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CONTENTS

LEADER	1
Pope's Colombia visit strengthens Santos legacy	
ANDEAN COUNTRIES	
VENEZUELA	3
More talks about talks get underway	
PERU	4
Zavala goes for broke	
TRACKING TRENDS	
BRAZIL & SOUTHERN CONE	
URUGUAY	6
Sendic succumbs to pressure and steps down	
BRAZIL	7
New charges laid against Temer	
ARGENTINA	8
Courts provide electoral battleground	
MEXICO & NAFTA	
MEXICO	10
New coalition launched	
Killing spree targeting police rocks Guanajuato	
TRACKING TRENDS	
CARIBBEAN	13
Irma wreaks havoc across Caribbean	
GUATEMALA	14
Congress deals double blow to transparency efforts	
TRACKING TRENDS	
POSTSCRIPT	16
Ecuador's Moreno and the challenge from within	

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Pope's Colombia visit strengthens Santos legacy

Pope Francis provided important validation of the peace process pursued by President Juan Manuel Santos during a five-day visit to Colombia. The trip, the first by a pontiff to Colombia in 31 years despite the country having the seventh largest Catholic community in the world, appeared to put the seal on the peace accord with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Farc). The pope was careful to focus on post-conflict reconciliation rather than the accord per se but his visit will provide a boost for Santos's political heirs and a setback for Senator Alvaro Uribe (president 2002-2010), the leader of the right-wing Centro Democrático (CD) which has made opposition to the peace process the cornerstone of its campaign ahead of presidential and congressional elections in May 2018.

Some 6.8m people turned out to see Pope Francis in Bogotá; Villavicencio, the capital of the central department of Meta; Medellín, Colombia's second largest city and capital of the northern department of Antioquia; and Cartagena de Indias, the capital of the contiguous department of Bolívar. Crime fell by 70% during the pope's 6-10 September visit, according to the defence ministry. But then Vice-President Óscar Naranjo, the former national police chief who organised preparations for the pope's trip, did deploy 36,600 members of the police and army, as well as 19,600 volunteers, to ensure it passed off smoothly.

The pope began his visit in the capital. His 7 September speech from the presidential palace, Casa de Nariño, to some 2,000 dignitaries was the most political of his visit. The pope praised efforts "to seek out paths of reconciliation", the word which cropped up most frequently in his addresses throughout his visit. "Over the past year significant progress has been made; the steps taken give rise to hope...despite obstacles, differences and varying perspectives on the way to achieve peaceful coexistence [to] flee from the temptation to vengeance and the satisfaction of short-term partisan interests".

This might almost have been directed at Uribe, who had penned a letter to the pope in advance of his visit lamenting "the total impunity for those responsible for atrocious crimes, their political eligibility, and legal authorisation they have received to spend illicit money on political activities". Uribe will ratchet up this rhetoric in the eight months until presidential and congressional elections, but the pope's visit, and his unequivocal endorsement of peace, is likely to damage the prospects of his CD to some extent.

It is noteworthy that the Colombian Church, albeit spearheaded by the evangelical protestant movement, played a pivotal role in the rejection of the peace accord with the Farc in the national referendum last October after confusion over the inclusion of 'gender ideology' within the accord and the

“The Church is not present in Latin America with her suitcases in hand, ready, like so many others over time, to abandon it after having plundered it. Such people look with a sense of superiority and scorn on its mestizo face; they want to colonize its soul with the same failed and recycled visions of man and life; they repeat the same old recipes that kill the patient while lining the pockets of the doctors. They ignore the deepest concerns present in the heart of its people, the visions and the myths that give strength in spite of frequent disappointments and failures. They manipulate politics and betray hopes, leaving behind scorched land and a terrain ready for more of the same, albeit under a new guise. Powerful figures and utopian dreams have promised magic solutions, instant answers, immediate effects. The Church respects the varied face of the continent [and] must continue working quietly to serve the true good of the men and women of Latin America.”

Pope Francis addressing the Colombian bishops' conference.

(unfounded) belief that it privileged the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) movement.

The pope was also the recipient of another (open) letter as he arrived in Colombia - from the Farc's maximum leader, 'Timochenko' (Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri). "We have fulfilled the indispensable act of contrition to recognise our mistakes and seek forgiveness from the victims of our actions," Timochenko wrote. "Your repeated expressions about God's infinite mercy move me to plead your forgiveness for any tears or pain that we have caused the people of Colombia," he went on, before imploring the pope to raise his voice in prayer to help ensure that "the enormous efforts of recent years are not frustrated, and the stubborn resistance to any stable and durable peace overcome".

Timochenko said that his poor health prevented him from being present during the pope's visit. The head of the Farc negotiating team in Cuba, Iván Márquez (Luciano Marín Arango), had expressed a desire to meet the pope but the pontiff opted against such a meeting for fear that it might be misconstrued. The pope did "raise his voice in prayer", however, for the great strides towards peace not to be squandered.

The pope's focus on reconciliation not as an abstract concept but rather concrete action was most evident during his visit on 8 September to Villavicencio where he held a prayer meeting with former guerrillas, some 6,000 victims of the country's armed conflict, and members of the security forces. Four people - a former paramilitary, a former Farc guerrilla, and two victims of guerrilla and paramilitary violence respectively - gave their personal accounts of the country's long armed conflict, urging an end to the cycle of violence. "This is only possible through forgiveness and concrete reconciliation," the pope said, adding "do not be afraid of asking for forgiveness and offering it".

Symbolically hanging on the wall above the stage during the event in Villavicencio was a crucifix which was salvaged from a church in Bojayá, in the northernmost department of Chocó, where a bomb exploded in May 2002 killing 79 civilians, including 48 children, who had sought refuge from violent clashes between the Farc and paramilitaries.

The pope also looked beyond national reconciliation to how a lasting peace could be ensured. And here he made a plea for greater social justice "to resolve the structural causes of poverty that lead to exclusion and violence". He added: "Let us not forget that inequality is the root of social ills...I encourage you to look to all those who today are excluded and marginalised by society, those who have no value in the eyes of the majority."

Timochenko claimed in his letter to the pope that "seeking justice for the marginalised and persecuted, and seeking to remedy the inequity and dispossession they suffered" had been the primary purpose of the Farc's struggle throughout the decades. But the manner in which it sought to pursue this professed priority is not something many Colombians will find easy to forgive. As everyday life resumes in the wake of the pope's departure, Uribe and his CD will seek to exploit this, retaking their entrenched ideological positions in the upcoming electoral campaign.

