

# Latin America and the Caribbean

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## Andes

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📍 **Colombia** **Security situation continued to deteriorate along Pacific coast and Venezuelan border, and govt took further steps toward restarting contentious coca crop fumigation.** In Cauca department (south west along Pacific coast), clashes involving guerrilla groups National Liberation Army and self-described Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidents, and military, continued in Argelia municipality, reportedly killing 14 guerrillas and one military officer 17 April; Ombudsman's Office next day reported 250 civilians displaced and several injured by anti-personnel mines. Also in Cauca, unidentified gunmen 20 April shot dead indigenous leader Sandra Liliana Peña in Caldono town, and 22 April opened fire on members of indigenous community who were destroying coca crops in Caldono municipality, leaving 31 injured. NGO Indepaz 20 April reported 52 social leaders and human rights activists killed across country since 1 Jan; later said seven demobilised FARC combatants were killed in several regions 14-21 April. Clashes between FARC dissidents and Venezuelan army continued in Venezuela's Apure state near Colombian border (see Venezuela), fuelling tensions between both countries. Notably, Colombia 13 April decried Venezuelan President Maduro's leadership as "illegitimate". As part of efforts to meet conditions set by 2017 Constitutional Court ruling to restart aerial fumigation of coca crops, govt 12 April issued decree outlining regulations to govern spraying with glyphosate pesticide. Earlier in month, govt 6 April signed decree relocating citizens' constitutional injunctions on national security issues – including those related to eradication and fumigation – from regional court system into administrative body Council of State; move comes after several petitions in regional courts held back fumigation. President Duque 20 April said govt expects to restart spraying as soon as June in coca-dense Norte de Santander department (north east). Civil society activists 20 April sent petition backed by 20,000 signatures to Constitutional Court, requesting it prevent govt from resuming fumigation, citing inefficiency in reducing cultivation and health and environment risks. Thousands 28-30 April protested govt's tax reform proposal in several cities, notably in Cali city in Valle del Cauca department; protests turned violent reportedly leaving several killed and hundreds of civilians and police injured.

📍 **Venezuela** **Deadly clashes between military and Colombian guerrilla groups in border region fuelled tensions between Caracas and Bogotá.** Amid ongoing fighting between Venezuelan military and alleged dissidents of Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Apure border state, Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino 5 April reported nine combatants and eight soldiers killed since violence started 21 March; 28 April reported another eight soldiers killed in renewed combat over past few days. FM Jorge Arreaza 6 April said govt was requesting UN assistance in deactivating anti-personnel mines allegedly planted by guerrilla groups on Venezuelan territory; also asked UN to investigate violence. President Maduro and other govt officials repeatedly accused Colombia's President Duque of supporting armed groups operating along border and seeking "military escalation" between two countries. Duque 13 April decried Maduro's

leadership as “illegitimate”. NGO Human Rights Watch 26 April accused Venezuelan security forces of “egregious abuses against local residents” during operations in Apure state, including extrajudicial killings of at least four civilians – three men and a woman –, torture, arbitrary arrests and prosecution of civilians in military courts. World Food Programme (WFP) and govt 19 April reached deal over WFP’s access to Venezuela, paving way for supply of 185,000 meals for school children by end of year and up to 1.5mn in 2023. Mainstream opposition leader Juan Guaidó 6 April launched broader political front, comprising his existing four-party coalition and six smaller parties; Guaidó said move would improve coordination within mainstream opposition, but some members complained about lack of consultation ahead of launch. Negotiations continued between Maduro’s govt and moderate opposition leaders notably on appointment of more inclusive National Electoral Council (CNE); Guaidó-led coalition however continued to oppose talks, rejecting any CNE not appointed by “legitimate” (2015-2021) National Assembly. Maduro 18 April said govt had paid required amount to World Health Organization to access COVID-19 vaccines under COVAX mechanism. Meanwhile, in parallel move, Guaidó-led National Assembly 22 April approved use of additional \$100mn in govt funds – frozen in U.S. accounts as part of sanctions against Maduro’s govt – to purchase COVID-19 vaccines.

