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Short honeymoon awaits Brazil's victorious Rousseff

Few of even President Dilma Rousseff's most ardent supporters would claim charisma is one of her principal electoral assets. Still, even by those standards, her victory speech on the evening of 26 October, following the closest presidential election in Brazil since 1894, was remarkably graceless. After berating the malfunctioning microphone, and expressing irritation at her supporters' wild enthusiasm, Rousseff gave a speech calling for "dialogue" which neglected to mention her opponent, Aécio Neves, or even acknowledge the 48.3% of the electorate who voted for him.

For Neves and the opposition centre-right Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB) the vote was agonisingly close. The final opinion polls, published the day before the election, showed Neves gaining ground once again on President Rousseff, of the left-wing Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT). Many of Neves's supporters genuinely believed in the possibility of victory. But it was not to be. In crude, simplistic terms the vote split the country in half, with the north and north-east voting for Rousseff, and the south, south-east and centre-west backing Neves. But crucially, Rousseff won Minas Gerais, the state where Neves served two terms as governor.

His failure to win in Minas (and his loss in Rio de Janeiro) was fatal to his chances of winning the presidency. According to Carlos Augusto Montenegro, the president of Ibope, one of Brazil's main pollsters, the Neves campaign bet too heavily on strong anti-petista sentiment, while simultaneously promising to maintain the government's successful social programmes. References to "poor, uninformed" PT voters by former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003) did not help to dispel the image of the PSDB as out-of-touch elitists.

Acknowledging the defeat, Neves argued that he had "played his part" in the campaign and urged Rousseff to heal the divide in the country. In her victory speech, Rousseff admitted no such division but said that she was open to "dialogue". In fact, her speech exemplified the limits of her power. The first few minutes were taken up with thanking former president Lula da Silva (2003-2010), without whose electoral potency Rousseff might not have crossed the line, and then all of her coalition allies, who will expect continued rewards for their support.

'Mais mudanças' or 'more changes' was one of Rousseff's election campaign slogans, and the word 'change' dominated the presidential debates more than any other. For Rousseff, delivering on this promise of change requires political reform, and she restated her desire to pursue this immediately after the results came through. However, previous attempts at political reform, particularly campaign finance reform (arguably the greatest source of corruption in Brazil), stalled in congress last year.

Already there are signs the president will struggle to get her way. The PT itself is slightly weaker in congress, having lost 18 seats; its principal ally, the

Abstention

Although voting is obligatory in Brazil, the punishment for abstention is a fine of R\$3 (US\$1.22). According to the supreme electoral court, around 30m Brazilians abstained, some 21.08% of the total; a figure very similar to the number who abstained in 2010.

Partido Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB) lost five, while the PSDB won 10 more. Congress as a whole is even more fragmented, with 28 parties winning seats in this election, up from 22 in 2010. Aloysio Nunes, Neves's vice-presidential candidate, has already indicated that the PSDB will be a "firm" opposition, and warned Rousseff "not to expect a honeymoon".

More worryingly for the president, the PMDB, conflicted at the best of times over its support for the PT, has been rallying opposition to the government's attempts to drum up support for a symbolic bill on political reform. On 28 October Henrique Eduardo Alves, the PMDB leader in the lower chamber, thwarted a bill which sought to enshrine in law the proposal that federal administrative bodies "ought to consider...popular participation as a method of government". Effectively the bill would open a way to introducing a plebiscite on political reform, in which voters would be consulted ahead of any changes. In response to the defeat, the government said that a referendum on political reform pre-approved by congress would also suffice.

The economy

While political reform may be much-needed, its impact is likely to be medium to long-term. More immediately, Rousseff needs to focus on the economy, specifically on inflation, now over target at 6.75%; a widening budget deficit, and sluggish growth, predicted to come in at just 0.3% this year. Both the Bovespa stock index and the Real suffered sharp falls last week, as the opinion polls showed Rousseff consolidating her lead. With her victory already priced in, the stock market fell just 2.77% on the first day of trading after the result, and the Real weakened 2% against the US dollar; but both have recovered since then.

Investors are watching carefully to see who will replace Guido Mantega, Rousseff's current finance minister who is due to stand down at the end of the year. Mantega was widely disliked by the markets for indulging in recon-dite accountancy, and for his perceived weakness in the face of Rousseff's opinions on economic policy. Investors are therefore waiting to see whether his replacement is both less interventionist and more strong-willed. Rousseff herself has given little indication she believes her economic policies need a radical overhaul. Alexandre Tombini, the central bank president, is expected to remain. During the election campaign, Rousseff made clear that she does not believe in central bank independence.

But one development may alter her thinking. Lula has already let his aides know that he intends to stand in 2018. Though Rousseff is very much Lula's protégé, she demonstrated a significant independent streak once in power, ignoring his requests to change her economic team. With Lula now eyeing a return to the Planalto, he has already indicated that he expects a greater say in Rousseff's second term, not least to ensure favourable conditions for his run in four years' time.

According to government sources quoted in the local media, Rousseff intends to announce her new economic team ahead of the G-20 summit in Australia on 15 and 16 November. Publicly, the president has only said she will make a decision before Christmas ahead of being sworn in for her second term on 1 January. Among the names being discussed for finance minister are Nelson Barbosa, a former executive secretary of the treasury who fell out with Mantega in 2013; Rossano Maranhão, the former president of Banco do Brasil; and the current president of Banco Bradesco, Luiz Carlos Trabuco.

PMDB wins most governorships

Just as the number of parties in congress has multiplied, so too has the number of parties winning state governorships. In 2010, six parties controlled at least one state, and the so-called G-4, comprising the PMDB, the PT, the PSDB and the Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB) ran 19 of Brazil's 27 states. Now, nine parties run at least one state, including the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT), the Partido Comunista do Brasil (PCdoB), the Partido Progressista (PP), Partido Social Democrático (PSD) and the Partido Republicano da Ordem Social (PROS).

