



Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

↓ **Colombia** FARC dissident group known as EMC fractured, plunging negotiations with govt into uncertainty and raising risk of stepped-up hostilities; civilians continued to bear brunt of worsening conflict.

FARC dissident group splintered. Peace efforts with dissident Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) faction known as EMC were thrown into disarray early April when over half the group's regional factions withdrew from talks. Internal frictions had surfaced in March after govt partially cancelled bilateral ceasefire with group in three departments along Pacific Coast; many fighters, including leader Iván Mordisco, agreed ceasefire needed to be national for talks to continue, but group's second-in-command 5 April returned to negotiating table alongside representatives from Caquetá, Catatumbo and Magdalena Medio regions. Govt's lead negotiator Camilo Gonzalez 16 April said military would resume operations against all blocs outside talks, including most economically powerful and belligerent blocs from Pacific Coast and southern Amazon region; EMC's split likely to have unanticipated impacts on civilians caught in crossfire between military and EMC, and between rival dissident factions.

Talks with National Liberation Army (ELN) remained stalled. ELN negotiators 6 April said talks with govt were "frozen", citing disagreements over latter's decision to open regional peace dialogue in Nariño department with group's local front, Comuneros del Sur. ELN central command argues all political dialogue must take place on national level, though Commander of Comuneros del Sur 27 April said many within ELN do not feel represented by national leadership in talks. Following emergency meeting in Venezuelan capital Caracas beginning 13 April, govt's lead negotiator Vera Grabe 22 April confirmed new round of talks would take place 20-25 May. Meanwhile, govt continued with plans to open Nariño dialogue.

Violence continued at high levels. Notably, ongoing clashes between ELN and EMC's Fronts 28 and 10 in Arauca department (east) forcibly confined dozens of families. Humanitarian organisations early April reported mass displacements around Argelia municipality (Cauca department) and Telembi Triangle area (Nariño) due to fighting between EMC and rival armed groups. New FARC dissident faction known as Frente 57 extended an ongoing incursion into Toribío town (Cauca) and nearby indigenous reserves in apparent challenge to EMC control.

➔ **Ecuador** Voters welcomed President Noboa's plans to tighten security, probes into state complicity with organised crime continued, and Quito drew global condemnation after storming Mexican embassy.

Voters backed Noboa's tough security measures in referendum. Ecuadorians 21 April voted on Noboa's hard-line security strategy in referendum. Majority of voters backed all nine security-related proposals, including stepped-up military role in fight against organised crime and longer sentences for offences like drug trafficking, but rejected his economic proposals. Meanwhile, 90-day state of emergency 8 April ended amid uptick in violence early month, particularly in Manabí and Guayas provinces. Minutes before measure's expiry, Noboa issued decree recognising persistence of internal armed conflict, which permits continued military presence on streets and designation of prisons as security zones; Noboa 30 April decreed state of emergency in El Oro, Guayas, Los Ríos, Manabí and Santa Elena provinces due to insecurity. Targeting of political figures continued; notably, unknown gunmen 17 April killed mayor of mining town in Azuay province (south), 19 April killed mayor in El Oro province (south). Police 22 April recaptured fugitive leader of Los Lobos gang, Fabricio Colón Pico, who escaped prison in Jan.

Authorities detained over a dozen in corruption probe. Public Prosecutor's Office 3 April requested pre-trial detention for thirteen of fourteen individuals arrested as part of "Plaga Case", including judges, police officers and lawyers; suspects allegedly accepted bribes in exchange for facilitating release of convicted criminals. Plaga Case is one of several high-level investigations into ties between organised crime, govt and judiciary.

Authorities stormed Mexican embassy, drawing international community's ire. Authorities 5 April forced their way into Mexican embassy in capital Quito and arrested former VP Jorge Glas, who had been awaiting response to his political asylum request after being indicted on corruption charges. Mexico 6 April severed diplomatic ties with Ecuador, while international community condemned incursion. Mexico 11 April brought charges before International Court of Justice, requesting that it suspend Ecuador's UN membership.

↑ Venezuela Opposition coalition rallied behind little-known presidential candidate Edmundo González, raising hopes for a more competitive election in July; U.S. partially revoked sanctions relief.

