

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ **Bolivia** **Amid public discontent, presidential election delay sparked renewed mobilisation against govt.** Thousands 14 July protested interim govt in capital La Paz, defying COVID-19 restrictions; demonstrators voiced grievances over mass layoffs and govt health and education policies. Supreme Electoral Tribunal 23 July postponed presidential election from 6 Sept to 18 Oct, citing virus-related health crisis; exiled opposition leader and former President Evo Morales same day accused govt of unconstitutional move to “gain more time”. Influential union Bolivian Workers’ Centre (COB) 28 July marched in second-largest city El Alto against election delay, accusing govt of using pandemic to extend its powers; COB next day declared indefinite general strike and countrywide mobilisation; COB 30 July met with electoral authorities.

➔ **Colombia** **Armed groups continued to take advantage of COVID-19 pandemic to expand territorial control, while National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas reiterated willingness to negotiate ceasefire with govt.** Amid COVID-19 pandemic, armed group violence remained high. Notably, criminal group Rastrojos 18 June reportedly killed eight farmers and coca growers in Tibú municipality, Norte de Santander department (north east), forcing more than 400 people to flee. Attorney general’s office first week of July said 37 social leaders were killed in first six months of 2020 with a further 49 cases under verification; civil society group Indepaz counted 166 such assassinations in same period. NGO Global Witness 29 July said 64 environmental activists were killed in 2019, highest total globally and increase from 25 in 2018. ELN 7 July urged govt to negotiate bilateral 90-day humanitarian ceasefire amid coronavirus; next day, President Duque excluded possibility of bilateral talks until several preconditions are met. ELN chief negotiator Pablo Beltrán 9 July said group would not consider unilateral truce, claiming govt used guerrillas’ April ceasefire to reposition forces and launch offensive in May. Govt 8 July launched individual demobilisation program allowing armed group combatants to disarm in exchange for reduced judicial sentences and economic reintegration packages; *El Espectador* newspaper 10 July reported Dairo Antonio Úsuga David alias Otoniel, leader of Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (one of country’s main drug trafficking groups), was exploring options to lay down arms through program. Govt 15 July relocated dozens of former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) combatants from collective demobilisation zone in Ituango, Antioquia department (north west) following threats from dissident factions. Govt continued to insist on 31 July deadline for FARC political party to hand over economic proceeds from conflict, though party reiterated it had already returned profits in cash and commodities. Amid dramatic increase in COVID-19 cases, govt 29 July extended nationwide quarantine until 30 Aug, with different sets of local restrictions depending on number of cases.

➡ **Venezuela** **President Maduro's govt continued to tighten control on electoral framework ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for Dec.** Newly appointed electoral authority (CNE) 1 July said parliamentary elections would take place 6 Dec. On occasion of Independence Day 5 July, Defence Minister Padrino López delivered hardline speech describing mainstream opposition led by Juan Guaidó as “bunch of crooks” who will “never exercise power” as long as army remains “anti-imperialist, Bolivarian and revolutionary”. Supreme Court 7 July transferred command of Guaidó's Voluntad Popular party to ad hoc committee led by José Gregorio Noriega, previously expelled from party over allegations of corruption but recognised by govt as National Assembly VP; decision followed similar moves against two other mainstream opposition parties in June. Opposition continued to reject govt-controlled Supreme Court changes to electoral law announced in June – which resulted notably in increase in number of National Assembly seats from 167 to 277, and in number of MPs elected by party list rather than individually – saying they have no legal basis. In interview with *Tal Cual* newspaper 13 July, CNE board member Rafael Simón Jiménez admitted CNE, despite being officially independent, executes decisions taken by National Dialogue Roundtable – govt-led dialogue initiative involving minority opposition parties. Following call between EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell and FM Jorge Arreaza, govt 2 July rescinded its late June decision to expel EU representative from country; expulsion came in response to EU imposition of sanctions on individuals for “undermining democracy and rule of law” following appointment of new CNE earlier in June. Borrell 13 July proposed ministerial-level meeting of EU/Uruguay-led International Contact Group “with all the key players” of Venezuelan political crisis to discuss conditions for Dec elections. Opposition 24 July reiterated that Norway-sponsored govt-opposition talks were over after Norwegian govt representatives said they would visit capital Caracas late July to assess political and humanitarian situation. Amid dramatic increase in COVID-19 cases, concerns persisted over health system capacity, while several high-level officials tested positive for virus.

