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## PAN schism could pave PRI's way to re-election

The steady but sure fragmentation of Mexico's political opposition is increasing the likelihood of the federally ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) retaining power in the presidential election on 1 July 2018, despite a succession of opinion polls showing that President Enrique Peña Nieto is the least popular head of state since records began. In the latest boost to the PRI's prospects, Margarita Zavala, one of the favourites to win the presidency, abandoned Mexico's main opposition Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) to pursue election as an independent after her public disagreements with the party president, Ricardo Anaya, proved insoluble.

Infighting within the PAN grew in intensity four months ago when Anaya launched an alliance, known as Frente Ciudadano por México, with his counterparts Alejandra Barrales and Dante Delgado, the presidents of the left-wing opposition Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) and Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) respectively, to contest next July's elections. Zavala, the wife of former president Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012), opposed the coalition, suspecting that it was a stitch-up by Anaya and Barrales, under which the PRD would agree to back Anaya for president in return for the PAN supporting Barrales's bid for governor of Ciudad de México (CDMX).

Zavala sought an assurance that the Frente would select its presidential candidate via open primaries, which would have given her a strong chance of winning, but Anaya and Barrales last week refused. They said that the method for electing the Frente's candidates would not be "traditional" in order to avoid the intervention of the PRI government (which they maintained was determined to undermine the Frente) in an open election. Zavala promptly left the PAN, conscious that she would stand little chance of winning the Frente's candidacy any other way, as she is not viewed very favourably by the PRD or MC, and with the deadline for registering as an independent candidate set for 14 October.

By parting ways with the PAN, Zavala has dealt a body blow to the Frente. Since the coalition was formed there have also been significant defections from disgruntled politicians within the PRD to the radical left-wing Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena) led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador. "In a situation like this nobody wins," Rafael Moreno Valle, a former governor of Puebla and fellow PAN presidential aspirant, said. "She is not going to win but also we are going to lose. The votes that she obtains will not be taken from the PRI or Morena, they will be taken from the PAN," he added. Some senior members of the PAN expressed their concern to the media that as many as 10m traditional PAN supporters could vote for Zavala, who will have until 6 February next year to collect 866,593 signatures from voters in 17 of Mexico's 32 states to register as an independent.

## Tamargo

PAN Senator José Luis Luege Tamargo, who left the party after 29 years of membership, accused party president Ricardo Anaya of making “a serious strategic error” in the CDMX. Tamargo said that it was a big mistake backing the PRD in the CDMX when last month’s earthquake had exposed “multiple failings...directly linked to poor PRD administrations which imposed a demagogic vision with a lot of corruption”.

Zavala launched an extraordinary attack on Anaya in June, holding him responsible for the abject defeat suffered by the PAN’s Josefina Vázquez Mota in the gubernatorial elections in the Estado de México (Edomex) that month. Zavala has also accused Anaya of misusing PAN radio and television publicity spots, abusing his position to pursue his own presidential ambitions while keeping his true intentions hidden. She had demanded that he leave his position and compete on a level playing field. Anaya demurred.

But Anaya released a video shortly after Zavala announced that she was leaving the PAN, containing a last-ditch offer of talks “to preserve the unity of the PAN”. Zavala swiftly rebuffed him on *Twitter*, claiming that she had unsuccessfully sought a meaningful dialogue for two years, “with public and private speeches on video and in papers” (although these constituted lacerating critiques of PAN policy under Anaya rather than a formal offer of dialogue). She laid the blame for the split squarely on Anaya. “I am not the cause but the effect of [PAN] division,” she claimed.

The fallout from Zavala’s departure has been acrimonious. “I feel a great sense of relief, like when you have an abscess and the pus comes out,” PAN Senator Ernesto Ruffo said. “Ruffo neatly encapsulates the intellectual standard, the moral stature, the level of debate and democratic tolerance that prevails now within the PAN,” Calderón responded. Senators Roberto Gil and Jorge Luis Lavalle said they would fight for Zavala’s cause from within the PAN, denouncing “the absurd attitude of Anaya”, and speculated that there was a strong chance of her returning as a presidential candidate for the Frente when clear evidence emerges of voters coalescing behind her. Former governors Fernando Canales Clariond, Alberto Cárdenas, Emilio González Márquez, Alejandro González Alcocer and José Guadalupe Osuna Millán released a statement offering support for Zavala’s decision without going so far as to leave the party.

In short there will be no exodus of politicians from the PAN. Unlike the PRD politicians who flocked to López Obrador’s banner, there would be no party structure for them to get re-elected as with Morena, and they are not prepared to jeopardise their own positions in next July’s concurrent congressional elections.

Two PAN senators did announce their decisions to leave the party, but for family and political reasons. Luisa ‘Cocoa’ María Calderón, Zavala’s sister-in-law, left the PAN after 41 years of membership, accusing Anaya of deserting the party’s ideals. Senator José Luis Luege Tamargo, who served in the federal governments of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Calderón, said the PAN was going through one of the worst crises of its history thanks to Anaya’s “dreadful leadership”. But Luege Tamargo only left after the PAN overlooked him for CDMX governor (*see sidebar*).

Zavala has since met Moreno Valle, who in turn met the PRD governor of Michoacán, Silvano Aureoles; all three were signatories to a letter demanding open primaries to compete for the Frente’s presidential candidacy. Moreno Valle said it was essential that the movement live up to its name and “allow a wide democratic process, in which the citizens have the final word in a free, universal, and secret vote”. But for now Anaya and Barrales are arguing that it is time to construct a shared government programme, insisting, somewhat disingenuously, that it is ideals not individuals that matter.

## Boost for PRI

PAN Senator Adriana Dávila bemoaned the fact that the PAN had shot itself in the foot, blaming “a strategy orchestrated by the PRI”. The PRI president, Enrique Ochoa Reza, while he could barely conceal his glee at the PAN’s convulsions, was adamant that the party only had itself to blame: “[the split]

## Los Zetas

In reference to the Cadereyta prison director being on the payroll of the Los Zetas drug trafficking organisation, the national press even published pictures of a banner hung outside the prison during the riot, which read: “We don’t want the Z director”. This has been neither confirmed nor denied by the state authorities, which have nonetheless announced the launch of an investigation.

is the product of an intolerant, undemocratic, attitude, in which Ricardo Anaya appropriated radio and television spots for his own personal promotion instead of using these democratic spaces for his party and democracy”. The president of the federal lower chamber of congress, the PRI’s Jorge Carlos Ramírez Marín, meanwhile, accused Anaya of seeking a scapegoat, arguing that the PRI would not have the influence to persuade Zavala to leave the PAN even if it wanted to.

