

latin american weekly report

23 February 2017, WR-17-07

ISSN 0143-5280

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This edition of *Latin American Weekly Report* has been produced for Canning House Corporate Members by LatinNews (www.latinnews.com).
Latin American Newsletters since 1967

Moreno to face Lasso in Ecuador run-off

Lenín Moreno came very close to ensuring that the Citizens' Revolution crafted by President Rafael Correa survives beyond a decade in Ecuador. Moreno needed to win 40% of the vote in presidential elections on 19 February, with a 10-percentage-point lead over his closest rival, but he fell agonisingly short. By failing to capitalise on the fragmentation of the opposition, which presented seven separate presidential candidates, Moreno will have to contest a second round on 2 April. Not all of the opposition will coalesce around Guillermo Lasso, who finished in second place for the centre-right Movimiento Creo, but he should win enough additional support to make the run-off a tight affair.

Correa steamrollered the opposition in 2009 and 2013, but this is not the norm in Ecuador. No other presidential candidate since the return to democracy in 1978 has managed to win in the first round. Moreno finished with 39.3% of the vote to 28.1% for Lasso. With Moreno so close to the winning line, the president of the national electoral council (CNE), Juan Pablo Pozo, announced that final results would not be released for three days after the elections. The army released a statement ostensibly to restore calm by demanding "a transparent electoral scrutiny" but its intervention succeeded in ratcheting up the tension among protesting opposition supporters. Lasso claimed it had "the whiff" of electoral fraud, but Pozo was true to his word and confirmed on 22 February that there would need to be a second round.

Despite Moreno's margin of victory of 11 percentage points it is a setback for the ruling Alianza País (AP) not to win in the first round. This disappointment looks like being compounded by the AP's loss of its absolute majority in the 137-seat national assembly when the final legislative count is completed by the CNE, although Correa expressed his confidence that the party would retain it.

If just two-thirds of those who cast their ballots in favour of the third-place candidate Cynthia Viteri, who finished with 16.3% of the vote, back Lasso in the second round it would bring him level with Moreno. Viteri, who ran for the traditional Partido Social Cristiano (PSC), has already pledged her support for Lasso in the run-off. Her strong showing in Ecuador's most populous province of Guayas, where she won 26.1% of the vote, could enable Lasso to overturn a 17-percentage-point deficit to Moreno here. Viteri's chief backer Jaime Nebot, the long-serving mayor of Guayaquil, the provincial capital, and Correa's sole credible rival for most of his mandate, will be a key ally for Lasso in the run-off.

Correa argued that the PSC vote would not transfer to Lasso en masse as voters in Ecuador responded to proposals, region and identification with leaders more than parties, making Lasso "the best rival" for Moreno in the

Provinces	Moreno	Lasso	Viteri	Moncayo	Electorate
Guayas	38.8	21.1	26.1	2.1	3,073,000
Pichincha	37.3	32.2	12.5	10.9	2,255,000
Manabí	54	18.1	10.3	4.3	1,193,000
Azuay	43.9	32.3	7.1	9.7	646,000
Los Ríos	44.1	20.9	19.9	2.4	637,000
El Oro	41.9	26.4	19.3	2.9	521,000
Tungurahua	28.7	37.8	13.9	11.1	449,000
Chimborazo	27.6	42.1	12.8	8.6	410,000
Loja	33	42	10.6	8.9	392,000
Esmeraldas	40.6	28.1	16.8	6.4	391,000
Cotopaxi	30.6	32.6	10.2	19.5	353,000
Santo Domingo Tsáchilas	40.8	29.9	13.1	4.3	362,000
Imbabura	43.1	25.7	13.4	10.7	360,000
Santa Elena	47.9	28	9.8	2.1	239,000
Expats Europe & Asia	42.6	15.7	23.3	8.4	236,000
Cañar	34.7	29.3	17.8	10.8	226,000
Bolívar	25.1	44.3	14.5	9	165,000
Carchi	38.8	25.5	19.7	9.9	144,000
Sucumbios	39.5	27.2	15.9	8.4	137,000
Morona Santiago	29.1	53.6	5.9	7.8	121,000
Expats North America	38.5	29.3	17.4	7.9	110,000
Orellana	36	37.8	8.3	12	109,000
Napo	25	55.8	6.5	5.9	82,000
Zamora Chinchipe	29.7	46.4	11.8	8.9	80,000
Pastaza	26.4	47.8	11.4	9.5	70,000
Galápagos	32.5	45	13.7	3.5	20,000
Provinces won	15	11			
Total percentage	39.3	28.1	16.3	6.7	
Total votes	3,707,180	2,647,310	1,536,760	632,395	

second round. There is some merit to this argument. Lasso, as a prominent former banker, has a high rejection rate because he is associated with the 1999 financial crisis, but little separates the policy proposals he advanced from those of Viteri's PSC. And a breakdown of the results by province (see table), besides showing the country's geographical political polarisation, suggests Lasso has a good chance.

Moreno won in each of Ecuador's six largest provinces, recording an emphatic victory in Manabí, a reward for the government's swift and decisive response to the earthquake last April. In eight of the 13 provinces he won Moreno surpassed 40%. But there were some costly setbacks. He might have been 11 points adrift of Moreno but Lasso won in 11 provinces. The six smallest provinces all went to Lasso, the majority by a landslide. Individually they might not amount to many votes but collectively they were decisive to keep Lasso in it.

An eye-catching paradox is that many of the poorer more indigenous provinces came out in favour of the former banker Lasso, while the more affluent coastal provinces backed the Citizens' Revolution, which despite enshrining the spirit of Pachamama ('Mother Earth') in the constitution is reviled by the country's largest indigenous organisation Conaie. Moreno won all seven coastal provinces. Lasso won five of the six Amazonian provinces. He posted emphatic victories in the southern provinces of Morona Santiago and Zamora Chinchipe where there is considerable opposition to the Correa administration's mining policies. He also won in the more populous highland provinces of Tungurahua, Chimborazo, Loja and Cotopaxi, as well as Bolívar. Moreno won the northern highland provinces – Carchi, Imbabura (the home of the Yachay City of Knowledge, which Correa hopes will be his legacy) and Pichincha, as well as Azuay and Cañar in the south.