Central America and Mexico

➡ **El Salvador** **Tensions continued between, on one hand, President Bukele and, on the other, Legislative Assembly and Supreme Court, over COVID-19 response, while allegations of corruption in use of emergency funds plagued govt.** After Legislative Assembly declined to discuss govt's 24 June proposal to declare 15-day state of exception to restrict public movement and gatherings amid pandemic, at least three mayors 4 July requested MPs to allow localised quarantines. Bukele 19 July postponed sine die second phase of economic reopening, citing rising number of COVID-19 cases. Allegations of corruption in govt's use of coronavirus emergency funds persisted, including reports of overcharging by suppliers linked to govt officials; newspaper *La Prensa Gráfica* 17 July reported Health Minister Francisco Alabí in April authorised purchase of health equipment worth \$225,000 from family member's auto repair business. Director of prisons 1 July said authorities had contained COVID-19 outbreak in prisons, though head of penitentiary system's medical department same day said reduction in number of cases was due to infected

inmates' release. Govt continued to boast of security achievements; ministry of justice and public security 11 July said number of homicides in nine historically violent municipalities had decreased by 54 to 77% since Bukele took office in June 2019. Attorney General's Office 23 July said authorities had arrested former Defence Minister David Munguía Payés and issued arrest warrant for former President Funes over allegations of "unlawful acts" during 2012-2014 gang truce, notably making "pact" with gangs. U.S. authorities 15 July announced arrest and indictment of 24 MS-13 gang leaders, for first time charging one with terrorism.

➡ **Guatemala** **Under pressure for alleged corruption in handling of COVID-19, govt created new anti-graft body, while insecurity persisted.** Following June removal of health minister and other ministry officials for mismanagement of COVID-19 response, including allegations of corruption, govt 9 July created Anti-corruption Secretariat. President Giammattei's cabinet same day went into quarantine after minister tested positive for virus, amid reports pandemic had stretched health care facilities to their limits. Govt 27 July introduced "traffic light" alert system, allowing local authorities to impose different levels of restrictions depending on contagion numbers. Following Congress and Supreme Court's late June attempt to lift immunity of Constitutional Court magistrates, Constitutional Court 25 July ruled to defend its members' immunity; move came after series of Constitutional Court rulings on alleged irregularities in selection process of judges to Supreme Court and Court of Appeals. Meanwhile, insecurity continued. Unidentified gunmen 14 July injured new mayor of Teculután town, Zacapa department (east), whose predecessor was murdered in May. Govt 27 July imposed 15-day state of emergency in five municipalities in departments of Izabal (east) and Alta Verapaz (north), alleging presence of criminal groups there; peasant (*campesino*) movement had rejected govt move to impose 30-day state of emergency in same municipalities 19 July saying it would militarise area and restrict rights; in statement published 21 July, 125 national and international rights groups supported peasants' complaint. Tensions with U.S. remained high over continued deportation flights amid COVID-19 pandemic; health ministry 7 July reported 216 returned migrants had tested positive since outbreak started.

