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Fernández's indiscretions could have electoral impact in Argentina

Two pieces of embarrassing evidence are giving Argentina's President Alberto Fernández a very large hangover. The first is a leak obtained by a journalist – a computer file copy of all the visitors to the presidential residence in the Buenos Aires suburb of Olivos, with in and out times, over a 15-month period running up to last June. The second is a photograph of Fernández, his wife, and nine guests, having a dinner party on 14 July last year.

At any other time, these pieces of information would have been unremarkable, even banal. But the visitor records and the photo date back to the most intense initial phase of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, when the country was being told by President Fernández, backed by the force of law and the threat of fines, to stay at home, avoid socialising, wear masks, and follow strict social distancing protocols.

Investigative journalists were quick to work out that many of the visitors to Olivos, particularly those arriving in the evenings, were not there to conduct essential government business, but more likely were attending for social and entertainment purposes. To put it bluntly, while the country was in lockdown, it appeared Olivos was having a bit of a party.

Publication of the visitor logs eventually triggered other leaks, the most damaging of which was a photograph of the president celebrating the birthday of Fabiola Yáñez, the First Lady, on 14 July 2020, some four months after the pandemic had first hit. There are 11 people in the photograph, nine of whom are friends of the first couple including a stylist, public relations consultant, television presenter, actor, real estate agent, hairdresser, and health coach. None are wearing masks; a birthday cake can be seen.

Internationally, Fernández is neither the first nor the last to face embarrassing revelations and accusations of hypocrisy during the pandemic. But his initial faltering response put him in a political hole that he had difficulty digging himself out of. The presidency had dismissed an earlier, poor-quality photo of the birthday party as being a photoshopped fake, but later had to admit the authenticity of the better-quality snap. On 13 August the president admitted the party had happened, called it a mistake and apologised, but even the apology did not work out quite as planned.

Fernández implied that the party had been organised by the First Lady, which many interpreted as an ungallant attempt to shift the blame to her (an implication he later angrily denied). He also described it as simply a short "toast" which he had not known about beforehand, saying he had only "stopped by for a minute" – when it was evidently a pre-planned sit-down meal.

In later statements, Fernández raged against the centre-right opposition

Protests

Thousands of people participated in a march staged by social organisations in Buenos Aires, and elsewhere in the country, on 18 August, protesting against the government's economic policy and demanding more jobs and an increase in social assistance to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The main march, which blocked the centre of the capital, culminated in a demonstration outside the ministry of social development.

Juntos por el Cambio (JxC), claiming his own mistakes were nothing compared to those of his predecessor Mauricio Macri (2015-2019), who piled up debt and had to turn cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The scandal clearly has multiple political ramifications. In the short term, and in response to the Olivos visitor log, opposition leaders filed a complaint against Fernández for breaking lockdown rules, a case which was picked up by a federal prosecutor who has opened a formal investigation.

Following the release of the photograph, the JxC leadership announced that it would initiate formal impeachment proceedings in the federal congress. This is, in reality, no more than a token measure, however, since there is no chance of the opposition rallying the necessary two-thirds majority in congress needed to start the process.

Electoral repercussions

But the impact on the primaries - due on 12 September, and to be followed by the full mid-term congressional elections on 14 November - could be highly significant. Before the scandal broke, opinion polls and political calculations were all suggesting it will be a closely fought race. The government's success in compiling single lists of candidates, supported by most internal factions, was seen as giving it an edge over JxC, which is fielding multiple competing lists in various key constituencies [\[WR-21-30\]](#). But voting prospects could change dramatically.

A rapid survey by local pollster Management & Fit suggested the Olivos parties could wreak electoral havoc for the ruling coalition. It showed that over 90% of respondents had seen the photo, and three quarters (76.1%) considered the incident "serious" or "very serious".

Crucially, over one-fifth (22.3%) said they had been planning to vote for Frente de Todos (FdT), the governing coalition, and would now no longer do so. A further 11.7% said they had until then not decided how to vote, but as a result of the scandal would also now shun the FdT. While the massive electoral swing implied by the poll could be inaccurate, a statistical 'blip', or transient, there is still a possibility that Fernández could be looking at a bruising defeat in the mid-terms.

The other political consequence may be to further weaken the president's influence within the FdT, to the benefit of the more radical faction lead by Vice-President Cristina Fernández. Two new cabinet appointments (Jorge Taiana at the defence ministry and Juan Zabaleta at the social development ministry) were announced on 9 August as the previous incumbents stepped down to take part in the primaries [\[WR-21-32\]](#). Both appointees are seen as increasing Kirchnerismo's influence in the cabinet.

Vice-President Fernández formally supported the head of state in his hour of need, but the words and tone she chose to adopt in public can also be interpreted as a warning. Speaking at a political rally on 17 August she said, "Alberto, keep cool, put your house in order where order is needed, don't get nervous and don't get angry".

Off the record, Kirchnerista leaders accuse President Fernández's inner circle of responsibility for the leaks, and for giving him poor advice, leading to something of a public relations disaster. Julio Vitobello, the general secretary of the presidency, and Juan Pablo Biondi, the presidential spokesman, are said to be in the firing line.

Béjar out, confidence vote looms

Peru's new left-wing government under President Pedro Castillo is beginning to look even more inexperienced and accident-prone. Castillo took office on 28 July, while still struggling to appoint a full cabinet. Just 19 days later, on 17 August, a key member of the cabinet, Héctor Béjar, resigned as foreign minister amid controversy over ill-judged comments on terrorism.

Béjar, an 85-year-old sociologist who set up a short lived pro-Cuban guerrilla movement in the 1960s, resigned after comments he had made during a virtual seminar last February, when he was still a little-known academic, were broadcast by a Lima television station. In them Béjar said it was "historically demonstrable" that terrorism had been introduced into Peru by the navy, after training by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). He also said, "I cannot prove it, but I am convinced that Sendero Luminoso [SL] was in large part a creature of the CIA and the US intelligence services".

Although the foreign ministry initially argued that the comments had been taken out of context and were maliciously edited, they clearly caused deep offence. The navy issued a statement saying Béjar's comments were "absolutely untrue" and an "insult" to the force, as well as to all the families of those who were killed in the long struggle against SL (*see sidebar*).