The fourth-place candidate Paco Moncayo, who performed well for the leftist Acuerdo Nacional por el Cambio in Pichincha, called for a national dialogue with Lasso. Moncayo is not a natural ideological ally but he swore never to support Moreno and "a corrupt and corrupting government", and his support base, which includes Conaie's political arm Pachakutik, is hostile to Correa. There were also nearly 900,000 votes cast for the four outsiders in the elections which are up for grabs, plus there is a lot to be gained by appealing to the 18.2% of the electorate that abstained: 2.29m, more than any province except Guayas.



Morales' re-election bid stokes controversy

'21-F Day of the Lie' is how Bolivia's ruling Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) is referring to 21 February 2016. Political opponents have baptised it 'Day of Democracy'. It was on this day that 84.45% of the 6.5m electorate voted by 51.30%-48.70% in a public referendum against amending the 2009 constitution to allow President Evo Morales to seek a further term in the 2019 general elections [[WR-16-08](#)]. The MAS attributed the unexpected defeat to a corruption scandal which broke shortly before the vote, implicating Morales but over which he was subsequently vindicated (*see sidebar*). With Morales having declared at the end of last year his intention to run again regardless [[WR-16-50](#)], the vote's anniversary was marked by thousands taking to the streets both for and against the president, illustrating how polarising the re-election issue remains.

Marches took place in the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba, Oruro, Potosí, and Santa Cruz, all capitals of their eponymous departments, along with El Alto city (La Paz department). The issue of President Morales' re-election has remained in the headlines since the MAS formally declared him its presidential candidate in late December 2016 – at which point the party approved four “democratic” ways of seeking to allow him to stand again [[WR-16-50](#)].

At the time, the announcement was slammed by opponents like former president Jorge Quiroga (2001-2002) who accused Morales of trying to subordinate the constitution to “his caprice, avarice, and endless ambition”, and it is worth pointing out that while Morales remains popular (an Equipos Mori poll released on 22 January gave him a 58% approval rating) a survey released on 5 February by La Paz-based daily *Página Siete* showed 64% of 800 respondents opposed his re-election. Quiroga, somewhat paradoxically, denounced the pro-government marches this week as “coup mongering” on the grounds that they sought to “contravene the constitution” by failing to recognise a legitimate referendum.

The current constitution, (Art. 168), allows both the president and vice-president to stand for a single consecutive re-election. First elected in 2005 and re-elected in 2009, Morales had already been permitted to stand again in October 2014 on the grounds that this was his first re-election under the 2009 constitution.

Proposed new coca law fans unrest

As well as calls for the referendum result to be respected, Morales is facing protests from the Asociación Departamental de Productores de Hoja de Coca de La Paz (Adepcoca), one of the main organisations of coca growers' (*cocaleros*) in the traditional Los Yungas coca producing area of La Paz department. The protests, which began on 17 February, are in response to a proposed new coca law (replacing the current 1988 legislation) which establishes new limits for the amount of coca legally permitted in different areas. The proposed initiative has left Adepcoca, not for the first time, accusing Morales (a former *cocalero* from the Chapare area, Cochabamba department) of favouring *cocaleros* from his home turf.

Hundreds of coca-grower protesters clashed violently with anti-riot police in La Paz for over four hours on 20 February, throwing rocks and sticks of dynamite near the palace of government Palacio Quemado. Some 148 arrests were made. A meeting between the coca growers and cabinet ministers intended to defuse tension was cancelled.

Scandal

Weeks before the February 2016 referendum, a controversial local journalist, Carlos Valverde, revealed that Gabriela Zapata Montañó, a manager at the local branch of Chinese company CAMC, had had a two-year relationship with President Morales that began in 2005. This led some to accuse Morales of using his position to get Zapata the job and more generally fuelled accusations of influence trafficking regarding the awarding of state contracts. A congressional investigative commission subsequently cleared Morales of any wrong-doing but the damage had already been done.

“We have only had 11 years [in power], we have another 20 years, 30 years, 40 years, 50 years, 100 years left; we have to guarantee the Revolution.”

Bolivia's productive development

minister, Eugenio

Rojas, addresses

supporters of

President Evo

Morales during a rally

on '21-F Day of the Lie'.

The dispute stems from the fact that the legislation would legalise only 13,000 hectares (ha) for the Yungas area while it permits Cochabamba 7,000 ha. Adepcoca complains that this amount for the Yungas is less than the 14,000 ha currently grown (on figures from the most recent United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] annual monitoring survey, released in July 2016). The quota for the Chapare (where coca cultivation became legal in 2004 under former president Carlos Mesa [2003-2005] following pressure from Morales), is 1,000ha more than is currently grown according to the UNODC survey.

Bolivia's 1988 drug control law designates 12,000ha as 'traditional', where coca production is considered legal in order to satisfy the domestic demand for raw coca, traditionally consumed by local indigenous groups. However, the MAS government, which operates a 'Coca Sí, Cocaína No' drugs policy (distinguishing between the raw coca leaf and cocaine, the illegal narcotic), already currently tolerates 20,000ha as part of its efforts to industrialise traditional coca production.

PERU | POLITICS & ECONOMY

Dealing with an epidemic

Daily life continues in Peru, but the corruption scandal involving the Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht has cast a dark cloud. Asked about the impact, the veteran Peruvian lawyer and former politician Luis Bedoya Reyes pointed to a moral crisis in politics of epidemic proportions, not only in Peru but across Latin America.

The Peruvian congress, public prosecutors and courts are preparing to take testimony from President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, his prime minister Fernando Zavala, and his two immediate predecessors Ollanta Humala (2011-2016) and Alan García (who served a second [non-consecutive] term from 2006 to 2011) in relation to the Odebrecht payments' scandal, which cost Peru an estimated US\$29m in the decade and a half to 2015.

Also under scrutiny in relation to both Odebrecht and other corruption cases are the leftist former mayor of Lima, Susana Villarán (2011-2015), the right-wing opposition leader Keiko Fujimori (along with her brothers), and even the president of the state judicial defence council (CDJE), Julia Príncipe, to name but a few.

Recriminations are flying, risking political paralysis. Supporters of Keiko Fujimori are crying a conspiracy by those implicated in the Odebrecht scandal, after the public ministry announced that she would be investigated for money laundering as part of an illicit campaign financing case against the former secretary general of her Fuerza Popular (FP) party, Joaquín Ramírez. García, on whose watch US\$1.9bn was added (via contract addendums) to Odebrecht's lucrative concession for the 2,600km Inter-Oceanic highway between Peru and Brazil, continues to maintain his innocence, declaring that "history will look favourably" upon him.

