

HEMISPHERE HIGHLIGHTS

VOLUME VIII | ISSUE 6 | JUNE 2009

Upcoming Events

Friday, July 10

10:00a.m. - 11:30a.m.

Venezuela and Russia: What
Sort of Relation-
ship?RSVP to americas@csis.org

Headlines

The province of Alberta, **Canada** announces an extension of incentives to attract investment in the oil and gas sector. Increased levels of drug-related violence in **Mexico** and the government's military response may affect rates of protest ballots cast, and the death of 48 children in a day-care center fire sparks controversy over the transparency of the investigation into the cause of the fire. Voter boycotts of a runoff Senate election in **Haiti** suggest a growing lack of confidence in government legitimacy. A military coup in **Honduras** causes substantial international criticism and the country's suspension of membership from the Organization of American States. The 2009 *World Drug Report* notes changes in levels of coca production in the **Andean Region**, observing a decrease in Colombia and increases in Peru and Bolivia. Investigations begin into the participation of former government officials in illegal wiretapping activity in **Colombia**. **Ecuador** becomes a member of ALBA. Well-organized indigenous protests in **Peru** surprise government officials. Midterm elections in **Argentina** mark a loss for the Kirtchner government coalition, as the country struggles to respond to a worsening public health situation due to the spreading H1N1 virus.

North America

Canada

The oil-rich Canadian province of Alberta announced on June 25 an extension of an incentives program to boost oil and gas drilling activity in the province. According to Alberta Energy Minister Mel Knight, oil and gas industry investors can now potentially save up to \$3 billion on royalty fees under this program, doubled from the previously estimated \$1.5 billion. The "three-point incentive program" of credits for drilling costs and reductions in first-year well royalties was originally introduced in March of 2008. However, the program was scheduled to expire in March 2010, leaving the industry little time to adjust its activities enough to take full advantage of the incentives. The extension announcement came the day after the Fraser Institute, a prominent conservative think-tank, released its *Global Petroleum Survey 2009* report which found that the province of Alberta now ranks as the "least attractive" Canadian province for oil and gas investment out of the provinces ranked. The major reason cited in the report for Alberta's decline is investor dissatisfaction with the province's energy policies including "punitive royalty rates, a lack of consultation, and a growing anti-energy bias." Manitoba has surpassed Saskatchewan since last year to become the "most attractive," due to its "low royalties and an easy to understand regulatory framework." In another survey on economic competitiveness in Western Canada released on June 27 by the Conference Board of Canada (not specific to the oil and gas industry), Alberta was found to still be ranked the most competitive Western Canadian province, earning an 'A' grade for both GDP per capita and GDP growth. *This extension of the three-point incentive program is a positive development for the Alberta oil and gas industry, but is only a short-term fix. Industry experts have responded to the move critically, saying that they do not expect investment to actually rebound until the province's future energy policy intentions become*

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Recent Events

Friday, June 19

10:00a.m. - 11:30a.m.

Cuba Outlook Series 6:
“Grassroots
Politics and Cuba’s
Communist Party”

Tuesday, June 30

4:00p.m. - 5:30p.m.

Presentation by the Honor-
able William
Brownfield, U.S.
Ambassador to
Colombia

“Some observers remain concerned that the day care owners themselves will not be adequately investigated regarding their management of an apparently faulty facility.”

more apparent and fluctuating prices for oil and gas stabilize, particularly in the currently flush natural gas markets. The Alberta government has changed its oil and gas industry royalties structure no less than five times in the last three years, repeatedly amending its widely criticized October 2007 ‘New Royalty Framework’ (NRF) before the policy even came into effect on January 1, 2009. The actual formulas to calculate the increased royalties were not announced until December 2008, adding to the overall confusion. Along with its announcement of the three-point incentive program extension, the government of Alberta also announced on June 25 that it intends to carry out a competitiveness review to be completed by the fall of 2009. Officials have not yet given any indication of what steps might be taken as a result of the findings of this review. The province of Alberta currently accounts for roughly 18 percent of Canada’s GDP. **Jessica B. Horwitz**