Although the PRI looks set to benefit from Zavala’s decision, Ivonne Ortega, a former governor of the south-eastern state of Yucatán (2007-2012), urged the party leadership to heed the warning. Ortega has denounced a lack of internal democracy within the PRI, pushing for a reform of anachronistic practices such as the *dedazo*, under which the party hierarchy handpicks its presidential candidate. “We need to leave *dedazos* behind to allow all presidential candidates to compete on a level playing field,” Ortega said.

## MEXICO & NAFTA

### MEXICO | SECURITY

#### New fatal prison riot raises old questions

**At least 17 inmates were killed and 31 people (including prison guards and police officers) were injured during a riot on 10 October at the prison located in the municipality of Cadereyta, in Mexico’s north-eastern state of Nuevo León. Given that this is the third riot registered in the Cadereyta prison this year, and the fourth deadly riot in a Nuevo León prison in the last two years, the incident has raised familiar questions about the situation in the state’s prisons. Both the state and federal governments are under pressure to answer these questions not least because after 49 inmates were killed during a riot at Nuevo León’s Topo Chico prison last year – the deadliest prison riot in Mexico’s history - they had vowed to address the deficiencies in the penitentiary system to ensure that there would be no repeat of such episodes.**

The latest riot at the Cadereyta prison began when a group of some 150 inmates decided to stage a protest against the conditions inside the prison. As part of their protest, the inmates set fire to mattresses and dustbins. This led to prison guards opening some of the cells to allow inmates to escape the fire. But according to the official accounts, some of the imprisoned members of the criminal organisation took advantage of the situation to settle scores with members of rival gangs.

Meanwhile, based on accounts from the relatives of Cadereyta prison inmates, the local press reported that the protests inside the jail started when imprisoned members of the Golfo drug trafficking organisation (DTO) accused the prison’s director, Edgardo Aguilar Aranda, of being on the payroll of the rival Los Zetas DTO. According to these accounts, with the help of Aguilar, Los Zetas members had effectively gained control of the prison and were imposing their rule on their rivals (*see sidebar*).

Nuevo León state government spokesperson Aldo Fasci said that, following the deployment of additional security forces to the prison, they had been able to bring the riot under control but only after using “lethal force”. After putting the initial death toll at 13, Fasci said that the authorities were now trying to clear up the incident and did not rule out the possibility of the death toll rising further. In fact, following Fasci’s initial report, the Nuevo León authorities reported that the death toll had increased to 17 and that some of the over 1,500 prisoners were still unaccounted for. Meanwhile Nuevo León’s attorney general, Bernardo González, has said that 54 individ-

## **‘El Bronco’**

Margarita Zavala’s desertion of the PAN overshadowed the decision by the maverick governor of the north-eastern state of Nuevo León, Jaime ‘El Bronco’ Rodríguez Calderón, to register as an independent presidential pre-candidate on 7 October. He will now set about seeing if he can collect the requisite number of signatures to register his candidacy, 866,593, and would then seek leave of absence in January. “I want to show that society is tired of political party and the politicians themselves,” Rodríguez said.

uals are already under investigation for the role they played in the riot, although González refused to confirm if Aguilar was one of those.

The rising death toll, and allegations that the Cadereyta prison may be under the effective control of a criminal organisation, produced serious concerns. Noting that in the wake of the Topo Chico riot last year it had issued a warning about the parlous condition of the state’s penitentiary system marked by chronic overcrowding and a lack of internal control, Mexico’s human rights commission (CNDH) called for the state and federal governments to intervene, conduct a swift investigation, and address all the failings that led to the loss of life. The CNDH’s call was echoed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Mexico.

An OHCHR statement said that it is the state and federal authorities that are responsible for clearing up the case and ensuring that the rights of inmates are fully respected. To this end, the OHCHR statement added that “it is imperative that there is an end to the outbreaks of violence inside Nuevo León’s prisons, by effectively investigating the previous incidents that took place in the prisons of Topo Chico, Apodaca, and Cadereyta itself”.

### **Political pressure**

As the Nuevo León authorities begin investigating the case, the state government led by independent governor Jaime ‘El Bronco’ Rodríguez Calderón is facing public demands to provide a full explanation of the incident. Dozens of relatives of Cadereyta prison inmates have been staging demonstrations outside the prison demanding that the authorities provide them with information about their loved ones and at the same time accusing the state government of failing to protect prisoners.

Meanwhile, the national right-wing opposition Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) has accused the Rodríguez administration of being responsible for the lack of control at the Cadereyta prison and Nuevo León’s wider prison system. Noting that a total of 71 inmates have died in riots and over 100 have been injured inside Nuevo León prisons since Rodríguez assumed office in 2015, the PAN leader in Nuevo León, Mauro Guerra Villareal, said that it was clear that for all his electoral promises about improving public security, Rodríguez was not interested in improving the situation in the state’s prisons.

“There is a vacuum of authority, there is no control, no order, because the governor is not even in Nuevo León,” Guerra said in allusion to Rodríguez’s failure to make a public appearance in Nuevo León after registering as an independent presidential candidate in next year’s general election (*see sidebar*). “What happened in Cadereyta is a reflection of what is happening in Nuevo León”, Guerra said, adding that “when the priority is the presidency, then the ship drifts aimlessly”.

### **Mayor murdered in Puebla**

The attorney general’s office in Mexico’s Puebla state (FGE) reported on 10 October that Manuel Hernández Pasi6n, the mayor of the Puebla municipality of Huitzilan de Serd6n, had been murdered by unidentified gunmen. An FGE statement said that Hernández, who won election in 2014 for the nationally ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), was attacked while travelling in his vehicle on a local highway with his bodyguard, who was also killed in the attack.

According to eyewitness accounts, Hernández, a member of the local indigenous organisation Antorcha Campesina, was killed by a group of heavily armed gunmen who shot him and his companion at close range, suggesting that he was targeted by a criminal organisation. Hernández is the second mayor to be murdered in Mexico this month.

**MUD in pole position but...****Maduro's popularity**

President Maduro's approval rating rose to 23.2% as of end-September, up 5.8 percentage points from end-July, according to Datanálisis. The pollster attributed the improvement to the end of street protests and violence since late July, a rejection of US President Donald Trump's verbal aggression against Venezuela, and a perception in some quarters of an improvement in the economy as oil prices edged up.

