

December 2017

CHILE

Dec. 17—Sebastián Piñera, a billionaire businessman leading the center-right Chile Vamos (Let's Go Chile) coalition, is elected president by a margin of 9 percentage points over center-left Senator Alejandro Guillier, returning him to the office he held from 2010 to 2014 before he was replaced by his predecessor, Michelle Bachelet. (Chile's presidents are limited to 1 term at a time.) Chile becomes the latest of several Latin American countries to swing back to the right after a period of rule by left-leaning leaders.

HONDURAS

Dec. 17—The electoral commission, headed by a member of the ruling National Party, declares incumbent President Juan Orlando Hernández the winner of the Nov. 26 election by a margin of 50,000 votes. The 2nd-place finisher, Salvador Nasralla, rejects the result. His claim that voting and vote-counting were marred by numerous irregularities is backed by international election monitors. The Organization of American States calls for a new election. Widespread street protests over the disputed outcome have led to more than 20 deaths.

IRAN

Dec. 31—Protests that began Dec. 28 in Mashhad, the country's 2nd-largest city, spread to Tehran and many other cities, in the biggest demonstrations since a disputed election in 2009. Some protesters call for an end to rule by hard-line clerics including the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. On state-run television, President Hassan Rouhani acknowledges the protesters' grievances over a stagnant economy and corruption but appeals for calm.

ISRAEL

Dec. 6—US President Donald Trump recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital and vows to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which Palestinians have long viewed as their own future national capital. Trump's move abandons a policy of neutrality on the final status of Jerusalem pending a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which all US presidents have followed since Israel occupied Jerusalem in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Dec. 22—The UN General Assembly approves a resolution condemning Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, with 128 nations voting for the measure, 9 voting against it, and 35 abstaining. Trump suggests before the vote that the US might cut aid to countries that vote for the resolution. But leading aid recipients including Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq voted for it anyway.

LIBERIA

Dec. 26—In the country's 1st democratic transfer of power since 1944, George Weah, a former soccer star in Europe, is elected president with 61.5% of the vote in a runoff, defeating Vice President Joseph Boakai. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is stepping down after 2 terms as Africa's 1st elected female head of state.

NEPAL

Dec. 7—A coalition of 2 communist parties wins a majority of seats in the 2nd and final round of national legislative elections, defeating Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's ruling Nepali Congress party. The elections are the 1st since a new constitution was adopted in 2015, following the end of a Maoist insurgency in 2006.

PERU

Dec. 24—President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski pardons Alberto Fujimori, who was president from 1990 to 2000 and was convicted of corruption and crimes against humanity in 2009. He had served less than half of his 25-year sentence. Kuczynski cites Fujimori's poor health as the reason for the pardon, but it came 3 days after 10 Fujimori loyalists, including his son, abstained on a vote in Congress, effectively blocking a motion to impeach Kuczynski. Suspicions of a quid pro quo lead to protests across the country Dec. 26.

POLAND

Dec. 20—The European Commission advises EU member nations to issue a formal warning to Poland, asserting that 13 laws enacted in the past 2 years have attacked the independence of the judiciary and imperiled the rule of law. The commission for the 1st time invokes Article 7 of the EU Treaty, which permits the EU to impose sanctions for violations of the bloc's core principles, potentially stripping a member state's voting rights. But at least 22 of the other 27 member states must agree on the commission's recommendation for a formal warning to be issued, and sanctions must receive unanimous support.

RUSSIA

Dec. 5—The International Olympic Committee bars Russia from competing in the Winter Olympics scheduled to begin in South Korea in February. The punishment is a response to findings that government officials were involved in systemic doping of Russian athletes, culminating in the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. Individual Russian athletes will be allowed to compete in the games, but they will not be permitted to display the Russian flag or other national emblems.

SOUTH AFRICA

Dec. 13—President Jacob Zuma is ordered by the High Court to set up a judicial inquiry into allegations of "state capture," a term used for the undue influence that favored private business interests exert over the government.

Dec. 18—Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa wins an election for the leadership of the ruling African National Congress, replacing Zuma and positioning him as the party's likely candidate in the 2019 presidential election. Ramaphosa edges Zuma's ex-wife, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, a former cabinet minister who ran on a populist message. Ramaphosa has vowed to crack down on corruption and improve the economy.

SPAIN

Dec. 21—In elections for the regional parliament in Catalonia, voters give a narrow majority of seats to pro-independence parties. In October, the national government dismissed Catalan President Carles Puigdemont and his cabinet and dissolved the regional parliament after it voted in favor of independence from Spain.

YEMEN

Dec. 4—Ali Abdullah Saleh, a deposed ruler who dominated the nation for decades, is killed outside Sana'a, the nation's capital, by Houthi militiamen. In 2012, following protests against his corrupt rule that began as part of the Arab Spring uprisings a year earlier, Saleh was forced to step down as president. The nation has been mired in a civil war ever since, with Saudi Arabia and its allies intervening against the Iran-backed Houthis. Saleh had formed an alliance with the Houthis but broke with them 2 days before his death. ■