Mexico

The deaths of 48 children in a fire at a daycare center in northwestern Mexico have provoked intense national debate regarding political favoritism, corruption, and accountability. The fire broke out at the ABC day care center in Hermosillo, Sonora on June 5. Licensed by the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS), a federal health insurance and social security agency, the ABC served an estimated 200 children and occupied a building formerly used for manufacturing. When a blaze at a nearby government warehouse spread to the ABC, smoke and flames filled the interior, asphyxiating and burning the many occupants who could not get out because emergency exits had been blocked off. One witness eventually used a vehicle to rupture the building’s wall in order to allow those inside to escape. Reports that municipal fire inspectors had certified the ABC facility as safe just two weeks earlier have raised questions about corruption and competency within the IMSS system, the Hermosillo fire department, and the administrators of the day care facility. *By the end of June law enforcement agents had detained and questioned 13 people regarding the incident; however, only one person, Irma Crescencia Díaz Gómez, regional coordinator of IMSS day care centers, had been formally charged in connection with the fire. Parents of the children who died or were injured at the ABC have expressed frustration at the slow pace of the investigation and the failure of authorities to determine who is responsible for the tragedy. News that the facility was owned by wives of two officials close to incumbent governor Eduardo Bours generated accusations that members of the Sonoran political class are not concerned with the well-being of working Mexican families, the primary clients of the ABC day care center. The two officials have stepped down from their posts, but some observers remain concerned that the day care owners themselves will not be adequately investigated regarding their management of an apparently faulty facility. Some parents of children who died in the fire have formed the Movimiento Ciudadano 5 de Junio to coordinate civil society action with respect to the incident, organizing marches in Hermosillo and nearby cities on June 27 to demand greater transparency and accountability in the context of the investigation. They have also called on Mexico’s Supreme Court to establish a special commission to investigate the matter. Based on preliminary results, it appears that the association of the ABC fire with political figures tied to outgoing PRI governor Eduardo Bours may have favored candidates representing the PAN, PRD and other parties in Sonora during the midterm elections on Sunday, July 5. Katherine E. Bliss*

On June 21, the Felipe Calderón administration deployed 2,500 soldiers and 1,500 federal police officers to Mexico’s most violent city, Ciudad Juárez, in an effort to quell the nation’s escalated levels of drug-related violence. Officials decided to augment the troops and law enforcement agents stationed there after authorities reported an exponential rise in deaths in the metropolitan area of Ciudad Juárez—from one casualty daily to the current number of eight to nine daily—in a matter of two weeks. According to Mexican authorities, Ciudad Juárez reports the highest murder rate and levels of narcoviolence nationwide, with 800 violent deaths this year alone and 1,600 of the 6,000 drug-related homicides that took place in Mexico last year. The surge is part of the broader “Joint Operation

Juárez,” a strategy announced in March to fight drug traffickers by more than tripling law enforcement presence in the city via dispatching 5,000 soldiers and militarized federal police officers to Ciudad Juárez and surrounding areas to patrol the streets in lieu of local police forces. Given the initial but temporary success of the first deployment, the new surge replaces 2,000 troops and augments the total number of forces to 8,500 soldiers and 2,300 militarized federal police officers patrolling the city of 1.4 million inhabitants. *The Calderón administration’s sustained use of the military to stifle drug violence has been a constant concern of civilians and opposition parties in Mexico. Critics of President Calderón’s strategy claim that the national deployment of 46,000 troops throughout his two-and-a-half-year tenure has been overreaching and futile; they cite endemic corruption among police, the army, and political officials as a force that nullifies his proposed solutions. The tangible successes of the Calderón administration’s policies remain to be seen; following the arrest of 28 Michoacán officials in May and this month’s detainment of 92 police officers in Pachuca, Hidalgo, President Calderón stated on June 24 at a conference on security that the future of Mexican democracy is at stake in the government’s fight against official corruption and organized crime. Allegations that candidates for public office have ties to drug cartels have infiltrated many of the campaigns focused on Mexico’s upcoming July 5 midterm elections and have caused many citizens to consider invalidating their votes in a voto nulo –or spoiled ballot–campaign. The Mexican Electoral Tribunal estimates that popular dissatisfaction has raised the voter abstention rate to around 70 percent. If this figure proves to be accurate, a widespread lack of participation could prompt large-scale reforms on all levels of society. Aware of voter discouragement, many candidates have signed their names to “Mi Voto por tu Compromiso,” a candidate-citizen contract focused on ensuring that elected officials are held to campaign promises and avoid corruption by submitting their actions to monitoring by citizen groups. Despite a soaring presidential approval rating of 69 percent, President Calderón’s Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) party trailed the opposition Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) party 31 to 34 percent in a poll conducted two weeks ahead of the elections, in which all federal legislative seats, several state governorships, and a number of municipal positions will be determined. Analysts predict that if the main opposition parties are successful on July 5, it will become increasingly difficult for Calderón to pass legislation to combat cartels and drug-related violence without altering a number of his present strategies. Margaret Frost*

