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# Latin America and the Caribbean: U.S. Policy and Issues in the 116th Congress

March 6, 2020

**Congressional Research Service**
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R46258

**CRS REPORT**
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

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SUMMARY

R46258

March 6, 2020

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# Latin America and the Caribbean: U.S. Policy and Issues in the 116th Congress

The United States maintains strong linkages with neighboring Latin America and the Caribbean based on geographic proximity and diverse U.S. interests, including economic, political, and security concerns. The United States is a major trading partner and source of foreign investment for many countries in the region, with free-trade agreements enhancing economic linkages with 11 countries. The region is a large source of U.S. immigration, both legal and illegal; proximity and economic and security conditions are major factors driving migration. Curbing the flow of illicit drugs has been a key component of U.S. relations with the region for more than four decades and currently involves close security cooperation with Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. U.S. support for democracy and human rights in the region has been long-standing, with particular current focus on Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

Under the Trump Administration, U.S. relations with Latin America and the Caribbean have moved toward a more confrontational approach from one of engagement and partnership during past Administrations. Since FY2018, the Administration's proposed foreign aid budgets for the region would have cut assistance levels significantly—the FY2021 request would cut aid to the region by 18%. (A large increase for Venezuela masks significantly larger cuts for many countries and programs.) To deter increased unauthorized migration from Central America, the Administration has used a variety of immigration policy tools (including Migrant Protection Protocols and "safe third country" agreements), as well as aid cuts and threats of increased U.S. tariffs and taxes on remittances. Other Administration actions on immigration include efforts to end the deportation relief program known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designations for Nicaragua, Haiti, El Salvador, and Honduras. Among trade issues, President Trump strongly criticized and repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which led to the new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) negotiated in 2018. The Trump Administration also did not follow the policy of engagement with Cuba advanced by the Obama Administration and imposed new sanctions.

**Congressional Action in the 116th Congress.** Congress traditionally has played an active role in policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of both legislation and oversight. The 116th Congress did not implement the Trump Administration's downsized foreign aid budget requests for the region for FY2019 (P.L. 116-6) and FY2020 (P.L. 116-94), instead providing aid amounts roughly similar to those provided in recent years.

Congress approved the Venezuela Emergency Relief, Democracy Assistance, and Development Act of 2019 in December 2019 (included in Division J of P.L. 116-94), which, among its provisions, codifies several types of sanctions imposed on Venezuela and authorizes humanitarian assistance to Venezuelans and support for international election observation and democratic civil society. In January 2020, Congress completed action on implementing legislation (P.L. 116-113) for the USMCA, but before final agreement, the trade agreement was amended to address congressional concerns regarding provisions on labor, the environment, dispute settlement procedures, and intellectual property rights. The FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 116-92), approved in December 2019, includes provisions on Venezuela and Guatemala and reporting requirements on Brazil, Honduras, Central America, and Mexico.

Both houses approved several bills and resolutions on a range of issues and countries: H.R. 133, which would promote economic cooperation and exchanges with Mexico; H.R. 2615, which would authorize assistance to Central America's Northern Triangle countries to address the root causes of migration; S.Res. 35 and S.Res. 447 on the political situation in Bolivia; and H.Res. 441 and S.Res. 277 commemorating the 25th anniversary of the 1994 bombing of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association in Buenos Aires. To date, congressional committees have held almost 20 oversight hearings on the region in the 116th Congress (see **Appendix**).

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# Regional Political and Economic Environment

With 33 countries—ranging from the Caribbean nation of St. Kitts and Nevis, one of the world's smallest states, to the South American giant of Brazil, the world's fifth-largest country—the Latin American and Caribbean region has made significant advances over the past four decades in terms of both political and economic development. (See **Figure 1** and **Table 2** for a map and basic facts on the region's countries.) Significant challenges remain, however, and some countries have experienced setbacks, most prominently Venezuela (which has descended into dictatorship). In the early 1980s, authoritarian regimes governed 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries, both on the left and the right. Today, three countries in the region—Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela—are ruled by authoritarian governments.[1]

**2020 Elections**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Guyana** | March 2 |
| **Bolivia** | May 3 |
| **Dom. Republic** | May |
| **Suriname** | May 25 |
| **St. Kitts & Nevis** | by August |
| **Trinidad & Tobago** | by September |
| **Belize** | by November |
| **St. Vincent** | by December |

Most governments in the region today are elected democracies. Although free and fair elections have become the norm, recent elections in several countries have been controversial and contested. In 2019, Argentina, Dominica, El Salvador, Panama, and Uruguay held successful free and fair elections. Guatemala held two presidential election rounds in June and August 2019 that international observers judged to be successful, but the elections suffered because several popular candidates were disqualified from the race on dubious grounds. In Bolivia, severe irregularities in the conduct of the country's October 2019 presidential elections ignited protests and violence that led to the resignation of incumbent President Evo Morales, who was seeking a fourth term; new elections under an interim president are now scheduled for May 2020. In addition, Guyana held elections (final results have not been announced) on March 2, 2020, and six other Caribbean countries are scheduled to hold elections in 2020 (see text box "2020 Elections").

Despite significant improvements in political rights and civil liberties since the 1980s, many countries in the region still face considerable challenges. In a number of countries, weaknesses remain in the state's ability to deliver public services, ensure accountability and transparency, advance the rule of law, and ensure citizen safety and security. There are numerous examples of elected presidents who have left office early amid severe social turmoil and economic crises, the presidents' own autocratic actions contributing to their ouster, or high-profile corruption. In addition to Morales's resignation in 2019, corruption scandals either caused or contributed to several presidents' resignations or removals of several president—Guatemala in 2015, Brazil in 2016, and Peru in 2018.

Although the threat of direct military rule has dissipated, civilian governments in several countries have turned to their militaries or retired officers for support or during crises, raising concerns among some observers.[2] Most recently, in El Salvador on February 9, 2020, President Nayib Bukele used the military in an effort to intimidate the country's legislature into approving

[1] See The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Democracy Index 2019*, January 2020 (hereinafter cited as EIU, *Democracy Index, 2019*), which classifies all three governments as *authoritarian* based on some 60 indicators; and Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2019*, February 2019, which classifies all three governments as *not free* based on their poor records on political rights and civil liberties. For additional background, see CRS Report R46016, *Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Compilation of Selected Indices*, by Carla Y. Davis-Castro.

[2] See "Latin America's 21st-Century Militaries," *Americas Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2020), pp. 12-72.

an anti-crime bill; the action elicited strong criticism in El Salvador and abroad, with concerns centered on the politicization of the military and the separation of powers.[3]

The quality of democracy has eroded in several countries over the past several years. The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU's) 2019 democracy index shows a steady regional decline in democratic practices in Latin America since 2017. Several years ago only Cuba was viewed as an authoritarian regime, but Venezuela joined its ranks in 2017 as President Nicolás Maduro's government violently repressed the political opposition. Nicaragua turned to authoritarian practices in 2018 under long-time President Daniel Ortega, as the government violently repressed protests. The continued regional downward trend in 2019 stemmed from Bolivia's post-election crisis and to a lesser extent by setbacks in the following other countries: Guatemala, where the government ousted the anti-corruption body known as the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala; Haiti, which experienced widespread anti-government protests against corruption and deteriorating economic conditions; and Guyana, with the delay of elections following a no-confidence vote by the legislature.[4]

Public satisfaction with how democracy is operating has declined along with the quality of democracy in the region. According to the 2018/2019 AmericasBarometer public opinion survey, the percentage of individuals satisfied with how democracy was working in their countries averaged 39.6% among 18 countries in the region, the lowest level of satisfaction since the poll began in 2004.[5] Given these trends, the eruption of social protests in many countries around the region in 2019 is unsurprising, but in each country a unique set of circumstances has sparked the protests. In addition to the protests in Bolivia and Haiti cited above, protests broke out in Ecuador over fuel price increases, in Chile over pent-up frustration over social inequities, and in Colombia over opposition to a range of government policies and proposals, from tax reform to education to peace accord implementation.

Although each country is unique, several broad political and economic factors appear to be driving the decline in satisfaction with democracy in the region. Political factors include an increase in authoritarian practices, weak democratic institutions and politicized judicial systems, corruption, high levels of crime and violence, and organized crime that can infiltrate or influence state institutions. Economic factors include declining or stagnant regional economic growth rates over the past several years, high levels of income inequality in many Latin American countries, increased poverty, and the inadequacy of social safety net programs or advancement opportunities, along with increased pressure on the region's previously expanding middle class.[6]

Beginning around 2015, the global decline in commodity prices significantly affected the region, as did China's economic slowdown and its reduced appetite for imports from the region in 2015 and 2016 (see **Table 1**). According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the region

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[3] See Brian Winter, "Latin America's Armed Forces, Q&A: Why El Salvador's Crisis Is Different – and Worrying," *Americas Quarterly*, February 13, 2020; and Christine Wade, "Bukele's Politicization of the Military Revives Old Fears in El Salvador," *World Politics Review*, February 12, 2020.

[4] EIU, *Democracy Index 2019*.

[5] Elizabeth J. Zechmeister and Noam Lupu, *LAPOP's AmericasBarometer Takes the Pulse of Democracy*, Vanderbilt University, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2019.

[6] See, for example, the following studies and articles discussing social unrest in Latin America: EIU, *Where Next and What Next for Latin America?*, December 2019; Michael Mantera and Maria de Lourdes Despradel, *Latin America and the Caribbean in the New Decade, How Did We Get There?*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2020; Michael Shifter, "The Rebellion Against the Elites in Latin America," *New York Times*, January 21, 2020; and Eric Farnsworth, "In a Season of Discontent, Are Latin American Democracies at Risk?," *World Politics Review*, December 6, 2019.

experienced an economic contraction of 0.6% in 2016, dragged down by recessions in Argentina and Brazil, as well as by Venezuela's severe economic deterioration as oil prices fell. Since then, the region has registered only marginal growth rates, including an estimated growth rate of 0.2% in 2019. Regional growth in 2019 was suppressed by the collapse of much of the Venezuelan economy, which contracted 35%, and by continued recession in Argentina, which suffered an economic contraction of 3.1%.[7]

The current IMF 2020 outlook is for regional growth to reach 1.6%, led by recovery in Brazil and spurred by growth forecasts of 3% or higher for Chile, Colombia, and Peru. The economic fallout from the current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, which already is having repercussions around the world, could jeopardize this forecast.[8] Even before the onset of the coronavirus, recession was forecasted to continue in several countries, including Argentina and Venezuela, with contractions of 1.3% and 10% respectively.[9] The risk of social unrest similar to that experienced in 2019 could also constrain growth in some countries.

**Table 1. Latin America and Caribbean: Real GDP Growth, 2016-2021**

(annual percentage change)

| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 estimate | 2020 projection | 2021 projection |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brazil | -3.3 | 1.1 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 2.2 | 2.3 |
| Mexico | 2.9 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 1.6 |
| Latin America and the Caribbean | -0.6 | 1.2 | 1.1 | 0.1 | 1.6 | 2.3 |

**Source:** International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook, Update*, January 20, 2020, and IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2019.

Despite some easing of income inequality in the region from 2002 to 2014, reductions in income inequality have slowed since 2015; Latin America remains the most unequal region in the world in terms of income inequality, according to the United Nations (U.N.) Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.[10] The level of poverty in the region also has increased over the past five years. In 2014, 27.8% of the region's population lived in poverty; that figure increased to 30.8% by 2019.[11]

[7] Economic statistics are from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), "World Economic Outlook, Update, January 2020: Tentative Stabilization, Sluggish Recovery?," January 20, 2020, and *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2019.

[8] Frida Ghitas, "The Coronavirus Will Send Political and Economic Shockwaves Far Beyond China," *World Politics Review*, February 6, 2020. Also see CRS In Focus IF11434, *COVID-19: U.S.-China Economic Considerations*, by Karen M. Sutter and Michael D. Sutherland; and CRS In Focus IF11421, *COVID-19: Global Implications and Responses*, by Sara M. Tharakan et al.

[9] IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2019.

[10] U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America 2019*, December 2019 (hereinafter cited as U.N. ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2019*).

[11] U.N. ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2019*.

**Figure 1. Map of Latin America and the Caribbean**

**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS) Graphics.

**Notes:** Caribbean countries are in purple, Central American countries are in gold, and South American countries are in green. Although Belize is located in Central America and Guyana and Suriname are located in South America, all three are members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

**Table 2. Latin American and Caribbean Countries: Basic Facts**

| Country | Area (square miles) | Population (2019 estimated, thousands) | GDP (2019 est., U.S. $ billions, current) | GDP Per Capita (2019 est., U.S. $, current) | Leader (elected/next election) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Caribbean*** | | | | | |
| **Antigua & Barbuda** | 171 | 93 | 1.7 | 18,109 | Gaston Browne (March 2018/by March 2023) |
| **Bahamas** | 5,359 | 381 | 12.7 | 33,261 | Hubert Minnis (May 2017/by May 2022) |
| **Barbados** | 166 | 287 | 5.2 | 18,069 | Mia Mottley (May 2018/ by May 2023) |
| **Belize**[a] | 8,867 | 406 | 2.0 | 4,925 | Dean Barrow (Nov. 2015/by Nov. 2020) |
| **Cuba** | 42,803 | 11,338 (2018) | 100.0 (2018) | — | Miguel Díaz-Canel (April 2018/ 2023)[b] |
| **Dominica** | 290 | 71 | 0.6 | 8,381 | Roosevelt Skerrit (Dec. 2019/by Dec. 2024) |
| **Dominican Republic** | 18,792 | 10,369 | 89.5 | 8,629 | Danilo Medina (May 2016/May 2020) |
| **Grenada** | 133 | 109 | 1.2 | 11,381 | Keith Mitchell (March 2018/by March 2023) |
| **Guyana**[a] | 83,000 | 785 | 4.1 | 5,252 | David Granger (March 2, 2020/2025)[c] |
| **Haiti** | 10,714 | 11,248 | 8.8 | 784 | Jovenel Moïse (Nov. 2016/Oct. 2021) |
| **Jamaica** | 4,244 | 2,875 | 15.7 | 5,461 | Andrew Holness (Feb. 2016/by Feb. 2021) |
| **St. Kitts & Nevis** | 101 | 57 | 1.0 | 18,246 | Timothy Harris (Feb. 2015/by Aug. 2020) |
| **St. Lucia** | 238 | 180 | 2.0 | 11,076 | Allen Chastanet (June 2016/by June 2021) |
| **St. Vincent & the Grenadines** | 150 | 110 | 0.9 | 7,751 | Ralph Gonsalves (Dec. 2015/by Dec. 2020) |
| **Suriname**[a] | 63,251 | 598 | 3.8 | 6,311 | Desiré Bouterse (May 2015/May 25, 2020) |
| **Trinidad & Tobago** | 1,980 | 1,381 | 22.6 | 16,366 | Keith Rowley (Sept. 2015/by Sept. 2020) |
| ***Mexico and Central America*** | | | | | |
| **Mexico** | 758,449 | 125,929 | 1,274.2 | 10,118 | Andrés Manuel López Obrador (July 2018/July 2024) |
| **Costa Rica** | 19,730 | 5,079 | 61.0 | 12,015 | Carlos Alvarado (Feb. & April 2018/Feb. 2022) |