Other ministerial changes may be imminent. The country faces a likely conflict of powers between a largely right-of-centre legislature and a left-wing government. Under the constitution, having appointed a ministerial team and outlined his proposed policies, President Castillo must now seek a confidence vote from the legislature. If it is twice denied he has the power to dissolve congress and convene new legislative elections – a course of action that was taken in 2019 by former president Martín Vizcarra (2018-2020).

A date for the first vote of confidence has now been set – 26 August. Prospects for how it will go are uncertain. Congressional deputies have already registered several objections to the new administration. They firmly oppose the appointment of Guido Bellido as prime minister, as he is under investigation by the public prosecutor's office for alleged corruption and links to terrorism (including his public support for Edith Lagos, an early SL militant).

Members of Perú Libre (PL), the far-left party for which Castillo came to power, including its Marxist founder Vladimir Cerrón, are also under investigation on allegations of money laundering and mishandling of electoral campaign finance. In addition, socially liberal deputies want to question the prime minister's publicly expressed male chauvinism and homophobia.

Before his resignation, congress had also wanted to question Béjar over his support for the authoritarian left-wing government in Venezuela. In the policy field, the legislature is likely to challenge the administration's plans for a constituent assembly. In short, there are a multitude of issues over which the two powers could, and more than likely will, become deadlocked.

In at least one respect, Béjar's early departure could open a window of opportunity for Castillo. It would allow him to carry out a partial ministerial reshuffle aimed at reaching some kind of a compromise with congress.

Sendero Luminoso

Most analysts see the Maoist SL as a lethal and largely home-grown insurgent movement. According to the 2003 report by the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation (CVR), SL was mainly responsible for two decades of terrorism (1980-2000) which left a death toll of 69,000.

Áñez transferred to hospital

Contradictory statements have emerged about the state of Jeanine Áñez's health after she was transferred from prison to a hospital in El Alto on 18 August. The director of health issues in Bolivia's prison system, Mariana García, said that she was attending a pre-arranged appointment on the advice of a cardiologist, that her condition is "stable", and that her rights had not been violated. This is disputed by the political opposition: Senator Centa Rek of the right-wing Creemos announced that her party would be lodging complaints with the IACHR, the European Parliament, and Amnesty International over her treatment, which she said amounts to "violations of [her] human rights to health and life". Áñez has since been returned to prison.

There are moderate leftists in the ministerial team, including the economy & finance minister, Pedro Francke, and the justice minister, Aníbal Torres, who might be able to build bridges.

It was left to Torres to try and cool tempers over the Béjar affair, saying "we condemn all terrorist acts and respect private property and private enterprise, because we know that it will require private enterprise and the intermediation of the state for us to achieve economic growth". A swing to the moderate left would be one way of stabilising Peru's volatile politics.

It is also true, however, that at least some cabinet ministers may be pushing for an alternative 'confrontation strategy'. A recent video of a PL meeting captures Guillermo Bermejo, a congressman close to Cerrón, saying that "if congress doesn't like Bellido as prime minister it will vote no confidence, and we'll appoint someone else. And if they don't like that person, then it will be 'bye, bye congress'".

A third interpretation is that the new Castillo administration is neither set on being conciliatory nor confrontational but is simply yet to find its feet, lacks any clear policy direction, and has not built a ministerial consensus. This would suggest that it is still undecided over whether to tack to the moderate or to the more radical left.

BOLIVIA | POLITICS & HUMAN RIGHTS

IACHR publishes damning verdict on Áñez presidency

The Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has published a damning assessment of human rights violations under Bolivia's former interim president Jeanine Áñez (2019-2020). Whilst the 471-page report falls short of describing her rise to power as a coup, it does question whether her ascension to the presidency was legitimate. The report's findings were seized upon by President Luis Arce's government as vindication for the much-criticised imprisonment of Áñez since March. However, the ruling left-wing Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) government has also been tainted by the report's warnings of judicial politicisation that could impede a fair trial of those accused of wrongdoing.

The IACHR-commissioned report, which was published on 17 August and written by an interdisciplinary group of independent experts (IGIE), paints a vivid picture of "grave human rights violations" in the weeks after the disputed October 2019 presidential election. It found evidence of "systematic torture" and "summary executions" by the security forces against demonstrators protesting the ousting of Áñez's MAS predecessor Evo Morales (2006-2019), and it counts at least 37 deaths. Regarding the November 2019 massacres of at least 21 Morales supporters in Senkata (La Paz department) and Sacaba (Cochabamba), the IGIE claims there is evidence that police and soldiers "acted with the intention of killing protesters, even though they were running away".

Áñez's legitimacy as interim president is also called into question, although the report avoids the thorny issue of whether she seized power in a coup or intervened in the face of alleged electoral fraud by the MAS government. The IGIE does note, however, that her ascension to president of the senate (which enabled her to then proclaim herself interim president) was voted upon without the necessary quorum mandated by Bolivia's constitution.

Following the report's publication, President Arce insisted that it corroborated his government's claims of a coup against Morales and said that he would push for those accused of crimes to face trial "as soon as possible". He also vowed to disband "all parapolice and irregular groups" such as the Resistencia Juvenil Cochola, which the report names as one of

Humanitarian aid

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) announced on 18 August that Venezuela received more humanitarian aid in the first six months of 2021 than it did in the entirety of 2020. An OCHA statement said that US\$279.4m in aid had been mobilised in the year to date as part of the OCHA's Venezuela Humanitarian Response Plan, and that it is seeking donations to secure US\$708.1m in aid by the end of the year. The OCHA stated that this funding has enabled over 700 humanitarian workers to assist some 2.1m Venezuelans this year. Jan Harfst, the OCHA's coordinator in Venezuela, said that most of these workers are "on the frontline in hospitals, ambulances, temporary shelters or in communities to ensure access to basic goods and services."

several anti-MAS citizens' militias that attacked Morales supporters in the aftermath of the election.

Whilst the report will help cushion the Arce administration from accusations that it has been too heavy-handed in its imprisonment of Áñez, there was also some uncomfortable reading for the MAS government. It notes that the turmoil of October 2019 "did not occur unexpectedly" but was instead preceded by "political decisions and actions that put pressure on...the mechanisms of participative democracy" – a reference to Morales' overriding of a 2016 referendum that rejected his seeking another term.