Extradition request filed for Toledo

Peruvian authorities have filed a formal petition for the arrest and extradition of former president Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006), accused of receiving US\$20m in bribes from Odebrecht to secure the original concessions for the Inter Oceanic Highway. Peru is also offering a reward of US\$100,000 for information leading to Toledo's arrest.

Toledo has legal residency in the US and so cannot easily be deported. Peru's attorney general, Pablo Sánchez, is preparing additional material for the US authorities to strengthen the extradition case, but admits that it could take six months to a year to repatriate the former president.

Fujimori era not immune from suspicion

While the authorities are examining allegations of Odebrecht bribery in Peru over the 15 years to 2015, Odebrecht won bids for 28 projects during the decade Alberto Fujimori was in power (1990-2000). That is more than it secured overall in the three subsequent administrations led by Alejandro Toledo, Alan García and Ollanta Humala.

For some, the further away Toledo remains the better, amid fears that his return would create a political maelstrom. It is an ignominious end to the career of a man who 16 years ago led hundreds of thousands in a protest march against corruption under the disgraced authoritarian leader Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000). Toledo, of indigenous descent, named the march 'Los Cuatro Suyos', calling for a political awakening from the four corners of the Inca Empire. At the time, he was feted by the likes of Mario Vargas Llosa, Peru's Nobel literature laureate.

'El Cristo de lo Robado'

Standing 37 metres tall and shining an almost excessively-luminous bright white light across the bay of Lima is an out-of-place-seeming replica of Rio de Janeiro's Cristo Corcovado. This giant white statue of Christ was gifted by Odebrecht to Peru during the government led by Alan García (2006-2011). At the time, Odebrecht's most emblematic project in Peru was Lima's first metro line. It now appears that the company may have paid some US\$7m in bribes to win that contract alone.

The 'Cristo del Pacífico', as García called it, cost US\$800,000, most of it covered by Odebrecht. García claimed to have put in US\$30,000 of his own money, declaring that he wanted the figure erected "to bless Peru". It was eventually inaugurated by the current Archbishop of Lima, Juan Luis Cipriani.

The unpopular and rarely-visited statue is now seen as a monument to corruption, and has been renamed 'El Cristo de lo Robado'. Graffiti at the base screams, 'Odebrecht, out of the country' and 'Alan Guilty'. The three former presidents potentially facing political crucifixion for their avarice now surely view Odebrecht's gift as less of a blessing, and more of a curse. A campaign is underway to have the statue removed.

TRACKING TRENDS

PERU | Peru experiences continuing economic growth. The economy grew by 3.9% in 2016 compared with the previous year, the national statistics institute (Inei) revealed last week. This puts Peru among the pacesetters for economic growth in the region for the second consecutive year. It also ensures 18 years of uninterrupted growth.

GDP growth in December 2016 reached 3.25% compared to the same month in 2015, registering 89 consecutive months of growth. The main sectors driving the annual growth were mining and hydrocarbons, which expanded by 16.29%, mainly due to metal mining, followed by the telecommunications sector (8.09%), electricity, gas and water (7.3%), and finance and insurance (5.45%). On the other hand, the fishing industry contracted by 10.09%, followed by the construction sector 3.15%.

Although the mining sector's growth in December was well below the average between January and November, 8.6% compared to 23%, making the annual growth slightly lower than expected, Inei calculated that the sector still contributed 1.9% of the annual growth.

Another important factor was external demand and exports which increased by 13.4% compared to 2015, mainly due to traditional exports including mining, agriculture, oil, and natural gas; non-traditional exports contracted by 0.5%. Peru's main export destinations in 2016 were China (29.2%) and the US (14.5%), followed by South Korea (4.8%) and Japan (4.5%).

The economy and finance minister, Alfredo Thorne, said the GDP growth would create more jobs and improve quality of life. Thorne was also optimistic about 2017. He said the economy grew by between 4.5% and 5% in January, the highest rate since September 2016. Thorne attributed the high rate of growth in January to expanding public investment, and said the objective was to make the economy less reliant on external demand and focus on domestic markets by increasing investment and boosting production.

MUD reinvents itself

Venezuela’s opposition coalition Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD) has unveiled a new canopy structure. This will incorporate into the MUD additional political parties, as well as civil-society organisations and NGOs, to create one national opposition movement. This appears to be an effort to broaden, renew and strengthen the opposition, before launching a new offensive against the government led by President Nicolás Maduro and the ruling left-wing Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). The clear risk, however, is that this ambitious new movement becomes even more unwieldy and unmanageable.

Late last year, having failed in its ambition to dislodge President Maduro via a recall referendum, and deeply divided about the advisability of sitting down to a Vatican-backed roundtable dialogue with the government, the MUD seemed at risk of total implosion between its various constituent parts, which range from Marxists to moderate left-wing social democrats to conservative right-wing groups. In December with the Vatican-backed talks going nowhere, the MUD decided upon a restructuring as a way of moving forward.

After some delay, the new structure was unveiled on 17 February. The main casualty of the re-organisation was the MUD’s secretary general, Jesús ‘Chuo’ Torrealba, whose apparently unilateral decision (in late October 2016) to take the MUD into the talks backed by the Vatican cost him dearly. His post has now been eliminated, but José Luis Cartaya, a political scientist and relative unknown who to date has been assistant secretary of the MUD-controlled national assembly, becomes ‘general coordinator’ of a newly-expanded MUD secretariat. “In Venezuela, there’s an urgent need for a new opposition, it was absolutely necessary that the coalition restructured, and not just cosmetically,” Torrealba stated, announcing the changes.

MUD – new structure

- 1. Consulting Organisms**
 Congreso de la Sociedad Democrática (Democratic Society Congress)
 – Political Organisation
 – Social Organisation
- 2. Political Committee (with a rotating leadership)**
 Comprising nine parties: Acción Democrática, Alianza Bravo Pueblo, Avanzada Progresista, La Causa R, Movimiento Progresista de Venezuela, Primero Justicia, Un Nuevo Tiempo, Vente Venezuela, Voluntad Popular.
- 3. Secretariat – General Coordinator – José Luis Cartaya**
 Comprising three sub secretariats:
 Political – coordinated by Ángel Oropeza
 Technical – coordinated by Roberto Picón
 Social – coordinated by Alfredo Padilla and Tinedo Guía

Torrealba also emphasised that the MUD, as per an August 2015 regulation, will continue to select candidates via primaries in the first instance, or via consensus, in limited and exceptional circumstances. However, the fate of the pending state and municipal elections remains in doubt, as the CNE continues to find ways to delay, the latest of which includes a re-registration process for small parties that the MUD says will kill off a string of smaller political groups, most of them opposition-leaning. Maduro declared on 20 February that he ‘didn’t know’ when the CNE would call elections, but noted that whenever it did, the government “must have victory guaranteed”. To this end, Maduro too announced a restructuring of “the PSUV...of the missions...and the inauguration of ‘casas del partido’ in every parish and municipality of the country”.