| Country | Area (square miles) | Population (2019 estimated, thousands) | GDP (2019 est., U.S. $ billions, current) | GDP Per Capita (2019 est., U.S. $, current) | Leader (elected/next election) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **El Salvador** | 8,124 | 6,704 | 26.9 | 4,008 | Nayib Bukele (Feb. 2019/Feb. 2024) |
| **Guatemala** | 42,042 | 17,613 | 81.3 | 4,617 | Alejandro Giammattei (June & August 2019/2023) |
| **Honduras** | 43,278 | 9,594 | 24.4 | 2,548 | Juan Orlando Hernández (Nov. 2017/Nov. 2021) |
| **Nicaragua** | 50,336 | 6,528 | 12.5 | 1,919 | Daniel Ortega (Nov. 2015/Nov. 2021) |
| **Panama** | 29,120 | 4,219 | 68.5 | 16,245 | Laurentino Cortizo (May 2019/May 2024) |
| ***South America*** | | | | | |
| **Argentina** | 1,073,518 | 45,052 | 445.5 | 9,888 | Alberto Fernández (Oct. 2019/Oct. 2023) |
| **Bolivia** | 424,164 | 11,550 | 42.4 | 3,671 | Jeanine Añez (Oct. 2019/May 3, 2020)[d] |
| **Brazil** | 3,287,957 | 209,962 | 1,847.0 | 8,797 | Jair Bolsonaro (Oct. 2018/Oct. 2022) |
| **Chile** | 291,932 | 19,107 | 294.2 | 15,399 | Sebastián Piñera (Nov. 2017/Nov. 2021) |
| **Colombia** | 439,736 | 50,382 | 327.9 | 6,508 | Iván Duque (May & June 2018/May 2022) |
| **Ecuador** | 109,484 | 17,268 | 107.9 | 6,249 | Lenín Moreno (Feb. & April 2017/Feb. 2021) |
| **Paraguay** | 157,048 | 7,153 | 40.7 | 5,692 | Mario Abdo Benítez (April 2018/April 2023) |
| **Peru** | 496,225 | 32,496 | 229.0 | 7,047 | Martín Vizcarra (April & June 2016/April 2021)[e] |
| **Uruguay** | 68,037 | 3,519 | 59.9 | 17,029 | Luis Lacalle Pou (Oct. & Nov. 2019/Oct. 2024) |
| **Venezuela** | 352,144 | 27,530 | 70.1 | 2,548 | Nicolás Maduro (May 2018/May 2024)[f] |

**Sources:** Area statistics are from the Central Intelligence Agency's *World Factbook*, with square kilometers converted into square miles. Population and economic statistics are from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2019. Since the IMF database does not include economic statistics on Cuba, population and gross domestic product (GDP) statistics for Cuba are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators databank, with 2018 being the most recent data presented.

a. Geographically, Belize is located in Central America and Guyana and Suriname are located on the northern coast of South America, but all three are members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and are therefore listed under the Caribbean region.

b. Cuba does not have direct elections for its head of government. Instead, Cuba's legislature selects the president of the republic for a five-year term.

c. The Granger government lost a no-confidence vote in the country's legislature in December 2018. New elections were held on March 2, 2020, but final results have not been announced.

d. Bolivian President Evo Morales resigned on November 10, 2019, after weeks of protests and violence alleging fraud in the October 20, 2019, presidential election. Opposition Senator Jeanine Añez became interim president on November 12, 2019. New presidential elections are scheduled for May 3, 2020.
e. Martin Vizcarra took office in March 2018 upon the resignation of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, who faced impeachment.
f. Venezuela's May 2018 elections were characterized by widespread fraud. The United States and over 50 other countries recognize Juan Guaidó, president of Venezuela's National Assembly, as interim president of Venezuela.

# U.S. Policy Toward Latin America and the Caribbean

U.S. interests in Latin America and the Caribbean are diverse and include economic, political, security, and humanitarian concerns. Geographic proximity has ensured strong economic linkages between the United States and the region, with the United States being a major trading partner and source of foreign investment for many Latin American and Caribbean countries. Free-trade agreements (FTAs) have augmented U.S. economic relations with 11 countries in the region. The Western Hemisphere is a large source of U.S. immigration, both legal and illegal; geographic proximity and economic and security conditions are major factors driving migration trends.

Curbing the flow of illicit drugs from Latin America and the Caribbean has been a key component of U.S. relations with the region and a major interest of Congress for more than four decades. The flow of illicit drugs, including heroin, methamphetamine, and fentanyl from Mexico and cocaine from Colombia, poses risks to U.S. public health and safety; and the trafficking of such drugs has contributed to violent crime and gang activities in the United States. Since 2000, Colombia has received U.S. counternarcotics support through Plan Colombia and its successor programs. In addition, for over a decade, the United States sought to forge close partnerships with other countries to combat drug trafficking and related violence and advance citizen security. These efforts include the Mérida Initiative begun in 2007 to support Mexico, the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) begun in 2008, and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) begun in 2009.

Another long-standing component of U.S. policy has been support for strengthened democratic governance and the rule of law. As described in the previous section, although many countries in the region have made enormous strides in terms of democratic political development, several face considerable challenges. U.S. policy efforts have long supported democracy promotion efforts, including support for strengthening civil society and promoting the rule of law and human rights.

## Trump Administration Policy

In its policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean, the Trump Administration has retained many of the same priorities and programs of past Administrations, but it has also diverged considerably. The Administration has generally adopted a more confrontational approach, especially regarding efforts to curb irregular immigration from the region. In 2018, the State Department set forth a framework for U.S. policy toward the region focused on three pillars for engagement: (1) economic growth and prosperity, (2) security, and (3) democratic governance.[12]

[12] U.S. Department of State, then-Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson, "U.S. Engagement in the Western Hemisphere," February 1, 2018, at https://www.state.gov/u-s-engagement-in-the-western-hemisphere/. These three pillars dovetail with key topics for the Western Hemisphere currently laid out on the State Department's website: fostering inclusive

The framework reflects continuity with long-standing U.S. policy priorities for the region but at times appears to be at odds with the Administration's actions, which sometimes have been accompanied by antagonistic statements on immigration, trade, and foreign aid. Meanwhile, according to Gallup and Pew Research Center polls, negative views of U.S. leadership in the region have increased markedly during the Trump Administration (see text box "Latin America and the Caribbean: Views of U.S. Leadership").

**Foreign Aid.** The Administration's proposed foreign aid budgets for FY2018 and FY2019 would have cut assistance to the region by more than a third, and the FY2020 budget request would have cut funding to the region by about 30% compared to that appropriated in FY2019. Congress did not implement those budget requests and instead provided significantly more for assistance to the region in appropriations measures. In 2019, however, the Trump Administration withheld some assistance to Central America to compel its governments to curb the flow of migrants to the United States. (See "U.S. Foreign Aid" section.)

**Trade.** In 2017, President Trump ordered U.S. withdrawal from the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) FTA that had been negotiated by 12 Asia-Pacific countries in 2015. The TPP would have increased U.S. economic linkages with Latin American countries that were parties to the agreement—Chile, Mexico, and Peru. President Trump strongly criticized the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and Canada, repeatedly warned that the United States might withdraw from the agreement, and initiated renegotiations in 2017. The three countries agreed in September 2018 to a new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which retained many NAFTA provisions but also included some modernizing updates and changes, such as provisions on digital trade and the dairy and auto industries. (See "Trade Policy" section.)

**Latin America and the Caribbean: Views of U.S. Leadership**

Negative views of U.S. leadership in the region have increased markedly since the Trump Administration took office in 2017, influenced by disparaging political rhetoric and certain actions on immigration and trade. Such views could affect the willingness of countries to cooperate with the United States on regional and global challenges. A Gallup public opinion poll of worldwide views on U.S. leadership issued in January 2018 showed that in Western Hemisphere countries, 58% disapproved of U.S. leadership and 24% approved. The highest rates of disapproval were in Chile (74%), Mexico (72%), and Uruguay (70%). This result was a significant change from 2016, when the Gallup poll showed that 27% disapproved of U.S. leadership and 49% approved.

A subsequent Gallup poll issued in February 2019 showed a slight improvement in views of U.S. leadership in the region, with 31% approving. Nevertheless, a median of 53% disapproved of U.S. leadership, with continued high negative views in Chile (75%), Mexico (74%), and Uruguay (62%); in El Salvador, negative views of U.S. leadership (63%) increased slightly from the previous year.

A January 2020 Pew Research report showed low confidence rates for President Trump in Argentina (22%), Brazil (28%), and Mexico (8%).

**Sources:** Gallup, *Rating World Leaders, 2018, The U.S. vs. Germany, China, and Russia*, January 2018, and *Rating World Leaders, 2019, The U.S. vs. Germany, China, and Russia*, February 2019; Richard Wike et al., "Trump Ratings Remain Low Around Globe, While Views of U.S. Stay Mostly Favorable," Pew Research Center January 8, 2020.

**Mexico, Central America, and Migration Issues.** Relations with Mexico have been tested by inflammatory anti-immigrant rhetoric, immigration actions, and changes in U.S. border and asylum polices that have shifted the burden of interdicting migrants and offering asylum to Mexico. In September 2017, the Administration announced that it would end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program; begun in 2012 by the Obama Administration, the program provides relief from deportation for several hundred thousand immigrants who arrived in

economic growth, protecting U.S. citizens at home and abroad, and defending freedom. See https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-political-affairs/bureau-of-western-hemisphere-affairs/.

the United States as children. The future of the initiative remains uncertain given challenges in federal court. In December 2018, Mexico's president agreed to allow the United States to return certain non-Mexican migrants to Mexico (pursuant to Migrant Protection Protocols or MPP) while awaiting U.S. immigration court decisions. In May 2019, President Trump threatened to impose new tariffs on motor vehicles from Mexico if the government did not increase actions to deter U.S.-bound migrants from Central America; Mexico ultimately agreed in June 2019 to increase its enforcement actions and to allow more U.S.-bound asylum seekers to await their U.S. immigration proceedings in Mexico. Despite tensions, U.S.-Mexico bilateral relations remain friendly, with continued strong energy and economic ties, including the USMCA, and close security cooperation related to drug interdiction. (See "Mexico" section.)

Other Administration actions on immigration have caused concern in the region. In 2017 and 2018, the Administration announced plans to terminate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designations for Nicaragua, Haiti, El Salvador, and Honduras, but federal court challenges have put the terminations on hold. (See "Migration Issues" section.)

Unauthorized migration from Central America's Northern Triangle countries—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—has increased in recent years, fueled by difficult socioeconomic and security conditions and poor governance. To deter such migration, the Trump Administration implemented a "zero tolerance" policy toward illegal border crossings in 2018 and applied restrictions on access to asylum at the U.S. border. The Administration also has used aid cuts of previously appropriated assistance for FY2017 and FY2018 and threats of increased U.S. tariffs and taxes on remittances to compel Central American countries and Mexico to curb unauthorized migration to the United States. In 2019, the Administration negotiated "safe third country" agreements with each of the Northern Triangle countries to permit the United States to transfer asylum applicants from third countries to the Northern Triangle countries. (See "Central America's Northern Triangle" section.)

**Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua.** In November 2018, then-National Security Adviser John Bolton made a speech in Miami, FL, on the Administration's policies in Latin America that warned about "the destructive forces of oppression, socialism, and totalitarianism" in the region. Reminiscent of Cold War political rhetoric, Bolton referred to Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela as the "troika of tyranny" in the hemisphere that has "finally met its match." He referred to the three countries as "the cause of immense human suffering, the impetus of enormous regional instability, and the genesis of a sordid cradle of communism in the Western Hemisphere."[13]

As the situation in Venezuela has deteriorated under the Maduro government, the Trump Administration has imposed targeted and broader financial sanctions, including sanctions against the state oil company, the country's main source of income. In January 2019, the Administration recognized the head of Venezuela's National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, as interim president. In September 2019, the United States joined 11 other Western Hemisphere countries to invoke the Rio Treaty to facilitate a regional response to the Venezuelan crisis. The Administration also is providing humanitarian and development assistance for Venezuelans who have fled to other countries, especially Colombia, as well as for Venezuelans inside Venezuela. (See "Venezuela" section.)

With regard to Cuba, the Trump Administration has not continued the policy of engagement advanced during the Obama Administration and has imposed a series of economic sanctions on Cuba for its poor human rights record and support for the Maduro government. Economic sanctions have included restrictions on travel and remittances, efforts to disrupt oil flows from

[13] The White House, "Remarks by National Security Adviser John R. Bolton on the Administration's Policies in Latin America," November 2, 2018.

Venezuela, and authorization (pursuant to Title III of the LIBERTAD Act, P.L. 104-114) of the right to file lawsuits against those trafficking in confiscated property in Cuba. In 2017, the State Department cut the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Havana by about two-thirds in response to unexplained injuries of U.S. diplomatic staff. (See "Cuba" section.)

Since political unrest began to grow in Nicaragua in 2018, the Trump Administration has employed targeted sanctions against several individuals close to President Ortega due to their alleged ties to human rights abuses or significant corruption. (See "Nicaragua" section.)

## Congress and Policy Toward the Region

Congress traditionally has played an active role in policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of both legislation and oversight. Given the region's geographic proximity to the United States, U.S. foreign policy toward the region and domestic policy often overlap, particularly in areas of immigration and trade.

The 116th Congress completed action on FY2019 foreign aid appropriations in February 2019 when it enacted the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6). Amounts appropriated for key U.S. initiatives and countries in Latin America and the Caribbean exceeded the Administration's request by almost $600 million. Congress completed action on FY2020 foreign aid appropriations in December 2019 when it enacted the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94), with amounts for key countries and regional programs once again significantly exceeding the Administration's request. Congress recently has begun consideration of the Administration's FY2021 foreign aid request.