Santos, meanwhile, will feel more confident that the legacy of the pope's visit will help buttress the peace process. As the pope concluded his visit to Colombia, Santos said that the country was "a better place for your visit". Santos said two points stressed by the pope in their private conversations would stick with him: "All peace efforts without a sincere commitment to reconciliation will be a failure", and "hate does not have the last word".

Maduro backs Opec plan

President Maduro has expressed support for the plan of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) to extend the global oil output deal between Opec and non-Opec oil producers into 2018. While global oil demand is rebalancing, price rises are expected to be modest, amid rising US shale output in particular.

ANDEAN COUNTRIES

VENEZUELA | POLITICS & ECONOMY

More talks about talks get underway

Venezuelan politics has moved to the Dominican Republic, with international pressure for a mediated solution.

Opposition politicians Julio Borges, Luis Florido, Timoteo Zambrano, Manuel Rosales, Vicente Díaz, and Eudoro González were in the Dominican Republic on 13 September for a fresh round of 'talks about talks' with the country's president, Danilo Medina. Also on the ground in the Dominican Republic is the lead international mediator for Venezuela, Spain's former prime minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

Borges reportedly flew straight to the Dominican Republic from Europe, where he has spent the past week meeting the leaders of France, Spain, Germany, and the UK. Also in Europe was Venezuela's foreign minister Jorge Arreaza. News of the new round of talks was revealed by Arreaza's French counterpart, Jean-Yves Le Drian, who said after a meeting in Paris with Arreaza on 12 September that he was "happy to learn that dialogue with the opposition will restart tomorrow in the Dominican Republic. This is good news and I hope that it will rapidly lead to concrete steps on the ground".

The French foreign minister told journalists that he had told Arreaza that "France was deeply worried by the political, economic and humanitarian situation in Venezuela. I reminded him of the risk of European sanctions and the need to rapidly see evidence from Venezuela that it is ready to relaunch negotiations with the opposition and engage in a sincere and credible process".

President Nicolás Maduro responded just hours later on state television, saying he had "accepted" the invitation and would send a delegation immediately, led by Jorge Rodríguez, mayor of the Caracas municipality of Libertador and a key figure in previous discussions with the opposition.

In marked contrast, the following 24 hours were punctuated by confusion on the part of the Venezuelan opposition coalition, the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD), as it struggled to respond to the announcement by Le Drian. The MUD saw it as yet another cynical manoeuvre by Maduro to buy time, with Rodríguez Zapatero, who the MUD considers wholly biased, 'facilitating' these moves by Maduro internationally.

Finally, the MUD put out a statement insisting that while it had sent a delegation to the Dominican Republic to meet President Medina - there was no mention whatsoever of Rodríguez Zapatero in its statement - there would be no new dialogue until the Maduro administration met its conditions. It listed these as a fixed electoral schedule for the gubernatorial, municipal and presidential elections; the release of political prisoners and the removal of political disqualifications against opposition candidates; respect for the independence of state powers and recognition of the elected (MUD-controlled) national assembly; and immediate measures to deal with the economic and social crisis in Venezuela, including permission for a humanitarian corridor.

Late on 13 September, Medina said he had met delegates from the two sides for more than five hours, albeit he did not specify whether he had met them together or separately. "There is a lot of willingness to reach some kind of negotiation," Medina stated, adding that talks would resume the following morning (14 September).

Notably, the secretary general of the United Nations, António Guterres, also

FP censure

The FP-led congress forced out President Kuczynski's first education minister, Jaime Saavedra, a respected veteran of the education sector and the country's most popular minister, in December 2016. Saavedra had been carried over from the previous leftist government led by Ollanta Humala but was forced out over alleged corruption in procurement.

expressed his support for dialogue, calling on the two sides to "take this opportunity to show their commitment to solve the country's problems through mediation". That statement came just days after the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had suggested evidence of potential crimes against humanity committed by the Venezuelan government.

According to Venezuelan media reports, in earlier exploratory moves in late August it had been agreed, tentatively, that the Vatican would act as guarantor in any new talks, with France, Portugal, Greece, Peru, and Mexico coming onboard as additional mediators and the UN also having an involvement in preparing an agenda and a working plan. Nonetheless, the MUD appeared totally unprepared for Arreaza's trip to Paris to 'inform' the French government about the new talks. Once again, Maduro seemed to outflank them.

PERU | POLITICS & EDUCATION

Zavala goes for broke

"The welfare of children is non-negotiable", Prime Minister Fernando Zavala declared in announcing that the opposition-controlled congress would have to censure the entire cabinet if it wanted to remove the embattled education minister Marilú Martens over her handling of the long-running teachers' strike. Zavala made his move after the right-wing Fuerza Popular (FP, Fujimoristas) prepared a motion to censure Martens.

"State policy is at risk," Zavala tweeted late on 13 September upon his announcement, adding that he expected congress to respond the very next day. "Peru cannot wait," he added.

At a ceremony to turn the first stone on works for the 2019 Pan American Games in Lima, President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski backed up Zavala, saying that to oust Martens would be "completely unfair." "It would be the second education minister censured purely over political preferences," Kuczynski complained, going on to accuse the legislature of trying to "sabotage" Peru's flagship education reforms (see sidebar). The FP ousted Kuczynski's finance minister Alfredo Thorne in June, while the transport minister (and also elected vice-president) Martín Vizcarra stepped aside in May to avoid a censure vote.

Clearly, by turning the censure vote on Martens into a vote of confidence on the whole cabinet, Kuczynski hopes to take the battle to the FP, which, despite all the pledges of party leader Keiko Fujimori to be a "responsible opposition", has instead used its absolute majority in congress to obstruct and stymie the executive at every turn, strangling and suffocating governance. "What is happening is that they are starting to censure ministers just because they don't like them. It's undermining the democratic system," said Carlos Bruce, bench leader of Kuczynski's minority Peruanos Por el Cambio (PPK) party.

If congress fails to approve a confidence vote in the cabinet, all 19 ministers would have to step down. Under Peruvian law, the president can dissolve congress if it votes twice this way against the cabinet. Such a step has not been taken in decades, underlining the toxicity of the current situation.