Pezão's meagre victory

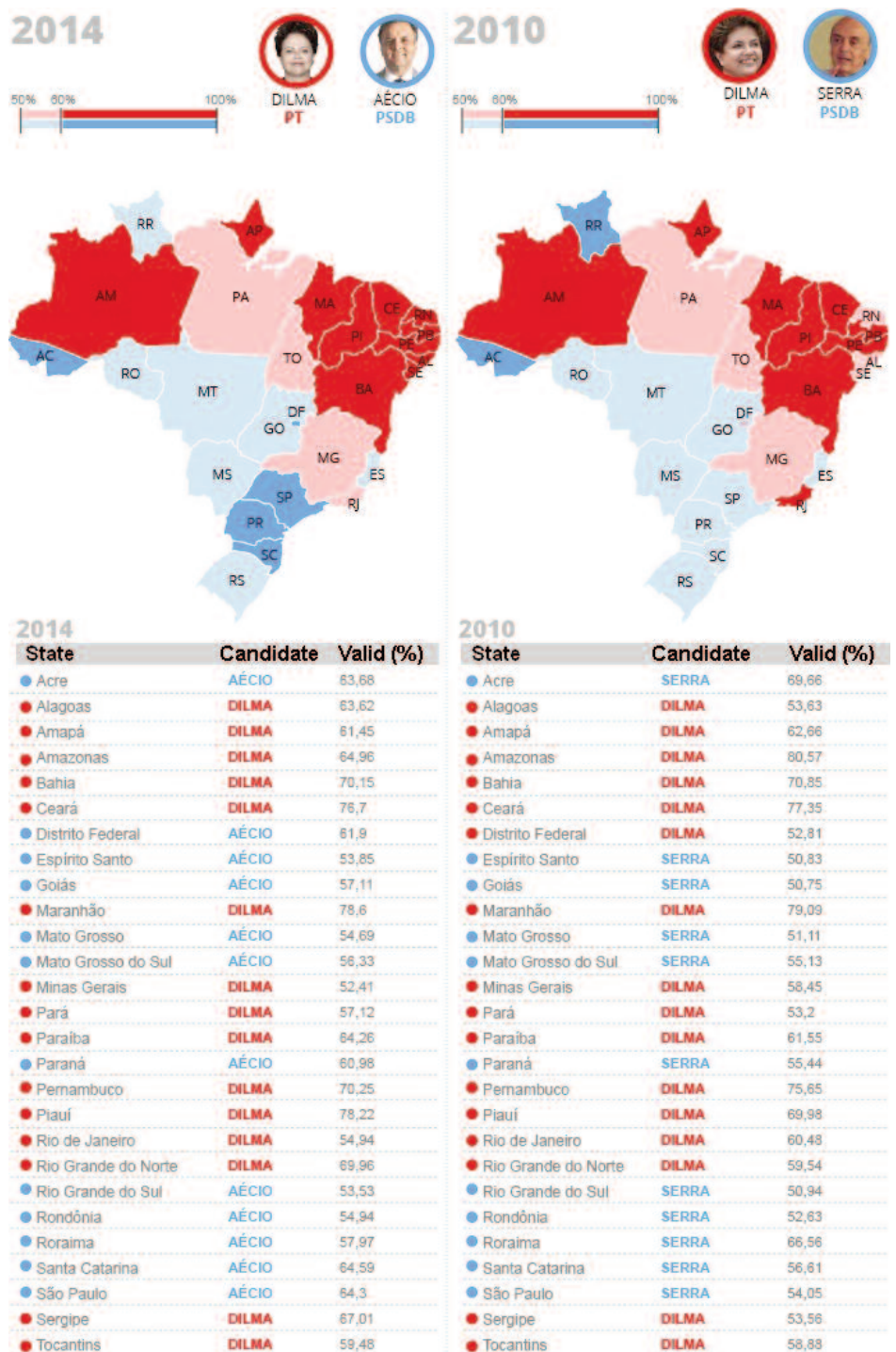
In the election for governor of Rio de Janeiro, the real victor was none-of-the-above. In terms of overall number of votes, 4,348,950 people voted null, blank or abstained; 5,000 more than voted for the eventual winner, Luiz Fernando Pezão, who won with 55.78% of the valid votes. The lack of enthusiasm for Rio's politicians could manifest itself on the streets of Rio before long, as the city's major transformations, and evictions, continue ahead of the 2016 Olympics.

Image Source: Brazil's Globo

The PMDB was the only party to increase its number of state governorships. It won in Rio de Janeiro, the third-most populous state, where Luiz Fernando Pezão carried off the nimble trick of distancing himself from the widely perceived elitism of his predecessor, Sérgio Cabral, while embracing his political legacy. In Rio Grande do Sul, the PMDB's Ivo Sartori forced the PT candidate, Tarso Genro, out of office. The PT won five states, the same number as in 2010.

The PSDB was the big loser. Despite gaining seats in the lower chamber of congress, it lost three state governorships and now controls just five. The PSB also saw its number of states shrink from six to three. With the exception of the eight states controlled by the PSDB and the PSB, all the other winning parties are part of the ruling PT-led coalition.

A number of the victors face outstanding charges for acts of political corruption, which could, in theory, bar them from taking office. In Rio, the losing candidate, Marcello Crivella, from the Partido Republicano Brasileiro (PRB), is contesting the validity of Pezão's victory on the grounds of the 13 outstanding charges against him. The electoral court has two weeks to decide if any of the winners should be prevented from taking office.



FA clings on to majorities**Radical Left**

The small radical left-wing Unidad Popular (UP) has finally won congressional representation taking one seat in the lower chamber after the party's presidential candidate, Gonzalo Abella, won 1.1% of the vote, just over 25,000 votes, two-thirds more than in 2009. Eduardo Rubio will serve as the UP's deputy. Rubio is a member of the UP's Movimiento 26 de Marzo, which left the ruling FA because of internal disputes during the Vázquez administration (2005-2010), which it accused of embracing neoliberalism.

It will take something very special from Luis Alberto Lacalle Pou, of the main opposition Partido Nacional (PN; Blancos), to deny the ruling left-wing Frente Amplio (FA) coalition a third straight term in power in a run-off on 30 November. The FA presidential candidate, former president Tabaré Vázquez (2005-2010), won much the same number of votes as all of his rivals combined in the first round of presidential elections on 26 October and heads into the run-off against Lacalle Pou a strong favourite. Vázquez will also be buoyed by the knowledge that for the second time in a row the political opposition fell one seat short of depriving the FA of a majority in the lower chamber and the senate in the concurrent congressional elections.

Vázquez won 47.90% of the vote, not enough to win in the first round, which requires a majority of 50% plus one, but some five percentage points more than most opinion pollsters had predicted. Lacalle Pou needed to finish within 12 percentage points of Vázquez to have a decent chance of winning in the run-off. As it was he finished 17 points back on 30.96% of the vote. The difference is almost insurmountable. The third-placed candidate, Pedro Bordaberry of the Partido Colorado (PC; Colorados), sealed an alliance with Lacalle Pou with a warm embrace within three hours of the release of the preliminary results but he only won a disappointing 12.92% of the vote.

It was widely predicted that the small Partido Independiente (PI) would provide the balance of power, and would be in a position to dictate terms to Vázquez and Lacalle Pou for an electoral alliance in the run-off campaign. But even though the perennial PI presidential candidate, Pablo Mieres, won a greater percentage of the vote than ever before, 3.07%, and the party will gain one more seat in the lower chamber and its first senate seat (*see below*), Vázquez still won 1,108,839 votes, nearly 22,000 votes more than the combined total of the PN, the PC and the PI.

Supporters of the more right-wing PC would have transferred en masse to Lacalle Pou but he faces a tall order to rally them all to his cause given his slightly underwhelming performance and widespread opposition despondency at effectively being consigned to the political wilderness for another five years. The congressional results showed the FA winning 50 of the 99 seats in the lower chamber and 15 of the 30 senate seats (an additional senate seat will be awarded to the eventual Vice-President so if Vázquez wins election, the FA will secure a majority here too). This means that yet again the FA will be able to use its majorities to ride roughshod over opposition efforts to hold the government to account by means of legislative investigations into alleged mismanagement, or even corruption, in public administration.

