



Weekly

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Americas Weekly Summary - August 4-10, 2021

Highlights of the Week

This report reviews notable events this week in the Americas. This includes FARC dissidents planning an attack in Bogota, Colombia; further arrests in Haiti related to the president's assassination; a strike by gas distributors in Mexico; the continuing political crackdown in Nicaragua; Peru's new government withdrew from a regional body critical of Venezuela's leadership; and the US DHS warned of an increase in online violent rhetoric.

AMERICAS

August 4-10, 2021

- Dissident FARC members were arrested planning an attack in Bogota, **Colombia**
- **Haiti's** investigation into President Moise's assassination led to more arrests
- LP gas distributors strike in **Mexico** over government price controls
- **Nicaragua's** government continued its crackdown on opposition ahead of the elections
- **Peru** withdrew from the regional body set up to encourage a solution to the Venezuelan crises
- The **US** DHS warned of an increase in online violent rhetoric surrounding the 2020 elections



Colombia

Notable Developments:

- Reports indicate that two members of the Segunda Marquetalia Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) dissident group were arrested in the south of Bogota on August 5 for planning to stage an attack in the capital in the following days. This coincided with Bogota's 483rd anniversary on August 6 and the anniversary of the 1819 Battle of Boyaca on August 7.
- The suspects were reportedly in possession of 149 bars of pentolite-type explosives, a device often used by the military, detonating cords, and telephone communications equipment.

ANALYSIS: Based on the nature of the explosives seized, it is possible the attacks were intended to be coordinated and carried out simultaneously across Bogota during the memorial days. While the attacks likely planned to target government buildings and law enforcement personnel, the incident would have posed a significant and imminent threat to the public. Given FARC's declared intent to "wage war" against the government, the risk of high-impact attacks targeting government buildings, police, and military sites, as well as key state officials, including President Ivan Duque and Defense Minister Diego Molano remains high in the near-to-medium term. Given the ongoing unrest associated with the anti-government protest movement, although not witnessed up to this point, the possibility of armed protesters, potentially supported by FARC dissident groups, using explosives and ammunition to attack security forces and government sites remain.

Haiti

Notable Developments:

- According to August 3 reports, Port-au-Prince's State Attorney Claude Bed-Ford issued arrest warrants to five individuals on July 12 for their alleged involvement in former President Jovenel Moise's assassination. The suspects include two religious leaders; Line Balthazar, president of the ruling Parti Haitien Tet Kale (PHTK); former Prime Minister Paul Denis; and a businessman. With this, the total number of suspects in Moise's assassination totals 44. Balthazar had previously opposed Moise's constitutional referendum project in April 2021.
- Political opposition organized a demonstration in Port-au-Prince on August 6.

ANALYSIS: That the 44 suspects include members who are not directly related to the assassination, and that a majority of such secondary suspects have previously expressed their opposition to Moise, it is likely that they are being detained for political reasons in an attempt to either obstruct the investigations or in order to reduce their ability to challenge the new leadership. Regardless, with Balthazar being suspected of the assassination, political infighting over the leadership of the ruling PHTK party can be expected in the coming days. With the above developments, procedural delays to the investigation are likely to continue until the legislative elections, scheduled for September. Further protests are anticipated, with each carrying a high potential for violence and unrest, especially if the influential criminal groups are displeased with either the investigation or how the political situation unfolds.

Mexico

Notable Developments:

- Liquefied petroleum (LP) gas distributors began an indefinite national strike, including in Mexico City on August 3. The strike has caused hundreds of homes, transporters, and businesses to run out of fuel.
- The work stoppage was called by small gas companies that make up the Gremio Gasero Nacional de Mexico, after the federal government imposed price controls on the fuel on August 1. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) said that non-striking gas tankers will receive National Guard protection and that he will continue with the policy after striking workers vandalized and blocked distribution centers and vehicles continuing to operate.

