



## A REVIEW AND PREVIEW OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AMERICAS

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### Abstract

U.S. foreign policy in the Americas has undergone many changes between the Donald J. Trump administration (2017-2021) and the Joe Biden administration (2021-2025). The election offers a chance to the winner – either Vice President Harris (a Democrat) or former President Trump (a Republican) – to update U.S. foreign policy in the region. If Harris wins, she will likely initially continue Biden’s strategy of broad engagement and multilateralism to address shared challenges, such as promoting democracy, managing migration, and advancing economic development, while adjusting it over time to more closely align with her vision and priorities. If Trump wins, he is likely to return to his past foreign policy nationalism, prioritizing bilateral relations over multilateralism, utilizing confrontation and coercion to advance his objectives, and focusing extensively on combating irregular migration and punishing the undemocratic outliers of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Yet regardless of who wins, the U.S. government should prioritize three issues: Haiti and Venezuela, enhancing hemispheric security, and pursuing a more robust trade and investment policy in the region.

### 1. Introduction

In the last eight years, there have been many changes in U.S. policy toward the Americas. This is not surprising given the shift in leadership from President Obama (a Democrat) to President Trump (a Republican) to President Biden (a Democrat), Trump's leadership style, and the impact of hemispheric issues such as trade, migration, drugs, and security on U.S. domestic politics.

With President Biden’s decision in July to abandon his re-election campaign, a new president – either Vice President Harris or

former President Trump – will occupy the White House in January 2025. The winner will be able to tweak or overhaul U.S. foreign policy in the region. This article will examine the developments in U.S. foreign policy in the Americas over the last eight years. It will also explore what the U.S. foreign policy agenda in the region might look like under a Harris or Trump administration and provide recommendations on issues that should be prioritized.

### 2. U.S. Relations with the Americas

U.S. relations with the 33 countries in the Americas are closely interconnected, given their geographic proximity, historical connections, family and cultural bonds,

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and shared economic, security, political, and humanitarian interests.

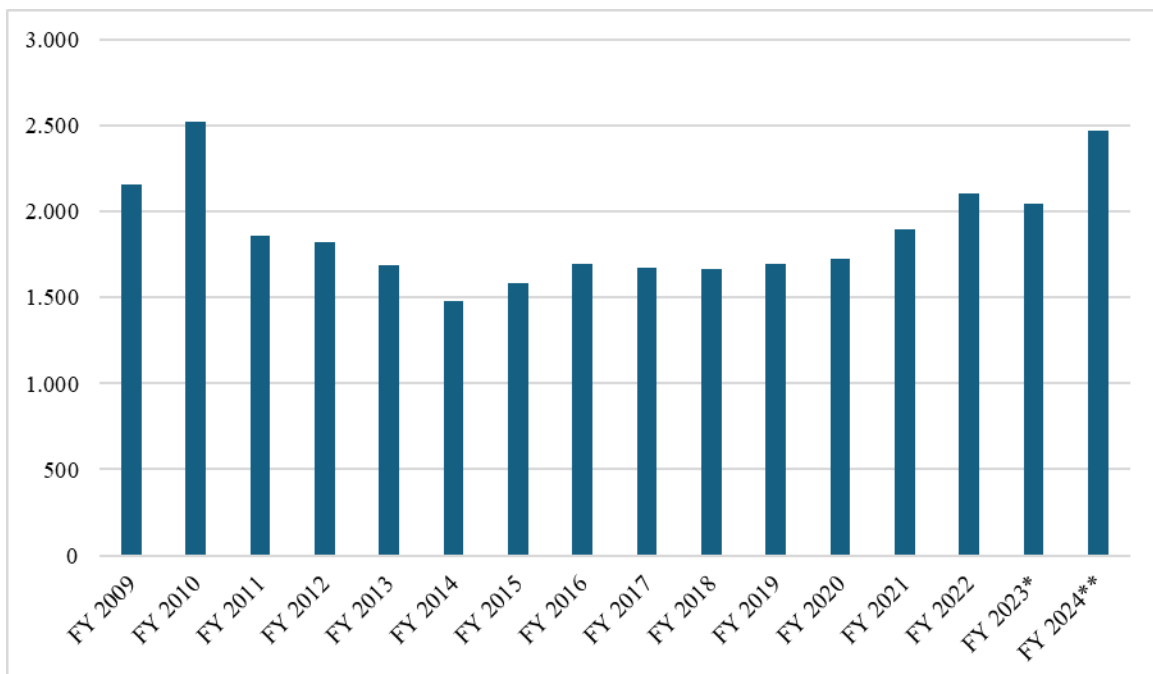
The number of Latino voters in the United States is growing. An estimated 36 million Latinos will be eligible to vote in the 2024 election, up from 27 million in 2016. They will represent nearly 15 percent of the U.S. electorate this year. Many are first- or second-generation Latinos with family members who still live in the Americas.