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Caribbean

Haiti

Haitians were asked for the second time this year to go to the polls in a June 22 runoff election to fill 11 vacant seats in Haiti’s 30-member Senate. This second round of voting, which followed on the heels of an inconclusive election on April 17, underscores the tremendous resources that are being used to achieve what can only be described as a pyrrhic victory for democracy in Haiti. The exclusion of the Fanmi Lavalas, the political party of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, by the national electoral commission intensified the partisan battles in Haiti. Although the Senate elections went forward, the successful boycotts of both this and the April runoff suggest a growing lack of confidence in public support for the government of President René Préval who supported the decision to exclude Lavalas. The turnout disappointed, despite pleas by the electoral commission to vote. In urban areas less than 5 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot, especially in certain areas of Port au Prince. Polling sites were virtually empty all day according to radio reports. Turnout in rural Haiti was higher (some speculate as much as 22 percent) but still low given the resources spent on this electoral effort. The cost of this round of elections is said to have been around \$16 million, underwritten by U.S. funding, and managed by the Organization of American States—a very high price for so few candidates. On a more positive note for the Haitian economy, the World Bank granted Haiti its long-awaited \$1.2 million debt relief package under its program for highly indebted poor countries. The

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decision, backed by U.S. congressional action on June 30 will result in a savings of \$265 million this year in debt service. This decision will free up much-needed funds for basic services in Haiti, giving the government more flexibility to meet some of the essential needs including health care and education. *By continuing to exclude Fanmi Lavalas the government of Haiti risks a further erosion of public trust and legitimacy. The election week was also complicated by student marches against the government, a challenge by businesses to support the proposed increase of a minimum wage in Haiti, and the further deterioration of the governance structure in Haiti. The next few months will determine whether Haiti can still move forward toward managing its basic needs—security, justice and socio-economic well-being—or whether it will continue to falter in the political realm. With the current UN mandate expiring this fall we face a challenge of maintaining peace and stability in very tense times.*

Johanna Mendelson Forman

Central America

Honduras

On the morning of June 28, members of the Honduran military stormed the presidential palace, arrested President Jose Manuel Zelaya, and placed him on a plane to Costa Rica. In the hours immediately following the coup, an emergency session of the Honduran Congress accepted a letter of resignation purportedly written by President Zelaya and voted to allow the president of Congress, Roberto Micheletti, to serve as interim president for the remainder of Zelaya's term, which ends in January 2010. The motivation for the coup was a controversial referendum scheduled for later the same day, which the president had hoped would allow for a revision of the constitution. The referendum had been a serious point of contention in recent weeks, with critics accusing Zelaya of seeking to amend the constitutional limit of a single four-year term for president. On June 23, both Congress and the supreme court ruled the referendum illegal, and the military, which handles election logistics, refused to distribute ballot boxes for the vote. In response, Zelaya fired armed forces chief General Romeo Vásquez, but the supreme court ruled to reinstate him the next day. In the hours following the coup, televisions went off the air, radio stations broadcast no news, and electricity went out over much of Tegucigalpa. While the coup was supported by much of the business, political and military establishment, hundreds of government supporters swarmed the capital Sunday, setting up roadblocks and burning tires in protest. From Costa Rica, Zelaya emphatically denied the veracity of the resignation letter and maintained he was still the legitimate leader of the country. *The Honduran coup represents a major setback for Central American democracy. The last military coup in the region took place in Guatemala in 1983. Since then, while politics and elections are often divisive and polarizing affairs, the general trend has been toward the consolidation and strengthening of democratic processes and principles. Honduras, as a member of the Organization of American States (OAS), is party to the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which states that representative democracy is "essential for the social, political, and economic development of the peoples of the Americas." The OAS, in a special session convened June 28, issued a resolution strongly condemning the military's actions and calling for the immediate return of Zelaya to his constitutional duties. No country has recognized the interim government, and the coup has met with resounding condemnation from the international community, including the United States. While at the time of writing the United States had not decided to sever diplomatic ties, the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 requires the suspension of U.S. aid to countries whose elected heads of government have been overthrown by a military coup. A loss of current U.S. assistance and trade benefits provided through the Millennium Challenge Fund, the Merida Initiative, and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) could persuade the coup leaders their position will not be easy to sustain.* Jessica Marsh