ANALYSIS: As LP is used by around 70-80 percent of the population, being the main fuel for daily life, including for cooking and heating water, the strike against the announced price controls lead to severe shortages in various regions. AMLO's response to the strike reflects his wider attempts to nationalize the gas distribution sector, accusing many of the regional and larger companies of corruption and overcharging, with prices rising by 50 percent in 2021. The striking distributors claim this is due to rising costs, especially on the majority of imported LP gas, threatening further labor action if the price cap is extended, making shortages liable to recur throughout the year. The deployment of National Guard troops to protect the tankers is likely to reduce direct attacks on those continuing to operate, although it is also liable to anger strikers, who may attempt to block roads or centers.

Nicaragua

Notable Developments:

- The Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) disqualified the Alianza Ciudadanos por la Libertad (ACxL) party from contesting in the November presidential elections after annulling the party's legal status. The CSE stated that the president of ACxL holds dual US-Nicaraguan citizenship in violation of the law. ACxL vice presidential candidate Berenice Quezada was arrested and placed under house arrest on August 3.
- As a result, the leader of the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC) Milton Arcia announced his resignation from presidential candidacy on August 7.
- The USA imposed visa restrictions on dozens of Nicaraguan government officials, including President Daniel Ortega, on August 6.

ANALYSIS: The latest developments reiterate sustained attempts by the Nicaraguan government to suppress political opponents ahead of the November elections, evidenced

by the various ACxL members being arrested or disqualified in recent months. Moreover, that Ortega's government has continued to crack down on the opposition despite the latest rounds of US sanctions reflects the limited effectiveness of international sanctions to deter such moves. Ortega appears prepared to rely on regional allies, as well as China and Russia, for economic and diplomatic support. In light of this, additional arrests, disqualifications, and resignations of opposition leaders are likely to persist in the coming months leading up to the vote, regardless of possible additional sanctions and intensified international condemnation. Protests are highly likely to manifest ahead of the elections, possibly witnessing widespread unrest and violence similar to 2018.

Peru

Notable Developments:

- On August 7, Foreign Minister Hector Bejar announced the country's withdrawal from the Lima Group, the multilateral body established in 2017 by 12 Latin American countries to restore democracy in Venezuela. Bejar claimed that the decision was part of the "non-interference foreign policy" aimed at "promoting integration among South American countries". Furthermore, government officials reaffirmed their intent to remain in the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), as well as in the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).
- On August 9, Finance Minister Pedro Francke stated that the government is developing a formula to raise taxes on mining without affecting the country's competitiveness.

ANALYSIS: The latest announcements are indicative of President Pedro Castillo's left-wing policy agenda, with similar left-leaning foreign and economic policies likely to be introduced in the near-to-medium term. Moreover, the decision reflects a regionwide rapprochement with Venezuela, evidenced by Argentina and Bolivia also withdrawing from the Lima group in recent months. Although Bejar announced that Peru would continue to support South American integration, the withdrawal from the group reflects a setback for regional cooperation. Meanwhile, Francke's statement reflects his own policy standpoint of balancing raising taxes, especially on mining, but retaining Peru's attraction for investment. Should his taxation formula be considered too lenient on the mining companies, Castillo will likely face pressure to replace him. Such a move would further impact the Sol, as confidence in the government remains fragile.

USA

Notable Developments:

- The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a bulletin on August 6 warning of an "increasing but modest" amount of online activity advocating violence in relation to former President Donald Trump's allegations of fraud in the 2020 presidential election.
- The Public Safety Situational Awareness Notification was issued to federal, state, and local law

enforcement agencies. However, DHS stated that there is no specific evidence of a confirmed plot as of writing.

