



Weekly

18

AUG

5:56 UTC

Americas Weekly Summary - August 11-17, 2021

Highlights of the Week

This report reviews notable events this week in the Americas. This includes Canadian PM Trudeau triggering snap elections; the deployment of an additional 1,500 police officers in Bogota, Colombia; a major drug seizure and increasing levels of gang violence in Ecuador; continued armed clashes between cartels and the military in Tamaulipas, Mexico; raids targeting the offices of La Prensa newspaper in Nicaragua; and clashes at “anti-vaxxer” protests in Los Angeles, CA, USA.

AMERICAS

August 11-17, 2021

- **Canadian** PM Justin Trudeau requested the dissolution of Parliament, triggering a snap election on September 20.
- 1,500 police officers have been deployed in Bogota, **Colombia**, amid rising homicide and theft rates.
- 9.5 tons of narcotics were seized in Guayaquil's Los Vergeles sector in **Ecuador**.
- Eight members of a Los Zeta splinter group were killed in clashes with the military in Tamaulipas, **Mexico**.
- La Prensa's offices, **Nicaragua's** oldest print newspaper were raided following the suspension of the print edition.
- Unrest was recorded at an anti-vaxxer rally in Los Angeles, CA, **USA**. One person was stabbed.

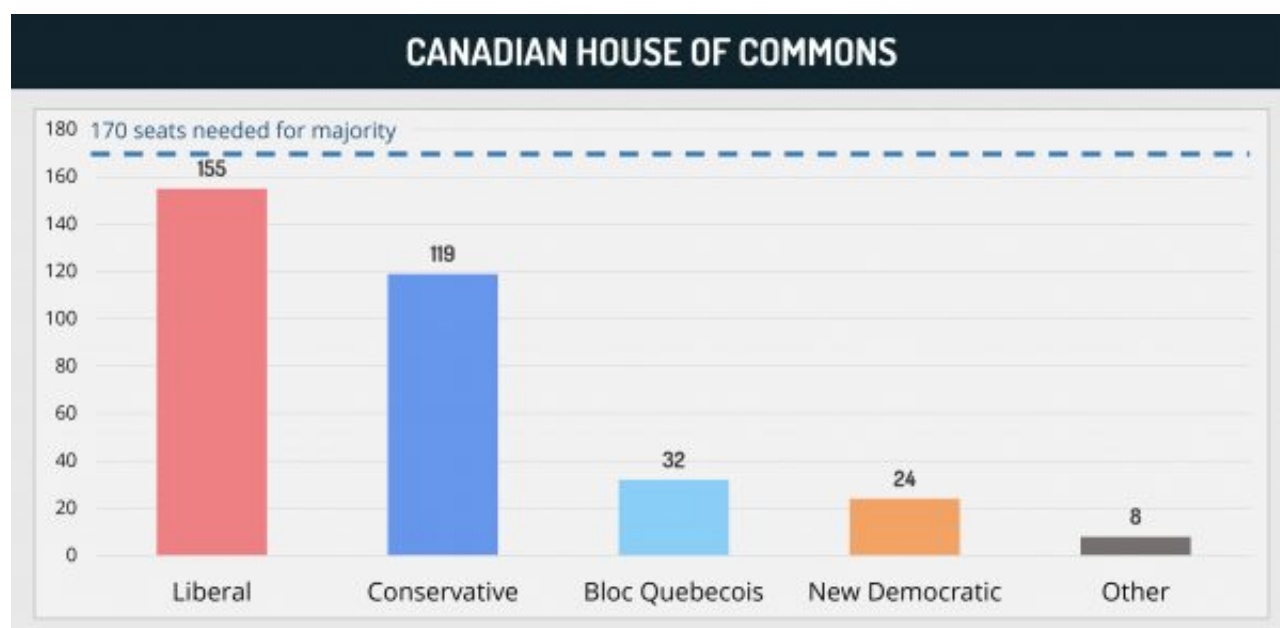


Canada

Notable Developments:

- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his center-left Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) requested the dissolution of Parliament by Governor-General Mary Simon on August 15, triggering a snap election on September 20, two years earlier than required.
- LPC secured a majority in the 2015 elections with 184 out of 338 seats in the House of Commons. However, the ruling coalition was reduced to a minority government in 2019 after losing support from certain coalition partners over controversial images of Trudeau that surfaced online. The LPC currently has 155 seats.