In addition, hemispheric issues like trade, migration, drugs, and security regularly factor into U.S. domestic politics. They are also weighing on voters in advance of the 2024 elections. According to a September 4-5 Harvard CAPS-Harris poll,

33% of respondents said immigration was one of the country’s most important issues, and 16% listed crime and drugs.

U.S. foreign assistance to the region over the past 15 years has remained relatively stable. Funding priorities have included programs to strengthen civilian security and the rule of law in Mexico, address Central America's economic, security, and governance challenges, and combat drug production and support peace accord implementation in Colombia. Other priorities, though with smaller budgets, include fostering stability in Haiti, improving security in the Caribbean, and responding to the Venezuelan political and humanitarian crises.

FIGURE 1. U.S. Foreign Assistance to the Americas, Fiscal Year 2009 – 2024



Source: Congressional Research Service reports and U.S. Department of State Congressional Budget Justifications.

\* FY 2023: estimate.

\*\* FY 2024: administration budget request.



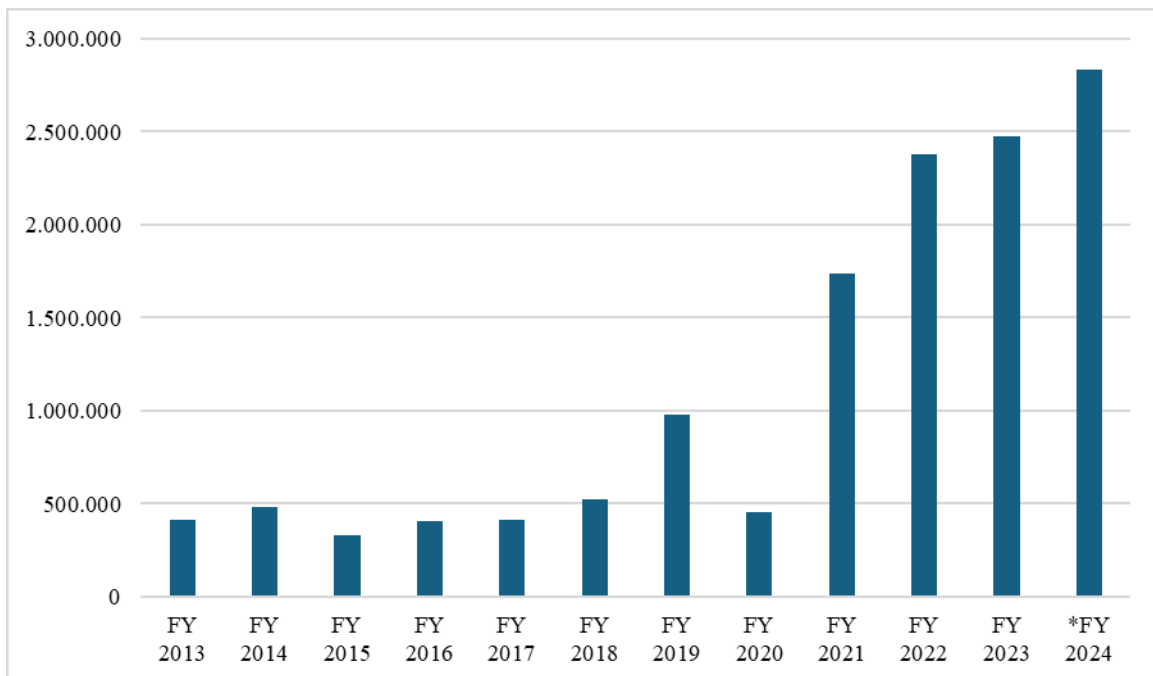
Over the past three decades, the United States has strengthened economic ties with its Western Hemisphere neighbors through trade and investment. The United States accounts for roughly 31 percent of the region’s imports and 45 percent of its exports. The United States has signed free trade agreements (FTAs) with 11 countries in the region: Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru. Two-way foreign direct investment (FDI) grew almost ninefold in the past 30 years.

