

Face to face: Contested integration projects, electoral processes, and popular mobilisations

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Observatory of the Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Summary

Latin America and the Caribbean is a region in flux due to a series of changing events. This is the result of a global dispute amidst the decline of North American hegemony and the rise of China on the one hand and, on the other hand, of a regional dispute which is expressed in the struggles of popular movements against right-wing groups that seek to sustain and deepen the capitalist and dependent[1] status quo. Report no. 14 seeks to account for the events that shaped the continent during the months of July and August of 2021. This is a continent troubled by the spread of new strains of COVID-19 and the vaccination process amidst the exacerbation of crises and social tensions that produce political instability and catastrophic standoffs in various regions.

The Delta strain has created a scenario of uncertainty regarding the strength of countries' health systems and governments' social responses. There has been an increase in infections in Mesoamerica and the Caribbean, where there is also the lowest percentage of the vaccinated population. After the failure of COVAX and the obstacles posed by Big Pharma, vaccine diplomacy faces a new chapter with Biden's decision to donate vaccines to countries on the continent.

Multiple social, economic, and migratory crises have become exacerbated during the pandemic. Not only are we witnessing deepening inequalities, unemployment, and food insecurity: the capitalist system is leading us towards a socioenvironmental crisis spurred by ecological collapse. This reality can be seen, for example, in the drought of the Paraná River in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay and in fires such as those in the Amazon rainforest. Various organisations and movements from the Southern Cone to Central America have been rising up against extractive policies and the dispossession of common goods.

Regional integration is being contested. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) is the alternative to the fragmentation and paralysis of spaces of integration and, above all, to the interventionist and destabilising attempts of the Organisation of American States (OAS), as can be observed in the continents' trends and countertrends. This organisation, chaired by the widely criticised Luis Almagro,

is in crisis. Similarly, the Lima Group not only lost Lima, but also saw its strategy to overturn the Bolivarian Revolution defeated. On the contrary, the Puebla Group has asserted itself as a regional political space based on a partnership between Mexico and Argentina and seeks to strengthen CELAC to build a new body that can replace the OAS which, even in its early years, was referred to as the ‘Ministry of North American Colonies’.

During the months analysed in this report, the Caribbean region has been at the centre of the profound exacerbation of social tensions. The assassination of Jovenel Moïse in Haiti is evidence of the growing violence in the country and has exposed interventionist aspirations. Mounting investigations have brought to light Colombia and the US’ connection in the murder of the former president. The 7.2 magnitude earthquake greatly affected the Haitian people and intensified the humanitarian crisis. In addition, the elections – already postponed several times – continue to face delays due the actions of provisional governments, which are illegitimate and are not supported by a consensus of the people.

Not satisfied with this, the imperial strategy turned its sights on Cuba again, seeking to destabilise and overturn the revolution. On 11 July, there was a series of protests spurred on by social media that were supported and made viral by international media. Some of the protests’ demands arose from discontent over power outages and the lack of food and medicine caused by the blockade that the United States has carried out in Cuba for more than 60 years against which 184 voiced their opposition in the United Nations. The Cuban and international right wing sought to create the conditions to destabilise current President Díaz Canel. This forced the government to differentiate between the legitimate demands of the population and a covert strategy on the part of the groups promoting a coup. The needs to revitalise the revolutionary process, to further reduce the bureaucratisation of the State, to come up with solutions for the problems at hand, and to incorporate into the process a generation of young people who do not feel included today were made evident. The Cuban people showed strong support for the revolution, which was seen in the mobilisations in support of the government. At the international level, social, political, intellectual, scientific, and artistic leaders of the world published the letter entitled ‘Let Cuba Live’, which demands that the Biden administration end the coercive measures against Cuba and put an end to the blockade against the island.

The West Indies have also been in the midst of rocky waters. Saint Lucia left the Lima Group after the victory of the Labour Party and the inauguration of Philip Pierre as prime minister. Barbados announced that it will cease to be a constitutional monarchy and become a Republic. The mobilisations on the continent, in this case centred on the pandemic, have had repercussions on the islands Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, the French Island of Guadeloupe, and Saint Martin.

After uncertain months, the Andean region has found some resolution – however precarious – crystallising small victories that nonetheless point towards the enormous challenges ahead. Such is the case with the inauguration of President Pedro Castillo in Peru after electoral coup attempts. The path on which his administration has had to embark includes urgent attempts to obtain vaccines as well as the difficulties presented by right-wing and oligarchy groups that seek to weaken the government, whose first victory was the resignation of two ministers, including that of former Foreign Minister Héctor Béjar. There was another important gain in Venezuela with the beginning of the negotiation process with opposition groups, which is based in Mexico. This marks a turning point after numerous attempts by the opposition – led from Washington – not to recognise Maduro as the legitimate president. This comes as preparations for local and regional elections begin.