ANALYSIS: With several reports of a possible early election being released previously and Trudeau having accused the opposition of obstructing the passage of key emergency legislation, the development was largely expected. With recent polls indicating that the support for LPC stands at 38 percent, while the Conservative party continues to poll below 29, there remains a high likelihood of LPC gaining the most seats in the lower house, although even slight swings may determine if Trudeau gains an outright majority. Based on his initial statements, Trudeau is likely to try to frame the campaign within the COVID-19 pandemic, as Canada has responded comparatively well. Furthermore, the timing suggests the LPC was attempting to outmaneuver opposition parties, who are reportedly less prepared for campaigning, given the snap nature of the elections.



Colombia

Notable Developments:

- Defense Minister, Diego Molano, announced the deployment of 1,500 police officers in Bogota from August 14 amid a heightened level of homicides and thefts citywide. The deployment was prompted by the killing of a patrolman, Humberto Sabogal, at the hands of freight forwarders on August 11 in Bogota. An increased incidence of armed robberies and assaults has also been reported on public transportation.
- 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 explosives attack in the capital.

ANALYSIS: The decision indicates the increasing emphasis on domestic policing by the administration. With a bolstered security enforcement, the potential for armed confrontations between local criminals and police is liable to remain high in the coming weeks, consequently also posing a credible security threat to bystanders in the vicinity of the targeted operations. Random security checks across the city, especially in public transportation are also likely. Additionally, the potential for protests against Molano's measure cannot be ruled out, especially in the event that attendees of past protests are targeted or incidents of police brutality are reported. Given the earlier FARC arrests, the security landscape in Bogota is liable to remain precarious within the short-to-medium term, in terms of crime, civil unrest, and potential militancy.

Ecuador

Notable Developments:

- According to August 15 reports, 9.5 tons of narcotic substances valued at USD 450 million were seized in Guayaquil's Los Vergeles sector in an anti-drug trafficking operation on August 13. The operation follows the seizure of 0.5 tons of drugs in Los Vergeles on July 23.
- Additionally, following the August 13 operation, several armed attacks have been reported in Guayaquil. Separately, in Manabi, inter-gang clashes were registered frequently amid turf wars through July, while reports indicate that the 2021 death toll from such gang violence is currently at 336.

ANALYSIS: The high incidence of drug trafficking-related gang violence and seizures along Ecuador's Pacific coast highlights the region's importance within the South American drug trafficking route, with a majority of narcotic substances often arriving from Colombia via maritime routes. Besides, given the constant turf war over these routes, inter-gang clashes are likely to persist in Guayaquil and Manabi through the medium term. This, in turn, is liable to increase the threat of spillover violence posed to residents in these areas, resulting in a further deterioration of the security situation. With this, domestic and transnational anti-drug trafficking operations and security checks at ports along Ecuador's western inland and international ports are liable to increase in the medium term. As with previous crackdowns, this may lead to trafficking groups kidnapping individuals, both civilians and military personnel, in northern Ecuador, especially on the Colombian border.

Mexico

Notable Developments:

- On August 11, eight members of La Tropa del Infierno, a splinter group of the Los Zeta drug cartel, were killed during armed clashes with the Ejercito Mexicano, the Mexican army, in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas.
- The confrontation followed the arrest of the leader of La Tropa del Infierno Fernando de Jesus Rodriguez Adame, also known as El Werko. Reports indicate that blockades and shootings were initiated by Alberto Rodriguez, the brother of El Werko, at prominent locations in the region.

ANALYSIS: The incident highlights a heightened threat of armed violence in the Tamaulipas region, as evidenced by the killing of 15 individuals by rival cartel factions in Reynosa, Tamaulipas in June 2021. Given heightened sentiments over Adame's arrest, members of the La Tropa del Infierno are likely to launch retaliatory attacks against security forces in the near term, posing a risk to bystanders. Given the uptick in violent incidents witnessed in recent months and Tamaulipas' strategic location as a drug trafficking route to the USA, armed confrontations between security forces and criminal groups are expected to continue going forward. The incident also reiterates the increased threat following the arrest or killing of senior cartel members, with similar incidents having taken place in Mexico City and Sinaloa in recent years. Blockades, protests, shootouts, and other violent actions are often taken by cartel members in the area where the arrest took place, impacting both security forces and bystanders, with little concern for collateral damage.