In January 2020, Congress completed action on implementing legislation for the USMCA (P.L. 116-113).[14] The agreement retains many of NAFTA's provisions and includes new provisions on the auto and dairy industries and some modernizing features. Before U.S. implementing legislation received final congressional approval in January 2020, the trade agreement was amended to address concerns of Congress regarding provisions related to labor (including enforcement), the environment, dispute settlement procedures, and intellectual property rights (IPR).[15]

On Venezuela, Congress has supported the Administration's efforts to sanction the Maduro government for its antidemocratic actions and to provide humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan migrants throughout the region. In December 2019, Congress enacted the Venezuela Emergency Relief, Democracy Assistance, and Development Act of 2019, or the VERDAD Act of 2019, in Division J of P.L. 116-94. The measure incorporates provisions from S. 1025, as reported by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June 2019, and some language or provisions from three bills on Venezuela passed by the House in March 2019: H.R. 854, to authorize humanitarian assistance to the Venezuelan people; H.R. 920, to restrict the export of defense articles and crime control materials; and H.R. 1477, to require a threat assessment and strategy to counter Russian influence in Venezuela. In other legislative action, the House approved H.R. 549 in July 2019, which would provide TPS to Venezuelans in the United States.

[14] The USMCA does not go into force until after Canada ratifies the agreement (Mexico did so in December 2019); and at least 30 days prior to USMCA's entry into force, the President must notify Congress that he has determined that the other parties have taken the necessary legal and regulatory measures to comply with their commitments under the agreement. See CRS Report R44981, *NAFTA and the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)*, by M. Angeles Villarreal and Ian F. Fergusson.

[15] Kimberly Ann Elliot, "Trump and Pelosi Both Claim Victory on the USMCA. Who Really Won?" *World Politics Review*, January 7, 2020.

Congress included several provisions related to Latin America in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (FY2020 NDAA; P.L. 116-92), signed into law in December 2019. Among the provisions are the following:

- **Venezuela.** Section 880 prohibits the Department of Defense (DOD) from entering into a contract for the procurement of goods or services with any person that has business operations with the Maduro regime in Venezuela.
- **Western Hemisphere Resources.** Section 1265 provides that the Secretary of Defense shall seek to enter into a contract with an independent nongovernmental institute that has recognized credentials and expertise in national security and military affairs to conduct an accounting and an assessment of the sufficiency of resources available to the U.S. Southern Command, the U.S. Northern Command, the Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to carry out their respective missions in the Western Hemisphere. Among other matters, the assessment is required to include "a list of investments, programs, or partnerships in the Western Hemisphere by China, Iran, Russia, or other adversarial groups or countries that threaten the national security of the United States." A report on the assessment is due to Congress within one year, in unclassified form, but may include a classified annex.
- **Brazil.** Section 1266 requires the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to submit a report to Congress regarding the human rights climate in Brazil and U.S.-Brazilian security cooperation.
- **Guatemala.** Section 1267 requires the Secretary of Defense to certify, prior to the transfer of any vehicles to the Guatemalan government, that the government has made a credible commitment to use such equipment only as intended.
- **Honduras.** Section 1268 requires the Secretary of Defense to enter into an agreement with an independent institution to conduct an analysis of the human rights situation in Honduras.
- **Central America and Mexico.** Section 5522 requires the Director of National Intelligence, in collaboration with other agencies, to submit within 90 days a comprehensive assessment of drug trafficking, human trafficking, and human smuggling activities in Central America and Mexico; the report may be in classified form, but if so, it shall contain an unclassified summary.

Other bills and resolutions have passed either or both houses:

- **Mexico.** In January 2019, the House approved H.R. 133, which would promote U.S.-Mexican economic partnership and cooperation, including a strategy to prioritize and expand educational and professional exchange programs with Mexico. The Senate approved the bill, amended, in January 2020, which included a new provision that would promote positive cross-border relations as a priority for advancing U.S. foreign policy and programs.
- **Central America.** The House approved H.R. 2615, the United States-Northern Triangle Engagement Act, in July 2019, which would authorize foreign assistance to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to address the root causes of migration. The bill would also require the State Department to devise strategies to foster economic development, combat corruption, strengthen democracy and the rule of law, and improve security conditions in the region.

- **Bolivia.** The Senate approved S.Res. 35 in April 2019, expressing support for democratic principles in Bolivia and throughout Latin America. In January 2020, the Senate approved S.Res. 447, expressing concerns about election irregularities and violence in Bolivia and supporting the convening of new elections.
- **Argentina.** Both houses approved resolutions, H.Res. 441 in July 2019 and S.Res. 277 in October 2019, commemorating the 25th anniversary of the 1994 bombing of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association in Buenos Aires.

Congressional committees have held almost 20 oversight hearings on the region, including on Venezuela, Central America (including the impact of U.S. aid cuts), relations with Colombia, human rights in Cuba, China's engagement in Latin America, environmental concerns in the Brazilian Amazon, repression in Nicaragua, and security cooperation with Mexico (see **Appendix**).

# Regional U.S. Policy Issues

## U.S. Foreign Aid

The United States provides foreign assistance to Latin American and Caribbean nations to support development and other U.S. objectives. U.S. policymakers have emphasized different strategic interests in the region at different times, from combating Soviet influence during the Cold War to promoting democracy and open markets, as well as countering illicit narcotics, since the 1990s. Over the past three years, the Trump Administration has sought to refocus U.S. assistance efforts in the region to address U.S. domestic concerns, such as irregular migration and transnational crime.

The Trump Administration has also sought to cut U.S. assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2019, for example, the Administration withheld an estimated $405 million that Congress had appropriated for Central America in FY2018 and reprogrammed the funds to address other foreign policy priorities inside and outside the Western Hemisphere. (See "Central America's Northern Triangle," below.)

The Administration has proposed additional foreign assistance cuts in each of its annual budget proposals. For FY2020, the Administration requested approximately $1.2 billion to be provided to the region through foreign assistance accounts managed by the State Department and USAID, which is about $503 million (30%) less than the region received in FY2019 (see **Table 3**). The request would have cut funding for nearly every type of assistance provided to the region and would have reduced aid for most Latin American and Caribbean countries. The Administration's FY2020 budget proposal also would have eliminated the Inter-American Foundation, an independent U.S. foreign assistance agency that promotes grassroots development in the region. For FY2021, the Administration requested $1.4 billion for the region, which is about 18% less than Congress appropriated for FY2019, and again proposed eliminating the Inter-American Foundation.

**Congressional Action:** After a partial government shutdown and a short-term continuing resolution (P.L. 116-5), the 116th Congress completed action on FY2019 foreign aid appropriations in February 2019. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6) included an estimated $1.69 billion of foreign assistance for Latin America and the Caribbean. That amount was slightly more than the $1.67 billion appropriated for the region in FY2018 and nearly $600 million more than the Trump Administration requested for the region.

**Table 3. U.S. Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: FY2012 - FY2021**

(appropriations in billions of U.S. dollars)

| 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 (Est.) | 2019 | 2020 (Req.) | FY2021 (Req.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.79 | 1.64 | 1.45 | 1.56 | 1.69 | 1.67 | 1.67[a] | 1.70 | 1.19 | 1.40 |

**Sources:** U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justifications for Foreign Operations,* FY2013-FY2021.

**Notes:** These figures exclude Food for Peace Act (P.L. 480) food aid. The FY2017, FY2018, and FY2019 totals each exclude $9 million appropriated as voluntary contributions to the Organization of American States.

a. Final FY2018 allocations are unclear because the Administration reprogrammed approximately $405 million of FY2018 aid that Congress appropriated for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, reallocating some of those funds to countries outside of the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Although the House passed an FY2020 foreign aid appropriations bill in June 2019 (H.R. 2740, H.Rept. 116-78), and the Senate Appropriations Committee reported its bill in September 2019 (S. 2583, S.Rept. 116-126), neither measure was enacted before the start of FY2020. Instead, Congress passed two continuing resolutions (P.L. 116-59 and P.L. 116-69), which funded foreign aid programs in Latin America and the Caribbean at the FY2019 level between October 1, 2019, and December 20, 2019, when President Trump signed into law the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94). The act and the accompanying explanatory statement do not specify appropriations levels for every Latin American and Caribbean nation. Nevertheless, the amounts designated for key U.S. initiatives in Central America, Colombia, and Mexico significantly exceed the Administration's request. The act provides

- "not less than" $519.9 million to continue implementation of the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America, which is about $75 million more than the Administration requested but $8 million less than Congress appropriated for the initiative in FY2019.
- "not less than" $448.3 million to support the peace process and security and development efforts in Colombia, which is about $104 million more than the Administration requested and $27 million more than Congress appropriated for Colombia in FY2019.
- $157.9 million to support security and rule-of-law efforts in Mexico, which is $79 million more than the Administration requested but about $5 million less than Congress appropriated for Mexico in FY2019.

The act also provides $37.5 million for the Inter-American Foundation to continue its grassroots development programs throughout the region. Resolutions have been introduced in both houses (H.Res. 649 and S.Res. 297) to commend the Inter-American Foundation on its 50th anniversary, recognize its contributions to development and to advancing U.S. national interests, and pledge continued support for the agency's work.

For additional information, see CRS Report R45547, *U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: FY2019 Appropriations*, by Peter J. Meyer and Edward Y. Gracia.

## Drug Trafficking and Criminal Gangs

Latin America and the Caribbean feature prominently in U.S. counternarcotics policy due to the region's role as a source and transit zone for several illicit drugs destined for U.S. markets—cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, and opiates (plant-based and synthetic). Heroin abuse and synthetic opioid-related deaths in the United States have reached epidemic levels, raising

questions about how to address foreign sources of opioids—particularly Mexico, which has experienced an uptick in opium poppy cultivation and the production of heroin and fentanyl (a synthetic opioid). According to the State Department, over 90% of heroin seized and sampled in the United States comes from Mexico and increasingly has included fentanyl.[16] Policymakers also are concerned that methamphetamine and cocaine overdoses in the United States are on an upward trajectory. Rising cocaine usage occurred as coca cultivation and cocaine production in Colombia, which supplies roughly 89% of cocaine in the United States, reached record levels in 2017 before leveling off in 2018.[17]

Whereas Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and most other source and transit countries in the region work closely with the United States to combat drug production and interdict illicit flows, the Venezuelan government does not. Public corruption in Venezuela also has made it easier for drug trafficking organizations to smuggle illicit drugs.

Contemporary drug trafficking and transnational crime syndicates have contributed to degradations in citizen security and economic development in some countries, often resulting in high levels of violence and homicide. Despite efforts to combat the drug trade, many Latin American governments, particularly in Mexico and Central America—a region through which roughly 93% of cocaine from South America transited in 2018—continue to suffer from weak criminal justice systems and overwhelmed law enforcement agencies.[18] Government corruption, including high-level cooperation with criminal organizations, further frustrates efforts to interdict drugs, investigate and prosecute traffickers, and recover illicit proceeds. At the same time, a widespread perception—particularly among Latin American observers—is that U.S. demand for illicit drugs is largely to blame for the region's ongoing crime and violence problems.

Criminal gangs with origins in southern California, principally the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the "18th Street" gang, continue to undermine citizen security and subvert government authority in Central America. Gang-related violence has been particularly acute in El Salvador, Honduras, and urban areas in Guatemala, contributing to some of the highest homicide rates in the world. Although some gangs engage in local drug distribution, gangs generally do not have a role in transnational drug trafficking. Gangs have been involved in a range of other criminal activities, including extortion, money laundering, and weapons smuggling, and gang-related violence has fueled unauthorized migration to the United States.

**U.S. Policy.** For more than 40 years, U.S. policy toward the region has focused on countering drug trafficking and reducing drug production in Latin America and the Caribbean. The largest support program, Plan Colombia, provided more than $10 billion to help Colombia combat both drug trafficking and rebel groups financed by the drug trade from FY2000 to FY2016.[19] After Colombia signed a historic peace accord with the country's largest leftist guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the United States provided assistance to help implement the agreement. U.S. officials concerned about rising cocaine production have praised Colombian President Ivan Duque's willingness to restart aerial fumigation of coca crops and significantly scale up manual eradication.

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[16] U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) Volume 1: Drug and Chemical Control*, March 2020 (hereinafter cited as State Department, INCSR 2020 Volume 1).

[17] The White House, "ONDCP Reports Cocaine Production in Colombia is Leveling Off," June 26, 2019; and State Department, INCSR 2020 Volume 1.

[18] U.S. Government, Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement (IACM), based on 2018 data from the Consolidated Counterdrug Database (CCDB).

[19] See CRS Report R43813, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by June S. Beittel.

U.S. support to combat drug trafficking and reduce crime also has included a series of partnerships with other countries in the region: the Mérida Initiative, which has led to improved bilateral security cooperation with Mexico; the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI); and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI). During the Obama Administration, those initiatives combined U.S. antidrug and rule-of-law assistance with economic development and violence prevention programs intended to improve citizen security in the region.

The Trump Administration's approach to Latin America and the Caribbean has focused heavily on U.S. security objectives. All of the aforementioned assistance programs have continued, but they place greater emphasis on combating drug trafficking, gangs, and other criminal groups than during the Obama Administration. The Trump Administration also has sought to reduce funding for each of the U.S. security assistance programs and has reprogrammed, withheld, or not yet obligated significant portions of assistance to Central America due to concerns that those governments have not adequately curbed unauthorized migration. President Trump has welcomed Mexico's assistance on migration enforcement, but the Administration noted in an FY2020 presidential determination issued in August 2019 that "without further progress over [this year], he could determine that Mexico has 'failed demonstrably' to meet its international drug control commitments."[20] Such a determination could trigger U.S. foreign assistance cuts to Mexico.

President Trump also has prioritized combating gangs, namely the MS-13, which the Department of Justice (DOJ) has named a top priority for U.S. law enforcement agencies. U.S. agencies, in cooperation with vetted units in Central America funded through CARSI, have brought criminal charges against thousands of MS-13 members in the United States. U.S. assistance that supports vetted units working with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and DOJ have been exempt from recent aid reductions for Central America.

**Congressional Action:** The 116th Congress has held hearings on opioids, which included consideration of heroin and fentanyl production in Mexico; corruption in the Americas; the importance of U.S. assistance to Central America (including CARSI); and relations with Colombia, Mexico, and Central America, including antidrug cooperation. Compared to FY2018, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6) provided increased FY2019 resources for Colombia and Mexico, slightly less funding for CARSI, and stable funding for the CBSI. P.L. 116-6 provided $1.5 million to support the creation of a Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission to assess U.S. policy and make recommendations on how it might be improved. The Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94) provides more security and rule of law funding for Colombia and Mexico than the estimated FY2019 appropriations level, less funding for CARSI, and slightly more funding for the CBSI. The FY2020 NDAA (P.L. 116-92) requires the Director of National Intelligence, in collaboration with other agencies, to submit within 90 days of enactment an assessment of drug trafficking, human trafficking, and human smuggling activities and how those activities influence migration in Mexico and the Northern Triangle. The FY2020 NDAA also establishes a Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking to report on, among other things, the scale of opioids coming from Mexico.

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF10578, *Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2020*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS In Focus IF10578, *Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2020*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS In Focus IF10400, *Transnational Crime Issues: Heroin Production, Fentanyl Trafficking, and U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Liana W. Rosen; CRS Report R44812, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS Report

[20] White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Memorandum on the Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year 2020," presidential memorandum, August 8, 2019.