On the face of it, the main opposition coalition, Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD), should score an even bigger victory in regional elections on 15 October than it did in the December 2016 legislative elections, when it won majority control of the national assembly from the ruling Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Berlin-based NGO Transparency International (TI), and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) just did the MUD a favour with new reports heavily critical of the performance of the government led by President Nicolás Maduro. Yet Maduro, regularly dismissed by the MUD as a hapless ex-bus driver, will not be dislodged just yet.

In its latest (October) update to its World Economic Outlook, the IMF said that Venezuela's triple-digit average annual inflation rate could soar to over 2,300% in 2018 (from 653% in 2017), the highest estimate of all the countries tracked by the Fund. Real GDP will contract by 6% in 2018, it forecast, following a contraction of 12% this year (and 16.5% last year). The IMF also put unemployment at 30%, five times the regional average of around 6%.

Meanwhile, TI put Venezuela fourth on a new list of regional countries for the frequency with which citizens have to pay bribes to access public services. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of Venezuelan citizens, 87%, felt that corruption had increased in the past 12 months. A full 73% felt the police were 'completely corrupt' while, astonishingly, seven of every ten – 70% of the population – said they feared 'a violent death', in reference to the world-record homicide rates in the country. The Venezuelan Observatory on Violence (OVV) estimates a homicide rate of 82 per 100,000 in the country, the second highest in the world. In the capital Caracas it is above that again, at around 120 per 100,000.

Over in Chile, the FAO's regional representative for Latin America and the Caribbean, Julio Berdegué, said that "the situation in Venezuela" had been an important contributory factor in the sharp 6% annual rise in malnutrition levels in the region in the past year (to an estimated 42.5m people). This was a strong comment by the FAO leadership, which has previously come under fire for continuing to praise the progress against malnutrition in Venezuela despite clear evidence on the ground to the contrary.

The FAO was forming its judgements on the basis of old data, taken during the period of exponential growth in social welfare spending under former president Hugo Chávez (1999-2013), when oil prices were over US\$100/barrel. Early this year, it acknowledged a changed reality in the country – rather belatedly in the view of critics.

In similar vein, in early October the local Caritas Foundation reported a sharp 14% increase – in just four months – in the incidence of malnourished children presenting to its medical workers. It said that of the total cohort of children presenting in May, 54% showed signs of malnutrition. By August, that had risen to 68%. Based on this and much more evidence gathered in-country, it does not appear to be any exaggeration, or 'international media conspiracy', to assert that there is hunger in Venezuela in 2017.

Against this backdrop – and bearing in mind the political violence of the second quarter, when around 125 people died in violent clashes with the

## Threat of violence

Carlos Ocariz of Primero Justicia, who is seeking to replace Henrique Capriles Radonski, as the state governor of Miranda, notes that immediately after the elections, the MUD intends to pile pressure on to demand a set date and free and fair conditions for the presidential election, technically due by December 2018 at the latest. “People are very angry, and their anger has a face: Maduro”, he commented to *Reuters*. As such, fresh violence on the streets is a very clear risk as the results come in next week. This is a problem for President Maduro as he tries to convince the international community of his commitment to a peaceful, democratic solution to the social, political, economic, and internal security breakdown that has taken place on his watch since April 2013.

security forces in protest at Maduro’s call for a constituent assembly – the US investment bank Torino Capital suggested in a recent client note that the opposition could win 18 of the country’s 23 states, an 180-degree turnaround from the last regional elections in December 2012, when the PSUV won 20 states, adding two more to its roster (from 18 previously).

Yet the MUD is not in any way confident of its chances now, because the idea of a level playing field in Venezuela would be the ultimate in wishful thinking. Among the various obstacles erected by the national electoral council (CNE) – which has long since shed any vestige of independence as an institution – was its refusal to put the MUD’s consensus candidates in each state, chosen via primaries in early September, on the electronic ballot sheet. Instead, and rather bizarrely, all of the MUD’s initial candidates, from before the primaries, will appear on the ballot sheet, listed as aspirants for the plethora of MUD parties. This is patently nonsensical. It is bound to confuse voters, and split the opposition vote to the likely advantage of the PSUV, but the CNE, backed by the powerful supreme court, simply refused to update the ballot to show only the actual slate of contenders running on the single MUD ticket.

Prior to that, in early August, the CNE announced that the MUD as an entity could not register (unity) candidates in seven PSUV-run states – Apure, Aragua, Bolívar, Carabobo, Monagas, Trujillo, and Zulia. Instead, its candidates could only register for their individual parties – another way of splintering and weakening the already-fragile MUD unity.

And, on 11 October, just four days before the vote, the CNE confirmed that it would relocate 200 voting stations in 16 states, affecting over 300,000 voters. The list of MUD grievances goes on. Many of the MUD’s most recognisable faces, including most of its leadership – were all prohibited from running by the CNE on trumped-up legal grounds. Thus voters will not only be looking at a very confusing ballot sheet on Sunday but there will also be very few faces that they recognise.

Meanwhile, the PSUV is being accused of particularly dirty tricks, such as handing out food boxes, while making clear that registered party members and government supporters will be marched, if necessary, to polling stations (tactics it was also accused of using in the 31 July constituent assembly election, which was boycotted by the MUD). The PSUV’s number two, Diosdado Cabello, has also publicly threatened public sector workers on national television with “severe consequences” unless they remain loyal.

Despite all these manoeuvres, the Catholic Church, leading local academics, business leaders, the Organization of American States (OAS), Latin American notables, the US, most of the MUD leadership, and also Chavista dissidents are all urging Venezuelans to turn out en masse on Sunday, on the grounds that a right not exercised is a right lost, no matter how imperfect the system, and that the bigger the turnout, the more difficult – and glaringly obvious – it will be for the CNE and the Maduro government to try to fiddle with the outcome.

The message to voters is that, despite the despair and disillusion, elections do still matter. Abstention will only favour the incumbent and that means no change. And even if – as before – the Maduro government neutralises an electoral loss by undermining the power of state governors (using the constituent assembly and the supreme court to do so), the cost to the administration of such blatant manoeuvres is getting incrementally higher, with the European Union (EU) standing ready to add its considerable weight of sanctions to that already brought to bear on the Caracas government by the US and Canada.

**Kuczynski over latest hump, but bumpy road ahead**

President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski's approval rating rose by nine percentage points to 31% in October, having fallen to a low of 22% in September, according to a new Datum survey for the local business daily *Gestión* published on 11 October. The low opinion of politicians is not confined to Peru; in a new report by Transparency International, 47% of Latin American and Caribbean citizens said they believed that all elected representatives were corrupt, with 43% saying the same of presidents.