Opposition agreed on unity candidate. Opposition coalition Unitary Platform 19 April announced it had reached agreement to support candidacy of retired diplomat Edmundo González in July poll. Zulia state governor Manuel Rosales, whose Un Nuevo Tiempo party (Platform member) had registered his candidacy unilaterally, stood down in favour of González, while banned candidate María Corina Machado 20 April pledged her support. Fears that govt would move to ban González or Unitary Platform's ticket (known as MUD) did not immediately materialise as govt, after delay, eventually allowed parties that had backed Rosales to formalise their change of candidate. Decision to rally behind González raised hopes for more competitive presidential election in July. Meanwhile, Colombian President Petro 17 April told Brazilian President Lula that he had proposed "plebiscite" between govt and opposition guaranteeing protection from political persecution for poll's loser.

U.S. reimposed oil sanctions but stopped short of full snapback. U.S. 17 April announced it would not renew General Licence 44, under which Venezuela could sell oil and gas on open market, though its replacement, GL-44a, leaves open option of licences for individual companies to do business with state oil corporation PDVSA.

U.S. argued Maduro govt had “not fully met the commitments” it made under Oct 2023 Barbados Agreement with opposition; in particular, it said govt had “prevented the democratic opposition from registering the candidate of their choice, harassed and intimidated political opponents, and unjustly detained numerous political actors and members of civil society”. President Maduro and his chief negotiator Jorge Rodríguez same day said Washington, not Caracas, had failed to fulfil commitments, with Maduro claiming U.S. had promised to lift all sanctions during talks. U.S. Ambassador Francisco Palmieri 23 April said Washington would “keep channels open” for further talks.

International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor to open office in capital. President Maduro 23 April signed agreement allowing ICC prosecutor Karim Khan to open office in capital Caracas and invited UN human rights officials (expelled in Jan) to return to Venezuela; terms for their return have yet to be agreed.

Central America and Mexico

► El Salvador Authorities again renewed state of exception as attention shifted from security to economy.

Authorities renewed state of exception amid ongoing discussions about its impact. Legislative Assembly 10 April extended state of exception for 30 days. University Institute of Public Opinion (IUDOP) 15 April published survey evaluating measure. Among other things, review found that majority of people credit state of exception with improving security, with almost 88% reportedly feeling safer since its inception; 74% said they were cautious of discussing measure, however, for fear of reprisals. Many respondents also raised concerns about arrest of innocent people and other abuses perpetrated by security forces. Meanwhile, lawmakers 29 April approved amendment to Article 248 of Constitution, allowing same legislature to pass constitutional reforms with two thirds of vote; critics said move further consolidates President Bukele’s power.

Concerns about economy grew. IUDOP’s survey revealed that Salvadorans main concerns have shifted from security to economy, unemployment and high cost of living. Media 11 April reported that Legislative Assembly had approved 49 different loans for Bukele administration; opposition congresswoman Claudia Ortiz 10 April criticised govt debt and lack of transparency about how loans are used.

► Mexico Tensions ran high in lead-up to June elections as corruption allegations mounted, criminal violence continued, and Mexico severed ties with Ecuador following embassy raid.

Former chief justice dismissed corruption allegations as politically motivated. Supreme Court 12 April announced investigation into former Chief Justice Arturo Zaldívar, who stepped down from his position late 2023 to join campaign of ruling MORENA party’s presidential candidate Claudia Sheinbaum; court alleged Zaldívar pressured judges to vote in favour of govt during his four-year stint as Chief Justice. Zaldívar 16 April announced he would take legal action against his successor Norma Piña for using court for political purposes and electoral interference. Meanwhile, MORENA leader Mario Delgado 16 April said his party would bring charges against

opposition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez for alleged corruption. Sheinbaum and Gálvez 28 April accused each other of belonging to “narco parties” during presidential debate.

