

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ **Colombia** Violence ran high as armed and criminal groups sought to expand territorial control ahead of “Total Peace” talks with authorities; border with Venezuela reopened after three-year closure.

Govt worked toward dialogue with armed groups. Govt pursued “Total Peace” plan aimed at reviving negotiations with National Liberation Army (ELN) and demobilising other armed groups. Notably, after high-level govt delegation visited Cuba in Aug to meet ELN negotiating team, Venezuela 13 Sept agreed to act as guarantor in possible forthcoming talks. ELN 5 Sept however raised questions about govt’s peace plan, saying it was wrong to consider talks with criminal organisations since they exercise violence for “profit and capital accumulation” rather than political objectives. Meanwhile, govt 28 Sept said at least ten armed groups, including Gulf Clan and two Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident groups, agreed to unilateral ceasefires.

Criminal and armed groups stepped-up violent attacks over territorial control. Dramatic violence occurred across country, including in cities where delinquent and criminal organisations who have shown interest in peace talks operate. Notably, violence accelerated in Barranquilla city on Atlantic coast (north), key drug trafficking route where at least two criminal groups battle for territory, leaving six dead 12 Sept. Groups also launched attacks on security forces; notably, FARC dissidents 2 Sept killed seven police officers in Huila department (south). Land invasions increased during month in ten departments, with cases of poor farmers taking over private land; Ombudsman’s Office 22 Sept said most invasions were in response to expectations among communities that govt will redistribute land, though at least 13 cases have seen armed groups vying for territorial control. Partly in response to violence, govt 3 Sept established “unified command centres” in 65 municipalities to increase coordination between local authorities and security forces to maintain order and protect “social leaders, human rights defenders and peace signers”.

Shared border with Venezuela reopened after three-year closure. After govt restored diplomatic relations with Caracas late Aug, Colombia-Venezuela border 26 Sept reopened, paving way for better regional coordination to address proliferation of criminal groups.

➔ **Venezuela** Dialogue between authorities and opposition remained on hold, opposition started preparations ahead of 2024 polls, and restoration of diplomatic relations with Colombia proceeded apace.

Mexico dialogue between govt and opposition remained stalled. U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee 15 Sept held hearing on policy toward Venezuela. U.S. Assistant Sec State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols reaffirmed Biden administration’s goal of persuading Maduro govt to return to suspended negotiations in Mexico City with opposition in exchange for limited sanctions relief.

Under pressure from Republican members and committee chair Senator Bob Menéndez, Nichols stressed Washington's continued support for "interim govt" and willingness to take "comprehensive" measures if progress on talks was not achieved. Maduro same day dismissed threat, saying U.S. would never again be world's "only empire".

Opposition made progress on preparations for primaries. Opposition alliance Unitary Platform 15 Sept announced plans to appoint special commission with members drawn from civil society, responsible for overseeing primaries to select single candidate for 2024 presidential election. Platform same day said it had reached "important agreements" with other opposition groups willing to participate, although several such groups, including breakaway faction of Acción Democrática party, have already announced their own candidates for 2024 election. In report published 20 Sept, UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela found that Venezuela's state security agencies have committed "crimes against humanity" since 2014 as "part of a plan designed by high-level authorities to repress opponents of the Government". Govt same day rejected "false and baseless accusations".

Authorities continued to strengthen diplomatic relations with Bogotá, reopened shared border. Colombian President Petro 12 Sept submitted formal request to Venezuela to act as guarantor in planned peace talks with National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group, which has substantial presence in Venezuela; President Maduro 13 Sept accepted request. Members of ELN negotiating team same day reportedly left for Caracas from Cuba's capital Havana, where they had remained in exile since 2019 when talks with Colombian govt broke down. Marking another step forward in bilateral relations, Colombia-Venezuela border 26 Sept reopened, although anticipated meeting between Maduro and Petro did not take place.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador President Bukele announced candidacy for 2024 elections, authorities renewed for sixth time state of exception, and economic outlook remained poor.**

President Bukele announced re-election bid. On anniversary of country's independence, Bukele 15 Sept announced he would seek re-election in 2024, defying country's constitution prohibiting presidents from serving consecutive terms. Supreme Court's constitutional chamber, appointed by current legislature, had already ruled in favour of allowing Bukele to stand for re-election in Sept 2021.