The report also voices concern over the likelihood that those accused of crimes will receive a fair trial. It states that, whilst the prosecution of those guilty of human rights violations is "fundamental" to reconciliation, there are "serious deficiencies" in the Bolivian state's ability to "guarantee and respect the independence and the autonomy of the judiciary and the interior ministry" and "weaknesses in these institutions' capacity to guarantee... due process".

That warning has been seized upon by the political opposition as proof that charges against Áñez should be dropped. Carlos Mesa, the leader of the centre-right opposition Comunidad Ciudadana (CC), maintained that the report was proof that a "reform of the judiciary and the attorney general's office and the replacement of officials are a prerequisite" for any trials relating to the Áñez administration.

The European Union (EU) and the United Nations, meanwhile, both welcomed the report's publication, with the EU's Bolivian delegation stating that it will "enable a step towards delivering justice in a transparent manner" and referring to it as "another tool to achieve reconciliation in Bolivia." The UN office in Bolivia, meanwhile, said that the report will help to ensure "justice and reparation measures for all of the victims". The EU's statement is noteworthy, given that it previously expressed deep concern over Áñez's arrest.

VENEZUELA | POLITICS

Dialogue process commences in Mexico

President Nicolás Maduro's description of opposition leader Juan Guaidó as "the devil" heralded an inauspicious start to the negotiations to resolve Venezuela's political stalemate. Nonetheless, the ball is now rolling on a dialogue process that potentially holds important rewards for both sides – a lifting of international sanctions remains the government's most urgent need, whilst the opposition is demanding guarantees of free, fair, and transparent regional and municipal elections in November and the release of all political prisoners. Major doubts remain as to whether compromise can be reached, but the signing of a memorandum of understanding between both sides, as well as some recent shifts in the Maduro administration's rhetoric, suggest that making headway is not impossible.

Delegations from the Maduro government and the Venezuelan opposition kickstarted negotiations in Mexico City on 13 August with the signing of a memorandum of understanding to "agree the necessary conditions for the carrying out of electoral processes" and "in understanding of the need to lift sanctions against the Venezuelan state". While the objectives may be clear, the path to achieving both outcomes is far less certain: Maduro has repeatedly insisted that sanctions be lifted ahead of any reforms, whilst Guaidó has called for international pressure to be eased only when the government has made concrete steps towards democratic reform. Compromise and a scaling back of expectations will likely be required from both parties if these talks are to progress.

Progress

The US, Canada, and the European Union (EU) released a joint statement on 14 August affirming their willingness to “review sanctions policies if the [Venezuelan] regime makes meaningful progress in the announced talks” with the opposition in Mexico City.

Both the government and the opposition claim to have each other on the back foot. Following the launch of the dialogue process, Guaidó warned that if the government uses the negotiations “to seek some form of recognition and to play for time” then “the conflict will deepen and the pressure will increase”. That threat is unlikely to resonate with the Maduro administration, which has watched the opposition leader fail to muster mass anti-government protests over the course of the last year and has survived escalating rounds of sanctions that have pummelled the Venezuelan economy without visibly threatening its political dominance.

Maduro also claims to be in the stronger position – perhaps with good reason, given that it is the opposition’s weakness that has driven it reluctantly to the negotiating table [\[WR-21-32\]](#). On 14 August Maduro claimed that “we’ve managed it in Mexico; we’ve sat the extremist opposition down at the table for peace”, while adding that “if we have to sit down with the devil, then with the devil we’ll sit, with a crucifix and holy water”.

Maduro goes into these talks in his strongest position in years, facing a fissiparous opposition and a weakened international coalition against him; this month, the governments of Peru and St Lucia both announced they would be withdrawing from the Lima Group of western hemisphere countries pushing for democratic reform in Venezuela, following in the footsteps of Argentina [\[WR-21-32\]](#).

However, recent statements from the Maduro government have indicated that its position is not as comfortable as it claims. Although the government’s lead negotiator, national assembly president Jorge Rodríguez, insisted in Mexico City that “threats won’t work with us”, there can be little doubt that sanctions have wrought their toll. Key figures in the ruling Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV) have softened their rhetoric regarding market liberalisation in recent months, suggesting that the economic crisis has forced the government into a change of tack away from the socialist policies that have guided it since the election of Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) [\[WR-21-25\]](#).

There are other signs that Maduro may take these negotiations seriously, despite the fears of many in the opposition that the government is merely seeking a veneer of legitimacy. On 16 August Maduro said that diplomatic relations with the US could be repaired, with the US ambassador to Venezuela, James Story, able to carry out his role in Caracas rather than Bogotá, if the Biden administration “sets out its agenda” and “puts an end to its arrogance, its hatred and its contempt”.

The 15 August release of Freddy Guevara, the detained national coordinator for the opposition Voluntad Popular (VP), also represented a gesture of goodwill ahead of the negotiations. Guevara’s arrest last month for supposedly orchestrating an eruption of gang violence in Caracas had threatened to derail plans for dialogue [\[WR-21-28\]](#). His release will encourage the opposition delegation in its ability to secure the release of all political prisoners in Venezuela – of which there are currently 266, according to the local NGO Foro Penal.

Similar, incremental, acts of compromise represent the best chance of these negotiations succeeding. The opposition’s lead negotiator, former deputy Gerardo Blyde, appeared to recognise this at the talks, saying that “partial agreements” would be preferable to a collapse of negotiations. Bruised by eight months in the political wilderness since its decision to boycott the December 2020 legislative elections, a new pragmatism appears to have set in among opposition delegates, and a phased lifting of sanctions in return for gradual concessions from the government may be attainable. This could pave the way for further progress beyond the next round of dialogue, scheduled for 3-6 September.

Investigations stack up

On 16 August, the attorney general's office (PGR) announced that it had launched a preliminary investigation into President Bolsonaro for his attacks on the electoral system, a small concession after facing weeks of pressure from the STF to take position on the issue and respond to several investigation requests. This adds to two lines of enquiry which Bolsonaro currently faces as part of the STF-led 'fake news' investigation and an administrative investigation being carried out by the supreme electoral court (TSE) [[WR-21-31](#)], all linked to unfounded claims of electoral fraud that the president has made as part of what is seemingly a sustained campaign to erode public trust in Brazil's electoral system ahead of the 2022 elections.

