested late March; senior govt official admitted he released prominent MS-13 leader to illustrate commitment to talks. Meanwhile, country's economic outlook worsened, driven by stark decrease in Bitcoin value, which country adopted as legal tender in 2021. Emerging Markets Bonds Index 16 May rated country's bonds at over 24%, signalling increasing risk, while govt 8 May bought another 500 bitcoins despite drop in prices.

➔ **Honduras Security forces continued targeting drug-trafficking organisations, authorities extradited former head of police, and setting-up of international anti-corruption body proceeded at slow pace.** Authorities continued crackdown on criminal organisations. In Colón department (north east), police 15 May arrested Herlinda Bobadilla, leader of Montes Bobadilla trafficking clan, after U.S. authorities offered \$15 mn reward for information leading to her and her sons' arrest; in shootout, police killed Bobadilla's son, Tito Montes Bobadilla, arrested three. In La Ceiba coastal town, police same day arrested Nicaraguan drug trafficker Omar Zamora Mayorga, who is wanted by U.S. Operations continued in Colón department to arrest those involved in assault and killing of three police officers in late April; police chief Gustavo Sánchez 4 May announced curfew's extension for another 90 days. As of 2 May, police had eradicated 550,000 coca crops in 2022, surpassing 525,125 eradicated during 2021; forced eradication in country is aimed at curbing activities of criminal groups, who largely control coca production. Authorities 10 May extradited former head of National Police Juan Carlos Bonilla to U.S. on drug-trafficking and weapons charges; Former President Juan Orlando Hernández same day pleaded not guilty to drug and weapons charges in federal court in U.S. Honduran court 19 May approved extradition to U.S. of MS-13 leader Tokiro Rodas Ramírez, alias "Perverso". UN mission 9-13 May visited capital Tegucigalpa to assess possibility of creating International Commission Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras; commission met with representatives from judiciary, legislature, executive and civil society, including country's president, Xiomara Castro. President Castro 11 May said

she would not attend Americas Summit planned 6-10 June unless all countries were invited.

➡ **Mexico Lethal violence remained high, notably targeting journalists, and President López Obrador called on U.S. to ease embargo on Cuba.** Criminal violence continued during month. Notably, unidentified armed group 3 May attacked offices of Attorney General's Office of Mexico State in Sultepec municipality (centre), blocking roads and wounding two agents, in fourth such incident in area in 2022. In apparent gang shooting, 15 unidentified gunmen opened fire in two bars in Celaya city, Guanajuato state (centre), killing at least 11. Journalists faced targeted violence: unidentified gunmen 4 May killed journalist Luis Enrique Ramírez Ramos in Culiacán city, Sinaloa state (north west); unidentified gunmen 9 May shot dead journalists Yessenia Mollinedo and Johana García in Cosoleacaque municipality, Veracruz state (east). Other violence persisted, notably involving state forces. Puebla state police 9 May allegedly ambushed members of indigenous group Unidad por Coyomeapan, who occupied offices of city govt since June 2021 to prevent local politician they accused of electoral fraud from taking office, leaving four dead. Civilians 11 May confronted and chased off soldiers in Nueva Italia municipality, Michoacán state (centre); army said it entered area in search of methamphetamine laboratories and accused locals of collaborating with local armed group, while civilians said soldiers acted on behalf of armed group Los Viagras. Municipal police 1 May violently suppressed march protesting violence against women in Irapuato city, Guanajuato state (centre), arresting dozens, who were released next day. Interior Ministry's National Registry of Missing People 16 May registered 100,000 people as missing or disappeared. Human rights organisation Fundación para la Justicia y el Estado Democrático de Derecho 28 May released report denouncing militarisation of migration policy since President López Obrador took office. U.S. judge 20 May blocked President Biden's plan to end pandemic-era policy allowing U.S. authorities to turn away asylum seekers arriving at country's southern border with Mexico. López Obrador 7-8 May visited Cuba calling for "renovation" of country's "revolution" and on U.S. to lift sanctions, 10 May said he would not attend U.S. summit planned 6-10 June if other countries were excluded, 18 May demanded Venezuela and Nicaragua be invited.

➡ **Nicaragua Govt's crackdown on opponents continued amid growing international isolation, and senior Iranian oil official pledged support to country.** Authorities continued to repress civil society organisations. Notably, authorities 4 May effectively shut down 50 NGOs, another 44 on 18-19 May, and 83 on 31 May. Number of organisations closed in 2022 has now surpassed 250. Govt also increased persecution of religious leaders. Notably, Matagalpa bishop Rolando Álvarez 19 May announced hunger strike in protest against govt surveillance; and govt 20 May shut down catholic TV channel handled by Episcopal Conference. U.S. media outlet The New York Times 5 May reported that Laureano Ortega, son of Daniel Ortega, and Rosario Murillo quietly reached out to U.S. "shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine". Meanwhile, during visit to Nicaragua, Iranian oil minister Javab Owji Hom 6 May announced that Iran would supply country with oil and would look into possibility of reactivating investments in refinery called "Bolívar's ultimate dream". However, Nicaragua remained largely isolated from international community, with foreign leaders throughout month denouncing Ortega's repressive tactics. Notably, EU High Representative Joseph Borrell 4 May

described Ortega's regime as "one of the most repressive on the planet", adding "we will do everything we can to isolate Ortega". Permanent Council of Organization of American States (OAS) 13 May passed resolution with 29 votes calling on Nicaraguan authorities to return OAS offices seized in late April.

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## **Caribbean**

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➔ **Haiti** **Gang violence continued to run high across Port-au-Prince, notably in Croix-des-Bouquets neighbourhood, while negotiations on political transition resumed.** Turf war between gangs Chen Mechan and 400 Mawozo that began 24 April continued until 5 May. Acting PM Ariel Henry did not comment on armed clashes, sparking widespread outrage at ineffective police response. Also in Croix-des-Bouquets, 400 Mawozo 8 May hijacked bus, kidnapping 12 passengers including Dominican driver and eight Turkish missionaries; 400 Mawozo 14 May released driver, all other hostages remained in captivity as of 24 May. Armed bandits 30 May attacked bus in Port-au-Prince's Martissant neighbourhood, killing one and injuring two passengers. Dominican Republic FM Roberto Álvarez 4 May announced release of Dominican diplomat Carlos Guillén Tatis, kidnapped 29 April by gang 400 Mawozo in Croix-des-Bouquets. UN 17 May reported at least 92 people unaffiliated with gangs and some 96 alleged gang members killed in Port-au-Prince 24 April-16 May. International humanitarian organisation Doctors Without Borders 22 May expressed concern over continued closure of its hospitals amid "unacceptable situation of insecurity". Authorities 3 May extradited 400 Mawozo leader Germine Joly aka "Yonyon" to U.S., incarcerated since 2018; U.S. federal grand jury 10 May indicted Joly for role in armed kidnapping of 16 U.S. Christian missionaries in Haiti in Oct 2021. Following months of stalled negotiations between PM Henry and members of so-called Montana Accord (who have proposed two-year transitional plan that includes five-member presidential college and prime minister), Henry 11 and 15 May met with Montana Accord member and former culture minister to establish rules for engaging in formal negotiations. Henry made counter-proposal, which Montana Accord 21 May objected to because agenda did not include governance arrangements; 29 May sent new agenda including stipulations for "sufficient consensus" to enact constitutional changes and "transparent and credible structures" for holding elections. Meanwhile, Court of First Instance 30 May appointed Judge Walter Wesser Voltaire to oversee investigation into late President Moïse's assassination.