Curbing the flow of illicit drugs and combating drug trafficking and other criminal organizations has been a longstanding

component of U.S. policy and relations with Mexico, Colombia, Central America, and the Caribbean. Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia are the world’s largest coca producers, and Mexico is the largest exporter of fentanyl to the United States.

The United States has expanded migration cooperation with countries in the hemisphere in recent years to respond to growing displacement trends. These countries represent a significant source of irregular border crossers at the U.S.-Mexico border. In fiscal year 2023, a record-setting year for border crossings, 88 percent (2.2 million) of the nearly 2.6 million migrants apprehended were from the Americas.

**FIGURE 2. U.S. Immigrant Apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexico Border, Fiscal Year 2013 – 2024**



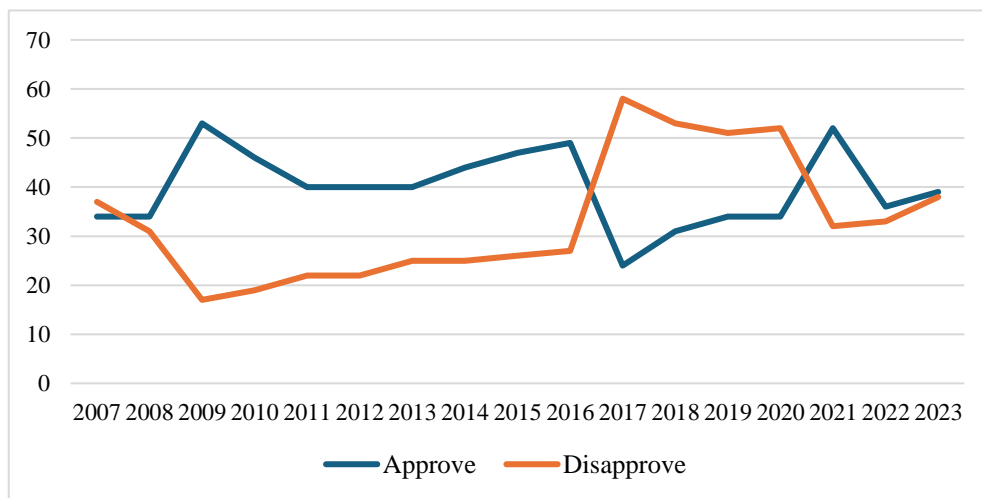
Source: Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection data.

\*Note: FY 2024 projection is based on the 11 months of available data (October 2023 to August 2024).

Promoting democracy and human rights has been a longstanding component of U.S. foreign policy in the region. Many countries have made significant strides in democracy and governance since the end of the Cold War and the democratization wave in the late 1980s and early 1990s, though democracy faces challenges. In 2023, only 48% of citizens in the Americas supported democracy, a decline of 15% from 2010. Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela are the three undemocratic outliers in the region, as they are ruled by authoritarian regimes that suppress political opposition.

U.S. leadership approval ratings in the Americas remained above 50% for President Obama’s tenure (January 2009 to January 2017). The Americas’ view of U.S. leadership dropped in 2017 after Donald Trump’s election. It slowly increased over Trump’s four-year term but never reached 40%. With Biden’s election, approval of U.S. leadership surged to 52% in 2021. However, U.S. approval ratings dropped precipitously in 2022 to 36% before slightly recovering to 39% in 2023.

**FIGURE 3. U.S. Leadership Approval in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016 to 2023**



Source: Gallup, Rating World Leaders reports.

**3. Review of the Trump administration 2016 Campaign.** Trump emphasized three issues of importance to the Americas while campaigning for the 2016 election: free trade, immigration, and Cuba. On free trade, he said he would back out of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico

and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a proposed agreement with 11 countries in Asia and the Americas, including Canada, Chile, Mexico, and Peru. On immigration, he promised to complete the construction of a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border to combat irregular migration. Lastly, he committed to rolling back Obama’s Cuba



policies and retaining the U.S. economic embargo.