López

The jailed leader of the radical MUD party Voluntad Popular, Leopoldo López, continues to call for a more disruptive strategy against what he says is a dictatorship in Venezuela. “This fight is not a fight within a democratic framework, it’s a fight against a dictatorship, and thus a democratic resistance”, he told the Spanish newswire *Efe*. López has called on the newly restructured MUD to push for a national referendum on whether to hold early elections this year.

Radical Islam

Seasoned Venezuelan observers have urged some caution around the latest ‘noise’ in the US about Venezuela, including its alleged links to radical Islamic groups, which has come both from Capitol Hill and media sources. These commentators make the point that certain vested interests are not above exaggerating (and even putting out fake news) about the radical Islamist ‘threat’ in Venezuela (and elsewhere in Latin America) to get President Donald Trump’s attention. Tales of Islamic fundamentalism in Latin America have long circulated in conservative right-wing US circles, but actual evidence has always been scant.

López marks three years in jail

In September 2015, having spent 18 months in pre-trial detention, the opposition politician Leopoldo López was sentenced to almost 14 years in prison on charges of incitement to violence during fatal anti-government protests in early 2014. The supreme court (TSJ) rejected a final appeal and upheld his sentence last week.

The TSJ issued its final decision just 24 hours after an intervention by US President Donald Trump, who tweeted a demand for the immediate release of López, and, to some astonishment in Venezuela, posted a photo of himself in the White House with Vice President Mike Pence, the Florida Republican Senator Marco Rubio, and Lilian Tintori, López’s activist wife.

The deputy spokesperson for the US State Department, Mark Toner, followed up on Trump’s statement 72 hours later, issuing a broader call for the release of all those in prison in Venezuela for their political beliefs. Noting the TSJ ruling in the López case, the State Department asserted that “the Venezuelan government continues to arrest and imprison citizens from across Venezuelan society for their political beliefs”. “Currently, more than 100 such individuals are in prison”, it stated, mentioning López, the Caracas mayor Antonio Ledezma, now two years under house arrest, Daniel Ceballos, the former mayor of San Cristóbal (capital of the western border state of Táchira), now two years in jail, plus “many other students, activists, journalists, and peaceful protestors”. The statement continued: “The United States reiterates its dismay and concern about these arrests, and other actions taken by the Venezuelan government to criminalize dissent and deny its citizens the benefits of democracy. We call for the immediate release of all prisoners of conscience, respect for the rule of law, the freedom of the press, the separation of constitutional powers within the government, and the restoration of a democratic process that reflects the will of the Venezuelan people.”

The State Department communication capped a week of unexpectedly intense US pressure on Venezuela, which started with the US Treasury Department’s designation of Vice President Tarek El Aissami as a drugs kingpin; was followed by a fresh scandal over the alleged sale of Venezuelan passports and fake IDs to potentially criminal elements and/or Islamic extremists; continued with Trump’s provocative appearance with Tintori; and ended with Toner clarifying that the US expected the release of all political prisoners.

There is an expectation of a sharp shift in US-Venezuela policy under Trump. To date, however, the pronouncements on Venezuela have largely echoed those of President Barack Obama (2009-2017). Obama regularly called for the release of López and other activists. A string of Venezuelan officials were sanctioned under Obama, with the case against El Aissami put together under his administration (the designation apparently held back in late 2016 to facilitate Vatican mediation in Venezuela). Obama also sought to engage in bilateral dialogue with the Maduro administration, albeit these efforts tended to be scuppered by Venezuela’s own actions.

Curiously, Maduro in his latest weekly TV show (*Los Domingos con Maduro*) again seemed to try to ingratiate himself with Trump, warning the US President that he was in danger of being duped by US elites and their powerful lobby groups. Maduro played on Trump’s ego. “President Donald Trump...they are imposing on you all the failed and illegal policies of the Obama and Bush era,” he declared. To that end, Maduro added, certain interests are “paying million dollar sums in corridors and offices” across Washington (*see sidebar*).

Goic joins presidential race

Senator Carolina Goic, president of Democracia Cristiana (DC), has declared her interest in standing as a presidential candidate in general elections this November. The once mighty DC, the largest and most centrist member of the ruling centre-left Nueva Mayoría coalition, is not the force it once was in Chilean politics. Goic is therefore unlikely to be a frontrunner: her candidature appears designed to improve DC's negotiating position within current or future political coalitions.

In an interview with Radio Cooperativa on 20 February Goic, a senator for the southern Magallanes district, declared her intention to run for the presidency. DC, she said, would take a formal position on her bid on 11 March, as well as deciding whether to participate in party primaries due in July. Participation in primaries is voluntary under Chilean law, so DC could opt in – taking part in July alongside other parties within the Nueva Mayoría coalition, or alternatively, deciding to opt out and go straight to competing in the first round of the presidential election due on 19 November. Disaffected over the party's limited influence within Nueva Mayoría, and the low popularity ratings of the administration led by President Michelle Bachelet, a number of party members favour the second, 'go it alone' option.

In her interview Goic said, "The alliance between the Left and the Centre-Left has been good for our country, it allowed us to restore and strengthen our democracy. Today, we have to face new challenges, but that will need to be done in a coalition other than the existing Nueva Mayoría". Goic acknowledged a share of responsibility for the failure of the ruling coalition "to rise to the occasion when needed...there are times where we have created more mistrust than certainty". Goic also dismissed one of Nueva Mayoría's main candidates, former president Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006), as representing "the logic of the past". This, she said, was the logic of top-down politics. By contrast, today's voters wanted to be involved in dialogue and in the shaping of new policies, she argued.

