

GLOBAL AMERICANS

Recommendations for U.S.-Latin America/ Caribbean Policy, 2016 Elections

Conclusions of Global Americans Campaign Working Group

Executive Summary

This consensus paper, developed by a working group of 23 leading U.S. scholars of the region, lays out a series of nonpartisan proposals for a new administration to strengthen and leverage the U.S.'s relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. We believe Latin America and the Caribbean is a region where a small, focused effort can help build allies for other global issues, reap great rewards for our domestic, regional and global interests, and prevent disruptive crises from erupting south of the United States. In other words, in terms of U.S. priorities, it's a region where a little effort can go a long way.

But today, not just any effort or more of the same will do. It is time for a substantive reassessment and shift in our strategy and relations. This requires a sober, honest assessment of U.S. interests in the region and its tools to affect them. We believe that it is necessary to reframe U.S. policy discussions (as is often done in other regions) around a more basic premise of U.S. and regional interests, inter-state (and non-state) relations, and the U.S.'s power to achieve those. The first place to start is, rather than talking about building walls, framing the discussion around building bridges with like-minded governments in the region and with citizens and NGOs across the Americas.

This paper provides some background analysis on several of the topics and countries around which those bridges can be built. It concludes with a series of specific proposals for U.S. policy after 2017 that reflect both the new realities in the region and the opportunities and constraints of U.S. power regionally and internationally. **We argue that despite the many possibilities for collaboration and growth, one of the greatest challenges the region and the U.S. will face in the near future is the potential popular and economic fallout from declining economies and states that have failed to seriously improve accountability and the delivery of key social services such as education and health care.**

U.S. interests and strengths in the region remain strong. Below is a brief summary of some of the ways the next administration—Republican or Democrat—can further U.S. interests by taking advantage of its soft and hard power assets:

1. Create a positive economic pole within the region of deepened commercial and financial relations with U.S. markets by harmonizing existing trade agreements and strengthening bilateral commercial, taxation, and investment discussions and agreements;
2. Collaborate with friendly groups of nations such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico on targeted issues such as: supporting Caribbean economies on their energy needs post-Petro-Caribe; collaboratively promoting institution rebuilding and greater respect for political and civil rights in Cuba and Venezuela; assisting in the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; sharing information to promote social inclusion in areas such as gender, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation;
3. Shore up regional and international norms to defend and promote human rights and democracy. This should include promoting—when applicable—independent, international commissions to finally clear up pending matters of human rights violations, such as the AMIA bombing in Argentina and the disappearances in Mexico, and strengthening regional commitments to defend representative democracy;
4. Engage other countries in the region to augment and assist in the U.S.’s package for Central America’s Northern Triangle, Alliance for Prosperity, to address crime, insecurity, violence, and the lack of economic opportunity in Central America;
5. Establish a rational, humane immigration system in the United States that both meets U.S. demands for labor and creates a pathway to citizenship for immigrants who are here illegally. This should include, as first steps, ending the deportations of children who are fleeing violence in Central America and allowing those who qualify under DACA and DAPA to remain in the United States;
6. Continue to press governments in the region, particularly recipients of U.S. anti-narcotics and security assistance, to abide by human rights standards and expand assistance to continue to professionalize police forces and civilian oversight of those forces; and
7. Work to lift the U.S. embargo on Cuba while also insisting that Cuba continue to provide opportunities for collaboration on a number of fronts, including human

rights, and encouraging other Latin American governments and international bodies to assist promoting human rights and the opening of political space on the island and in the country's much-needed economic reforms.

The impressive economic growth of the past 15 years brought dramatic gains in prosperity, including lifting 50 million people out of poverty into a fragile middle class and rising expectations and demands over the efficiency of the state and the integrity of public officials. But the economic boom is temporarily cooling, and many of those who were celebrated as joining the middle class are in a precarious position, with limited access to social services and formal jobs or job security. The region now faces a time of deteriorating economic expansion and public funds for social programs at the same time that governments face rising public demands and frustration.

U.S. partnership in working with governments in the region to address these issues will be key and will help shore up the U.S.'s role in the region as a partner, especially as other countries —many of which were often the target of misplaced fears or conspiracy mongering—are also confronting problems of their own and unable to provide the levels of assistance once counted on. The greatest challenge will be Venezuela.

This and many of the issues above will require cooperation with Latin American and Caribbean countries bilaterally or multilaterally (when possible). Unfortunately the proliferation of weak multilateral groups and the weakening of the regional Organization of the American States (OAS) make it difficult to address many of the most pressing issues of human rights and democratic governance through existing multilateral bodies. While the next administration should work to strengthen the OAS and be willing to assist new sub-regional organizations address regional needs, the most effective, flexible and accountable multi-state method to address many of the region's challenge will be through informal groups of countries, what has been termed "mini-lateralism."*

* Naím, M. (2009). "Minilateralism." *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/06/21/minilateralism/>.