*Foreign Assistance.* The Trump administration's FY 2018 to FY 2021 budget requests proposed significant funding cuts to the Americas, but Congress rejected many of them and maintained funding generally in line with prior years. However, Trump suspended most U.S. assistance to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in 2019 and reprogrammed nearly \$400 million in aid to compel the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to enhance efforts to curb irregular migration to the United States.

*Trade.* President Trump fulfilled a campaign promise by signing an executive order on his third day in office to withdraw the United States from the TPP, one of President Obama's most significant trade achievements. Obama had pushed for the agreement as part of his administration's plans to pivot to the Pacific Rim by pursuing closer ties with China's neighbors to counter China's growing influence. Instead, the Trump administration said it would push for bilateral agreements.

Although Trump threatened to withdraw from NAFTA on the campaign trail, he ultimately decided to negotiate to update it. Trilateral talks began in 2017 and concluded in late 2018. The agreement, renamed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), entered into force in mid-2020. The updated agreement retained many of NAFTA's original provisions but was updated to address issues like rules on investment and intellectual

property. It also included new sections on digital trade, state-owned enterprises, and currency misalignment.

*Immigration.* Over his four-year term, President Trump used harsh rhetoric and controversial actions to compel Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries to bolster efforts to deter irregular migration to the United States. He also made many threats he never implemented, such as threatening to shut down the U.S.-Mexico border, imposing a 25% tariff on Mexican goods, and taxing remittance flows from the United States. In addition, he made immigration policy decisions – some of which were blocked by courts – that had or would have had a significant impact on nationals of countries from the Americas.

In 2017, the administration announced it would end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, an Obama initiative to provide deportation relief for certain immigrants who arrived as children. When the termination was announced, nearly 610,000 Mexican and Northern Triangle nationals were beneficiaries. In 2017 and 2018, the administration also announced the end of the Temporary Protected Status designations for El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The program provides protection from deportation and work authorization for nationals of countries experiencing challenges (e.g., war, natural disaster, etc.) that make it difficult or unsafe for their nationals to be deported. At the time, over 410,000 nationals of these four countries were beneficiaries. Federal courts ultimately blocked both decisions.



Mexico agreed in 2018 to allow the United States to implement the Migrant Protection Protocols. This program enabled the United States to return certain non-Mexican migrants to Mexico while they awaited U.S. immigration processes. In 2019, the United States signed Asylum Cooperation Agreements with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. These programs allowed the United States to transfer third-country asylum applicants to these three countries so they could pursue their protection claims there.

In 2018, the Trump administration began implementing Zero Tolerance. Pursuant to this policy, immigrant families apprehended crossing the border were separated: the parents were held in jails, prosecuted for crimes, and then deported, while the children were transferred to U.S. custody for family reunification while they pursued immigration relief. Trump ended the policy after four months, bowing to domestic and international pressure. There is no public breakdown of the nationalities of the families impacted, but the vast majority of the more than 4,600 separated children were likely Mexican and Northern Triangle nationals based on immigration trends at the time.

*Undemocratic Outliers.* Trump's National Security Advisor John Bolton called Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua the "troika of tyranny" in a 2018 speech outlining the administration's plan to combat authoritarianism in the Americas. He declared the United States "will no longer appease dictators and despots near our shores." He lamented they are the "cause of immense human suffering, the impetus of enormous regional instability, and the genesis

of a cradle of communism in the Western Hemisphere." This speech outlined and underscored the administration's focus on isolating and punishing these three countries.

Since the early 1960s, the U.S. policy toward Cuba has focused on imposing economic sanctions to isolate the undemocratic Cuban government. In 2014, Obama initiated a policy shift toward a policy of engagement and re-established the U.S. Embassy in Havana. However, Trump announced in 2017 that he would roll back these normalization efforts. He presented a new policy that introduced new sanctions for its poor human rights record and its support for the Maduro regime in Venezuela. The administration imposed restrictions on travel and remittances and sanctions targeting Venezuela's oil exports to Cuba and other trade and financial transactions. One of Trump's last acts in office in 2021 was the re-designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of international terrorism.