Luz Salgado, the FP former president of congress, pushed back. "They're putting the governability of the country at risk over one minister? It's completely irresponsible," she declared. The FP's hardline congressional bench spokesman, Daniel Salaverry, suggested that "Zavala wants to go but doesn't want to go alone". However, at the same time the FP said they would

Teachers' strikes

Peru's teachers' strikes lasted 53 days in all, from June to late August. As part of the settlement, the government agreed to raise wages by from PEN1,500 (US\$460) to PEN2,000 (US\$615). The education ministry also promised that unpopular teachers' assessments would be "formative not punitive" and that no teacher would be assessed without prior training.

need to carefully examine the legality of Zavala's request and Salgado noted that the censure motion for Martens had not yet been presented – leaving the FP some wiggle room yet.

The FP decided to censure Martens after she appeared before congress on 8 September to defend her performance during the recent teachers' strike. Salaverry said the decision had been taken after "a profound analysis of the state of education in the country". "Education policies are being driven by the previous administration, of which the minister was also a member, and we don't see the results," he added, belying some of the FP's political motives against Martens.

Martens, backed by Zavala and Kuczynski, took a firm line with the striking teachers, who were protesting against the efforts of the education ministry to reform the teaching profession under the major education reform implemented in 2015 by the left-wing administration led by Ollanta Humala (2011-2016). Peru's public education system ranks poorly, both in the region and internationally, and the quality of teaching has been identified as a core weakness, requiring systemic reform.

Martens repeated her charges in her congressional testimony that certain teachers' groups in regions such as Puno, Ayacucho, Áncash, Junín, and Huancavelica had been infiltrated by the Movimiento por la Amnistía y los Derechos Fundamentales (Movadef), widely considered the political wing of the guerrilla group Sendero Luminoso (SL), noting that certain regional teachers' union groups were pursuing "objectives of a political character" with little regard for the provision of quality education. This was a tacit reference to Pedro José Castillo, leader of regional teachers' movement Comité Nacional de Lucha de las Dirigencias Regionales (previously known as Conare), accused of links to Movadef.

Martens also admitted that the government had not properly understood the fragmentation of the teachers' sector into distinctive (and divisive) regional factions and had "overestimated" the capacity of the main union, Sindicato Unitario de Trabajadores en la Educación del Perú (Sutep), as well as that of the education ministry, to deal with these divisions. She said that the government had in effect faced a series of parallel independent strikes.

TRACKING TRENDS

VENEZUELA | Abandoning the dollar? President Nicolás Maduro has said that Venezuela will cast off the 'yoke' of the US dollar by replacing it with a basket of other currencies including the Chinese yuan, the Japanese yen, the Russian rouble, and the Indian rupee which will be used instead for both international and domestic payments. The central bank will no longer include the dollar in its currency auctions – and has suspended auctions until further notice – with local businesses told to open bank accounts to take the new currencies. Apparently, the state will no longer sign contracts in dollars.

There is a great deal of scepticism about this currency diversification plan. Firstly, Venezuela's main oil trading partner - both for crude exports and derivatives imports – is the US. This trade is conducted exclusively in dollars and these dollar revenues are the country's main source of FX earnings. Right now, Venezuela's cash reserves are less than US\$5bn, totally inadequate to back up a basket of foreign currencies.

Secondly, Venezuela's non-oil trade, including food imports, is also heavily dollarised. Expecting suppliers in dollarised Ecuador, for example, to trade in rupees is an unlikely ask. Private economists say the whole proposal is simply 'non-sensical' and almost certainly a ruse by Maduro to deny dollars to importers ahead of the country's looming US\$3.8bn debt bill due in October-November.

BRAZIL & SOUTHERN CONE

URUGUAY | POLITICS

Sendic succumbs to pressure and steps down

Raúl Sendic has become the first vice-president in Uruguay's history to resign from the post. Congress officially accepted Sendic's resignation on 13 September. President Tabaré Vázquez sought to downplay the significance of Sendic's resignation, while the political opposition crowed that his government was in crisis. When the dust settles, however, it is the ruling left-wing coalition Frente Amplio (FA) and not the opposition which should benefit from Sendic's departure. Lucía Topolansky, the wife of former president José Mujica (2010-2015), will replace Sendic as vice-president on 18 September, becoming in the process Uruguay's first female to hold the post.

Sendic had become a political liability for the government. Firstly, he faced allegations of mismanagement after it emerged that the state-run oil company Administración Nacional de Combustibles, Alcoholes y Portland (Ancap) had accumulated massive debt during his tenure as vice-president and later president (2005-2015). Secondly, national daily *El Observador* last year exposed his CV as false when it put it to him in an interview that there was no such degree as human genetics offered at Cuba's Universidad de La Habana where he had enrolled for studies in 1986.

Sendic apparently offered to stand aside over the decree furore but the FA stuck by him, hoping that it would all blow over. But then came revelations in recent weeks that he had misused corporate credit cards while at Ancap. This appeared to be the final straw. The FA's political conduct tribunal (TCP) found that Sendic was responsible for the "unacceptable use" of the credit cards, but before he could be sanctioned he tendered his resignation.

President Vázquez put a brave face on the situation. Flanked by his entire cabinet, a clear effort to present a united front amid rumours of a serious split between the FA's moderate and radical wings over the treatment of Sendic, Vázquez praised the fortitude of Uruguay's democratic institutions. He also welcomed the prospect of working with Topolansky, but not before lashing out at the opposition which he accused of "a brutal cruelty never before seen in this country against a public figure, bestial in its tremendous inhumanity".

Senator José Amorín Batlle of the right-of-centre opposition Partido Colorado (PC, Colorados) responded by accusing Vázquez of making light of "a very serious incident...a vice-president who resigned for corruption allegations". Senator Luis Lacalle Pou, the presidential candidate for the centre-right Partido Nacional (PN, Blancos) defeated in a run-off by Vázquez in 2014, bemoaned "a dark day for the country", while his colleague Senator Jorge Larrañaga said "the government crisis is undeniable".

In the short-term Sendic's resignation is awkward for the ruling FA. But in the medium-term his departure will be a blow to the opposition rather than the FA. While Sendic was around, with new revelations appearing almost every other month, the opposition could afford the luxury of sitting back and watching the FA inflict more damage on itself than it could ever hope to. The opposition will now need to come up with its own electoral strategies to attract voters rather than relying on the FA to assist. In short, Sendic's resignation has strengthened not weakened the FA's chances of retaining power in 2019.