'Digital militia' investigation fans tensions

Roberto Jefferson, a Brazilian politician and hardline supporter of President Jair Bolsonaro, was arrested by order of a supreme court (STF) justice on 13 August, as part of an investigation into the possible existence of a criminal organisation that acts online to attack democracy and the rule of law in Brazil. The timing of Jefferson's preventive arrest has fanned ongoing institutional tensions in the country, particularly exacerbating Bolsonaro's attacks on certain members of the judiciary.

The federal police (PF) arrested Jefferson on the orders of STF Justice Alexandre de Moraes. In his decision, Moraes cited Jefferson's activity on *Twitter*, where the former federal deputy (1983-2005) and national president of the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB, a party of flexible politics which can now ideologically be described as ultra-conservative and bolsonarista) "displays firearms, promotes hate speech and homophobia, and encourages violence". According to Moraes, the PF also found that Jefferson attacked public institutions and sought to deepen polarisation and foment animosity within Brazilian society through his social media posts and comments in interviews.

Jefferson is suspected of being part of the political arm of an alleged criminal group, sometimes described as a 'digital militia', which carries out online activity "with the clear purpose of undermining democracy and the rule of law". Moraes requested that the PF probe this group in July after an investigation into anti-democratic acts promoted by Bolsonaro supporters last year [[WR-20-24](#)] was shelved on orders from the attorney general's office (PGR). According to Moraes at the time, the new line of enquiry is based on "strong evidence" that radical right-wing bloggers and bolsonarista lawmakers acted to destabilise the state, "provoke an institutional rupture", and weaken the work of the legislative and judicial branches of government as counterweights to the executive.

Jefferson's preventive arrest was maintained after a hearing, although the legitimacy of Moraes' prison order has been the subject of debate amongst legal experts. Bolsonaro called it "arbitrary" and a violation of constitutional rights in an indirect critique on *Twitter* on 14 August, when he also announced that he would shortly be presenting the senate president, Rodrigo Pacheco, with impeachment requests against Moraes and Luís Roberto Barroso, another STF judge who is the current president of the supreme electoral court (TSE).

Bolsonaro had yet to make good on this threat as we went to press on 19 August, but his making it illustrates his increasingly antagonistic relationship with the judiciary (and Barroso and Moraes in particular), as he doubles down on efforts to discredit Brazil's voting system by claiming it is vulnerable to fraud, earning himself countless rebukes and prompting a few investigations (*see sidebar*).

If Bolsonaro were to present impeachment requests against STF justices, it would complicate his relations with the senate, where there is little appetite for getting involved in his fights. Although a government ally, Pacheco would not put such impeachment proceedings to a vote. In a token gesture to smoothing over tensions, Pacheco re-affirmed the importance of "seeking consensus and respecting differences" in a tweet on 16 August and stressed that congress would not allow setbacks to "democratic advances". Less mealy-mouthed, 14 state governors issued a joint statement, expressing their "solidarity" with the STF and promising "to preserve the dignity and integrity of the judiciary" in their states.

Lula on tour

Covid optimism

In urban centres with higher vaccination rates, politicians are already celebrating the imminent end of the pandemic. The mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Eduardo Paes, has said that the coming New Year's Eve celebrations will be "the biggest in the city's history" and has mooted creating a new municipal public holiday to mark the end of pandemic restrictions (however, he quickly backtracked on plans voiced in late July to hold large public parties as early as September). This unrestrained optimism worries scientists who warn that the pandemic is far from over, with the Delta variant spreading in Brazil – Rio is currently the epicentre – and the majority of the population still not benefitting from the protection of full vaccination.

Brazil's former president Lula da Silva (2003-2011) has begun a 10-day tour of the Northeast region, the political bastion of his left-wing Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT). While the PT leadership presented it as an opportunity to observe the reality of Brazilians up close and discuss development policies for the region, Lula's trip is ostensibly a pre-electoral tour to sound out possible alliances ahead of the 2022 presidential elections, in which he is expected to challenge President Jair Bolsonaro's re-election bid.

Lula arrived in Recife, the state capital of Pernambuco, on 15 August. His trip will take in another five states in the Northeast up until 26 August: Piauí, Maranhão, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, and Bahia. His agenda includes meetings with local politicians, as well as representatives from social movements, labour organisations, and members of the business community.

In an interview with news site *Poder360*, PT Senator Humberto Costa stressed that Lula's trip was not seeking to mark a campaign launch or compete with the political mobilisations which President Bolsonaro frequently attends with his supporters. "The principal objective is to have a conversation with political forces," Costa said, mentioning, for example, the Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB), a leftist party which is strong in Pernambuco and has reportedly been resisting the prospect of an alliance with the PT.

With well over a year to go before the election, many parties on the centre-right, and some on the left, are still not convinced by the idea of Lula as a consensus candidate for an anti-Bolsonaro front in 2022, even though polls show that Lula would easily beat Bolsonaro, and that other prospective candidates would barely get a look in. Lula has yet to formally announce that he will be a candidate next year, although he has given many hints. "I'm not running for president, not yet, we'll wait for the right moment, but I have never felt the desire to return to the presidency as strongly as I do now," he told social leaders in Piauí on 17 August.

Covid-19 vaccine rollout advances

Brazil's coronavirus (Covid-19) epidemic continues to give signs of improving, with figures for new cases and deaths falling to levels not previously seen this year, after a devastating second wave of infections brought the health system to its knees across the country in March-April. In an 11 August bulletin, the Fiocruz public health institute noted that intensive care occupancy had fallen below 80% across all states for the first time since October 2020; 22 of Brazil's 27 states now have hospital occupancy levels below 60%.

Vaccination underpins this positive evolution. On 13 August, several local news outlets hailed the fact that Brazil had overtaken the US with 73.9% of adults having received at least one jab, compared with 71% in the US, where vaccine hesitancy has caused the rollout to stagnate. Relative to total population, 55.8% of Brazilians had had one Covid-19 vaccine dose as of 18 August, according to figures from state health secretariats; the distribution of second doses lags, however, with just 24.5% of the population fully vaccinated.