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## **Southern Cone and Brazil**

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📍 **Brazil** **Amid spiralling COVID-19 infection rates, series of Supreme Court rulings posed challenge to President Bolsonaro’s rule, notably his handling of pandemic.** Supreme Court 14 April ordered Senate probe into govt’s “actions and omissions” in management of COVID-19 pandemic, including whether “genocide” was committed against indigenous communities in Amazon rainforest, who have been ravaged by P1 variant; 18-member commission, which opened probe 27 April, could recommend impeachment of Bolsonaro or even criminal proceedings against him. Supreme Court 8 April also ruled that mayors and governors may ban holding of in-person religious services as means to contain COVID-19; subsequently, Bolsonaro 23 April said army could intervene to “re-establish Article 5 of the Constitution” – which guarantees freedom of movement and religion – if lockdown measures he opposes led to chaos. Newly-appointed Justice Minister Anderson Torres 6 April replaced heads of federal police and federal highway patrol with Bolsonaro-backed candidates; move could help Bolsonaro secure more direct influence over law enforcement. In appeal ruling, Supreme Court 15 April upheld its March ruling annulling corruption convictions against former President Lula, permanently clearing way for Lula to stand for re-election in 2022.

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## **Central America and Mexico**

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📍 **El Salvador** **Amid ongoing political tensions, President Bukele took confrontational stance against U.S. officials who voiced concern over his rule of law record.** In heated argument on Twitter, Bukele 1 April urged U.S. voters not to vote for U.S. Congresswoman Norma Torres after she called him a “narcissistic dictator”; U.S. Congressman Albio Sires 14 April decried Bukele’s call as

“foreign election interference” that could amount to “national security threat”. After U.S. State Dept 5 April called on Bukele to “restore separation of powers”, Bukele 7-8 April refused to meet with U.S. Special Envoy for Northern Triangle Ricardo Zúñiga during his country visit. Zúñiga 7 April pledged \$2mn to support International Commission against Impunity in El Salvador (CICIES), while group of 16 civil society organisations same day reiterated call on Legislative Assembly to expand CICIES’ mandate, including possibility to be plaintiff, before newly-elected Assembly takes office 1 May. Bukele immediately dismissed proposal as “worst thing we could do”, also said “nothing that outgoing Assembly approves will ever come into force”. Following Feb legislative elections, which saw Bukele’s party gain control of legislature, Supreme Electoral Tribunal 11 April said it had dismissed 40 electoral complaints; 15 April said institution’s electronic system had suffered some 15,000 attacks during vote counting. Supreme Court’s Constitutional Chamber 15 April admitted case against June 2019 appointment of Mauricio Arriaza Chicas as police chief, on grounds that Chicas’ military rank of lieutenant could violate constitutional

🔗 **Honduras Govt continued to face legitimacy crisis ahead of Nov general elections amid drug trafficking and corruption allegations against senior officials.** After U.S. court late March sentenced President Hernández’s brother to life imprisonment on drug trafficking charges, 37 civil society groups 5 April urged Hernández to step down; also called on heads of Congress, Supreme Court, Attorney General’s Office and armed forces to resign for supporting “corrupt and criminal family” in power. Authorities 8 April arrested two former govt officials on corruption charges related to \$47mn purchase of seven mobile hospitals amid COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, Luis Zelaya, losing candidate for Liberal Party in 14 March primary elections, 13 April filed complaint to Public Prosecutor’s Office, claiming widespread electoral fraud, demanding election results be annulled and National Electoral Council members dismissed. Govt 7 April signed agreement with Honduran Private Enterprise Council allowing organisation to negotiate purchase and import of COVID-19 vaccines with pharmaceutical companies; doctors’ associations and other civil society groups decried move as admission of govt’s incapacity to provide vaccines. Unidentified gunmen 6 April killed female lawyer in Comayagua city. Six members of U.S. House of Representatives 21 April introduced bill to request sanctions against Hernández and suspension of military cooperation with Honduras, citing corruption and human rights violations.

🔗 **Mexico Criminal groups continued to target politicians and civil society activists ahead of June general elections, and tensions ran high between ruling party and electoral authorities.** Suspected members of criminal group 3 April killed Carlos Marqués Oyorzábal, environmental activist and municipal commissioner in San Miguel Totolapan municipality, Guerrero state (south). Unidentified gunmen 24 April killed Francisco Rocha, candidate for Tamaulipas state (north) Congress, in state capital Ciudad Victoria. Etellekt, a consultancy firm tracking political killings, 10 April reported 68 politicians, including 22 candidates, killed since campaign for legislative, gubernatorial and municipal elections started in Sept 2020. Meanwhile, clashes between Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) and alliance of local criminal groups mid-March-early April reportedly left at least eight killed and displaced more than 1,000 in Aguililla municipality, Michoacán state (centre). U.S. 6 April sanctioned two CJNG members over accusations of involvement in attack on Mexico City’s police chief in June 2020