State of exception was extended for sixth time amid small-scale protests. Several protests against state of exception (imposed in March to address gang violence) took place throughout month. Notably, relatives of detainees 5 Sept marched to Human Rights Ombudsperson's office calling on institution to address alleged abuses perpetrated under emergency powers; hundreds 15 Sept took to streets in capital San Salvador demanding end to state of exception. Civil society groups 23 Sept filed lawsuit with Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for arbitrary detention of at least 152 people. Legislative Assembly 14 Sept however extended emergency measures for sixth time; decision came days after consulting firm Cid Gallup 5 Sept

published poll showing that 91% of respondents supported gov't's measures to crackdown on gangs.

Economic outlook remained worrying. Govt 12 Sept offered creditors partial buyback of \$1.6 billion bonds due in 2023 and 2025 in order to reduce risk of debt default; Bukele 21 Sept announced gov't had repurchased \$565 million bonds. However, financial services company Fitch Ratings 15 Sept said "default of some sort" in future was "probable".

➡ **Honduras** **Amid gov't's efforts to tackle crime and strengthen rule of law, deadly attacks continued, notably targeting lawyers.**

Criminal violence continued, notably targeting lawyers. Unknown assailants 1 Sept shot dead lawyer Kelvin Moncada in Danlí municipality, El Paraíso department (east); unidentified gunmen 8 Sept shot dead lawyer Santos Abel Martínez Barahona in capital Tegucigalpa. Over 200 lawyers have been murdered in Honduras since 2004; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada al-Nashif 12 Sept urged strengthening of national protection system for human rights defenders in country.

Gov't took steps to tackle gender-based violence and enforced disappearances. Director of National Statistics Institute (INE) and representative of country's UN Development Programme (UNDP) 7 Sept announced that in Oct-Nov this year, Honduras would conduct specialised survey on violence against women and girls with UNDP support, in effort to tackle gender-based violence. National Police and International Committee of the Red Cross 14 Sept signed agreement to strengthen mechanisms in place for search of disappeared persons.

Efforts to strengthen rule of law and combat corruption continued. Congress 14 Sept ratified installation of Nominating Committee, which will be made up of representatives from different social sectors and tasked with proposing candidates for Supreme Court in 2023. Meanwhile, during speech at UN General Assembly, President Castro 20 Sept confirmed establishment of international commission to combat corruption with support of UN Sec-Gen António Guterres.

➡ **Mexico** **Authorities stepped up military control over policing amid persistently high levels of criminal violence.**

Authorities took steps to deepen militarisation of public security. Gov't proposal to formally integrate National Guard into defence ministry 9 Sept came into effect. Civil society groups same day condemned decision, with NGO Amnesty International saying increased military involvement in public security would "lead to more human rights violations and perpetuate impunity". Responding to accusations he broke campaign promise to demilitarise public security, President López Obrador 6 Sept claimed he had changed his mind after realising gravity of security situation. In response to López Obrador's move, protests 6, 15, 17 Sept took place in Mexico City. Meanwhile, lower house 14 Sept passed constitutional amendment, proposed by opposition Institutional Revolutionary Party, allowing armed forces to carry out public security tasks until 2028 instead of 2024. Senate 20 Sept approved amendment with 18 votes in favour.

Criminal violence remained high. Unidentified gunmen 22 Sept opened fire in bar in Tarimoro town, Guanajuato state (centre), killing ten. Unknown assailants 25 Sept

ambushed police officers in Cañitas de Felipe Pescador municipality, Zacatecas state (centre north), injuring five. Meanwhile, advocacy group Global Witness 29 Sept released report on threats to environmental activists, showing that Mexico recorded highest number of killings of any country in 2021, totalling 54.

Efforts to address impunity for past disappearances continued to face challenges. General Prosecutor's Office 25 Sept cancelled 21 of 83 arrest warrants it requested last Aug against former officials allegedly involved in 2014 disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College, Guerrero state; judge 14 Sept acquitted José Luis Abarca, former mayor of Iguala, of having ordered students' kidnapping. Authorities 15 Sept arrested General José Rodríguez Pérez, then commander of local infantry battalion, for allegedly ordering killing and disappearance of six of the students; Rodríguez Pérez is first high-ranking military officer arrested in case.

➔ **Nicaragua** **Despite international criticism, authorities continued crackdown on civil society as govt drew closer to China and Russia.**

Crackdown on civil society and political opposition continued. National Assembly 7 Sept revoked legal status of 100 civil society organisations, 19-21 Sept revoked 200 more, bringing total number of banned groups since Dec 2018 to around 1,968. UN rapporteur on right to freedom of peaceful assembly 5 Sept said he had never seen "such a number of civil society organisations declared illegal from one day to the next". Authorities 12 Sept arrested at least two activists from opposition movement Unamos in capital Managua and León city (west), 15 Sept arrested brother of exiled Unamos leader in Jinotepe city (centre). Govt 22 Sept suspended cable news channel CNN's Spanish-language service from all cable channels in Nicaragua.