So far DC politicians have hardly registered at all in the early opinion polls on the presidential race. The latest monthly Adimark poll published in early February has for the first time put television presenter and independent Alejandro Guillier ahead in the race with 28% unprompted support, pushing past former president and potential candidate for the right-wing Chile Vamos coalition Sebastián Piñera (2010-2014), who was on 27%. In third and fourth places came Lagos with 5%, and conservative senator Manuel José Ossandón, with 2%.

The big headline story in Chile in recent months has been the meteoric rise of Guillier in the polls. Guillier is politically independent, although close to the Partido Radical (PR), another member of the Nueva Mayoría. He has managed to present himself both as an outsider – and therefore attractive to those disaffected with the political system – and broadly speaking as a social democrat – and therefore as someone who could attract centre-left voters and win the endorsement of parties currently in the ruling coalition.

For politicians in the Nueva Mayoría coalition the question is whether Guillier's star will continue shining ever more brightly as the campaign moves forward, or whether he has peaked too early and his support will begin to fall back. DC's move to launch Goic as a candidate prepares it for both those eventualities.

Goic's role

According to analyst Héctor Soto writing in Chilean daily *La Tercera*, Democracia Cristiana (DC) is fully aware that it has no chance of winning the presidency this year. Instead, Carolina Goic's role will be to position the party to negotiate better terms within a new governing coalition. To achieve that, Goic's task will be to build the party's strength in congress, and to articulate a new policy vision, a job which, Soto says, "the party has neglected for years".

Milani

Asked whether it was right for former president Cristina Fernández to have appointed and supported General Milani in light of the accusations against him, Juan Cabandié insisted that “Milani was promoted various times before becoming army commander, and those promotions were approved in congress”. There had been “disconnections” in the information about alleged human-rights violations, which had only fully come to light at a later stage. Cabandié also claimed the former commander “was not a friend of Cristina’s or a member of the party, or anything like that”.

Deadlock at Escondida

A meeting between management and the labour union on 20 February, to try and resolve the strike by 2,500 miners at the Escondida copper mine, failed to break the deadlock between the two sides. Escondida is the world’s largest copper mine, accounting for 5% of global supply. It is majority controlled by Australia-based BHP Billiton.

Workers have been striking since 8 February demanding a 7% wage increase and a Cl25m (US\$38,460) bonus. The company’s counter-offer is a Cl8m (US\$12,300) bonus, with no wage increase. Union leader Carlos Allendes said after the meeting that attempts to reach a compromise had “failed completely”.

On 21 February Escondida management said that to signal its openness to dialogue it would wait for at least 30 days from the start of the strike before beginning to replace striking miners (under Chilean law companies can hire temporary workers 15 days after the start of a strike).

ARGENTINA | POLITICS

Milani arrested

General César Milani, who was commander-in-chief of the Argentine army in between 2013 and 2015, during the government of President Cristina Fernández (2007-2015), was arrested on 17 February on human-rights charges.

General Milani is accused of responsibility for the kidnapping and torture of Pedro Olivera, his son Ramón, and Verónica Matta during the ‘dirty war’ of the late 1970s. The 62-year-old judge had testified in La Rioja province before federal judge Daniel Herrera Piedrabuena, who at the end of the session ordered that he be imprisoned.

Milani also faces investigation on one other human-rights charges, and on an additional charge of illegal enrichment. An initial appeal against the arrest was rejected, but a further appeal to a federal court in the province of Córdoba was still pending this week.

The allegation that Milani was involved in human-rights violations is not new – a number of rights activists had raised it at the time of his appointment back in 2013. The arrest is an embarrassment for former president Fernández, who appointed General Milani and consistently dismissed criticism against him. It is also a blow for the former ruling party, the Frente para la Victoria (FPV, Kirchneristas), a faction of the Partido Justicialista (PJ, Peronists) movement.

Fernández herself has not commented on Milani’s arrest. However, Juan Cabandié, an FPV federal deputy and himself the grandson of ‘disappeared’ activists, tried to interpret the news in a manner favourable to his party (*see sidebar*). Cabandié said he welcomed the arrest as a sign of progress in the enforcement of human rights, but claimed it had only been made possible “thanks to the human-rights policies supported by Néstor and Cristina” (a reference to the late Néstor Kirchner, president from 2003-2007, and to his widow and successor).

The case comes at a time when the centre-right government led by President Mauricio Macri and the FPV are squaring off in preparation to sling mud at each other during this October’s mid-term federal congressional elections. Much of the action is in the courts. A new case has been opened against former FPV federal planning minister Julio de Vido (2003-2015) accused of irregularities in the funding of a still-unfinished new hospital in Chaco province.

Meanwhile, Fernández herself faces a multitude of charges related to money laundering and illegal enrichment by family-controlled companies. This

Moraes

In an interview last year, Alexandre de Moraes described Michel Temer as a friend of 20 years' standing. Both lawyers specialising in constitutional affairs, the two men first met as professor and student.

week an appeals court rejected an attempt by her lawyers to recuse Judge Claudio Bonadio, who has been presiding over the case. Fernández is scheduled to appear before Judge Bonadio once more on 7 March.

Macri steps back on Correo Argentino case

One of the FPV's big electoral hopes is that it will be able to make political and electoral capital out of the Correo Argentino case, where Macri stands accused of a potential conflict of interest. The company, controlled by the Macri family, briefly ran a privatised mail service before going into liquidation and the service being renationalised over 12 years ago. The charge against Macri is that, after years of legal argument, officials in his government in June last year reached a preliminary and excessively favourable deal to reduce and reschedule the company's outstanding debts to the Argentine state. Two prosecutors have asked for the case to be investigated.

This week, seven days after the story broke, Macri spoke about it for the first time. Macri said he had no involvement in negotiating the preliminary agreement, admitted that not enough information had been released to the public, and said he had asked for the deal to be taken off the table pending agreement on finding a better way for "resolving legal disputes like this one". Macri added, "If I make a mistake, I take a step back and correct myself."

Some political analysts say that Macri's "step back" came after a conversation with Elisa Carrió, the anti-corruption campaigner whose Coalición Cívica (CC) party forms part of the governing Cambiemos coalition. Jorge Arias, of the political consultancy Polilat, commented that in an election year "the government cannot allow someone like Carrió to slam the door in its face".

Orlando D'Adamo of the Centro de Opinión Pública at the Universidad de Belgrano said that the Correo Argentino case was "a golden opportunity" for the FPV to counterattack the government. In his view, while the government might have a reasonable technical and legal case to show it had acted in good faith, it would still be difficult to communicate that to the voters. "What people understand is that there are links between the president and a company his family controls – and that is not good for the government," D'Adamo said.

