

BI-WEEKLY LATIN AMERICA SNAPSHOT

September 14, 2026

Top Developments

In this biweekly edition, Washington expands cooperation with **Colombia, Ecuador and Peru** on organized crime, defense and strategic competition with China. **Colombia** and Japan revive long-stalled trade negotiations, while **Brazil's** presidential race tightens as Flávio Bolsonaro gains ground on President Lula. **Argentina's** Javier Milei deepens U.S. ties while reinforcing the country's Malvinas policy, and the **Dominican Republic** resumes talks with Washington seeking tariff relief. Lastly, the OECD's PISA 2025 results highlight persistent weaknesses in basic skills as **LATAM** prepares for a more digital and technology-driven labor market.

Washington expands cooperation with Colombia, Ecuador and Peru on organized crime, defense and strategic competition with China. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio concluded a three-day visit to Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, reflecting Washington's push to strengthen ties with governments aligned with its security agenda while countering China's growing influence in infrastructure, energy, technology and trade.

In Colombia, Secretary Rubio and President Abelardo de la Espriella established the "Barranquilla Agreements," a bilateral roadmap organized around three priorities: post-earthquake reconstruction, economic recovery, and regional security. Trade is also central to the renewed relationship, with De la Espriella seeking a temporary suspension of the 12.5% U.S. tariff on Colombian products to support recovery. Rubio described the improving relationship as the beginning of a potential "golden era" in U.S.–Colombia ties.

Ecuador emerged as a central security component of the tour. Following talks with President Daniel Noboa, Secretary Rubio announced plans to seek US\$45 million in additional U.S. security assistance, including new maritime equipment to strengthen counternarcotics operations. Washington also designated the Ecuadorian gang "Los Tiguerones" as a foreign terrorist organization and is expanding cooperation against illegal mining, illicit finance and organized crime.

In Peru, President Keiko Fujimori confirmed the country will join the U.S.-backed Shield of the Americas, expanding cooperation against transnational organized crime alongside growing ties in defense, intelligence and artificial intelligence. Overall, the tour underscores Washington's effort to build a more coordinated network of security partners along South America's while strengthening its strategic presence in a region where competition with China is becoming increasingly important.

Colombia and Japan revive long-stalled trade negotiations. Colombia and Japan are seeking to restart negotiations on an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) following Trade Minister Mauricio Gómez Amín's visit to Tokyo. Negotiations were originally launched in 2012 but have remained stalled for years, making the renewed engagement an important step toward expanding Colombia's trade relationships in Asia. Beyond tariff reductions, the EPA could provide a broader framework for investment, services, technology transfer and stronger integration between Colombian and Japanese companies. The government is also using the renewed relationship to attract Japanese capital into strategic sectors. Gómez Amín held discussions with Toyota, Mazda and Toshiba focused on potential investments in manufacturing, electric mobility, energy, digital infrastructure, innovation and technology, as greater Japanese participation in these areas could support Colombia's efforts to expand higher-value manufacturing and diversify its sources of foreign investment.

Brazil's presidential race tightens as Bolsonaro gains momentum. Brazil's presidential race is tightening less than a month before the October 4 election, with Senator Flávio Bolsonaro continuing to close the gap with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. A September Datafolha poll places Lula at 38% and Bolsonaro at 33% in the first round, narrowing the president's advantage from six to five percentage points over the past month. In a potential runoff, the gap has fallen to just two points, with Lula at 46% and Bolsonaro at 44%, effectively a statistical tie given the poll's margin of error.

The tightening race comes amid growing controversy surrounding Brazil's Supreme Federal Court and allegations linked to the Banco Master investigation. The case has placed Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who played a central role in the prosecution and imprisonment of former President Jair Bolsonaro, under increased scrutiny and intensified criticism of the judiciary from Bolsonaro supporters. Flávio Bolsonaro has sought to capitalize on the controversy, mobilizing supporters and sharpening his criticism of both the judiciary and the Lula government. While it remains unclear how much the court crisis will ultimately influence voters, the narrowing polls suggest that Brazil is heading into the final weeks of the campaign with an increasingly competitive presidential race.

Milei deepens U.S. alignment while reinforcing Argentina's Malvinas policy. President Javier Milei will travel to New York on September 23 as the keynote speaker at the "Democratic Values, Economic Freedom and Strategic Security" forum, organized by the International Republican Institute (IRI). Milei is expected to highlight the U.S.–Argentina partnership in global supply chains, critical resources and strategic security, reinforcing his government's close alignment with Washington.

The visit comes as Buenos Aires adopts a more assertive approach to the Malvinas/Falkland Islands sovereignty dispute. The government has initiated action against companies involved in hydrocarbon exploration around the islands and revived plans for an integrated naval base in Tierra del Fuego. Milei also canceled a planned October visit to the United Kingdom amid renewed bilateral tensions over the issue. The government has also created a new Foreign Policy Coordination System under the Foreign Ministry to ensure that government initiatives with international implications remain consistent with Argentina's foreign-policy priorities, including its sovereignty claim over the islands.

Dominican Republic seeks U.S. tariff relief as bilateral talks resume. The Dominican Republic has opened a new round of trade discussions with the United States, as the government seeks improved market access following the additional 12.5% tariff imposed on Dominican exports in July under Section 301. Foreign Minister Víctor "Ito" Bisonó met with Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Jeffrey Goettman to advance the bilateral tariff agenda.

The talks are particularly important given the Dominican Republic's exposure to the U.S. market. In 2025, the country exported US\$14.65 billion in goods, with 48.6% destined for the United States, making tariff relief increasingly relevant for export competitiveness. The negotiations also build on recent Dominican efforts to strengthen customs controls, product traceability and enforcement against tariff circumvention, issues that have gained importance as Washington increases scrutiny of regional supply chains.

Key Data

Latin America's education gap raises long-term competitiveness concerns. Latin America continues to face significant learning challenges, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s PISA 2025 assessment, which evaluated more than 700,000 15-year-old students globally. Among the 13 Latin American countries assessed, seven recorded lower average results than in 2022, while six remained broadly stable.

Mathematics remains the region's largest weakness. Around eight in ten Latin American students did not reach the minimum proficiency level, while approximately six in ten fell below basic proficiency in reading and science. Chile and Uruguay remained among the region's strongest performers, although both continued to fall below OECD averages. Performance also varies significantly across countries. Brazil remained broadly stable compared with 2022 across mathematics, reading and science, while Mexico recorded a decline in mathematics, with reading and science remaining approximately unchanged.

The results underscore a broader human-capital challenge for Latin America. While declining educational performance is not unique to the region, Latin American economies are starting from lower learning levels and must simultaneously improve foundational skills and prepare younger generations for labor markets increasingly shaped by digitalization, artificial intelligence and technological change. Persistent learning gaps could therefore become a growing constraint on productivity, workforce development and the region's longer-term competitiveness.

2026 ELECTORAL CALENDAR



Country	Date	Election
 Peru	Oct. 4, 2026	Regional and municipal elections
 Brazil	Oct. 4, 2026	Presidential, legislative and state elections
 Paraguay	Oct. 4, 2026	Municipal elections
 Brazil	Oct. 25, 2026	Presidential and gubernatorial runoffs
 United States	Nov. 3, 2026	Congressional midterms (all House seats and one-third of the Senate), gubernatorial and local elections
 Ecuador	Nov. 29, 2026	Provincial and municipal elections
 Haiti	Dec. 13, 2026 (tentative)	Presidential and legislative elections

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