The greatest hope for Lacalle Pou is that the FA falls prey to overconfidence. In his initial reaction to the results Vázquez mooted seeking electoral alliances in the second round in the hunt for extra votes, but after it was confirmed that the FA would have a majority, the FA president, Mónica Xavier, said it would not forge any alliances but only look to win popular support. The number of blank ballots cast was also very low offering little to gain for Lacalle Pou there; abstention of 10%—some 270,000 of those registered to vote—offers slightly more hope.

Internal challenge

If he wins, Vázquez will not have it all his own way in congress, however. His biggest challenge could come from within the FA, a disparate coalition comprising parties ranging from the moderate to the radical Left. Vázquez represents the moderate wing of the coalition, but it is the radicals that performed best in the elections. A bloc of eight parties, including President

Plebiscite

A narrow majority of 53% voted against reducing the age of sentencing from 18 to 16 for crimes such as homicide and rape in a plebiscite held simultaneously with the elections. The plebiscite was promoted by the right-wing Colorados and staunchly opposed by the ruling left-wing FA.

José Mujica's Movimiento de Participación Popular (MPP) and the Partido Comunista de Uruguay (PCU), formed in 2013 to force "a move to the Left" in FA policymaking. This bloc won 56% of the FA vote, and will have nine of the 15 FA senators and a majority of FA deputies in the lower chamber.

Vázquez will resist any pressure brought to bear on him by the radicals in the FA, having argued back in April that there would be "no move to the Left" as in his view the FA was "a centre-left party", but they could well rebel and create real difficulties for him in congress. Many in the bloc feel that the FA has failed to use its 10 years in government to advance a genuine leftist agenda, elevating orthodox macroeconomic policies and fiscal stability over social justice.

Vázquez and the moderates argue that the main reason the FA is in a strong position to win a third straight term in power is because of its successful stewardship of the economy since the 2002 economic and financial crisis (with exceptional economic growth, significant growth in real wages, unemployment at historically low levels, and widely available credit) and the perception that he is a safe pair of hands on the tiller as the ship of state moves into choppy waters, with huge uncertainty about the economic and political future of Argentina over the course of the next year culminating in presidential elections there in October 2015.

Breakdown of Uruguay's congress				
	Lower chamber		Senate	
	2010	2015	2010	2015
Frente Amplio (FA)	50	50	17	16*
Partido Nacional (PN)	30	32	9	10
Partido Colorado (PC)	7	13	5	4
Partido Independiente (PI)	2	3	-	1
Unidad Popular (UP)	-	1	-	-
Total	99	99	31	31

* Assuming the FA retains the seat awarded to the Vice-President.

ARGENTINA | LAW & ORDER

A strange and convenient attack

The attack on federal prosecutor Carlos Stornelli that took place on 27 October is far from clear. But the arrest of seven Colombian nationals, four of whom had previous criminal convictions, has been used by the government to strengthen its case for a reform of the penal code. Currently under discussion in the senate, the government's bill would, if approved, result in a much tougher approach on bail and the deportation of foreign criminals.

Stornelli was travelling in a car near the Aeroparque, the small city airport in central Buenos Aires, when his bodyguards noticed the drivers of some of the surrounding vehicles were communicating in a suspicious way. According to the official report, when one of the bodyguards challenged one of the drivers, he opened fire, in an apparent attempted robbery. No one was injured but the incident ended after seven men were detained (accounts vary as to the number of suspects who escaped).

All seven of those caught, ranging in age from 19 to 44, are Colombian nationals, and four of them have criminal records in Argentina (one served time in Colombia as well). Three of the suspects are seeking bail; their lawyer argues that they are being stigmatised because they are Colombian. Following the news of their arrest, the security secretary, Sergio Berni, described foreign criminals as a "virus that has infected" the country. Decrying the current law, Berni said "they will probably be released this evening to rob again". They remain in custody.

No worries over reserves

The new president of Argentina's central bank, Alejandro Vanoli, said he is "not worried" about the levels of foreign reserves, currently at a record low of under US\$29bn. He pointed out that the value of the US dollar against the peso had fallen in recent weeks and that he was confident the year would end with higher reserve levels. "In 2014 we had a perfect storm, but expectations are changing now," Vanoli said.

Berni was speaking while the senate was taking evidence from Julio Alak, the justice minister, and his deputy over the new law. Alak argued that its main purpose was to reduce the time it takes to administer justice, and he pointed to statistics showing that six out of 10 Argentines in detention are facing charges, but have not been convicted. Alak said that 17 of Argentina's 23 provinces had made adjustments to their criminal code, and that the federal government needed to follow suit.

Under the government's proposal, once the case enters the criminal justice system, the prosecutor will have 15 days to decide whether to proceed with a prosecution. Once the process has been initiated, the prosecutor has a year to decide whether to take the case to trial. Any trial would have to take place within three years of the offence.

Article 35 of the proposed law states that any foreigner convicted of an offence and sentenced to over three years' imprisonment can be immediately deported. The government defended the proposal by arguing that the right to a family life would still be respected, and that currently 21.8% of prisoners in Argentine jails are foreign nationals (and 80% of those prisoners are accused of drug trafficking offences). The senate will continue to debate the bill next week, taking evidence from jurists and magistrates. The government hopes the bill will be approved by the end of November.

Some of the government's usual defenders have been highly critical of the proposals, while the largely hostile media has focused on the strange and fortuitous coincidence of the attack on Stornelli.

TRACKING TRENDS

CHILE | **Lacnic convention.** On 27 October the Latin American and Caribbean Network Information Centre (Lacnic), the regional internet registry managing body, opened a five-day convention in Santiago. The Lacnic convention is the most important event for the regional internet community as it gathers experts from across the region to discuss the future of the 'network of networks' and its administration in the region. This year's Lacnic also hosts the Latin American Network Operators Group (Lagnoc) 2014 convention, which represents the community of regional internet network operators to discuss issues related to the installation and operation of internet networks across the region.

One of the main discussion topics of this year's convention will be the region's upgrade of the Internet Protocol version 4 (IPv4), the current system that assigns a unique alfa-numerical address for each server, webpage and apparatus that helps to route Internet traffic. For a number of years now the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the NGO responsible for the coordination and maintenance of databases of unique identifiers related to the namespaces of the Internet, has been warning that IPv4 addresses are reaching their limit and that there is a need to migrate to a new system- IPv6, developed by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF).