Nicaragua

Notable Developments:

- The offices of La Prensa, Nicaragua's oldest and only surviving print newspaper, were raided on August 14 over allegations of customs fraud and money laundering. The development followed the paper's suspension of its print edition because authorities refused to release imports of newsprint on August 12.
- La Prensa is owned by the family of politician Christiana Chamorro, who was detained in June after announcing she would run against President Daniel Ortega in the November elections. It has published several editorials critical of his administration.
- The administration recalled its ambassadors from Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico on August 9. The four countries had previously made similar diplomatic moves. On August 11, Spanish authorities also announced the recall of their ambassador to Nicaragua.

ANALYSIS: The incidents are illustrative of the crackdown on all alleged forms of dissent in Nicaragua by the Ortega administration, and are likely to prompt international and domestic criticism of the lack of press freedom in the country. Further, the targeting of La Prensa in particular potentially reflects Ortega's intent to manipulate the November elections in his favor, given that it is owned by the Chamorro family. As such, civil unrest in the run-up to the elections is highly likely to witness significant violence, with clashes

between protesters and riot police expected. The ambassadorial recalls reflect Nicaragua's growing international isolation, increasing its reliance on remaining allies in the region, Cuba and Venezuela mainly, as well as Russia, who has recently expressed support for Ortega.

USA

Notable Developments:

- Unrest was recorded at an "anti-vaxxer" rally at Los Angeles City Hall, CA on August 14. Hundreds attended the protest, with many carrying signs calling for "medical freedom."
- Clashes broke out after a group of left-wing counter-protesters arrived. Reports indicate that counter-protesters sprayed mace while "anti-vaxxer" shouted death threats.
- One anti-vaxxer activist was stabbed and a journalist was physically assaulted during the protest. The rally comes amid discussions on public vaccine verification rules and follows the reimposition of certain COVID-19 restrictions.

ANALYSIS: The violence recorded at the rally reflects concerns that the reimposition of COVID-19 restrictions, as well as vaccine mandates, is likely to bolster extremist groups and increase anti-government sentiments. That the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recently issued a warning stating that the reimposition of such measures is liable to increase the threat posed by extremists supports this. Moreover, considering that clashes broke out between two opposing groups, the potential for similar levels of unrest and potential attacks is likely to remain heightened at "anti-vaxxer" protests nationwide in the coming weeks, with such protests and counter-protests likely to increase as more states reimpose measures. Considering that far-right extremists are becoming increasingly emboldened, the potential for attacks at left-wing counter-protests remains heightened, with future attacks likely to be carried out by lone actors in the form of shootings or vehicular rammings.

Other Developments

- The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) has issued multiple tropical storm warnings between August 13-19 due to three tropical storm systems; Tropical Storm Fred, Tropical Storm Grace, and, most recently, Tropical Storm Henri. Warnings are in effect across the **Caribbean** and over the southeast and northwest of the **USA**. In the USA, the Florida Panhandle has been particularly affected, with TS Fred making landfall on August 16, resulting in significant power outages.
- As of writing, 1,941 people are reported dead and more than 9,900 have sustained injuries following a 7.2-magnitude earthquake in southwest **Haiti** on August 14. An unknown number remain unaccounted for and more than 30,000 families have reportedly been left homeless.
- **Brazilian** President Jair Bolsonaro called for the Senate to bring charges against Supremo Tribunal Federal (STF) judges Alexandre de Moraes and Luis Roberto Barroso on a social media post on August 14, claiming that they have "exceeded constitutional limits with their acts" and warning of

an “institutional rupture.”

- In the **USA**, thousands were evacuated in eastern Utah on August 15 due to the Parleys Canyon fire, which has burned up to 1,500 acres of land. The Dixie Fire in California remains at 31 percent containment as of writing, with growing concerns that fresh winds will accelerate the fire. Over 90 large wildfires are currently active nationwide.

The Week Ahead

- **August 18:** Nationwide strike and associated demonstrations in **Brazil**.
- **August 25:** Independence Day in **Uruguay, US** President Joe Biden to meet with private sector leaders to discuss cybersecurity.