"While the coup was supported by much of the business, political and military establishment, hundreds of government supporters swarmed the capital Sunday, setting up roadblocks and burning tires in protest."

The military coup that removed Honduran president Manuel Zelaya from power on June 28 has laid bare the deep and persistent weaknesses in the institutions of democracy in many countries of Latin America. While the phenomenon of a Latin American president being forced from office has not been uncommon in recent history, developments in Honduras stirred dormant memories of military rule in the region. The fact that leaders around the Americas universally condemned the coup responds to concern about any potential resurrection of the military in power. Although the Honduran military may soon reach the conclusion that it blundered in removing Zelaya, it will be difficult to repair the damage that the coup has caused. The Organization of American States (OAS), appropriately, has attempted to address the crisis in Honduras through multilateral diplomacy, using the Inter-American Democratic Charter as a key point of reference. The Democratic Charter allows for the suspension of a member state from the OAS if a determination is reached that there has been an “unconstitutional interruption of the democratic order of a member state and that diplomatic initiatives have failed.” On July 5, the OAS in fact invoked article 21 of the Charter to suspend Honduras. Beyond this step, the OAS member states themselves are unlikely to recognize a regime brought to power by military coup. The difficult task of the OAS will be to help put Honduras back on a path that will be accepted as constitutional both within the country and internationally. *The recent events in Honduras underscore the need for the strengthening of democratic institutions in the region. The longstanding tradition of executive predominance over other branches of government has in many cases been exacerbated, with few checks and balances. According to the World Bank, only 4 of the 17 Latin American countries score in the top half on an international scale measuring effectiveness of the rule of law. The weakness of judicial branches and the inability of judiciaries to conduct judicial review of legislation or to enforce rulings of constitutionality only encourage abuse of executive authority. Other key institutions, such as legislatures and political parties need considerable strengthening. While military coups per se have been consigned to the past, a number of elected regimes in the region have been toppled by the threat of force applied by civilian parties—such as Bolivia in 2003 and 2005, or in league with military elements, such as Ecuador in 2000. Had the seated presidents not resigned in these circumstances in favor of a constitutional successor, resolution of these crises would have been far more difficult. Fortunately in the case of Honduras, elections are scheduled for later in the year but the challenge for now is producing a negotiated constitutional solution that will bridge the gap.* Peter DeShazo

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South America

Regional

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has released its annual *World Drug Report* for 2009 which shows a large decrease in coca cultivation in Colombia and a small rise in cultivation in Peru and Bolivia. The report found that coca bush cultivation in the Andean region has fallen 8 percent from 2007 to 2008. This was led by an 18 percent decrease in Colombia but offset by a 6 percent increase in Bolivia and 4 percent increase in Peru. This month the UNODC also published “Colombia: Coca Cultivation Survey 2009.” While the *World Drug Report* gives a broader picture of the global coca and cocaine market, the Colombia survey provides in-depth regional analysis. In Colombia, the Meta-Guaviare and Putumayo-Caquetá regions saw the largest decreases in coca cultivation. However, the Pacific region on the southwest border with Ecuador witnessed a 15 percent increase in cultivation levels. The Colombia survey contained numerous other signs of improvement such as a 28 percent decline in cocaine production, a 57 percent increase in cocaine seizures, and a 36 percent increase in laboratory destruction. The Colombia survey also highlights the progress made in the Meta region due to the Colombian government’s successful implementation of its Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena (PCIM). The PCIM is a coordinated interagency effort to