The migration from IPv4 to IPv6 will represent the most significant challenge to the region's internet network over the next few years. According to Arturo Servín, content delivery manager for Google in Latin America and the Caribbean, IPv6 has currently been adopted by just 4.5% of internet users in Chile, Brazil and Peru; a "positive" figure compared to 2011. However, Servín said that there appears to be a "lack of awareness-raising" in the region about the importance of migrating to the new system. This lack of foresight could particularly affect businesses when the use of IPv6 is standardised. Lacnic attendees, such as Patricio Poblete, director of Chile's network information centre (NIC Chile), underscored the need for participating countries to adopt the new system. Poblete said that Chile has long been looking to upgrade to IPv6; something it brought to the attention of the wider Latin American community at the 2007 conference. Pedro Huichalaf, Chile's deputy minister of telecommunications, hailed Chile's role in transforming Latin America's internet network by hosting Lacnic 22.

Mockus speaks out

President Santos named his former rival for the presidency in 2010, Antanas Mockus, as a possible mediator between him and former president Uribe last week after Mockus expressed his incredulity in an interview with the national daily *El Tiempo* on 20 October that while the government is sitting down and talking to the guerrillas in Havana, the country's political leaders are incapable of meeting and speaking for the sake of the national interest. Mockus said this undermined the position of the State at the negotiating table and weakened internal support necessary for the peace accord. He added that politicians should have an ethical imperative to set an example for how dialogue should be conducted.

ANDEAN COUNTRIES

COLOMBIA | POLITICS & SECURITY

Farc leadership bolsters presence in Cuba

Four members of the seven-strong leadership committee of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Farc) are now in Cuba participating in the peace process. The presence of the Farc secretariat doubled with the arrival in Havana last week of 'Pastor Alape' (Felix Antonio Muñoz Lascarro) and 'Carlos Antonio Lozada' (Luis Antonio Lozada) at the head of a group of some 18 guerrillas, including several senior commanders. Many of these will join a sub-commission with representatives of every branch of the Colombian armed forces led by the head of the joint command, General Javier Flórez Aristizábal, to discuss the logistics of guerrilla disarmament and an eventual ceasefire.

'Pastor Alape' and 'Carlos Antonio Lozada' (an 'alternate' member of the secretariat and commander of the Farc's eastern bloc) join 'Pablo Catatumbo' (Jorge Torres Victoria) and the Farc's chief negotiator, 'Iván Márquez' (Luciano Marín Arango), in Cuba. In a sign that the Farc's commitment to peace is "as high as our mountain ranges", Márquez also revealed that four members of the Farc military command had arrived to sit on the sub-commission: 'Pacho Chino' (Édgar López Gómez), commander of the western or 'Alfonso Cano' bloc; 'Walter Mendoza' (José Vicente Lesmes), the second-in-command of 'Pablo Catatumbo', who was commander of the 'Alfonso Cano' bloc before heading to Cuba; 'Isaías Trujillo' (Luis Carlos Usuga), commander of the north-western bloc; and Rubín Morro (Martín Cruz Vega), head of the 'Aurelio Rodríguez' front operating in the western departments of Risaralda and Chocó.

In addition to these six senior Farc commanders, 'Romaña' (Henry Castellanos Garzón), who coordinates the actions of five eastern bloc 'fronts', will also sit on the sub-commission. Romaña's was the most controversial arrival. He acquired the infamous soubriquet 'the czar of kidnapping' for masterminding several mass kidnappings, including 61 members of the security forces (most of whom were then held hostage for three years) after a siege of the small town of Mitú, the capital of the south-eastern department of Vaupés, in 1998. He also orchestrated the kidnapping of the governor of Meta, Alan Jara, in 2001. Jara, who was held hostage for eight years, formed part of the third delegation of victims to travel to Cuba, on 1 October, to participate in the current phase of the talks dealing with compensation of victims of the armed conflict.

Senator and former president Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) savaged the arrival of the Farc commanders who he said would take part in the 'tenth terrorism conference in Havana', allowing the guerrilla group in the meantime "to reorganise and rearm, protected by the official discourse of peace". Uribe also tweeted that the presence of Romaña (who in 2012 was the most sought after criminal in Colombia) was an affront to the armed forces and kidnap victims. President Juan Manuel Santos acknowledged that it was "difficult to accept [...] seeing someone like Romaña strutting around [but] some very bitter pills have to be swallowed" in the interests of peace. He added, however, that the arrival of hardline Farc members was a sign that the talks had reached "the moment of truth".

During a radio interview on 22 October Uribe rejected an invitation from Santos to discuss the peace talks, calling it a "false gesture" (*see sidebar*). The very next day, however, Santos made a major gesture to one of his most prominent critics, the prosecutor general, Alejandro Ordóñez, often branded an *Uribista*. In a public forum attended by Ordóñez in Valledupar, the capital of the north-eastern department of Cesar, Santos welcomed three conditions

Council of state ruling

The council of state ruled that “those carrying out obligatory military service never cease being a citizen subject to the protection of their human rights, which the State must safeguard”. It also ruled that the word ‘victim’ extended to immediate family. It ordered that the State provide compensation of Col\$920m (US\$445,000) for the Farc attack on the Patascoy base, arguing that warnings had been received from the local population that such an attack could be imminent. It also ordered the attorney general’s office to investigate possible human rights violations at the base in view of reports of the conditions there having been inhumane.

for peace made by the prosecutor general: that the Farc disbands as a criminal organisation as soon as a peace accord is struck; that the Farc accepts it was responsible for numerous crimes; and that it attends to the rights of the victims of these crimes. “I guarantee you that if none of the conditions are met, a peace agreement will not be reached,” Santos said.

Only a week earlier Santos had brusquely dismissed as “inappropriate” a letter from Ordóñez seeking clarification on two visits to Cuba in recent months by the Farc’s top leader, ‘Timochenko’ (Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri), which were authorised by Santos. Santos’s surprising gesture in Valledupar was matched by Ordóñez who took indirect aim at Uribe and his Centro Democrático (CD) party for failing to debate the peace process. “It is absurd to have talks with the Farc but not with sectors critical of the peace process; but it is also absurd that those who criticise today, could talk with the AUC [the paramilitary Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia] yesterday, and now won’t talk to the government,” Ordoñez said.

Judicial rulings impact peace process

Two separate rulings by different Colombian institutions over the last week will have been received with different emotions by the Santos administration. The first ruling by the constitutional court (CC) is a big boost for the peace process. The CC ruled by six votes to three that ‘the referendum for peace’ approved by congress in December 2013 was constitutional. This empowers President Santos to call a referendum on the peace accord. It could be held alongside regional and municipal elections on 25 October next year, if the peace process has been concluded before then.

The second ruling, by the council of state, provides a potential spanner in the works. The council of state ruled that members of the armed forces are victims of the armed conflict in Colombia and should be incorporated into the Victims’ Law, opening the door to the military and police being entitled to compensation for attacks by guerrillas. This is problematic, especially at a time when the government and the Farc negotiating teams are thrashing out an accord in Cuba on compensation for victims of the armed conflict. Specifically, the council of state ruled that the State should apologise and recognise its responsibility for the deaths of three conscripts killed when 400 Farc guerrillas stormed a military mountaintop communications post at Patascoy, in the southern department of Nariño, in December 1997: 10 soldiers were killed in total and 18 kidnapped (*see sidebar*).