R43813, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by June S. Beittel; and CRS In Focus IF10789, *Caribbean Basin Security Initiative*, by Mark P. Sullivan.

## Trade Policy

The Latin American and Caribbean region is one of the fastest-growing regional trading partners for the United States. Economic relations between the United States and most of its trading partners in the region remain strong, despite challenges, such as President Trump's past threats to withdraw from NAFTA, tariff policy, diplomatic tensions, and high levels of violence in some countries in the region. The United States accounts for roughly 33% of the Latin American and Caribbean region's merchandise imports and 44% of its merchandise exports. Most of this trade is with Mexico, which accounted for 77% of U.S. imports from the region and 61% of U.S. exports to the region in 2019. In 2019, total U.S. merchandise exports to Latin America and the Caribbean were valued at $418.9 billion, down from $429.7 billion in 2018. U.S. merchandise imports were valued at $467.0 billion in 2019 (see **Table 4**).

The United States strengthened economic ties with Latin America and the Caribbean over the past 24 years through the negotiation and implementation of FTAs. Starting with NAFTA in 1994, which will be replaced by the USMCA when it enters into force, the United States currently has six FTAs in force involving 11 Latin American countries: Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru. NAFTA was significant because it was the first U.S. FTA with a country in the Latin American and Caribbean region, and it established new rules and disciplines that influenced future trade agreements on issues important to the United States, such as IPR protection, services trade, agriculture, dispute settlement, investment, labor, and the environment.

In addition to FTAs, the United States has extended unilateral trade preferences to some countries in the region through several trade preference programs. The Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act (no expiration), for example, provides limited duty-free entry of select Caribbean products as a core element of the U.S. foreign economic policy response to uncertain economic and political conditions in the region. Several preference programs for Haiti, which expire in 2025, provide generous and flexible unilateral preferences to the country's apparel sector. Two other preference programs include the Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act (CBTPA), which expires in September 2020, and the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which expires in December 2020. The CBTPA extends preferences on apparel products to eligible Caribbean countries similar to those given to Mexico under NAFTA. The GSP provides duty-free tariff treatment to certain products imported from 120 designated developing countries throughout the world, including Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and other Latin American and Caribbean countries.

In the 15 to 20 years after NAFTA, some of the largest economies in South America, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela, resisted the idea of forming comprehensive FTAs with the United States. That opposition may be changing. In September 2019, President Trump noted preliminary talks with Brazil for a trade agreement, and Brazilian officials recently stated that the country was ready for a trade deal similar to USMCA. Numerous other bilateral and plurilateral trade agreements throughout the Western Hemisphere do not include the United States. For example, the Pacific Alliance, a trade arrangement composed of Mexico, Peru, Colombia, and Chile, is reportedly moving forward on a possible trade arrangement with Mercosur, composed of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. On June 28, 2019, the European Union (E.U.) and Mercosur reached a political agreement to negotiate an ambitious and comprehensive trade agreement.

**Table 4. U.S. Trade with Key Trading Partners in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2012-2019**

(in billions of U.S. dollars)

| Partner Country | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| U.S. Exports | | | | | | | | |
| Mexico | 215.9 | 226.0 | 241.0 | 236.5 | 230.2 | 243.5 | 265.4 | 256.4 |
| Brazil | 43.8 | 44.1 | 42.4 | 31.6 | 30.2 | 37.3 | 39.6 | 43.1 |
| Chile | 18.8 | 17.5 | 16.5 | 15.5 | 12.9 | 13.6 | 15.4 | 15.8 |
| Colombia | 16.4 | 18.4 | 20.1 | 16.3 | 13.1 | 13.4 | 15.2 | 14.8 |
| Total LAC | 399.1 | 410.4 | 424.9 | 389.0 | 366.1 | 393.9 | 429.7 | 418.9 |
| World | 1,545.8 | 1,578.5 | 1,621.9 | 1,503.3 | 1,451.5 | 1,546.5 | 1,666.0 | 1645.2 |
| U.S. Imports | | | | | | | | |
| Mexico | 277.6 | 280.6 | 295.7 | 296.4 | 293.5 | 312.8 | 346.1 | 358.1 |
| Brazil | 32.1 | 27.5 | 30.0 | 27.5 | 26.0 | 29.5 | 31.1 | 30.9 |
| Colombia | 24.6 | 21.6 | 18.3 | 14.1 | 13.8 | 13.6 | 13.8 | 14.1 |
| Chile | 9.4 | 10.4 | 9.5 | 8.8 | 8.8 | 10.6 | 11.4 | 10.4 |
| Total LAC | 449.4 | 439.0 | 446.0 | 412.3 | 401.2 | 428.7 | 468.3 | 467.0 |
| World | 2,276.3 | 2,268.0 | 2,356.4 | 2,248.8 | 2,186.8 | 2,339.9 | 2,540.8 | 2,498.4 |

**Source:** U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC) Interactive, "DataWeb: Tariff and Trade."

**Notes:** This table provides statistics on the top four countries followed by the total of U.S. trade with all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

President Trump has made NAFTA renegotiation and modernization a priority of his Administration's trade policy. Early in his Administration, he viewed FTAs as detrimental to U.S. workers and industries, stating that NAFTA was "the worst trade deal" and repeatedly warning that the United States may withdraw from the agreement. The United States, Canada, and Mexico subsequently renegotiated NAFTA and concluded negotiations for USMCA on September 30, 2018. Mexico was the first country to ratify the agreement in June 2019 and the first country to approve the amended USMCA on December 12, 2019. The original text of USMCA was amended to address congressional concerns on labor, environment, IPR, and dispute settlement provisions. On January 16, 2020, Congress approved the agreement, and many expect Canada's parliament to ratify it in early 2020. The USMCA retains NAFTA's market opening provisions and most other provisions. The agreement makes notable changes to labor and environment provisions, market access provisions for autos and agriculture products, and rules, such as investment, government procurement, IPR, and dispute settlement; it adds new provisions on digital trade, state-owned enterprises, and currency misalignment. All parties must ratify the agreement and have laws and regulations in place to meet their USMCA commitments before the agreement can enter into force.

In 2018, President Trump issued two proclamations imposing tariffs on U.S. imports of certain steel and aluminum products using presidential powers granted under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962. In doing so, the Administration added new challenges to U.S. trade relations with the region. The proclamations outlined the President's decisions to impose tariffs of 25% on steel and 10% on aluminum imports, with some flexibility on the application of tariffs by country. In May 2018, President Trump proclaimed Argentina and Brazil permanently exempt

from the steel tariffs in exchange for quota agreements, but he threatened to impose tariffs again in December 2019. The United States imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from Mexico on May 31, 2018, and Mexico subsequently imposed retaliatory tariffs on 71 U.S. products, covering an estimated $3.7 billion worth of trade. By May 2019, President Trump had exempted Mexico from steel and aluminum tariffs, and Mexico agreed to terminate its retaliatory tariffs.

President Trump's January 2017 withdrawal from the proposed TPP, an FTA that included Mexico, Peru, and Chile as signatories, signified another change to U.S. trade policy. In March 2018, all TPP parties signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP or TPP-11), which essentially brought a modified TPP into effect. The TPP-11 has entered into force among seven countries—Canada, Australia, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore, and Vietnam. Chile and Peru expect to ratify the agreement eventually. Colombia has expressed plans to request entry into the agreement after it enters into force among all partners. Some observers contend that U.S. withdrawal from the proposed TPP could damage U.S. competitiveness and economic leadership in the region, whereas others see the withdrawal as a way to prevent lower-cost imports and potential job losses.

**Congressional Action:** The 116th Congress, in both its legislative and oversight capacities, has faced numerous trade policy issues related to NAFTA's renegotiation and the USMCA. The U.S. House of Representatives approved USMCA implementing legislation, H.R. 5430, on December 19, 2019, by a vote of 385-41, and the Senate approved it on January 16, 2020, by a vote of 89-10; it was signed into law (P.L. 116-113) on January 29, 2020. Lawmakers took an interest as to whether the Administration followed U.S. trade negotiating objectives and procedures as required by Trade Promotion Authority (Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act of 2015, or TPA; P.L. 114-26). Some Members also considered issues surrounding the labor and environment provisions' enforceability, access to medicine, and economic effects. Other Members showed interest in how the USMCA may affect U.S. industries, especially the auto industry, as well as the overall effects on the U.S. and Mexican economies, North American supply chains, and trade relations with the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Among other trade issues, legislation was introduced (H.R. 991 and S. 2473) that would extend CBTPA benefits through September 2030. Regarding the Section 232 investigations on aluminum and steel imports, the impact of tariffs and retaliatory tariffs from Mexico on U.S. producers, domestic U.S. industries, and consumers raised numerous issues for Congress. Energy reform in Mexico, and the implications for U.S. trade and investment in energy, may continue to be of interest to Congress. Policymakers also may consider how U.S. trade policy is perceived by the region and whether it may affect multilateral trade issues and cooperation on matters regarding security and migration. Another issue relates to U.S. market share. If Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Mercosur countries continue trade and investment liberalization efforts with other countries without the United States, doing so may open the door to more intra-trade and investment among certain Latin American and Caribbean countries, or possibly China and other Asian countries, which may affect U.S. exports.

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF10997, *U.S.-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) Trade Agreement*, by M. Angeles Villarreal and Ian F. Fergusson; CRS Report R44981, *NAFTA and the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)*, by M. Angeles Villarreal and Ian F. Fergusson; CRS In Focus IF10038, *Trade Promotion Authority (TPA)*, by Ian F. Fergusson; CRS Report RL32934, *U.S.-Mexico Economic Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications*, by M. Angeles Villarreal; and CRS Report R45249, *Section 232 Investigations: Overview and Issues for Congress*, coordinated by Rachel F. Fefer and Vivian C. Jones.

## Migration Issues

Latin America's status as a leading source of both legal and unauthorized migration to the United States means that U.S. immigration policies significantly affect countries in the region and U.S. relations with their governments. Latin Americans comprise the vast majority of unauthorized migrants who have received relief from removal (deportation) through the TPS program and the DACA initiative; they also comprise a large percentage of recent asylum seekers.[21] As a result, several U.S. immigration policy changes have concerned countries in the region. These include the following Trump Administration actions: ending TPS designations for Haiti, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras; rescinding DACA; and restricting access to asylum in the United States. In January 2019, the Administration launched the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), a program to require many migrants and asylum seekers processed at the Mexico-U.S. border to be returned to Mexico to await their immigration proceedings; the program is currently facing legal challenges but remains in place.[22] Under a practice known as "metering," migrants may now be required to wait in Mexico until there is capacity to process them at a port of entry. The Administration also signed what it termed "asylum cooperative agreements"—also referred to as "safe third country" agreements—with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras to allow the United States to transfer certain migrants who arrive to a U.S. border seeking asylum protection to apply for asylum in one of those countries.

The factors that have driven legal and unauthorized U.S.-bound migration from Latin America are multifaceted, and some have changed over time. They include poverty and unemployment, political and economic instability, crime and violence, natural disasters, as well as relatively close proximity to the United States, familial ties in the United States, and relatively attractive U.S. economic conditions. As an example, Venezuela, a historically stable country with limited emigration to the United States, recently has become the top country of origin among those who seek U.S. asylum due to Venezuela's ongoing crisis.[23]

Migrant apprehensions at the southwest border had been steadily declining, reaching a 50-year low in 2017, but they began to rise in mid-2017. By FY2019, DHS apprehended 977,509 migrants, roughly 456,400 more than in FY2018.[24] Unaccompanied children and families from the Northern Triangle, many of whom were seeking asylum, made up a majority of those apprehensions.[25] (See "Central America's Northern Triangle," below.) During the first three

[21] Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is a discretionary, humanitarian benefit granted to eligible nationals after the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) determines that a country has been affected by armed conflict, natural disaster, or other extraordinary conditions that limit the country's ability to accept the return of its nationals from the United States. TPS designations began for Nicaragua and Honduras in 1999, for Haiti in 2010, and for El Salvador in 2001. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) initiative is a program that the Obama Administration implemented in 2012 to provide temporary relief from removal and work authorization to certain unlawfully present individuals who arrived in the United States as children.

[22] DHS, "Migrant Protection Protocols," press release, January 24, 2019. For additional information, see https://www.dhs.gov/publication/policy-guidance-implementation-migrant-protection-protocols.

[23] In FY2018, Venezuela ranked first among countries of origin for those seeking affirmative asylum in the United States. Guatemala and El Salvador ranked second and third. See DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics, *Annual Flow Report: Refugees and Asylees: 2018*, October 2019.

[24] DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), "Southwest Border Migration FY2019" (hereinafter cited as CBP, "Southwest Border Migration FY2019").

[25] CBP, "Southwest Border Migration FY2019."

months of FY2020, total apprehensions declined compared to FY2019, but apprehensions of Mexican adults surged.[26]

The Trump Administration's rhetoric and policies have tested U.S. relations with Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries. Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador agreed to shelter migrants affected by the MPP program and then, to avoid U.S. tariffs, allow the MPP to be expanded in Mexico and increase Mexico's immigration enforcement efforts, particularly on its southern border with Guatemala. DHS is now reportedly considering sending Mexican asylum seekers to Guatemala, despite Mexico's opposition to the policy.[27] Amidst U.S. foreign aid cuts and tariff threats (in the case of Guatemala), the Northern Triangle countries signed "safe third country" agreements despite serious concerns about conditions in the three countries; DHS began implementing the agreement with Guatemala in November 2019, but the agreements with Honduras and El Salvador have not yet been implemented. Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries, which received some 91% of the 267,258 individuals removed from the United States in FY2019, have expressed concerns that removals could overwhelm their capacity to receive and reintegrate migrants. Central American countries also are concerned about the potential for increased removals of those with criminal records to exacerbate their security problems.

**Congressional Action:** The 116th Congress has provided foreign assistance to help address some of the factors fueling migration from Central America and support Mexico's migration management efforts in FY2019 (P.L. 116-6) and FY2020 (P.L. 116-94). In July 2019, the House passed H.R. 2615, the United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act, which would require a report on the main drivers of migration from Central America.

The 116th Congress has also acted on bills that could affect significant numbers of individuals from Latin America and the Caribbean living in the United States. For example in June 2019, the House passed H.R. 6, the American Dream and Promise Act of 2019, which would establish a process for certain unauthorized immigrants who entered the United States as children, such as DACA recipients, and for certain TPS recipients to obtain lawful permanent resident (LPR) status. In July 2019, the House passed H.R. 549, the Venezuela TPS Act of 2019, which would provide TPS designation for Venezuela. In December 2019, the House passed H.R. 5038, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2019, which would create a new temporary immigration status (certified agricultural worker (CAW) status) for certain unauthorized and other agricultural workers and would establish a process for CAWs to become LPRs.

