



Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

↑ **Colombia** Govt struck ceasefire agreement with FARC dissidents, marking further progress for President Petro’s “total peace” policy; armed and criminal violence persisted.

Govt secured ceasefire with FARC dissident faction. Petro administration 16 Oct agreed to three-month bilateral ceasefire with dissident Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) faction known as FARC-EP Estado Mayor Central (FARC-EMC), marking significant political win for govt. Agreement, which went into effect 17 Oct, included specific protocols protecting civilians and ensuring free conduct of local elections on 29 Oct; FARC-EMC had previously said it would not allow unfriendly candidates to run in its territory. While deal is national, sides agreed to define regions where FARC-EMC is present and concentrate implementation and monitoring there. Agreement also officially opened talks between govt and dissidents; negotiations aim to reach partial deals that can be implemented as political talks continue; sides agreed, for example, to undertake “transformation” projects aimed at improving conditions in priority areas, starting with Caño de Míca, Cauca department (south west), where some 1,800 civilians were recently displaced in confrontations between FARC-EMC and military. Meanwhile, govt-ELN negotiating table as of 10 Oct will function permanently in capital Bogotá to maintain progress on implementing agreements on participation, bilateral ceasefire and humanitarian relief.

Violence persisted in several regions. Despite diplomatic advances, clashes between armed and criminal groups continued. Notably, Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces clashed with ELN in attempt to dislodge guerrillas from gold mining areas in eastern Antioquia and southern Bolívar (north). FARC-EMC fought separate dissident faction Segunda Marquetalia in Telembí triangle area in Nariño department (Pacific Coast), displacing almost 500, according to early Oct UN report. Comandos de la Frontera criminal group 6-8 Oct held armed strike in Caquetá and Putumayo departments (south).

Governing party suffered setback at ballot box. Local elections 29 Oct dealt blow to Petro govt, with opposition candidates winning number of key seats, including in major cities and governorships. Authorities reported several incidents of vandalism and clashes between voters at polling centres, while eight candidates were murdered in months leading up to polls.

In another important development. Petro 31 Oct recalled ambassador to Israel over “massacre of the Palestinian people”.

➡ **Ecuador** Centre-right businessman Daniel Noboa defeated left-leaning rival in presidential election mired by escalating criminal violence.

Ecuadorians elected new president in run-off overshadowed by security crisis. Centre-right businessman and son of former presidential candidate Daniel Noboa 15 Oct won presidential election, defeating left-leaning rival Luisa González with around 52% of vote. Noboa has promised to “restore peace” by strengthening police force, deploying military to safeguard key infrastructure, beefing up community-based prevention and addressing socioeconomic drivers of violence.

Insecurity persisted at high levels. Violence against public officials continued ahead of election. Notably, armed assailants 5 Oct murdered prosecutor Genaro Oswaldo Reasco Bolaños in Jujan canton (Guayas province); unknown assailants 24 Oct shot and killed councillor from Citizen’s Revolution Movement party in Yaguachi canton, Guayas province; and unidentified assailants 28 Oct attacked former mayor of Duran city, killing his bodyguard. Meanwhile, authorities 6 Oct found six suspects in murder of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio dead in their prison cells in Litoral Penitentiary, Guayaquil city; police next day found seventh suspect dead in prison near Quito. President Lasso 7 Oct announced investigation into officer in charge of Litoral prison and removed several top security officials. Lasso 8 Oct extended state of emergency by one month.

⬆ **Venezuela** In crucial step toward competitive presidential poll, govt and opposition reached deal to improve electoral conditions, leading to substantial U.S. sanctions relief.

Govt and opposition struck deal to improve electoral conditions. Maduro govt and group of opposition parties known as Unitary Platform reached agreement in Barbados on minimum conditions for 2024 presidential poll. Notably, agreement fixes vote for unspecified date in second half of 2024, includes update of electoral registry and commits govt-controlled National Electoral Council (CNE) to invite international ‘technical’ observation missions including from EU, UN and AU. Text says parties will promote “authorisation” of all candidates and political parties as long as they “meet requirements to participate in the presidential elections”; govt’s chief negotiator Jorge Rodríguez immediately interpreted clause as stating banned candidates cannot run, which would rule out opposition candidate (see below).