International actors denounced repression. Colombian FM Álvaro Leyva 9 Sept told Colombian radio network W Radio that President Petro's govt was trying to persuade President Ortega to release 21 political prisoners, including four former presidential candidates and some journalists. UN human rights chief 13 Sept presented report condemning "deterioration" of situation. European Parliament 15 Sept passed resolution condemning repression and arrests of members of Catholic Church. European Council President Charles Michel 26 Sept urged Ortega to "return the sovereignty of Nicaragua to the Nicaraguan people"; govt 28 Sept declared European Union Ambassador to Nicaragua Bettina Muscheidt persona non grata.

Managua drew closer to Russia and China. Nicaragua participated in military drills led by Russia 1-7 Sept in locations in Russia's Far East and Sea of Japan, only Latin American country to do so. National Assembly 8 Sept ratified "early harvest" agreement with China signed in July, considered precursor to free trade agreement.

Caribbean

↓ **Haiti** **Protests demanding PM Ariel Henry's resignation escalated and turned violent amid fuel price hike, forcing services to close; gangs exploited unrest and seized control of major oil terminal.**

Anti-govt protests turned violent, forcing public and private services to close down. Protests that started late Aug demanding Henry's resignation intensified: after govt

14 Sept announced drastic reduction of gasoline subsidies, which prompted sharp rise in prices, anti-govt demonstrations same day broke out and expanded across capital Port-au-Prince and other towns and cities, growing increasingly violent as protesters set fire to vehicles, blocked roads and burned barricades. Businesses, banks, transportation networks and other public services were forced to shut down, while many embassies, including Mexico's and Dominican Republic's, 14 Sept shut their borders. Police responded with force, with clashes (which involved gang members among protesters) leaving over ten civilians dead and many more injured. As leaders called for calm, businesses 21 Sept began opening their doors. However, protests and blockades 26 Sept resumed, again paralysing commercial and public activities across major cities. Civil society platform Montana Accord (who have proposed two-year transitional plan that includes five-member presidential college and new PM) 16 Sept said protests were legitimate and urged Haitians to continue taking to streets until formation of legitimate transitional govt.

Gangs exploited unrest, aggravating violence and blocking fuel supplies. G9 gang alliance, of which members 11 Sept murdered two journalists reporting on escalating gang violence in Cité Soleil district of Port-au-Prince, exacerbated unrest. Notably, G9 leader Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier was filmed 15 Sept leading protest and demanding Henry's resignation. Meanwhile, G9 gang members 17 Sept dug trenches around Varreux oil terminal, blocking access to operators, employees and trucks and taking control of 188,000 barrels of fuel; petrol stations across country same day closed and had yet to reopen by end of month.

Fuel blockade further strained country's public services, notably health sector. Caracol Industrial Park – which employs 13,000 workers – 25 Sept ceased operations due to lack of fuel, affecting electricity services. UN children agency UNICEF 26 Sept said fuel blockade was preventing deliveries needed to power hospitals and risked bringing country's health services to "a standstill".

Southern Cone

➔ **Brazil In tense run-up to general election, Electoral Court set boundaries for military involvement, and Supreme Court suspended relaxations on gun control.**

Electoral Court denied military parallel vote count. Amid President Bolsonaro's persistent efforts to discredit electronic voting system and involve military in vote count for 2 Oct general election, Supreme Electoral Court 12 Sept announced military would not be granted real-time access to voting data in order to conduct parallel count. However, Court 17 Sept authorised deployment of military personnel for logistical support in eleven states where criminal groups operate and where risk of electoral violence is higher. Meanwhile, as former left-wing President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva widened lead over Bolsonaro in polls, president 7 Sept rallied tens of thousands of supporters across country in show of strength, coinciding with military parades marking country's bicentennial anniversary of independence.

Fears of electoral violence prompted Supreme Court to strengthen gun control. Supreme Court Justice Edson Fachin 5 Sept suspended several decrees issued by Bolsonaro allowing citizens to buy more arms with less restrictions and govt

oversight; Fachin claimed “risk of political violence” around elections rendered decision “extremely and exceptionally urgent”. In response, son of president and Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro 5 Sept called on gun owners to volunteer for his father’s election campaign by distributing campaign materials.