As the situation in Venezuela deteriorated under President Maduro, the Trump administration imposed numerous financial sanctions, including against the state oil company, the country's primary source of income. The administration also provided humanitarian and development assistance for Venezuelans who fled to other countries and Venezuelans inside the country. Trump openly discussed the possibility of using military force in Venezuela, though he ultimately sought to compel Maduro to leave office through diplomatic, economic, and legal pressure. In 2019, the administration recognized the head of Venezuela's National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, as

interim president and successfully encouraged over 50 countries to follow suit. However, despite the international pressure, Maduro retained power.

Under President Ortega, U.S. policy towards Nicaragua was generally focused on strengthening civil society and promoting respect for human rights and free and fair elections. After the regime executed a brutal crackdown against protesters in 2018, the Trump administration imposed sanctions on high-level officials and organizations, including Vice President and First Lady Rosario Murillo and National Security Advisor Moncada, for corruption, serious human rights abuses, and undermining democracy and stability. The new country-specific sanctions regime increased pressure on Ortega and imposed indirect pressure on its allies, Cuba and Venezuela.

*Economic Diplomacy.* The United States launched America Crece in late 2019 to foster U.S. private sector energy and infrastructure investment in the Americas, improve their regulatory frameworks and procurement structures, and reduce these countries' reliance on funding from Chinese state-owned enterprises and multilateral development banks. The U.S. government did not provide additional funding for the initiative; instead, it relied on U.S. diplomatic engagement and existing programs. By the end of Trump's term, the United States signed MOUs with 14 countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Suriname, and Uruguay.

#### 4. Review of the Biden administration

*2020 Campaign.* During Biden's campaign for the 2020 election, he stressed he would pursue a different approach than Trump in the Americas by "rebuild[ing] strong hemispheric ties based on respect for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law." He vowed to "do away with the Trump Administration's draconian immigration policies and galvanize international action to address the poverty and insecurity driving migrants" from the Northern Triangle. He also promised to reverse the "failed Trump policies that have inflicted harm on the Cuban people and done nothing to advance democracy and human rights."

*Democracy and Undemocratic Outliers.* In 2021, the Biden administration set forth its foreign policy priority of renewing democracy to counter rising authoritarianism and nationalism globally. In the Americas, this priority included working with partners to promote democracy in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela and broader efforts to reinforce democracy and combat corruption in other countries.

President Biden hosted a Summit for Democracy in late 2021, in which 25 governments from the Americas participated. Biden lamented how the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated economic inequities and contributed to a decrease in support for democracy and argued for the need to defend against authoritarianism and respect human rights.

Biden has successfully confronted risks to democracy in the region in two high-profile cases. The United States undertook robust advocacy efforts in Brazil



(2022) and Guatemala (2023-2024), in partnership with domestic and international actors, to promote the democratic transfer of power in the face of campaigns to nullify the election results.

In early 2021, the administration said it would review Trump's Cuba policy, including its late decision to designate Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism. However, in mid-2021, Cuba executed a harsh response to street protests, detaining and charging hundreds with crimes. As a result, the administration imposed sanctions against Cuban officials involved in the government's repression. In 2022, the Administration announced several policy changes to increase support for the Cuban people, including facilitating family reunification and easing some U.S. restrictions on travel and remittances.

On Nicaragua, Biden has used sanctions against specific sectors of the economy, including the gold sector, in response to the Ortega government's antidemocratic actions. The administration has also worked multilaterally with the Organization of American States and the United Nations to increase international pressure against the government.

Biden has continued to pressure Maduro and the Venezuelan government through sanctions. The administration supported negotiations between the Venezuelan opposition and the Maduro regime. It lifted some sanctions after civil society and the opposition struck an electoral agreement with Maduro in late 2023. However, it reinstated many of them after Maduro failed to live up to the deal. Maduro agreed to hold a long-anticipated

presidential election in mid-2024, yet when the election results came in, he claimed victory with little evidence to back his claims. The United States has followed the diplomatic lead of regional partners Brazil and Colombia to press for a resolution. Still, thus far, it has not recognized the opposition candidate as the winner. It has, however, announced new sanctions and visa restrictions, targeting 16 individuals involved in the government's illegitimate claims of victory and his brutal crackdown after the election.