BRAZIL | POLITICS

Senate approves new Supreme Court judge

Brazil's federal senate approved the appointment of Alexandre de Moraes as a supreme court judge by 55 votes to 13 on 22 February. He will now take up the place of Teori Zavascki, who died in a plane crash last month. Until his appointment by President Michel Temer he served as justice minister and in his confirmation hearing by the senate's constitution and justice committee he was repeatedly questioned over both his close ties to the government and his actions as minister. Such is the Temer administration's dominance of the legislature, however, Moraes passed the test comfortably.

After completing his studies, Moraes served first as public prosecutor in São Paulo, then as the state's secretary of justice. More recently he was São Paulo's secretary of public security before he was chosen by President Temer to serve as justice minister. Traditionally, the supreme court tends to be reserved for experienced judges, though Moraes is not the first non-judge to be appointed.

Moraes' political ties were closely scrutinised by the opposition in a gruelling, 11-hour hearing. Appointed to his senior public positions in São Paulo by then-governor Geraldo Alckmin, Moraes was until earlier this month a member of the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB). In 2014, he

Improvements

The CNT poll also asked the interviewees whether they expected 'improvements' in Brazil in five key areas. Expectations were more negative for employment, income and public safety/security, but improved slightly for education, and were 'stable' for public health care.

was even a member of then-presidential candidate Aécio Neves' campaign team. But he also enjoys close links to Temer's own Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB), not least through the president himself and also via the disgraced former speaker of the federal lower chamber of congress Eduardo Cunha for whom he acted as a defence lawyer in 2013.

As justice minister, Moraes had also faced criticism, particularly over his handling of the crisis in Brazil's prisons, which have seen over 130 inmates killed in various uprisings since the start of the year. In one incident, Moraes was exposed for misleading the public after he denied receiving a request to help alleviate the situation in the state of Roraima. He was also roundly mocked for his ambition to see marijuana "eliminated from the Latin American continent".

For the opposition, Moraes' appointment, together with the recent promotion of Wellington Moreira Franco to a ministerial position (and thus protection from prosecution by lower courts), is another example of the Temer administration attempting to shield itself from 'Operation Car Wash'. Senator Randolfe Rodrigues, from the Rede Sustentabilidade, described his nomination as "an attempt to protect the government's base from prosecution".

Currently 48 years old, Moraes could occupy a Supreme Court position until he is 75. He will now inherit Zavascki's 7,500 cases. However, he will not take over Zavascki's position overseeing the Car Wash cases that come to the supreme court. Edson Fachin was chosen to take over those cases following Zavascki's death. During his senate committee hearing, Moraes insisted that he would act with "absolute independence and impartiality" in his new role. So far, Temer has yet to find his replacement at the justice ministry.

BRAZIL | POLITICS

Temer's approval rating sinks further

Though the Brazilian government appears increasingly confident that the recovery is around the corner, the feel-good factor is certainly eluding the electorate. On 15 February, the CNT announced the results of a poll that was conducted among 2,002 voters in 25 states. Overall the evaluations of Temer's government and his performance as president declined from what they were in October. For what it is worth, they remain slightly higher than they were for Dilma Rousseff this time last year.

Just 10.6% of respondents described President Temer's government as 'good' or 'excellent', down from 14.6% in October. Meanwhile, the number of respondents who consider the administration to be 'bad' or 'terrible' rose from 36.7% to 44.1% (compared with 62% for Rousseff's government in February 2016). Temer's personal approval rating had also fallen from 31.7% to 24.4%. The number who disapproved of him personally increased from 51.4% to 62.4%.

This decline is mostly due to economic factors, such as the continuing recession (now in its eighth quarter), increased unemployment (at 12.5%), high interest rates, and very tight credit. The political scenario has also not improved, with 'Operation Car Wash' and many other scandals continuing to result in accusations against members of Temer's cabinet.

It is difficult to see the president's standing improving rapidly, given that further austerity measures, such as pension reform, are likely to erode his popularity even more. However, the government's support base in the federal congress is solid and the administration will be hoping that forthcoming populist measures will at least keep Temer's approval rating on life support.

World Bank study
In a recent study, the World Bank estimated that because of the continued economic crisis in Brazil, an estimated 3.6m people will drop back below the 'poverty line' (R\$140,00 [US\$45.70] per month) into extreme poverty. If there is a small amount of economic growth in 2017 then 'only' 2.5m would fall back below the poverty line.

From mid-March Brazilians will have access to their inactive FGTS accounts – workers' funds usually only to be used on retirement, unemployment, or when buying a house. Millions of Brazilians will thus benefit from a small windfall of up to a few thousand reais.

The 2018 race

The survey also looked ahead to the presidential elections in 2018. Between October 2016 and February 2017, all of the pre-candidates fell – except for former president Lula da Silva (2003-2011), who was up 5.2 percentage points, and the far-right federal deputy Jair Bolsonaro, who was up 3.2 points. Interestingly, for the first time, the poll showed Lula winning against two viable alternative candidates, Aécio Neves and Marina Silva, in a second-round run-off.

Clearly, the recent press coverage after the death of his wife, Marisa Letícia, has boosted Lula's support. But it remains a fact that Lula retains a significant and passionate following, regardless of the fact he now faces trial in five separate criminal cases. If he does run in 2018, he will be a formidable candidate. Bolsonaro improved his standing because of increased press coverage of his activities as federal deputy.

The Instituto Paraná conducted a separate poll in mid-February among 2,020 voters in 26 states. The results for Lula, Marina Silva and Jair Bolsonaro were similar to the CNT poll. However, the big news was the candidate from the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB), São Paulo Mayor João Doria. Doria has been in office only 45 days and appeared in this poll with 9.1%, the same level as the PSDB Governor Geraldo Alckmin, and just one percentage point less than PSDB Senator Neves.

Doria has had large media coverage of his activities as mayor, particularly as a non-politician businessman who had never run for office before, but was elected in the first round.

TRACKING TRENDS

ARGENTINA | Keeping lid on inflation. Inflation in January was 1.3%, up marginally on the 1.2% registered in December last year, the national statistics institute (Indec) reported.