For more information, see CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10402, *Safe Third Country Agreements with Northern Triangle Countries: Background and Legal Issues*, by Ben Harrington; CRS In Focus IF11151, *Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy*, by Peter J. Meyer and Maureen Taft-Morales; CRS In Focus IF10215, *Mexico's Immigration Control Efforts*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R45266, *The Trump Administration's "Zero Tolerance" Immigration Enforcement Policy*, by William A. Kandel; CRS Report R45995, *Unauthorized Childhood Arrivals, DACA, and Related Legislation*, by Andorra Bruno; CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*, by Jill H. Wilson; CRS In Focus IF11363, *Processing Aliens at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Recent Policy Changes*, by Hillel R. Smith, Ben Harrington, and Audrey Singer; and CRS Report R46012, *Immigration: Recent Apprehension Trends at the U.S. Southwest Border*, by Audrey Singer and William A. Kandel.

[26] DHS, CBP, "Southwest Border Migration FY2020."

[27] Patrick J. McDonnell and Molly O'Toole, "Mexico balks at U.S. plan to send Mexican asylum seekers to Guatemala," *Los Angeles Times*, January 7, 2020.

# Selected Country and Subregional Issues

## The Caribbean

### Caribbean Regional Issues

The Caribbean is a diverse region of 16 independent countries and 18 overseas territories, including some of the hemisphere's richest and poorest nations. Among the region's independent countries are 13 island nations stretching from the Bahamas in the north to Trinidad and Tobago in the south; Belize, which is geographically located in Central America; and Guyana and Suriname, located on the north-central coast of South America (see **Figure 2**).

Pursuant to the United States-Caribbean Strategic Enhancement Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-291), the State Department submitted a multiyear strategy for the Caribbean in 2017. The strategy established a framework to strengthen U.S.-Caribbean relations in six priority areas or pillars: (1) security, with the objectives of countering transnational crime and terrorist organizations and advancing citizen security; (2) diplomacy, with the goal of increasing institutionalized engagement to forge greater cooperation at the Organization of American States (OAS) and the U.N.; (3) prosperity, including the promotion of sustainable economic growth and private sector-led investment and development; (4) energy, with the goals of increasing U.S. exports of natural gas and the use of U.S. renewable energy technologies; (5) education, focusing on increased exchanges for students, teachers, and other professionals; and (6) health, including a focus on long-standing efforts to fight infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

In July 2019, the State Department issued a report to Congress on the implementation of its multiyear strategy. The report maintained that limited budgets and human resources have constrained opportunities for deepening relations, but funding for the strategy's security pillar has supported meaningful engagement and produced tangible results for regional and U.S. security interests.[28]

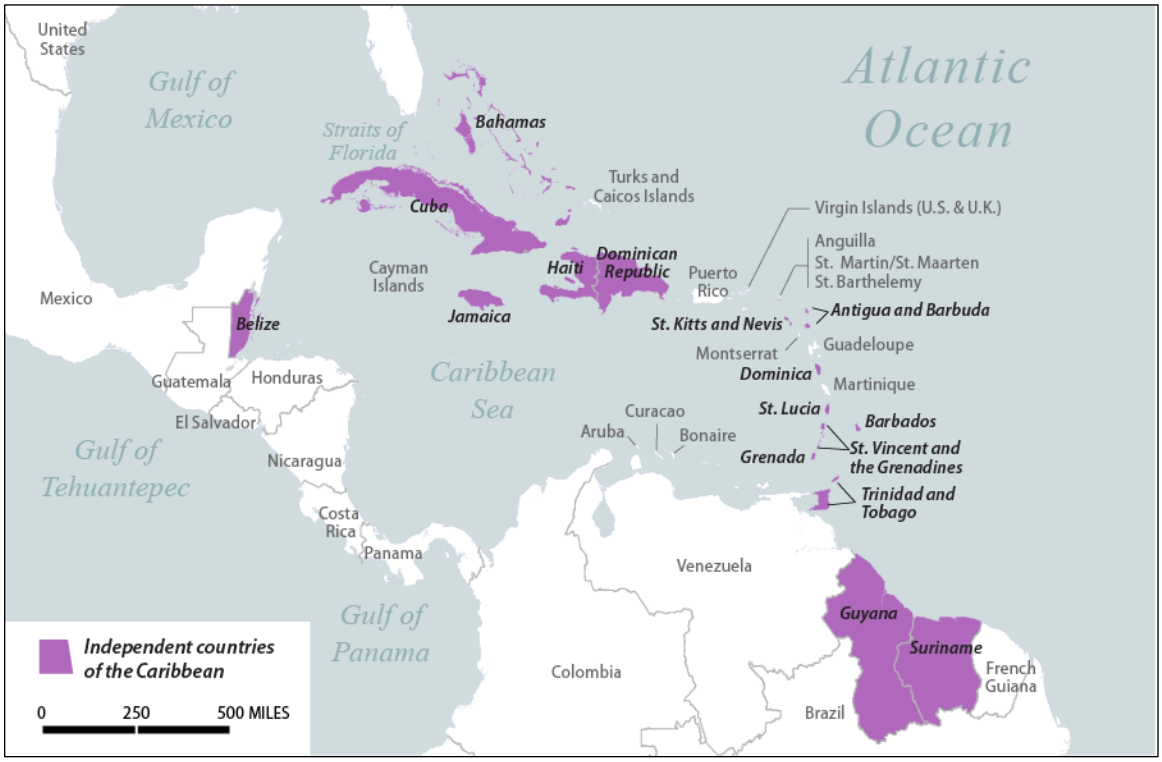
Because of their geographic location, many Caribbean nations are vulnerable to use as transit countries for illicit drugs from South America destined for the U.S. and European markets. Many Caribbean countries also have suffered high rates of violent crime, including murder, often associated with drug trafficking activities. In response, the United States launched the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) in 2009, a regional U.S. foreign assistance program seeking to reduce drug trafficking in the region and advance public safety and security. The program dovetails with the first pillar of the State Department's Caribbean multiyear strategy for U.S. engagement. From FY2010 through FY2020, Congress appropriated almost $677 million for the CBSI. These funds benefitted 13 Caribbean countries. The program has targeted assistance in five areas: (1) maritime and aerial security cooperation, (2) law enforcement capacity building, (3) border/port security and firearms interdiction, (4) justice sector reform, and (5) crime prevention and at-risk youth.

Many Caribbean nations depend on energy imports and, over the past decade, have participated in Venezuela's PetroCaribe program, which supplies Venezuelan oil under preferential financing terms. The United States launched the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative (CESI) in 2014, with

[28] U.S. Department of State, *2019 Report to Congress on Progress of Public Law (P.L.) 114-291: Efforts to Implement the Strategy for U.S. Engagement with the Caribbean Region*, July 2019.

the goals of promoting a cleaner and more sustainable energy future in the Caribbean.[29] The CESI includes a variety of initiatives to boost energy security and sustainable economic growth by attracting investment in a range of energy technologies through a focus on improved governance, increased access to finance, and enhanced coordination among energy donors, governments, and stakeholders.[30]

**Figure 2. Map of the Caribbean Region: Independent Countries**




**Source:** CRS Graphics.

**Notes:** With the exception of Cuba and the Dominican Republic, the remaining 14 independent countries of the Caribbean region are members of the Caribbean Community, or CARICOM, an organization established by English-speaking Caribbean nations in 1973 to spur regional integration. Six Eastern Caribbean nations—Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines—are members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, established in 1981 to promote economic integration, harmonization of foreign policy, and other forms of cooperation among member states.

Many Caribbean countries are susceptible to extreme weather events such as tropical storms and hurricanes, which can significantly affect their economies and infrastructure. Recent scientific studies suggest that climate change may be increasing the intensity of such events.[31] In September 2019, Hurricane Dorian caused widespread damage to the northwestern Bahamian islands of Grand Bahama and Abaco, with 70 confirmed deaths and many missing.[32] The United States

[29] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, "U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership," at https://www.state.gov/u-s-caribbean-resilience-partnership/.

[30] For background, see U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, "Caribbean Energy Security Initiative (CESI)," at https://www.state.gov/caribbean-energy-security-initiative-cesi/.

[31] See, for example, Kieran T Bhatia et al., "Recent Increases in Tropical Cyclone Intensification Rates," *Nature Communications*, vol. 10, no. 635 (2019).

[32] The Government of the Bahamas, Cabinet & Disaster Management (NEMA), "Hurricane Dorian, NEMA Update," November 29, 2019.

responded with nearly $34 million in humanitarian assistance, including almost $25 million provided through USAID. Prior to the hurricane, the State Department had launched a U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership in April 2019, with the goal of increasing regional disaster response capacity and promoting resilience to natural disasters. In December 2019, USAID announced it was providing $10 million to improve local resilience to disasters in the Caribbean.

**Congressional Action:** The 116th Congress has continued to appropriate funds for Caribbean regional programs. Over the past two fiscal years, Congress has funded the CBSI at levels significantly higher than requested by the Trump Administration. For FY2019, Congress appropriated $58 million for the CBSI ($36.2 million was requested), in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6). For FY2020, the Trump Administration requested $40.2 million for the CBSI, about a 30% drop from FY2019 appropriations. Ultimately, Congress appropriated not less than $60 million for the CBSI for FY2020 in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94). For FY2021, the Administration is requesting $32 million for the CBSI, a cut of almost 47% from that appropriated for FY2020.

Congress has also continued to provide funding for the CESI, appropriating $2 million in FY2019 (P.L. 116-6) and $3 million in FY2020 (P.L. 116-94). Regarding U.S. support for natural disasters, the report to the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill, 2020—H.Rept. 116-78 to H.R. 2839—directed that bilateral economic assistance be made available to strengthen resilience to emergencies and disasters in the Caribbean.[33]

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF10789, *Caribbean Basin Security Initiative*, by Mark P. Sullivan; CRS In Focus IF10666, *The Bahamas: An Overview*, by Mark P. Sullivan; CRS Insight IN11171, *Bahamas: Response to Hurricane Dorian*, by Rhoda Margesson and Mark P. Sullivan; CRS In Focus IF10407, *Dominican Republic*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS In Focus IF11381, *Guyana: An Overview*, by Mark P. Sullivan; CRS In Focus IF10912, *Jamaica*, by Mark P. Sullivan; and CRS In Focus IF10914, *Trinidad and Tobago*, by Mark P. Sullivan.

## Cuba

Political and economic developments in Cuba, a one-party authoritarian state with a poor human rights record, have been the subject of intense congressional concern since the Cuban revolution in 1959. Current Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel succeeded Raúl Castro in April 2018, but Castro is expected to head Cuba's Communist Party until 2021. In February 2019, almost 87% of Cubans approved a new constitution in a national referendum. The changes include the addition of an appointed prime minister to oversee government operations, limits on the president's tenure (two five-year terms) and age (60, beginning first term), and market-oriented economic reforms, including the right to private property and the promotion of foreign investment. The new constitution, however, ensures the state sector's dominance over the economy and the Communist Party's predominant role.

The Cuban economy has registered minimal growth in recent years; the EIU estimates that the economy grew 0.5% in 2019 but will contract 0.7% in 2020.[34] For more than a decade, Cuba has implemented gradual market-oriented economic policy changes but has not taken enough action to foster sustainable economic growth. The economy also has been hard-hit by the reimposition of, and increase in, U.S. economic sanctions in 2019 that impede international financial transactions with Cuba, as well as by Venezuela's economic crisis that has limited Venezuela's

[33] Division G of the explanatory statement to P.L. 116-94 provided that federal departments and agencies are directed to comply with the directives, reporting requirements, and instructions contained in H.Rept. 116-78 accompanying H.R. 2839 and S.Rept. 116-126 accompanying S. 2583, unless specifically directed to the contrary.

[34] EIU, *Cuba Country Report*, February 2020.

support to Cuba. Cuban officials reported that 4.3 million tourists visited Cuba in 2019, down from 4.7 million in 2018; the decline in tourism has hurt Cuba's nascent private sector.

Since the early 1960s, the centerpiece of U.S. policy toward Cuba has consisted of economic sanctions aimed at isolating the Cuban government. Congress has played an active role in shaping policy toward Cuba, including the enactment of legislation strengthening, and at times easing, U.S. sanctions. In 2014, the Obama Administration initiated a policy shift moving away from sanctions toward a policy of engagement. This shift included restoring diplomatic relations (July 2015), rescinding Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of international terrorism (May 2015), and increasing travel, commerce, and the flow of information to Cuba implemented through regulatory changes (2015-2016).

President Trump unveiled a new policy toward Cuba in 2017, introducing new sanctions and rolling back some of the Obama Administration's efforts to normalize relations. By 2019, the Trump Administration had largely abandoned the previous Administration's policy of engagement by significantly increasing economic sanctions to pressure the Cuban government on its human rights record and its military and intelligence support of the Nicolás Maduro regime in Venezuela. The Administration has taken actions to allow lawsuits against those trafficking in property confiscated by the Cuban government, provided for in the 1996 LIBERTAD Act (P.L. 104-114), and tighten restrictions on travel to Cuba, including terminating cruise ship travel from the United States and U.S. flights to and from Cuban cities other than Havana.

**Congressional Action:** The 116th Congress has continued to fund democracy assistance for Cuban human rights and democracy activists and U.S.-government sponsored broadcasting to Cuba. For FY2019, Congress appropriated $20 million for democracy programs and $29.1 million for Cuba broadcasting (P.L. 116-6, H.Rept. 116-9). For FY2020, Congress appropriated $20 million for democracy programs and $20.973 million for Cuba broadcasting (P.L. 116-94, H.R. 1865, Division G). The measure also includes several reporting requirements on Cuba set forth in H.Rept. 116-78 and S.Rept. 116-126. Congress is now considering the Administration's FY2021 request of $10 million for Cuba democracy programs (a 50% decline from that appropriated in FY2020) and $12.973 for Cuba broadcasting (a 38% decline from that appropriated in FY2020).

Much of the debate over Cuba in Congress throughout the past 20 years has focused on U.S. sanctions. Several bills introduced in the 116th Congress would ease or lift U.S. sanctions: H.R. 213 (baseball); S. 428 (trade); H.R. 1898/S. 1447 (financing for U.S. agricultural exports); H.R. 2404 (overall embargo); and H.R. 3960/S. 2303 (travel). H.R. 4884 would direct the Administration to reinstate the Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program, which has been in limbo since 2017. Several resolutions would express concerns regarding Cuba's foreign medical missions (S.Res. 14/H.Res. 136); U.S. fugitives from justice in Cuba (H.Res. 92/S.Res. 232); religious and political freedom in Cuba (S.Res. 215); and the release of human rights activist José Daniel Ferrer and other members of the pro-democracy Patriotic Union of Cuba (S.Res. 454 and H.Res. 774). In September 2019, the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade (House Western Hemisphere Subcommittee) held a hearing on the human rights situation in Cuba (see **Appendix**).