In Haiti, there has been a presidential assassination, a surge in gang violence, and an earthquake since 2021. The country's acting prime minister left the country but was unable to return due to gang violence and political manipulations. The administration has supported free and fair elections, promoted the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, and improved security. It has been supporting the delivery of equipment to support Haitian law enforcement and is currently backing the Kenyan-led multinational force that recently arrived to enhance security. Biden called the force Haiti's "best chance" to achieve democratic governance. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited the island, the first senior U.S. secretary of state to visit Haiti in nearly ten years. The United States has also sanctioned eight current and former Haitian officials, including two prime ministers and several gang members.

*Immigration.* In its first few years, the Biden administration revised U.S. immigration policy in the Americas. It reversed several of Trump's most controversial policies and established a task force to





identify and reunify families separated as a result of the Zero Tolerance policy. It also launched two new regional strategies to address hemispheric migration: the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America and the Collaborative Migration Management Strategy.

Over his time in office, Biden has had to respond to record levels of irregular migrants reaching the U.S.-Mexico border. After bipartisan legislative negotiations failed in early 2024, he issued a proclamation in June 2024 allowing the government to shut down the border between ports of entry if daily border crossings exceed a certain threshold. Since its announcement, monthly apprehensions have steadily dropped but remain high.

The administration also expanded and created more legal avenues for immigration to promote safe, legal, and orderly migration and discourage irregular immigration. For example, refugee resettlement from the region has increased. As of August, the United States is on pace to resettle 22,000 refugees from the Americas in the fiscal year, the highest total ever from the region. The administration also created a humanitarian parole program for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans. From 2022 to early 2024, over 357,000 nationals of these four countries entered the United States and received a work visa.

The administration is on pace to allocate \$4 billion in foreign assistance to address the root causes of migration in Central America. It is also leading hemispheric

efforts to enhance migration management cooperation.

*Summit of the Americas.* Biden hosted the Ninth Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles in 2022. Its theme was “Building a Sustainable, Resilient, and Equitable Future.” The 30 participating countries approved political commitments related to health, climate change, clean energy, digital transformation, and democratic governance. The administration also announced several new regional policy initiatives, including a new U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 (PACC 2030) to advance climate adaptation and resilience and clean energy cooperation, and the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP), an initiative to mobilize increased investment, make supply chains more resilient, create clean energy jobs and energy, and ensure sustainable and inclusive trade. The United States also led the creation of the Los Angeles Declaration for Migration and Protection, backed by 20 countries, to mobilize the countries in the region around actions to promote safe, orderly, humane, and regular migration.

*Economic Diplomacy.* After launching the APEP in June 2022, the United States organized the Leaders’ Summit in November 2023. It announced a plan to use the APEP to promote inclusive growth in the region and strengthen critical supply chains, particularly clean energy, semiconductors, and medical supplies. U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the United States wants to diversify supply chains with “trusted partners and allies,” a strategy that had “tremendous potential benefits for fueling growth” in the region.



The initiative includes Barbados, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay. All participating countries, except Uruguay, have an FTA with the United States.

### 5. What to Expect from a Trump or Harris Administration

*Overall.* Harris and Trump have said little about their policy agenda in the Americas. Still, there are some clues about what a Harris or Trump administration might mean for U.S. policy in the region.

*Trump.* Trump's 2024 presidential campaign, much like his 2020 and 2016 campaigns, has focused extensively on combating irregular migration. This time, he has emphasized undertaking a large-scale deportation of undocumented immigrants residing in the country. According to the most recent U.S. government estimate, there are 11 million such immigrants. This includes 4.8 million Mexicans, 2 million Northern Triangle nationals, and nearly 800,000 Brazilians, Colombians, and Venezuelans. If the government could identify, detain, and secure removal orders for a significant number of immigrants, the United States would need the cooperation of these governments to receive their nationals. And if the governments do not comply, Trump would likely use the tools at his disposal – such as imposing tariffs, withholding or reprogramming U.S. foreign assistance, or backing out of trade agreements – to compel them.