Reacting to Sendic's resignation

"We can be proud of our democratic institutions, of the separation of powers and abiding by what the constitution and the law stipulate,"

President Vázquez said after his vice-president's resignation. Javier Miranda, the president of the ruling FA, acknowledged that it was "not the best thing in the world" but it was necessary as "public confidence in politics" was at stake.

New charges laid against Temer

It was a week of hyperactivity in Brazil's courts, marked by new corruption charges against President Michel Temer.

One of the factors behind a burst of intense court activity is that Attorney General Rodrigo Janot's term in office is due to end on 17 September; he is set to be replaced by Raquel Dodge. In a first move in May this year, Janot had filed "passive corruption" charges against President Temer, but they failed to prosper. In a vote in August, the federal lower chamber of congress failed to muster the two-thirds majority needed to lift Temer's immunity from prosecution.

Janot was expected to file various different corruption charges against Temer, in an attempt to gradually erode his support in the lower chamber. On 12 September the supreme court duly authorised a new investigation that will require a new vote in the lower chamber on whether to lift Temer's immunity. This second case is based on wiretapped conversations involving Rodrigo Rocha Loures, a former aide to Temer. The prosecutor alleges the conversations show that Temer took bribes from Rodrimar SA, a logistics company, which was allowed to shape various clauses in a decree on the reorganisation of Brazilian ports. Temer's lawyer has denied the allegations, describing them as "contaminated by untruths and malicious distortions".

Temer's legal team also challenged the legality of the plea-bargaining process (known as *delação premiada*) that produced the Rocha Loures wiretaps. The main source of the information is Joesley Batista, the millionaire co-owner of the sprawling JBS meatpacking and foodstuffs conglomerate. Batista has himself admitted paying massive bribes, but escaped a prison sentence by offering up incriminating evidence on the involvement of Temer and other officials. It was his testimony that also lay behind the first "passive corruption" charges against Temer.

But the integrity of that *delação premiada* is now in question. Audio recordings sent by Batista's lawyers to the prosecutor's office, apparently in error, show he was selective in his confessions, admitting some crimes but keeping quiet about others. There are also claims that a former prosecutor may have secretly advised him during the plea-bargaining process. As a result temporary arrest orders were issued for both Batista and for Ricardo Saud, a top executive in the company. They handed themselves in to the federal police in the city of São Paulo on 10 September. Their case will now be reviewed; it is probable that Batista could find himself facing a prison sentence after all.

Doubts over the *delação premiada* process could therefore help Temer resist prosecution. This may explain why Janot was spending his last few days in office trying to review and resolve the loose ends of the Batista plea-bargaining case, so as to pass on a relatively solid case file to his successor. Janot also filed new charges against six top members of Temer's party, the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB), of forming a criminal organisation which received R\$864m (just under US\$280m) in illegal payments. How vigorously Dodge will pursue these corruption charges is not yet known.

Lula

Temer is not the only top personality facing ongoing legal troubles. Former president Lula da Silva (2003-2011), widely seen as the de facto leader of the opposition and a potential presidential candidate in next year's election, is also facing a further erosion of his credibility. Antonio Palocci, his former finance minister (2003-2006), alleged that there had been a "blood pact"

Temer and Janot
An attempt by President Temer's legal team to have Attorney General Rodrigo Janot taken off the case on the grounds that he holds a personal grudge against the head of state, was dismissed by the supreme court.

Alternative to Lula

The leftist Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) has long considered fielding Lula as its 'Plan A' in Brazil's presidential elections next year. But off the record, its leaders are now talking of the need for a 'Plan B' – some kind of multiparty left-wing alliance supporting another candidate – perhaps the PT's Fernando Haddad, the former mayor of São Paulo (2013-2016).

between Lula and the construction company Odebrecht. Odebrecht had bribed the then-president by donating land for the Lula Institute, a country house, and R\$300m (US\$97m).

Appearing before federal judge Sérgio Moro on 13 September Lula denied these allegations and insisted he was the victim of a politically motivated "witch-hunt". However, his political position has been weakened: a two-week tour of his traditional electoral strongholds – the key states of the impoverished northeast of Brazil – attracted only relatively small crowds.

Lula now faces no less than six separate corruption cases. He has already been found guilty and sentenced to nine and a half years' imprisonment in one of them; if that or any other guilty sentence is upheld on appeal he will be banned from running for election next year (*see sidebar*).

ARGENTINA | POLITICS & JUSTICE

Courts provide electoral battleground

The political confrontation between President Mauricio Macri's ruling centre-right coalition Cambiemos and the leftist opposition Kirchnerista groups led by former president Cristina Fernández (2007-2015) is increasingly being played out in the local judiciary. With a little over a month before midterm federal legislative elections on 22 October, a host of different court cases affecting Fernández and her allies are coming to a head. Meanwhile lawsuits against officials in the Cambiemos government, including Macri himself, over alleged irregularities in public office have been filed recently. Progress on these various cases could influence the electoral result by tipping the balance of public opinion towards one side or the other.

The Macri administration is already under scrutiny over the case of the disappearance of a political activist, Santiago Maldonado, who has been missing since taking part in pro-Mapuche public protests in the southern province of Chubut [\[WR-17-35\]](#). This is set to increase after federal prosecutor Federico Delgado presented a formal request on 6 September calling for President Macri, Security Minister Patricia Bullrich, Justice Minister Germán Garavano, and Macri's cabinet chief, Marcos Peña, to be investigated in relation to the case. Delgado's request is based on a complaint filed by the Liga Argentina por los Derechos del Hombre and the Instituto Arturo E. Sampay local human rights organisations.

The human rights organisations accuse the government of abuse of authority and dereliction of duty over their alleged attempts to cover up what happened to Maldonado and running a "disinformation campaign" about the case. Consequently, Delgado has asked Federal Judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corral to order the Macri administration to make public a full report into the operation carried out by the national gendarmerie (GNA) to disperse the pro-Mapuche protest in which Maldonado had been taking part to help determine what happened to him. Delgado's request prompted Peña to deny emphatically that the government was involved in any cover up, reiterating that it was fully cooperating with investigations and would continue to do so.

Delgado's request for an investigation is a blow to the image of the Macri administration and Cambiemos, as it assists critics in their attempts to liken it to the last military government (1976-1883) and its infamous legacy of forced disappearances of political dissidents. However, this is not the only case currently affecting Macri government officials.