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF10045, *Cuba: U.S. Policy Overview*, by Mark P. Sullivan; and CRS Report R45657, *Cuba: U.S. Policy in the 116th Congress*, by Mark P. Sullivan.

## Haiti

During the administration of President Jovenel Moïse, who began a five-year term in February 2017, Haiti has been experiencing growing political and social unrest, high inflation, and

resurgent gang violence. The Haitian judiciary is conducting investigations into Moïse's possible involvement in money laundering, irregular loan arrangements, and embezzlement; the president denies these allegations.

In mid-2018, Moïse decided to end oil subsidies, which, coupled with deteriorating economic conditions, sparked massive protests. Government instability has heightened since May 2019, when the Superior Court of Auditors delivered a report to the Haitian Senate alleging Moïse had embezzled millions of dollars. Mass demonstrations have continued, calling for an end to corruption, the provision of government services, and Moïse's resignation. Moïse has said it would be irresponsible of him to resign, and that he will not do so. He has called repeatedly for dialogue with the opposition.

Haiti's elected officials have exacerbated the ongoing instability by not forming a government. The president, who is elected directly by popular elections, is head of state and appoints the prime minister, chosen from the majority party in the National Assembly. The prime minister serves as head of government. The first two prime ministers under Moïse resigned. The Haitian legislature did not confirm the president's subsequent two nominees for prime minister. Some legislators actively prevented a vote by absenting themselves to prevent a quorum being met or by other, sometimes violent, tactics. Nevertheless, a legislative motion to impeach the president did not pass. Because the legislature also did not pass an elections law, parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2019 have been postponed indefinitely.

Moïse is now ruling by decree. As of January 13, 2020, the terms of the entire lower Chamber of Deputies and two-thirds of the Senate expired, as did the terms of all local government posts, without newly elected officials to take their place. Currently, there is no functioning legislature. When the legislature's terms expired in January 2015 because the government had not held elections, then-President Michel Martelly ruled by decree for over a year, outside of constitutional norms. On March 2, 2020, President Moïse appointed a new prime minister, Joseph Jouthe, by decree.

Since January 2020, the U.N., the OAS, and the Vatican have been facilitating a dialogue among the government, opposition, civil society, and private sector to establish a functioning government, develop a plan for reform, create a constitutional revision process, and set an electoral calendar.[35] The Trump Administration supports the efforts to break the political impasse, but states that "while constitutional reforms are necessary and welcome, they must not become a pretext to delay elections."[36]

Haiti has received high levels of U.S. assistance for many years given its proximity to the United States and its status as the poorest country in the hemisphere. In recent years, it was the second-largest recipient of U.S. aid in the region, after Colombia. Since a peak in 2010, the year a massive earthquake hit the country, aid to Haiti has been declining steadily. Since 2014, a prolonged drought and a hurricane have severely affected Haiti's food supply. Haiti continues to struggle against a cholera epidemic inadvertently introduced by U.N. peacekeepers in 2010.

The U.N. has had a continuous presence in Haiti since 2004, recently shifting from peacekeeping missions to a political office, and authorized its Integrated Office in Haiti for an initial one-year period beginning in October 2019. The office's mandate is to protect and promote human rights

[35] U.N. Security Council, Report of the Secretary General, S/2020/123, "United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti," February 13, 2020, p. 3.

[36] U.S. Mission to the U.N., "Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Situation in Haiti, Ambassador Cherith Norman-Chalet," February 20, 2020.

and to advise the government of Haiti on strengthening political stability and good governance through support for an inclusive inter-Haitian national dialogue.

With the support of U.N. forces and U.S. and other international assistance, the Haitian National Police (HNP) force has become increasingly professional and has taken on responsibility for domestic security. New police commissariats have given more Haitians access to security services, but with 14,000-15,000 officers, the HNP remains below international standards for the size of the country's population. It is also underfunded. According to the U.N., the HNP has committed human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings.[37]

**Congressional Action**: The Trump Administration's FY2020 request for aid for Haiti totaled $145.5 million, a 25% reduction from the estimated $193.8 million provided to Haiti in FY2019.[38] The Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94) contains several provisions related to Haiti, including that aid may be provided to Haiti only through the regular notification procedures. Under the act, Economic Support Fund assistance for Haiti may not be made available for assistance to the Haitian central government unless the Secretary of State certifies and reports to the Committees on Appropriations that the government is taking effective steps to strengthen the rule of law, combat corruption, increase government revenues, and resolve commercial disputes. The act provides budget authority for $51 million in Development Assistance, including $8.5 million for reforestation; it also provides $10 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement funds for prison assistance, prioritizing improvements to meet basic sanitation, medical, nutritional, and safety needs at Haiti's National Penitentiary. The measure also prohibits the provision of appropriated funds for assistance to Haiti's armed forces. The House Western Hemisphere Subcommittee held a hearing on U.S. policy toward Haiti in December 2019 (see **Appendix**).

Congress has begun consideration of the Administration's FY2021 foreign aid request for Haiti. The Administration requested $128.2 million, almost a 34% cut from the amount appropriated by Congress in FY2019.

For background, see CRS Report R45034, *Haiti's Political and Economic Conditions*, by Maureen Taft-Morales.

# Mexico and Central America

## Mexico

Mexico and the United States share a nearly 2,000-mile border and strong cultural, familial, and historical ties. Economically, the United States and Mexico have grown interdependent since NAFTA entered into force in 1994. The countries have also forged close security ties, as security conditions in Mexico affect U.S. national security and U.S. citizens living in or traveling to Mexico, particularly along the U.S.-Mexican border.

On December 1, 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the populist leader of the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) party, which he created in 2014, took office for a six-year term. López Obrador won 53% of the July 2018 vote, marking a shift away from Mexico's traditional parties, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the National Action Party (PAN). Elected on an anti-corruption platform, López Obrador is the first Mexican president in

[37] Marta Hurtado, "Press briefing note on Haiti unrest," Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 1, 2019.

[38] U.S. Department of State, FY2019 estimate data provided to CRS, November 2019.

over two decades to enjoy majorities in both chambers of Congress. In addition to combating corruption, he pledged to build infrastructure in southern Mexico, revive the poor-performing state oil company, address citizen security through social programs, and adopt a foreign policy based on the principle of nonintervention. Given fiscal constraints, observers question whether his goals are attainable.

Thirteen months into his term, President López Obrador enjoys high approval ratings (60% in January 2020), even though Mexico experienced record homicides and 0% economic growth in 2019.[39] Mexicans have praised López Obrador's backing of new social programs, minimum wage increases, and willingness to tackle problems, such as oil theft by criminal groups. His decision to cut his own salary and public sector salaries generally has prompted resignations among experienced bureaucrats but has been popular with his constituency. Critics also have expressed concerns that López Obrador has centralized power and weakened institutions, relied too much on his own counsel, and dismissed journalists, regulatory agencies, and others critical of his policies.[40]

Despite some predictions to the contrary, U.S.-Mexico relations under the López Obrador government have thus far remained friendly. Tensions have emerged over several key issues, including trade disputes and tariffs, immigration and border security issues, U.S. citizens killed in Mexico (including the November 2019 massacre of an extended family of U.S.-Mexican citizens), and Mexico's decision to remain neutral regarding the crisis in Venezuela. The Mexican government has condemned anti-immigrant rhetoric and actions in the United States, including the August 2019 mass shooting in El Paso, TX, that resulted in the deaths of at least seven Mexican citizens.[41] Security cooperation under the Mérida Initiative has continued, including efforts to address the production and trafficking of opioids and methamphetamine, but the Trump Administration has pushed Mexico to improve its antidrug efforts and security policies. During López Obrador's administration, the Mexican government has accommodated most of the Trump Administration's border and asylum policy changes that have shifted the burden of interdicting migrants and offering asylum to Mexico. After enacting labor reforms and raising wages, the López Obrador administration achieved a significant foreign policy goal: U.S. congressional approval of implementing legislation for the proposed USMCA to replace NAFTA. (See "Trade Policy," above.)

**Congressional Action:** The 116th Congress closely followed the Trump Administration's efforts to renegotiate NAFTA and recommended modifications to the proposed USMCA (on labor, the environment, and dispute settlement, among other topics) that led to the three countries signing an amendment to the agreement on December 10, 2019. The House approved the implementing legislation for the proposed USMCA in December 2019, and the Senate followed suit in January 16, 2020 (P.L. 116-113). Both houses have taken action on H.R. 133, the United States-Mexico Economic Partnership Act (H.R. 133), which directs the Secretary of State to enhance economic cooperation and educational and professional exchanges with Mexico; the House approved the measure in January 2019, and the Senate approved an amended version in January 2020. The FY2020 NDAA (P.L. 116-92) requires a classified assessment of drug trafficking, human trafficking, and alien smuggling in Mexico.

[39] EIU, *Mexico Country Report*, January 2020.

[40] David Luhnow and José de Córdoba, "Mexico's Polarizing President Presides Over Rising Violence, Flailing Economy," *Wall Street Journal*, December 7, 2019 (hereinafter cited as Luhnow and de Córdoba, 2019).

[41] Government of Mexico, Secretariat of Foreign Relations, "Mexico Considers Attack in El Paso an Act of Terrorism Against Mexicans in U.S.," press release, August 4, 2019.

Regarding foreign aid, in FY2019, Congress provided some $162 million for Mexico in P.L. 116-6, with much of that designated for the Mérida Initiative. Those increased resources aimed to help address the flow of U.S.-bound opioids. For FY2020—total aid amounts are not yet available—Congress provided $150 million for accounts that fund the Mérida Initiative in P.L. 116-94 (roughly $73 million above the Administration's budget request). For FY2021, the Administration has requested $63.8 million for Mexico, a decline of almost 61% compared to that provided in FY2019. In the wake of recent high profile massacres in Mexico, congressional concerns about the efficacy of U.S.-Mexican security cooperation and calls for oversight have increased as Congress begins consideration of the FY2021 foreign aid request.

For additional information, see CRS Report R42917, *Mexico: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report RL32934, *U.S.-Mexico Economic Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications*, by M. Angeles Villarreal; CRS In Focus IF10997, *U.S.-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) Trade Agreement*, by M. Angeles Villarreal and Ian F. Fergusson; CRS In Focus IF10578, *Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2020*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R41576, *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*, by June S. Beittel; CRS In Focus IF10215, *Mexico's Immigration Control Efforts*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; and CRS In Focus IF10400, *Transnational Crime Issues: Heroin Production, Fentanyl Trafficking, and U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Liana W. Rosen.

## Central America's Northern Triangle

The Northern Triangle region of Central America (see **Figure 3**) has received renewed attention from U.S. policymakers in recent years, as it has become a major transit corridor for illicit drugs and has surpassed Mexico as the largest source of irregular migration to the United States. In FY2019, U.S. authorities apprehended nearly 608,000 unauthorized migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras at the southwest border; 81% of those apprehended were families or unaccompanied minors, many of whom were seeking asylum.[42] These narcotics and migrant flows are the latest symptoms of deep-rooted challenges in the region, including widespread insecurity, fragile political and judicial systems, and high levels of poverty and unemployment.

The Obama Administration determined it was in the national security interests of the United States to work with Central American nations to improve security, strengthen governance, and promote prosperity in the region. Accordingly, the Obama Administration launched a new, whole-of-government U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America and requested a significant increase in foreign assistance for the region to support the strategy's implementation. Congress appropriated more than $2 billion of aid for Central America between FY2016 and FY2018, allocating most of the funds to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Congress required a portion of the aid to be withheld, however, until the Northern Triangle governments took steps to improve border security, combat corruption, protect human rights, and address other congressional concerns.

The Trump Administration initially maintained the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America, but suspended most aid for the Northern Triangle in March 2019 due to the continued northward flow of migrants and asylum seekers from the region. The aid suspension forced U.S. agencies to begin closing down projects and canceling planned activities. Although Administration officials acknowledged that U.S. foreign aid programs had been "producing the results [they] were intended to produce" with regard to security, governance, and economic

[42] CBP, "U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border Apprehensions by Sector Fiscal Year 2019," October 29, 2019.

development, they argued that, "the only metric that matters is the question of what the migration situation looks like on the southern border."[43] Over the course of 2019, the Trump Administration reprogrammed approximately $405 million of aid appropriated for the Northern Triangle to other foreign policy priorities while negotiating a series of "safe third country" agreements (also known as asylum cooperative agreements) with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Under the agreement with Guatemala, the United States has begun sending some individuals to Guatemala to apply for protection there rather than in the United States; similar agreements with El Salvador and Honduras are awaiting implementation. The Trump Administration has released some previously suspended assistance, primarily for programs to counter transnational crime and improve border security, as the new agreements have gone into effect.

**Figure 3. Map of Central America**

**Source:** CRS Graphics.

**Notes:** Belize, although located in Central America, is considered a Caribbean country and belongs to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

For FY2021, the Administration maintains that it is requesting almost $377 million for Central America if countries in the region continue to take action to stem unauthorized migration. The Administration's Congressional Budget Justification, however, does not specify request amounts for the three Northern Triangle countries or the foreign affairs accounts from which the assistance would come.

**Congressional Action:** The 116th Congress has demonstrated continued support for the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America but has reduced annual funding for the initiative. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6) provided an estimated $527.6 million for the Central America strategy, which is about $92 million more than the Trump Administration requested. The Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94) provides $519.9 million for the initiative, which is about $75 million more than the Trump Administration requested. Both appropriations measures maintained conditions on U.S. assistance to the central governments of the Northern Triangle.

[43] Remarks of Michael G. Kozak, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and Kirsten D. Madison, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, "Senate Foreign Relations Committee Holds Hearing on U.S. Policy in Mexico and Central America," *CQ Congressional Transcripts*, September 25, 2019.

Congress has also sought to improve the effectiveness of the Central America strategy. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, House Foreign Affairs Committee, and House Western Hemisphere Subcommittee each held oversight hearings to assess U.S. policy and foreign assistance in Central America (see **Appendix**). The United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act (H.R. 2615), passed by the House in July 2019, would require the State Department, in coordination with other agencies, to develop five-year strategies to support inclusive economic growth, combat corruption, strengthen democratic institutions, and improve security conditions in the Northern Triangle. The measure would also authorize $577 million for the Central America strategy in FY2020, including "not less than" $490 million for the Northern Triangle. Other measures introduced in the 116th Congress that would authorize certain types of assistance and guide U.S. policy in the region include the Central America Reform and Enforcement Act (S. 1445), the Northern Triangle and Border Stabilization Act (H.R. 3524), and the Central American Women and Children Protection Act of 2019 (H.R. 2836/S. 1781).