The bounce in President Kuczynski's support follows his cabinet reshuffle and appointment of Mercedes Aráoz as his new prime minister, after the right-wing opposition *Fuerza Popular* (FP, Fujimoristas) used its control of congress to force out the previous incumbent, Fernando Zavala, in a vote of no-confidence. Aráoz was due to present her plan of government to congress as we went to press on 12 October. Having spent the weeks since her appointment sounding out the congressional benches, she was expected to secure a new vote of confidence. While the FP has pledged to turn over a new leaf and work with the newly retooled executive team, for most Peruvians this pledge rings hollow, given the disastrous executive-congress relationship to date. As such, 53% of respondents expected no change in the government's relationship with the legislature, while 42% felt the changes made by Kuczynski 'could help' improve things.

Kuczynski's popularity rose across all social classes, led by the wealthier sectors. More notably, it also rose in all regions of the country, suggesting that the government is making progress in stabilising those regions hit hard by extreme floods earlier this year. Economic growth is also slowly reviving in the country, albeit still unevenly, which is feeding through into somewhat better public sentiment (football is uppermost in people's minds, with Peru making it through to take on New Zealand next week in a playoff for a slot in next year's FIFA World Cup, and the national mood has been lifted by Chile's failure to qualify).

Datum reported that Kuczynski's popularity in the south of Peru rose to 33% in October, from 14% in September, while in eastern regions it went from 18% to 34%. In Lima, home to a third of the population and by far the largest electoral district, Kuczynski's rating was also 34%, from 25% in September. Datum surveyed 1,207 people at a national level between 29 September and 3 October with an error margin of 2.8%.

In its latest World Economic Outlook released this week the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects real GDP growth of 2.7% this year, rising to 3.8% next year. With recent floods-related inflation pressures easing, the central bank was expected to leave the benchmark interest rate unchanged in its 12 October meeting so as to create space for rising public expenditure to do its intended job of stimulating domestic economic activity. One of the key challenges for the Kuczynski administration – and for Peru as a country – is to better execute public spending, to see to it that funds channelled to regional and municipal level get spent, and properly.

According to a new report on corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean by the NGO Transparency International (TI), Peru is the third most corrupt country in the region on the basis of how often citizens have to pay bribes to access public services. In Peru's case, 39% of citizens told TI they had paid a bribe in the past year. In Mexico, over half of citizens (51%) said the same, followed by the Dominican Republic (46%). Of Peru's Andean neighbours, Colombia also ranked as corrupt, with 30% of citizens obliged to pay a bribe in the past year. In Bolivia and Ecuador, the proportion was 28%, while in Chile it was 22%, still quite a high figure and indicative of the depth of corruption in the region.

**Corruption**

José Ugaz, the respected Peruvian jurist and chair of Transparency International, said, "The people of Latin America and the Caribbean are being let down by their governments, their political class and their private sector leaders...Corruption is far too prevalent. Bribery represents a means for enrichment of the few, and a significant barrier to accessing key public services, particularly for the most vulnerable in society."

## Ruling coalition splits over Farc

Three senior figureheads in the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Farc) registered the demobilised guerrilla group's new political party this week before the national electoral council (CNE). Before the Farc can compete in next year's elections, however, congress must approve legislation pertaining to the transitional justice system. This has made it through the first of three debates but it was deeply divisive and led to the rupturing of the ruling Unidad Nacional coalition. Cambio Radical (CR), the party of presidential aspirant Germán Vargas Lleras (until March the vice-president) opted to go its own way and withdrew its cabinet ministers from the government.

'Iván Márquez' (Luciano Marín Arango), 'Jesús Santrich' (Seusis Pausias Hernández), and 'Victoria Sandino' (Judith Simanca Herrera) registered the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (Farc) party before the CNE on 9 October, filing the political organisation's statutes, ideological platform, and code of ethics. The CNE should decide whether to grant the new party juridical status by the end of the month. "The war is behind us...we have turned that sad page," Márquez said. "Now we must dedicate ourselves to reconciling the Colombian family, curing the wounds with truth."

It is this 'truth' which has been at the centre of a heated debate in congress about the transitional justice system (JEP), a core component of the peace accord signed with the Farc. Vargas Lleras and the CR, the most lukewarm of the Unidad Nacional coalition allies on the peace accord, have questioned the impartiality of the magistrates selected to sit on the peace tribunal.

Even proponents of peace balked at Márquez et al registering the Farc as a political party before they have made any commitment at all to tell the 'truth' about the armed conflict before this tribunal. Senator Claudia López, of the left-wing Alianza Verde (AV), sought to insert an amendment to the JEP legislation barring guerrillas responsible for the worst atrocities in the armed conflict from taking up seats in congress before appearing before the peace tribunal. The CR rowed in behind this proposal but the government rejected it on the grounds that it ran counter to what was agreed in Cuba, and it failed to prosper.

The debate led to a definitive break between the government and the CR, however, shortly after President Juan Manuel Santos issued an ultimatum last week saying that anyone who failed to support the peace process would have to leave his government [WR-17-39]. The CR refused to buckle and opposed the JEP legislation. After a few days of standoff, the housing minister, Jaime Pumarejo, and environment minister, Luis Gilberto Murillo, tendered their resignations, although Santos retained the latter's services on the grounds that he was not in government because of his ties with the CR (which effectively dissolved in May when CR legislators dropped their support of the minister).

A presidential statement acknowledged the rift with the CR, which it said was due to "a distancing from the government's most important policy, which has been to consolidate the peace process". This should spell the end of Santos's unofficial support of the presidential candidacy of Vargas Lleras. This marks a decisive moment in the election campaign. Santos is likely to endorse the victor in the primary elections in the Partido Liberal (PL) on 19 November. Vargas Lleras, meanwhile, is likely to distance himself decisively from Santos, attacking aspects of the peace process and economic policies about which he has reservations.

### Tumaco

Colombian authorities are investigating a confused incident in a rural area in the municipality of Tumaco in the south-western department of Nariño in which at least six people lost their lives. A crowd numbering between 300 and 1,000 local farmers encircled a field to protest against forced coca eradication being carried out in the area. They claim that police opened fire on them in "a massacre". The police claim that they were responding to an attack by Farc dissidents.



**Macri gets three timely boosts**

President Mauricio Macri's prospects of gaining a stronger foothold in the federal congress received three significant boosts this week. Firstly, his ruling centre-right Cambiemos coalition triumphed in gubernatorial elections in the north-eastern province of Corrientes. An exultant Macri is betting on the result having a ripple effect across northern Argentina in the mid-term federal congressional elections on 22 October, allowing Cambiemos to expand its presence in both chambers of congress. Secondly, the senate campaign of his government's principal critic, former president Cristina Fernández (2007-2015), foundered on yet another legal case. And, thirdly, the Argentine national football team snatched victory from the jaws of defeat to avoid the ignominy of failing to qualify for the Fifa World Cup.