The day after Delgado filed his request, on 7 September, the social security crimes investigation unit (Ufises) at the attorney general's office presented a formal accusation against Finance Minister Luis Caputo for suspected irreg-

Netanyahu in Buenos Aires

Speaking to local business representatives, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu likened President Mauricio Macri's economic policies to those he had followed when Israeli finance minister in 2003, which he said consisted of putting the public sector "on a diet" and "giving oxygen" to the private sector by reducing taxes and removing barriers to competition. Netanyahu's Latin American tour will also take him to Colombia and Mexico.

ularities in the management of the sustainability fund (FGS) of the national social security administration (Anses). According to the Ufises, the FGS, in which Caputo acts as chief executive, last year invested Ar\$500m (US\$20.2m) in a private investment fund, Axis Sociedad Gerente de Fondos Comunes de Inversión (Axis SGFCI), which has links to the minister (Caputo was a former director at Axis SGFCI), and has been flagged up as a potential misuse of public funds.

Yet as the cases against Macri government officials mount, some of the numerous cases faced by Fernández and her previous government officials are also reaching a critical stage. On 7 September, federal prosecutor Gerardo Pollicita requested that Fernández be quizzed as a defendant in the long-running investigation into the alleged cover up by her administration of the 1994 bombing of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Amia) Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires. It has long been suspected that the perpetrators of the attack, which claimed the lives of 85 people, were members of the Hezbollah Islamist terrorist group who were working for the Iranian government at the time.

In 2013 the Fernández government signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran to launch a joint investigation to clear up the case. But this was condemned as a 'whitewash' by many in Argentina after five of the eight Iranian suspects (some of whom were incumbent government officials at the time) were cleared of any responsibility without facing trial. Fernández and her former ministers have always denied a cover up and the insinuation that they agreed to a whitewash in exchange for strengthening commercial ties with Iran. However, Pollicita's request is based on the evidence compiled by special prosecutor Alberto Nisman, who was tasked with investigating the cover-up allegations only to wind up dead (with a bullet in the head) inside his Buenos Aires flat in January 2015 just days after he filed new obstruction of justice charges against Fernández and her foreign minister, Héctor Timerman (2010-2015).

In his request to Federal Judge Claudio Bonadio, Pollicita accuses Fernández, Timerman, and nine other Fernández government officials of negotiating a deal with Iran to drop all the charges against Iranian government officials implicated in the case. Pollicita has also requested that all defendants be banned from leaving the country and have all their assets frozen. There is a chance that Fernández will have to appear in the dock to answer Pollicita's questions before the 22 October polls. This could harm her public image and damage her electoral support. Fernández's lawyer, Alejandro Rúa, denounced political motivation behind Pollicita's request, saying that "this is connected to the electoral calendar".

Netanyahu visit

The move by prosecutor Pollicita against Fernández and her allies in the Amia case came just a few days before Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu arrived in Argentina for a two-day official visit on 11 September, part of a wider Latin American tour. After visiting Israel's embassy in Buenos Aires and commemorating the death of 29 people in a 1992 bombing attack targeting, which like the Amia bombing has long been attributed to Hezbollah, Netanyahu stated that "We know without a doubt that Iran and Hezbollah initiated those attacks...the time has come for Iran to take full blame and assume responsibility for what it has done". He said he supported Argentina's continuing attempts to bring those responsible to justice.

Despite some small protest demonstrations, Netanyahu's visit was seen as marking closer relations between the two countries. It was the first of its kind by an Israeli head of government in 70 years.

MEXICO & NAFTA

MEXICO | POLITICS

New coalition launched

Three political parties, the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and two moderate left-wing groups, Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) and Movimiento Ciudadano (MC), formally registered a coalition, to be known as the Frente Ciudadano por México (FCM), with the national electoral institute (INE) last week. The FCM has already won a significant victory in the federal congress.

The three political parties intend to fight next year's presidential and congressional elections as a coalition. At stake in the polls due on 1 July 2018 are the choice of over 3,000 elected positions, including the president and both chambers of the federal congress, as well as the governorships of nine out of Mexico's 32 states.

The PAN is the largest of the three parties and it is widely expected that it will have the last word in the choice of the coalition's presidential candidate, although this would put the PRD leadership in a very awkward position as the party would risk haemorrhaging further support to its estranged former presidential candidate in 2006 and 2012, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the leader of the radical left-wing Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena) and current presidential frontrunner.

According to PAN party president Ricardo Anaya, despite coming from different ends of the political spectrum, the shared aims of the alliance are to "end corruption, impunity, and violence", to boost economic growth, and to end poverty and inequality. His PRD counterpart, Alejandra Barrales, said she was fully aware of the ideological differences within the new FCM: the aim was not to eliminate them, but to come together to build a new political system for Mexico.

The PAN and the PRD have never stood together in presidential elections but they have forged a coalition at state level various times in the past in alliances designed to stop the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) - more often than not with success. Indeed, between 1992 and 2017, the PAN and PRD have formed 16 state-level electoral alliances, triumphing on 10 occasions. And if they had managed to overcome their differences in the Estado de México (Edomex) to present a unity candidate ahead of gubernatorial elections in June it is likely they would have toppled the PRI in its main stronghold.

To give an indication of the relative strengths of the political parties, according to a poll for the national daily *El Universal* published in August, the PAN lies in second place, with 19% of voter intentions, followed by the PRD in fourth place with 6% and the MC in seventh with 4%. If the FCM were able to rely on a simple aggregation of those percentages, it might therefore claim to have 29% support, which would push it past Morena which, in the same poll, had 23% of voter intentions. However, these are early days; personalities matter and the majority of presidential candidates have not yet been selected. It is not clear how the political dynamics will play out over the next few months.

The FCM [the new name for the Frente Amplio Democrático (FAD) to reflect the addition of the MC] has come into being precisely when its two main participants, the PAN and the PRD, are wracked by their own internal power struggles [WR-17-23]. The PAN is entangled in a bitter dispute between

Senate president

The PAN has announced that it will expel four of its pro-Margarita Zavala federal senators who defied the whip and voted with the PRI in the choice of a new senate president, Ernesto Cordero, a dissident member of the PAN opposed by the party president Ricardo Anaya.