Congress has continued to express concerns about corruption and human rights abuses in the region. P.L. 116-94 provides $45 million for offices of attorneys general and other entities and activities to combat corruption and impunity in Central America. Congress allocated $3.5 million of those funds to the OAS-backed Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH); Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández allowed the MACCIH's mandate to expire in January 2020, ignoring repeated calls for the mission's renewal from Members of Congress and the Trump Administration. P.L. 116-94 also includes $20 million for combating sexual and gender-based violence in the region, as well as a total of $3 million for the offices of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guatemala and Honduras and El Salvador's National Commission for the Search of Persons Disappeared in the Context of the Armed Conflict.

Several other legislative measures also include provisions intended to address corruption and human rights abuses in the Northern Triangle. The FY2020 NDAA (P.L. 116-92) requires DOD to certify, prior to the transfer of any vehicles to the Guatemalan government, that the government has made a credible commitment to use such equipment only as intended. The act also requires DOD to enter into an agreement with an independent institution to conduct an analysis of the human rights situation in Honduras. Other measures introduced in the 116th Congress addressing corruption and human rights include the Guatemala Rule of Law Accountability Act (H.R. 1630/S. 716) and the Berta Caceres Human Rights in Honduras Act (H.R. 1945).

For additional information, see CRS Report R44812, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS In Focus IF10371, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: An Overview*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS In Focus IF11151, *Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy*, by Peter J. Meyer and Maureen Taft-Morales; CRS Report R43616, *El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R42580, *Guatemala: Political and Socioeconomic Conditions and U.S. Relations*, by Maureen Taft-Morales; CRS Report RL34027, *Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Peter J. Meyer; and CRS Insight IN11211, *Corruption in Honduras: End of the Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH)*, by Peter J. Meyer.

## Nicaragua

President Daniel Ortega, aged 74 in early 2020, has been suppressing popular unrest in Nicaragua in a manner reminiscent of Anastasio Somoza, the dictator he helped overthrow in 1979 as a leader of the leftist Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Ortega served as president from 1985 to 1990, during which time the United States backed right-wing insurgents known as

*contras* in an attempt to overthrow the Sandinista government. In the early 1990s, Nicaragua began to establish democratic governance. Democratic space has narrowed as the FSLN and Ortega have consolidated control over the country's institutions, including while Ortega served as an opposition leader in the legislature from 1990 until 2006. Ortega reclaimed the presidency in 2007 and has served as president for the past 13 years. Until recently, for many Nicaraguans, Ortega's populist social welfare programs that improved their standard of living outweighed his authoritarian tendencies and self-enrichment. Similarly, for many in the international community, the relative stability in Nicaragua outweighed Ortega's antidemocratic actions.

Ortega's long-term strategy to retain control of the government began to unravel in 2018 when his proposal to reduce social security benefits triggered protests led by a wide range of Nicaraguans. The government's repressive response led to an estimated 325-600 extrajudicial killings, torture, political imprisonment, suppression of the press, and thousands of citizens going into exile.[44] The government says it was defending itself from coup attempts. The crisis also undermined economic growth in the hemisphere's second poorest country. The Nicaraguan economy contracted by 5.1% in 2019, and some economists estimate the economy will contract a further 1.5% in 2020.[45]

The international community has sought to hold the Ortega government accountable for human rights abuses and facilitate the reestablishment of democracy in Nicaragua. In July 2018, an Inter-American Commission on Human Rights team concluded that the Nicaraguan security forces' actions could be considered crimes against humanity. The OAS High Level Commission on Nicaragua concluded in November 2019 that the government's actions "make the democratic functioning of the country impossible," in violation of Nicaragua's obligations under Article 1 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The Nicaragua Human Rights and Anticorruption Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-335), effectively blocks access to new multilateral lending to Nicaragua. The Trump Administration has imposed sanctions against 16 high-level officials, including Vice President Rosario Murillo. Despite those efforts, dialogue between the government and the opposition has collapsed.

**Congressional Action:** The 116th Congress remains concerned about the erosion of democracy and human rights abuses in Nicaragua. The Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94) appropriates $10 million for foreign assistance programs to promote democracy and the rule of law in Nicaragua. For FY2021, the Administration has requested $10 million for democracy and civil society programs in Nicaragua.

In December 2019, the House Foreign Affairs Committee ordered H.Res. 754 to be reported favorably by unanimous consent to the full House. The resolution expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that the United States should continue to support the people of Nicaragua in their peaceful efforts to promote democracy and human rights and to use the tools under U.S. law to increase political and financial pressure on the Ortega government. In June 2019, the House Western Hemisphere Subcommittee held a hearing on the Nicaraguan government's repression of dissent (see **Appendix**).

[44] Organization of American States, *Report of the High-Level Commission on Nicaragua of the Organization of American States*, November 19, 2019.

[45] EIU, *Nicaragua Country Report*, March 2020.

# South America

## Argentina

Current President Alberto Fernández of the center-left Peronist *Frente de Todos* (FdT, Front for All) ticket won the October 2019 presidential election and was inaugurated to a four-year term in December 2019. He defeated incumbent President Mauricio Macri of the center-right *Juntos por el Cambio* (JC, Together for Change) coalition by a solid margin of 48.1% to 40.4% but by significantly less than the 15 to 20 percentage points predicted by polls. The election also returned to government former leftist Peronist President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015), who ran on the FdT ticket as vice president.

Argentina's economic decline in 2018 and 2019, with high inflation and increasing poverty, was the major factor in Macri's electoral defeat. Macri had ushered in economic policy changes in 2016-2017 that lifted currency controls, reduced or eliminated agricultural export taxes, and reduced electricity, water, and heating subsidies. In 2018, as the economy faced pressure from a severe drought and large budget deficits, the IMF supported the government with a $57 billion program. Macri's economic reforms and IMF support were not enough to stem Argentina's economic decline, and the government reimposed currency controls and took other measures to stabilize the economy.

President Fernández faces an economy in crisis, with a recession that is expected to extend into 2020, high poverty, and a high level of unsustainable public debt requiring restructuring. He has pledged to restructure Argentina's debt by the end of March 2020, and he has opened talks with bondholders and other creditors, including the IMF. Fernández also has rolled out several measures, including a food program and price controls on basic goods, aimed at helping low-income Argentines cope with inflation and increased poverty.

U.S. relations with Argentina were strong under the Macri government, marked by increasing engagement on a range of bilateral, regional, and global issues. After Argentina's 2019 presidential race, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the United States looked forward to working with the Fernández administration to promote regional security, prosperity, and the rule of law. One point of contention in relations could be Argentina's stance on Venezuela. Under Macri, Argentina was strongly critical of the antidemocratic actions of the Maduro regime. The country joined with other regional countries in 2017 to form the Lima Group seeking a democratic resolution, and in 2019, recognized the head of Venezuela's National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, as the country's interim president. In contrast, the Fernández government does not recognize Guaidó as Venezuela's interim president, although it criticized Maduro's January 2020 actions preventing Guaidó from being elected to a second term as head of the legislature.

**Congressional Action:** Argentina has not traditionally received much U.S. foreign aid because of its relatively high per capita income level, but for each of FY2018-FY2020, Congress has appropriated $2.5 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement assistance to support Argentina's counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and law enforcement capabilities.

Congress has expressed concern over the years about progress in bringing to justice those responsible for the July 1994 bombing of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA) in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people. Both Iran and Hezbollah (the radical Lebanon-based Islamic group) allegedly are linked to the attack, as well as to the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires that killed 29 people. As the 25th anniversary of the AMIA bombing approached in July 2019, the House approved H.Res. 441, reiterating condemnation of the attack and expressing

strong support for accountability; the Senate followed suit in October 2019 when it approved S.Res. 277.

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF10932, *Argentina: An Overview*, by Mark P. Sullivan; CRS In Focus IF10991, *Argentina's Economic Crisis*, by Rebecca M. Nelson; and CRS Insight IN11184, *Argentina's 2019 Elections*, by Mark P. Sullivan and Angel Carrasquillo Benoit.

## Bolivia

Bolivia experienced relative stability and prosperity from 2006 to 2019, but as governance standards weakened, relations with the United States deteriorated under populist President Evo Morales. Morales was the country's first indigenous president and leader of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party. On November 10, 2019, President Morales resigned and sought protection abroad (first in Mexico and then in Argentina) after weeks of protests alleging fraud in the October 20, 2019, election in which he had sought a fourth term. After three individuals in line to succeed Morales also resigned, opposition Senator Jeanine Añez, formerly second vice president of the senate, declared herself senate president and then interim president on November 12. Bolivia's constitutional court recognized her succession. In late November, the MAS-led Congress unanimously approved an electoral law to annul the October elections and select a new electoral tribunal. On January 3, 2020, the reconstituted tribunal scheduled new presidential and legislative elections for May 3, 2020. A second-round presidential contest would likely occur, if needed, on June 14.

The situation in Bolivia remains volatile. On January 24, 2020, Interim President Añez announced her intention to run in the May presidential election, abandoning her earlier pledge to preside over a caretaker government focused on convening credible elections. Even before she announced her candidacy, observers had criticized Añez for exceeding her mandate by reversing several MAS foreign policy positions and bringing charges of sedition against Morales and other former MAS officials.

The Trump Administration has sought to bolster ties with the Añez government while expressing support for "free, fair, transparent, and inclusive elections."[46] U.S. officials have praised the Añez government for expelling Cuban officials and recognizing Venezuela's Guaidó government. In January 2020, President Trump waived restrictions on U.S. assistance to Bolivia,[47] and a multiagency team traveled to the country to assess what type of election support U.S. agencies might offer the interim government.

**Congressional Action:** Members of the 116th Congress have expressed concerns about the situation in Bolivia. S.Res. 35, approved in April 2019, expressed concern over Morales's efforts to circumvent term limits in Bolivia and called on his government to allow electoral bodies to administer the October 2019 elections in accordance with international norms. Although some Members condemned the ouster of Morales as a "coup," most have focused on ensuring a democratic transition. In January 2020, the Senate agreed by unanimous consent to S.Res. 447, expressing concerns about election irregularities and violence in Bolivia, urging the Bolivian government to protect human rights and promptly convene new elections, and encouraging the U.S. State Department and the OAS to help ensure the integrity of the electoral process.

[46] U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy in Bolivia, "Secretary Pompeo's Meeting with Bolivian Foreign Minister Longaric," readout, January 20, 2020.

[47] White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Presidential Determination on Waiving a Restriction on United States Assistance to Bolivia," presidential memorandum, January 6, 2020.

For more information, see CRS Insight IN11198, *Bolivia: Presidential Resignation and Aftermath*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; and CRS In Focus IF11325, *Bolivia: An Overview*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.

## Brazil

Occupying almost half of South America, Brazil is the fifth-largest and the fifth-most populous country in the world. Given its size and tremendous natural resources, Brazil has long had the potential to become a world power. Its rise to prominence has been hindered, however, by uneven economic performance and political instability. After experiencing a period of strong economic growth and increased international influence during the first decade of the 21st century, Brazil has struggled with a series of domestic crises in recent years. The economy fell into its worst recession on record in 2014; the recovery since 2017 has been slow, with annual economic growth averaging 1% and the unemployment rate stuck above 11%.[48] The political environment has also deteriorated as a sprawling corruption investigation underway since 2014 has implicated politicians from across the political spectrum. Those combined crises contributed to the controversial impeachment and removal from office of President Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) and discredited much of the country's political class, paving the way for right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro to win the presidency in October 2018.

Since taking office in January 2019, President Bolsonaro has maintained his political base's support by taking socially conservative stands on cultural issues and proposing hardline security policies to reduce crime and violence. He has also begun enacting economic and regulatory reforms favored by international investors and Brazilian businesses. His confrontational approach to governance has alienated many potential allies, however, hindering the enactment of his policy agenda. Many Brazilians and international observers are concerned that Bolsonaro's environmental policies are contributing to increased deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, and that his frequent verbal attacks against the press, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and other government branches are weakening democracy.

The Bolsonaro administration's foreign policy has focused on forging closer ties to the United States. Brazil has partially abandoned its traditional commitment to autonomy in foreign affairs as Bolsonaro has supported the Trump Administration on a variety of issues, including the crisis in Venezuela, the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba, and the U.S. killing of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani. On other issues, such as commercial ties with China, Bolsonaro has adopted a more pragmatic approach intended to ensure continued access to major export markets. In 2019, President Trump designated Brazil as a major non-NATO ally for the purposes of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. 2751 et seq.), offering Brazil privileged access to the U.S. defense industry and increased joint military exchanges, exercises, and training. President Trump also signed several agreements with President Bolsonaro intended to strengthen bilateral commercial ties. Some Brazilian analysts have questioned the benefits of partnership with the United States due to the Trump Administration's decision to maintain import restrictions on Brazilian beef until February 2020, and the Administration's threats to impose tariffs on other key Brazilian products, such as steel.

**Congressional Action:** The 116th Congress has continued long-standing U.S. support for environmental conservation efforts in Brazil. In September 2019, the House Western Hemisphere Subcommittee held an oversight hearing on preserving the Amazon rainforest that focused on the

[48] IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2019; and Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, "PNAD Contínua: Taxa de Desocupação é de 11,0% e Taxa de Subutilzação é 23,0% no Trimestre Encerrado em Dezembro," press release, January 31, 2020.

surge of fires and deforestation in the region (see **Appendix**). Some Members of Congress also have introduced legislative proposals to address the situation. A Senate resolution (S.Res. 337) would express concern about fires and illegal deforestation in the Amazon, call on the Brazilian government to strengthen environmental enforcement, and support continued U.S. assistance to the Brazilian government and NGOs. The Act for the Amazon Act (H.R. 4263) would take a more punitive approach. The act would ban the importation of certain fossil fuels and agricultural products from Brazil, prohibit certain types of military-to-military engagement and security assistance to Brazil, and forbid U.S. agencies from entering into free trade negotiations with Brazil. Congress ultimately appropriated $15 million for foreign assistance programs in the Brazilian Amazon, including $5 million to address fires in the region, in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94). That amount is $4 million more than Congress appropriated for environmental programs in the Brazilian Amazon in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6).

Congress has also expressed concerns about the state of democracy and human rights in Brazil. A provision of the FY2020 NDAA (P.L. 116-92) directs the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to submit a report to Congress regarding the human rights climate in Brazil and U.S.-Brazilian security cooperation. Some Members have also called for changes to U.S. policy. A resolution introduced in September 2019 expressing profound concerns about threats to human rights, the rule of law, democracy, and the environment in Brazil (H.Res. 594) would call for the United States to rescind Brazil's designation as a major non-NATO ally and suspend assistance to Brazilian security forces, among other actions.

For additional information, see CRS Report R46236, *Brazil: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Peter J. Meyer; and CRS In Focus IF11306, *Fire and Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon*, by Pervaze A. Sheikh et al.