**'Corrientes effect'**

Gustavo Valdés won 54% of the vote in the gubernatorial elections in Corrientes on 8 October for the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), one of the three member parties of Macri's Cambiemos. Valdés defeated Carlos 'Camau' Espínola, who was representing a coalition led by the Partido Justicialista (PJ, Peronists), by nine percentage points. Valdés will succeed Ricardo Colombi, also of the UCR, a firm ally of Macri who had attempted to extend his mandate for two years via an unsuccessful constitutional reform.

The Macri administration invested a lot in retaining Corrientes for Cambiemos. Macri, who had visited the province nine times in the last two years, dispatched his cabinet chief, Marcos Peña, and his interior, public works, and housing minister, Rogelio Frigerio, to Corrientes for the elections. Peña insisted that the local election had national resonance: "It is a message for the whole of Argentina". National governments normally maintain the exact opposite but the Macri administration is very keen to set off a chain reaction in northern Argentina.

Frigerio predicted that the Macri administration could "go down as the most federal in [Argentina's] history", attracting the most widespread support. It expects to repeat this victory in Corrientes in the mid-term congressional elections in the province on 22 October, and also in Jujuy, where the UCR's Gerardo Morales is governor, but it is also hopeful of improving its performance in neighbouring provinces where Cambiemos was defeated in August's primary elections (Paso): Misiones, Chaco, and Salta.

Macri went on the campaign trail in the border town of Puerto Iguazú, in the province of Misiones, the day after the Corrientes victory. Polls suggest that Cambiemos has closed the gap on the dissident PJ Frente Renovador in Misiones from 12 percentage points in the Paso to five points now. Meanwhile, Vice-President Gabriela Michetti visited Salta, where Cambiemos trailed by 14 points in the Paso, to try and capitalise on the 'Corrientes effect'. There are also hopes Cambiemos could overturn the PJ's seven-point victory in the Paso in Chaco and finish all square with two seats apiece in the lower chamber.

**'Messi effect'**

The significance of the Corrientes factor could be overblown. The PJ has not wrested control of the governorship of Corrientes from its political rivals since before the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) so had Cambiemos stumbled here it would have been a huge setback. Cambiemos could well derive as much benefit from the 'Messi effect' as the 'Corrientes effect'.

**Corrientes**

President Macri received the governor-elect of Corrientes, Gustavo Valdés, in the presidential palace on 10 October. The incumbent governor, Ricardo Colombi, also attended the meeting, along with the cabinet chief, Marcos Peña, the interior minister, Rogelio Frigerio, and the recently appointed cabinet minister in charge of Plan Belgrano to develop northern Argentina, Carlos Vignolo, an ally of Colombi's. Valdés pledged support for the federal government, although he also called for "mature federalism", more resources to be made available to Corrientes "to resolve the asymmetry between central and northern Argentina".

## Amia case

Judge Claudio Bonadio ordered Cristina Fernández to appear in court on 26 October, along with 14 other defendants, including her former foreign minister Héctor Timerman (2010-2015), and legal and technical secretary to the presidency Carlos Zannini (2003-2015). The case against them is based on the original complaint by the special prosecutor Alberto Nisman, who had been due to present it to congress in January 2015 but was found dead in his flat from a bullet wound the day beforehand.

All the main political protagonists sought to take advantage of the feel good factor generated by the hat-trick scored by Lionel Messi which saw Argentina win 3-1 in Ecuador and qualify for the Fifa World Cup by the skin of its teeth after falling behind in the first minute of the tie. But the main beneficiary is usually the national government so Cambiemos should gain the most. One senior cabinet official admitted to the national press, "Argentina lives and breathes football. It would not have been good for the national mood to have been eliminated". Argentina has only failed to qualify on one previous occasion.

### 'Legal effect'

The other boon for Macri is the legal quagmire into which Fernández is being sucked. As if the corruption cases against Fernández, and her former cabinet members, were not enough to damage her image, Federal Judge Claudio Bonadio this week summoned Fernández to appear in court in connection with her government's alleged cover-up of the suspected involvement of Iranian government officials in the 1994 bombing of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Amia) community centre in Buenos Aires. She received the news while campaigning in Escobar, a district in Greater Buenos Aires allied to Kirchnerismo.

The only saving grace for Fernández, who is running for a senate seat representing the country's largest province of Buenos Aires, is that she will not have to appear in court until after the elections, on 26 October. But addressing national and international media gathered at the headquarters of Instituto Patria, the think tank in the city of Buenos Aires which she created in 2015 just before leaving office, Fernández accused Macri of "political persecution, degradation of democracy, and obscene partisan use of the judiciary".

Fernández alleged that the judiciary in general was "acting like the executive's task force", while Bonadio in particular had set out "a judicial timetable in parallel with the electoral timetable". She presented a six-minute video detailing alleged irregularities committed by Bonadio and his political links to the government led by Carlos Menem (1989-1999).

### Rocket to the moon

Not since August 2011 has Fernández accepted open questions from the press, but she is fighting a rear-guard action to defend herself in the face of mounting legal cases against her. At one point she came closer than ever before to equating Macri directly with the country's last dictatorship. Accusing Macri of "an unprecedented and dangerous concentration of power", the senate candidate for Unidad Ciudadana (UC) said he had "drawn up a black list of people" that he would like to "send to the moon in a rocket", adding that she was sure she would feature "at the top of this list". Fernández added that the idea of a black list had disturbing echoes of "the modus operandi of the last military dictatorship; those that had to disappear so that Argentina would no longer have problems".

Macri has never publicly spoken of such a list although the press reported last week that he joked about one to his inner circle. He apparently quipped that the list comprises some 562 people, including politicians, union leaders, and social activists, responsible for blocking the changes the country needs. "We don't want to have a president that has black lists," Fernández said. "We want a president that is worried by other lists. It is the supermarket list that bothers me."

Fernández will always have a devoted following but it is unlikely that fastening onto hypothetical black lists will succeed in attracting more voters than are put off by the less abstract lists of legal charges which are progressively blackening her name.

## Bribery scheme reaches Olympic proportions

In 2016, Rio de Janeiro became the first South American City to host the Olympic Games. But what should have been a euphoric moment in Brazil's sporting history has since been overshadowed by reports of foul play. Most recently Carlos Nuzman, one of the key players who helped Brazil secure its winning bid to host the Games, was taken into custody over allegations that he ran a vote-buying scheme to persuade other countries on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to vote for Brazil.

