

# Latin America and the Caribbean

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## Andes

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↓ **Bolivia Nationwide protests against third postponement of presidential election turned violent.** Following late-July govt decision to delay polls for third time, indigenous and labour groups aligned with former President Morales' Movement for Socialism (MAS) party and led by Bolivian Workers' Centre (COB) union early Aug erected over 75 road blockades across Bolivia; authorities justified postponement from 6 Sept to 18 Oct by need to avoid Sept projected peak in COVID-19 infections. After talks between COB and electoral authorities broke down 9 Aug, clashes erupted between protesters and armed individuals on blockade sites in La Paz and Cochabamba cities 10-11 Aug, leaving dozens injured. Interim govt 11 Aug deployed military to protect oxygen transport into cities for COVID-19 patients. Morales, exiled in Argentina, next day called for dialogue and lifting of blockades; COB by 14 Aug dismantled majority of blockades but some indigenous groups continued to demand resignation of interim President Áñez. Áñez 13 Aug signed new electoral law, which sets election date to 18 Oct and rules out further postponements. Two trade union headquarters in La Paz, including that of COB, were attacked with explosives 14 Aug; govt 17 Aug announced arrest of six members of anti-Morales group Resistencia de los Pititas. Justice ministry 20 and 24 Aug filed two criminal complaints against Morales over alleged sexual relationships with two minors. Unidentified assailants 26 Aug broke into Bolivian Ombudsman's office in alleged attempt to attack Ombudsperson Nadia Cruz; UN next day called on interim govt to protect institution.

↓ **Colombia Amid concerns over armed groups exploiting COVID-19 pandemic to recruit youths and extend control over territories, attacks against civilians increased, leaving dozens dead.** Series of attacks targeted civilians throughout month, leaving high toll on youth, primarily in country's south west but also in north east along Colombia-Venezuela border. Gunmen 9 Aug killed two schoolchildren in Cauca department; authorities accused Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, one of country's main drug trafficking groups). Unidentified gunmen 11 Aug killed five youths in Cali city, Valle del Cauca department, and 15 Aug killed eight others in Samaniego town, Nariño department; National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas 17 Aug denied responsibility for latter attack and blamed Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident group Los Contadores. Armed groups 21-22 Aug killed at least 17 youths in three attacks in Arauca, Nariño and Cauca departments in one of deadliest 24 hours since 2016 peace deal between govt and FARC. Further attacks killed three in Capitan Largo, Norte de Santander department 25 Aug and three others in Antioquia department 28 Aug. Armed groups also pursued efforts to increase control over populations and territories. ELN 3-17 Aug implemented strict restrictions on movement in south of Bolívar department (north), ostensibly to control spread of COVID-19. Fighting between armed groups and restrictions imposed by them also confined over 17,000 people in their communities 21 July-17 Aug including 2,000 people from indigenous Embera community in Murindó municipality and 14,300 people in El Bagre

municipality, both Antioquia department, as well as 1,270 people in Bojayá municipality, Chocó department (west). Number of COVID-19 cases 27 Aug reached 581,995, making Colombia seventh worst coronavirus-affected country globally. Controversy emerged after Supreme Court 4 Aug placed former President Uribe, head of ruling Democratic Centre party, under house arrest over suspected witness tampering in relation to allegations that Uribe helped found paramilitary group in 1990s; President Duque next day argued court had violated presumption of innocence. Duque 20 Aug said he had received information from foreign intelligence services that Venezuela was looking to acquire Iranian missiles and reiterated accusation that Caracas supports armed groups on Colombia-Venezuela border.

➔ **Peru Amid highest COVID-19 fatality rate globally and plunging economy, series of protests and incidents turned deadly.** After group of indigenous people armed with spears 2 Aug entered pipeline station of state-owned Petroperú oil company in Marañón region to demand medical care for COVID-19 patients, Petroperú next day said protesters occupying site forced them to halt operations; company 17 Aug said protesters agreed to leave station after it committed to implementing social development projects in area. Around 70 armed indigenous people 2 Aug entered PetroTal Corp oil production field in Loreto region to voice demands for economic and medical support; attack led to violent confrontation with police that left three indigenous people killed and 17 injured on both sides. After govt 12 Aug strengthened COVID-19 restrictions, police 22 Aug raided clandestine party at nightclub in capital Lima; ensuing stampede left at least 13 dead. National statistics agency 20 Aug said GDP had dropped by 30.2% in second quarter of 2020 compared to same period last year. Govt 31 Aug reported 28,944 deaths from COVID-19; country now registers highest virus-related fatality rate per capita globally.