President Mauricio Macri argued this week that his government had successfully brought inflation under control and that it was now on a downwards trajectory. But the Macri administration faces an uphill task keeping inflation within its ambitious target of 12%-17% in 2017, not least because the country's individual trade unions are agitating for wage increases in excess of 20% in collective salary negotiations with employers. After staging a 72-hour strike the bank workers' union Asociación Bancaria (AB) managed to secure 23.5% for members on 16 February.

BRAZIL | Copom powers ahead with another 75-point cut. The monetary policy committee of Brazil's central bank stuck with its aggressive pace of monetary easing in its latest decision on the benchmark interest rate (Selic). As in January, Copom decided to slash 75 basis points off the Selic, bringing it down to 12.25% on 22 February.

Inflation data released earlier in the day confirmed the slowdown in price rises over the past year, though in the last month prices rose above analysts' expectations. Twelve-month inflation is now down to 5.02%, its lowest level since mid-2012. Speaking on 22 February Finance Minister Henrique Meirelles expressed confidence that inflation would hit the 4.5% target by the end of this year. Both the central bank and private-sector economists expect the same.

Bumpy start to a difficult negotiation?**The border wall**

There are reports that a number of federal agencies are questioning the plan to build a wall on the Mexican border citing bureaucratic and environmental obstacles. A preliminary report by US Customs and Border Protection has suggested the wall will be built in three phases, but sources quoted by *CNN* described the third and biggest phase as a “fantasy” that was unlikely to materialise.

Some kind of a negotiation to reset bilateral relations between Mexico and the US is beginning, with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly flying in to Mexico City for talks with top government officials this week. There has also been a telephone conversation between newly appointed US Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin, and his Mexican opposite number, José Antonio Meade Kuribreña. But for Mexico the process is still looking like an alarmingly unstable cocktail of unilateral announcements from Washington, hostile policies, and confused thinking.

The Trump administration has developed a technique of making unilateral announcements just before major meetings with Mexican leaders. Notoriously, on 25 January it announced executive orders to begin building a border wall with Mexico and to toughen immigration policies – those orders, together with Trump’s insistence that Mexico would pay for the wall (estimated to cost up to US\$20bn), provoked Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto to cancel his planned meeting with Trump, which had been scheduled for 31 January. Now, on 21 February, just before this week’s visit to Mexico by Tillerson and Kelly, it seems to have done it again.

This time Kelly’s department released two memos designed to give further details of the administration’s plans. They were highly significant documents. One seeks to widen federal powers to deport undocumented migrants, using a process called “expedited removal”. The paper implies that almost all undocumented migrants could be deported over a short time span. To streamline the removals (for which an additional 15,000 border agents are to be recruited) the US authorities will “return aliens arriving on land from a foreign territory contiguous to the United States, to the territory from which they arrived”.

This has been interpreted as meaning that large numbers of migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras could be put in the hands of the Mexican authorities. Those wanting to contest expulsion orders in the US courts by claiming legal entry or asylum would have to do so from Mexico. A Homeland Security official told the press “these are elements that still need to be worked out in detail”. The Mexican government, whose cooperation would be needed for any such programme to work, appeared not to have been consulted.

Another of the memos insisted on plans to build the border wall and was written from a perspective that implied the US would insist on its plan to make Mexico pay.

Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray reacted rapidly saying Mexico rejected this new approach, and would appeal to the United Nations in defence of migrant rights. The issue would become “agenda point number one” in discussions with Tillerson and Kelly. He said Mexico would not accept such “unilateral dispositions”. The Tillerson and Kelly trip was still going ahead as we went to press, but Arturo Sarukhan, a former Mexican ambassador to the US, noted that the prior unilateral release of documents of this type “does poison the general context in which the trip is taking place, adding “It will create public opinion backlash and congressional backlash in Mexico.”

A critical US diplomat told the politico.com website “you can’t just leave people in the middle of a bridge. This has to be negotiated with the

Sinaloa factor

Worried by relations with the US, the Mexican government still needs to focus on a rising domestic problem – a resurgence of the security threat in the north of the country. The homicide rate rose by one-third (34%) in January to 1,938, reflecting a power struggle in areas previously dominated by the Sinaloa/Pacifico drug trafficking organisation (DTO), whose leader Joaquín ‘El Chapo’ Guzmán Loera was deported to the US last month. Murders were up by half in the states of Chihuahua and Sinaloa, and by nearly half in Baja California. Tomás Guevara, a criminologist at Sinaloa state university, said most of the deaths were due to a surge in infighting within criminal cartels.

Mexicans.” A Homeland Security official played the issue down, saying that Kelly “looks forward to a strong partnership with the Mexican government”.

President Peña Nieto faces some difficult choices in terms of his approach to the negotiations. The Mexican government is concerned over three fundamentally important areas of its relationship with the US: migration, trade (and particularly the future of the North American Free Trade Agreement [Nafta], which Trump has pledged to renegotiate or terminate) and security. Its general stance is that in all these areas there is a relationship of mutual benefit and interdependence, which requires dialogue. This approach is in stark contrast to Trump’s unilateralism. Nor is it clear whether each of these issues will be negotiated separately or whether they will be lumped together to allow trade-offs between them.

Mexico does have some tough cards it could play in response to the US. On migration, it has been cooperating with the US by limiting the number of Central Americans entering its southern border and transiting through the country to reach the US. Last year Mexico actually turned away more Central Americans than the US itself. Indeed, this week human-rights group Amnesty International described Mexico as “the country that does the dirty work” for the US by turning back or deporting Central American refugees.

Mexico could threaten to cease to cooperate, effectively letting the Central Americans enjoy free passage to travel north with no restrictions. On the economic front Mexico could reduce its significant maize imports from US farmers and buy from Argentina and Brazil instead – something that the agriculture minister is already investigating and which could hit many Midwest farming states that delivered significant support for Trump in last November’s elections.

There is also a counter-argument to consider. Rather than escalate, Mexico could deliberately take a more reactive role, in the hope that some of the Trump administration’s more hostile initiatives will simply become entangled within the US, falling victim to legal challenge and potentially to congressional and state-level objections and delays (*see sidebar*).

In the medium term, however, Mexican voters might opt to elect a maverick of their own to confront Trump. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the leader of the radical left-wing Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena), has gone into hyperdrive since Trump’s election, which he sees as his ticket to the presidency in 2018 after narrowly missing out in the last two contests. Polls make him the early frontrunner.