Vaccination rates are also uneven. The wealthiest and most populous state, São Paulo, leads the pack, with 68.7% of the population having received one jab. In the city of São Paulo, over 99% of adults have received one dose: 500,000 people were vaccinated during a 34-hour vaccination drive on 14 and 15 August. Teenagers are now being offered the jab. At the other end of the scale (and country), the poor state of Roraima has fully vaccinated just 13.3% of its population, while 40% have received one jab. In recent days, as São Paulo was applying hundreds of thousands of jabs, several other large cities had to suspend their vaccine rollout while awaiting the delivery of new doses from the federal government.

Determined to reopen schools despite risks

Unicef

The new representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) in Mexico, Fernando Carrera, praised what he called "a gesture of courage" by the government for its plan to return to in-school learning. Speaking during President López Obrador's morning press conference on 19 August, Carrera said the decision was "without doubt exceptionally important for Mexican schoolchildren, and, it must be said, very important for the world". Carrera said there was no question that there would be pockets of infections in schools as a result of the decision but the question should be "how do we manage these?"

Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his government officials are insisting that the country's schools must reopen for in-person learning on 30 August. Last month López Obrador had already dismissed public concerns that the return to school would exacerbate the third major wave of coronavirus (Covid-19) infections that is currently ripping through the country [\[WR-21-30\]](#). The unrelenting rise in infections and the growing evidence that this is once again putting pressure on the national public health system had raised the prospect that the government could reconsider. However, López Obrador remains unmoved, arguing that the risks are manageable even though local and international organisations warn that the conditions are not in place for the safe reopening of schools.

The third Covid-19 wave is producing a new peak of infections in Mexico. The federal authorities reported 29,975 new infections on 12 August, the highest daily infection figure since the start of the pandemic. This brought the seven-day rolling daily average to 17,558, another record-high figure that points to a deterioration of the epidemiological situation in the country.

The López Obrador administration argues that, in spite of the sharp rise in infections, this has not led to the saturation of public hospitals (the national hospital bed occupancy rate stands at just over 50%) or to a spike in fatalities (although 877 deaths were reported on 17 August, the highest daily death toll of the pandemic). It also maintains that the lack of face-to-face learning should be prioritised as it has been damaging for children's educational, social, and psychological development.

Opponents of the reopening of schools say that the saturation of hospitals and a rise in deaths is only a matter of time. Epidemiologists point to the high hospital occupancy rates (over 70%) in some states, such as Nuevo León, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, and Guanajuato, as evidence that the health system is under pressure and that it will be overwhelmed in due course.

An increase in Covid-19 cases in children has also been noted in recent weeks. According to official figures, over 60,000 school age children have been infected by the virus: 7,233 of them have been hospitalised (over 1,300 in the last 70 days) and over 700 of these have died.

Others point to data from the US, which shows that following the reopening of schools there has been a 40% increase in infections of school children. This despite the fact that children aged 12 to 18 have already started being vaccinated in the US: Mexico has yet to start vaccinating those under 18.

Meanwhile, parent associations and some teachers' unions have voiced concerns that many schools still lack the facilities that would allow for the implementation of sanitary protocols including reliable water provision, and large enough classrooms to maintain social distancing. The López Obrador government itself has recognised that 10,000 of the country's schools have fallen into disrepair or have been vandalised after they were closed. It has even asked the parents of school children to give some of their time to help repair damaged schools ahead of their reopening.

Yet despite the various concerns, on 12 August Education Minister Delfina Gómez reiterated that schools will be reopened across the country on 30 August for a new school year. Gómez said that the return to in-person

Responsibilities

The protocol presented by Education Minister Gómez says that parents must sign and submit a ‘co-responsibility commitment letter’ under which they assume responsibility for the implementation of the protocol presented by the federal education ministry (SEP) and of taking all the measures to prevent their children from getting infected, but acknowledge the risk of this. This was broadly criticised by parents, who complained that they were being asked to do something seen as a government duty: to provide a safe learning environment for children. The public backlash was such that, on 17 August, President López Obrador said that he had not approved the use of the letter, which had been devised by “someone at the SEP” and should be scrapped.

classes will be “orderly and careful”. She said that the authorities were doing everything possible to make schools safe for children and presented the sanitary protocols that are to be followed in classrooms. But the protocols were criticised for not contemplating reducing class numbers; not providing sanitary, personal protective equipment, or Covid-19 testing kits; and for controversially making parents responsible for implementing the protocol (*see sidebar*).

López Obrador dismissed the criticism and concerns, accusing the critics of being “conservatives” intent on disrupting his government’s plans. “It is notable how the conservative press has come out against the return of in-person classes,” López Obrador said, criticising the media reports on the rise in child infections and deaths.

López Obrador insists that children need to go to school for their own good and that the risk they could get Covid-19 must be assumed. “We need to take some risks, like with anything in life. Imagine if we were not to go out because something could happen to us...we can’t be locked up inside all the time. We need to face adversity,” López Obrador remarked.

But in a clear sign that a return to schools is a contentious issue, a poll of parents of school children, published on 17 August by local daily *El Financiero*, found that 58% of respondents are opposed to the resumption of in-person teaching on 20 August. Notably, on that same day López Obrador adopted a more conciliatory tone and said that while school attendance is mandatory, no parent will be forced to send their children for in-person learning against their will, with those opposed allowed to keep their children in the national distance learning programme.

MEXICO | POLITICS

Morena scrambles to give López Obrador his wish

Senators from Mexico’s ruling left-wing Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena) mobilised this week to approve secondary legislation, at the committee stage, enabling a presidential recall referendum to be held. The senators were responding to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s demands that the full legal framework be approved so that he can become Mexico’s first president to face such a referendum. The paradox is explained by López Obrador’s conviction that he can win the recall referendum and recover some of the support that his administration has lost since he assumed office in 2018. It is a gamble that could backfire, leading to López Obrador losing legitimacy or his mandate altogether.

President López Obrador wants to show that he can convincingly win a popular vote, following two consecutive electoral setbacks in which Morena was unable to secure a qualified congressional majority in the mid-term federal elections [\[WR-21-23\]](#) and failed to convince enough voters to take part in his proposed first national popular consultation to make it binding [\[WR-21-31\]](#). López Obrador himself promoted the constitutional reform introducing presidential recall referendums, and he has always said that his intention was to subject himself to one halfway through his term, claiming that if he lost the support of the people, he would step down.