➡ **Honduras** **Govt continued to face accusations of using COVID-19 to stay in office, while unrest remained high over food shortages and living conditions.** Concerns persisted that govt could call off or alter results of primary and general elections scheduled for March and Nov 2021 following delays in updating electoral register due to COVID-19 pandemic; commission in charge of register update 13 July said it will complete process on time and congressional leaders reiterated primary elections planned for March 2021 will go ahead. Liberty and Refoundation opposition party leader Xiomara Castro 21 July said she would not participate in primary elections, alleging they would be filled with irregularities. Insecurity persisted despite govt's 30 June announcement that police had arrested senior figures of criminal group Barrio 18 and MS-13 gang senior leader known as "The Priest". Notably, unidentified attackers 1 July killed two journalists in La Ceiba city, Atlántida department (north); armed men in police outfit 18 July kidnapped 5 indigenous Garifuna leaders in Tela town, also Atlántida; and ambush by unidentified assailants 19 July killed nine civilians in rural area in Yoro department (north). Turmoil in prisons continued with mutiny in Támara maximum security prison leaving penitentiary official wounded 20 July; authorities

22 and 24 July raided prison, seizing several weapons and discovering escape tunnel. Amid reports COVID-19 pandemic had stretched health care facilities to their limits, President Hernández 2 July left hospital having been admitted 17 June after testing positive; unrest over food shortages and deteriorating livelihoods continued nationwide, including protests by merchants in Danlí (El Paraíso department in south) 10 July, university union members in various cities 13 July, and taxi drivers in capital Tegucigalpa 14 July; govt late July extended nationwide curfew into Aug.

➡ **Mexico** **Criminal violence remained at record levels while govt faced scrutiny for COVID-19 response.** In Guanajuato state (centre), armed attack on drug rehabilitation centre 1 July killed 27 in Irapuato town; attack reportedly part of territorial battle between Jalisco Cartel New Generation and Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel over drug routes and retail markets. In Tamaulipas state (south), army 3 July killed twelve people, allegedly members of Cartel of the Northeast, in Nuevo Laredo city, while criminal group Zetas Vieja Escuela 6-9 July reportedly carried out several attacks on food company delivery vehicles in state capital Ciudad Victoria. Criticism of President López Obrador's austerity program and lack of economic response to COVID-19 persisted amid concerns that rising poverty levels could boost recruitment by armed groups; meanwhile govt continued its partial economic reopening amid steadily rising number of virus infections and deaths. Federal State Attorney's Office 7 July announced it had identified remains of one of 43 Ayotzinapa teaching college students who disappeared in 2014, accused former President Peña Nieto's administration of covering up state involvement; Federal Search Commission 13 July said at least 79,602 persons have disappeared since 2006. In first trip abroad as president, López Obrador 8 July visited U.S. President Trump, praising Washington's respect of "Mexico's sovereignty"; observers criticised comments, pointing to Trump's use of anti-Mexican sentiment for electoral gain and forcing of Mexico into hardline anti-migration position. U.S. authorities same day detained former Chihuahua state (north) governor César Duarte for alleged links to organised crime and began extradition process. Former head of state-owned oil company PEMEX Emilio Lozoya arrived in Mexico 17 July to face corruption charges following extradition from Spain; amid reports Lozoya's testimony may implicate Peña Nieto, López Obrador same day reiterated refusal to pursue legal cases against former presidents.

➡ **Nicaragua** **Political tensions and infighting remained high amid preparations for presidential election scheduled for late 2021.** Family sympathetic to opposition in Masaya department (west) 3 July said strong contingent of police same day raided their property and occupied their land. Police 5 July raided and ransacked house of opposition member and university student Jerry Urbina in Waslala municipality, North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (north). UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Bachelet 2 July reported "persistent impunity had eroded trust" in govt and "together with the lack of legal and institutional reforms, increased the risk of new human rights violations". U.S. 18 July imposed sanctions on Jorge Mojica Mejía, President Ortega's close collaborator, and Ortega's son Juan Carlos Ortega Murillo, as well as two media companies, accusing both men of using these platforms to distribute propaganda and launder money. Supreme Electoral Council 14 July set presidential election for

7 Nov 2021 and extended deadline for parties to register for vote from Nov 2020 until June 2021, citing delays due to COVID-19 pandemic; opposition National Coalition immediately rejected change and demanded full electoral reforms. Internal divisions continued to plague National Coalition; coalition member Civic Alliance 21-30 July suspended participation to discuss several issues including alleged lack of participation of youth movements. Divisions also emerged within main private-sector association COSEP over organisation's leadership, with several members early July calling for president to leave post in Sept elections. Opposition and civil society continued to accuse Ortega's govt of concealing information about virus' spread; celebrations of anniversary of 1979 Sandinista revolution held virtually 19 July.