In Bolivia, investigations to find those responsible for the coup against Evo Morales in 2019 are moving forward. With Añez in prison, there have been mounting condemnations of the international complicity of former Argentine president Mauricio Macri, former Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno, and Luis Almagro, who played a role in the OAS' legitimization of the coup.

Four months into the cycle of struggle following the national strike, the Colombian people continue to resist a weakened government that seeks to maintain its position by unleashing its most authoritarian, repressive, and murderous side against activists. With sights set on 2022, political unity is necessary to defeat a confused *Uribismo*[2] which – in order not to lose its compass – is leaning even further to the right.

In Ecuador, the neoliberal project seeks to establish itself at the hands of Lasso, who follows in the footsteps of his predecessor Lenin Moreno and seeks to advance measures such as the new labour law and increase in the cost of fuel, going against the interest of the people. Trade unions and indigenous groups, gathered in the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), have responded with mobilisations.

The countries of the Southern Cone are undergoing a number of electoral processes, which are sparking social tensions. In Chile, Gabriel Boric (Apruebo Dignidad) and Sebastián Sichel (Chile Puede +) kicked off the presidential elections as the top two candidates in the lead going into the second round, but with the centrist Yasna Provoste (Unidad Constituyente) and the right-wing Antonio Kast (Partido Republicano) also in the running. Simultaneously, the Constitutional Convention was launched, which in its first session elected Elisa Loncón, a Mapuche[3] linguist, as president, marking a political victory for the demands of indigenous populations and for the recognition of cultural diversity.

Meanwhile, the Brazilian people are mobilising against the destructive project of Jair Bolsonaro, which is threatening democracy through demonstrations of power by sending the armed forces into the streets, all while further privatising the state electric company Eletrobras[4] and the Postal Services company. In addition, the destructive effects of Bolsonaro's administration have had an impact on nature with the fires in the Amazon and the expropriation of lands that belong to indigenous peoples.

In Argentina, elections for National Congress are polarised between the two largest Coalitions: *Frente de Todos* ('Everybody's Front') and *Juntos por el Cambio* ('Together for Change'). In the big cities, the 'libertarian' right is attempting to grow amidst significant social mobilisations and progress in the vaccination process. Municipal elections in Paraguay are also taking place in the context of advancing investigations and controversies surrounding the Itaipú hydroelectric dam and territorial conflicts between agribusiness entrepreneurs and peasants. Finally, it is worth noting the referendum on the Urgent Consideration Law (LUC) in Uruguay, one of the first counterattacks facing President Lacalle Pou, which is taking place in a climate of declining living conditions for the population. The trade union confederation, PIT-CNT, convened a national strike against the policies carried out by the government on 15 September.

Moving up to the Mesoamerican region, echoes of continent-wide mobilisations reverberate in Guatemala. There, the tense social calm was broken and a process of struggle began with the plurinational strike on 29 July, calling for the resignation of President Giammattei and Attorney General Consuelo Porras and convening a Plurinational Constituent Assembly.

In Mexico, the importance of the debate surrounding the corruption trial referendum marked a historic milestone; however, there were not enough voters for the referendum to be binding. This occurred amidst

high rates of homicide and disappearances, a product of the militarisation of the security forces that has continued under the López Obrador government.

Meanwhile, Central America is experiencing a strong migration crisis on the US-Mexico border, which prompted the White House to implement a strategic plan to address what they consider to be the causes of this problem. The Darien region on the border between Colombia and Panama is also at the heart of migration. Political instability also characterises the region: in El Salvador, Nayib Bukele has increased his persecution leaders of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, all while there is social uncertainty over the implementation of Bitcoin as a legal currency. In Nicaragua, the arrests of opponents and imperialist interference have deepened social polarisation in the face of the November presidential elections. Honduras is another country with upcoming presidential elections amidst uncertainty about the transparency of the electoral process and social mobilisations against the Zones of Employment and Economic Development (ZEDE).

We have prepared OBSAL report no. 14 by following the thread of struggles, resistance, advances, and setbacks between the Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires Offices of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. Our hope is that the constituent and plurinational forces and the leading actors of this political moment will write the history of another possible world, one in which many worlds fit, following the Zapatista art of poetry.



[1] The notion of a 'dependent status quo' refers to the dependency of 'peripheral' regions and countries, such as Latin America, on 'core' countries and regions, such as North America. This notion was developed within dependency theory, a critical response to development theory.

[2] Translator's note: the term 'Uribismo' refers to the political tendency and group of politicians lead by former Colombian president Álvaro Uribe Vélez.

[3] Translator's note: the Mapuche are an indigenous group from the southern-most region of Argentina and Chile.

[4] Translator's note: Eletrobras is an electric utilities companies which is partially owned by the Brazilian federal government.

