

Political Risk Update: September 16, 2020

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Peru: Attempts to impeach President Vizcarra may be losing momentum

Event: After only 65 members of the 130-seat Congress voted in favour of impeachment, which requires 87, political leaders from various parties came out against the move on September 13.

Outlook: The impeachment effort appears designed primarily to prevent political reforms backed by the president from taking place before the next election, but the attempt to remove the popular Vizcarra is a risk to stability.

Analysis

Several potential opposition candidates for president in next year's election, including Keiko Fujimori, Julio Guzman, George Forsyth and Cesar Acuna, have warned of the risk of political instability if a presidential vacancy is created seven months ahead of the vote. They have also questioned the weight of corruption allegations made against the president thus far. For its part, the government has said it will contest the legislatures competence to mount an impeachment vote, possibly invoking the Organization of

American States Democratic Charter on the grounds that Congress is violating democratic process. The leaders of Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador warned on September 12 of the threat to stability in Peru. At the same time, Prime Minister Walter Martos has accused Congress speaker Manuel Merino of seeking to involve the armed forces in Vizcarra's removal.



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Ivory Coast: President faces mounting opposition pressure as he seeks third term

Event: Former President Henri Konan Bedie was officially chosen as the presidential candidate of the opposition Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (PDCI) on September 12, amid growing unease at the prospect of a divisive election in October.

Outlook: In an attempt to build support from other areas of the opposition, Bedie, who was president during 1993-99 and is now aged 86, has promised "the unconditional return of all exiles" and "the release of political prisoners". This is taken to include would-be presidential contenders Laurent Gbagbo, who was president 2000-11 and is currently in Belgium pending an appeal at the International Criminal Court to his acquittal on war crime charges, and former rebel leader and National Assembly Speaker Guillaume Soro, in self-imposed exile in France after an Ivorian criminal conviction in absentia.

Analysis

Gbagbo's spokesperson has denied reports of back-channel talks between President Alassane Ouattara and Gbagbo over the latter's return home following the polls.

Separately, according to Jeune Afrique, French President Emmanuel Macron recently urged Ouattara to delay polling to allow the incumbent (aged 78), Gbagbo (75) and Bedie to withdraw and open a dialogue that would result in a younger successor to Ouattara.

The Constitutional Council will almost certainly approve Ouattara's candidacy, having banned both Gbagbo and Soro from standing on September 14 on the grounds of their outstanding domestic convictions. Nevertheless, intensifying outreach by the government to the opposition reflects Ouattara's own concern at rising domestic and international discomfort at his controversial bid for a third term in office.

Russia: United Russia wins by default in no-surprise polls

Event: United Russia party candidates secured 13 of the 20 governorships that were up for election on September 13, with eleven of them winning a vote share of 70-86%, according to incomplete data from the Central Election Committee.

Outlook: Although questions will be asked about how six out of 13 United Russia candidates scored above 80% when just three out of ten did so last year, the authorities will ignore opposition accusations of fraud. United Russia's overall victory and the absence of electoral reverses will be taken as a sign it is in sufficiently good shape to serve as the Kremlin's political vehicle in next year's parliamentary elections.

Analysis

The party's win is less resounding when new candidates are disaggregated from elected incumbents. All eleven new candidates (including one for an indirectly elected post) were appointed on an interim basis before the election and are thus Kremlin candidates, but six

of them chose to stand as independents to dissociate themselves from United Russia. This repeats the pattern seen in 2019, despite pleas from United Russia leader Dmitry Medvedev for candidates to identify themselves with his party. Liberal Democratic Party governor Alexey Ostrovsky held on in Smolensk.

The Sahel: Floods will overwhelm government capacity

Event: Reports on September 10 indicate that three-quarters of a million people have now been affected by flooding across the countries of the Sahel.

Outlook: The excessive rainfall is likely to continue at least until the end of the rainy season in September/October. Regional governments are already struggling to cope with the needs of those affected by the floods even as they face further challenges ahead, such as potential water-borne disease outbreaks, greater poverty, and food insecurity.

Analysis

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says that some 760,000 people have been affected by severe floods across the Sahel in recent weeks, with the three most affected countries being Sudan, Chad and Niger. Estimates suggest that in Sudan over 500,000 people have been affected while in Chad, 120,000 people have been displaced and in Niger 330,000 people have been affected and 34,000 houses destroyed. These numbers exclude fatalities caused by the flooding, which has also affected Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Cameroon, as well as East African countries. Crops have been damaged and economic activity in many places has ground to a halt, adding to distress at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the region and insecurity in much of the Sahel is rising.

Colombia: Latest police abuse cases pose awkward test for President Duque

Event: At least ten people have reportedly been killed and hundreds injured in clashes between police and protestors following the alleged killing of an unarmed man by two police officers in Bogota on September 9.

Outlook: Police brutality and human rights abuse cases are generating increasing anger and the latest incident, caught on video, has seen a new wave of protests and an apology from the mayor of Bogota. Protests threaten to spiral, with any police response likely to inflame matters further. President Duque, whose government favours tough security measures, will struggle to address the matter to the public's satisfaction, leaving him vulnerable to attack from political rivals.

Analysis

Javier Ordonez was allegedly confronted after meeting friends for drinks. He is thought to have been tasered multiple times before dying in custody. A video of the incident circulated online, generating widespread outrage. His death follows that of student Dilan Cruz, who was hit with a projectile fired by riot police during demonstrations in Bogota in November. President Duque responded to the death of Ordonez by expressing admiration for the police generally but saying that there could be "no tolerance when the uniform or authority is abused". Bogota Mayor Claudia Lopez pledged to pursue reforms to prevent police abuses and has urged citizens not to react violently in anti-police protests.

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