➡ **Brazil** Country remained second worst-affected by COVID-19 globally, while tensions ran high between President Bolsonaro's govt and military, on one hand, and Supreme Court, on the other. Supreme Court Judge Gilmar Mendes 11 July said Bolsonaro's response to COVID-19 pandemic amounted to "genocide", and military could be seen as complicit. In response, Defence Minister Fernando Azevedo 14 July sent formal complaint against Judge Mendes to Federal Prosecution Office, accusing him of violating National Security Law, remnant of military regime. Brazil, country second worst affected by coronavirus globally, with more than 2mn active cases and 85,000 deaths; states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Paraná (south) reported highest growth in number of cases in July; Bolsonaro 7 July tested positive. São Paulo Police Internal Affairs Department and Rio de Janeiro Institute of Public Safety 14 July reported record number of police killings in both cities, with 741 people killed by police in Rio de Janeiro and 442 others in São Paulo between Jan and May.

Caribbean

➔ **Guyana Political standoff over results of March general election deepened amid protests.** Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) 8 July declared invalid Chief Election Officer Keith Lowenfield's June final report on elections, which gave incumbent President Granger's Partnership for National Unity and Alliance for Change (APNU-AFC) the win; CCJ same day ordered Lowenfield to submit final election report based on electoral commission (GECOM)'s national recount of votes, which declared opposition leader Irfaan Ali's People's Progressive Party (PPP) the winner; Lowenfield 11 July submitted unaltered version of report. Dozens of APNU-AFC supporters 13 July protested in front of GECOM's building in capital Georgetown; suspected arson attack 14 July severely damaged GECOM's office in Linden city in north east. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 15 July urged President Granger to "step aside" and announced visa restrictions on "individuals responsible for or complicit in undermining democracy in Guyana". APNU-AFC 21 July said it would not accept final report based on vote recount result; in response, former president and PPP supporter Bharrat Jagdeo 23 July warned Granger's refusal to leave office would be tantamount to coup d'état and meet "fierce resistance". Court of Appeal 30 July reaffirmed Lowenfield must submit final report based on GECOM's vote recount. U.S. same day imposed travel restrictions on additional senior officials, citing Granger's refusal to accept vote recount result.

➔ **Haiti Political tensions emerged over new penal code, while gang-related violence persisted.** After President Moïse late June published decree on new penal code due to come into effect in 2022, conservative opposition throughout month condemned code for lowering age of consent to 15 and legalising abortion, while liberal opposition denounced lack of debate; Senate president 7 July called upon Moïse to form commission to amend code; thousands of Haitians of Protestant faith 26 July protested "immoral" code in capital Port-au-Prince. Meanwhile, insecurity remained high. Following June creation of G9 coalition of gangs in Port-au-Prince, opposition and civil society early July claimed group is involved in pro-govt electoral deals, govt denied accusations; over 50 armed G9 members 7 July protested in Port-au-Prince demanding legal recognition as local authorities in areas they control. Hundreds of civil society activists 6 July staged peaceful sit-in in Port-au-Prince to denounce insecurity, following similar action 29 June; police reportedly used live ammunition to clear crowds; in response, Moïse 9 July replaced justice minister. Episcopal Justice and Peace Commission 11 July said gang violence left 244 people killed in first six months of 2020. Govt 2 July suspended pardons to 415 prisoners, granted by Moïse in June to prevent COVID-19 spread in prisons, after human rights groups criticised govt for freeing inmates convicted of serious offences.