➔ **Venezuela Govt continued to press for legislative elections in Dec despite widespread domestic and international concerns over fair conditions and inclusive vote.** In statement issued 2 Aug, 26 mainstream opposition parties led by Juan Guaidó confirmed refusal to participate in legislative elections scheduled for 6 Dec, said vote would be rigged and taking part would amount to “collaborating with the dictatorship’s strategy”. Episcopal Conference of Venezuela 11 Aug warned abstention could lead to demobilisation of opposition and called on it to adopt clear strategy. Guaidó 19 Aug called on opposition and civil society leaders to sign up to Unity Pact as pledge of support to existing strategy. Two-time opposition presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, formally a member of mainstream opposition, did not rule out electoral participation; govt twice put back deadline for candidates to register, apparently to accommodate him. VP of electoral authority Rafael Simón Jiménez – linked to minority opposition parties taking part in govt-led National Dialogue – 6 Aug resigned, arguing he was unable to maintain neutral stance; govt immediately replaced Jiménez with senior member of National Dialogue party, breaching law on appointments to body. EU foreign policy chief Borrell 11 Aug said govt had failed to compromise on electoral framework and conditions for “transparent, inclusive, free and fair” election did not exist, pledged to convene ministerial-level meeting of EU-backed International Contact Group to consider next steps. Group of 30 countries including U.S., UK, some small EU states and members of regional body Lima Group 14 Aug issued joint statement calling for “inclusive transitional govt” to lead country into “free and fair presidential elections”. Maduro 17 Aug said govt-controlled National Constituent Assembly (ANC) would

close down when its mandate expires in Dec; ANC was created in 2017, supposedly to reform constitution, but has so far failed to deliver on its mandate. Govt 31 Aug pardoned over 110 people including opposition politicians; Guaidó immediately said move was govt ploy to legitimate elections and institutional reform was only route to “reconciliation”. Amid exponential increase in COVID-19 cases, concerns persisted over govt and health system’s capacity to respond to crisis.

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## **Southern Cone and Brazil**

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➔ **Brazil** **President Bolsonaro strengthened his popularity and hold on power despite world’s second worst COVID-19 outbreak.** Although COVID-19 pandemic reached milestones of 3mn reported infections and 100,000 deaths, most major cities continued to relax confinement measures as infection rate started to slow in most states, with only Goiás and Tocantins states reporting rising infection rate. Datafolha institute’s public opinion poll, which surveyed 2,065 people, 13 Aug showed Bolsonaro’s approval rating jump from 32% in June to 37%, with analysts attributing rise to emergency cash transfer program to people in need during pandemic. Piauí magazine 5 Aug reported that Bolsonaro had threatened to send troops to substitute Supreme Court judges in May after Judge Celso de Mello considered request to seize phones of Bolsonaro and his son Carlos as part of probe against group of presidential advisers suspected of fostering and spreading fake news; neither president nor Supreme Court commented on media report. Bolsonaro’s bid to build new political alliances with “Big Center” (*Centrão*) parties to strengthen govt support in Congress and avoid possible impeachment moved forward with 12 Aug appointment of center-right Progressive Party member, MP Ricardo Barros, as govt’s chief whip in Congress. In wake of increasing death toll from police operations to combat crime in poor communities of Rio de Janeiro, which led to 21-year high in police killings last year (1,814 dead) and further rises early this year, Supreme Court 18 Aug extended restrictions on police raids in Rio, allowing them only in case of extreme necessity and prohibiting use of helicopters in operations.

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## **Central America and Mexico**

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➔ **El Salvador** **Tensions persisted between President Bukele’s govt on one hand and Legislative Assembly and Supreme Court on the other, while corruption allegations emerged against current and previous administrations.** Assembly 2 Aug approved Inter-American Development Bank’s \$250mn loan to address COVID-19 pandemic after missing 31 July initial deadline for approving loan following disagreement with govt on how money would be spent. Supreme Court 7 Aug ruled July executive decree, which postponed second phase of economic reopening until 20 Aug, as unconstitutional as it gave health ministry power to limit citizens’ rights; businesses 23 Aug resumed operations without restrictions. After Bukele said in 9 Aug televised speech that he would have “shot [*fusilado*]” Supreme Court magistrates who ruled against govt were he a dictator, UN rapporteur on judiciaries 11 Aug expressed concern over threat to life and integrity of magistrates. Allegations of corruption involving current and former govt officials