BOLIVIA | POLITICS

Wasting no time

With the dust yet to settle on the 12 October general elections (the supreme electoral court [TSE] has not even announced the final results), the first candidacies have been launched ahead of the regional and municipal elections which are expected to take place in March 2015. In the general elections, President Evo Morales and his Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) won in eight of Bolivia’s nine departments (losing only in Beni). Yet it remains to be seen how far the MAS, which has yet to confirm its candidates for key seats, will replicate this victory at a local level given the traditional strength of local opposition outfits able to exploit the tendency of voters to distinguish between local and national priorities.

On 20 October Percy Fernández, the mayor of Santa Cruz, the capital of the eponymous wealthy eastern department - the country’s second largest - became the first candidate officially to declare his bid ahead of the 2015 election. Currently in his second consecutive five-year term (having previously held the post between 1990 and 1994), Fernández will represent the citizen grouping, Santa Cruz Para Todos (SPT). As regards the department’s governorship, so far only Senator Germán Antelo of the right-wing Nuevo Poder Ciudadano (NPC) has announced that he will run.

Gender parity

Women's organisations like the *Coordinadora de la Mujer* are hailing the fact that women will account for 48% of Bolivia's new bicameral national legislature which will sit in January 2015 following the October general elections. According to the NGO, women will take up 65 of the 130 seats in the lower chamber and 16 of the 36 senate seats – the highest proportion in Bolivian history. The *Coordinadora* attributes this change to new electoral rules introduced in 2010 which establish gender parity. Of the total number of candidates registered on the electoral lists, 52% were women. According to the latest figures from the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America & the Caribbean (Eclac)'s gender observatory, 30.0% of cabinet positions in Bolivia are currently held by women, while 25.4% of legislators are female.

The current governor, Rubén Costas, who has been in his post since 2006, is also expected to stand again although he has yet to confirm his candidacy. Costas, who in the last regional and municipal elections in 2010 won on the ticket of his own Verdes movement, is also a member of the *Movimiento Demócrata Social (MDS)* which was launched in 2013 and comprises the rump of the former opposition governor's regional bloc, *Consejo Nacional Democrático*. Ahead of the October general election, the MDS struck an alliance with the *Unidad Nacional (UN)* to field as its presidential candidate the UN's leader, Samuel Doria Medina (who came second, winning 24.5% of the national vote). The UD and MDS confirmed this week that the alliance would remain in place for March's elections.

While the MAS is still to confirm its candidate for what remains a key strategic seat, the media is reporting that there are at least three names currently being floated - Nemesia Achacollo, the rural development minister; Silvia Lazarte, the *MASista* former president of the 2006-2007 constituent assembly; and Jaime Soliz, a former Santa Cruz prosecutor who recently joined the MAS.

Another key seat

Two days after Fernández launched his bid, another high-profile incumbent mayor, Luis Revilla, announced his intention to stand for re-election for his current La Paz seat. Revilla won in 2010 on the ticket of the left-wing opposition *Movimiento Sin Miedo (MSM)* which has held the La Paz mayoralty since 2000. However, as the MSM looks to have lost its legal status after winning less than 3% of the national vote in the general elections, Revilla has since announced the launch of a new party, *Soberanía y Libertad (SOL)*, for which he is currently in the process of gathering the 30,000 signatures necessary to register. This puts paid to the rumours surrounding Revilla's political future and allegiances. Various parties – including the MAS – had reportedly invited Revilla to be their mayoral candidate although President Morales denied these claims. A TSE spokesperson, Ramiro Paredes, told reporters that SOL must obtain legal status before December in order to participate as parties must be legally registered 90 days prior to elections.

The MAS has yet to confirm its candidate for either the mayoral seat or the governorship of La Paz which it currently holds through César Cocarico who could well stand for re-election. As regards the mayoral seat, two names are being bandied about - Guillermo Mendoza, a current MAS local councillor and César Dockweiler, the managing director of *Mi Teleférico*, the state-owned company in charge of the new cable-car system linking La Paz and El Alto.

Other key seats

Other high profile candidates to have thrown their hats into the ring include Rebeca Delgado, a former president of the national chamber of deputies (2012-2013), who broke with the MAS last year, after several run-ins with prominent MAS figures like Vice-President Alvaro García Linera, who she accused of authoritarianism. Delgado has announced she will run for the mayoralty of Cochabamba, the capital of the eponymous department - the country's third largest - with her own political outfit, *Libertad de Pensamiento para Bolivia (LPB)*, which presented the requisite 30,000 signatures to register on 17 October.

The local press is also speculating that former Beni governor, Ernesto Suárez, could run again in a bid to recover his old seat, from which he was forced to resign in May 2012 over what he claimed were trumped up corruption charges. Suárez ran as the UD's vice-presidential candidate in the October vote and, significantly, Beni was the one opposition hold-out in that election. Suárez's resignation as governor triggered fresh regional elections which took place in January 2013 and were won by Carmelo Lens who also hailed from Suárez's local *Primero Beni* movement. Lens convincingly defeated by 52 %-44% Jessica Jordan, the candidate for the MAS which has yet to confirm its candidate for the March 2015 vote.

Military consolidates its grip

Admiral Carmen Meléndez, the defence minister since July 2013 when she became the first woman to hold the post, has shifted across to the interior and justice ministry, after President Nicolás Maduro removed Army General Miguel Rodríguez Torres on 23 October. Meléndez, a powerful figure believed to be the ‘pulse’ of the military in the Maduro government, has been replaced at the defence ministry by General Vladimiro Padrino López, the powerful head of the armed forces’ strategic command. In the past 18 months the Venezuelan military has consolidated an unprecedented grip on the national government, while it is also in firm control of key state governorships in the country since regional elections a year ago.

There are some suggestions that Maduro’s latest moves - which also involved the removal of the entire high command in the Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas Penales y Criminales (CICPC), the investigative arm of the national police - were an effort to placate the pro-government armed militia groups known as ‘collectives’ (‘colectivos’) after a murky incident on 7 October in which a well-known Caracas collective leader, José Odreman, was killed in a shootout with CICPC officers.

In a video clip recorded during an eight-hour standoff and hostage situation with the CICPC, Odreman said he would hold Rodríguez responsible for whatever happened to him. After his death, Odreman’s ‘5 de Marzo’ collective demanded that Rodríguez resign by 23 October, warning of negative consequences otherwise. There have been suggestions of links between the Odreman/CICPC incident and the murder, not long before, of Robert Serra, a prominent young deputy for the ruling Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV) - the rumour being that Serra, a criminologist, was looking into police corruption. Both cases remain so shrouded in secrecy, however, that it is impossible to know.

The ‘5 de Marzo’ had planned a rally at the attorney general’s office on 23 October to push for Rodríguez to be removed. It was called off before Maduro made his announcement, suggesting the government had done a deal with the collectives. Oddly, Maduro did not say Rodríguez Torres had been sacked, but that he was taking a two-week holiday from his post, before moving on to other duties.