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reassert legitimate state authority in a region previously held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Coca cultivation in the PCIM area fell 63 percent from 2007 and total coca cultivation in the Meta Department fell 47 percent. *The coca and cocaine figures from Colombia are a testament to the efforts of the Uribe government in tackling its drug problem. In Peru, the resurgence of the Shining Path, a maoist guerilla group with previous drug-smuggling ties, has coincided with steadily increasing coca cultivation, raising fears that coca will once again finance this terrorist group. In Bolivia, President Evo Morales' pro-coca policies and his ejection of American Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) personnel in the Chapare region are among likely explanations for Bolivia's increased coca cultivation. Despite the critics of Plan Colombia, some experts believe that changes in survey area and methodology in 2005 make direct comparisons of current drug levels to those of prior periods subject to misinterpretation. However, the encouraging figures of this latest survey suggest that the PCIM program is an important example of how the Colombian government's policy has adapted and become more effective since Plan Colombia's initial implementation in 2000. Thomas Cook*

“According to critics of the government such as Senator Gustavo Petro, democratic processes and guarantees in Colombia have been undermined and disregarded in exchange for a false sense of security.”

Colombia

In June, Colombian chief prosecutor Mario Iguarán called all of the former directors of the Department of Administrative Security (DAS) during President Álvaro Uribe's administration in for questioning. Iguarán is weighing the legality of telephone surveillance that the DAS, Colombia's civilian intelligence agency, had conducted against opponents of the Uribe administration. The news magazine *Semana* first made the existence of these wire taps public in May 2007. Referred to as *chuzadas*, the wire taps were reportedly deployed against supreme court justices, journalists, politicians, generals in the armed forces, prosecutors, human rights advocates, and high government officials. In response, the Uribe administration set in motion a general purge of the agency due to alleged links between DAS agents and members of the paramilitary and guerrilla groups. *Semana's* coverage has further damaged the already tarnished image of the DAS—a scandal in 2005 showed links between Uribe's first DAS director Jorge Noguera and paramilitaries—, after which the government promised to reorganize the institution. According to the new allegations, this reorganization was apparently insufficient as the *chuzadas* continued under DAS directors Andrés Peñate, María del Pilar Hurtado and Joaquín Polo. As reported by *Semana*, the counterintelligence unit inside the DAS, known as G-3, was created by Noguera and coordinated by his adviser José Miguel Narváez. The charges under which former intelligence directors are being investigated are: illicit violation of communications, conspiracy to commit a crime, illegal use of radio transmitters and radio receivers, abuse of authority, destruction, suppression or concealment of public documents, procedural fraud and ideological deceit in a public document. *Since the first months of 2009 the chuzadas scandal has been a major distraction for the Uribe administration and has weakened its credibility. According to critics of the government such as Senator Gustavo Petro, democratic processes and guarantees in Colombia have been undermined and disregarded in exchange for a false sense of security. Senator Petro maintains that this false sense of security is the product of officials who have been linked to paramilitary and guerrilla activities. The possibility that Uribe's intelligence team has been spying on the other branches of government raises concerns about the separation of powers. The president and the supreme court have been at odds for more than two years—the president believes that some members of the court are trying to delegitimize his work and link him to the parapolítica scandal (regarding alleged links between paramilitary groups and some national and regional politicians), and the president of the supreme court has criticized Uribe for his failure to respect judicial independence. According to the minister of social protection, Diego Palacios, Colombia is experiencing a politicization of the justice system. The confrontation between Uribe and the supreme court is a fight that will only weaken the state and exacerbate the political crisis created by the parapolítica scandal and the chuzadas. Brian Townsend*