On 5 October, police arrested Nuzman, a former president of Brazil's Olympic Committee (COB) who is wanted as part of a joint anti-corruption investigation between Brazilian and French authorities named 'Operation Unfair Play'. In 2009, Nuzman allegedly ordered the payment via an intermediary of US\$2m to Papa Massata Diack, the son of former head of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) Lamine Diack, to win votes from African members of the IOC, according to Brazil's office of the attorney general (PGR). The payment was allegedly made just three days before Brazil won the bid to host the 2016 Olympics.

Papa Diack is also under investigation by French financial prosecutors from the Parquet national financier (PNF) for allegedly taking more bribes ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games. This suggests the Brazilian probe could have international repercussions and could influence the progress of ongoing investigations in Japan. However, the IOC has stressed that the allegations regarding irregularities in both the 2016 and 2020 Olympic Games have not yet been proven and it has called for the presumption of innocence for all implicated parties.

While Nuzman appears to be a central player in the vote-buying scandal centring around Brazil, this was a team effort involving senior businessmen and politicians, according to investigators behind 'Operation Unfair Play'. Nuzman allegedly channelled the bribes to Papa Diack through Brazilian business mogul Arthur César de Menezes Soares Filho, known as 'King Arthur'.

Some of the same men who helped Brazil host the 2016 Olympics allegedly went on to profit from it, at the expense of the Rio de Janeiro state. Soares Filho paid another US\$10.4m to jailed former Rio de Janeiro governor Sérgio Cabral (2007-2014) in exchange for contracts which would benefit his business empire, prosecutors have found. "This is part of an extremely complex criminal organisation that carefully planned each stage of the Olympic Games which came to Brazil," federal prosecutor Fabiana Schneider said.

Brazil's federal public ministry (MPF) blocked R\$1bn (US\$316m) in assets from Nuzman and Filho, along with his former business partner Eliane Pereira Calvacante. Nuzman is now under preventive detention with no set date for his release. Meanwhile, Soares Filho is wanted by Interpol but remains at large. He is currently believed to be residing in the US and was last seen entering an exclusive US\$5.3m luxury villa on Key Biscayne, Miami, according to an article published by *The Miami Herald* in August.

Elsewhere, Swiss authorities are investigating the provenance of 16 1kg gold bars belonging to Nuzman worth an estimated US\$750,000 following a tip-off from Brazilian authorities as part of a money-laundering probe. This would be enough to make 2,388 gold medals for the Olympic Games (with each weighing 6.7 grams), reported *BBC Brasil*. Moreover, Nuzman's wealth grew by as much as 457% in the last 10 of the 22 years he was president of the COB (1995-2017).

### Nuzman

Before joining Brazil's Olympic Committee in 1995, Carlos Arthur Nuzman headed Brazil's volleyball committee (CBV) for 20 years (1975-1995). During the 1960s and 1970s he was a professional volleyball player. He was selected to represent Brazil in the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games – the first time volleyball was included.

### **Rio de Janeiro residents getting restless**

Some 72% of Rio de Janeiro residents want to live elsewhere found a Datafolha survey published on 7 October, which canvassed over 800 people. Following reports of increased violence in Brazil's second largest city, 90% of *cariocas* said they are afraid to go out at night, and a third of interviewees changed their routine to avoid certain areas.

### **Reaction from the sporting community**

The vote-buying allegations surrounding the Rio 2016 Olympic Games have "brought Brazil's sporting community to its knees," Edgar Alves, a columnist for news site *Folha de São Paulo* wrote. He fears that the sporting scandals could adversely affect the way Brazil's sports stars are received abroad, citing the way Russian athletes were treated in the wake of the 2015 doping scandal.

Leading Brazilian sportsmen have since spoken out against Nuzman following the allegations. Federal senator Romário de Souza Farias, formerly a professional footballer who played in the 1994 Fifa World Cup in the US and the 1998 Seoul Olympic Games, said 'Operation Unfair Play' marked the "saddest moment" for Brazilian sport. "After the party of the Olympic Games, we know the reality behind the organisation of the mega-event, including the suspicions about...[Nuzman]...Brazilian sport needs cleaning up, more than ever before, because it is propped up by millions of reais of public funds. It is also necessary to review the structure of sporting institutions to stop repeats of these kind of robberies," he wrote on *Facebook*.

Following his arrest, the IOC suspended Nuzman from his position as an honorary member of the board on the recommendation of the ethics committee. He also lost his seat on the Coordination Commission for the Olympic Games in Tokyo 2020. More controversially, the IOC provisionally suspended the body Nuzman was responsible for, the COB, until governance conditions are improved. This means that payments from the IOC to the COB will be suspended. However, Brazilian athletes are still allowed to compete in upcoming tournaments including the 2018 Olympic Winter Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, read a statement on the IOC's website. The IOC has been criticised, however, for not acting to discipline Nuzman sooner.

News of the Olympics sporting scandal follows fast on the heels of another investigation into Brazil's management of the 2014 Fifa World Cup. The former head of Brazilian football association (CBF), José Maria Marin, was arrested on charges of bribery and money laundering in 2015 and is currently serving out house arrest in the Trump Tower, Fifth Avenue, New York. His replacement, Marco Polo Del Nero, is also under investigation amid growing calls for his resignation. He is wanted by US authorities for conspiracy, money laundering, and electoral fraud, but he refuses to leave Brazil for fear of being arrested.

### **Brazil's changing fortunes**

At the time, mega events such as the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics were seen as Brazil's ticket to economic success. Instead, they have left the country with eye-watering debts, disused stadiums, and a string of lawsuits. The unfulfilled promise of such events can perhaps be felt most keenly in Rio de Janeiro, which still has an economic hangover from the Games.

Despite this, some politicians are becoming nostalgic for those bygone days. "During the period of great sporting events...the incidences of violence fell and we lived in a peace that has not been felt here recently," wrote Rio de Janeiro mayor Marcello Crivella in a column for news site *O Globo* published last month. At least when international events like the World Cup and Olympics took place, federal security forces made their presence in Rio felt more strongly, he argues. Now, by contrast, the perception of violence has increased (*see sidebar*). following budget cuts to police services, among many other factors.

Crivella has suggested compensating for the shortfall in state funds by promoting yet more mega events. He has pledged to increase the budget for the Rio de Janeiro New Year's celebrations and Carnival next year to attract international visitors and boost tourism. However, unless Rio's security situation improves, those measures may have limited success.