Observers are divided as to whether the colectivos—which see themselves as legitimate civilian defenders of the Bolivarian Revolution but are criticised by the opposition as a bunch of armed thugs given complete impunity—won this particular battle against CICPC/Rodríguez Torres-led efforts to rein them in, or whether a problem resides with the CICPC itself (as Odreman and others from the PSUV base, notably including the journalist José Vicente Rangel, have hinted). Whatever the truth, the Venezuelan military is pulling many of the strings in the situation, and may seek to assert, on behalf of the civilian state, a monopoly on the use of force in the country.

Police reform?

As interior and justice minister, Admiral Meléndez automatically becomes head of the general council of the police (Congepol), established in 2008 under an organic law of the police, which was meant to launch a wholesale reform of policing in Venezuela but has delivered precious few results on the ground. Congepol is tasked with “helping to define, plan and coordinate public policies on policing” (*see sidebar*).

Police reform

The eight-member general council of the police (Congepol) was given permanent status in January 2012; it meets every 15 days and the interior minister can call emergency sessions. Congepol comprises the minister as president, along with a representative of state governors, mayors, the public ombudsman and the attorney general’s office, plus three policing experts.

Congress takes action to tackle regional corruption

Popular measure, limited impact

The president of the association of mayors for the metropolitan region of Arequipa, Omar Candia Aguilar, criticised the congressional bill barring re-election at a regional and local level, arguing that it was no guarantee against corruption. "Someone who is corrupt will always take advantage of their position, even if it is just for four years. The difference is that now they will do it more quickly," he said. Other mayors complained that many of them would suffer for the sins of a few, and that the new measure would imperil the continuity of policymaking carried out by efficient and competent mayors.

Just a matter of weeks after regional and local elections in Peru, the national congress has comprehensively approved a bill barring regional presidents and mayors from running for consecutive re-election. Opinion polls suggest this is a very popular measure. How effective it will actually be at targeting corruption and inefficiency is a decidedly moot point.

In addition to barring consecutive re-election the bill reforming regional and local politics will also see regional presidents downgraded to 'regional governors' and stipulates that they could be summoned to the national congress and held to account. The bill also retains the provision for a recall referendum, such as that faced by Susana Villarán, the outgoing mayor of Lima, last year. The bill was approved by 97 votes to 0 against with 10 abstentions. Because it reforms the constitution it will also need to be approved in the next legislative session beginning in March 2015 in order to enter into force but given that not one deputy opposed it this should be straightforward. The changes would take effect in time for the next regional and local elections in 2018.

The president of the national electoral council (JNE), Francisco Távara, congratulated congress which he said had taken the first step towards "the reform the people are demanding". He said it would "relieve political tension unleashed through the excessive ambition of those who try to impose their re-election through anti-democratic measures". The JNE is also calling on congress to approve a new political parties' law and a law on rights of participation.

Marisol Pérez Tello, a deputy for the conservative Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC), explained that her party had abstained from voting in favour of the changes because it did not feel the reform gets to the root of the problem. "Corruption has to be pursued, and re-election is not the solution," Pérez Tello said. She has a point. Of the 100 regional presidents elected between 2002 and 2014, only 12 were re-elected so this is clearly not the sole cause of corruption and inefficiency at a regional and local level in Peru. The reform does not address the problem of hundreds of candidates facing legal charges, some for corruption, narco-trafficking and even terrorism, who registered to compete in the elections earlier this month.

The electoral authorities have also made suggestions to congress to reform the rules and regulations for the registration of local and regional political movements and to strengthen national parties, with heavy penalties for those which fail to meet established standards of financial transparency, or if party candidates are found to be guilty of any crime. National deputies have shied away from approving reforms which would create stronger national institutions to provide more efficient oversight of parties and improve the quality of candidates.

The president of the southern region of Puno, Mauricio Rodríguez, struck back at the national congress by saying that re-election of national deputies should also be outlawed. He claimed that the reform had no legal basis because re-election should be decided by popular will. Congress was responding to public sentiment, however, when it approved the reform: a recent nationwide poll conducted by Ipsos Perú showed that 72% of the Peruvian public approved of the proposal to ban the immediate re-election of regional presidents and mayors. If the survey had included re-election to congress, the result would probably have been very similar but national deputies argue that as they do not command a budget they cannot misuse public funds in the same way as regional presidents and mayors.

Ortega

Rogelio Ortega had been the general secretary of the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero (Uagro) since 2010. Although currently not affiliated to any political party, he is a former registered member of the PRD and has always been identified with the radical Left. Some local legislators questioned Ortega's appointment as interim governor because of this radical past. Ortega joined the (now disbanded) Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR) leftist guerrillas in the 1970s. In 2009 he was accused by the PGR of being the conduit between Mexican insurgent movements and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Farc) guerrillas, after his name appeared in emails recovered from the computers of the deceased Farc second-in-command, 'Raúl Reyes' (Luis Edgar Devia). Ortega has always denied this.

Guerrero follows Michoacán's lead

After weeks of public pressure the governor of the state of Guerrero, Angel Aguirre Rivero, took a leave of absence on 23 October to allow for the investigations into the disappearance of trainee teachers from the town of Iguala to proceed under an interim administration. Guerrero is the second Mexican state, after neighbouring Michoacán, to see its governor step down this year as a result of a major security crisis that quickly turned into a political one. President Enrique Peña Nieto will be hoping that, as in Michoacán, the establishment of an interim administration in Guerrero allows the federal authorities to better tackle the crisis, the latest example of the significant challenges his government faces when it comes to fighting corruption and organised crime.

Aguirre's decision came just under a month after the Iguala students disappeared on 26 September. Protesters, who have been staging mass demonstrations in Guerrero and elsewhere demanding that the federal and state authorities find the missing students and for Aguirre to resign, called nationwide demonstrations on 26 October to up the pressure. Aguirre's departure also came as the federal congress began debating a motion tabled by the right-wing opposition Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) to remove Aguirre from his post over his administration's poor handling of the Iguala crisis. Given that federal senators from the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) backed the motion and that Aguirre has been steadily losing the support of the left-wing Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), on whose ticket he was elected back in 2011, it looked increasingly likely that Aguirre would eventually be removed should he continued to cling on to office (*see sidebar*).

Tellingly, Aguirre said that he had decided to request an indefinite leave of absence to Guerrero's congress (which effectively amounts to a resignation as the state is due to hold gubernatorial elections in June 2015) to "favour the political climate" both at the state and national levels; and for the Iguala investigations to continue completely unhindered. Aguirre, who denies any involvement in the Iguala incident, has not been directly implicated in the disappearances but after it became clear that the local gang, Guerreros Unidos, had infiltrated various municipal governments in the state, questions began to arise over whether this problem extended to the state government itself.