Ecuador

On June 24, Ecuador became an official member of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), a nine-member group of countries spearheaded by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez that describe themselves as socialist and anti-imperialist. ALBA was formed in 2004 by Chávez and Fidel Castro and emphasizes Latin American and Caribbean unity together with the struggle against poverty, inequality, and the neoliberal model of development. Ecuador joins Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Venezuela as part of the group. In announcing the decision to join ALBA, Ecuador's president Rafael Correa cited the benefits to Ecuador of joining with other like-minded nations in opposing international arbitration processes. On June 12, Ecuador's legislature approved the country's withdrawal from the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), where the country is currently being sued by foreign firms in cases worth at least \$10 billion. Companies with pending lawsuits in the ICSID include Repson YPF, Perenco, M.C.I. Power Group, and Occidental Petroleum. Also during his announcement, President Correa threatened to expel foreign oil firms that sue his government, saying "I'm not going to let these oligarchies sue the country while they continue to exploit our national resources." The ALBA countries capped off the inaugural summit in Carabobo, Venezuela, by releasing a statement in support of President Ahmadinejad of Iran and condemning "external interference," in a pointed reference to President Obama's recent statements on the Iranian elections. *Correa, a left-leaning economist who came to power in 2007 and was reelected in April 2009, has governed on a platform of opposition to U.S.-backed free-market policies and the power of Ecuador's traditional elites. An avid nationalist, he emphasizes control of the economy and social welfare programs for the poor. The decision to join ALBA comes after a number of recent moves to challenge international business. Since his inauguration, he has reworked oil deals to increase state control, raised taxes, and appointed a new Oil and Mines Minister who has vowed to take a tougher stance on oil companies. These policies have resulted in a sharp decline in foreign investment in Ecuador. The addition of Ecuador to ALBA strengthens the institution and raises questions about the possibility that other left-leaning leaders in the hemisphere could join in the future, such as Mauricio Funes of El Salvador. While the United States has in the past seen ALBA as an inconsequential body lacking clear goals, the group's enlargement and recent rhetoric on Iran could signal a shift toward a more active and antagonistic organization, which could further deteriorate relations between the United States and member countries.* Jessica Marsh

Peru

After weeks of indigenous protests, the Peruvian Congress overturned two presidential decrees that would facilitate the development of large areas of the Amazon rainforest. For more than two months, thousands of protestors from dozens of indigenous groups showed their displeasure at recent government measures that would open large areas of the Amazon basin to oil drilling, logging, and hydroelectric dams. Surprising authorities with their high level of organization, strategically placed indigenous protestors disrupted oil production and transport, blocked roads and waterways, and stopped traffic at remote airports. In one instance, the Peruvian Navy was forced to break up a blockade preventing a potential oil investor from going deeper into the rain forest. In early June, the protests turned violent; police opened fire on protestors blocking a highway near the northern town of Bagua, resulting in the death of approximately 30 tribesmen and 23 police. On June 19, indigenous groups claimed victory after the Peruvian Congress revoked the controversial laws. *The recent unrest is a symptom of deeper divisions in Peruvian society. Though three-quarters of Peru's citizens live in urban areas, the nation's natural resources are centered in the sparsely populated Amazon basin. The indigenous peoples of Peru's rainforests argue that the government's campaign to increase investment in the region will destroy their way of life; President Alan García counters that natural*

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"The indigenous peoples of Peru's rainforests argue that the government's campaign to increase investment in the region will destroy their way of life; President Alan García counters that natural resources don't belong only to the people who had the fortune to be born there."

resources “don’t belong only to the people who had the fortune to be born there.” Support for the U.S.-Peru free-trade agreement, whose provisions called for the recent expansion of investment in the Amazon, is also a point of division—the textiles and agro-export industries are expected to benefit at the expense of the livelihoods of rural farmers. **Anna Nelson**

“The day following the elections, both President Cristina Kirchner and Elisa Carrió, the leader of the opposition Frente Cívico y Social, claimed victory in the total number of votes obtained by their respective forces.”