continued to emerge; authorities 14 Aug charged two former defence ministers and a former president of opposition ARENA party over suspicion of unlawful transactions with weapons company, while media outlet Factum next day accused current director of prisons of misusing \$8.5mn revenue from jail shops. Govt continued to tout security achievements but homicide rates increased. Justice and Public Security Minister Rogelio Rivas 3 Aug stated femicides had dropped by 61.4% and disappearances by 46% since Bukele took office in 2019; but police reported average of 4.1 daily homicides 1-24 Aug, increase from 3.6 in July and 2.3 in June.

➔ **Guatemala Govt's management of COVID-19 crisis continued to come under scrutiny amid tensions between Congress and judiciary.** In address to Congress 3 Aug, first party in Congress Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza said govt has only distributed 3.5% of food rations earmarked in emergency funds approved to address COVID-19. Indigenous and civil society groups stepped up criticism of govt and lawmakers over management of pandemic; over 20 organisations in Quetzaltenango department 9 Aug declared five of their Congress representatives as persona non grata, and several organisations in Chiquimula department 11 Aug did the same for their three representatives. Maya, Xinca and Garifuna indigenous authorities 14 Aug demanded resignations of heads of executive, judicial, and legislative branches, citing their alleged inability to serve citizens. Hundreds 15 and 22 Aug gathered in capital Guatemala City to protest govt's management of pandemic. Concerns over slow response grew further after media 17 Aug reported four out of 14 COVID-19 relief programs have yet to distribute money despite being approved five months ago. Congress continued to delay elections of Supreme Court and appeal courts magistrates after Attorney General's office in Feb revealed irregularities in selection process of magistrates; Attorney General 7 Aug requested that immunity of 92 Congress members and several Supreme Court and Constitutional Court members be lifted for allegedly thwarting election process. Armed assailants 11 Aug killed French NGO worker in San Antonio Ilotenango municipality, El Quiché department (north east). Govt 16 Aug renewed for 15 days state of emergency imposed late July in five municipalities in Izabal (east) and Alta Verapaz departments over reported presence of criminal groups there.

➔ **Honduras Authorities faced new allegations of corruption and mismanagement of COVID-19 response, while fight against corruption suffered setback.** National Anti-Corruption Council 3 Aug charged former head of state-managed company Invest-H Marco Bográn with fraud and abuse of power following reports that Invest-H overpaid medical equipment amid COVID-19 pandemic. Prosecutors 10 Aug launched investigation into alleged govt mismanagement of COVID-19 response after 250,000 tests which had been inadequately stored were destroyed in April-May. Fight against corruption suffered major setback. Appeals Court 5 Aug dismissed embezzlement charges against 22 National Congress deputies in so-called "Pandora case" involving diversion of \$12mn in public money to finance election campaigns. Faced with persistent insecurity, members of Garifuna indigenous community 10 and 18 Aug protested in Triunfo de la Cruz village, Atlántida department, demanding release of five community leaders kidnapped by armed group in July. Insecurity in prisons remained high; fellow inmates 6 Aug killed three jailed members of 18th Street gang in La Tolva (east of Tegucigalpa) maximum security prison; police 3, 14 and 21 Aug carried out inspections in three different jails, finding large volumes of cash and weapons. In

ongoing operations against drug trafficking, security forces 9 Aug destroyed airstrip used by trafficker in Gracias a Dios department (Caribbean region), and 16 Aug dismantled drug production facilities in Colón department (north). Govt 11 Aug invited Organization of American States (OAS) to oversee 2021 general elections. National Election Council next day approved introduction of second round in presidential election; reform now requires Congress approval.

➔ **Mexico Criminal violence remained high while political tensions emerged over corruption allegations against previous administrations.**