López Obrador concluded a two-week tour of the US this week, meeting Mexican migrants and unofficially campaigning. Speaking from his final port of call, Chicago, López Obrador said he would be back in the US on 14 March to meet the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to denounce the Trump administration for violating human rights through its anti-immigrant policies. López Obrador said he would visit the headquarters of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in Washington the following day to file a related suit against the US.

TRACKING TRENDS

MEXICO | **Carstens to delay exit.** The governor of Mexico’s central bank (Banxico), Agustín Carstens, will remain in his post until 30 November at the behest of President Enrique Peña Nieto. Carstens had been set to take up a new job on 1 July as general manager of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS). His decision to stay on is a bonus for Peña Nieto as he will be able to draft a plan to mitigate the fallout from a potential painful renegotiation of Nafta.

Morales confronts multiple protests

President Jimmy Morales and his Frente de Convergencia Nacional (FCN-Nación) government this week faced protest action on various fronts from indigenous protesters. Demands ranged from the approval of constitutional changes which would recognise indigenous justice to the suspension of operations at a controversial hydroelectric project. A presidential press release published following a 21 February meeting between President Morales and indigenous leaders cited the latter as underlining “progress” made in the encounter. Yet few are optimistic that the FCN-Nación government will take the demands of the historically marginalised indigenous sector (which accounts for 44% of Guatemala’s population on official figures) any more seriously than its predecessors.

On 21 February some 20,000 indigenous protesters staged blockades at various points along one of the country’s main roads, the Pan-American Highway, as part of protests organised by an indigenous organisation, 48 Cantones de Totonicapán. A key demand is the approval by the 158-member unicameral legislature of a bill which would amend Article 203 of the country’s 1985 constitution so that it acknowledges indigenous methods to impart justice alongside the existing judicial system. It would also allow indigenous groups to exercise jurisdictional functions according to their own procedures, as a form of legal pluralism.

The bill remains under discussion after it failed, by two votes, to receive the necessary 105 votes for its approval in November 2016. It has received firm backing from figures such as the human-rights ombudsman, Jorge de León Duque, Iván Velásquez, the director of the United Nations-backed International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (Cicig), and Attorney General Thelma Aldana. On 15 February, for instance, the national daily *Prensa Libre* cited Aldana as saying that there is no contradiction between a legally recognised justice system and an indigenous one. She said indigenous justice “contributes directly to maintaining peace; impacts on decongestion [of the justice system]” and “reduces budget costs of an ordinary system”.

However, the initiative is opposed by the influential private-sector lobby Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales y Financieras (Cacif), which has warned of legal confusion if two different judicial systems are allowed to co-exist.

Unpopular hydroelectric projects

In November 2016, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) released its human development report for Guatemala. The report flagged up the continued inequalities afflicting the indigenous sector, among more general concerns about steps back in human development with disputes over water use identified as one of the main obstacles to human development.

This issue again made headlines when hundreds of indigenous people from Santa María Cahabón municipality, Alta Verapaz department marched to Guatemala City on 20 February to protest against two hydroelectric dams which are being constructed by a Spanish firm, Grupo Cobra.

The protests stem from the fact that last month the supreme court (CSJ) ordered the suspension of both projects on the grounds that, in breach of Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), affected indigenous communities had not been consulted.

Human development

In its human development report for Guatemala, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) highlights figures from the national survey of living conditions (Encovi) from 2014 which notes that 79.2% of the indigenous sector are impoverished compared with 46.6% of the non indigenous population. The same report also flags up a deterioration in the country’s Human Development Index (HDI), a composite rating of life expectancy, education, and per capita income. The UNDP notes that the HDI rose between 2000 and 2006 by 2.3%. However, in the period 2006–2014 it fell to 0.3%.

Quotes of the week

“The idea of being in contact with the people again fascinates me.”

The ruling party's presidential candidate Lenín Moreno tries to look on the bright side of narrowly falling short of a first round electoral triumph in Ecuador.

“Be careful with your criticism. If you change the constitution to seek re-election, you could govern for more years than the Pinochet dictatorship lasted.”

Chile's José Miguel Insulza, former secretary general of the OAS, responds to the declaration of Bolivia's President Evo Morales that “to live in democracy, in the 21st century, is not to govern with the constitution of Augusto Pinochet [which is still in place in Chile]”.

“I want to make clear, in the most emphatic way, that the government of Mexico and the people of Mexico will not accept decisions that, in a unilateral way, are imposed by another government.”

Mexico's Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray.

POSTSCRIPT

Colombian government insists on Farc disarmament deadline

The Colombian government expressed its “surprise” this week at a letter written by Jean Arnault, the head of the United Nations special mission in the country, saying that the construction of the 26 camps accommodating guerrillas from the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Farc) would not be completed until the end of March, and mooted the postponement of the disarmament and demobilisation phase of the peace process from 1 March until then. The foreign minister, María Ángela Holguín, and the government's high commissioner for peace, Sergio Jaramillo, responded to Arnault's letter, which was leaked to the press, by stressing the need to stick to the deadline of 1 June for the completion of the Farc's disarmament.

The government led by President Juan Manuel Santos is desperate to avoid slipping behind in the implementation of the peace process. The protracted negotiations in Cuba with the Farc, and the rejection of the initial peace accord in a national referendum, mean that there is not a great deal of time to play with before Colombia swings into election mode, with general elections taking place in May 2018.

Arnault wrote in his letter that “the majority of camps have not been finished” and that because they had not been “demarcated with precision” this could result in “a grey area which could allow for interpretations and lead to incidents”. He also said the construction of the camps and storage facilities for the weapons had not been completed. The government responded by saying that logistical difficulties associated with transferring all of the guerrillas to the camps had been overcome and that some 6,900 members of the Farc had now entered them in total, with the final 300 arriving at a camp in the southern department of Caquetá this week.

Meanwhile, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that 96 families had been forced to abandon their homes in the municipalities of Teorema and Tibú in the region of Catatumbo in the department of Norte de Santander. Peasant farmers in Catatumbo blocked the passage of Farc guerrillas to a local camp for several days earlier this month out of deep concern that it would leave a vacuum, which would be filled by paramilitary groups [WR-17-06].

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LATIN AMERICAN WEEKLY REPORT is published weekly (50 issues a year) by **Latin American Newsletters**, Hamilton House, Fourth Floor, Mabledon Place, London, WC1H 9BB, England. Telephone +44 (0)203 695 2790, Email: subs@latinnews.com or visit our website at: <http://www.latinnews.com>

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