Assuming political responsibility

Aguirre tried to fend off such accusations [WR-14-42]. But as the crisis continued to spread with more and more municipal government officials and police officers arrested, Aguirre's efforts increasingly looked like attempts to dodge any political responsibility. After the federal attorney general, Jesús Murillo Karam, whose office (PGR) is now leading the Iguala investigations, remarked that it was clear that Guerreros Unidos had managed to "weave a network of complicity" with Guerrero's state authorities under Aguirre's watch, the governor was left with little defence.

However, Aguirre did take a parting shot at the federal authorities. Arguing that the federal government lacked a cohesive national security strategy, he said that his administration had "relentlessly" fought against organised crime but that it was ultimately defeated by an enemy with far more resources. Aguirre added that following his departure, "the priority must be to continue searching for the disappeared and guarantee that those responsible for these serious human rights violations are punished".

Federal congress pressure

On 21 October PRI and PAN senators called on Governor Aguirre to resign as Mexico's senate began discussing his potential removal. Speaking on behalf of the PRI, Senator Arturo Zamora deplored the state government's handling of the Iguala case and suggested that governability in Guerrero had broken down. Zamora then called for Aguirre to "assume political responsibility and step down to help establish social peace in Guerrero". Until that point the PRI had been reluctant to push for Aguirre's departure, concerned that this could lead to a confrontation with the PRD, which currently holds the federal senate's presidency. With the PRI holding a simple majority in the federal senate, followed by the PAN, Aguirre's removal looked like a foregone conclusion.

Such remarks were clearly intended to pressure the federal authorities to assume their responsibility in failing to prevent the crisis by more effectively fighting organised crime and the high levels of official corruption across the country that allow it to have become so entrenched. They should also increase the pressure on the PGR and Murillo in particular to find the disappeared. It is worth noting that national PAN and PRD legislators have already called for Murillo to resign for the PGR's lack of progress in finding the disappeared or all the material and intellectual actors of the abductions.

Distributing blame

The three main parties reacted to Aguirre's comments. Ricardo Anaya, the PAN's interim party president, said that Aguirre's decision to step aside was the right one, but added that it did not provide "a definitive solution" to the crisis. Anaya said that he did not wish to politicise the issue, but that "more action needs to be taken to resolve the underlying institutional and security crisis in Guerrero... and that all levels of government must assume their responsibilities". Significantly, the PAN recently presented a proposal for a new national anti-corruption initiative, which it is now trying to get through the national congress (see box).

Anaya may have avoided directly confronting the federal government but PRD Deputy Silvano Aureoles did not. Aureoles, the president of the federal chamber of deputies, also hailed Aguirre's decision and echoed Anaya's assertions that this alone would not "resolve the problem". He said that the Iguala disappearances, like the persisting violence in Michoacán, Tamaulipas and the Estado de México force all political actors to "re-evaluate" what is going on in the country. "Let's not kid ourselves, the problem of infiltration by organised crime does not just affect one municipality, I don't think any municipality in Guerrero is immune, or in Michoacán or in the Estado de México, consequently it is a deeper and structural problem," Aureoles said. He then called on the federal government to come up with new initiatives to fight insecurity and corruption at the municipal and state levels more efficiently.

The PRI lashed back with statements from the leaders of the federal senate and the federal chamber of deputies. Senator Emilio Gamboa Patrón said that all those "political leaders that backed José Luis Abarca as the PRD candidate for the mayoralty of Iguala, are not free from responsibility". In particular, Gamboa said that suspicion of Abarca's links to organised crime had emerged in 2012 and that this was "ignored". Deputy Manlio Fabio Beltrones went even further, accusing all those politicians that backed Abarca of being his "accomplices".

Amid such tensions, there were serious concerns that the representatives of the three main parties in the Guerrero state congress would fail to reach consensus on who should be elected as interim governor to see out Aguirre's term. In the end, on 26 October, Guerrero's congress opted for the somewhat controversial figure of local academic, Rogelio Ortega Martínez (see sidebar). Like the interim governor in Michoacán, Ortega is now in charge of leading the efforts to clean up Guerrero's municipal governments and restore order to the state (unlike in Michoacán, Peña Nieto has not yet appointed a federal commissioner in charge of coordinating the state government's actions).

National anti-corruption system

In a 20 October press conference the PAN's interim president, Ricardo Anaya, unveiled a new party proposal to set up a national anti-corruption system. Anaya explained that the proposal consists of creating a new national council on the matter, comprised of public organisations and civil society representatives, which will monitor the actions of elected officials across the country. The proposal also calls for strengthening the public oversight body (SFP), as well as the creation of two new independent bodies to audit the management of public resources. The initiative has been welcomed by PRI legislators and should soon be debated in congress.

Continuing to patch up relations

High-level delegations from Haiti and the Dominican Republic (DR) met in Port-au-Prince last week for bilateral talks. This is the fourth such round of talks, which have been taking place since January [WR-14-01], aimed at overcoming strains caused by the contentious September 2013 ruling by the DR's constitutional court (TC) that children of non-resident foreign nationals born in the DR before 2010 do not have the right to Dominican nationality. While another related ruling by the Costa Rican-based Inter-American court of human rights (CorteIDH) against the DR is threatening to reignite these tensions, the meeting took place amid other signs that bilateral relations are on the mend.

The 22 October meeting, which focused on trade and investment, was attended by delegations headed up by Haiti's Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe and the DR's foreign minister, Andrés Navarro. Also present were the DR's ministers for trade & industry (José del Castillo); agriculture (Ángel Estévez) and finance (Simón Lizardo Mézquita) as well as Dominican private sector representatives like Juan Vicini, president of the sugar company Grupo Vicini. The meeting yielded the pledge to boost trade and investment and set up a joint investment fund to promote private sector investment. On the latest official DR figures, Haiti was the DR's second biggest export market in 2013 after the US, accounting for US\$1.43bn out of the total US\$9.58bn of exports. Meanwhile Haitian imports represented just US\$3.5m of the DR's total import bill of US\$17.12bn.

The meeting came the same day as Dominican President Danilo Medina sent a bill to the national congress proposing to extend by a further 90 days, the 28 October deadline to register for a naturalisation and regularisation programme launched by his government in June. The initiative, which at the time of writing had yet to be ratified, was in response to a request made on 15 October by Haiti's foreign minister, Pierre-Duly Brutus, after a meeting with Navarro in which the two pledged to boost bilateral ties.

The naturalisation programme is in line with a law approved in May by the Medina government in response to concerns regarding the impact of the 2013 TC ruling, particularly on Haitians and their descendants. Brutus had called for the deadline to register to be extended on the grounds that the Haitian government has had difficulties in providing identification documents to its nationals. Under the regularisation plan migrants living in the DR with irregular (or without any) documents are given the chance to regularise their status, allowing them to apply for residence and eventually for citizenship after two years later.

CorteIDH delivers a blow to Medina government

The same day as the fourth round of Haiti-DR talks took place, the CorteIDH made public a ruling dated 28 August which ordered the DR to provide redress for human rights abuses that took place between 1999-2000, suffered by Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent due to illegal deportations, denial of identity documents and arbitrary deprivation of nationality among other things by Dominican authorities.