Argentina

As expected, the government coalition lost an important number of seats in both houses of Congress in the June 28 midterm national elections. Under present circumstances, it would have been extremely difficult for the government to have repeated its victories of six and four years ago and maintained its hold over Congress. The result is the end of six years of control by the executive of the legislative branch, probably the only undisputable conclusion that can be drawn from an analysis of the election. Coalitions submitted lists of candidates in different districts under more than one name. Local parties that are theoretically considered members of the same coalition ran against each other in several provinces. The strongest party in the country, the Partido Justicialista, is clearly within the government coalition in most provinces, against it in a few and in an ambivalent position in others. This complex puzzle did not affect the distribution of seats allotted to each district among the competing lists by the application of a proportional representation system. But it makes counting votes at the national level very difficult and allows for different interpretations. The day following the elections, both President Cristina Kirchner and Elisa Carrió, the leader of the opposition Frente Cívico y Social, claimed victory in the total number of votes obtained by their respective forces. A first approximation indicates that the Partido Justicialista continues to attract more votes than any other movement but is deeply divided. Former president Néstor Kirchner headed a list in the province of Buenos Aires as candidate for a seat in the lower house, accompanied by the province’s governor, Daniel Scioli. In the last few months, he had managed to create the public image of a plebiscite on his and his wife’s administrations to be decided in that province. Kirchner expected his list to get more votes than any other, a goal more attainable than that of maintaining his coalition’s seats in Congress. But he finished in second place behind a rival center-right coalition of Peronists and followers of the chief of government of the city of Buenos Aires, Mauricio Macri. In a highly contested race, another dissident *Justicialista*, Senator Carlos Reutemann, managed to get re-elected in the province of Santa Fe. Finally, Vice President Julio Cobos strengthened his position toward the next presidential elections through the clear victory scored by the candidates that he backed in his native Mendoza. *In sum, the new Congress is expected to show a new dynamic after December 10. And Macri, Reutemann, and Cobos seem to be the presidential hopefuls most benefited by the results. But 2011 is still too far off.*

Carlos M. Regúnaga

With 60 deaths attributed to H1N1 influenza and nearly 2500 confirmed cases, Argentina has the highest case fatality rate associated with the new virus in South America. Argentina now has the third highest number of H1N1 fatalities internationally, ranking behind the United States and Mexico. On Tuesday, June 30, the city of Buenos Aires and the province of Buenos Aires, where the majority of the fatalities have been reported, joined several other provinces in declaring a health emergency. The measure closes schools for two weeks beginning on July 6, in effect extending the winter holidays originally scheduled to begin in mid-July. While public officials have so far elected not to close restaurants, bars and theaters, they have urged Argentines to undertake hygiene measures such as hand washing and covering their mouths when coughing in order to avoid exposing family members, coworkers, classmates or other personal contacts to the virus. The supreme court is deciding whether to begin its own winter recess early; it has already announced that pregnant judges and staff working

within the judicial system should stay away from their workplaces until further notice. *The health emergency declarations come on the heels of the June 29 announcement that Minister of Health Graciela Ocaña was resigning her post. Juan Luis Manzur, vice-governor of Tucumán province, has been appointed to replace her. The ministry had been criticized for its response to the H1N1 outbreak, but Ocaña herself had also clashed with unions over control of funds related to health promotion activities. Public health experts are keeping a close eye on H1N1 developments in Argentina, mindful that the incipient southern hemisphere influenza season could foster conditions propitious to the spread of H1N1 or its mutation into a more serious infectious agent. On June 11 the World Health Organization declared the H1N1 outbreak to be a “pandemic,” reflecting evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission of the virus and its geographic spread. Currently the WHO reports more than 94,000 confirmed cases and at least 429 deaths. Mexico, which reported the earliest cases of H1N1 in April 2009 and which has now confirmed 10,262 cases and 119 deaths, hosted a conference on “Influenza A (H1N1): Lessons Learned and Preparedness for the Future,” held July 2-3 in the resort city of Cancún, which had suffered economic losses and a reduced number of tourists in the context of the outbreak. The meeting was sponsored by Mexico’s health and foreign affairs ministries, the state of Quintana Roo, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), WHO, Canada’s Public Health Agency and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health experts and public officials from around the world gathered to review pandemic preparedness plans, consider the state of implementation of the 2005 International Health Regulations, which structure international collaboration in the context of a pandemic, and exchange best practices with representatives from countries that have experienced the outbreak.* Katherine E. Bliss

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