There is no shortage of political analysts who argue that López Obrador has shown that he is much better at campaigning than governing; at interacting directly with the public than carrying out the day-to-day tasks of running the country. It is worth noting that while López Obrador’s approval rating has fallen significantly in the last three years, it remains relatively high at

Opposition rejection

Opposition senators complained that the bill was designed to turn the recall vote into a referendum on President López Obrador's administration. They objected to the proposed referendum question: 'Do you agree that President Andrés Manuel López Obrador should remain in office until the end of his term?' They said this is unconstitutional as the recall referendum reform stipulates that voters should be asked if they want to revoke the president's mandate, not whether he or she should remain in office. They also argue that López Obrador cannot be subjected to a recall because the reform was approved after the start of his term and retroactive application of laws is also unconstitutional. The senators threatened to lodge constitutional challenges against the bill.

above 50%. For this reason, his detractors and the political opposition have not been pushing for the recall referendum. In fact, López Obrador has repeatedly challenged the opposition to request the referendum. But such a request has not been forthcoming.

This prompted López Obrador to call on legislators publicly to convene an extraordinary congressional session to debate the legislation enabling the referendum (which must stipulate who can request a referendum and how, and who will be responsible for organising it). Complaining that congress has had enough time to pass the secondary legislation since the approval of the constitutional reform in 2019, López Obrador accused legislators of "being scared of the people and democracy" and urged them to pass the necessary legislation to "schedule the referendum".

A day later, the Morena senate majority bench called for an extraordinary session to debate the matter. The session took place on 16 August and a bill was swiftly approved by the joint governance and legislative studies commission with the Morena majority on the commission voting in favour and the opposition against (*see sidebar*).

The bill stipulates that a referendum can be requested by the electorate (at least 3% of registered voters), congress (a third of legislators in either chamber), and by the president himself, and that for the result to be binding at least 40% of registered voters must participate. It can now be debated by the senate plenary. It is likely to be approved by the Morena majorities in the senate and the chamber of deputies. But should the enabling legislation be approved, and the referendum staged, it is debatable how much political gain López Obrador will get from the exercise.

The participation rate at the national public consultation was less than 10% and analysts doubt that the 40% participation rate will be reached in the recall referendum. Moreover, if the required participation threshold is reached the prospects of López Obrador obtaining more votes than the 30m he received in the 2018 presidential election are minimal given that his popularity is not what it was. Meanwhile, there is a possibility, albeit fairly remote, that López Obrador could be removed from power if a majority of votes cast in a binding vote favour this.

TRACKING TRENDS

MEXICO | Interest rates lifted. Mexico's central bank Banco de México (Banxico) lifted interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point on 12 August to 4.5%. This was the second straight increase, following a decision in June to lift interest rates by the same amount. In a split 3-2 vote, Banxico decided that it was necessary to increase interest rates in order to try and bring inflation down towards the annual target of 3%. Annual inflation stood at 5.81% in July.

Speaking in his morning press conference on 18 August, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said he agreed with Banxico's decision to try and contain inflation but criticised the bank for not focusing sufficiently on stimulating GDP growth.

MEXICO | Surge in agricultural exports. Mexico recorded its third largest agricultural surplus in the last 27 years in the first half of 2021, according to figures released by the agriculture and rural development ministry (Sader) on 16 August. Agricultural and agro-industrial exports totalled US\$22.59bn in the first half of the year, while imports amounted to US\$17.73bn, leaving a surplus of US\$4.86bn. The export figure is the highest for 29 years, according to Sader, eclipsing oil exports by US\$9.91bn over this period and tourism by US\$14.77bn.

In terms of value, the five products contributing most to the export figure were beer (US\$2.67bn); avocados (US\$1.53bn); tequila and mezcal (US\$1.45bn); tomatoes (US\$1.20bn); and pepper (US\$896m).

Devastating earthquake compounds woes

With Haiti still reeling from the multifaceted political, security, and institutional crises, compounded by the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse (2017-2021) on 7 July, a 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck on 14 August, dealing a hammer blow to its chances of recovery. It also casts fresh doubt on the staging of presidential and legislative elections which the international community has long heralded as the way out of the various crises confronting the country, despite resistance from local civil-society groups.

According to the latest figures from the Haitian government, the earthquake has left more than 2,000 confirmed fatalities, over 12,000 people injured, and damaged or destroyed 130,000 homes, figures which are continuing to rise. While the earthquake was strongly felt in Port-au-Prince, no major damage was reported in the capital. Rather it was south-western Haiti which was hardest hit, particularly the departments of Sud and Grand'Anse, and their respective capitals Les Cayes and Jérémie, and the department of Nippes, notably the city of Anse à Veux. The government announced a 30-day national state of emergency on 14 August.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), despite its strength and depth, the quake was nothing like as catastrophic as the 7-magnitude earthquake which struck in 2010, the worst natural disaster in Haiti's history, which left over 300,000 dead and 1.5m injured and caused an estimated US\$7.9bn in damage. An 18 August OCHA update describes the dire health situation in the worst hit areas as the most pressing concern following the earthquake, as several hospitals have been damaged or destroyed, while those still operating are completely overwhelmed.

In the context of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, where less than 1% of Haiti's population has received their first jab of the vaccine, the displacement of thousands of people poses additional health risks. Ahead of the earthquake, the country was already facing a humanitarian crisis with over 4.4m Haitians, or about 40% of the population, requiring humanitarian assistance in 2021, following a year marked by the pandemic, tropical storm Laura, and the political crisis.

According to a recent World Food Programme (WFP) survey cited by OCHA in an 8 August statement, Haitian households have seen the price of fuel and local transportation costs rise by over 120% and 50% respectively since May 2021. The prices of staple food commodities have increased between 12% and 34% during the same period.

Gangs

Humanitarian organisations like OCHA have highlighted the complex security situation as a particular challenge in reaching affected areas - a reference to the presence of gangs, particularly in areas like Martissant in Port-au-Prince. Prior to Moïse's assassination, this had forced the displacement of thousands of people from the capital [[WR-21-27](#)].

An 18 August OCHA statement notes that "following successful negotiations, an initial convoy with government and UN personnel has reached affected areas in the southern peninsula, cut off by the presence of gangs and

Humanitarian assistance

As we go to press, Haitian government authorities and the UN are estimating that nearly 800,000 people have been affected by the earthquake, and that about half this number require some form of humanitarian assistance in the three affected departments of Sud, Grand'Anse, and Nippes.