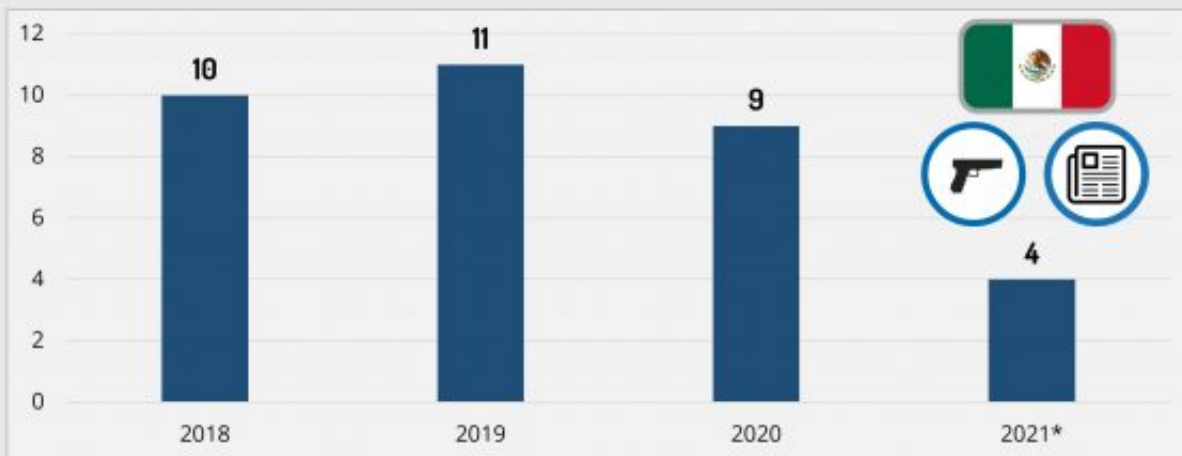
ANALYSIS: The DHS bulletin highlights the persistence of online rhetoric questioning the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election and the seriousness with which federal law enforcement agencies are taking the extremist threat following the riots at the US Capitol building on January 6 and various plots that were foiled during the campaigning period itself. State and local law enforcement are liable to increase their security presence around government buildings and important landmarks for the near term, but the risk of a successful coordinated attack remains low as of writing. However, while DHS did not provide specific evidence of an attack plot, there remains a latent risk of lone-wolf individuals subscribing to extremist, conspiracy-driven ideologies perpetrating an attack going forward. These remain most likely to manifest as attempted mass shootings. However, due to the disparate ideologies within the wider far-right, anti-establishment extremist spectrum, the potential targets of such attacks are varied, including religious sites, public events, high-profile organizations and individuals, and government or security authorities.

Other Developments

- The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) issued a Tropical Storm Watch for the **Caribbean:** Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands during the night hours (local time) on August 9.
- **Canadian** border guards held a strike on August 6 ahead of the reopening of the border with the USA on August 9. The strike was suspended after an agreement was reached with the Government.
- In **Chile**, President Sebastian Pinera announced plans to administer COVID-19 booster doses starting on August 11. In the **USA**, authorities are planning to introduce booster COVID-19 shots for those already vaccinated at an unspecified date.
- **Cuba's** government announced that private enterprises of up to 100 employees will be allowed as per August 8.
- Indigenous groups in **Guatemala** organized protests calling for President Alejandro Giammattei and the Attorney General's resignation on August 5-6 for the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In **Mexico**, the Ministry of Health and the Mayor of Mexico City argued over COVID-19 restrictions, with the federal agency saying the city should return to "red level" restrictions, while the Mayor said that local authorities will only enforce lesser "orange level" ones.
- On August 4, the **Mexican** government sued 11 prominent US gun manufacturing firms on grounds of contributing to arms trafficking. However, the **US** government has not been targeted.

Infographic of the Week

JOURNALISTS & MEDIA WORKERS KILLED IN MEXICO 2018-2021



*As of August 10, 2021

The Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion (CJNG) threatened to kill a journalist from a prominent news outlet on August 9 for “biased” reporting against the group.

The Week Ahead

- **August 14:** Housing protests in Toronto, ON, **Canada**
- **August 15:** Environmental protest planned in Foley Sq, New York, NY in the **USA**
- **August 15:** Public holiday in multiple countries regionwide in celebration of Assumption Christian holiday
- **August 16:** Restoration Day marking the Dominican Restoration War in 1863 is celebrated in the **Dominican Republic**