Washington provided ample sanctions relief. Welcoming agreement, U.S. 18 Oct issued broad authorisation of transactions involving Venezuela’s oil, gas and gold sectors, and removed ban on secondary trading of certain Venezuelan sovereign bonds, as well as debt and equity issued by state-owned Petróleos de Venezuela oil company. License lifting sanctions on oil and gas sector issued for six months, with Washington promising to renew it if Caracas complies with electoral agreement and releases U.S. and Venezuelan prisoners. Govt same day released five political prisoners.

María Corina Machado won opposition primary, govt later suspended results. Opposition 22 Oct held primary to select candidate for presidential election. Hardline politician María Corina Machado, currently banned from running for office, won overwhelmingly with 93% of vote after several prominent candidates pulled out of race in weeks before. Turnout was greater than expected, lending

legitimacy to Machado's candidacy for presidential election. Govt officials, however, alleged primary had been fraudulent and 24 Oct said opposition had inflated voter turnout; Attorney General Tarek William Saab next day announced criminal investigation into primary's organisers. Govt-controlled Supreme Court 30 Oct suspended results of primary and ordered organisers to hand over all materials related to process; U.S. same day warned it would take action if govt fails to uphold commitments under electoral roadmap.

Central America and Mexico

➡ **El Salvador** Concerns about human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence, under state of exception persisted.

Govt denied allegations of rights violations under state of exception. Legislative Assembly 12 Oct extended state of exception for 19th time, with VP of assembly claiming that human rights violations committed during measure were isolated incidents. Despite claims, civil society organisations and journalists continued to document cases of arbitrary arrests and torture, and shed light on conditions within prisons. Notably, coalition of human rights organisations 18 Oct estimated inmate population of 1,620 people per 100,000, translating into 148% overcrowding rate. Meanwhile, military 11 Oct sent 3,500 soldiers into Apopa municipality, San Salvador department (centre), amid ongoing efforts to root out gangs.

Women's groups spotlighted sexual violence at hands of military and police. Following late Sept charges brought against six soldiers involved in rape of minor, military and police came under scrutiny for abuse of power and allegations of rape from within their ranks. Notably, several feminist groups 18 Oct protested in front of army headquarters, accusing military and police of using state of exception to act with impunity; they reported, for example, that one soldier had raped an eight-year-old girl in Bajo Lempa area, Usulután department (south east).

In other important developments. Govt and opposition 3 Oct began campaigns for Feb 2024 general elections, which President Bukele is expected to win; Bukele 26 Oct officially registered as candidate despite constitutional ban on consecutive presidential re-election.

↓ **Guatemala** Violence against protesters opposing electoral interference after Bernardo Arévalo's surprise victory left one dead.

Protests against judicial interference in electoral transition paralysed country. Amid continued efforts by Attorney General Consuelo Porras and Public Prosecutor's Office to derail electoral transition, indigenous leaders, civil society and student organisations 2 Oct began protesting, establishing roadblocks throughout country and calling for resignation of Porras and other judicial officials; indigenous leaders called for nationwide strike. Blockages led to food and fuel shortages. Porras 9 Oct urged govt to act against "illegal" demonstrations and to clear roadblocks using force if necessary, while outgoing President Giammattei same day suggested protest leaders were receiving foreign funding. Riot police next day began clearing roadblocks and using tear gas. Interior Minister Napoleón Barrientos 16 Oct resigned after Porras requested his dismissal for not forcefully dispersing protests.

Unrest left one dead. In first casualty since protests began, unidentified gunmen 16 Oct killed one person and wounded two other protesters in Malacatan town, San Marcos department (west);_videos on social media same day showed machete-carrying assailants attacking protesters in El Asintal township, Retalhuleu municipality (south west), allegedly in concert with police; Arévalo condemned violence.