Clashes between armed groups and targeted attacks on journalists continued in several areas. In Guanajuato state (centre) where Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel (SRLC) and Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) compete for territory and over oil siphoning, security forces 2 Aug detained head of SRLC; violence dropped slightly but remained high following arrest, with Guanajuato recording at least 334 homicides in Aug, more than any other state. In Guerrero state (south), armed group 2 Aug killed journalist Pablo Morruagares and his bodyguard in Iguala city, and two days later shot at offices of publishing platform El Diario de Iguala where Morruagares had worked. In Michoacán state (centre), fighting between CJNG and alliance of smaller armed groups continued to cause displacements in El Aguaje municipality, and unidentified gunmen 4 Aug shot dead journalist Luis Eduardo Ochoa in Uruapan city. In Colima state (also centre), National Guard 6 Aug reportedly discovered 22 bodies in clandestine graves in Tecomán city. In Tamaulipas state (north east), soldiers 17 Aug killed nine alleged members of armed group in Miguel Alemán municipality. Following July extradition from Spain of former head of state-owned oil company PEMEX Emilio Lozoya, who faces corruption charges, Lozoya in testimonies early Aug reportedly accused former presidents Peña Nieto and Calderón of corruption, notably accepting bribes from Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht. President López Obrador 10 Aug claimed Mexico was “narco-state” under his predecessors and 12 Aug said both former presidents should be called to testify; in response, Calderón 10 Aug accused him of politically motivated persecution and state attorney 12 Aug argued he had no constitutional right to be involved. Number of COVID-19 deaths 6 Aug rose to over 50,000, third highest toll globally.

➔ **Nicaragua Attacks on opposition, press and clergy increased, while internal divisions continued to plague opposition platform National Coalition.**

Media association and civil society group Violeta Barrio de Chamorro Foundation 7 Aug reported 30 attacks on press in July and identified police as main perpetrator, while police 15 Aug temporarily detained eight members of opposition Blue and White National Unity (UNAB)’s political council in Estelí city, Estelí department (north). At least five churches late-July to early-Aug denounced acts of vandalism, thefts and assaults; notably, Episcopal Conference 1 Aug condemned assailants who previous day set chapel of capital Managua cathedral ablaze. After National Coalition member Constitutionalist Liberal Party (PLC) 6 Aug sent letter to Organization of American States Sec Gen Almagro demanding joint control of Supreme Electoral Council with ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front Party, major coalition members UNAB and Civic Alliance 11 Aug suspended their participation in coalition’s working committees; U.S. State Department same day called for unity in virtual meeting with UNAB, Civic Alliance and *campesino* (peasant) movement; Civic Alliance official 25 Aug accused *campesino* movement of

allying with PLC to control coalition. Amid COVID-19 pandemic, concerns grew over incidents at southern border with Costa Rica, with reports of Nicaraguans attempting to return home through illegal crossings after govt mid-July introduced stricter conditions for entering country. Govt continued to receive criticism for reportedly downplaying and mismanaging COVID-19 crisis, with NGO Citizens' Observatory reporting death toll 20 times higher than officially admitted as of 19 Aug.

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## Caribbean

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↑ **Guyana** **Opposition candidate was sworn in as president following months of political standoff over election results.** After Chief Election Officer Keith Lowenfield submitted final report on March presidential election, Electoral Commission Chair Claudette Singh 2 Aug declared opposition People's Progressive Party presidential candidate Irfaan Ali winner; Ali was sworn in same day, after months of post-electoral crisis marked by court actions, vote recount, and intervention by regional bloc Caribbean Community. Outgoing President Granger immediately acknowledged declaration of results, but vowed to challenge it in court, citing "significant anomalies and irregularities"; Granger's Partnership for National Unity and Alliance for Change (APNU-AFC) 31 Aug filed election petition in High Court, asking it to cancel polls and order fresh elections within 90 days.

➔ **Haiti** **President Moïse announced elections for 2021, while gang-related violence remained high.** After seven months of ruling by decree, Moïse 16 Aug said legislative elections, which have been delayed since 2019, would be held in 2021 alongside presidential and municipal elections. More than 300 opposition parties and civil society groups 21 Aug ruled out participating in elections. Insecurity remained high. Gunmen 3 Aug attacked minibus in Ganthier city, killing two including baby; PM Jouthe next day criticised police for being unable to protect citizens. Gunmen 28 Aug killed prominent lawyer in capital Port-au-Prince hours after he addressed political and security crisis in radio interview. Three individuals including policeman night of 5-6 Aug stormed hospital in Port-au-Prince, damaging vehicles and ransacking parts of building. NGO National Network for the Defence of Human Rights 13 Aug said in new report at least 111 people were killed, 20 others wounded and 48 went missing in Port-au-Prince's Cité Soleil 1 June-28 July. Amid media reports that govt has been downplaying number of COVID-19 cases, schools reopened 10 Aug following end of state of health emergency in July. Famine Early Warning Systems Network late Aug warned against rising prices for food staples after flagging risk of crisis levels of food insecurity in several regions in July.