## Colombia

Colombia is a key U.S. ally in Latin America. Because of the country's prominence in illegal drug production, the United States and Colombia have forged a close relationship over the past two decades to respond to mutual challenges. Focused initially on counternarcotics, and later on counterterrorism, a program called Plan Colombia laid the foundation for a security partnership between the two countries. Plan Colombia and its successor strategies ultimately became the basis for a 17-year U.S.-Colombian bilateral effort. President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) made concluding a peace accord with the FARC—the country's largest leftist guerrilla organization—his government's primary focus. Following four years of formal peace negotiations, Colombia's Congress ratified the FARC-government peace accord in November 2016. During a U.N.-monitored demobilization effort in 2017, approximately 13,200 FARC (armed combatants and militia members) disarmed, demobilized, and began the process of reintegration.

Iván Duque, a former senator from the conservative Democratic Center party, who won the 2018 presidential election, was inaugurated to a four-year presidential term in August 2018. Duque campaigned as a critic of the peace accord. His approval ratings slipped early in his presidency, and his government faced weeks of protests and strikes in late 2019 focused on several administration policies, including what many Colombians view as a halting approach to peace accord implementation. Colombia continues to face major challenges, including a sharp increase of coca cultivation and cocaine production, vulnerability to a mass migration of Venezuelans fleeing the authoritarian government of Maduro, a spike in attacks on human rights defenders and social activists, and financial and other challenges enacting the ambitious peace accord commitments while controlling crime and violence by armed groups seeking to replace the

FARC. President Duque has not succeeded in building a legislative coalition with other parties to implement major legislative reforms.

In August 2019, a FARC splinter faction, which included the former lead FARC negotiator of the peace accord, announced its return to arms. In response, neighboring Venezuela appears to be sheltering and perhaps collaborating with FARC dissidents and guerrilla fighters of the National Liberation Army (ELN)—formerly Colombia's second largest insurgency, now its largest. The ELN is also a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization. Some 3,000 former FARC fighters are estimated to have returned to armed struggle, and some have indicated they will cooperate with the ELN. The majority of demobilized FARC members remain committed to the peace process, despite numerous risks; the U.N. Verification Mission in Colombia reported in December 2019 that 77 demobilized FARC members were killed in 2019, with 173 in total killed since 2016.[49]

In 2017, Colombia cultivated a record 209,000 hectares of coca, amounting to a potential 921 metric tons of pure cocaine. In 2018, drug yields declined marginally, according to U.S. estimates, although the U.N. estimates for cocaine production were considerably higher. In meetings between President Duque and Secretary of State Pompeo in 2019, the governments reaffirmed a March 2018 commitment to work together to lower coca crop expansion and cocaine production by 50% by 2023.[50] The U.S. government depends on the Colombian government to interdict much of the cocaine leaving the country, as it is mainly destined for the United States. President Duque campaigned on returning to forced aerial eradication (or spraying of coca crops) with the herbicide glyphosate. This strategy has been a central—albeit controversial—feature of U.S.-Colombian counterdrug cooperation for more than two decades. In late December 2019, President Duque announced that spraying was likely to restart in early 2020. Several analysts maintain that forced manual and aerial eradication of coca have not been successful strategies in Colombia, and they consider voluntary eradication and alternative development programs made viable by a gradually more present central government in rural communities as critical to consolidating peace.[51]

The United States remains Colombia's top trading partner. Colombia's economy, which grew 2.6% in 2018, is estimated to have grown by 3.1% in 2019, with foreign direct investment on the rise. Projections are that Colombia's growth rate will remain at 3% and above over the next few years, which makes it one of the strongest major economies in the region.[52]

**Congressional Action:** At the close of 2019, 1.6 million Venezuelans were residing in Colombia.[53] This number could grow in 2020 to more than 3 million migrants depending how the political crisis in neighboring Venezuela unfolds. Since FY2017, the State Department has allocated more than $400 million to support countries receiving Venezuelan migrants, with over half—almost $215 million in U.S. humanitarian and development assistance—for Colombia, as the most severely affected country. (See "Venezuela," below.)

Congress appropriated more than $10 billion for Plan Colombia and its follow-on programs between FY2000 and FY2016, about 20% of which was funded through DOD. Subsequently,

[49] U.N. Security Council, "United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, Report of the Secretary-General," December 26, 2019.

[50] State Department, INCSR 2020 Volume 1.

[51] See, for example, Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Detoxifying Colombia's Drug Policy: Colombia's Counternarcotics Options and their Impact on Peace and State Building*, Brookings, Foreign Policy, January 2020.

[52] EIU, *Colombia Country Report*, February 2020.

[53] U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), "Venezuela Regional Crisis," Fact Sheet #1, FY2020, February 12, 2020 (hereinafter cited as USAID, Venezuela Crisis Fact Sheet, FY2020).

Congress provided $1.2 billion annually in additional assistance for Colombia from FY2017 through FY2019, including assistance funded through DOD. For FY2020, Congress provided $448 million in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94) for State Department and USAID-funded programs in Colombia. For FY2021, the Administration has requested $412.9 million for Colombia, about a 2% decline from that appropriated in FY2019.

For additional information, see CRS Report R43813, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by June S. Beittel; CRS Report R44779, *Colombia's Changing Approach to Drug Policy*, by June S. Beittel and Liana W. Rosen; CRS Report RL34470, *The U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement: Background and Issues*, by M. Angeles Villarreal and Edward Y. Gracia; and CRS Report R42982, *Colombia's Peace Process Through 2016*, by June S. Beittel.

## Venezuela

Venezuela remains in a deep crisis under the authoritarian rule of Nicolás Maduro of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. Maduro, narrowly elected in 2013 after the death of Hugo Chávez (president, 1999-2013), began a second term on January 10, 2019, that most Venezuelans and much of the international community consider illegitimate. Since January 2019, Juan Guaidó, president of Venezuela's democratically elected, opposition-controlled National Assembly, has sought to form a transition government to serve until internationally observed elections can be held. The United States and 57 other countries recognize Guaidó as interim president, but he has been unable to wrest Maduro from power, and he has faced increased danger since returning home from a January-February 2020 international tour, which included a meeting with President Trump. Some observers believe that National Assembly elections due this year might start an electoral path out of the current stalemate. Maduro has used repression to quash dissent; rewarded allies with income earned from illegal gold mining, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities; relied on support from Russia to avoid U.S. sanctions; and had his supporters use violence to prevent the National Assembly from convening.

Venezuela's economy has collapsed. The country is plagued by hyperinflation, severe shortages of food and medicine, and electricity blackouts that have worsened an already dire humanitarian crisis. In April 2019, U.N. officials estimated that some 90% of Venezuelans are living in poverty.[54] Many observers cite economic mismanagement and corruption as the key factors responsible for the economic crisis, but also acknowledge that economic sanctions have contributed to Venezuela's economic decline. U.N. agencies estimate that 4.8 million Venezuelans had fled the country as of December 2019, primarily to Latin American and Caribbean countries.

**U.S. Policy.** As the situation in Venezuela has deteriorated under Maduro, the Trump Administration has imposed targeted sanctions on Venezuelan officials responsible for antidemocratic actions, human rights violations, and corruption, as well as increasingly strong financial sanctions against the Maduro government and the state oil company, its main source of income.

Since recognizing Guaidó as interim president in January 2019, the Administration has increased sanctions on the Maduro government and encouraged other countries to do so. The E.U., Canada, and 11 Western Hemisphere countries who are states parties to the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty) have imposed targeted sanctions and travel bans on Maduro officials, but not broad economic sanctions as the United States has done. Those countries

[54] "Venezuela's Needs 'Significant and Growing" UN Humanitarian Chief Warns Security Council, as 'Unparalleled' Exodus Continues," *UN News*, April 10, 2019.

similarly oppose military intervention in Venezuela, a policy option that the Trump Administration reportedly considered early in 2019 but has not raised since.

In January 2020, the Administration issued a statement backing a political solution that leads to the convening of free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections this year.[55] International efforts to broker a political solution have not produced results. Although the U.S. statement encourages a focus on convening elections (as did the 2019 Norway-led talks between the Guaidó and Maduro teams), it also says that those elections should be overseen by a "negotiated transitional government," a requirement that Maduro may not accept. Some observers maintain that any negotiations between Maduro and Guaidó would need the backing of the United States and Russia in order to succeed.[56]

Since FY2017, the Administration has provided $472 million in humanitarian and development assistance, including $56 million for humanitarian relief activities in Venezuela, and the remainder to support regional countries sheltering most of the 4.8 million Venezuelans who have fled the crisis.[57] The U.S. military has twice deployed a naval ship hospital to the region. In October 2019, the Administration signed an agreement with the Guaidó government to provide $100 million in development assistance, including direct support for the interim government.

**Congressional Action:** Congress has supported the Administration's efforts to restore democracy in Venezuela and provide humanitarian assistance to Venezuelans, although some Members have expressed concerns about the humanitarian effects of sanctions and about potential unauthorized use of the U.S. military in Venezuela. In February 2019, Congress enacted the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6), which provided $17.5 million for democracy programs in Venezuela.

In December 2019, Congress enacted the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94), which provided $30 million for democracy and human rights programs in Venezuela. The measure also incorporates provisions from S. 1025, the VERDAD Act, authorizing $400 million in FY2020 humanitarian aid to Venezuela, codifying several types of sanctions on the Maduro government, and authorizing $17.5 million to support elections and a democratic transition in Venezuela. P.L. 116-94 also incorporates languages from several House-approved bills including H.R. 920, restricting the export of defense articles to Venezuela; and H.R. 1477, requiring a strategy to counter Russian influence in Venezuela.

Congress has begun consideration of the Administration's $205 million FY2021 foreign aid request for Venezuela, an 811% increase over that appropriated in FY2019. According to the Administration, the assistance would provide support to democratic institutions following a potential political transition and would address the urgent health needs of the Venezuelan people.

In July 2019, the House passed H.R. 549, which would designate Venezuela for TPS. In December 2019, Congress enacted the FY2020 NDAA (P.L. 116-92), which prohibits federal contracting with persons who do business with the Maduro government. House and Senate committees have held hearings on the situation in Venezuela and U.S. policy (see **Appendix**).

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF10230, *Venezuela: Political Crisis and U.S. Policy*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS In Focus IF10715, *Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions*, by Mark P. Sullivan; CRS Report R44841, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations*,

[55] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "Free and Fair Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Venezuela," fact sheet, January 9, 2020.

[56] International Crisis Group, *Peace in Venezuela: Is There Life after the Barbados Talks?*, Briefing no. 41, December 11, 2019.

[57] USAID, Venezuela Crisis Fact Sheet, FY2020.

coordinated by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS In Focus IF11216, *Venezuela: International Efforts to Resolve the Political Crisis*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; and CRS In Focus IF11029, *The Venezuela Regional Migration Crisis*, by Rhoda Margesson and Clare Ribando Seelke.

# Outlook

Congress has begun to consider the Trump Administration's FY2021 $1.4 billion foreign aid budget request for the region. The 18% cut in overall funding compared to FY2019 foreign aid levels masks large cuts, ranging from 30-60%, for some countries and programs. In particular, the Trump Administration's linkage of aid to Central America to reductions in unauthorized migration from the region could be an area of contention with Congress as could the Administration's large increase in assistance to support a democratic transition in Venezuela that has yet to happen. On trade issues, the 116th Congress may consider whether to extend a tariff preference program for certain Caribbean countries, the CBTPA—which expires in September 2020—and the broader GSP for developing countries worldwide, which expires in December 2020.

Looking ahead through 2020, the Latin America and Caribbean region faces significant challenges—most prominently, Venezuela's ongoing political impasse and economic and humanitarian crisis, which has resulted in some 4 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region. Upcoming elections in Bolivia in May 2020 are expected to be an important test of the country's political system in the aftermath of President Morales's resignation following protests ignited by widespread electoral fraud in October 2019. Social protests racked many Latin American countries in late 2019, and such unrest could continue in 2020 given that many of the underlying conditions still exist. These challenges and the appropriate U.S. policy responses may remain oversight issues for Congress. Other areas of congressional oversight and interest may include the ongoing difficult political situations in Haiti and Nicaragua, efforts to stem drug trafficking from South America, appropriate strategies to curb the flow of migrants from Central America, and U.S. policy toward Cuba.

# Appendix. Hearings in the 116th Congress

**Table A-1. Congressional Hearings in the 116th Congress on Latin America and the Caribbean**

| Committee and Subcommittee | Date | Title |
|---|---|---|
| Senate Armed Services Committee | February 7, 2019 | United States Africa Command and United States Southern Command |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee | February 13, 2019 | Venezuela at a Crossroads |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | February 26, 2019 | Made by Maduro: The Humanitarian Crisis in Venezuela and U.S. Policy Responses |
| Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transitional Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues | March 7, 2019 | U.S.-Venezuela Relations and the Path to a Democratic Transition |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | March 13, 2019 | Hearing on H.R. 1004, Prohibiting Unauthorized Military Action in Venezuela Act |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | March 26, 2019 | Understanding Odebrecht: Lessons for Combatting Corruption in the Americas |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee | April 10, 2019 | The Importance of U.S. Assistance to Central America |
| House Armed Services Committee | May 1, 2019 | National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activity in North and South America |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | May 9, 2019 | Dollar Diplomacy or Debt Trap? Examining China's Role in the Western Hemisphere |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | June 11, 2019 | Crushing Dissent: The Ongoing Crisis in Nicaragua |
| Senate Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities | July 9, 2019 | Implementation of the National Defense Strategy in the United States Command Southern Command Area of Responsibility |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | July 11, 2019 | Human Rights in Cuba: Beyond the Veneer of Reform |

| Committee and Subcommittee | Date | Title |
|---|---|---|
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | September 10, 2019 | Preserving the Amazon: A Shared Moral Imperative |
| Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transitional Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues | September 18, 2019 | U.S.-Colombia Relations: New Opportunities to Reinforce and Strengthen Our Bilateral Relationship |
| Senate Foreign Relations Committee | September 25, 2019 | U.S. Policy in Mexico and Central America: Ensuring Effective Policies to Address the Crisis at the Border |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | October 23, 2019 | The Trump Administration's FY2020 Budget and U.S. Policy Toward Latin American and the Caribbean |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | December 10, 2019 | Haiti on the Brink: Assessing U.S. Policy Toward a Country in Crisis |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | January 15, 2020 | Strengthening Security and the Rule of Law in Mexico |
| Senate Armed Services Committee | January 30, 2020 | United States Africa Command and United States Southern Command |
| House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade | February 13, 2020 | Assessing U.S. Security Assistance to Mexico |

**Source:** CRS, prepared by Nese F. DeBruyne, Senior Research Librarian.

**Notes:** See also hearing information at House Foreign Affairs Committee at https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearings; Senate Foreign Relations Committee at http://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings.

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