Elections

While the US has repeatedly pushed for the elections to take place, including since President Moïse's assassination, the US national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, said in a press briefing on 17 August that "it's too early to tell what the impact on the political process of the earthquake is. We are in the process of assessing that".

persistent road blockages for months, with more convoys planned to deliver various humanitarian relief supplies."

Elections

As well as exacerbating existing humanitarian and health emergencies (*see box*), the earthquake casts further doubt on the staging of elections. Three days before it struck, the provisional electoral council (CEP) released its latest electoral calendar for presidential and legislative elections which, ahead of Moïse's assassination, had been scheduled for next month. According to the latest time frame, the first round of these elections would take place on 7 November, along with a referendum on a new constitution, which local civil-society groups, lawyers, and the international community have all rejected.

Since the earthquake, however, considerable doubt persists as to when these elections will go ahead. In an interview with the *Miami Herald* published on 15 August, Prime Minister Ariel Henry appeared to dismiss the new dates. "We do not have an election calendar," he said (*see sidebar*).

EL SALVADOR | POLITICS

Constitutional reform proposal unveiled

The commission tasked by President Nayib Bukele with drawing up changes to El Salvador's 1983 constitution has unveiled its proposed amendments. The draft document, which includes plans to amend presidential term limits and the process of changing the constitution itself has met with criticism from civil-society groups on various grounds. It is likely to fuel fears regarding Bukele's perceived authoritarianism, concerns which have gathered pace since the new ruling Nuevas Ideas-controlled legislative assembly took up its seats in May.

Last year President Bukele named Vice President Félix Ulloa to head up the commission to amend the constitution. Unveiled on 11 August, the 215 changes proposed by the panel include plans to increase the presidential term from five to six years; to permit presidential re-election after a single term out of office instead of two, as is currently the case; and to create a new constitutional court to replace the constitutional chamber of the supreme court of justice (CSJ), among other things.

The proposed amendments also allow for the possibility of introducing a recall referendum on elected presidents after three years, the halfway point of their mandate, and would synchronise the current three-year legislative periods with the six-year presidential term. Crucially, the commission also proposed a modification of the way that constitutional reforms can be approved. The existing 1983 constitution stipulates that a constitutional reform requires approval by a simple majority of 43 in one legislature and a two-thirds majority of 56 in the next in order to take effect. One change proposed by the panel is that future constitutional reforms would require approval by a single legislature, as well as by a public referendum.

Due to be presented to Bukele before 15 September, the proposed changes have met with criticism on various levels from civil-society groups. A joint statement released on 17 August by think tank Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho (Fespád), Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo (Funde), the local branch of NGO Transparency International (TI), and private sector lobby Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada (Anep), among others, said that while it is "valid" to update the constitution, the

Constitutional reform

“Making 200 reforms to the current constitution seems to me to be an anti-democratic manipulation, above all when the constitution has not been respected and those making the reform proposals are silent in the face of or applaud constitutional violations,” a member of the Instituto Universitario de Derechos Humanos (IDHUCA) of the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), José María Tojeria, said. “First respect, then reforms,” he added.

way in which it was being done and the context did not provide the requisite conditions of “democratic legitimacy”.

The statement highlights that the initiative was imposed from the presidency (which civil-society groups note breaches a constitutional article stipulating that this should be proposed by 10 or more national deputies). “It is impossible to trust those wishing to change the constitution,” the statement said, citing events such as Bukele’s incursion into the legislative assembly at the head of the military in February 2020 and the dismissal on 1 May of the CSJ’s constitutional chamber and attorney general that had held the Bukele government to task [WR-21-18]. The magistrates on the constitutional chamber declared their dismissals to be unconstitutional but their resolution was rescinded by their irregularly appointed replacements.

As well as contending that many of the changes are unnecessary, the signatories of the statement also take issue with the proposed amendment of the length of presidential terms. The constitution expressly forbids any reform to the article outlawing presidential re-election, which is a ‘cláusula pétrea’ (a ‘fixed clause’ that cannot be modified).

Opposition legislators from the right-wing Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Arena) and the left-wing Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), are deeply suspicious of Bukele’s intentions. FMLN deputy Anabel Belloso said they had not been consulted about the proposed constitutional reforms. She also expressed doubt about whether the public was consulted as claimed. There is no list of proposals made by the public to the commission, she said, or any criteria published for their consideration.

Markets nervous

The price of El Salvador’s bonds dropped to a nine-month low on 12 August, in the wake of the unveiling of the controversial constitutional reform package in the country. International markets are already nervous regarding the government’s plan to make the cryptocurrency, Bitcoin, legal tender, and the impact that this might have on its ability to strike a financial arrangement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) [WR-21-24].

On 30 July the international ratings agency Moody’s downgraded El Salvador’s long-term foreign-currency issuer and senior unsecured ratings from ‘B3’ to ‘Caa1’. The outlook remains ‘negative’. Moody’s cited two key factors behind the downgrade: the fact that access to financial markets is likely to remain constrained ahead of debt repayments falling in 2023, and “a deterioration in the quality of policymaking that has intensified implementation risks to the authorities’ fiscal adjustment plans and increased uncertainty about financing prospects”.

Moody’s said that while authorities in El Salvador have shown willingness to achieve fiscal consolidation, this is in question due to liquidity pressures likely to arise from limited access to funding and uncertainty surrounding fresh financing from the IMF. It adds that while authorities are likely to continue enacting measures to achieve further, gradual fiscal consolidation, public debt ratios remain elevated at 89.2% of GDP as of the end of 2020.

Given large financing needs, which Moody’s estimates will be in excess of 15% of GDP in 2022, and upcoming debt redemptions in subsequent years, identifying sources of financing against a backdrop of tight liquidity will be a key credit challenge. Even if an agreement with the IMF unlocks fresh multilateral financing, Moody’s expressed concern that “implementation risks and policy missteps could undermine market sentiment, potentially increasing risks to bondholders”.

Vice President Félix Ulloa was dismissive in response to the decline in the price of bonds and the Moody’s report. “There is a hidden political agenda to damage the government’s image, especially its international image,” Ulloa said, adding that “no market is going to react by increasing country risk on the basis of something that has not even happened yet but is under discussion.” He also denied that the reform sought to concentrate power in the hands of the presidency to benefit Bukele.