and murder of Jalisco state's former governor in Dec 2020. National Electoral Institute (INE) 27 April confirmed its March decision to cancel 50 ruling MORENA party candidacies, including for governor of Guerrero and Michoacán states, over candidates' failures to account for campaign spending. President López Obrador next day said decision was politically motivated and "blow against democracy". Earlier in month, MORENA candidate for governor of Guerrero, Félix Salgado Macedonio, 11 April threatened to impede elections if barred from running, and next day emitted veiled threats against INE commissioners, asking his supporters if they would "not want to know where [the commissioners] lived"; women's groups and allies have widely protested Salgado's candidacy, who stands accused of rape. Govt-controlled Senate 15 April voted to prolong Supreme Court President Arturo Zaldívar's tenure by two years until 2024, in possible violation of constitutional four-year limit to Supreme Court presidents' tenure; opposition immediately accused MORENA and López Obrador of aiming to "control" institution ahead of 2024 presidential election. Amid rise in number of migrants on Mexico-U.S. border in recent months, U.S. govt 12 April said it had reached deal for Mexico to send more troops to border with Guatemala.

📍 **Nicaragua** **Govt continued to restrict political space in lead-up to Nov general elections.** Ahead of presidential and legislative elections scheduled for 7 Nov, govt-controlled National Assembly 12 April opened process to select new magistrates for Supreme Electoral Council (CSE); ruling party National Sandinista Liberation Front same day introduced electoral reform project prohibiting anyone who has been involved in "coup attempts" – a wording used by govt to describe 2018 anti-govt protest movement – from participating and tasking police with granting permission for electoral rallies. Over 50 organisations, including civil society, private sector and political parties, 22 April decried project as "repressive", arguing it goes against electoral reforms suggested by Organization of American States in Oct 2020 resolution to improve prospects for free and fair elections. Meanwhile, national and international actors maintained pressure on President Ortega's govt to cease human rights violations and release political prisoners. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) Commissioner Antonia Urrejola 14 April denounced "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" of political prisoners. On occasion of its third anniversary, opposition movement Blue and White National Unity (UNAB) 16 April staged rare protest in capital Managua to demand release of political prisoners; police reportedly assaulted journalists covering protest. Civil society organisation Civic Blue and White Observatory 23 April reported 382 violations of human rights against govt opponents 15-20 April.

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## **Caribbean**

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📍 **Haiti** **PM Joseph Jouthe resigned amid mounting public anger over govt's failure to address rising gang violence and kidnappings.** Armed gang 1 April attacked Bel Air neighbourhood of capital Port-au-Prince, reportedly killing six people and injuring four others, with a further five kidnapped; several residents described raid as attempt to take over neighbourhood. Unidentified gunmen same day kidnapped pastor and three others in Port-au-Prince; all released 4 April after ransom payment. Hundreds of women 3 April protested in Port-au-Prince against insecurity, citing high toll on women. Suspected gang members 11

April abducted seven clergy members, including two French nationals, and three other people in Croix-des-Bouquets commune near Port-au-Prince, and demanded \$1mn ransom; all ten released by late April. Archbishop of Port-au-Prince Max Leroy Mésidor 12 April described rising gang violence as “descent into hell”. Unidentified gunmen 13 April reportedly sexually assaulted three people including two minors and killed security guard at orphanage in Croix-des-Bouquets. Organization of American States same day expressed concern about “resurgence of kidnappings and killings”, including of clergy members. PM Joseph Jouthe 14 April resigned; President Moïse same day appointed FM Claude Joseph as PM, sixth to assume position under Moïse’s presidency. Catholic Church 15 April declared national strike to protest violence and targeting of clergy members; heads of seven business associations endorsed closures, saying rising violence had brought them to “a saturation point”. Harvard Law School 22 April released report alleging “high-level govt involvement in the planning, execution and cover-up” of three gang attacks that killed at least 240 civilians between 2018 and 2020, echoing rights activists’ allegations of collusion between gangs and govt officials. Joseph immediately denied accusation, claiming “anti-democratic forces” are “fomenting the gangs” to destabilise Moïse’s govt ahead of presidential and legislative elections scheduled for Sept.