**Mapuche conflict impacts electoral campaign****Piñera's short memory**

Back in 2010 after a group of 38 Mapuche activists (including Coordinadora Arauco Malleco leader, Héctor Llaitul) accused of carrying out arson attacks remained on hunger strike for 82 days in protest at being prosecuted under the anti-terrorism legislation, the Piñera administration caved in and allowed the activists to be tried under common law. The Mapuche were subsequently given suspended prison sentences, which they would not have been able to get if tried under anti-terrorism legislation.

The indigenous Mapuche may have begun their struggle to reclaim what they consider to be ancestral lands in southern Chile many decades ago, but rarely has the conflict become such a key election campaign issue. The flare-up in violence linked to the Mapuche conflict in recent weeks has led the leading presidential candidates ahead of the 19 November general election to weigh in on the issue. None more so than Sebastián Piñera, the former president (2010-2014) who is seeking re-election for the centre-right opposition Chile Vamos coalition and currently leads all voting intention polls. By heavily criticising the government's response to rising violence, Piñera has set himself apart from some of his main presidential rivals on the centre-left.

In the wake of the decision by the leftist Nueva Mayoría coalition government to prosecute four Mapuche activists accused of carrying out an arson attack on an evangelical church, not under Chile's anti-terrorism legislation but under common law [[WR-17-39](#)], Piñera accused the administration led by President Michelle Bachelet of being "weak" and unable to stand up to "radical and criminal" Mapuche groups. Although Piñera savaged the government's U-turn, his government took a similar decision when he was in power (*see sidebar*).

In a 7 October interview with local media, Piñera insisted that the acts for which the Mapuche activists were being prosecuted were clearly acts of terrorism and should be treated as such. He argued that failure to do so would only lead to more such attacks by other radical Mapuche activists encouraged by the fact that they would receive lenient treatment from the authorities.

Piñera was careful to point out that trying Mapuche activists suspected of carrying out terrorist attacks under anti-terrorism legislation does not mean "equating Mapuche with terrorists". But he insisted that there are a number of radical Mapuche groups that "are financed from abroad, and which have links to many terrorist organisations around the world".

Piñera's remarks came after Chile's militarised police (Carabineros) announced the arrest of eight Mapuche community leaders – including the leader of the Coordinadora Arauco Malleco (CAM) radical Mapuche organisation, Héctor Llaitul – on 23 September. All of those arrested are suspected of being implicated in some of the recent arson attacks in the southern Araucanía area. The arrests came during a series of raids in Araucanía as part of an intelligence-led operation codenamed 'Operación Huracán'.

The Carabineros said that they had information that those arrested formed part of a criminal ring not only dedicated to launching arson attacks but also to smuggling firearms from Argentina illegally, ostensibly to arm the likes of the CAM. These revelations have strengthened Piñera's stance as opposed to that adopted by his main presidential rivals.

Both Alejandro Guillier, the candidate supported by the majority of the Nueva Mayoría parties, who currently sits second in the voting intention polls, and Beatriz Sánchez, the candidate of the leftist opposition Frente Amplio coalition, who is currently third, have been reluctant to describe the violence in the Araucanía area as terrorism. Guillier and Sánchez also criticised the application of anti-terrorism legislation to deal with the Mapuche conflict, stating that they would instead seek to engage with the Mapuche community to try to find a negotiated solution if they win election.

## Blooming?

“We are now beyond green shoots and we are starting to see the first little blooms,” Chile’s Finance Minister Nicolás Eyzaguirre said this week. He added that “these are robust signals...that clearly show that [economic] activity is higher than that seen up to July”.

## Pro-Mapuche march

While the wave of violence in the Araucanía has received widespread public condemnation, the application of the draconian anti-terrorist legislation and repressive tactics against the Mapuche to try and combat the violence divides opinion. The latest sign of this was the large turnout observed for the annual protest march in Chile’s capital, Santiago, organised by Mapuche groups in support of their cause.

Tens of thousands of people took part in the ‘Día de la Raza’ protest march on 9 October, in one of the largest such demonstrations in years. The marchers protested against the “colonialisation” of the Araucanía by the Chilean state, and the recent arrest of the Mapuche community leaders, which they described as a “political show”.

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## TRACKING TRENDS

**CHILE | Falling short of expectations.** Chile’s monthly economic activity index (Imacec), a GDP proxy measure, increased by 2.4% in August compared with the same month last year, according to new figures released by the central bank (BCCh) on 5 October. The August Imacec result was largely driven by a 9.2% year-on-year increase in the mining Imacec, compared to a 1.8% increase in the non-mining Imacec, according to the BCCh report.

The full August Imacec results were lower than the consensus market forecast of 2.5%-3%. However, Finance Minister Nicolás Eyzaguirre insisted that the August Imacec figure was positive, as it suggests that the domestic economy is exhibiting dynamic growth compared to the sluggish growth registered in the first half of the year (*see sidebar*).

Eyzaguirre’s view is shared by BCCh president Mario Marcel, who said that “the economy is travelling on the projected path. Today we see that economic activity continues to accelerate...[this] is similar to our projections”. Last month the BCCh revised up its year-end GDP growth forecast from 1%-1.75% to 1.25%-1.75%.

**PARAGUAY | Maintaining positive trade balance.** On 9 October, Paraguay’s central bank (BCP) released new trade figures, which showed that the country’s exports increased by 5.6% year-on-year in September to reach US\$9.09bn. A BCP report noted that the increase in exports in September offset the 19.2% increase in imports (which reached US\$8.35bn) registered in the month leading to a trade surplus of US\$748.6m.

**URUGUAY | Renewable energy.** Uruguay’s decisive shift from importing energy from Brazil and Argentina to cover its needs to becoming a net exporter was underscored this week by the presidential office’s release of a report compiled by the foreign trade agency Uruguay XXI.

The Uruguay XXI report found that renewable energy sources make up 62% of Uruguay’s overall energy mix (including transport fuel), more than triple the global average of 19%, as the country aggressively invests in wind farms, biomass, and solar power. Wind farms often feed into hydropower plants to ensure dams maintain reservoirs for longer after rainy seasons helping to reduce vulnerability to drought by as much as 70%.

Uruguay ranks third on the global list of renewable energy investment as a percentage of GDP, with total investment of more than US\$7bn since 2010 by means of public-private partnerships. The government has allocated a total of US\$4.23bn of investment in the energy sector in its US\$12.5bn infrastructure plan (2015-2019).