Giammattei compelled to act amid Covid surge

Guatemala's President Alejandro Giammattei has announced a 30-day state of calamity amid a new surge in coronavirus (Covid-19) cases, attributed to the more infectious Delta variant. Medical associations had been urging his government to act as Guatemala continues to register new records for daily infections. However, the move, which suspends civil liberties, comes as protesters continue to call for Giammattei's resignation, as well as that of the attorney general, Consuelo Porras. While the calls were sparked by the dismissal of Juan Francisco Sandoval, the head of the attorney general's special anti-corruption unit (Feci) [\[WR-21-30\]](#), the government's pandemic response and alleged irregularities surrounding the vaccine rollout have also been a major complaint of protesters.

Announced on 13 August, the state of calamity limits freedom of movement and constitutional freedoms. Among other things, it introduced a curfew between 10pm and 4am; provides for expediting the purchase of supplies to address the pandemic; establishes minimum and maximum prices for essential goods; and bans mass meetings, although demonstrations compliant with social distancing measures are permitted. The announcement came four days after President Giammattei confirmed the presence of the Delta variant in the country, which on 11 August registered its highest ever daily total of new infections (4,618). Indicative of the strain on hospitals, in an interview with a local radio station *Emisoras Unidas*, broadcast on 9 August, the deputy health minister Francisco Coma said that occupation of the national hospital network was in excess of 95%. The following day Gerardo Hernández, the executive director of one of the main public hospitals in Guatemala City, San Juan de Dios, urged people to seek medical attention elsewhere for the next 48 hours due to an outbreak of Covid-19 infections within the hospital itself.

With hospitals reaching saturation point, on 10 August the association of infectious diseases (Agei) issued a statement warning that the virus was out of control, and serious cases and fatalities would increase "imminently". As well as criticising the government for relaxing prevention measures and decrying a "total absence of mitigation measures on the part of governmental authorities", the Agei urged the government to take action and to speed up the vaccination process, complaining of limited progress in immunising the population despite "better availability" of vaccines. Just 3.02% of Guatemala's population was fully vaccinated as of 16 August – the lowest rate in Central America. The declaration of the state of calamity, however, has failed to silence government critics. In a video which went viral on 16 August, Griselda López, a doctor at a hospital in Puerto Barrios, Izabal department, described the new measures as a "joke" for Guatemala's doctors and urged the government to hire more medical staff.

TRACKING TRENDS

HONDURAS | Economic activity picks up. The economy expanded by 20.9% year-on-year in June 2021, according to the monthly economic activity index (Imae) released by Honduras's central bank (BCH) on 13 August. This is the fourth consecutive month of GDP growth in the country after year-on-year expansions of 30.5% in May, 27.0% in April, and 13.5% in March.

According to the BCH, GDP growth increased by 12.4% in the first half of 2021 compared with the same period in 2020 and was driven by hotels & restaurants (45.8%), manufacturing (29.8%), and mining & quarries (24.8%). Livestock, agriculture and fishing continued to contract (-4.1%).

Honduras's economy shrank by 9.0% in 2020. The latest (July 2021) forecast by the Economic Commission for Latin America & the Caribbean (Eclac) forecasts that Honduras's GDP will grow by 5% in 2021.

Anti-government protests continue

On 9 August a leading Guatemalan indigenous organisation, Comité de Desarrollo Campesino (Codeca) staged protests across the country calling for President Giammattei and Attorney General Porras to resign. It was the third time in the last 15 days that people took to the streets to protest Juan Francisco Sandoval's dismissal at the head of the Feci.

POSTSCRIPT

Chile's Boric wobbles on pensions

Switching opinion in the middle of a presidential campaign can be politically risky. Gabriel Boric has done a bit of a U-turn on pension withdrawals in Chile and the other candidates in the presidential race have been quick to accuse him of opportunism.

At issue is a bill making its way through congress which would allow contributors to Chile's privatised pension system to make their fourth withdrawal of up to 10% of their pension capital. The background is that private pensions have been inadequate, averaging well below the minimum wage. Withdrawing capital has been an electorally popular short-term fix, but one that leads to long-term pension shortfalls. All presidential hopefuls know that major pension reform is going to be one of the next government's big priorities.

Speaking in June, Boric, the candidate of the left-wing Apruebo Dignidad (AD) coalition, had said that he would oppose a fourth draw-down since it was better and fairer to cover cases of need through the emergency family income programme (IFE). However, by August his position had changed: he began arguing that a fourth withdrawal was acceptable if the money received was deemed taxable.

Boric's opponents claimed this was a case of electoral opportunism. Sebastián Sichel, his main rival from the ruling right-of-centre Chile Vamos coalition, described Boric's change of position as "incredible" and accused his rival of "seeking easy applause to win an election". Labour Minister Patricio Melero said Boric had changed positions because he had been told there was more electoral upside from supporting the withdrawal. Criticism also came from more moderate left-wing presidential hopefuls. Paula Narváez, who opposes a fourth withdrawal, and who is seeking the nomination of the Unidad Constituyente (UC) coalition, lamented Boric's lack of consistency. Yasna Provoste, another candidate for UC presidential nomination, made the point that 4m families have already drawn down all their pension capital and remain in financial hardship, so reliance on the universal IFE programme is better.

Boric admitted his position had changed but positioned it as a sign of his ability to maintain an open mind. All the candidates are supporting more state funding for pensions. Boric wants to replace the privatised system with a state universal basic pension equivalent to the minimum wage, while Sichel proposes topping up the privatised system with an additional employers' contribution equivalent to 6% of salary levels.

Quotes of the week

“You'll never have to hear me apologising for kneeling before the IMF and plunging the country, and generations of Argentines into debt.”

Argentina's President Alberto Fernández goes on the attack against the opposition after awkward revelations that it was one rule for him, his family, and friends, and one rule for everyone else during the pandemic.

“L'Union fait la force.”
Haiti's Ariel Henry tweets the country's motto 'strength through unity' in response to the second powerful earthquake to strike the country in just 11 years.

“Terrorism in Peru was started by the navy, and that can be demonstrated historically, and they have been trained for that by the CIA.”
Comments made earlier this year that led to the resignation this week of Peru's new foreign minister, Héctor Béjar.

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