Violence persisted at high levels. Political violence continued to intensify in run-up to elections. Notably, unknown gunmen 1 April shot dead MORENA mayoral candidate outside Celaya city (Guanajuato state). Criminal violence also continued, particularly in Chiapas and Michoacán states. Notably, security forces 15 April clashed with alleged members of Sinaloa Cartel in Acapetahua municipality (Chiapas); fighting between Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) and armed self-defence groups over territory along border between Michoacán and Colima states displaced hundreds; and alleged CJNG members 23 April killed four in Centro Municipality, Tabasco state. Meanwhile, International Organization for Migration 12 April reported that number of irregular migration cases in Mexico had risen by 77% in 2023 compared with 2022, and that violence against migrants had escalated.

Police in Ecuador stormed Mexican embassy, prompting Mexico to sever ties. Authorities in Ecuador 5 April forced their way into Mexican embassy in capital Quito and arrested Ecuador’s former VP Jorge Glas, who had been awaiting response to his political asylum request. Mexico 6 April severed diplomatic ties with Ecuador, while international community condemned incursion. Mexico 11 April brought charges before International Court of Justice, requesting that it suspend Ecuador’s UN membership.

➡ **Nicaragua Crackdown on civil society and religious organisations continued; govt accused Germany of enabling “genocide” in Gaza.**

Crackdown on dissent continued. Govt 8 April approved law declaring April as “the month of peace”, in move critics argued was designed to overshadow anniversary of April 2018 protests and violent govt response. Meanwhile, repression of civil society and religious organisations continued. Notably, authorities 3 April closed down fifteen civil and religious organisations, 23 April cancelled legal status of fifteen NGOs. NGO Monitoreo Azul y Blanco 3 April denounced arbitrary detention of at least seven people who participated in religious activities during Holy Week in March. Monitoreo Azul y Blanco 16 April published report about evolving nature of govt repression since 2018 and said it had documented 11,350 human rights violations since clampdown began.

In important international developments. Nicaragua 8 April accused Germany of “facilitating the commission of genocide” in Gaza by supplying Israel with arms and financial assistance, and pressed International Court of Justice to order Germany to cease arms deliveries to Israel; Berlin next day rejected allegations amid rising tensions. Managua 10 April closed its embassy in Berlin. Delegation from Belarus 9 April arrived in capital amid efforts to expand bilateral cooperation. U.S. 16 April expanded sanctions against Nicaragua.

Caribbean

➔ **Haiti Transitional council was sworn in after lengthy negotiations, gang offensive continued amid deteriorating humanitarian crisis, and deployment of multinational security mission remained uncertain.**

Transitional council sworn in, Edgard Leblanc selected to head body. After weeks of negotiations, cabinet of outgoing PM Henry 12, 16 April published two documents formalising creation of transitional presidential council and naming its seven voting members and two non-voting observers. Henry 24 April resigned; Council was sworn in next day with heavy police protection, 30 April it named former senate President Edgard Leblanc to head body. Four council members (forming majority bloc) same day proposed former sports minister Fritz Bélizaire as their candidate for prime minister, however, threatening new crisis as three remaining voting members accused their colleagues of violating procedures for designating PM.

Gang offensive continued. Gang alliance known as Viv Ansanm continued their offensive, mostly in capital Port-au-Prince. Notably, gangs 1 April launched assault to seize control of national palace; gang members from Canaan gang 7 April demolished police station in Bon Repos neighbourhood; and armed attack 11 April in Cabaret town north of capital killed ten. Gangs also looted and burned down dozens of pharmacies, clinics, shops and private residences. Police conducted some successful counter-operations, 5 April seizing significant number of weapons and ammunition at Cap Haitian port, 6 April recovering ship carrying rice that gangs had hijacked two days before. Self-defence groups stepped-up activities, pushing back gangs from several neighbourhoods in capital and beyond.

Violence aggravated humanitarian crisis. Notably, International Organization for Migration 9 April reported some 95,000 people had fled capital since early March; World Food Program 11 April warned its food stocks could run out by end of April; and head of UN children's agency 22 April said essential services had collapsed in many areas.

Deployment of multinational security mission remained uncertain. Kenyan President Ruto 25 April welcomed swearing-in of council as "a crucial step in the political transition of Haiti" and reiterated Kenya's readiness to send security mission, though start date still unknown. Earlier, eight private sector organisations in Haiti 15 April sent letter to Ruto expressing concern about delays to mission and called for its rapid deployment.