Guanajuato violence

Guanajuato's security minister, Alvar Cabeza de Vaca, did not name any criminal organisation suspected of being responsible for the attack in the state. However, drug trafficking organisations including the *Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación* (CJNG), Los Zetas, and the Sinaloa/Pacífico are known to operate in the area.

Anaya and presidential hopeful Margarita Zavala, the wife of former president Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) (see sidebar).

The PRD, meanwhile, is caught between those who are abandoning ship to join López Obrador and Morena on the Left, and those who believe a more centre-left option for the party remains viable, and who support the alliance with the PAN. Last week two veteran PRD senators, Dolores Padierna and René Bejarano, announced that they were leaving the party in order to back López Obrador's electoral campaign.

In a radio interview, Padierna said "we can't accept an alliance with part of the right-wing, which is responsible for what is happening in this country. We respect those who think the alliance [with the PAN] may be a way out, but we don't have to follow them, as they are going straight to the slaughterhouse". She added: "This would renounce our history and our principles...you can't be on the Left supporting the Right." Barrales shot back defiantly: "Those who want to leave should leave, but they shouldn't take too long doing so".

FCM triumph

The FCM, meanwhile, won its first victory within days of registering before the INE when the PRI agreed to drop its bid to retain the attorney general, Raúl Cervantes, in his post after his office is revamped, changing from the Procuraduría General de la República (PGR) to Fiscalía General de la República (FGR) under a long-awaited political reform [WR-17-35]. The parties argued that the appointment of Cervantes, who was a PRI federal deputy for more than six years, was inconsistent with the image of independence the head of the new FGR must project.

MEXICO | SECURITY

Killing spree targeting police rocks Guanajuato

The murder of five police officers by a group of unidentified armed individuals in a public space during the middle of the night has shocked Mexico's Guanajuato state. The central state is not considered to be one of the country's most violent. But the incident has set off alarm bells about the growing presence in the state of criminal organisations that are seeking to exert their influence and intimidate the local authorities.

The incident took place in the municipality of Apaseo el Alto, late on 4 September, when a local police patrol stopped at a petrol station in the neighbourhood of Manuel Avila Camacho. CCTV cameras from the petrol station show that as two municipal police officers were filling up their patrol vehicle, four other vehicles entered the station and began opening fire on the police officers with high-powered firearms.

The footage also shows the assailants shooting dead two members of the petrol station staff, who had thrown themselves to the ground as soon as the attack began. As the assailants left the scene they encountered a second municipal police patrol, which they stopped at gun point, taking the two police officers in it hostage (their dead bodies later dumped on the side of the road), while they also gunned down a transit police officer who was keeping watch in a nearby police cabin.

Guanajuato's security minister, Alvar Cabeza de Vaca, said that local prosecutors believe that the assailants were tailing the police patrol that stopped at the petrol station and that, sensing an opportunity, they decided to launch a surprise attack. Based on the CCTV footage, Cabeza de Vaca said that prosecutors were working on the hypothesis that the assailants formed part of a

Another journalist murdered

On 5 September, photojournalist Juan Carlos Hernández Ríos became the 11th journalist to be murdered in Mexico this year. Hernández, who worked for an online media outlet, *La Bandera Noticias*, was shot dead by two unidentified gunmen outside his home located in the municipality of Yuriria, Guanajuato state.

While local prosecutors have yet to establish a motive for the crime, the local press noted that *La Bandera Noticias* had revealed that it had received threats from municipal government officials after it published a report alleging that the municipal government had irregularly appropriated lands from local peasant farmers.

group of hitmen hired by a local criminal organisation (see sidebar) to kill the police officers in the first patrol, and that all the other victims were killed so that there would be no witnesses to the attack.

Further fanning concerns that the incident is part of a systematic attempt to intimidate the local authorities, Cabeza de Vaca reported that, with the latest deaths, 19 law enforcement officers (17 municipal police officers and two criminal investigation police officers) have been killed since the start of the year in the municipalities of Apaseo el Grande, Apaseo el Alto, Celaya, Salamanca, León, Valle de Santiago, and Abasolo. All of these municipalities are located in eastern Guanajuato on the border with the state of Querétaro.

On official data, there were 619 homicides in Guanajuato between January and July this year, compared with 441 registered during the same period last year. This makes Guanajuato the 11th most violent state in Mexico this year, according to data from the national public security system (SNSP).

Indicative of this upsurge in violence, last month nine people were killed in just one night in four separate areas of the state, including in Apaseo el Alto. The local authorities reported that all nine individuals murdered on 3 August were shot dead from close range, suggesting that they had been executed.

Guanajuato Governor Miguel Márquez has reacted to the upsurge in violence by ordering the deployment of additional federal security forces to the east of the state, where much of the violence appears to have been concentrated since April. However, Márquez requested more assistance from the federal government, stating that while the security forces in Guanajuato had not yet been overwhelmed by the increase in violent crime, “the state, like the country, is experiencing an insecurity crisis”.

TRACKING TRENDS

MEXICO | Economic relief for Oaxaca and Chiapas. President Enrique Peña Nieto announced on 11 September that his government would implement a series of economic relief measures designed to help the communities in the southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas that were most severely affected by the major earthquake (8.2 on the Richter scale) registered in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of these states on 7 September.

Peña Nieto, who was visiting Chiapas to oversee the relief efforts, said that the government would launch a temporary work programme to benefit the thousands of people (2.3m according to the latest official estimates) who lost their homes and livelihoods as a result of the earthquake. This will also support reconstruction efforts. Peña Nieto explained that members of the affected communities would be given material and financial support to help clear the rubble and rebuild their homes (some 16,000 of which are estimated to have been destroyed in Oaxaca and Chiapas) and public buildings damaged by the earthquake.

Peña Nieto also called on experienced construction companies to come forward and offer their services to the reconstruction efforts. Meanwhile, Finance Minister José Antonio Meade Kuribreña, who was accompanying Peña Nieto, announced the immediate application of temporary tax relief measures for all individuals and firms in Chiapas and Oaxaca affected by the earthquake, such as the waiving of income tax, value-added tax (VAT), and social security tax collection.

Meade said that these measures would not impact government finances this year as they represent projected revenues that would not be realised now. He also insisted that the federal government has sufficient emergency relief finances in its natural disaster fund (Foden) to fund relief efforts in Oaxaca, Chiapas, and other parts of the country impacted by the quake. However, Meade did not rule out amending the government’s draft 2018 budget, which is currently being debated by the federal congress, to increase the allocation of funds to the relief and reconstruction efforts if necessary.

CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

CARIBBEAN | DISASTER

Irma wreaks havoc across Caribbean

The most powerful hurricane ever recorded in Atlantic waters tore through the Caribbean last week leaving a trail of destruction behind it. Irma, a category 5 hurricane, inflicted the most severe damage on the overseas territories of France, The Netherlands, the UK, and the US in the Leeward Islands, as well as Antigua & Barbuda. The death toll from Irma's passage currently stands at 38, but hundreds are still reported missing. The total cost of the damage has been estimated at around US\$10bn, ranging up to US\$15.8bn, making it the most expensive disaster ever in the Caribbean, narrowly surpassing Hurricane Hugo and Ike (1989 and 2008 respectively), and this does not include losses to the tourism sector which comprises up to 60% of GDP for many of the islands.

St Kitts & Nevis

The prime minister of St Kitts & Nevis, Timothy Harris, said that the country had been "spared the full brunt" of Hurricane Irma but warned of "significant damage" to property and infrastructure. Cedim put estimated damage on St Kitts & Nevis at 'only' US\$80m.

On 12 September French President Emmanuel Macron visited Saint Martin, a French overseas collectivity encompassing 60%, some 53km², of the northern part of an island shared with The Netherlands. The Dutch southern part of the island, Sint Maarten, comprises the other 40%, 34km², with a slightly larger population of some 35,000 people. Macron, who said 11 people were killed in St Martin, promised that he would "shake up all the rules and procedures so the [reconstruction] job is done as quickly as possible". Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said that four people had been killed in St Maarten, with 70% of homes destroyed.

The German-based Centre for Disaster Management and Risk Reduction Technology (Cedim) estimated damage to the tune of US\$2.5bn in St Maarten and US\$1.5bn in St Martin, together around 40% of its US\$10bn figure for the whole of the Caribbean (calculated before Irma hit Cuba albeit at a lesser intensity). The French state-owned insurer Compagnie Centrale de Reassurance (CCR) described the disaster as "one of the worst experienced by France in 35 years", although it put the cost slightly lower, estimating damage of US\$1.4bn in St Martin and the neighbouring, even smaller, French collectivity of Saint Barthélemy (25km², pop. 9,800), which seceded from the French department of Guadeloupe in 2003. Cedim estimated US\$780m of damage to St Barts, after Irma ravaged the island.

Like the French and the Dutch governments, the UK has been accused of a tardy and inadequate reaction to the disaster. British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson visited the country's self-governing overseas territory of Anguilla (90km², pop. 13,500) the day after Macron touched down in St Martin. Anguillan Chief Minister Victor Banks said the visit by Johnson "sends a very positive signal...that the British are serious about their response to this very severe hurricane", but he called for much more assistance.

Johnson insisted that the British response had been "extremely fast", and that the government would stand by Anguilla, which lies directly to the north of St Martin, for "the long term". He said the 700 British troops in the area would nearly double by the end of the week, not just to help with emergency relief but also to prevent looting which has been widespread on all of the affected islands. Cedim put estimated damage on Anguilla at US\$290m.

Johnson then headed on to the British Virgin Islands (BVI, 153km², pop. 30,000). Cedim estimated US\$1.4bn in damage on the BVI which, along with St Martin, St Maarten and St Barts, exceeds 100% of its GDP. It put damage to the US Virgin Islands (346km², pop. 107,000) at US\$2.4bn, some 50% of GDP.

Congressional vote

It is worth noting that while the vote in favour of stripping President Morales of immunity from prosecution was a massive 80 seats short of the 105 votes needed, the vote against was one shy of the 105 needed to settle the matter for good, meaning that the initiative could be reconsidered in a further session of congress.

The largest relative loss was not to an overseas territory, however, but to Barbuda (10km²), which felt the full brunt of the passing hurricane and was left “barely habitable”, according to the prime minister of Antigua & Barbuda, Gaston Browne. Browne said that 95% of the buildings on Barbuda had been either razed to the ground or damaged. Barbuda has now been denuded of its entire population of 1,800, which the government of the twin-island state decided to evacuate and temporarily rehouse in Antigua (440km²; pop. 93,000) after declaring a state of emergency for fear that Hurricane Jose might have struck at the weekend.

“For the first time in 300 years, there is not a living person on Barbuda,” Antigua & Barbuda Ambassador Sir Ronald Sanders said while addressing the permanent council of the Organization of American States (OAS) on 12 September. Cedim put estimated damage on Antigua & Barbuda at circa US\$215m.

Irma then passed north of the US Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (still causing an estimated US\$800m of damage, according to Cedim), largely sparing Hispaniola before striking the north coast of Cuba. Ten people were killed in Cuba (mainly from buildings collapsing in Havana) and 1.7m people evacuated. The capital was flooded, coastal communities cut off, and many homes damaged. Much of the centre and west of the country is without electricity as power stations (75% of which are located in the north of the country) were damaged. A preliminary report from the agriculture ministry estimated that some 5,000 hectares of crops had been damaged, including tobacco, one of Cuba’s main exports.

Reconstruction efforts will need to follow the immediate emergency relief process, including the rebuilding of homes and infrastructure, and the restoration of power, clean water, and food supplies. This will be discussed during the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York where world leaders will meet between 19 and 25 September. A rhetorical Irma is likely to rage during the UNGA as Caribbean island leaders debate the growing risks posed by climate change.

GUATEMALA | POLITICS

Congress deals double blow to transparency efforts

Hopes that the resignation of former president Otto Pérez Molina (2012-2015) over corruption would herald a new era in Guatemalan politics have well and truly been buried. This week the legislature voted not to strip President Jimmy Morales of his immunity from prosecution to face investigation over irregular campaign finance involving his Frente de Convergencia Nacional (FCN-Nación) party. Two days later, on 13 September, legislators - some of whom are themselves facing the threat of investigation for similar reasons - approved changes to the criminal code which would exonerate political parties’ general secretaries of all criminal responsibility for allowing illegal electoral funds. Both moves have caused outrage among local sectors and prompted a response from the US, raising questions as to whether the country will again witness the unprecedented mass anti-corruption protests, organised by the civil-society group #JusticiaYa, which led Pérez Molina to step down in 2015.