Trump has proposed a 60% tariff on Chinese imports and a tariff as high as 20% on all other worldwide imports during his 2024 campaign. If he follows through on

this promise, it would significantly impact trade with regional partners in the Americas, particularly the 11 countries with which the United States has an FTA. Mexico and Canada would be the hardest hit as they are the United States' largest and third-largest trading partners. Total trade in goods between the United States and Mexico in 2023 was nearly \$800 billion, with 80% of Mexico's exports destined for the United States. U.S.-Canada trade reached over \$750 billion in 2023 as well. If Trump followed through on a 10-20% tariff, the timing could be challenging for USMCA. The three countries must review and approve the trade deal by mid-2026 to continue the agreement.

Trump may threaten or use the military to pursue his regional policy objectives. Three of his advisors told the media in early 2024 that Trump had endorsed deploying special operations units into Mexico – with or without the government's knowledge – to kill drug cartel leaders. Trump's running mate, Senator JD Vance, has also endorsed this approach. Trump's last Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, wrote in a memoir that Trump wanted to use the U.S. military to bomb the cartels' drug labs in Mexico. Trump also repeatedly said publicly during his time in office that U.S. military intervention in Venezuela was an option, though he never followed through on it.

Trump would likely seek increased engagement and partnership with like-minded conservative leaders in the Americas, like Argentinian President Javier Milei and former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, and populist leaders like Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele. They



are part of a broader global network of leaders Trump has been courting since he left office. Milei and Bukele spoke at the U.S. Conservative Political Action Conference in 2024, raising their profile in U.S. conservative circles.

*Harris.* Although Harris built a public record on the Americas as a prosecutor in California, a U.S. Senator, and a presidential candidate in 2019, her positions have evolved, so it is most helpful to examine her tenure as vice president and brief time as a presidential candidate in 2024 to understand how she would lead U.S. relations with the hemisphere.

During her current presidential campaign, Harris has released few details on her foreign policy agenda, including that of the Americas. However, she has also talked about immigration, criticized Trump's tariff proposal, and written about Venezuela.

On immigration, she has burnished her centrist credentials, expressing support for bipartisan legislation to strengthen U.S. border security, and reform the U.S. asylum system, and provide an earned pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. During the September presidential debate, she also emphasized her experience prosecuting cases involving transnational criminal organizations, drug trafficking, and human trafficking.

Harris has not said much about the US-MCA or other regional free trade deals as a candidate, but she has mocked Trump's proposed tariffs. She referred to them as a "sales tax," highlighting that U.S. consumers would ultimately face higher prices

as importers would pass on the tariff to consumers.

She will likely continue Biden's efforts to maintain pressure on Maduro in Venezuela. After Venezuela's flawed election, she called for the "immediate release of detailed polling data," rejected Maduro's harassment of peaceful protestors, and underscored the United States "stands with the Venezuelan people." She later sent a letter to Venezuelan opposition leaders that highlighted the importance of "the international community, particularly the countries within our shared hemisphere, ... in condemning" the Maduro regime's abuses.

She will likely continue to back U.S. investments in Central America to address the root causes of migration. During her tenure as vice president, she traveled to Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras to address migration from the region. She leveraged \$5.2 billion from companies and organizations to fund development projects in areas of high emigration. She also played a critical role in ensuring that Bernardo Arévalo, whom Guatemalan voters selected as their next president, took office in 2024 despite the outgoing government's campaign to prevent him.

Harris's father was born in Jamaica, and she vacationed there as a child, giving her a unique perspective on the Caribbean. She will likely continue U.S. engagement and support in the Caribbean as president. At the 2022 Summit of the Americas, she launched the PACC 2030 to strengthen U.S. partnerships with Caribbean nations on climate adaptation, resilience, and clean energy. In 2023, she announced



over \$100 million in U.S. funding for energy resiliency, humanitarian assistance, and food security at the U.S.-Caribbean leaders' summit in the Bahamas.

Lastly, given her background as a prosecutor, Harris is likely to advance U.S. efforts to promote the rule of law, enhance citizen security, and focus on international law. Her comments about the need for Israel to adhere to international humanitarian law in its war with Hamas demonstrate the importance of the law for a future Harris administration.

#### **6. Issues that Should be Prioritized in the Next Administration**

Whether Trump or Harris wins, the next president should focus on these three issues: addressing the acute challenges in Haiti and Venezuela, enhancing hemispheric security, and improving regional trade and investment.