Uruguay now exports an average of 9.5% of the electricity it generates and has not imported a single kilowatt hour for five years. Agricultural processing is predominantly powered by biomass cogeneration plants, but the transport sector is still reliant on oil, which makes up 38% of the country’s total energy mix.

**Arzú targeted in anti-corruption efforts****New CSJ president**

On 6 October, Guatemala's supreme court (CSJ) elected José Pineda Barales as the new CSJ president for the period 2017-2018. Pineda was elected with nine votes in favour and three against by the 13-member CSJ which itself has seen three of its members face corruption accusations in the last two years – most recently Justice Blanca Aída Stalling Dávila who was arrested in February 2017 and has yet to be replaced (hence there were only 12 votes). The election attracted attention given the new CSJ president will preside over the commission responsible for electing a replacement for Attorney General Thelma Aldana who was appointed for a four-year term in May 2014 and who, along with Cicig's director Iván Velásquez, have been widely credited with the ground-breaking efforts to root out official corruption.

One of Guatemala's most well-known political figures, Álvaro Arzú, a former president (Partido de Avanzada Nacional, 1996-2000) and the current mayor of Guatemala City, has become the latest senior official to face corruption-related accusations from the United Nations-backed International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (Cicig) and the attorney general's office (AG). In an announcement which further shook the political establishment following calls for President Jimmy Morales to face investigation over two separate cases [[WR-17-39](#)], last week Cicig's director Iván Velásquez and the AG Thelma Aldana called for Arzú to be investigated for creating false payrolls and using public funds for his mayoral re-election bid in 2015.

In a press conference on 5 October, Aldana and Velásquez made the announcement regarding Arzú, who was elected for a fourth consecutive four-year term in 2015 for his Partido Unionista (PU) with an alliance of other parties (comprising Compromiso, Renovación y Orden [Creo], Todos, Victoria, and Gran Alianza Nacional [Gana]). During the press conference, Aldana and Velásquez presented the findings of an investigation which resulted in 11 arrests following various operations carried out mainly in the departments of Guatemala and Alta Verapaz. Known as 'Pandora', the case involves a corruption network previously headed up by a former prisoner, Byron Lima Oliva, killed last year in a prison riot. Lima Oliva had served as a security guard for Arzú during his presidency before being convicted in 2001 of one of the most notorious crimes committed during the 1960-1996 civil war: the 1998 murder of Bishop Juan Gerardi.

According to Cicig and the AG, between 2013 and 2015 Arzú reportedly contracted a local company, Torre Fuerte (owned by Lima, which he directed from behind bars), to manufacture uniforms and electoral propaganda for the PU and its allies, ahead of the 2015 elections. This was paid for with public funds, although the amount in question has yet to be determined. The same investigation also found that the municipal government had created fake posts for Lima Oliva's relatives including his partner Alejandra Reyes and her mother in the municipal transit authority (Emetra) in 2007.

As well as the accusations involving Arzú, the latest investigation by Cicig and the AG also shed light on Lima Oliva's control of the country's prison service (SP), serving as further evidence of the infiltration of state institutions by organised crime. According to Cicig and the AG, Lima Oliva's control of the SP was consolidated with the coming to power of the Partido Patriota (2012-2015) government led by President Otto Pérez Molina (himself forced to resign over corruption) and specifically his appointment of Mauricio López Bonilla as interior minister (2012-2015). López Bonilla has since been accused locally of illicit association and money laundering, while in February a US court formally accused him of conspiring to import cocaine into the US.

According to the investigation by Cicig and the AG, Lima Oliva was behind the appointment of key officials in the SP, with his choices of personnel reportedly endorsed by the SP director, retired colonel Luis Alberto González Pérez. According to Cicig and the AG, as well as the appointments in the SP, López Bonilla also authorised Lima Oliva to make decisions about the transfer of prisoners to different prisons.

### Quotes of the week

“[Andrés Manuel] López Obrador is mentally sick on autocracy, the leader who has to do everything. The PAN is the opposite and depends on its party institutions, but Ricardo Anaya has emulated him, taking decisions that are not his to take.”

*Mexico's Senator José Luis Luege Tamargo blames the PAN's president for the party's rupture.*

“The president has a black list of some 500 people that he thinks if they were not in Argentina and were sent in a rocket to the moon the country's problems would be solved.”

*Argentina's former president Cristina Fernández on her successor Mauricio Macri.*

“By converting ourselves into the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común, Farc, today, we are handing to the people a potent, crushing force so that they can direct change with their own hands.”

*Senior Farc leader 'Iván Márquez' on Colombia's newest party.*

### El Salvador's political landscape faces major upheaval

El Salvador's most popular politician no longer belongs to a party. The ruling left-wing Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) expelled Nayib Bukele, the mayor of San Salvador, this week, ostensibly for “verbal aggression” towards a party councillor, Xochilt Marchelli, at a municipal council meeting last month. Bukele's well-documented differences with the FMLN party hierarchy have suggested for while that his days might be numbered. The only thing staying the party's hand was the fact that opinion polls repeatedly show Bukele to be far more popular than any other FMLN politician.

Marchelli accused Bukele of physical and verbal assault after a council meeting on 6 September, saying she had to duck to avoid an apple he threw at her while branding her “a damned traitorous witch”. After 18 hours of deliberations, the FMLN's ethics tribunal found Bukele guilty of violating party principles, objectives, statutes, and regulations, causing internal divisions to the detriment of the party and damaging its image. Bukele swiftly tweeted his revised Wikipedia profile substituting FMLN to ‘independent’ under party affiliation.

Bukele had been heralded as the face of the new generation to replace the FMLN old guard but he had a simmering public disagreement with the party's veteran secretary general, Medardo González, and did not shy away from criticising President Salvador Sánchez Cerén. He even accused the FMLN at a local level of misappropriating public money for cynical party purposes. A succession of FMLN deputies defended the decision to expel Bukele, who they claimed had tried to seize control of the party and discredit the leadership and membership.

With municipal elections due on 4 March 2018, Bukele's ejection is a risky decision. Bukele won back the mayoralty of San Salvador, the country's second most important elected post, for the FMLN in 2015 after six years under the right-wing opposition Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Arena). In a Mitofsky poll last month asking whether respondents would vote for Bukele if he were no longer a member of the FMLN, 68% answered in the affirmative, while 88% said he was doing a good job, remarkable in such a politically polarised country. The poll also showed that Bukele would crush either of Arena's presidential pre-candidates, Carlos Calleja or Javier Simán, if he were to opt to run for president in March 2019. The same poll showed that any of the FMLN's other senior politicians, including González or Vice-President Oscar Ortiz, would lose to them.

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