International community reiterated its support for Arévalo. Arévalo 4 Oct restarted transition process, next day asked govt and demonstrators to engage in dialogue. Meanwhile, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 2 Oct called for “peaceful political transition”, and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan 3 Oct promised to ensure accountability for “those who are trying to suffocate democracy”. Organization of American States head Luis Almagro 10 Oct described election interference as “shameful”. U.S. official 24 Oct said Washington could apply sectoral sanctions to “support democratic process”. U.S. and EU same day issued joint statement, expressing concern about “flagrant attempts to undermine” elections.

➔ **Honduras Institutional crisis over Attorney General’s appointment continued, and govt extended state of exception for seventh time.**

Congress remained paralysed over selection of new Attorney General. Ruling Libre Party and opposition National Party continued to disagree on candidate for Attorney General, prolonging legislative paralysis. Opposition, who have blocked govt’s choice for new Attorney General in response to amnesty law they claim benefits Libre party, 12 Oct accused Castro administration of using justice system to harass opposition and manipulate selection process; accusation came after anti-corruption unit 11 Oct indicted former presidents Juan Orlando Hernández and Porfirio Lobo (both from National Party) on fraud charges. Crisis hindered progress on creation of UN-led anti-corruption commission.

Stringent security measures remained in place as authorities lauded impact. Govt 6 Oct announced extension of state of exception until 17 Nov, with authorities claiming period Jan-Oct saw 2,306 homicides, down from 2,761 in same period in 2022. Military police commander Ramiro Fernando Muñoz 11 Oct announced that after three months of special measures, prisons (where criminal groups often coordinate their activities) were “no longer a problem”; experts said strategy of splitting gangs into different prisons appeared effective. Concerns about criminality and violence continued, however. Notably, Human Rights Commission report 8 Oct decried high levels of violence and impunity against women and environmental activists, while UN rapporteur on freedom of expression 27 Oct warned that violence and judicial harassment against activists and journalists is “alarmingly high”.

➔ **Mexico Criminal violence remained rampant, govt and security forces faced more backlash for high number of disappearances, and Hurricane Otis wrought destruction in Acapulco city.**

Criminal violence, some of it politically motivated, remained high. Bodies of two pollsters from ruling MORENA party were found dead in Tabasco state 1 Oct, alongside message from Jalisco Cartel accusing MORENA and army of protecting rival Sinaloa Cartel in Chiapas. Guerrero state (south west) witnessed several high-profile attacks. Notably, unidentified gunmen 17 Oct killed prominent self-defence group leader Bruno Plácido and his driver in state capital Chilpancingo; and armed

men 18 Oct attacked priest and victims' rights activist Filiberto Velázquez in Tixtla town. Attacks came after 1,500 members of 66 communities from San Miguel Totolapan and Heliodoro Castillo municipalities 3 Oct announced creation of armed self-defence group amid state inertia. Three separate attacks in Coyuca de Benitez municipality (Guerrero), Tacámbaro town (Michoacán state) and San Miguel Cano (Puebla state) 23 Oct left at least 24 dead, including 13 police officers.

State faced more criticism for high number of disappearances. UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances 3 Oct lamented “alarming” number of disappearances in Mexico and “almost absolute impunity”. Group of experts investigating 2014 disappearance of students from Ayotzinapa teacher’s college 17 Oct released documents allegedly showing military had knowledge of crime as it unfolded; govt continued to deny military’s involvement or collusion. Meanwhile, search collective 2 Oct said clandestine burial site found in Tacámbaro likely contains more than the 51 bodies already found, largest identified in state in recent years; another collective 15 Oct reported discovery of clandestine human incineration site containing human remains in Tlaquepaque city, Jalisco state (centre).

In other important developments. Govt and U.S. officials 5 Oct held high-level security talks in Mexico City about fentanyl trafficking, migration and arms trafficking, and agreed to collaborate closely. Acapulco city (along Pacific Coast) was among areas worst hit by Hurricane Otis late Oct, raising fears that organised crime could capitalise on destruction and insufficient govt response to strengthen foothold in area.