The CorteIDH's decision was widely criticised in the DR. Government spokesperson Roberto Rodríguez Marchena said it was "out of season, biased and inappropriate" and complained that it ignored "very relevant aspects of our recent history" that show the "unequivocal will of the DR to modernise and improve its legal framework". As well as the regularisation plan, Rodríguez cited as examples of this will the approval of the 2010 constitution that includes third generation rights, and the creation of a specialised human rights unit in the foreign ministry.

Amnesty International

The response by the Dominican Republic's government to the ruling by the Inter-American court of human rights (CorteIDH) prompted outcry from the international human rights NGO Amnesty International (AI) which, in a statement issued on 24 October, said that it demonstrated "a shocking disregard for international law and the country's legal responsibilities".

FDI – not much progress in 2013

According to Eclac, FDI in Latin America and the Caribbean was stable in 2013, but only thanks to a single major transaction, the US\$13.2bn purchase of Modelo, the Mexican beer maker, by Anheuser-Busch InBev. Total inflows were valued at US\$188bn, a nominal annual increase of 6%. Eclac stressed that conditions in the region “remained conducive to FDI” and noted that transnational corporations made slightly higher profits than in 2012. However, it also reported that FDI outflows were more volatile and, after a large increase in 2012, fell 30% to US\$32.6bn in 2013.

COSTA RICA | Port strike continues. There is no progress in talks between the government led by President Luis Guillermo Solís and striking workers from Costa Rica’s main ports of Moín and Limón. The Sindicato de Trabajadores de Japdeva (Sintrajap) went on strike on 22 October, in response to the supreme court upholding a US\$1bn concession awarded to the Dutch firm, APM Terminals, for the construction of a new terminal at the Puerto Limón/Moín complex.

Sintrajap claims that the contract, signed in 2011 under the administration of former president Laura Chinchilla (2010-2014), would create an illegal monopoly and as such is unconstitutional.

In an effort to appease Sintrajap, the government announced a C\$406bn (US\$752m) investment plan for the state-run ports’ administrator, Junta de Administración Portuaria y de Desarrollo Económico de la Vertiente Atlántica (Japdeva). The plan includes funds to strengthen Japdeva and improve the local area, including C\$270bn (US\$500m) to upgrade a local highway.

That failed to do the trick. Patria Justa, a coalition of unions that includes the main public workers’ union, Asociación Nacional de Empleados Públicos (Anep), plus workers from the state-run electricity and telecommunications monopoly Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad (ICE), the state insurance company Instituto Nacional de Seguros (INS), and the state-oil company, Refinería Costarricense de Petróleo (Recope), have announced their backing for the Sintrajap action.

The labour unrest coincided with President Solís’s trip to Canada on 27 and 28 October in search of private investment. Accompanied by his foreign trade minister, Alexander Mora, foreign affairs minister, Manuel González, and the head of the Coalición Costarricense de Iniciativas para el Desarrollo (CINDE), Jorge Sequeira, Solís met potential investors and spoke at the Toronto Global Forum to some 400 Canadian and US business representatives.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America & the Caribbean (Eclac), foreign direct investment in Costa Rica was US\$1.0bn in the first half of 2014, down 21% year-on-year (see sidebar).

CUBA | US experts attend Havana Ebola conference. US officials travelled to Havana for a regional conference on Ebola on 29 October. The conference was organised by the regional radical left-wing bloc, Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Alba), best known in US government circles for its harsh criticism of US foreign and economic policy.

“This is a world emergency and we all should work together and cooperate in this effort,” said Nelson Arboleda, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) director for Central America, one of two US officials at the meeting, which was attended by some 254 specialists from 32 countries.

The Cuban government has won international plaudits, including public recognition from the US Secretary of State John Kerry, for its leading role in the international response to the crisis in West Africa. Cuba is training and dispatching over 400 medical personnel to the three worst-affected countries, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

GUATEMALA | Remittances up almost 10%. The central bank, Banco de Guatemala (Banguat), reported that remittances rose 9.2% in the first nine months to US\$4.15bn, up from US\$3.8bn in the equivalent year-earlier period.

In September alone inflows rose 9.0% to US\$459m, over 90% of which originate in the US, home to at least 1.6m Guatemalans on estimates by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Remittances are worth about 11% of GDP (US\$5.1bn in 2013) and are a key stay for the local economy, not least as the third biggest source of foreign exchange after exports and private capital inflows.

Banguat expects remittances to total US\$5.5bn for the year, as the US labour market continues to recover.

Quotes of the week

“Sincerely, I do not believe this election has divided the country.”

*Brazil's President
Dilma Rousseff.*

“If you assume a critical position within *Kirchnerismo* you are sent to Siberia.”

*Argentina's senator
Carlos Reutemann, a
dissident Peronist.*

“We must use extractivism to escape from it, to pass from an economy of finite resources to an economy of infinite resources: that based on human talent and knowledge, but without the absurdity of refusing to take advantage of our natural resources and being like beggars sat on a sack of gold.”

*Ecuador's President
Rafael Correa.*

Venezuela's Maduro breathes sigh of relief

“A great victory for Comrade Dilma and a tremendous result in Uruguay with the first round victory for Comrade Tabaré Vázquez; the force of independence, truth and progressive forces in Latin America keep advancing.” This was the ebullient response of Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro at an official event to the victory for President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil's ruling left-wing Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in elections on 26 October and the strong performance of Vázquez and the ruling left-wing Frente Amplio (FA) coalition in Uruguay.

The narrow triumph of President Rousseff was a blow to Venezuela's opposition coalition Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD) which had pinned its hopes on a victory for Aécio Neves of the right-of-centre opposition Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB). The executive secretary of the MUD, Jesús Torrealba, shrugged off any disappointment with a letter of congratulations to Rousseff, in which he expressed the hope of Venezuelans that “under your renewed leadership Brazil constructively assumes its role in the search for a peaceful, electoral, democratic and constitutional solution to the Venezuelan crisis, a search currently suspended”.

Rousseff has been far less effusive in her support of the Bolivarian Revolution than her predecessor Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and is likely to have even less time for it during her second term, which looks much more challenging than her first term, but Torrealba's expectations will be far lower than if Neves had won.

President Maduro, meanwhile, said he had phoned Rousseff to praise her “truly heroic victory” and for her valiant resistance over the last 18 months to those intent on “taking Brazil down the neoliberal route”. He added that he would celebrate with both Rousseff and Uruguay's President José Mujica at the summit of the Union of South American Nations (Unasur) in Ecuador's coastal city of Guayaquil on 4 and 5 December. The host of the Unasur summit, President Rafael Correa, issued a similarly euphoric response to the election results, tweeting “America will never be the same, the Left is still winning in Bolivia [where President Evo Morales was re-elected just two weeks earlier], Brazil and Uruguay”.

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