*Haiti and Venezuela.* The grave political and humanitarian situation in Haiti and Venezuela merits high-level attention from the next administration. If left unaddressed, they will continue to be the source of significant irregular migration, putting strain on the United States and neighboring countries. Venezuela undermines regional stability and security and is one of the three undemocratic nations in the region. If Maduro clings to power and takes office in 2025, he will not likely exit if and until he has assurances he will avoid jail if he steps aside. The United States should ramp up pressure on the elites that support him, increase support for civil society groups in Venezuela, repeal the existing licenses that allow

U.S. and other companies to work in the Venezuelan oil sector, and enhance collaboration with left-leaning presidents in the region who could influence Maduro, such as Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva, Colombia's Gustavo Petro, or Mexico's new president, Claudia Sheinbaum to find an exit ramp for Maduro. Given Haiti's proximity to and history with the United States, other countries likely assess it is the United States' responsibility to lead the international response. Haiti requires U.S. attention and support to ensure the continued arrival of humanitarian assistance, support for a larger and more robust peacekeeping mission, and enable a Haitian-led recovery to proceed. The United States should also redouble efforts to combat the illicit trafficking of arms from the United States that is fueling the violence in Haiti and other parts of the Caribbean.

*Hemispheric Security.* The United States should promote a new approach to improve hemispheric security. Crime is spreading across the region as transnational criminal organizations grow stronger and expand. Of the top 50 cities with the highest homicide rates in the world, 42 are in the Americas. This includes five in Ecuador, a country considered safe as recently as 2019. High levels of insecurity are also taking an economic toll. The Inter-American Development Bank assesses crime costs countries 3.5% of their annual GDP. U.S. security initiatives in Mexico, Central America, Colombia, and the Caribbean are important security and justice sector assistance programs. Still, other countries in the hemisphere also need more funding support to address the growing challenges. The



United States should lead or support a new hemispheric initiative to promote the exchange of best practices, facilitate intelligence sharing, track and block the financial assets of these organizations, and identify new, creative areas of collaboration. The initiative should incorporate external stakeholders, such as civil society, the private sector, academics, international organizations, and multilateral development banks, as these actors have a stake in an improved security landscape and can offer expertise, funding support, and accountability.

*Regional Trade and Investment.* The United States should also implement a robust plan to increase trade and investment ties, advance economic integration, promote re-shoring and nearshoring, and provide a viable alternative to countries considering Chinese trade or investment deals. The APEP initiative, like Americas Crece, represents a good start to promote U.S. investment in the region; however, it needs to be improved. It should include more countries and be significantly ex-

panded to other economic programs to meet the region's financing needs and to compete with China's state-led investment model. Two-way trade between China and the Americas has grown from \$18 billion in 2002 to \$450 billion in 2022. China is South America's top trading partner and is the second largest for the Americas, after the United States. The bipartisan Americas Trade and Investment Act, introduced in early 2024, proposes the most comprehensive U.S. economic policy to strengthen relations with the Americas in many years. The next administration should encourage Congress to pass the bill in its entirety or critical elements, such as creating the Americas Partnership, which would ensure countries benefiting from the proposed enhanced trade benefits and financial assistance meet established standards on democracy, trade, and the rule of law. While waiting for the bill's approval, the administration should also identify aspects of the bill that do not require Congressional approval and begin implementing them.



### Conclusion

- There is widespread recognition within the Americas about the challenges facing the hemisphere, such as high crime levels, record levels of displacement, low economic growth, and the growing competition between the United States and China.
- The U.S. presidential elections in November 2024 present an opportunity to update U.S. policy in the Americas.
- If former President Trump wins, he would likely exert significant pressure on countries to reduce irregular migration flows reaching the United States and accept their citizens with final deportation orders. If governments do not cooperate, he would likely use the tools at his disposal to compel them. He would also likely seek to further isolate and sanction the undemocratic outliers of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.
- If Vice President Harris wins, she would likely continue Biden's overall policy of engagement and multilateralism to address the region's cross-cutting challenges. She would also be forced to focus on immigration issues. She would likely follow Biden's approach by bolstering border security, implementing asylum reforms, addressing the root causes, improving migration management collaboration, and opening up legal avenues to reduce pressure on the border.

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