➡ **Nicaragua Govt continued to crackdown on opposition and Catholic Church despite sustained international condemnation.**

Repression of opposition and Catholic church continued. Following late Sept arrest of Brooklyn Rivera, only indigenous parliament representative, Rivera’s YATAMA party 1 Oct denounced detention and that of fellow politician Nancy Rodriguez. Authorities 3 Oct rescinded YATAMA’s legal status and closed two YATAMA-run radio stations. Govt 12 Oct allocated Rivera’s seat to ruling party politician. Despite Vatican’s late Sept call for diplomatic dialogue, attacks on Catholic church continued. Notably, police and paramilitary groups 1-9 Oct detained six Catholic priests. Govt 18 Oct freed six priests and exiled them to Rome following deal with Vatican. Authorities 24 Oct cancelled legal status of local chapter of Franciscan order and 16 NGOs, many of whom have ties to Catholic Church.

International community kept up pressure on Managua. EU Council 9 Oct extended measures including asset freeze and travel bans on 21 individuals and three entities until Oct 2024. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 10 Oct briefed Organization of American States (OAS) permanent council about situation in country, saying govt’s actions part of repressive strategy to consolidate power and silence critics. OAS next day condemned situation and called on govt to respect and protect human rights.

In another important development. Nicaraguan Central Bank 17 Oct announced reduction in imports and exports in first eight months of 2023 compared to same period in 2022.

Caribbean

➔ Dominican Republic Santo Domingo partially reopened border with Haiti, though tensions persisted.

Tensions with Haiti ran high after govt 15 Sept shut shared border, citing construction of canal by farmers on Haitian side of Massacre river (see Haiti). Santo Domingo 5 Oct said it was ready to restart decommissioned canal to collect water from Massacre River before it enters Haiti; Port-au-Prince 9 Oct denounced attempts to divert water as “unacceptable and hostile” and called for dialogue. Govt 11 Oct partially reopened border, including key Dajabón border crossing, to allow trade of essential products, but maintained ban on entry of Haitians. Haiti 12 Oct declined to follow Santo Domingo’s lead and reopen Dajabón, though it did open border gates at Elias Pina and Independencia, allowing some trade to resume. FM Roberto Alvarez same day attended Organisation of American States (OAS) extraordinary session, where he denounced “illegal construction” of Haiti’s canal.

➔ Haiti UN Security Council approved Kenya-led security mission to Haiti, assassination of gang leader sparked inter-gang fighting, and tensions with Dominican Republic remained elevated.

UN approved Kenyan-led multinational mission. UN Security Council 2 Oct authorised one-year Multinational Security Support mission to Haiti, to be reviewed after nine months; force will support Haitian police, including by planning and conducting joint operations, restoring security and creating conditions for free and fair elections. Kenya, who is leading mission, 7 Oct began selecting officers for mission; first group of 200 police officers 10 Oct started pre-mission training in Kenya. High Court of Kenya 9 Oct temporarily blocked deployment amid opposition pressure, 24 Oct extended ban for two weeks.

Assassination of gang leader triggered new waves of violence. Late Sept killing of gang leader from G9 coalition known as Tyson, allegedly by other members of coalition, sparked clashes in following weeks between gangs from G9 and Gpèp coalitions in capital Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas. Notably, clashes 13-14 Oct erupted in La Saline district between at least three G9 gangs, trapping around 400 children and teachers in school. Members of 400 Mawozo gang operating in Croix-des-Bouquets 4 Oct set fire to Thomazeau police station, third such attack in two weeks. Attackers reportedly from Village-de-Dieu gang 18 Oct kidnapped High Council for Transition Sec Gen Antony Virginy Saint Pierre. Meanwhile, UNICEF 3 Oct warned of intensifying violence in Artibonite department, known as Haiti’s breadbasket; UN envoy 23 Oct warned “major crimes” had reached “record highs”.

Spat with Dominican Republic over canal construction continued. After Dominican Republic mid Sept shut border with Haiti over dispute about construction of canal by farmers on Haitian side of Massacre River, Dominican Republic 11 Oct partially reopened border to some commercial activity (see Dominican Republic).

In other important developments. Former senator 10 Oct pleaded guilty to role in 2021 assassination of President Moïse, while authorities 19 Oct arrested key suspect in Port-au-Prince and U.S. court 27 Oct sentenced retired Colombian army officer to

life in prison. UN Security Council 19 Oct renewed sanctions regime on Haiti for one year.