In a vote on 11 September by the 158-member unicameral legislature, just 25 deputies voted in favour of stripping President Morales of his immunity, with 29 absent and 104 voting against it. The vote came despite the report by a five-member legislative panel which identified “sufficient elements” to recommend that the full plenary vote on the motion, although it found no evidence that Morales himself (who served as FCN-Nación general secretary

Another investigation

President Morales is facing fresh pressure after the comptroller general's office revealed on 12 September that it had requested information on the previously unknown monthly Q50,000 (US\$6,859) 'bonus for extraordinary responsibility' paid to the president by the armed forces, which is not officially part of his salary package. Defence Minister Williams Mansilla told reporters that Morales has received the payment since the end of last year, along with a handful of other high-level officials, in recognition of the "risks" that they face in their posts. It has again subjected Morales's links with the military to scrutiny; his party began as Frente de Convergencia when it was set up in 2004 by the military veterans' association (Avemilgua) before becoming FCN-Nación in 2008.

during the 2015 electoral campaign) was directly involved.

The panel cited the party's failure to provide information to the electoral authorities (TSE). This was in line with the investigation by the United Nations-backed anti-impunity commission in Guatemala (Cicig) and the attorney general's office (AG), made public last month which called for Morales's immunity to be revoked in the first place [WR-17-34], prompting the president to (unsuccessfully) seek to expel Cicig's head, Iván Velásquez.

The vote by congress (where FCN-Nación has just 37 seats) was met with deep cynicism from the local media which suggested that it was not entirely a surprise given that other parties, such as the main opposition Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE) (which has 31 deputies), are facing similar investigations over suspected illegal campaign finance [WR-17-34] and so would be unlikely to welcome the additional scrutiny. Alvaro Montenegro, the leader of #JusticiaYa, told reporters that legislators "are making a pact...now that they are afraid of being investigated themselves for illegal electoral financing".

Two days later, congress further inflamed public anger with the "urgent approval" of changes to the criminal code. These changes, proposed by legislators including UNE's Orlando Blanco (who is facing the threat of legal action over illegal campaign finance), transfer responsibility for campaign finance irregularities from political parties' general secretaries to the parties' accountants. Other changes reduce the penalty for illegal election financing from a maximum of 12 years to 10 and permit a fine to be paid to avoid jail time.

With #JusticiaYa having announced fresh protests in response, the latest moves by congress are likely to serve as a further test of the judiciary (which notably green-lighted the request for congress to strip Morales of his immunity and blocked his attempt to expel Velásquez). Since the vote, leading human rights activist Helen Mack and lawyer Alfonso Carrillo have filed complaints before the constitutional court (CC) against the vote not to strip Morales of his immunity. They argue it is a conflict of interest (those who voted in favour were themselves accused of illegal campaign finance) and in breach of laws relating to the probity and responsibility of public servants.

TRACKING TRENDS

EL SALVADOR | Mara money-laundering network. President Salvador Sánchez Cerén last week celebrated a "heavy blow" struck against the Mara Salvatrucha (MS13) gang after the national police (PNC) dismantled a money-laundering network. The US ambassador to El Salvador, Jean Manes, also praised the "important advance against mara networks".

Some 1,000 PNC officers, cooperating with the attorney general's office, carried out a massive operation on 8 and 9 September, apparently planned for more than two years, in Santa Ana, El Salvador's second largest city located in the west of the country. The PNC conducted more than 180 raids in Santa Ana during which 99 arrests were made, and some US\$40,000 in cash confiscated, along with 75 cars, five motorcycles, and 15 firearms.

The majority of those arrested were maras, but 40 local business owners were also detained, accused of receiving cash from MS13 and later returning a profit on this "investment" to the gang, according to the PNC director, Howard Cotto. The authorities believe that some US\$1.9m was laundered by two MS13 cells led by César 'Greñas' Larios, who was deported to El Salvador from the US in July this year.

On 12 September, a special tribunal in the capital San Salvador ordered 26 members of the MS13 money-laundering network to be placed under preventive detention because of imminent flight risk.

POSTSCRIPT

“There has been too much hatred and vengeance...this visit intends to offer you an incentive, a contribution that in some way paves the path to reconciliation and peace.”

Pope Francis during his visit to Colombia.

“Today is a day of mourning. It is good that he is resigning...but what is not noble or courageous is what he has done, leaving a US\$800m hole [in Ancap’s finances] and his use of corporate credit cards. This should not be ennobled.”

Uruguayan Senator Pedro Bordaberry of the right-of-centre opposition Partido Colorado (PC) responds to praise from President Tabaré Vázquez of Vice-President Raúl Sendic for resigning.

“For just 1% of the outrages uttered by [Honduran President] Juan Orlando [Hernández], I was ousted in a coup and flown out of the country...just for wanting to consult the people about whether we could design a new constitution”.

Former Honduran president Manuel Zelaya (2006-2009).

Ecuador’s Moreno and the challenge from within

Few would have predicted that the first 100 days of the mandate of Ecuador’s President Lenín Moreno would have been so eventful. Moreno’s determination to be his own man, breaking with his predecessor Rafael Correa (2007-2017) in both style and substance, has plunged the ruling left-wing Alianza País (AP) into unprecedented infighting. Moreno now faces the prospect of an AP faction aligned behind his Correísta vice-president, Jorge Glas, who he has denuded of power, providing his government with sterner opposition than the official opposition.

“We are going to test the true democratic vocation of Lenín Moreno,” Guillermo Lasso, the leader of Ecuador’s main, centre-right, opposition Creando Oportunidades (Movimiento Creo), said this week. Lasso said his party would launch a citizens’ movement to agitate for a referendum on political reform in the country if President Moreno failed to call one himself. This came after Moreno mooted holding a plebiscite to allow for the introduction of changes to “guarantee a fully functioning democracy, without caudillismos [a clear swipe at Correa and his personalist government] and with transparent institutions”.

Lasso, who lost a second round run-off to Moreno in April, said that his party would seek the elimination of “indefinite re-election” and the Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social (CPCCS), the ‘fifth branch of government’ established in the constitution approved under Correa, ostensibly designed to improve transparency in public office by virtue of increasing citizen participation; the abrogation of the media law; and the incorporation of dollarisation in the constitution.

Moreno’s bigger concern is not the threat posed by Lasso, however, so much as the challenge he faces from Glas and the Correístas. Glas said this week that he would call for a referendum on a new constituent assembly “to change the structure of state” if he felt that Moreno’s plebiscite might lead to “any backsliding on citizens’ rights”.

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